

REAL CHANGE

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ISSUES • INSIGHT • IMPACT

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ARUN SOMASUNDARAM IS A STUDENT AT CHINOOK MIDDLE SCHOOL, IN THE HIGHLINE PUBLIC SCHOOLS DISTRICT. THE SOON-TO-BE 14-YEAR-OLD CREDITS TEACHERS THERE WITH HELPING HIM SURPASS STATE GOALS ON ALL OF LAST YEAR'S WASL EXAMS. YET WHILE SOMASUNDARAM HAS FOUND SUCCESS, MANY OF HIS CLASSMATES STILL STRUGGLE TO BRING WASL SCORES UP TO STATE STANDARDS. PHOTO BY JOEL TURNER

Stepping up to the WASL

A local middle school seeks to improve its testing status

By **ROSETTE ROYALE**
Staff Reporter

Bing bing bing bing. The electronic bell announcing the end of fifth period chimes over the intercom of Chinook Middle School and, as its tone disintegrates into the ether, the closed classroom doors burst open, releasing streams of students into the barren corridors.

Laughter bounces off tiled walls. Backpacks yawn open in receipt of books. Lockers slam shut in percussive succession. Another quartet of bells ring out. Racing against its dying strains, a thin, dark-skinned girl, her pigtails bouncing with kinetic fury, sprints a diagonal path from locker to classroom. A door latches closed. And once again, silence and stillness reign.

Kim Ustanick, having wended her way through the youthful tide, enters a room adorned with colorful posters at the southern end of the hall. A part-time employee, Ustanick serves as Family/Community Support Liaison for Chinook, one of several middle schools in the Highline Public Schools District. Eight years in this capacity has left her with unrepentant and passionate views about why educational levels are lower in South King County.

"At this school," she says, "we're about 70 percent free and reduced lunch," speaking of a statistic that can be taken as a barometer for a region's socio-economic make-up. (The percentage for Chinook is nearly twice the state average.) She continues talking, eyes trained on a map.

"Over here," she says, her finger acting as pointer, "what we have is I-5. And," her finger shifts leftward, "we have [the Seattle-Tacoma International] Airport." Her nail taps an area on the map located between the two landmarks. "This is us." She means Chinook.

But more than being hemmed in by an interstate to the east and an airport to west, or even caught under someone's finger, Chinook finds itself

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BREAKING AWAY

Businesses need to account for tax handouts gifted to them by those in Olympia.

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Legislature convenes with weighty requests from social service advocates.

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HIP POPPED

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Seward Park blogmaster and radio host David Goldstein convenes the online spin machine.

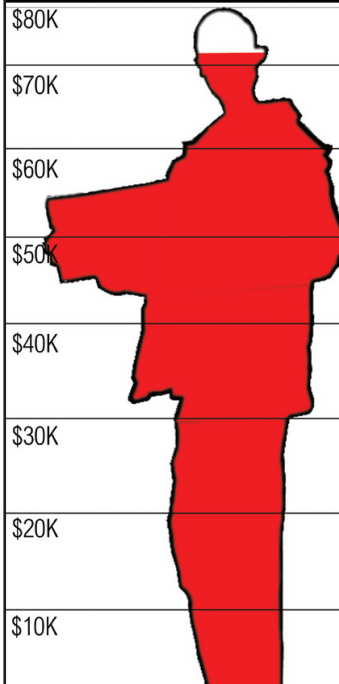
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[Thank You!]

Last week, the very generous readers of *Real Change* delivered another \$9,150 in year-end donations to close our holiday fund drive at \$72,751 raised since Nov. 1. This is an amazing show of support. It's been said before, but it's true. The quality alternative journalism. The opportunity we offer to more than 250 vendors each month. The effective organizing and advocacy to end poverty. We couldn't do it without you. It's not too late to help put us over the top to our \$80,000 goal. Please make a tax-deductible contribution at our website at realchangenews.org, or use the coupon on Page 12 to make your gift now. You make it all happen.

Our Goal: \$80K over the Holidays!



Break Even

Three small steps toward fixing Washington's unfair taxes

Gov. Gregoire has proposed a state budget for the next two years with increases for education, children's health care, and other high priority areas. These additions definitely move us in the right direction, but leave us far short of where we need to be.

By MARILYN WATKINS
Guest Writer

Bargaining for tax breaks has become a routine part of doing business. During every legislative session, business lobbyists line the hallways of the state capitol demanding their own special tax exemptions.

And they get heard. In the past three years, Washington's Legislature passed 61 tax break packages for businesses ranging from software giants, to car dealers, to soda pop distributors, giving away nearly half a billion dollars from the state's 2007-09 budget.

The state now has 553 tax exemptions on the books. Some of them we all benefit from, such as the exemptions on food and prescription drugs. But most of the newer tax breaks are for particular types of businesses. Altogether they add up to a lot of lost public revenue that could be providing high quality preschool to every at-risk four-year-old, opening more slots in the Basic Health Plan for uninsured families, or retrofitting schools for energy efficiency.

For Washington to become a healthy land of opportunity for all, we need to make major new investments. For our kids to be prepared for citizenship and the global economy, we need great preschools, smaller classes in the public schools, and open doors to the state's community colleges and universities. Our crumbling transportation infrastructure needs a 21st-century overhaul. And global warming requires major investments in energy efficiency and renewable resources.

But select businesses get tax cuts in the name of job creation, even when important programs go unfunded. And literally hundreds of studies across the nation have failed to prove that

higher tax subsidies create more jobs. Now and then, a particular tax break might keep one plant from closing. But demand for products, transportation costs, energy supply, and availability of trained labor make far more difference in where a firm will locate and whether it will expand. Providing high quality public services that benefit everybody is a better economic development strategy than parceling out tax breaks to the industries that hire the most persuasive lobbyists.

Gov. Gregoire has proposed a state budget for the next two years with increases for education, children's health care, and other high priority areas. These additions definitely move us in the right direction, but leave us far short of where we need to be. We just don't have the money to make critical investments now, even with the economy perking along nicely.

We also don't know if the tax breaks are having the results the lobbyists promised. The Legislature has made some progress towards accountability: About half of the new business tax breaks require companies that use them to report the number of jobs created, and some have sunset dates. Last year the legislature also established a citizens' commission to review most tax breaks on a 10-year schedule. But there is a lot more that could be done. Here is what we should all ask our state legislators to do in 2007:

1. Hold the line on new tax breaks. After cutting programs because of budget shortfalls between 2002 and 2005, we finally have a little money to spend on new and expanded services. But in the long run, the state is facing more deficits. Investments in education, transportation, and sustainable energy are more important than more business preferences.

2. Require the Department of Revenue to tally and report on all of the tax breaks every two years. This tax expenditure report should be a part of the governor's budget proposal. With an up-to-date accounting of all tax breaks before them, the governor and legislators could more easily adopt a state budget that truly reflects priorities for public investment.

