

Santa Monica Daily Press

A newspaper with issues

LOTTO

FANTASY 5

24, 18, 39, 37, 2

DAILY 3

Afternoon picks: 5, 2, 2

Evening picks: 0, 5, 3

DAILY DERBY

1st Place: 10, Sold Gold

2nd Place: 6, Whirl Win

3rd Place: 11, Money Bags

Race Time: 1:43.60



NEWS OF THE WEIRD

by Chuck Shepard

■ A 20-year-old woman died in a one-car collision in Bridgewater, Mass., in November; according to police, she lost control of her car while talking on a cell phone and crashed into the Cingular Wireless store on Route 106.

■ A 16-year-old student in Indianapolis was killed in November on his morning school bus ride when he stuck his head out of a window to see a dead raccoon in the road and was clipped by a tree.



QUOTE OF THE DAY

"Cockroaches and socialites are the only things that can stay up all night and eat anything."

— Herb Caen



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Del Pastrana/Daily Press

Borders 'baristas' Angela Ocampo (foreground) and Candan Webb serve up hot coffee drinks to Promenade customers on a recent evening.

Jury: Landlord off the hook for armed break-in

Tenants sought more than \$1.5M

BY JOHN WOOD

Daily Press Staff Writer

SM COURTHOUSE — A local landlord isn't responsible for preventing four armed gunmen from storming into a luxury apartment, tying up its tenants, beating and robbing them, and demanding \$30,000 in cash, a jury here ruled Thursday.

After less than a day of deliberations, jurors ruled 9-3 against Oliver Starr, 36, and his former live-in companion Julien Serrano, 32. The pair had sued landlord Marvin Engineering Co. Inc. for more than \$1.5 million in lost wages, plus an unspecified amount for emotional stress caused by the August, 2001 incident.

"We felt badly for what may or may not have happened to them in that event," said jury foreman Kevin Neustadt, 38, a West LA investment banker. "But we couldn't quite connect the dots to get that back to Marvin Engineering."

What proved even more difficult, Neustadt said, was determining how much money Marvin Engineering was

See LANDLORD, page 7

School activists have educated a community

BY CAROLYN SACKARIASON

Daily Press Staff Writer

As the school district continues to grapple with multi-million dollar shortfalls, a powerful and influential group is working behind the scenes to ensure that education in Santa Monica remains at the top of its class.

What started as a few school supporters who gathered occasionally has graduated into a political action committee with several hundred members. And its clout — the group's membership crosses nearly every political line in the city — can't be underestimated, most agree. "Community for Excellent Public Schools," also known as "CEPS," is a group that seems to get more focused about its commitment as economic conditions get more dire for the local school district.

CEPS has brought forward a controversial charter amendment that would force City Hall to give the Santa Monica-Malibu Unified School District a minimum of \$6 million each year. It's a unique proposal never tried here before and would require voter approval in November.

The amendment would pump a dedicated portion of City Hall's general fund into the district indefinitely, which proponents contend would create a stable and predictable funding source to ensure excellent education in Santa Monica and Malibu — CEPS' primary mission.

CEPS' steering committee met this week to strategize about how to get 15 percent of Santa Monica voters — about 9,000 people — to sign a petition by May in order to get the measure on the November ballot.

The group, comprised mostly of parents who have or had kids in the district, has been difficult to ignore over the past two years. They've thrown themselves behind school funding campaigns and rallied the community to march in front of City Hall.

City Council members and even John Deasy, the superintendent of schools, agree they've never seen anything quite like the movement CEPS has created.

"I like this group," said Deasy, who has been in education for 19 years. "You meet special interest groups, but for the sole purpose of making schools excellent, I've never met a group like this."

What makes CEPS unique is that the key people involved, some of whom participate heavily in local politics, tend to put their differences aside in order to try and achieve the common goal of support-



File photo

School-funding activists from SEPS attracted hundreds of supporters last year for a demonstration in front of City Hall in efforts to raise additional money for the district.

ing excellent education in the community.

When people like Denny Zane, who has been fundamental in the formation of Santa Monicans for Renters' Rights — a liberal party that currently holds the majority on the City Council — and Chris

See ACTIVISTS, page 6

Campaign for permanent school funding mounting

BY CAROLYN SACKARIASON

Daily Press Staff Writer

A broad-based initiative to change the city's charter that would force City Hall to give millions to local schools is gearing up for what could be a contentious election this fall.

Members of "Community for Excellent Public Schools," also known as "CEPS," has begun strategizing about how to win the November election, that is, if they can gather enough signatures to place the measure onto the ballot.

Earlier this month, CEPS co-chairs Louise Jaffee and Shari Davis, along with CEPS member Ralph Mechur, filed a proposal in City Hall to amend the Santa Monica charter.

"Community for Excellent Public Schools is dedicated to high quality education for every child," Davis said. "To that end, CEPS is pursuing a means to establish and maintain long-term, stable, local funding for our public schools."

But CEPS members would rather see the City Council come up with a long-term plan that will provide the school district with an ongoing source of funding every year. It's an ultimatum of sorts

See CAMPAIGN, page 7

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Happy Birthday Matt Crowley



JACQUELINE BIGAR'S STARS

The stars show the kind of day you'll have:

★★★★★-Dynamic ★★★★★-Positive ★★★-Average
★★-So-so ★-Difficult

ARIES (March 21-April 19)

★★★ Tell it like it is. You might want to rethink what has happened within a special friendship. You might not be comfortable with what comes up for you later in the day. Use the early hours to the max. Later on, you might want to close your door. Tonight: Happy as can be.

TAURUS (April 20-May 20)

★★★★ Stay on top of work, even if you find it to be a bit of a drag. You might have some issue that is frustrating you and driving you. You must clear out work before you can let go and relax. Leave networking until the late afternoon. Tonight: Where your friends are.

GEMINI (May 21-June 20)

★★★★★ You might want to make calls and do research. Making a decision could be tough without the help of an expert. You have the ability to draw from an assortment of suggestions. Ultimately, your choice weighs over others. Tonight: A must show.

CANCER (June 21-July 22)

★★★★★ Be willing to understand more of what is going on behind the scenes. You might not feel comfortable with what someone says about your relationship. Detach rather than getting in the middle of a difficult discussion. Tonight: A must show.

LEO (July 23-Aug. 22)

★★★★★ Others come toward you. Someone shares important information; you might want to digest it and mull it over. Your vision of a situation could change substantially as a result. Unexpected developments in a key relationship could be exciting if you choose to look at it that way. Tonight: With your favorite person.

VIRGO (Aug. 23-Sept. 22)

★★★ Get into your work, because, if possible, you will want to clear out for the weekend. Ask someone to chip in, and you'll get a lot done a lot faster. Unexpected developments occur later on that you might want to act on. Tonight: The only answer is "yes."

LIBRA (Sept. 23-Oct. 22)

★★★★★ Your playfulness emerges with loved ones whom you care about. Be sure you have completed what you need to do for the day, even if you don't want to. Frolicking and loving take big roles on your wish list right now. Tonight: Uh-oh, did you forget something?

SCORPIO (Oct. 23-Nov. 21)

★★★★★ Sometimes you might wonder what needs to happen within a key relationship involving a child or a significant other. Wonder all you want, but take care of some primary issues during the daytime, then go back to your pondering. Tonight: Frisky as can be.

SAGITTARIUS (Nov. 22-Dec. 21)

★★★★★ Your way of handling matters proves to be very assertive and charges the thinking process. You know what you want and where you are heading. During the day, you find a shortcut to the place you want to go. Tonight: Even being home might be exciting.

CAPRICORN (Dec. 22-Jan. 19)

★★★ A partner or family member might push to have what he or she wants. You also might decide to surprise this person with it. Take your time pricing this item, though you might pick it up in the afternoon. Tonight: Enjoy the one you are with.

AQUARIUS (Jan. 20-Feb. 18)

★★★★ Still ready to hit a home run, you handle whatever gets tossed on your plate with efficiency and direction. Understand what someone else wants. Not everything is as simple as you would like to think. Use caution with your funds. Tonight: Be careful with money.

PISCES (Feb. 19-March 20)

★★★ Lie back and listen. You'll get a strong feeling of what is appropriate to do in an uncomfortable situation. Mull over different ideas, though you are likely to act on one spontaneously late in the day. Others find you to be exciting and unpredictable. Tonight: Take charge. Express your capricious nature.

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Phone: 310.458.PRESS(7737) • Fax: 310.576.9913

1427 Third Street Promenade, Ste. #202 • Santa Monica, CA 90401 • www.smdp.com

PUBLISHER

Ross Furukawa ross@smdp.com

EDITOR

Carolyn Sackariason sack@smdp.com

STAFF WRITER

John Wood wood@smdp.com

ADVERTISING SALES MANAGER

Rob Piubeni rob@smdp.com

ADVERTISING ACCOUNT EXECUTIVE

Steve Averill steve@smdp.com

ADVERTISING ACCOUNT EXECUTIVE

Rob Schwenker schwenker@smdp.com

PRODUCTION MANAGER

Del Pastrana del@smdp.com

PRODUCTION ASSISTANT

Alejandro Cesar Cantarero II alex@smdp.com

ADMINISTRATIVE TRAFFIC MANAGER

Heather Rich heather@smdp.com

CLASSIFIED REPRESENTATIVE

Mitch Troy mitch@smdp.com

CIRCULATION MANAGER

Robert DeAmicis robert@smdp.com

CIRCULATION

Keith Wyatt keith@smdp.com

CIRCULATION

Glenn Bolan glenn@smdp.com

SPECIAL PROJECTS

Dave Danforth dave@smdp.com

MASCOT

Maya Furukawa maya@smdp.com

LOCAL



COMMUNITY BRIEFS

Head to Africa at Miles Playhouse

By Daily Press staff

Celebrating "Black History Month," Venice Theatre Works is presenting the world premiere of "Peru in Africa," a one-woman show that takes audiences into the heart of Africa and the soul of its main character, Mary Peru.

