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Charter Schools Plan

The system won't quite be up and ready for next year

By Donna Gordon Blankenship
The Associated Press

SEATTLE (AP) -- Now that voters have spoken about charter schools will the new, independent public schools be an option at the beginning of the next academic year?

It seems unlikely. Voters narrowly approved Initiative 1240 earlier this month, but opening charter schools by 2013 would require many things to happen quickly -- and there's a strong possibility that the state's top education officer will sue to block them.

First the state Board of Education has to figure out the next steps. The board has until March 6 to adopt rules to govern most aspects of charter schools in Washington. Board spokesman Aaron Wyatt said that schedule is tight, so people shouldn't expect them to beat their deadline.

Next on the agenda: The new Washington Charter School Commission will be formed and begin its work. The independent state agency created by the initiative will be authorizing and supervising the new entities.

The commission will be made up of nine members, three appointed by the governor, three by the president of the Senate and three by the speaker of the House. They will be supported by staff with a budget of an estimated \$3 million a year.

People who want to open a charter school in Washington will need to wait for the commission to get settled before they open the application process. It's not known how long the application process will take -- since the rules have not been written -- but the process in New York state, for example, takes about four months from the initial filing to final approval.

The new law would open as many as 40 charter schools over five years.

Under the terms of the initiative, any non-profit organization could start a charter school here if their plan is approved by

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DYNAMIC

Renowned vocalist Josephine Howell highlighted the performance of trumpet player Gabriel Burbano during her performance Nov. 17 at the Langston Hughes Performing Arts Center. Josie is famous for her dynamic audience interaction and her Langston Hughes performance was no exception.



PHOTO BY SUSAN FRIED

Officer Faces Four Years in Prison

Verdict comes after beating death of mentally disabled janitor

By Nicholas K. Geranios
The Associated Press

SPOKANE, Wash. (AP) — A police officer was sentenced Thursday to more than four years in prison for using excessive force against a mentally disabled janitor who died after being erroneously suspected of stealing money from an ATM.

Officer Karl F. Thompson Jr., 65, was sentenced by U.S. District Court Judge Fred Van Sickle to four years and three months for his role in the 2006

death of Otto Zehm.

Van Sickle said he hoped the sentence would begin to bring closure to Zehm's family and to the Spokane community, which has been at odds with the police department as a result of this case and others.

"This had a significant impact on the community and how it viewed its police department," Van Sickle said.

Van Sickle also ordered that Thompson be taken into custody immediately, over the objections of defense lawyers,

who wanted him to remain free while the verdict is appealed.

Thompson was convicted last year by a federal jury of violating Zehm's civil rights by using excessive force and then lying to investigators in the case.

Six years ago, Zehm was beaten and stunned by Thompson in a convenience store. He was hog-tied and sat on by other officers until he passed out. The 36-year-old died two days later without regaining consciousness.

Zehm had committed no

crime.

Defense attorney Carl Oreskovich argued for a sentence of zero to 16 months, saying there was no evidence presented that the actions of Thompson led directly to Zehm's death.

Thompson addressed the court, apologizing to Zehm's mother. "I did not intend to harm Mr. Zehm that night, and did not act in malice," he said. "I have dedicated my life to protection of the public."

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Reps: DOJ Should Respect Pot Votes

Taxes could bring the states tens or hundreds of millions of dollars

Gene Johnson
The Associated Press

SEATTLE (AP) — A group of lawmakers on Friday urged the Justice Department to respect recent votes in Colorado and Washington state allowing the recreational use of marijuana, and some introduced a bill to ensure that happens.

Democratic U.S. Rep. Diana DeGette of

Colorado said her bill would bar the federal government from blocking state marijuana laws. Several other lawmakers have signed on, including Republican Rep. Mike Coffman of Colorado.

"I voted against Amendment 64 and I strongly oppose the legalization of marijuana, but I also have an obligation to respect the will of the voters," Coffman said in a statement. "I feel obligated to support this

legislation."

Voters this month made Washington and Colorado the first states to allow adults over 21 to possess up to an ounce of marijuana, and to set up state licensing schemes for pot growers, processors and retail stores. Taxes could bring the states tens or hundreds of millions of dollars a year, financial analysts say.

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