3. Adopt and enforce uniform standards of accountability for existing business tax breaks. Legislators and the public have a right to know that tax breaks are delivering as promised. Expect results from the Citizens' Commission for Performance Measurement of Tax Preferences and act on the recommendations.

Ultimately, the demand for ever more tax breaks is a symptom of our archaic tax system. Washington is plagued with a tax structure rooted in the economy of the 1930s. Tax preferences have become part of a vicious cycle, in which each new tax break erodes the tax base and the ability to fund high quality public services, exacerbates inequities, and leads to demands for more tax breaks.

If our children don't have a world-class basic education, if our colleges aren't graduating enough nurses, engineers, and high-level thinkers, if our cities are mired in traffic jams, and if our economy suffers shocks with every outbreak of violence in the Middle East, all the tax breaks in the world won't generate more jobs. Let's be sure our state budget for 2007-09 reflects our state's real priorities. ■

[More]

For a full report on Washington tax breaks, see www.ecionline.org.

Marilyn Watkins is a member of the Real Change Advisory Board and policy director of the Economic Opportunity Institute, a research and advocacy organization focused on building economic opportunity for all Washington residents.



Real Change is published weekly and is sold by the poor and homeless of Seattle. Vendors receive 65¢ of the \$1.00 paid for this paper.

Mission Statement:

Real Change exists to create opportunity and a voice for low-income people while taking action to end homelessness and poverty.

The Real Change Homeless Empowerment Project is a 501(c)3 non-profit organization. Programs include the Real Change newspaper, the StreetWrites peer support group for homeless writers, the Homeless Speakers Bureau, and the First things First organizing project. All donations support these programs and are tax-deductible to the full extent of the law.

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Change Agent

Judy Reed has led the Washington Community Reinvestment Association in its efforts to create and preserve affordable housing throughout the state for the last 15 years. But she credits the organization's accomplishments — like nearly 8,000 apartments and homes it's created for farmworkers, seniors, and the homeless — to the support of the bankers and lenders she's known: "Without them, we would have been unable to achieve this kind of impact."

People in the financial sector contest her modesty. "Judy has delivered an outstanding track record of success and value to the community," says Jim Boora, chairman of WCRA's board of directors.

The organization pools funding from 42 financial institutions to invest in the creation and preservation of affordable housing for diverse groups of people. It's also produced over 85,000 square feet of economically priced space to house community centers and hygiene clinics.

For Reed, the work, which she's leaving this month upon her retirement, is only natural. "The huge economic divide between working folks and housing prices has always been a grave concern for me," she explains.

—Amy Besunder



Putting it all together: JUDY REED has made affordable housing possible. Photo by JOEL TURNER

Go Slow

Legislature starts with long list of requests from groups

By CYDNEY GILLIS
Staff Reporter

“You can't always get what you want.” That's the warning being raised by some housing and human services advocates heading into the 2007 legislative session that starts next week. The state may be flush with revenue now, says Nancy Amidei, who follows state bills for the newsletter PolicyWatch, but the good times are only expected to last one year.

As a result, says Amidei, an instructor at the University of Washington School of Social Work, legislators aren't going to want to provide new funding for programs past 2007.

“Some people talk about the fact that there are so many more Democrats in the House and Senate — it's almost two to one — as if everything is going to be a slam dunk. It isn't,” Amidei says. “It isn't going to be possible to do everything on everyone's wish list.”

The wish list includes a combined legislative agenda that a number of groups are backing to support affordable housing and ending homelessness. The agenda includes raising more funding for each county's 10-Year Plan to End Homelessness, increasing the Housing Trust Fund, providing \$15 million more in rental assistance for homeless families, and ensuring adequate discharge planning for individuals leaving foster care, jail, or mental wards.

To provide more money for the 10-Year Plans, Rep. Mark Miloscia (D-Federal Way) plans to introduce a bill that would allow counties to double the current surcharge of \$10 on document recording fees, which a county typically charges in property transactions.

Though the \$10 surcharge is fairly new (the Legislature passed it in 2005 to fund the Homelessness and Housing Assistance Act), Corine Knudsen,

director of the Washington State Coalition for the Homeless, says she doesn't see major opposition to allowing a \$20 fee.

“My sense is there's a lot of support at the local level,” Knudsen says. “Every time someone records a document, there's this extra surcharge, but it isn't a huge impact for any one person.”

She is less optimistic about getting the Legislature to increase the state's Transitional Housing Operating and Rental fund from today's \$5 million to \$15 million. In addition to providing extra cash to help families get into housing, the bill would broaden the program to help youth and single individuals.

The large request for the Housing Trust Fund, the state's primary tool for making grants to build homes for low-income families, could also be a long shot.

The coalition and its supporters want to add \$263 million to today's \$100 million fund, but Tony Lee, advocacy director for Solid Ground — the new name of the Fremont Public Association — says that will be tough given the starting point of negotiations: In the budget proposal released Dec. 19, Gov. Chris Gregoire called for only \$40 million more for the trust fund.

The Washington Low Income Housing Alliance is pushing for a state law to outlaw zoning that discriminates against building affordable housing. It's also seeking \$16 million to help save low-income mobile home parks, and backs a proposed amendment that would strengthen the Manufactured/ Mobile Home Landlord Act.

To keep landlords from discriminating against the elderly or disabled, the Housing Alliance and the Tenants Union are lobbying to get new legislation that would outlaw making rental decisions based on a person's source of income, be it Social Security or welfare.

Such recipients are currently protected in Seattle, Bellevue and unincorporated King County, but not statewide, says Michele Thomas of the Tenants Union.

Just Heard...

More Minutemen

The November election was a happy moment for most liberals, but don't relax too much: The week America voted for a new direction, the Minutemen formed a new chapter in Eastern Washington.

The Minutemen are a self-styled border patrol bent on stopping illegal immigration with their very own binoculars, night-vision goggles, and guns. The effort started in Arizona and spread, with a group of 12 to 25 Washingtonians now spending one weekend a month manning posts along the Canadian border.

One of the participants is Bob Baker, the Mercer Island pilot who ran last year's Initiative 946, a failed attempt to cut immigrants out of any state services. Baker was in Selah Nov. 12 when two dozen protesters squared off with Minutemen supporters at the Selah Civic Center.

“There was quite a big protest of our presence,” Baker says. “They had signs and we had American flags, and everyone was very gentlemanly.”

Out with the old

Mayor Greg Nickels announced in December that Parks Superintendent Ken Bounds will retire at the end of February. For Bounds' detractors, it's not a moment too soon.

Bounds is the man who put the Summer Nights concert series at Gas Works Park — an issue that ended up in court when a group of neighbors sued. Another group took the Parks Department to court over cutting down 17 trees in Occidental Park without doing an environmental study.

Last February, the controversies led to an anti-Parks protest rally that prompted the City Council to act: In the city charter amendments passed in November, the council got the right to take a vote every four years on whether to keep the head of Parks and two other departments. Bounds is bowing out long before his vote comes up.

