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KIZOMBA!



PHOTO BY SUSAN FRIED

Eddy Vents, an instructor in kizomba semba dance, offers some tips to a couple participating in the Seattle Kizomba Semba Camp Saturday, March 23, at the Century Ballroom. The two-day event offered dancers a chance to learn and improve their skills in this Angolan ballroom dance style.

Abortion Access Debated

Washington weighs first insurance mandate in U.S.

By Jonathan Kaminsky
The Associated Press

OLYMPIA, Wash. (AP) — In 1970, Washington became the first — and remains the only — state in the country to legalize elective abortions by a popular vote.

A generation later, and 40 years removed from the landmark United States Supreme Court Roe v. Wade ruling that extended abortion access nationwide, Washington is once again poised to stand out.

With 21 states having adopted bans or severe restrictions on insurance companies from paying for abortions, Washington is alone in seriously considering legislation mandating the opposite.

The Reproductive Parity Act, as supporters call it, would require insurers in Washington State who cover maternity care — which all insurers must do — to also pay for abortions.

The bill passed the state House earlier this month by a vote of 53-43, though it faces an uncertain future in the Senate. A similar bill in the New York state Assembly has been introduced each session for over a decade but has never received a public hearing.

"This is a core value for Washingtonians," said Melanie Smith, a lobbyist for NARAL Pro-Choice Washington. "We should protect it while we still have it and not leave access to basic health care up to an insurance company."

The proximate cause of Washington State's measure is the federal Affordable Care Act. Thanks to language placed in it to assuage anti-abortion congressional Democrats, insurers selling their plans on the state exchanges taking effect next year will have to segregate the premiums they collect for abortion coverage.

In addition to that built-in disincentive to insuring abortion, the law also invites states to enact stricter rules of their own. Thus far, 16 states have followed suit, barring or restricting insurance companies on their

Inslee Promotes Columbia Bridge

Light rail critics attack the controversial interstate highway project

By Jonathan J. Cooper
The Associated Press

VANCOUVER, Wash. (AP) Gov. Jay Inslee said Friday that Washington has a closing window of opportunity to replace the bridge carrying Interstate 5 over the Columbia River, warning that failure to act would "start that erosion process in our economic competitiveness."

Speaking with Southwest Washington business and government leaders, the governor said the opportunity for more

than \$1 billion in federal funding won't be available for at least another decade.

"This is the last-second shot for our team, and we've got to take it, because there's no other shot available to us," Inslee said.

The project has run into vociferous opposition from light-rail critics who oppose plans to use the bridge to link Vancouver with Portland's light-rail system. Inslee, a light-rail supporter, said removing the transit component isn't an option.

"There really, at this moment in time, are only two decisions that are before the state, and that is to move forward with the current configuration or not move forward for the next 10 years," he said.

Vancouver voters in November rejected a sales tax hike to help pay for light-rail expansion. Rail opponents say the decision is a signal that voters oppose light rail; Inslee said voters were merely opposing a sales tax increase but might support other ways of paying for

light rail.

Oregon recently approved \$450 million toward the project, and Washington has to kick in a similar amount to secure \$1.2 billion in federal transit and highway funds. Another roughly \$1 billion would come from the tolls.

Despite Inslee's enthusiastic support, the project is vocally opposed by more than just light-rail foes. Some say the cash-strapped state has higher priorities. Others say the height

See BRIDGE on page 3

See ABORTION on page 3

INDEX

News	3
Calendar	2
A&E	2,8
Opinion	4
Obituary	6
Bids/Classifieds	6,7

Nature Volunteers Needed in the City

Urban Stewards recruited to help restore Seattle's forestland

By Alyssa Keehn
Special To *The Skanner News*

The Green Seattle Partnership is recruiting volunteers to help restore Seattle's urban forestland. Volunteers are needed to remove invasive plants, plant new trees, and maintain and monitor restoration sites.

The partnership, founded in 2004, is a

unique public-private collaboration between the city of Seattle and Forterra, the state's largest conservation and community building organization (previously known as Cascade Land Conservancy).

The partnership's main effort is a 20-year plan to restore 2,500 acres of forestland throughout Seattle (roughly the equivalent of restoring 2,500 football fields of land). Thousands of volunteers are needed in order

to reach this goal.

The Forest Steward positions that are now open for application involve more leadership than the average volunteer position. Stewards are responsible for coordinating volunteer restoration events and activities within a specified parkland, as well as developing annual site restoration work

See FOREST on page 3