The production, which brings together some of the best theater artists in Los Angeles, will run Feb. 6-29 at the Miles Memorial Playhouse, 1130 Lincoln Blvd. in Santa Monica. Performances are at 8 p.m. Fridays and Saturdays and 7 p.m. on Sundays — except the closing performance on Sunday, Feb. 29 which will be at 2 p.m.

"Peru in Africa" is by award-winning playwright Stephen Legawiec, author of 27 full-length plays, including the critically acclaimed "Red Thread," which won the Garland Award in 2003 for Best Play of the Year.

"Peru in Africa" follows Mary Peru, an eccentric and adventurous Afro-British journalist who has experienced everything but believes in nothing. But when she decides to live with the Pygmies of the Congo, her life is changed — as is her relationship with her sister. Legawiec's evocative prose brings to life the world of the deep African forest and the spiritual awakening of the play's title character.

The one-act play stars Marianna Harris, whose theater credits include the Pasadena Playhouse and Los Angeles Theatre Center, and whose television credits include Pacific Blue and City of Angels.

The director is Ernest A. Figueroa, who has extensive credits throughout the country and who has served as artistic associate with the Pasadena Playhouse and has been instrumental in organizing the Lincoln Center Theater's "Directors Lab West" in Los Angeles.

Scenic design is by Trefoni Michael Rizzi and sound design by Martin Carrillo, both of whom have extensive credits at prestigious theaters throughout the country.

The production marks the first time Venice Theatre Works is the principal producer of a show outside its resident home, the Electric Lodge in Venice.

Tickets for "Peru in Africa" are \$18 for general admission; \$10 for children under 14, and \$15 for students, senior citizens and all guild and union members. The second and third Sundays of the run, Feb. 15 and 22, are "pay what you can" performances.

For reservations, call Venice Theatre Works at (310) 281-6299. For further information, call the Miles Playhouse at (310) 458-8634.



Mary Peru

Free wellness series offered

By Daily Press staff

As part of the older adult wellness series, the YMCA is hosting two free lectures this February.

The first, on Wednesday, Feb. 18, will focus on Lymphedema. Dr. Emily Ilker, a physical medicine specialist will explore both the causes of, and treatments for the disease. The lecture will begin at 6:30 p.m. and conclude at 8 p.m.

The second lecture, on Wednesday, Feb. 26, will include an update on diabetes. Dr. Michael Bryer-Ash, an endocrinologist at UCLA. He will discuss the reasons for the worldwide epidemic, as well as offer possible approaches to improve the outlook. The lecture begins at noon and will conclude at 1:30 p.m.

Both lectures are free. Participants may register anytime at the member services desk. Lectures are to be held on the second floor in the Naylor Community Room. The Santa Monica Family YMCA is located 1332 Sixth St.

From the black perspective in Santa Monica

By Daily Press staff

Residents are offered a chance to peer into the history of blacks in Santa Monica this month at the historical society.



Expect another slow start today as we try and push through another super-high tide. Since we will have some new WNW swell in the water, expect better surf than what we saw early on Wednesday — but still on the weak side, all things considered.

OUTLOOK: This swell will continue to fill in, holding a little more size and consistency as we move into Friday, putting many breaks in the 4-5' range, while best breaks see bigger sets.

Write us at wood@smdp.com and tell us what the surf is doing today at your local break. Epic.

Today the water is:

59°

	LOW TIDES		HIGH TIDES	
	LOW ONE	LOW TWO	HIGH ONE	HIGH TWO
SATURDAY	3:49 AM	5:14 PM	9:58 AM	N/A
SUNDAY	4:32 AM	5:48 PM	12:04 AM	10:35 AM
MONDAY	5:32 AM	6:23 PM	12:43 AM	11:21 AM
TUESDAY	6:49 AM	7:06 PM	1:24 AM	12:15 PM
WEDNESDAY	8:31 AM	7:48 PM	2:07 AM	1:41 PM
THURSDAY	10:08 AM	8:48 PM	3:00 AM	3:44 PM
FRIDAY	11:19 AM	9:51 PM	3:50 AM	5:32 PM

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The Santa Monica Historical Society Museum presents Black History Month Celebration: "Treasures From The Chest," a visual/sound collection presentation by native Santa Monica citizen Marty Payne.

Topics of the presentation include the pioneer African Americans in the Pico neighborhood and the Santa Monica Freeway impact, original land grants, families, cultural assimilation, job market, and the role of the church.

Payne was born on the July 4, 1947 at Saint John's Hospital. His parents, LeVert Payne and Daisy Quinn, settled in Santa Monica in 1932. Payne, known as "Citizen" in music circles, and his three older sisters are native Santa Monicans. The training, family, friends, schools, and work experiences provide background for Payne to lead a journey into Santa Monica's black history. The program will be held on Sunday, Feb. 8 at 2 p.m. at the museum. Admission to the celebration is free. The museum is located at 1539 Euclid St. For more information, call (310) 395-2290.

SORRY! Due to unforeseeable printing complications with Thursday's edition, the Daily Press was a little late getting to the racks. Thank you for the hundreds of calls and e-mails. We apologize for the inconvenience. We strive to hit the streets by 7 a.m. each and every day — except Sunday.

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OPINION

LETTERS

Thankfully, law still in driver's seat

Editor:

Take SMDP columnist Ed Silverstein's (Incites, 1-14-04) car keys away! His innocent-guilty-innocent rant about Russell Weller is schizophrenic. He misses the horrid truth:

- 1) Weller fled one crime scene to cause another one.
 - 2) Weller killed and maimed scores of human beings.
- Silverstein's improved propaganda that Weller was "exemplary," that he "accidentally" accelerated, that he is not a threat to society, that he is in poor health — is all a bunch of unimportant nonsense.

Thankfully, the rule of law protects all, not just the privileged few.

Richard Jarousel
Santa Monica

DA's office needs to look in mirror

Editor:

I just learned that the additional sales tax we approved for fire and police protection has been stolen by the District Attorney's office. I often wondered how they could afford to pursue stupid prosecutions, now I know. I was arrested for having my TV too loud and the DA's office was willing to go to trial over the incident. That would have cost thousands of wasted dollars over a loud television. Why didn't they just ask me to turn down the volume? Not to mention, it took eight officers to respond to the horrible crime. I plead guilty in an effort to save taxpayers like me footing the bill.

The DA can steal public funds and nothing is done, yet the fire department can't afford to buy new equipment. The firemen can travel to Anaheim Stadium and drool over the very equipment that could save our lives, but there is no money to buy. The DA's should arrest themselves for their criminal behavior.

Randy Rose
Santa Monica

FUNNY PAPERZ "STATE-OF-THE-FAMILY-UNION"

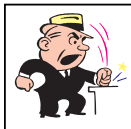


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Opinions expressed are those of the writer and do not necessarily reflect those of the Santa Monica Daily Press staff. Guest editorials from residents are encouraged, as are letters to the editor. Letters will be published on a space-available basis. It is our intention to publish all letters we receive, except those that are libelous or are unsigned. Preference will be given to those that are e-mailed to sack@smdp.com. All letters must include the author's name and telephone number for purposes of verification. Letters also may be mailed to our offices located at 1427 Third Street Promenade, Suite 202, Santa Monica, 90401, or faxed to (310) 576-9913. All letters and guest editorials are subject to editing for space and content.

A black eye for those with rose-colored glasses

MY WRITE
By Bill Bauer

The ever-optimistic Daily Press columnist Todd Flora waxed enthusiastically about the good things in Santa Monica in Tuesday's paper. He touted the virtues and charms of the Third Street Promenade and Main Street, and gushed about the boutiques and coffee houses on Montana Avenue.

"Enough," I thought. "My sweet tooth is aching."

While it's OK to be a cheerleader for the ol' home town, we need to get real. These streets have some unique stores, restaurants and watering holes, but they also have some serious negatives — traffic, lack of parking and vagrancy.

Before I bring my "shopping dollar back to Santa Monica through patronage of these gems," some changes must be made.

City Hall has spent millions of dollars in the last decade to narrow traffic lanes, widen sidewalks, construct decorative islands down the center of major thor-

oughfares, build roundabouts and speed bumps, install uncoordinated traffic lights and strangle traffic. Neilson Way, Main Street and 4th Street are "Gridlock Gulch" thanks to politicians and city planners.

The traffic calmers on City Council, especially Mayor Richard "Speed Bumps" Bloom and Kevin "I Love Crosswalks" McKeown have driven (no pun intended) many of us to shop, dine, work and play outside Santa Monica, where there is less stress and inconvenience.

Between traffic and antiquated, smelly parking garages, visiting the Third Street Promenade has become a very unpleasant experience. Inadequate and restricted resident-only street parking there and around Main Street make it difficult, if not impossible, to park, providing yet another good reason to stay away.

Then there's the vagrants, aggressive panhandlers, anti-social street punks, the mentally ill and all those who babble and scream and give these streets that special edginess some of our community leaders seem to think is stylish and exciting.

I can speak with experience when I say people don't want themselves, their families or loved ones exposed to crazies, drunks, the mentally challenged and the

obnoxious when they're trying to shop or have a good time. So there's another reason to go to Century City, Westwood, The Grove or Universal Citywalk.

I live near Montana Avenue and I'm not impressed with all the Starbucks, Coffee Beans, Dietrich's, Seattle's Best, Peets and the rest of the overpriced coffee shops seemingly on every corner. I don't like the overly expensive merchandise in most of the boutiques or the "Montana Avenue attitude" of much of the sales help.

Most of all, I'm sick of the rude, aggressive motorists who seem to think it's their right to cut off people legally crossing the street in marked crosswalks. The frustration of dealing with the street's many curb bump-outs, islands and other anti-vehicle impairments has not made the street safer, rather it's turned it into a real, life-sized version of a "Kill the Pedestrian" video game.

By the way, those same rude drivers who ignore pedestrians will park free in Wild Oats, stop traffic and drag their toddlers by the arm across busy Montana Avenue in the middle of the block just for a Jamba Juice.

My favorites are the mindless and inconsiderate snobs in oversized SUVs

who park and block bus stops while their rugrats go into a yogurt parlor for a double-chocolate with sprinkles.