—Cydney Gillis

In with the new

Mayor Greg Nickels' nominee to head the 90-person, \$8 million city Department of Neighborhoods — Stella Chao — has the approval of someone seldom in the Team Nickels camp: the department's former director, Jim Diers.

Diers, who left the department under Nickels and who shared a White Center office with the nominee, says the mayor's pick “was one of the better things I've seen Nickels do.” Chao has “a really deep commitment to social justice and community empowerment” and knows “new ways of engaging people on the margins of community life,” he says. “She'll provide the kind of leadership that will get people excited about their jobs.”

The nomination comes before the City Council in February.

—Adam Hyla

Before the Law

Six-year legal saga over WTO arrests gets a trial Jan. 8

By CHRIS MILLER
Contributing Writer

[Its day in court]
The Jury trial for *Hickey et. al. v. City of Seattle* begins 9 a.m. Monday, Jan. 8, in the U.S. Courthouse at 700 Stewart St. downtown.

December 1, 1999, Day Three of the “Battle of Seattle”: Protests over the World Trade Organization grip and pound the commercial heart of the city.

Tens of thousands of protesters threaten to disrupt the globalization summit, filling downtown with graffiti, shattering store windows, lighting dumpsters afire, and eliciting clouds of tear gas from the riot police.

Former Chief of Police Norm Stamper and then-Mayor Paul Schell call in the National Guard to establish a perimeter of checkpoints and barricades. They cordon off an area stretching along Boren Avenue, Seneca Street, Fourth, and Lenora.

No one is to be allowed into this free-speech-free zone, with a few exceptions: the press, residents, employees and business owners working there, emergency and public safety personnel, and shoppers. The order is never announced, however,

to 147 people seated in the middle of Westlake Park.

The 147 are arrested en masse, summarily shepherded into busses, and stashed for as much as three days in a temporary holding pen at Sand Point Naval Station.

This is the setting for *Robert Hickey et al. v. the City of Seattle*, a six-year, civil rights, class action lawsuit that will go to trial in the Ninth Circuit of U.S. District Court on Jan. 8. The judge’s ruling could set a precedent for the treatment of protestors and tighten the leash on preemptive arrests — that is, whenever in the course of a civil protest people are hauled off to jail on circumstantial evidence.

A summary judgment ruling by Judge Marsha Pechman on Dec. 13 said the city lacked probable cause for the arrests, a violation of the Fourth Amendment. For one, contrary to arrest records, the police never gave orders for the crowd to leave the park. Nor did they make any effort to determine that none of the 147 arrestees met the exceptions to Schell’s free-speech free-zone rule. One of the

arrested, for example, was an accredited member of the press.

The City countered in its Dec. 18 brief that to substantiate the claim that the arrests were made without probable cause, the plaintiffs must show “that the City’s policy, custom, or practice itself caused the constitutional deprivation, rather [than] the discretionary act of a non-policymaking official.”

The plaintiffs contend in their brief that Chief Stamper had ratified arrests, arrests ordered by Captain Jim Pugel, who also was a “policymaker by delegation.” Furthermore, they argue, the First Amendment rights of the 147 were stamped out because the City detained them until the WTO convention had concluded.

Judge Pechman’s Dec. 13 ruling asked if it is necessary to try the case on both Fourth and First Amendment grounds, a question to which the city’s lawyers promptly answered, No, in its brief, in an attempt to limit compensation.

The judge has asked both parties not to comment to the press. ■

Short Takes

Laborers’ lament

It’s been said many times, but now there are local statistics to back it up: Work is more dangerous for day laborers, who face up to twice the hazards, and experience five times the injuries, as other construction workers.

Those are a few of the statistics just released by the University of Washington’s Environmental and Occupational Health Sciences Department based on an extensive survey of local day workers. More than 180 workers participated in the poll, which was taken at four sites — CASA Latina on Western Ave., the nearby Millionair Club, and two Home Depots south of downtown and in Shoreline.

The vast majority were men, with notable differences among the sites: The Millionair Club, which does not dispatch undocumented workers, draws predominantly U.S.-born laborers who tend to be hired by homeowners, while those seeking jobs at CASA Latina or Home Depot are primarily Latin Americans favored by contractors.

The laborers reported 45 injuries within the past year, indicating an injury rate of 31 to 41 injuries per 100 workers, depending on the hours worked. In the construction industry, the rate is 6.4 injuries per 100 workers.

The injuries included sprains, cuts, and punctures from heavy lifting, operating equipment, and using nail guns, along with many falls from ladders. In some cases, workers reported that, after their injury, the employer sent them back to work. Others said they worked in pain for days or weeks.

“We as day laborers would like to not miss work,” one worker told the researchers. “We come from countries with families to support.”

Take that, BIAW

Some people aren’t too happy about the fact that the Building Industry Association of Washington poured millions of dollars into the November election to defeat several justices on the state Supreme Court.

The dirty politics, however, have turned out good for a group that advocates clean campaigns. That’s because Gov. Christine Gregoire has earmarked \$4.4 million in her proposed 2007-2009 budget for a pilot project in publicly financed judicial races.

Craig Salins, a board member with Washington Public Campaigns, says the money would fund a bill that’s expected to be introduced in the legislature by Rep. Shay Schual-Berke (D-Normandy Park). “Our understanding is that it would be a pilot project for perhaps two years,” Salins says, covering Appeals and Supreme Court races.

It would be up to the candidates whether or not to participate. It has to be, Salins says, because the U.S. Supreme Court has ruled that campaign donations are protected by the First Amendment. But after a while, he adds, candidates see the advantages. He points to the example of Maine, which has had three elections since passing its public-financing law.

“Every year, more incumbents and candidates choose to run on ‘clean money’ — and more are getting elected,” Salins says, adding that 83 percent of the seats in Maine’s senate and 77 percent in its house are now held by legislators who opted not to take private money.

The results are dramatic. “They have have been able to stare down big pharmaceutical companies, big oil, and banking interests and pass some of the most progressive legislation in the nation,” Salins

says, including a tough law that brought down the cost of prescription drugs.

The lawmakers, he adds, “freely admit that would not have been possible if legislators were worried about where their campaign money was going to come from the next time they ran for office.”

— Cydney Gillis

You call this a living?

Getting by is getting more difficult in our corner of the country, according to a September study by the Northwest Federation of Community Organizations.

The annually released study, which has employed the same methodology for the last four years, shows health care pushing up the cost of living in the four-state region of Washington, Oregon, Idaho, and Montana.

A living wage in Washington, the study says, is \$11.16 an hour for an individual working full-time. For a single parent caring for two children, the living wage is \$23.39, or \$48,644 a year. Only 24 percent of the jobs in the state pay that much or more, says the report. In King County, the same family needs \$25.99 an hour or about \$54,000 a year.

