

Man linked to missing women had contact with police

CHARLESTON, West Virginia (AP) — A man toting axes, a shovel and bleach when he was killed by an escort he met online had been stopped, interviewed or investigated by police in at least 20 states and is being looked into for possible links to unsolved disappearances or slayings, authorities said Monday.

West Virginia authorities are trying to circulate information to see if Neal Falls, of Springfield, Oregon, can be linked to any other crimes against women nationwide. Police say Falls was fatally shot July 18 as he attacked and choked the escort in Charleston, West Virginia, and she grabbed his handgun off the ground and fired it.

Police found axes, knives, handcuffs, a shovel, bleach and other items in Falls’ car, raising suspicions this wasn’t the first time he had attacked a woman. “The fact that he was 45 years old and carrying tools like he was and committing a crime that was so organized and so violent, it’s unlikely that this was his first violent

crime,” Charleston police Lt. Steve Cooper said. Cooper said Falls had a list of 10 other women in his pocket. Nine were in West Virginia; one was in San Diego. Similar to the Charleston woman, whom police are calling Heather, all were escorts active online, he said. They are all alive, he said.

Heather had a separated shoulder, broken vertebrae, strangulation marks around her throat and other injuries, Cooper said. No history of major crimes in Falls’ record has surfaced. However, police said records show that authorities in states including Arizona, Kentucky and Virginia had interactions with Falls such as stopping

him, running his license plate or checking his Social Security number. “We are sharing this information with law enforcement across the country in hopes that we may be able to help solve cold cases or bring closure to some families if Mr. Falls has been involved in anything like this before,” Cooper said.

GOLDEN: Opt out rule gives flexibility

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— the demise of the Oregon Education Investment Board, the removal of barriers to education, the controversy of the Smarter Balanced test and the goal of graduating all students from high school and 80 percent from college by the year 2025. Golden, a native of upstate New York, started her career as a special education teacher in Springfield, Oregon. In the next 30 years she found her niche as a leader, serving as superintendent of Springfield schools and administrating the licensure program at the University of Oregon. Ground zero, she said, is the classroom. “I never lose touch with what happens in the classroom,” she told the administrators. “That’s where we’re going to make the difference for kids.” Eastern Oregon administrators chatted back and forth with Golden during her presentation. When they didn’t agree with a piece of legislation, they didn’t candy-coat their opinions. La Grande Superintendent Larry Glaze expressed frus-

tration with House Bill 2655, which says school districts must provide two notices to parents that they can opt out of the new Smarter Balanced test. Governor Kate Brown signed the bill last week. “We’re mandated to give the test because it’s important, yet at the same time we’re telling parents they can opt out,” Glaze said. “We’re all trying to do our jobs the best we can, but we’re getting mixed messages. It’s hard to interpret the tea leaves sometimes.” The law, Golden conceded, will require engaging with parents. “We’ll need to show the value of (Smarter Balanced),” she said, and convey the potential consequences of opting out. “Communication will be critical.” The education chief soothed worries about funding. “People’s biggest fear is if our opt-out rate falls below the 95 percent required by the federal government, then we will lose funds,” Golden said. “We’re not going to lose federal funds over the opt-out — we’re positioning

ourselves to make sure that doesn’t happen.” Discussion of early childhood education, free community college and attempting to create an unbroken pathway to college and careers was less divisive. She said much of the work needs to come at the front end. “When kids come to school ready to learn, it changes their trajectory,” she said. “Kids deserve a system that helps them be successful.” Golden said her trips to Eastern Oregon often yield creative ideas and useful feedback. Eastern Promise, a program that allows college credits in high school and encourages college attendance, germinated in Northeast Oregon. “Eastern Oregon leaders have been exceptionally creative with such a strong commitment to meeting the needs of kids,” she said. “These are people who roll up their sleeves and work to get it done.”
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Mental health experts respond carefully to mass killings

By DAVID CRARY
AP National Writer

NEW YORK — One psychiatry professor calls it “the conversation we’re stuck with,” a teachable moment growing out of horror. Each time mental illness is cited as a possible factor in a high-profile mass killing, there’s a collective sigh among mental health professionals. Even as they see an opportunity for serious discussions of problems and remedies, they also worry about setbacks to their efforts to destigmatize mental illness. “Most people who suffer from mental illness are not violent, and most violent acts are committed by people who are not mentally ill,” said Dr. Renee Binder, president of the American Psychiatric Association. If, hypothetically, everyone with mental illness were locked up, “you might think you were safe, but you are not,” Binder said. According to the National Institute of Mental Health’s latest estimate, from 2012, there were an estimated 9.6 million adults in the U.S. — 4.1 percent of the total adult population — experiencing serious mental illness over the previous year. “If you look at that large pool of people, only