The Aero Theater has been closed for months, so that isn't a draw these days.

The small neighborhood-serving businesses such as the Esquire Barber Shop with its \$12 haircuts are an endangered species. Sooner or later, a French styling salon charging \$75 for a men's haircut (to cover the cost of a \$15-per-square-foot rent) will eventually replace it.

When I was younger, I worked for Six Flags and Anheuser-Busch in public relations and promotions for their theme park divisions. I quickly learned that the positives of visiting an attraction must far outweigh the negatives if it is to be successful. Guests must have a rewarding experience if they're ever to return or recommend the attraction.

When our politicians and city staff finally learn that same lesson and take steps to ensure that the good outweighs the bad, only then will Main Street, the Promenade and Montana Avenue become, in Flora's words, "wonderful."

(Bill Bauer is a freelance writer and longtime Santa Monica resident.)

YOUR OPINION MATTERS!

Please send letters to:
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sack@smdp.com

OPINION



The Q-Line

The straight poop about fining pet owners

This past week, Q-line asked:

"What can be done about the poop problem here? If pet owners aren't going to pick it up how should City Hall deal with it?"

Here are your responses:

■ "I think its ludicrous to even consider City Hall doing anything about dog poop in the city of Santa Monica. The City Council isn't interested in anything outside of their own agenda. I pick up after my own dog and it's up to other responsible dog owners to report on those who don't. But don't bother relying on the City Council to do a thing."

■ "People who have pets should carry newspapers with them or bags. The minute that dog stops to poop they should just place the paper beneath the animal and throw that away. If they are not doing this, why don't they implement a pet tax so the city can hire people to pick it up?"

■ "Pet owners should be fined at least \$500, not \$50, for not picking up after their pets on city sidewalks and other people's lawns. This is an incentive to definitely take care of this little problem. When the word gets out that the fine is \$500, they will be picking up after these dogs."

■ "Number one, these crap monsters that are owned by people that refuse to pick up after them should be severely taxed. We need to spend this money on jobs for crap monster picker-uppers. This is significantly bad in the Ocean Park area. I have heard stories of dog crap being thrown at homeowners when they complained to dog owners. It's disgusting."

■ "I am so sick of picking up dog poop in my yard and I know my neighbors are too. The problem is that these jerks walk their dogs very early or very late to avoid being caught. Dogs even poop on the sidewalk. I am surprised that with all the money to be made, the city doesn't have anyone like meter maids walking around ticketing people, including people who relieve themselves in public. They would have to work around the clock, but they would absolutely make a fortune. Eventually, there will be a new term, "yard rage," when someone catches one of these people and takes the matter into their own hands."

■ "Dog poop is a huge problem on Main Street, the beaches and even downtown. A good solution to this is a requirement that all licensed dog owners purchase bags from the city. They won't want to waste their own money."

■ "Any owner of an animal has a responsibility to take care of it properly. Animal lovers should band together as a co-op and find their own property for these animals to relieve themselves. This way the rest of the community isn't forced to bask in the joy of their presence."

■ "To deal with the messy dogs, we should catch the owners and put them to sleep."

■ "Unfortunately, our City Hall is not going to do anything about poop

problems. They never do anything about much that would be beneficial. I see lots of poop all over Sunset Park. When they do pick it up, they put the poop in any old trash can. Then, even if you don't have a dog, you end up with a trash can that stinks of poop. It just isn't fair."

■ "I don't live North of Wilshire. I live in the Sunset Park area. We deal with it by saying, "Hey, pick that up!" It works over here. I don't think that City Hall is going to do anything and it's not that big a deal. There is a lot more to worry about in life than dog poop. If that's all you are concerned about, lucky you!"

■ "The fecal problem isn't just for dogs here in Santa Monica. The city seems very eager to get as much money as they possibly can from any feed. They just want to spend, spend, spend. I propose a fecal fee. Any pet owner has to pay this to keep a pet and can be fined by enforcement as well if caught not cleaning up poop."

■ "With all the critical issues going on, you chose dog poop to waste precious print space? True, City Hall is deep in it, but you want them to get deeper? I would have loved it if you had touched upon the fluoridation of our water. This is a major issue and you never even mentioned it. I'm scratching my head."

■ "The city should provide bags all over the city. You never know when your dog is going to go. The owners should be fined and they need to really enforce the leash law. All the poop that gets picked up in the city should be delivered to the City Council, because that's what they're full of and that's what they've done to this city."

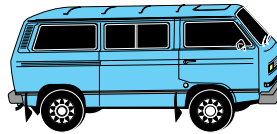
■ "Whatever is done about the dog poop should also be done about the human poop. These are both serious health risks and I hope if they come down on the dogs, they come down on the people too."

■ "I don't like the idea of the City Council being responsible for anything. I also don't like hearing about all these irresponsible pet owners. I always pick up after my dog. It is not pleasant, but it is part of living in a community. I am scared about implementing any type of tax or fine. I think it will force people to look outside of their neighborhood shelters and rescues to adopt animals that need homes. I don't know what can be done outside of getting these people's attention and embarrassing them so they pick up the poop."

■ "I think City Hall has enough issues to deal with and dog poop should not be one of them. I think we can solve this one on our own. Whether it be speaking up to these offending dog owners, post signs where appropriate, or keep a shovel handy. We all need to step up to the plate."

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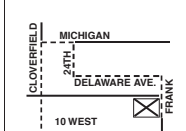
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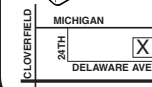
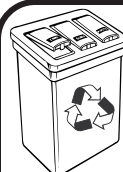
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LOCAL

Message: Schools need a stable, predictable revenue stream

ACTIVISTS, from page 1

Harding, a land use attorney who often is battling on behalf of the business community against SMRR, can put other differences aside and work together on the same campaign, then CEPS' goal has already been achieved.

"It's bipartisan. There is a sprinkling of everybody and, frankly, I'm not surprised," Zane said. "I think most people participate because they all share the value of kids in this community and their education."

Nat Trives, former mayor and chamber of commerce chairman, now sits on CEPS' steering committee.

"Education is the core value of the organization and it's part of our community as a whole," he said. "The quality of education is key as much as the sales tax is to keep the engine running."

Deasy, who not surprisingly thinks that CEPS' momentum and influence is key right now — the district is facing multi-million dollar shortfalls in the coming years — said the district's success in balancing its budget last year is largely because of the group's dedication.

"It's extremely gratifying that people are concerned enough to keep the effort going," he said, adding he is only advised by a few members on what the group is doing. "I didn't see the completed (charter amendment) language until it was filed (in City Hall)."

A 'NO-BRAINER'

Linda Gross, one of the handful of founders of CEPS, never dreamed the group would reach the level it has. At the time, the group was just trying to help the district overcome a small shortfall. But that shortfall grew over the ensuing years — the district was forced to find \$13 million to close its deficit last year.

"The deficit (remained at) a huge million and a half (dollars)," said Shari Davis, CEPS co-chair, who got involved in the organization in 1999. "We were frantic over what now seems like such a small amount. Everybody got mobilized at the perceived crisis at that time."

Gross thought that because the City Council indicated its commitment to education was strong, the group would be able to lobby local politicians into giving some extra cash to the district and the problem would be solved.

"We were always begging for money and the problem never went away," Gross said. "I didn't think we would be here six years later or certainly think we would be considering a charter amendment."

As the district's costs continued to increase and the state and federal government's financial commitment to education has decreased, CEPS found itself going to the City Council every year for more and more money — and each year they've gotten it. For the past several years, the City Council has given millions to the district, and more recently, even more than what was budgeted.

"The City Council has been very generous, but we don't want to come in front of them every year because it makes us feel like we are begging, and that doesn't feel very good," Gross said. "A group of us decided that what we needed was a reliable, steady source of funding."

And while the charter amendment would do that, it was thought early on that all that would be needed was a parcel tax and the City Council's contributions.

In 1999, the district's solution to closing its \$2 million deficit was to take in students from outside the district. But when the district's enrollment reached its maximum a few years later, the financial problems were still there.

"There were empty seats and permitted students bring in state money," said Ralph Mechur, one of the first CEPS members. "But when the number (of students) hit 12,000, enrollment was capped and we had increasing costs. We had to cut programs to meet the budget. That's when we went to the city, but it was met with skepticism, like 'what are you doing wrong that you need more money?'"

That's when Gross and others recruited people in the community who knew elected officials or had backgrounds in municipal finance and political campaigns, in an effort to find more money for local schools.

"We thought it was the most direct and effective way to address the yearly deficit. We didn't think we had a difficult task ahead of us," Gross said. "I really thought it was a no-brainer because the City Council said education was a top priority."

A THINK TANK

Most agree that the people behind CEPS are some of the brightest and committed community members in Santa Monica.



File photo

Top: SEPS co-chairs (l to r) Shari Davis and Louise Jaffe, and SEPS member Ralph Mechur hand the city charter amendment proposal to city clerk Maria Stewart earlier this month at City Hall.

Bottom: Legendary singer-songwriter Jackson Browne, who has a child in the Santa Monica-Malibu Unified School District, joined a SEPS rally in front of City Hall in June. The grass-roots organization was looking to procure more money for schools from City Council.

"(Linda Gross) was determined to bring people together that were on opposite sides of the political spectrum," Davis said. "There is a lot of brain power sitting around the table."

"Our well is very deep with people with expertise."

As CEPS was rallying the troops, Measure Y, a \$100-per property parcel tax was passed in 2000, according to Davis. Shortly after, a new superintendent of schools — John Deasy — was hired and a new strategic plan for the district was created, providing a map of where the district should go.

And it's going in the right direction, school supporters say. The district is closer to closing the achievement gap and test scores are up, Davis said.

"This district can improve and that's what keeps me going," said Davis, who has three children, two of whom are enrolled in the district. "Providing a stable source of municipal resources to the public school system will help all children achieve success in public schools."

Measure EE, another parcel tax, failed at the polls in the fall of 2002, despite enormous campaigning by CEPS members, who also work closely with other school groups like the PTA and the teacher's union.