The scarcity of those higher-paying jobs is an especially urgent problem for people of color, who are generally working for less pay, the study shows: While 51 percent of white households in the state earn at least enough for that single parent with two kids, only 28 percent of Native American families, 35 percent of Latinos, and 39 percent of African Americans do the same.

The report’s data on wages was supplied by the federal Bureau of Labor Statistics, which tabulates information supplied by the state. For a copy of the report, entitled “Living Wage Jobs in the Current Economy,” and other studies on health care and immigration, go to www.nwfc.org.

— Adam Hyla



Singing at the Center

THE AFTERNOON OF CHRISTMAS EVE AT SEATTLE CENTER WAS FILLED WITH MULTICULTURAL MUSIC FOR THE PEACE ON EARTH INTERFAITH CELEBRATION DURING WINTERFEST. HEJIRA AND GUEST VOCALIST GINA SALA (ABOVE) WERE AMONG THREE BANDS THAT PERFORMED MUSIC FROM ARAB, CHRISTIAN, AND JEWISH INFLUENCES. HEJIRA PLAYED A SELECTION OF ARABIC AND EAST INDIAN PIECES. PHOTO BY BROOKE KEMPNER.

A Way with Words

How New York lyricist Saul Williams learned to love language

By GHITA LOEBENSTEIN
Street News Service

[Onstage] Williams performs Jan. 25 at 7 p.m. at Pierce College in Puyallup. For more information: www.saulwilliams.com.

Saul Williams doesn't love words. He subjugates them. "I treat words sometimes the way rappers treat women in videos," he chuckles. "I pour champagne and see what happens. I wouldn't call it love. I use them for my own end."

It might not be love, but the New York born lyricist sure knows his way around language. As a revered poet, spoken-word artist, rapper, and actor, Williams has made his mark spinning words into the kind of bullets that traditional rappers can only brag about. In the mid-'90s, he was New York City's reigning slam poetry champion, but it wasn't until his starring role in 1998's award-winning film *Slam* that he reached cult status.

His body of work includes two albums and four poetry books, plus several television appearances, live spoken-word performances, and a lyrical contribution to a 2002 musical production of the antiwar organization Not In Our Name.

When Williams raps, he doesn't just link rhyming words together. He folds them in a frenzy of semantic origami, bending, twisting, and chanting them into a rhythmic work of art. All of his work ruminates on the social, political, personal, and spiritual, often appropriating hip hop's traditional argot and turning it inside out.

"Nah/ I wasn't raised at gunpoint and I've read too many books/ To distract me from the mirror when unhappy with my looks/ And I ain't got proper diction for the makings of a thug/ Though I grew up in the ghetto/ And my niggas all sold drugs," he raps on "Talk To Strangers" from his self-titled 2005 album.

But Williams maintains that his wordplay is just a means to an end. "I think there's a great deal of power in language," he says, "but I don't think it's my love of language that makes me write poetry. I think it's more a lack of being intimidated by it."

"It's like the Eastern teachers of the Tao say: 'The Tao that can be told is not the eternal Tao.' Which is to say that language covers a few things but it doesn't cover the essentials."

Williams started writing rhymes and teaching himself to rap when he was only eight, after hearing 'It's Yours' by T La Rock and Jazzy Jay, the first single to be released on the now renowned Def Jam label. "I thought it was the coolest thing I ever heard," he says.

His mother and his father, a Baptist minister, were always encouraging. "A lot of people like to point to my dad [as my inspiration] because I grew up watching my dad preach," he says. "But my dad was rigid and stuck and doubtful. I really look at my mom, who was much more adventurous in her desire to really understand things. She wasn't afraid to be something. That was inspiring."

Now he uses rhymes to retrain hip hop beats that have become sluggish with inane stereotypes, as he says in his poem "Telegram": "Hip hop is lying on the side of the road half dead to itself/Blood scrawled over its mangled flesh/Like jazz stuffed into an oversized recording bag/Tuba lips swollen beyond recognition/Diamond-studded teeth strewn like rice at karma's wedding."

Williams's work is far from the recording industry's norm of bitch-slappin' and gun-slinging thuggery. Being different is not something he has ever shied away from. Growing up, he was always the darkest rapper in the ghetto. "I always stood out. I didn't mind that. If everybody [wore] blue, I got purple."

"That's the thing about ghettos.

They create all sorts of people. People from ghettos grow up with people like me who are intellectual or whatever," he says. "Even the kids who aren't a lot like me on record are a lot like me off record. I don't know anyone who's been shot nine times and lived! I know people who have been shot twice and lived. And I don't think that I would be any more intimidated by 50 Cent than I would expect him to be intimidated by me." ■

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Sphere of Influence

Blogger David Goldstein kickstarts the Democrats' hype at HorsesAss.org

By DENA BURKE
Contributing Writer

"I think there's this sense that people haven't been getting the whole story and they want the whole story. Blogs might not be the best source to get it, because you can get untruths and misinformation from both sides, but consumers are coming to us because they don't trust the media anymore."

Budding out of their infancy, blogs have turned into much more than narcissistic domains for promoting one's individual daily events. Politically active people are utilizing them to comment on news stories, elections, and issues of the day. Some of their comments can go on to create national headlines. Former Republican Senator Trent Lott's infamous remarks at the birthday party of Strom Thurmond at first went relatively unreported by major newspapers, but bloggers Atrios and Joshua Marshall both wrote on it. When conservative blogger Andrew Sullivan wrote his piece "Trent Lott Must Go," the conservative media and Republicans followed in suit. The next day *The Washington Post* covered Lott's remarks, and 10 days later he resigned.

Seattle blogger David Goldstein's claim to fame is his initiative to proclaim Tim Eyman a horse's ass. The media spotlighted his campaign, and soon Goldstein found himself with a platform and audience for discussing and influencing local politics. He transformed his website, *HorsesAss.org*, into a blog that he updates almost daily with posts on local politicians, policies, and proposed initiatives. With over 3,000 readers per day, Goldstein is among the many bloggers who have the opportunity to shape the media and the population's understanding of the world and events.

Real Change: How have you recently influenced the media?

Goldstein: The big national story was Mike Brown, the FEMA director, in the days following Hurricane Katrina. I did a post revealing that his prior emergency management experience consisted of 10 years as the commissioner of judges and stewards for the International Arabian Horse Association. He

essentially managed horse show judges.

It was an interesting story that came from a reader of mine who is a bit of an Olympian insider and has Arabian horses. She sent me an e-mail and called him an unmitigated disaster. He left the association in the midst of litigation and in bankruptcy. They eventually had to fold and merge with another organization. She couldn't believe that this was the guy running FEMA, and I posted that on "HorsesAss" late at night. Then I thought, This is national, and I had just started posting diaries on Daily Kos (pronounced Daily Chaos). So I posted it on Daily Kos, and if enough people recommend your diary, you come up in the recommended list. By morning it was on the list, and then Markos Zúniga, who runs the site, frontpaged the story. A couple of other national blogs and eventually Joshua Marshall, who has the most credibility among bloggers, picked it up and elaborated.

