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GUNS, CHEAP

A man holds an inactive missile launcher he purchased near the Seattle Police Gun Buy Back on Saturday, Jan. 26. The missile launcher was later confiscated by the police. The event, which was held in a parking lot underneath the freeway between James and Cherry Streets, was forced to close up 3 hours early because so many people showed up to trade in their guns that they ran out of gift certificates. There were numerous people carrying signs offering to pay more for the guns on some of the streets near the buy back location.



PHOTO BY SUSAN FRIED

Faster Election Nights

Measure would require ballot counting til midnight

By Rachel La Corte The Associated Press

OLYMPIA, Wash. (AP) — It's well known that in Washington state, elections often don't end on election night, because the state's vote-by-mail system ensures that any close race will be unsettled for days afterward.

But one measure introduced by Rep. Kevin Van De Wege, D-Sequim, would require ballots on election night to be processed and counted until midnight, unless there are no more ballots on hand to count. However, because current law only requires that ballots be postmarked by Election Day, many voters drop ballots in the mail or into special drop boxes that day, meaning the forms often don't reach election officials for several more days. The system usually leaves about half of the vote outstanding at the end of the night.

There are special elections ending Feb. 12 in 32 of Washington's 39 counties.

The secretary of state's office says 80 measures in 68 districts are going before more than a million voters — nearly a third of the voters in Washington.

Most of the issues are school levies. Among the largest are two in Seattle — a \$552 million operations levy to provide about a quarter of the district's budget and a \$695 million capital levy for school construction and upgrades including Wi-Fi in every school.

During this past election in November, all of the state's counties — except for Pierce, which did three — did one count shortly after the 8 p.m. "poll close" deadline and then resumed tally updates in the following days and weeks. The governor's race wasn't called until the end of election week, and other races that were too close to call went even longer.

Van De Wege said after increasingly longer election cycles end, voters "want to know it's over and what the results are."

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Money Fuels Fight on Time Off

Dueling bills put paid family leave law on the chopping block

By Rachel La Corte The Associated Press

OLYMPIA, Wash. (AP) — Six years ago, Washington state lawmakers approved a program giving parents five weeks of paid time off to be with a new child.

But the question of how to pay for the program was never answered, and now some lawmakers are looking to remove it from the books, while the senator who introduced the bill is looking to expand the program.

Its start already has been delayed until 2015.

The bill, passed with much fanfare in 2007, was supposed to start paying benefits of up to \$250 a week starting in October 2009. But without an agreed-upon funding source, the Legislature has postponed its implementation twice.

"It may have seemed like a good idea, but we don't have the money to do it," said Sen. John Braun, R-Centralia, who is sponsoring the measure to repeal the law. "We need to face

the reality and deal with it."

Sen. Karen Keiser, a Democrat from Kent who sponsored the initial bill, decried any effort to repeal the law.

"It's an appalling move at a time when middleclass families are having a hard time making things work," she said. "We're getting steady again in our economy. It's time to look forward."

Keiser on Thursday introduced her own bill to expand the underlying measure to include caring for a family member or an employee's own disability.

Her bill would pay two-thirds of a worker's pay a week, up to \$1,000 a week, and would expand the time allowed from five weeks to 12 weeks. The program would be paid for with a .01 percent payroll tax on both employees and employers starting in 2014, and benefits would start in October 2015.

Keiser said she based her new measure on laws in California and New Jersey.

"I am not backing off and not going to give up this endeavor

Inslee Stays Put on Marijuana Law

Local officials still wait in vain for some sign of what Feds will do

By Gene Johnson The Associated Press

OLYMPIA, Wash. (AP) — Washington Gov. Jay Inslee and Attorney General Bob Ferguson met with U.S. Attorney General Eric Holder on Tuesday, but came away no further enlightened about how the federal government will respond to last fall's votes in Washington and Colorado that set up

legal markets for marijuana.

The two states voted to legalize recreational marijuana use by adults over 21 and to create state-licensed systems of growers, processors and retail stores that sell heavily taxed pot. The creation of those regulatory schemes poses a possible conflict with federal law, which outlaws marijuana, and the Justice Department hasn't said whether it will sue to block the state laws.

Inslee, a former Democratic congressman who was sworn in as governor last week, told reporters after the meeting in Washington, D.C., that the state will move forward to establish rules for the market.

Hundreds on Tuesday night attended the state Liquor Control Board's inaugural public forum on developing those rules. The

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