"That was not a fun time. It was a time of stress," Davis said. "That's when we decided to become a political action committee."

After the disappointing election results, CEPS really started gaining momentum. Its members and PTA supporters gathered the community and rallied in front of

City Hall in January when the City Council first began considering its budget, which had to be passed in July. Then, in April, close to 1,000 people marched through Palisades Park, rallying to save teachers' jobs as they were in jeopardy of being laid off. Two months later, about the same time as the parcel tax election, the group showed up again in front of City Hall, this time with legendary musician Jackson Browne, in an attempt to get extra money from the City Council. The group was successful both in terms of getting an extra \$2.25 million on top of the annual \$3 million contribution, and it also won the June election. CEPS had backed the school board's decision to go for a special election and try to get voters to pass a revised parcel tax.

"The momentum we had as an educational-based organization and the political power allowed us to organize the community and achieve our mission to find strategic ways to increase financial resources for the district," Davis said.

While Measure S was successful, CEPS members knew the \$39 million it will bring in over the next six years still wouldn't be enough.

Almost immediately after the June election, CEPS started strategizing other funding mechanisms for the district — the result being the charter amendment.

"We always knew parcel taxes are partial solutions because the need is so much greater than that," Zane said. "The issue is to create a reliable and predictable source of funding."

LOCAL



City charter proposal met with skepticism by officials

CAMPAIGN, from page 1

— either establish a permanent funding source for the school district, or let voters decide how their tax dollars should be spent.

That's how City Council members see it, anyway. When the proposal was filed, some elected officials felt the move was a threat, even though CEPS members have discussed the idea with them in the past.

Santa Monica City Council members have been looking for ways to provide ongoing, stable funding to education. School supporters hope the charter amendment will expedite what could otherwise be a long, drawn-out decision-making process.

"They've heard it and want to consider it," said CEPS member Linda Gross, who helped form the group six years ago. "They could, in fact, talk forever."

So far, there has been no discussion since the proposal was filed. It's expected to be a topic of conversation at the City Council's Jan. 27 meeting. Meanwhile, CEPS isn't waiting around for officials to make a decision.

"We are very eager to see what happens," Davis said, adding the group met this week to strategize over how to collect signatures for the ballot petition. "We'll be gearing up soon."

The measure would require the city to provide a minimum of \$6 million in annual revenues to the school district, or about 4 percent of designated general funds, whichever is greater. Also, funding to the district would

be modestly increased each year — but only when the city's revenues grow by at least 3.5 percent.

Last year's contribution to the district from City Hall was \$5.25 million — its regular \$3 million annual contribution, plus \$2.25 million in one-time funds. City Hall also doled out one-time funds above and beyond its annual contribution in previous years, despite its own budget problems.

The Santa Monica-Malibu Unified School District faced a \$13 million budget shortfall last year, but was able to close the gap through personnel cuts, and new revenue sources such as the parcel tax, which will bring in \$6.5 million annually over the next six years.

But it won't be enough to keep the schools "excellent," which is CEPS' ultimate goal.

And with more than a \$350 million annual budget, school supporters believe City Hall can afford to continue its financial commitment to the district. But they don't want to have to ask every year, particularly because the school district has to provide a balanced budget to the county in March and the City Council doesn't pass the city's budget until July.

"The timing is off," Gross said, adding that many people have told her that CEPS should have pushed through a charter amendment long ago.

"They said we waited too long and were too patient," she said.

Davis said CEPS is putting a lot of energy into its

strategy for what could be a long campaign. It has conducted extensive research, including public opinion polls via phone to gauge whether the community would support such a measure.

Schools Superintendent John Deasy said he hopes the City Council comes up with a plan to provide steady, predictable funding without the need for the charter amendment.

"The end is exactly what we need — sustained funding," he added. "It would great, in my opinion, if we didn't have to go to a ballot, but I don't know how we are going to solve funding in education in California ... I don't particularly like going to the City Council every year."

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Tenants must pay for breaking lease

LANDLORD, from page 1

owed by the former couple, who broke their lease and moved to a house in Venice shortly after the incident. The landlord had asked for more than \$40,000 for missed rent, late fees, and the cost of cleaning and hiring a broker.

In the end, jurors awarded the landlord \$18,000, while also allowing the firm to keep a \$9,000 security deposit that was never refunded to the former couple.

As the court clerk read the verdict, Starr closed his eyes and Serrano held both of her hands up to her mouth. In the hallway outside afterwards, Starr said, "We're very surprised. We think if the jury had known everything, they would have found very differently."

During the trial, Starr and Serrano contended that Marvin Engineering officials knew security at their luxury seaside building was inadequate, but failed to make necessary improvements. They argued the safety locks on both their elevator and on the emergency fire doors were broken, noting that several other break-ins occurred there in the months preceding theirs.

But officials from Marvin Engineering, an aerospace and defense manufacturer that also owns several properties on the westside, said they had no way of foreseeing the accident. Defense attorney Gilbert Garcia argued in the trial that the four armed gunmen were intent on getting in to the apartment by any means necessary.

Starr, who is considering an appeal, accused the defense attorney of hiding information about previous break-ins and faulted Santa Monica Superior Court Judge Valerie Baker for not allowing jurors to hear about a man who that summer was shot in front of the building, at Sunset Boulevard near Pacific Coast Highway.

The break-in occurred in broad daylight while Starr and Serrano were entertaining two guests for lunch on a Friday afternoon. Though the burglars stole some jewelry and cash, they seemed more concerned with the \$30,000, which they thought Starr had. But the gunmen, who were never caught, apparently had the wrong apartment. They were looking for a reported drug dealer named "Matt" who had moved out of his apartment in the middle of the night a month earlier and hasn't been located.

But it wasn't just defense attorneys that were successful in lobbying Judge Baker to keep information away from the jurors. According to documents filed with the court, Serrano and her two guests were all born men. Each of the three now live as women.

"It's completely irrelevant and potentially prejudicial," said plaintiff attorney Blaine Greenberg. "Some folks are prejudiced against people different than they are."

Greenberg, who has practiced law in California for 22 years, said this was only the second case he's taken on contingency — and probably the last.

Jurors, who said they picked up on and felt uneasy concerning some of the issues relating to sexuality, said the bottom line was that the accident was not foreseeable.

One such juror, a Santa Monica artist who declined to give his name, said, "Having lived and worked at the beach for 20 years, I know — the beach is a place people come to get unglued."

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Entertainment

'Date' should have been 40 years ago at the drive-in

Review

BY DAN DUNN
Special to the Daily Press

The fundamental problem with "Legally Blonde" director Robert Luketic's latest effort, "Win A Date With Tad Hamilton!" is that the timing of the release is off. By about 40 years or so. Though it convincingly mimics the look and feel of those jejune Doris Day sex comedies, there's nary a wink, nor a hint of irony that suggests Luketic and screenwriter Victor Levin ("Mad About You") realize that the 1960s mores and conventions upon which they establish their narrative no longer apply. So we get Kate Bosworth as an impossibly sweet and innocent small-town bumpkin with the insipidly unsubtle bumpkin-y name, Rosalee Futch, who worships a dashing matinee idol named Troy Donahue ... er, Tad Hamilton (soap opera star Josh Duhamel). And we also get Topher Grace ("That 70s Show") as Pete Monash, an invertebrate grocery store manager who's been pining for Rosalee forever, but hasn't even been able to screw up the nerve to ask her to the sock hop ... er, out to dinner. Did I mention that these characters are supposed to be in their 20s? In 2004?

After the incorrigible playboy Tad gets popped for drunk driving with a floozy, his handlers (Nathan Lane and Sean Hayes play-

ing uninspired agent-stereotypes, both named Richard Levy — perhaps the funniest gag in the movie) decide the only way to clean up Tad's bad-boy image is to send him on a date with a true blue fan. Of course, one need look no further than Sean Penn and Colin Farrell to know how damaging a bad-boy image can be to an actor's career ... er, nevermind. The point is, Rock Hudson was NOT gay and Tad Hamilton really is dreamy. After their publicity tryst in Hollywood, so smitten is Tad with Rosalee's aw-shucks freshness that he follows her back to — ready for this? — Fraziers Bottom, West Virginia. This doesn't sit well at all with Pete, who is hoping beyond hope that Rosalee will protect her "carnal treasure" long enough for him to grow a pair of cojones and make his move, or realize he IS gay (the subtext is undeniably apparent).

Parents might find the time warp element of "Win A Date With Tad Hamilton!" to be of some comfort — Luketic was certainly taken by the purity of a simpler era. And the made-for-"Tiger Beat" leads certainly have considerable appeal to the teen audience this film targets. But it's doubtful that even the most unsophisticated 8-year-old will be able to relate to these characters or the outmoded world they inhabit. Forty years ago, this film would have been a hit. Today, it misses.

(Rated PG-13 for sexual content, some drug references and language. Running time: 95 minutes)



Josh Duhamel and Kate Bosworth in "Win a Date With Tad Hamilton!"

Kate Bosworth on celebrity crushes and keeping it real

BY DAN DUNN
Special to the Daily Press

When I meet Kate Bosworth in a suite at the Four Seasons Hotel in Beverly Hills, it's about 15 minutes prior to kickoff of the New England Patriots divisional playoff game against the Tennessee Titans. Since Bosworth grew up on the south shore of Massachusetts, I attempt to establish a rapport by mentioning how impressed I've been by Pats quarterback Tom Brady and the inspired coaching of Bill Belichick.

But Bosworth, the talented young star of "Blue Crush" and the new comedy "Win A Date With Tad Hamilton!" isn't aware that Belichick recently won Coach of The Year honors, or that Tom Brady isn't related to Greg and Marcia, or even that the Patriots are in the playoffs. She did, however, immediately flash a smile that could light up Gillette Stadium, and even offered me a stick of cinnamon chewing gum. That was all the rapport this scribe needed. So with that, it was on to the questions:

QUESTION: Rosalee Futch, your character in "Tad Hamilton," is hopelessly in love with matinee idol Tad Hamilton. Who was your first celebrity crush?