At that point, the mainstream media picked it up, and the story framed the coverage of the disaster: the disaster being the administration's failure to respond effectively. The impact of Bush Administration cronyism came from that odd story about the Horse Association.

On a more local level, I think a lot of people credit me for changing the dynamics of the County Executive race last year. Three weeks out, there had been a poll showing David Irons in the lead or at the very least, neck and neck. The next day I broke a story that I had been working on for weeks, explaining why his parents wouldn't vote for him. I interviewed his parents, and it turned out the most dramatic reason was that he hit his mother in an explosive rage. The major press knew about it, but didn't report because they thought



it was a he-said-she-said story. But I pushed it into the news, *The Seattle P-I* picked up on it, and then the TV stations. The polling switched overnight on that race. He went from down three points with women to down 23 points within about a week. I think Ron Sims would have won anyway, but it would have been a real battle at the end.

RC: Why do you think the media picked up on it after you wrote about it?

Goldstein: There's this chain that stories [follow:] from bloggers, to talk radio, to print, to TV. The trick is to get it to feed up that chain. Sometimes it happens overnight, and sometimes it takes a long time of pushing the story and pushing the story. As a blogger, you're a kind of unpaid freelance PR department.

RC: What false rumors have been started through blogs?

Goldstein: I've gotten things wrong sometimes. I try not to. It depends what you want to call a rumor. There is a certain amount of rumor-mongering that some blogs do. I occasionally talk about rumors and couch them that way. I think that from election coverage, people think that military voters were disenfranchised. They voted and were counted at the same rate as other absentee voters. It was a myth put forth deliberately by the [local, conservative] blog "Sound Politics." I think that blogs are dangerous because we don't have editors and there is no hard and fast set of ethics. We each come up with our own ethics.

Begun as an anti-Tim Eyman stunt, Seattleite David Goldstein's blog HorsesAss.org has broken stories of local and national import. Photo by Dena Burke

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See BLOG, Continued on Page 12

CHINOOK, Continued from Page 1

pinned down by an educational reality and regional perception.

The reality is that the Chinook Middle School, a red brick building attended by more than 600 seventh- and eighth-graders whose racial makeup — roughly 26 percent Hispanic, 22 percent Asian/Pacific Islander, 18 percent Black, 31 percent white — stands in stark contrast to state averages, is not meeting federal achievement goals. Those goals are determined by student scores on the Washington Assessment of Student Learning, or — in the parlance of educators and administrators, concerned parents and their test-loathing children — the WASL.

Unless something is done, federal mandates warn, to bring those scores into alignment with state standards, Chinook will be deemed a school that has failed the requirements of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). That Chinook Middle School and its attendant community cannot keep up, that others are leaving them behind— it's this perception that administrators, teachers, parents, and students are working to upend.

Signed into law by President Bush in 2002, the NCLB mandates that any school receiving federal funds where test scores do not satisfy achievement goals for two years running will be placed on what's called an "improvement" list. Viewed as a ladder,

this improvement list bears five rungs: Step One being the highest, or closest to removal from the list, and Step Five, the most dire designation, the lowest.

According to a preliminary report issued last fall by the state's Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction, Washington has 248 schools on

Like a cell splitting during mitosis, the group cleaves, the halves heading to different classrooms.

There are four "strands," or separate tests that make up the WASL — reading, writing, math, science — and the evening community meeting, taking such structure as a guide, is broken into four

and-leaf plot — into daily discussions. A father furrows his brow.

"Should my child be stressed out?" a second father asks.

"You can only prepare them as much as you can," a second teacher advises.

In another room, a female teacher tells the parents the science WASL

is filled with written language. "So reading skills are essential." She admits this presents a challenge to students who haven't mastered English.

Highlighting a sheet that shows how the science test is scored, she tells parents that only 18 percent of Chinook students who took that WASL met the state standard. She recommends educational TV as a tool to help young people understand science. "And the kitchen is one of the best places for kids to learn," she adds.

The parents trudge off to a new room.

A male teacher, who has just spoken to the

Spanish-speaking group in their native tongue, tells the English speakers that the reading WASL should not be viewed as mysterious. Parents nod their heads as they gaze at a screen.

Nearly 75 percent of Chinook students would have passed the reading WASL, he goes on, if they had only gotten two more questions right. The adults cheer up at this information. Riding that wave, he says, Some students may not have done well because they had a bad day.

"What if the person grading the test has a

bad day?" a mother asks. The rest of the parents grunt in agreement.

The teacher concedes it could happen. "But it's a complicated system for a complicated test," he says, "in a world that's getting more complicated."

Arun Somasundaram, who's seated near his family in the library at the WASL community meeting, sees the complications he's encountered in Chinook's classrooms as history.

Last year, says Somasundaram, while in the seventh grade, he was placed in a special education math class. He concedes he wound up there based upon a math WASL he took in the fourth grade — which, along with his writing WASL, found him scoring below state



STUDENTS ENTERING THE HALLWAY AT CHINOOK MIDDLE SCHOOL, RESPONDING TO THE TOLL OF THE BELL. PHOTO BY JOEL TURNER

its improvement list. Eight of these schools are in Step Five. Four state schools are in Step Four, a rung above those viewed most at risk. One of these Step Four schools is Chinook.

Seated around a grouping of tables in Chinook's library, parents and students are gathered for a community meeting on the WASL. Nearly 40 people, mostly adults, occupy chairs constructed for young people, listening to counselors and teachers instruct them how the audience will be divided into two groups: one English speaking, the other Spanish speaking.

segments, each taught in separate lessons. Each half of the larger group will visit the four classrooms in turn.

During the writing segment, a teacher parses, via an overhead projector, two actual student essays culled from a past WASL, one meeting state standards, the other falling short. She points to the essays' command, or lack of, cohesion, and tone. The teacher advises parents to encourage their students to write at home during their free time.

As she speaks, a mother rushes into the room, her son in tow. "Sorry," she says, nearly out of breath. "I just got off of work." She takes a seat. The teacher returns to the essays.

Seconds later, a father stands up from a chair. He twists his hat in his hands. "I have to go," he tells the teacher. "Work." She nods.

Why, a parent wonders aloud, is there so much stress around passing the WASL for graduation, if a child can retake all sections of the test in their sophomore, junior, and senior years until they pass each one?

"Because it all matters," answers Ustanick, standing near the doorway. "Our schools are being judged each year."

