

# Initiative Fighting for Children's Health

continued ▲ from Front

nize a need for addressing these types of issues, but have concerns about some of the specifics, including a \$10 co-pay for visits with a primary-care provider.

Geri Washington, a Multnomah Education Service District board member representing north/northeast Portland and an organizer for Oregon Action, said the co-pay presents a continued barrier for low-income families.

Washington would prefer to see better planning to coincide with school districts' budgets so that the expected increase of students doesn't create strain for facilities or teachers, which are allotted based on the previous year's enrollment.

The campaign allays concerns that the measure amounts to an unfunded mandate by allowing school districts to opt out of the program if school boards deem the coverage unnecessarily expensive.



PHOTO BY RAYMOND RENDLEMAN/THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

Martin Rivers collects signatures for an initiative that would provide health insurance for students in Portland Public Schools. Signing (from left) are Sheridan Schlegel, Megan Anderson and Edyth Lee-Barnes.

The proposal calls for city budgets to cover the estimated \$4.05 million cost for the first two years of the health insurance starting in February of next year, then school districts would be responsible for 66 percent of the program.

Petition organizers count on a voter mandate and the success of the program's first years for the political pressure of continued funding. With no exclusions for pre-existing conditions, the program would subject physician-referred hospital services to an annual \$7,500 deductible.

Competitive bidding would recruit contracts with local private insurers. The City of Portland would pay bidders a \$50 monthly maximum for each child covered, and the contract stipulates that the rate would not increase annually more than the U.S. Consumer Price Index.

"If the city votes yes, this is what we want, then the city's leaders have to respond, so you have the potential to take much of the politics out of it," Deschaine says.

## Vanport after 60 Years



The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers surveys a levee near the Columbia River in early 2007. Data from these surveys help owners determine a levee's level of flood protection. Trees along some of the levees present an increased risk because they were not designed for this type of vegetation.

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this year, despite the large amounts of snow last winter approximating the lead-up to Vanport's demise.

"The Vanport Flood was a combination of rain plus a lot of snow, and as far as conditions we're having today, we certainly have above-average snow conditions—the fortunate thing is that we don't have the rain on top of the snow," says Harold Opitz, chief hydrologist for the National Weather Service's Northwest River Forecast Center.

However, the predictability of flooding may become even harder with global warming's effects on weather patterns.

"The risk boundaries are certainly going to shift," Opitz says. "The climate-change baseline question is: What is that warming going to mean? At this point there are a lot of unknowns to us that we're investigating how to approach."

The Army Corps of Engineers has recognized increasing stakes for accountability, first after Vanport, then

after Hurricane Katrina. But limited funding, shared liability and technological unknowns continue to dog the agency to this day.

Vanport was the result of a railroad fill giving way, and it's possible the levy would have held without engineering to include freight traffic. A similar situation can be found on the Columbia-skirting Northeast Bridgeton Road, which was built on an old levy not designed for street traffic.

While the corps' annual inspections have determined such areas to be safe, the inspectors would much rather see money allocated for new levees than to constantly worry over tree roots, burrowing animals or human activities compromising integrity.

Adding to the concern, the corps built most of the levees in the '30s and '40s but now shares oversight with local drainage districts.

"While we don't own them, nor are we responsible for the maintenance of them, we can provide collaborative inspection and recommendations," Echols says.

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