KATE BOSWORTH: I guess Brad Pitt was the first guy that made me go, "Wow!" (Sighs) Yeah, he was the one.

Q: Did you get along well with co-stars Topher Grace and Josh Duhamel?

KB: They're "guys" guys, but really nice guys as well. Nobody had an ego. Everybody was so sweet. It was fun because we're all kind of young, so we were learning and growing and making good and bad decisions together. It was a great experience for us, getting to work with Sean Hayes and Nathan Lane, who are veteran comedic actors.

Q: What's it like to see yourself up on the screen?

KB: It was really weird the first time, because I sat there listening to myself and I thought "Is that what I sound like?"



Kate Bosworth

But this film, well, she was such a character for me that I was able to just sit back and enjoy it. It's difficult, though, that first time because you are so on edge.

Q: Have you ever watched something you've done and wished you could have a do-over?

KB: Oh yeah, all the time. I'm not going to give you specific moments because that wouldn't be fair to other people, but I will tell you that it happens quite a bit.

Q: You recently celebrated your 21st birthday. Do things

feel differently now that you're of legal drinking age?

KB: They feel pretty good, actually. Twenty was kind of difficult because it was a transition year. There were growing pains associated with not quite wanting to be an adult or a teenager. Twenty-one makes me feel like I'm coming into my own.

Q: I read somewhere that you may be enrolling in college soon to study psychology.

KB: Where did you read that?

Q: Why, is it not true?

KB: No, I might go back to school. It's just, I wonder where they get this stuff sometimes.

Q: Have you been surprised by something you've read about yourself before?

KB: Well, here's one I always wondered about: When I went to the audition for "The Horse Whisperer," they asked me to bring a picture. Obviously, they wanted an 8x10 professional headshot, but I didn't understand that. So I brought a Christmas card picture — a little 4x6 job that I threw on the stack with all the actors' headshots. Years later, when "Blue Crush" came out, I read about the Christmas card picture in a story about me, and I was, like, how in the world did they find out about that?

Q: You learned to surf for your role in "Blue Crush." Do you still take the board out from time to time?

KB: I really don't, because the training schedule for that movie was so intense that I still associate surfing with work. I enjoyed it, but I went from surfing to making "Wonderland," which was totally different, so surfing kind of got left behind.

Q: Finally, how do you feel about Boston now that you've relocated to LA?

KB: You know what I love about Boston? It's real. With all the superficiality that LA can embody, being in Boston always brings me back to reality. And it's a great, great thing to have that.

ENTERTAINMENT



William Lee Scott (standing) and Ashton Kutcher in "The Butterfly Effect."

Reason flies out the door viewing 'Butterfly Effect'

BY DAN DUNN
Special to the Daily Press

From the guys who brought us "Final Destination 2" — proving that the first film was actually just a lay over — comes yet another supernatural thriller that asks audiences to check all reason at the theater door and prepare to do the time warp again. Ashton Kutcher ("That '70s Show," Demi Moore) is the latest leading man to revisit yesteryear, but unlike his predecessors, Kutcher (or Evan Treborn, his nom de guerre in the movie) doesn't require any fancy machinery or divine intervention to get back to where he once belonged. All he has to do is read passages from his childhood journals while squinting so hard he looks like he's in need of a powerful laxative.

A pedophile, a criminally insane father and a psychotic play pal all combine to make Evan's formative years a living hell. Along the way, he develops an unusual coping mechanism: Whenever something really awful takes place, he blacks-out. All grown up and away at college, Evan discovers that the notebooks filled with his adolescent scribbles are a portal to the past. It's easily the most unsophisticated time-traveling technique ever devised, but there's serious comedic currency in the notion of Kutcher's brain getting so taxed by text, it blows a hole through time.

Once he's got a handle on his powers, Evan attempts to rewrite history to transform the present, seemingly for the sole purpose of landing his dreamgirl, Kayleigh (played as an adult by Amy Smart). But as any cinephile knows, changing the past almost always yields unexpected and disastrous results in the now. So Evan is stuck trying to right his wrongs over and over and over. "The Butterfly Effect" is entertaining, and at times hilarious, though not by design. One thing it isn't, however, is frightening. Rather, it's a no-thrills thriller that gets sillier as it lists toward a wholly preposterous finale. In a bold attempt to distance himself from his "That 70s Show" and "Punk'd" pedigree, Kutcher grew a beard. Nice move. Makes him seem like a much older Kelso. Smart manages to move deftly between several variations of Kayleigh, from a stylish sorority sister to a strong-out and scarred hooker.

(Rated R for violence, sexual content, language and brief drug use. Running time: 113 minutes)

What's Playing

BY DAN DUNN
Special to the Daily Press

ALONG CAME POLLY
Ultimately sags due to an absence of chemistry between the leads and a surprising shortage of crisp comedy.

TORQUE
An eye-popping, all-out assault on the senses that makes very little sense. A big-budget thrill for designer motorcycles, Budweiser and Mountain Dew, set to a kinetic soundtrack.

TEACHER'S PET
It's kid stuff, to be sure, but with a piquancy similar to such edgy fare as "Ren & Stimpy" and "Pinky and the Brain" to keep the adults interested.

CHASING LIBERTY
Despite an arrant disregard for verisimilitude, this is an undeniably pleasant fairy tale about an 18-year-old girl coming of age under highly unusual circumstances.

MONSTER
Serves as a grim reminder of humanity's very real and limitless capacity for evil. Charlize Theron delivers a career-defining performance.

BIG FISH
If you're willing to lose yourself for a few hours in a surrealist fish story, well, it's hard to imagine anything better than what Burton has conceived here.

HOUSE OF SAND AND FOG
Manages to be compelling despite a host of implausibilities thanks to the lead actors, both of whom bring such conviction to their roles that what transpires almost seems feasible.

CHEAPER BY THE DOZEN
An insipid flick about a dopey dad who can't control a pack of wild kids that seems to have been put together solely for the purpose of separating parents from their hard-earned dough.

CALENDAR GIRLS
Boasts an appealing British sensibility and echoes the uplifting themes that made "Billy Elliott" a surprise hit stateside a few years back.

THE COOLER
Wayne Kramer's lowdown on the desperate lives of lost souls in Las Vegas is easily one of the best bets this year.

THE BARBARIAN INVASIONS
An emotionally charged, and often hilarious tale about a dying man who reconnects with old friends and his estranged son.

THE RETURN OF THE KING
This film, the best of the year, seals the deal: Director Peter Jackson has delivered the most spectacular film trilogy of all-time.

SOMETHING'S GOTTA GIVE
If you enjoy lots of jokes about May-December romances and erectile dysfunction, this is the film for you.

STUCK ON YOU
Contains several laugh-out-loud moments and some surprisingly deft comedic performances.

IN AMERICA
An inescapably moving elegy about pain and loss and hope and renewal that unabashedly wears its broken heart on its tattered sleeve.

THE LAST SAMURAI
An entertaining film, but highly derivative of superior antecedents such as "Dances With Wolves" and "Unforgiven."

HONEY
With Jessica Alba leading the way, it's only a matter of time before the Crips and the Bloods trade in their colors and guns for tap shoes and ballet slippers.

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STATE

Immigrant philanthropic groups turn toward politics

BY LAURA WIDES

Associated Press Writer

LOS ANGELES — A decade ago, a small group of immigrants from Mexico united to send money back home for a bakery, baseball diamond and sewer system in their mountain village of Jalpa.

Today, that group and hundreds like it have evolved from hometown philanthropic clubs to become members of a burgeoning political network seeking to improve life for immigrants in the United States and for their families back home.

In a sign of the clubs' growing influence, a delegation of Mexican governors is scheduled to meet for the first time with a coalition of the groups in Los Angeles. The meeting, scheduled for Tuesday, will be followed by similar ones planned in Chicago, Dallas and San Antonio, Texas.

Among the issues the groups expect to discuss are President Bush's proposal of temporary work visas for illegal immigrants, legalizing voting in all Mexican elections for Mexican nationals living abroad, providing Mexican health insurance for families of immigrants, and protecting social services for all immigrants in the United States.

"This is a new stage in the evolution of political organization by Mexican immigrants," said Louis DiSipio, an assistant professor of political science at the University of California, Irvine. "This is the first time I've seen them getting together and working across state barriers."

Many U.S.-based immigrant rights organizations and even Mexican-American organizations have long been politically active. But these hometown groups and larger organizations called federations, which represent people from entire Mexican states, differ because many of the members are first-generation immigrants and many are not U.S. citizens.

As a result, their agenda is binational. "You can no longer just look at the impact of the immigrants here or there," said Gonzalo Arroyo, a founder of the Michoacan federation in Aurora, Ill. "They are starting to work on both sides."

On the U.S. side, the Southern California coalition of federations helped organize a one-day work stoppage by Hispanics throughout California in December. Its members were protesting the repeal of a state law permitting illegal immigrants to obtain driver's licenses.

Federation leaders say they also have begun meeting with state and local officials and are planning voting drives for this year's U.S. presidential election.

Politically, their influence has grown tremendously in recent years in their home country.

Members of several clubs have run for local office in Mexico, and a number of federation leaders sit on a panel advising the Mexican government on immigrant issues.

The coalition recently called for the

resignation of President Vicente Fox's foreign minister for failing to adequately support immigrants in the United States. They also have urged Fox to push for amnesty for illegal immigrants in the United States and plan to discuss that issue with the governors.

The change is all about numbers, said Jose Guadalupe Gomez, a member of the Jalpa club and president of the state of Zacatecas federation of Southern California.

The number of Mexican immigrants living in the United States nearly doubled in the last decade from 4.3 million in 1990 to an estimated 9.9 million in 2002, according to U.S. Census data. Last year, they sent between \$12 billion and \$14.5 billion to the Mexican economy, exceeding for the first time income from both foreign investments and tourism.

Gomez recalled how in the 1970s, the Mexican government used to criticize those who left the country.