During the math segment, a teacher suggests parents could try to incorporate vocabulary from a handout — containing such terms as rhombus, radii, theoretical probability, and stem-



KIM USTANICK, FAMILY/COMMUNITY SUPPORT LIAISON AT CHINOOK, ATTENDS A COMMUNITY MEETING ON THE WASL. PHOTO BY JOEL TURNER

Schooling the Schools

The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) requires schools to make what the federal government calls "adequate yearly progress" on the Washington Assessment for Student Learning. If a portion of the school's students don't meet the expectations over two consecutive years, the school lands on Level One. After that, each consecutive year of failure bumps them down a level, and means the school must not only continue its previous efforts but try new things, too:

- Step One (two consecutive years of failing to meet the feds' expectations): Schools must adopt two-year improvement plans, pay for professional development for teachers, and allow parents the option to transfer their children to a higher-performing public or charter school, with the district paying for the costs of transportation.
- Step Two (three consecutive years): Give students from low-income families the option of obtaining services, such as tutoring, from outside providers.
- Step Three (four consecutive years): Do one or more of the following: Implement new curriculum, replace school staff, appoint an outside expert as advisor, or extend the school day or year.
- Step Four (five consecutive years): Plan for more restructuring, including possibly replacing all or most of the staff, reopening as a charter, contracting with a private overseer, or turning over operations to the state.
- Step Five (six consecutive years): Implement the plan they made in Step Four.

More than 100 Washington schools have been listed in Step One, 45 in Step Two, 65 in Step Three, four in Step Four, and eight in Step Five. Of these last eight, all are located in Central Washington, where students failing the test are predominantly low-income male Hispanics and Native Americans.

— Kevin Himeda

See CHINOOK, Continued on Page 10

Athletes with Brains

In *What's My Name, Fool?*, author Dave Zirin rejects the notion that we ought to welcome national anthems, pro-military gestures, and players thanking their savior in post-game interviews while criticizing, as too political, athletes who speak out against the war or racism.

What's My Name, Fool? Sports and Resistance in the United States
By Dave Zirin
Haymarket Books, 2005
Paperback, 293 pages, \$15

Book Review by R.V. MURPHY
Contributing Writer

In the 1960s, you could tell a lot about a media outlet by how they referred to the most well-known athlete of the era. It may come as a surprise to a whole generation that many sportswriters and sportscasters called boxer Muhammad Ali by his birth name, Cassius Clay, several years after the heavy-weight champ changed his name.

When Ali fought Floyd Patterson, also African-American, Patterson said, "This fight is a crusade to reclaim the title from Black Muslims." Ali easily defeated Patterson, chanting, "What's my name? Is my name Clay? What's my name, fool?" as he pummeled his opponent for nine rounds.

Dave Zirin's book, *What's My Name, Fool? Sports and Resistance in the United States*, chronicles athletes like Ali who stood up to the status quo. It also examines the narrowing divide today between the sports world and the so-called real world. Zirin rejects the notion that we ought to welcome national anthems, pro-military gestures, and players thanking their savior in

post-game interviews while criticizing, as too political, athletes who speak out against the war or racism.

The appearance of Ali, who was stripped of his title for refusing induction into the military, on the cover of Zirin's book is particularly important. Ali explained his refusal with "I ain't got no quarrel with the Viet Cong." Contrast that to basketball superstar Michael Jordan in the 1990s, when he was asked to endorse a Black candidate running against long-time segregationist senator and fellow North Carolinian Jesse Helms. "Republicans buy shoes too," said Jordan, as much a cultural icon as Ali, but a man who never met a commercial endorsement he didn't like.

But while Jordan sells his Nike shoes, Zirin writes that there are echoes of a new sporting resistance. The new mood is represented by people like NBA Most Valuable Player Steve Nash, who was critical of the war in Iraq; Toni Smith, the center of the Division III Manhattanville College women's basketball team, who refused to stand for the national anthem in her senior year; and by former NFL star Carl Eller, who used his 2004 induction into the Pro Football Hall of Fame to chastise America for turning its back on the Black male.

These athletes rank as the spiritual successors to the radical athletes of

the late 1960s and early '70s, who stood up to the institutional racism and corporate greed of the time — with an unpopular war as backdrop to boot. Along with Ali, their predecessors include U.S. Olympians Tommy Smith and John Carlos, who gave the Black Power salute while standing on the podium at Mexico City in 1968 after Smith received the gold medal and Carlos the bronze in the 200 meter run; Dave Meggyesy, a former NFL star and author of *Out Of Their League* (Bison Books, 2005), which deals with how big-time sports dehumanizes athletes; and Curt Flood, who won a lawsuit to free fellow baseball players' careers from team owners' control. Flood and other Black athletes were the spiritual descendants of Jackie Robinson, who successfully challenged baseball's color line in 1946.

Zirin's work has appeared in publications as diverse as the *International Socialist Review*, *The Los Angeles Times*, the leading Black newspaper the *Pittsburgh Courier*, and *SLAM*, a basketball periodical for younger, hipper fans. "I consider myself a radical journalist," Zirin told writer Mark Schneider. "I think the best journalism is about taking sides, consciously." ■

Scandal Sheets

Notes on a Scandal
Directed by Richard Eyre
Opens in theaters Jan. 5

By LESTER GRAY
Arts Editor

Down at the bottom of the silt and sludge, the deposit of 10 months of bloated-budget mediocrity, the true film lover sifts and shakes the pan, mining hope-against-hope for a couple of just-in-time-for-the-Oscars gems. That glint from under the muck is *Notes on a Scandal*.

Notes provides tangible evidence that between vapid celebrity vehicles and art-house obscurities, well-crafted suspense can still carry the day, if not the box office.

Based on the 2003 critically acclaimed Zoe Heller novel, the project distinguished itself before the first frame was shot. Directing the redoubtable combination of Cate Blanchett and Judy Dench is Richard Eyre, under whose helmsmanship Dench garnered an Oscar nomination for *Iris* in 2001. Add writer Patrick Marber, who, as he demonstrated in *Closer*, is an astute observer of bourgeois libidinousness, and we've got a lunch-pail collusion: craftspeople known for putting their shoulders to the wheel.

Sheba Hart (Cate Blanchett) takes a job as an art teacher at St. George, a London parochial school. Having married perhaps a bit too young to a man a generation her senior, she possesses a light and flirty air. Homebound for a decade raising a child with Down's syndrome, the

currency of her sex appeal has gone unappraised for some time, and despite Sheba's best efforts at restraint, there's a part of her that needs reassurance.

The story is told through the "notes" and perspective of history teacher Barbara Covett (Judy Dench), who serves as the school's self-appointed matron, never having ascended officially above her appointed classroom station. Austere and sardonic, she's obsessive in her scrutiny, weighing and measuring all with the misfortune to come within her purview. A late middle-age spinster, she allows Sheba to befriend her, belying the true depth of the older woman's need for companionship. When Barbara becomes aware of Sheba's indiscretion with one of the male students, the knowledge becomes a tool for perfidy and manipulation.

As with *Closer*, Marber's script adaptation is made even more effective in its London locale, where the breach of propriety remains a dramatic event. (What's illicit in LA?) And even as his characters anguish through their infidelities, they never lose their rapier wit and stylish repartee.