AP file photo
This Tuesday, July 24, 2012 file photo made through a broken window shows books and a poster on the wall inside the apartment where James Holmes lived in Aurora, Colo.

a tiny proportion of them will eventually commit violence,” Binder said. “How are you going to identify them? It’s like a needle in a haystack.” Yet public perceptions can be hard to shake. Of the mass shootings of the past 10 years that are most ingrained in America’s psyche, the mental health problems of the perpetrator became a central part of the narrative in several cases — notably the rampages at Virginia Tech in 2007, at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Connecticut, at an Aurora, Colorado, movie theater in 2012, and near the University of California, Santa Barbara, in 2014. Just this month, a jury

convicted James Holmes of 12 murders in Aurora, after a wrenching trial that delved deeply into his mental problems. In two rampages recently, the perpetrators also have been described as mentally troubled. After the killing of four Marines and a Navy sailor in Chattanooga, the family of slain assailant Muhammad Abdulazeer said he had been in and out of treatment for depression starting as an adolescent. John Russell Houser, who killed two people and wounded nine before killing himself at a Louisiana movie theater last week, had a history of mental health issues, according to his family.

SHIPPING: Goods now go through Seattle

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Portland attempts to recruit another container shipper to Terminal 6. More than 100 people attended the first Oregon Trade Solutions workshop Friday, July 24 in Portland. The series will shift to Eastern Oregon on Wednesday with a meeting in Hermiston. Ryan Frank, spokesman for Business Oregon, said the initiative started earlier this year when Hanjin Shipping and Hapag-Lloyd stopped making stops in Portland, taking the vast majority of the port’s container business with them. Oregon shippers now pay an additional \$500-\$1,000 per container to send their goods to Seattle and Tacoma. Not only is the freight more expensive, but it has also led to congestion along the other West Coast ports. Gov. Kate Brown announced a deal in April providing \$300,000 to help small and medium-sized businesses stay competitive in the export market. The goal is to deliver a list of solutions to lawmakers for the 2016 Legislature. The workshops are co-sponsored by Business Oregon along with the state Department of Agriculture, Department of Transportation and Port of Portland. “We want to hear from private industry to tell us what they need,” Frank said. “The best solutions are going to come from people who live and breathe this business every day.” Bruce Pokarney, spokesman for the Department of Agriculture, said the team was interested in visiting Hermiston based on the region’s vibrant farm economy. Umatilla County ranks first in the state for growing fresh vegetables that are shipped in containers, mostly potatoes and onions. Processed and packaged foods, such as french fries from the Lamb Weston potato plant, are also moved in containers. Wheat, on the other hand, is exported in bulk and not affected by Terminal 6. In all, about 40 percent of Oregon agriculture is exported out of the country, Pokarney said. With the added cost per container, that’s hitting a lot of small growers in the pocketbook. “There are ideas out there that we at the state level could certainly be advocates for,” Pokarney said. Input at the Portland

meeting included possibly building a drop yard near Corvallis, where containers could be transferred off trucks and onto rail, saving businesses trucking costs. Companies also proposed a website where the state and local ports could communicate shipping delays in real time. At the Port of Umatilla, manager Kim B. Puzey has spent more than a decade looking into short sea shipping on the Columbia River which would allow inland ports to bypass Portland entirely. So far, Puzey said he has not been able to find funding for the proposal. “I think it has merits. Europe and Asia seem to think so, and I haven’t given up on the idea,” he said. More than 1,000 Oregon businesses rely on container shipping for imports and exports, totaling \$101 million in revenue, according to figures from Business Oregon. Frank said there’s

a whole range of potential solutions that can come out of the workshops. “A lot of companies are doing really any workaround to get their product where it needs to go,” Frank said. “Sometimes they’ll pay the extra cost to ship to other ports, and are more or less eating those costs ... That’s not really a long-term sustainable solution.” Meanwhile, the Port of Portland is continuing to work with Terminal 6 operator ICTSI Oregon to restore container service, though port spokesman Kenny Macdonald said bringing in a company the size of Hanjin might take several years. The workshop Wednesday in Hermiston will run from 6:30-8 p.m. at the Hermiston Conference Center. For more information or to register, visit oregontradesolutions.com.
Contact George Plaven at gplaven@eastoregonian.com or 541-966-0825.



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