"Now they are interested in immigrant issues," he said. "These remittances have revolutionized the way our government looks at us."

Arroyo, who heads a nonprofit group for immigrant education, said there also has been a gradual shift in the type of people immigrating — from a more rural population to a more urban one that is comfortable with politics.

Hometown clubs began to form in the United States during the 1960s to preserve cultural traditions and to channel money more efficiently back home, first to families and later to communities. In the last two decades, many have united into federations representing individual states, funding major projects that in some cases receive matching money from the Mexican government.

Last year, the federations in Southern California formed a coalition representing roughly 300,000 immigrant families from across Mexico. Similar efforts are under way in Illinois and Texas, where some of the largest Mexican immigrant populations live. Smaller federations also exist in Atlanta, Las Vegas and other cities.

But DiSipio cautions that for now the federations' political influence in this country remains limited because many of their members are not U.S. citizens and therefore cannot vote. And they can expect only so much support from Mexico on issues of immigrant rights.

"Mexico has to walk a real tightrope in terms of trying to influence internal U.S. policy," DiSipio said.

Still, Gomez said the political awakening among the federations is just beginning.

"When I first sent money back to Jalpa, I never imagined I would be head of a big organization. I never thought I would be talking to the president of Mexico or be invited to the White House. Now I have been," he said. "Now they are beginning to hear us."



NATIONAL



Norton promotes forest plan, links it to renewable energy

BY JUDITH KOHLER

Associated Press Writer

DENVER — Interior Secretary Gale Norton has announced that the government will make it more attractive for companies and communities to use trees and excess brush to generate electricity.

The two goals — protecting communities from wildfires that feed on the extra fuel and tapping a new energy source — fit together, Norton said during a conference on alternative energy and wood products.

"We're changing the long-term management of forests," Norton said. She said converting trees and brush cleared from public lands into fuel is part of the solution.

Federal agencies will craft contracts to make it more economically appealing for timber companies, utilities or communities to use wood and brush for energy, Norton said. The government's cost of clearing the land could be reduced by allowing contractors to make money by turning the debris into fuel.

President Bush's "healthy forests" legislation, introduced by Rep. Scott McInnis, R-Colo., would reduce fire danger by thinning stands of trees. Large fires that have devastated swaths of the West in recent years have been blamed in part on fire suppression, leading to a buildup of fuels.

More and more homes have also been built among the trees in the foothills and mountains, driving up the risk of property damage.

Environmentalists have assailed the legislation because it speeds up environmental reviews of timber projects on public land and limits legal challenges to log-

ging. They also argue that it doesn't adequately deal with private land, where many of the biggest problems are blamed on development.

Gregory Aplet, senior forest scientist with The Wilderness Society, said he supports converting trees and debris into energy but questions the feasibility.

"The government will probably have to subsidize it," said Aplet, one of the speakers at the two-day conference.

If companies remove only the small, densely packed trees considered the prime

source of catastrophic fires, the source of biomass energy will eventually run out, Aplet said.

The likelihood of lawsuits by environmentalists is another drawback, said Henson Moore, president and chief executive of American Forest & Paper Association in Washington, D.C.

Moore said companies are also trying to decide if such projects make sense for "a capital-strapped, profit-challenged" industry. He said about 60 percent of the electricity for the country's logging facili-

ties is generated by burning wood, but in some cases it's not economically feasible.

Business and government officials are exploring various technologies, including portable equipment to cut and process the wood and debris.

The twin objectives of restoring forest health and using renewable energy are broadly supported by the public, said Mark Rey, under secretary of Natural Resources and Environment in the Agriculture Department.

Cows traced to Idaho in mad cow investigation

By The Associated Press

BOISE, Idaho — Three cows from a Canadian herd that entered this country in 2001 and included a mad cow disease-infected Holstein have been traced to a dairy farm in Burley, Idaho, the U.S. Department of Agriculture said Thursday.

One of the cows already died, while two others are alive. The state Department of Agriculture placed a hold order on the farm where they were found to prevent any animals from leaving, said Nolan Lemon, a USDA spokesman.

State Veterinarian Clarence Siroky announced earlier that a dairyman in Burley had purchased one cow from the Canadian herd in late 2002. The animal became sick last March 18 and died March 23. Siroky said the cow did not have mad cow disease, formally known as bovine spongiform encephalopathy, which eats holes in the brains of cattle.

The disease is a public health concern because humans can develop a brain-wasting illness, variant Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease, from consuming contaminated beef products.

The one calf the now-deceased cow had while in Idaho was stillborn, Siroky said. Neither was slaughtered for food.

State agriculture officials said late Thursday they had not yet been advised that two more cows were traced to the farm.

Siroky said he was notified by federal officials last Saturday of the possibility that one of the Canadian cattle had been shipped to Idaho but it took until Tuesday to verify it.

Federal agriculture officials announced Dec. 23 that a dairy cow at a central Washington farm had tested positive for the disease. The cow was slaughtered Dec. 9.

Investigators later traced that cow to a herd of 81 cattle that entered the United

States from Alberta, Canada in 2001. They have since been working to trace the remaining animals in the herd.

The findings in Idaho bring the number of located cows to 26. The other 23 were located at five central Washington farms.

Siroky declined to identify the Burley dairyman.

"He has been extremely cooperative, a very upfront person," Siroky said.

The other 5,000 cows in the farmer's herd were physically inspected on Wednesday, and background information on all of them was forwarded to investigators trying to account for all 81 animals.

It will take at least two weeks to cross-check information on the history of the Burley herd with that of the suspect cattle from Canada to determine whether any more of those cows are in Burley, Siroky said.

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**NATIONAL**

Company's tracked vehicles in war zones, farmers' fields

BY RICHARD COCKLE

Associated Press Writer

LA GRANDE, Ore. — When serial entrepreneur Dennis Wilkinson founded Omnitrac a decade ago, he wasn't sure what to expect from his little northeastern Oregon creation.

He had no idea that in relatively short order Omnitrac would become the world's best-known manufacturer of something called "rubber-tracked systems," producing everything from secret unmanned military reconnaissance vehicles to deep-sea machines.

Or that Omnitrac's modest offices would one day become the only spot in this mountainous and remote corner of Oregon where a visitor might rub elbows with weapons designers from the U.S. Department of Naval Surface Warfare and Alabama's Redstone Arsenal.

Wilkinson, 63, owner and president of Omnitrac, started the company in 1994 simply because he liked vehicles that ran on rubber tracks, and he hoped to find a niche producing them for farmers to use in their fields. Despite those modest expectations, the company has over the years become the best-kept manufacturing secret in this corner of Oregon.

"We had no idea there was an application there," he said of using unmanned, rubber-tracked vehicles in deep-sea and military operations.

Omnitrac recently designed and built a rubber-tracked system for a desk-sized military reconnaissance vehicle known as "Gladiator" that weighs 1,600 pounds and can smash through a 6-inch wall at 12 mph — which may not sound terribly fast until you consider it coming through the wall at you.

A smaller 3 mph version is designed to maneuver along interior hallways and climb stairs. Wilkinson said he was told the military machines could be outfitted with machine guns and flame throwers, as well as cameras.

"If you have bad guys, you just send this little guy in there; his lights are blinking and he says, 'How do you do, fellas,'" he said.

Omnitrac also has built tracks for 35 underwater machines that lay fiber-optic lines on the ocean floor at depths of 7,000 feet. The track systems for those submersible machines were commissioned by Perry Tri-Tech of Jupiter, Fla., and the machines tip the scales at 6 to 7 tons each, he said.

A similar tracked machine built with Omnitrac's assistance was designed to retrieve underwater pipelines for repairs, said Wilkinson. His company also builds tracks for machines engaged in scientific research in Antarctica and to explore for oil on Alaska's North Slope, he said.

"We don't have much competition in the areas where our specialties are," Wilkinson said.

Wilkinson gets inquiries from time to time from treasure hunters who think they need submersible tracked vehicles to find wrecks on the ocean bottom, he said. Disabled people sometimes want tracks on their wheelchairs, and Omnitrac clients sometimes use tracked vehicles for environmental studies of proposed industrial sites and office complexes.

"Everything now has to be environmentally tested to see if the ground is stable and what is down there," said

Wilkinson. "We can take a track system and drive across a yard and not leave a mark."

Most recently, Omnitrac completed initial testing of a 17-passenger "snowbus" built to transport winter sightseers around Yellowstone National Park. On a recent, snowy morning, Wilkinson brought the yellow snowbus to a halt in a knee-deep drift outside his company's headquarters after a test run.

"It handles pretty well," he said of the hybrid machine, part school bus and part snowmobile. "I drove it over to the bowling alley for lunch. Caused quite a stir."

Omnitrac won a contract early in 2003 to design and mount four sets of rubber tracks on the bus for seasonal use at the national park. The prototype track drive system cost \$100,000, but production models probably will run \$35,000 to \$45,000 a bus, he said.

Representatives of Goodyear, which manufactures the rubber tracks, said they would only support the project if Omnitrac were brought in to mount them on the buses, said Jim Bartel, president of Heart International, of Grand Blanc, Mich., which designs and makes the buses themselves.

"Dennis never flinched," said Richard Rief, vice president in charge of marketing for Heart International. "He went right ahead and did what he said he was going to do, and he did a heck of a job."

The tracked buses are designed to travel at up to 40 mph through unplowed snow carrying sightseers. Heart International developed a handicapped-accessible, wheeled version of the bus earlier this year for the National Park Service to carry summer visitors through Yellowstone.

Omnitrac has a contract with Heart International to mount tracks on at least two other Yellowstone snowbuses for winter use, said Wilkinson.

Heart International is heading up the development and eventual manufacture of the buses. Bartel hopes next winter 25 or more will be operating in Yellowstone.

The creation of the snowbus is timely. A recent ruling by a federal judge in Washington, D.C., had the effect of reducing snowmobile numbers in the park to 493 a day from 950, and could eliminate the one- and two-person snow machines altogether by next winter, said Bartel. The effect could be to increase demand for bused trips.

But Omnitrac's business fortunes aren't tied to Yellowstone, either way.