Eyre, a former director at England's Royal National Theatre and a Shakespearean veteran, is exacting, giving human folly no larger measure than its due. Taking story elements with all the potential for something too pulpy, too prurient, too-out-of-the-headlines, he keeps them from going over the top.

Perhaps in the next decade *Notes on a Scandal* will be readapted in true Hollywood style, with the aforementioned pitfalls made manifest, resulting in overwhelming box office receipts. The reviewers will revisit the 2006 version and lament about how movies used to be made — with writers who write, directors who direct, and actors who actually act. ■

Notes on a Scandal provides tangible evidence that between vapid celebrity-vehicles and art-house obscurities, well-crafted suspense can still carry the day, if not the box-office.

Cate Blanchett and Judy Dench in *Notes on a Scandal*.





Adventures
in Irony

©Dr. Wes Browning

Here's news you won't get on FOX: It's possible to object to Christian images in public places paid for by public funds without being in the slightest bit offended by the images themselves.

Who Says I Hate Jesus?

Christmas is over! Maybe we can have some peace around here!

Since I have another early deadline and no idea what new wars might break out, let's gossip about Christians!

We just spent an entire holiday season listening to various Christians gossip about non-Christians. "Non-Christians are offended by Christmas trees, you know." "Really? I heard they melt at the sight of Nativity scenes." "I'm not surprised. And the way they hate it when you say 'Merry Christmas' to them — my word, what thin skins they have! I think they're all hemophiliacs."

I don't want to ever hear one more single person tell me what offends other people. No third-party declarations of offense. Also, they prefer to be called the "Christianity-Free."

Here's news you won't get on FOX: It's possible to object to Christian images in public places paid for by public funds without being in the slightest bit offended by the images themselves. Of course, reducing all such objections to imaginary offenses taken is very convenient. You can tell people they just have a Weak Constitution. "Have a hanky and go cry in the corner until Christmas is over."

Actually, because I have some small say about what gets printed in *Real Change*, religious wars don't end with Epiphany for me. Submissions come in all year round that speak glowingly of some religious figure or another.

Who am I kidding? They all speak glowingly of Jesus. Apparently, nobody that cares deeply about Ahura Mazda thinks of *Real Change* when they are looking for an outlet to express their feelings. But Jesus moves people to want to publish here.

Since I have only one vote in about six, I make it a policy not to tell folks how I'll vote, because it could be misleading. So if you ask, "Does *Real Change*

publish fiction?" I'll say, "What do you think we are, *The New York Times*?" and laugh insanely.

Otherwise, imagine how it would be. I'd say to someone, "No, Mr. Manson, we're not about to publish your 'If I Had It To Do All Over, Here's How I Would Slaughter Them This Time' in 13 weekly installments." As sure as I'm sure we won't, that's just how surely the editorial committee will vote five-to-one in favor of slaughter. Or supposing I said, "Yes, Ma'am, we would be thrilled to print your detailed, explicit, graphic memoirs as a life-long call girl specializing in rare requests," I can just bet the committee will vote five-to-one against good fun. I'm not naming names, but some people on the Editorial Committee are not me. Not in any way me.

All of that said, I've decided to break my long silence on this one subject in order to fill up the rest of my space today. Now, remember, I just have one vote in six, and my opinions are NOT the official opinions of *Real Change* or any other decent organization.

First, the rumors are not true. I do not hate Jesus. Not only that, but I have been known to vote "yes" on submissions that mention Jesus and say good things about Jesus. I am not bothered by any utterance of the names "Jesus," "Christ," or those of His Relatives or Associates.

I am in fact very much interested in your touching story about how you and your pet goldfish Simon and your shared love for Jesus Christ saved you both from the well during the flood. Or how, thanks to Jesus, your 15 years of homelessness have been joyous throughout, or that you don't even consider yourself homeless because, with Jesus in your heart, wherever you are is Heaven, and Heaven is nothing if not home. It really, really interests me to read things like that.

I do however insist that any submission that gets my vote say something other than, "I'm a Christian; you be one too."

Take a look at my picture on this page. Does that look like a cheerleader outfit I'm wearing? ■

If you have reported the harassment to the right people at work and the situation has not been changed, or there is no one else there to talk to, there are additional resources available. Try contacting the Washington Human Rights Commission, Seattle's Equal Employment Opportunity Commission office, or the Seattle Office for Civil Rights. The EEOC and the SOCR allow you to file a complaint that will be reviewed and investigated by the organization free of charge. Both of these agencies can help you negotiate a solution that works for both you and your employer.

Many of the laws providing protection against harassment and discrimination in the workplace require such claims to be reported in a timely manner, often as soon as 180 days after the incident has occurred. It is also recommended that you keep track of the important events that are causing you concern. Writing down times, dates, and the names of observers will be important. If possible, keep copies of any emails, letters, or memos you have sent to your management expressing your concerns and any responses you have received.

If you have reported incidences of workplace hostility to appropriate management and management has taken no action, you may feel the need to quit. This should be your last resort. Typically, unemployment benefits are not available to those who quit their job voluntarily, but if you tried to get managers to fix the situation, you might have a claim for unemployment. Try contacting the state's Employment Security Department to see if you qualify. ■



Fri., Dec. 8, 10:14 p.m., Pine St., Starbucks.

A transient Black female aged 20 was seated on a wall on the south side of Starbucks, in an area clearly posted "No Trespassing, No Loitering." A police officer approached her and recognized her as having been previously trespassed by him from the same location earlier that day. He had spoken to her then and made it clear to her that she was not to be seated at the above location. She had stated that she understood and had left the location at that time. Suspect was seated in the same location, and was placed into custody for trespass. She was arrested and booked into King County Jail.

Sat., Dec. 9, 9:06 a.m., 800 Olive Way.

Victim, a transient white female aged 58, stated she had been sleeping in a doorway of a business on the 800 block of Olive Way on the north side of the street. She had her clothing and personal items in a bag next to her. The suspect, an unknown Black male, woke victim up by attempting to pull on her clothes and take them off. Suspect also had his pants pulled down. Victim yelled loudly at the suspect, and he left the area. Victim continued to stay in the doorway, and the suspect returned a short time later. He began to sort through her bags, and the victim left the scene and began looking for help. Suspect followed her as she attempted to get away from him. She went to the West Precinct to get help, but the precinct was closed at that time. She then fled to the Sobering Center on Boren Ave., and called 911 from there. An officer responded and contacted the victim — he stated she seemed intoxicated, and she did say she had been drinking a lot that night. Victim appeared angry and hostile towards the officer because the precinct had been closed and it had taken officers a long time to respond to her call. The officer requested that she show him the doorway where the suspect had approached her. After several attempts to find the location the victim spotted her items in a doorway on Olive Way. The suspect had rifled through her belongings, and the victim became irate and began to throw her personal items, toiletries and clothing around, including in the direction of the officer. The officer told her to stop her actions or she would be arrested, but the victim refused to pick up her items, saying they were no good to her anymore. The officer had her pick up her belongings and stack them back in the doorway where she had left them. He then gave her a business card with the case number. An area check for the suspect was negative.

