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# CELEBRATION



Members of the Green Party of Seattle celebrated the birthday of the Rev. Harriet Walden, founder of Mothers for Police Accountability and long time Seattle activist on Saturday Jan. 7. The event was both a celebration of Rev. Walden's many contributions to the community and a fund raiser for MFPA, the organization she started over 20 years ago.

## Schools Top Budget

### Legislature prepares to bring up policy issues in new session

By Donna Gordon Blankenship  
The Associated Press

SEATTLE (AP) — With nearly a billion dollar shortfall and a Washington Supreme Court ruling on inadequate education spending hanging over their heads, one might expect lawmakers preparing for the 2012 Legislative session to be focused exclusively on money.

While money is expected to be the top issue in Olympia this year, lawmakers who focus on education are just as happy to talk about policy ideas, including some that may address court concerns about education dollars.

The Legislature convened Monday for a 60-day legislative session, just a few weeks after lawmakers left Olympia after a special session on the state's budget situation. Although they made some cuts to the state budget, they still have a shortfall to resolve.

Among her budget proposals, Gov. Chris Gregoire has suggested a couple of unpopular education cuts — including cutting the money that helps some school districts make up for an inability to raise enough local taxes — that she would like to see offset by an increase in the state sales tax.

Rep. Bruce Dammeier, R-Puyallup, bristles when he hears the governor talk about buying back these education cuts.

"They shouldn't be used as fodder to justify a tax increase. They should be 'buy firsts,'" said the leader of House Republicans on the issue of education.

Cuts to levy equalization dollars are not likely to get much of a hearing in Olympia this session, because the chair of the Senate Education Committee says she doesn't support the idea.

"That's probably one of the last cuts I want to make," said Sen. Rosemary McAuliffe, D-Bothell.

McAuliffe would prefer to talk about science, technology engineering and math programs and expanding a pilot program to

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## Report on Prison Guard Murder

### Three jail staff found in dereliction of duty in officer's strangling at jail

EVERETT, Wash. (AP) — One of three Washington state prison guards fired after the slaying of a corrections officer was away from his post during the attack, and officials still don't know where he was, documents state.

The officer was supposed to be watching inmates as they filed out of the Monroe Correctional Facility's prison chapel on Jan. 29. In his absence, inmate Byron Scherf was able to re-enter the chapel, where he's accused of stran-

gling officer Jayme Biendl.

Officials believe the guard was still on prison grounds, documents released at the request of The Daily Herald show.

He said he was helping with pat-down searches and talked with two other guards, but the documents state that neither remembers seeing him.

The documents indicate that prison Superintendent Scott Frakes told the officer he "severely compromised an essential safeguard" for Biendl and an inmate "took full advan-

tage of your failure."

Scherf, 53, is charged with aggravated first-degree murder and could face the death penalty if convicted.

The three officers who were fired are appealing their terminations. It's unclear whether they could face criminal charges. The newspaper did not include the names of the fired officers.

The Monroe complex includes five prisons on one campus. About 25 miles northeast of Seattle, it's the state's largest

prison and houses more than 2,500 offenders. Biendl worked inside the Washington State Reformatory, a medium-security prison, now more than a century old.

Since Biendl's slaying, the prison says it has increased training, changed staffing and improved how inmates are classified.

Scherf was serving a life sentence. His file contained warnings that his criminal history and indicated he could present a

## Mortality Statistics Reveal Surprising Improvement

### Homicide drops off national list of top causes of death

By Mike Stobbe  
AP Medical Writer

ATLANTA (AP) — For the first time in almost half a century, homicide has fallen off the list of the nation's top 15 causes of death, bumped by a lung illness that often develops in elderly people who have choked on their food.

The 2010 list, released by the government

Wednesday, reflects at least two major trends: Murders are down, and deaths from certain diseases are on the rise as the population ages, health authorities said.

Homicide was overtaken at No. 15 by pneumonitis, seen mainly in people 75 and older. It happens when food or vomit goes down the windpipe and causes deadly damage to the lungs.

This is the first time since 1965 that homi-

cide failed to make the list, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

The CDC's latest annual report on deaths contained several nuggets of good news:

-The infant mortality rate dropped to an all-time low of 6.14 deaths per 1,000 births in 2010. It was 6.39 the year before.

-U.S. life expectancy for a child born in

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