Less exotic tracked machines by Omnitrac seed, fertilize and harvest such diverse agricultural crops as Australian sugar cane, grapes, blueberries, tomatoes and romaine lettuce, said Wilkinson.

Tracked vehicles are popular with farmers because they cause 50 percent to 75 percent less soil compaction than wheeled vehicles, he said.

Some agricultural machines shod with Omnitrac tracks are 100 feet wide and see heavy use in Montana, the Dakotas and on Washington's rolling Palouse Hills, he said.

Before starting Omnitrac, Wilkinson owned three farms, a travel trailer dealership and a shoe store in and around La Grande, he said. He started Beaver Creek Equipment near Oregon City in 1976, later moving it to La Grande. Growing bored with his other enterprises, he began looking for a new challenge, which turned out to be Omnitrac.

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NATIONAL



Public utilities reject rate settlement

BY WILLIAM MCCALL
Associated Press Business Writer

PORTLAND, Ore. — A dispute over Bonneville Power Administration rates is headed for a federal appeals court after public utilities on Wednesday rejected a proposed settlement to reduce wholesale electricity prices by 7.4 percent.

The settlement had been endorsed by the governors of Oregon, Washington, Idaho and Montana, along with the congressional delegation from the four Northwest states.

"I think it's unfortunate," said Washington Gov. Gary Locke. "I very much supported it. It would have meant a rate decrease."

The rejection was led by the Snohomish County Public Utility District, the largest of Bonneville's public customers, which is going to let the 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals decide whether the settlement offer was fair.

The lawyer for the Snohomish district said he will argue the settlement offer favored the large, investor-owned utilities in the Northwest instead of the public utilities.

"To make it simple, the Bonneville administrator cannot rewrite federal law in any way he wishes in order to write contracts," said Mike Gianunzio, general counsel for the Snohomish power district.

The dispute centers on electricity contracts drafted during the Western energy crisis of 2001, when prices soared due to drought that cut BPA hydropower production, failed utility deregulation in California and energy market manipulation by the now-bankrupt Enron Corp.

Bonneville administrator Steven Wright spent months negotiating a settlement with public and private utilities over what public utilities claimed were excessive payments to private utility companies in contracts negotiated during the energy crisis.

The deadline was midnight Wednesday, but all 72 utilities involved in a lawsuit against Bonneville had to sign the settlement in order for it to take effect, and Snohomish had officially declared last November that it would reject the settlement. Other Washington state utilities, and at least one in Oregon, also said "no" to the offer.

"The settlement is dead," Gianunzio said, noting that Snohomish accounts for about 10 percent of Bonneville revenue from utilities.

It was unlikely the settlement offer would be re-negotiated, said BPA spokesman Ed Mosey.

"It's full speed ahead, it's not back to the drawing board," Mosey said, adding that Wright wants to focus on future rate plans, fish and wildlife conservation issues, and upgrading the regional transmission system.

Members of the Northwest congressional delegation said they were disappointed.

The delegation "has heard repeatedly from utilities for more than two years that reducing BPA's rates was their top priority," said U.S. Rep. Peter DeFazio, D-Ore., a leading Bonneville critic.

"It's unfortunate that a few misdirected utilities in Washington state killed real rate relief for all rate payers in our region. The Northwest economy could certainly use the boost that lower energy costs may provide," DeFazio said.

"I think it's unfortunate. I very much supported it. It would have meant a rate decrease."

— GARY LOCKE
Washington Governor

Sen. Ron Wyden, D-Ore., called it "a shame" but said he will work with the Northwest governors and other members of Congress to fashion an alternative settlement, if possible.

Under the settlement terms, changes in the mix of credits Bonneville gives private utilities would have deferred an additional \$269 million in BPA payments until 2007, when the agency's next rate period begins. Public power customers would have seen wholesale electricity costs cut by an estimated \$190 million as a result, utility managers said.

Rick Crinklaw, general manager of Lane Electric Cooperative in Eugene, said Snohomish and other utilities believe they can get a better settlement in court.

"For them, successful litigation would result in greater benefits," Crinklaw said. "But from our standpoint, the benefits of a settlement would be certain if approved, and for us not markedly different than what a litigated solution would be."

For Lane Electric, the settlement would have saved about \$500,000 a year over several years, Crinklaw said.

U.S. Rep. Rick Larsen, D-Wash., whose district includes Snohomish County, said the utility is taking a chance by asking the 9th Circuit to decide the lawsuit because the appeals court has consistently favored Bonneville on contract issues over the years.

"The history of the BPA's success in the 9th Circuit is pretty good," Larsen said. "I hope that the utilities that moved forward with the lawsuit have an understanding of that. I don't want the region to suffer as a result of a good settlement being thrown away."

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NATIONAL

Hostages locked in prison tower, negotiators keep talking

MICHELLE RUSHLO

Associated Press Writer

PHOENIX — Since before dawn Sunday, two correctional officers have been held hostage by a pair of inmates locked in a gray block guard tower flanked by barbed wire fences.

Over the long days and nights, coffee and water have been sent in; at least one gas canister has been tossed out. But aware that the inmates hold the high ground and the lives of two guards, the authorities have done the only thing they could: kept talking.

"Time is definitely on our side," said Ivan Bartos, a Department of Corrections official.

He said prison officials were encouraged that talks continued with the inmates for a fifth day Thursday, because negotiations were the best opportunity to peacefully resolve the hostage situation at the prison west of Phoenix.

"The longer they go on, the more the quality and quantity improve," said Bartos, the Yuma prison warden who has been helping officials at the Arizona State Prison Complex-Lewis in Buckeye.

He declined to say whether the tower, which overlooks a yard for high-risk inmates, was stocked with weapons but noted it was built for the security of the people inside.

Paul Sutton, a criminal justice professor at San Diego State University who has studied prison life, said the inmates probably chose the best place in a prison to hold up.

A guard tower in a prison yard is typically well-armed

and designed to be accessible only with the cooperation of whoever is inside, he said.

Law enforcement "can't rush it. Snipers are going to have a real tough time shooting. All they can do is talk," he said.

A hostage situation in a cell block or an open yard would provide more options, including the ability to use gas to subdue them, Sutton said.

But given that the officers are being held in a three-story tower, the negotiators' best hope is that the inmates finally get hungry or otherwise desperate enough to let them in, Sutton said.

"It's safe to say that the situation is not easy to resolve for a number of reasons," Bartos conceded. "What our focus is to resolve this through talking, through negotiations."

The incident started around 5 a.m. on Sunday when an inmate, who was a kitchen worker, overpowered two correctional officers and a kitchen employee.

The inmate was then joined by another and they were able to get into the watch tower at the edge of the prison yard. They overpowered two officers inside the structure, which has two enclosed floors and a covered third floor, Bartos said. Prison officials have declined to say whether the second inmate was also working in the kitchen or how the pair got into the guard tower.

Since then, negotiators have been allowed to see the officers twice and talked to them as recently as Wednesday. The guards, one male and one female, indicated they were all right Wednesday and were able to walk to the top of the tower Thursday on their own, prison officials said.

Earlier Thursday, one of the inmates was seen briefly walking on the top floor of the tower, which is screened but has no solid walls. Bartos said the appearance may have been part of the negotiation process.

Corrections officials have been careful to withhold information about the inmates' demands, their identities or their captives.

Bartos said withholding the information is largely a tactical decision. The negotiators must assume that the inmates have access to broadcast media, he said.

"We don't want them to know what we know," he said.

Sutton said refusing to give the inmates' names or other information may also deprive the inmates of something they likely want: media attention.

Corrections officials have declined to say what may have motivated the standoff, but Sutton said inmates often feel completely impotent about their lives and future.

"They don't have an opportunity to articulate any kind of grievance. They don't get a voice. They don't get an audience. This is the most spectacular way to get their voice heard," said Sutton. He noted that in other high-profile prison hostage cases like one in 1971 in Attica, N.Y., inmates demanded media access.

Gaylene Armstrong, a criminal justice professor at Arizona State University West, said inmate hostage situations are so rare it's difficult to say what might have motivated the inmates to get themselves into what seems like a hopeless situation.

"It can be a very stressful environment for some people — most people — both the inmates and the officers," she said. "Sometimes poor decisions are made."

DID YOU KNOW?: It is believed that Shakespeare was 46 around the time that the King James Version of the Bible was written.

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WORLD BRIEFLY

Iraqi insurgents kill two U.S. soldiers

By The Associated Press

TIKRIT, Iraq — Insurgents fired mortars at an American military encampment in central Iraq, killing two soldiers and critically wounding another, the military said Thursday.

The attack happened Wednesday night on a forward operating base in Baqouba, 35 miles northeast of Baghdad, military spokeswoman Maj. Josslyn Aberle said.

The wounded soldier was evacuated to a support hospital, where he is in critical but stable condition, she said.

The three soldiers were standing outside the tactical operations center when a series of mortars and rockets hit, she said. The attack also damaged vehicles.

U.S. forces launched a counterattack but there was no indication the insurgents sustained casualties, she said.

Sharon not ready to shove off

By The Associated Press

JERUSALEM — Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon said in a newspaper interview published Thursday that he will not resign despite corruption allegations and the possibility he might be indicted in coming weeks.

Sharon also said the burgeoning scandal will not deflect his attention from what he considers more pressing issues.

"I am not about to resign. I emphasize, I am not about to resign. I am busy with work from morning to night, and I do not intend to make time for issues that are under investigation," the Yediot Ahronot daily quoted Sharon as saying.

Justice Ministry officials said Wednesday they will decide within months whether to indict the prime minister for allegedly accepting hundreds of thousands of dollars in bribes from a real-estate developer, who was charged with giving him the money.

Opposition politicians urged Sharon to resign now, and a leadership struggle in the ruling Likud Party already was brewing.

Sharon's spokesman, Assaf Shariv, said the prime minister could not comment on the case because of the investigation.

"I can guarantee there will not be an indictment," he told The Associated Press.

In Bush we trust?

By The Associated Press

PHOENIX — President Bush, on a two-day mission to take top campaign themes directly to voters in states important to his re-election, wants Americans to get this message: His leadership is winning the war on terror and should be trusted to ensure continued successes.

On Thursday, Bush was closing out an overnight, post-State of the Union sales trip with a speech in Roswell, N.M., focusing on both the progress and ongoing efforts in the global war against al-Qaida and other terrorist networks.

The White House road show is gaining the president several more days of publicity on key topics from the Tuesday night address and presenting him in presidential settings while his potential Democratic rivals engage in the hurly-burly of their New Hampshire pri-

mary battle.

On Wednesday during stops at community colleges in Ohio and Arizona, Bush highlighted the economy and several new job-training initiatives he proposed in the State of the Union speech. All three states, which combine for 35 out of the 270 electoral votes needed to win the White House, saw narrow voting margins in the 2000 election, with Bush losing New Mexico by just 366 votes and barely winning Ohio and Arizona.

Hug a tree, hug a banker

By The Associated Press

NEW YORK — Citigroup intends to become more environmentally friendly.

The nation's largest financial institution announced Thursday that it is adopting a corporate policy to carefully evaluate requests for project financing that could adversely affect the environment.

It also bans funding for illegal logging operations and commits Citigroup "to invest in sustainable forestry and renewable energy."

The initiatives come after two years of anti-Citi demonstrations by the Rainforest Action Network.

Ilyse Hogue, global finance campaign director for the San Francisco-based environmental activist group, said Citi is the first American bank to adopt such a comprehensive policy.

She spoke in a joint announcement with Pam Flaherty, head of global community relations and environmental affairs for Citigroup.

Flaherty said the new initiative builds on voluntary guidelines that 18 global financial institutions have signed since last June.

Arkansas lawmakers not making grade

By The Associated Press

LITTLE ROCK, Ark. — After Arkansas lawmakers missed a deadline to overhaul the public school system, the state's highest court must now decide whether the failure is grounds for cutting funds to state services.

Arkansas' government braced for the possible shutdown of some state services as early as Thursday, when the Supreme Court was to hear arguments on a school district's petition to halt funding until the legislature complies with a court order to reform schools.

The court had ruled in November 2002 that Arkansas' school funding system was unconstitutionally inadequate and inequitable, setting a Jan. 1, 2004, deadline for an overhaul.

The Legislature, in a special session now entering its fifth week, failed to meet the deadline.

"I feel like the school kid in trouble with the principal. I know I'm guilty, I just don't know whether he's going to pull the paddle out or not," said state Sen. Jim Argue, a Democrat.

The 2002 ruling came in response to a 1992 lawsuit by Lake View School District that challenged the way Arkansas distributes \$1.8 billion in education aid. Lake View is also behind the petition to halt state funding.

Enron case becomes a numbers game

By The Associated Press

HOUSTON — With a guilty plea from former Enron Corp. finance chief Andrew Fastow secured, the case

against the failed company's top accountant is moving to the forefront, according to sources familiar with the investigation.

Authorities expected Richard A. Causey to surrender and appear in federal court Thursday in Houston on charges related to the disgraced energy giant's 2001 collapse, two sources close to the investigation told The Associated Press on Wednesday.

Like Fastow, Causey reported directly to former chief executives Kenneth Lay and his successor, Jeffrey Skilling. Causey and Fastow split financial duties at Enron and were at the same management level.

Causey, 44, had been expected to surrender and appear in federal court in Houston two weeks ago on charges stemming from the Justice Department's two-year Enron investigation, the sources said on condition of anonymity. It was not immediately clear what charges Causey faces.

His case moved to the back burner when a plea bargain package for Fastow and his wife, Lea, hit a snag.

Ohio causes rift in same-sex marriages

By The Associated Press

COLUMBUS, Ohio — The Ohio Senate has approved one of the most far-reaching gay marriage bans in the nation despite charges from some lawmakers that the legislation was mean-spirited and discriminatory.

A divided Senate approved the bill 18-15 Wednesday and sent it back to the House, which is expected to approve minor changes next week. Gov. Bob Taft has said he will sign the bill.

The measure says same-sex marriages are "against the strong public policy of the state," and would prohibit state employees from getting benefits for domestic partners, whether they were gay or unmarried heterosexual couples.

The bill permits exceptions to the benefits ban, including cities, villages, townships, schools and private companies. However, universities are included in the ban.

Senate Minority Leader Gregory DiDonato, a Democrat, said the bill was mean-spirited and "just plain wrong."

Republican Sen. Jay Hottinger, a longtime supporter of the same-sex marriage ban, said that opponents were misstating the bill's intentions. He said the bill was not an attack on gays, but was meant to protect a traditional definition of marriage.

To SERVE, protect not Pentagon's motto

By The Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The Pentagon is standing by an Internet voting system it developed for U.S. citizens overseas despite an independent analysis that said it was so vulnerable to attacks that it should be scrapped.

In a report released Wednesday, four computer security experts said the Secure Electronic Registration and Voting Experiment, or SERVE, could be penetrated by hackers, criminals, terrorists or foreign governments.

"Internet voting presents far too many opportunities for hackers or even terrorists to interfere with fair and accurate voting, potentially in ways impossible to detect," the computer experts said in a statement. "Such tampering could alter election results, particularly in close contests."

But Defense Department spokesman Glenn Flood said the Pentagon was confident that the system, which could get its first test Feb. 3 in South Carolina's primary election, was secure.

"We knew from the start that security would be the utmost concern," Flood said. "We've had things put in place that counteract the things they talked about."

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PEOPLE IN THE NEWS

Dolly's Imagination busting out all over the state

By The Associated Press

■ **PIGEON FORGE, Tenn.** — Dolly Parton's Imagination Library, a program the country singer started to encourage parents to read to their children, has been adopted statewide in Illinois.

Parton launched the program in 1996 for preschool children in Sevier County, a rural community in the Great Smoky Mountains where she grew up. The 58-year-old singer was the first in her family to graduate from high school.

Today, 206 communities in 35 states participate in Imagination Library, but Illinois is the first to promote it statewide.

"I am thrilled Governor (Rod) Blagojevich shares my vision to inspire all children to dream more, learn more, care more and be more," Parton said in a statement. "It's exciting that Illinois wants to join us. Maybe other governors will follow their lead and jump on board. The more the merrier."

Administered by the Dollywood Foundation, the program provides a new, hardcover book each month to children from birth until age 5. States and communities fund the cost of the books and postage at a fraction of their retail value.

The 60-volume collection is selected by a committee of people from education, child development, academia and early childhood literacy. Children receive "The Little Engine That Could" as their first book, and "Look Out Kindergarten, Here I Come!" completes the set.

Officials expect to ship 1.6 million books during Illinois' first full year in the program. Illinois has about a million children under age 5.

■ **LONDON** — Prince Harry will spend two months in Africa working on projects that help young mothers and disadvantaged children, his father's office said Thursday.

The office at Clarence House — London home of Prince Charles, 19-year-old Harry and 21-year-old Prince William — said the eight-week African trip will take Harry to a number of locations and community projects.

An office spokeswoman said that "for security and privacy reasons," the dates of the trip and the countries the prince would visit weren't being announced.

Harry, taking time off between his education at Eton and his enrollment at Sandhurst military academy, spent part of last year working on a ranch in Australia.

In Africa, he'll see how international agencies and charitable groups aid and support to people in difficult circumstances, Clarence House said.

■ **WILBERFORCE, Ohio** — Central State University officials are confident they'll meet a challenge from Bill Cosby to raise \$750,000 for scholarships in exchange for a benefit performance for the school by him.

The comedian challenged officials at the historically black university during a campus visit in September. He asked Central State President John Garland how much the university could raise, and Garland told him \$500,000.

"He (Cosby) said, 'That's way too low. You're thinking way too small. If you raise \$750,000, I'll come. And if you don't raise it, I'm going to embarrass you and I won't show up,'" Garland recalled.

Garland said Wednesday the university has raised \$600,000 toward the goal, and said he's confident it can surpass \$750,000.

"An Evening with Bill Cosby" is scheduled for April 25 at the Schuster Performing Arts Center in Dayton. Ticket prices for the black-tie event have not been set.

Garland and CSU officials said the Cosby challenge got its biggest boost from a \$250,000 contribution from

philanthropist and former Iams Co. owner Clayton Mathile and his wife, MaryAnn.

Money raised will go toward student scholarships and will support the university's college of education, Garland said.

Cosby's support for the university in this city 17 miles southeast of Dayton dates to at least the 1980s. He received an honorary degree from Central State in 1986. The school's mass communication center is named for Cosby and his wife, Camille.

■ **GREENVILLE, S.C.** — John Grisham says his writing schedule revolves around baseball. Apparently, some of his speaking engagements do, too.

The courtroom novelist told a fund-raising dinner for the Furman baseball team he has a new book coming out Feb. 2, "The Last Juror."

Joined by former major league pitcher Tommy John, Grisham said spends his springs and summers at ballparks — he's the commissioner of a seven-field, 35-team Little League complex.

Grisham's son, Ty, flirted with attending Furman, and the best-selling author said it was difficult to tell Paladins coach Ron Smith that Ty wasn't going to play there. Smith sent Ty several handwritten recruiting letters in purple ink.

Though South Carolina has never been a backdrop in any of Grisham's books, he wouldn't rule it out. A character in "The Brethren" graduated from Furman. And his daughter, Shea, has applied to the College of Charleston.

Grisham's new book marks the first time in 13 years he returns to Ford County, a fictional place in Mississippi that helped begin his writing career with "A Time to Kill."

"It's another juicy legal thriller with all kinds of crooked lawyers," the 48-year-old writer said.

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- ◆ Check Suspension System
- ◆ Inspect Exhaust System for Corrosion
- ◆ Inspect & Rotate Tires, Adjust Pressures
- ◆ Multi-Point Inspection Report Card

Good through January 31st, 2004. Must present coupon at time of write up.

Excludes diesels & HD "E" & "F" series vehicles/OP code PMinor.

If you purchase elsewhere ... you probably paid too much!

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