Compiled from incident reports of the Seattle Police Department by Emma Quinn. Got your own experience to relate? Call us at (206)441-3247 ext. 207 and we'll get the scoop.



REAL-LIFE ANSWERS TO YOUR LEGAL HASSLES

My supervisor at work touched me in ways that make me feel uncomfortable, and when I complained to his supervisor, nothing happened and his behavior continues. Where can I go next to make this stop happening? Do I have to quit my job to get this to stop? If I quit my job, will I get unemployment benefits?

According to attorney Jenny Hsu at Foster Pepper PLLC, federal and state statutes are designed to protect you in the event you encounter a hostile work environment. This may include instances of unwanted touching and other various forms of harassment or discrimination by co-workers or supervisors.

Many of these laws also require most employers to have protocols and procedures that allow you to report incidents of harassment or discrimination in the workplace and require such employers to take reasonable steps to prevent such actions from happening again. Although you have already complained to a supervisor, you might want to seek the advice of a human resources manager, if available, at your place of work. In addition, your legal claim can be barred if the employer has a procedure in place to handle harassment or discrimination reports and can show that you failed to follow it.

Answers are intended for general information only and are not intended to take place of the advice of your own attorney. Got questions? E-mail atji@seattleu.edu.

CHINOOK, Continued from Page 7

standards — and a math placement test he took upon entering Chinook. But he credits the teacher of that special education class with helping him grasp mathematical concepts to such a degree, he was placed in an honors algebra class this year. The teachers of a two-week afterschool math program last year, he adds, assisted him in passing the math WASL. (He surpassed state standards on all of last year's WASL exams.) "It's not the teachers who are doing anything wrong," he proclaims of the school's testing woes. "They're great."

Then what causes the low scores?

Ustanick blames lack of resources. "It isn't about the school, and it isn't about the teachers," she says. "It's about kids having what they need, to learn what they need to learn."

At the middle school level, seventh graders face tests in reading, writing, and math; eighth graders are confronted with reading, math, and science. Meeting state standards in reading, writing, and math is required for the Class of 2008; passing science becomes an additional hurdle for the Class of 2010 and beyond. Graduation-required testing in the WASL officially begins in the 10th grade.

Somasundaram says he believes that both racial perceptions and socio-economic factors may affect student achievement. After all, as an Indian, he says he knows that people expect him to be smart and succeed. But as for the reasons a student might miss a state standard on the WASL, he says, "It's complicated."

He thinks some students' inability to meet standards can be overcome, much as his were. "In elementary school," Somasundaram says, "I never paid attention. But when I got here, I wanted to put my priorities in order. But some students think it's too late."

They may have given up by now."

Still, he insists all students can make a turn around, if they want. With a dream of working in robot technology in the future, he says he thinks success on the WASL can happen for every child at Chinook. "I think everyone can pass," says Somasundaram. "Everyone." ■

LEGISLATURE, continued from page 3

For families in need, says Solid Ground's Tony Lee, new federal regulations will make it tougher to collect welfare under the WorkFirst program's job requirements, something Solid Ground hopes the Legislature will respond to by providing state funding to those who are, in fact, working to educate themselves or get a job.

Starting in March, the governor plans to kick non-compliant families off welfare altogether, as opposed to reducing their monthly grant, which is the state's current form of sanction.

The governor's budget already includes new funding for a \$100-a-month stipend that former welfare recipients would get for six months after getting a job. For those still on the rolls, advocates are seeking a three percent increase in both the welfare grant and the state's General Assistance grant for unemployed individuals (GA-U).

The typical welfare grant for a family of two is \$440, a figure that hasn't budged since 1993, says welfare rights organizer Jean Colman.

In her budget proposal, Gov. Gregoire took a step closer to her goal of providing health care for all of Washington's low-income children by covering 32,000 more kids under a state plan. Children's advocates are also working for legislation to provide state health coverage for foster children up to the age of 21, increase day-

care reimbursements and school-lunch funding, and form a state commission to examine why high numbers of Black and Native American children end up in foster care for extended periods.

Among bills that will be reintroduced this year, a bid to cap the sky-high interest rates of payday lenders will be back, and labor advocates plan a renewed push to create a paid family leave program and force employers of 1,000 or more to contribute 9 percent of their payroll to health benefits for workers — a new and expanded version of last year's so-called Wal-Mart bill. ■

Letters

editor@realchangenews.org

Walking on by

Dear *Real Change*,

The Downtown Seattle Association's distribution of fliers advising passersby not to give to individual panhandlers ["The Panhandling Dilemma," Dec. 27], but rather to contribute to the more established and effective recognized charities that do help the homeless, may be well meaning but probably won't be effective.

Passersby will read the message and probably use it as an excuse not to drop money in the pan, and thereby relieving their conscience will walk on and not take the time or trouble to contribute to those organized charities which they should contribute to.

How about an alternative? DSA kiosks in downtown, collecting cash money to be distributed to the truly deserving as ascertained by appropriate charities and by the DSA and its staff.

I would be relieved to "drop money" in this fashion and would be happy to "man" such a kiosk.

Martin Paup

Real Change welcomes letters to the editor of up to 250 words in length. Please include name, address, phone number, and email for author verification. Letters should be addressed to Editor at *Real Change*, 2129 2nd Ave., Seattle, WA, 98121, or emailed to editor@realchangenews.org.

Chinook students have experienced trouble in all areas of WASL testing. Here are percentages, by grade, of students meeting state standards:

Reading

7th grade: Chinook: 40% State average: 62%

8th grade: Chinook: 55% State average: 70%

Writing

7th grade: Chinook: 46% State average: 65%

Science

8th grade: Chinook: 16% State average: 43%

Math

7th grade: Chinook: 24% State average: 49%

8th grade: Chinook: 26% State average: 49%

Source: Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction, 2005-06 testing.

Socioeconomics play a role, too. Here's how low-income students at Chinook are doing:

7th grade

Reading: 32% Writing: 37% Math: 17%

8th grade

Reading: 48% Science: 8% Math: 21%

Source: Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction, 2005-06 testing.

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CLASSIFIED**Opportunity**

Beginning and experienced writers read their work about ending racism, homelessness, homophobia, and war. Thurs., Jan. 11, 7:30 p.m., Honey Bear Bakery, 6504 - 20th Ave. NE.

Martin Luther King Festival features dramatic performances, the Kulshan Chorus, and delicious food. Tickets \$5. Fri., Jan. 12 and Sat., Jan. 13, Mount Vernon High School, Cafeteria, 314 N Ninth St.

Real Change classifieds are a way to reach 30,000 loyal readers. Call 441-3247, or email classified@realchangenews.org.

Calendar

This Week's Top Ten

Monday 1/8

Work for debt relief for the world's poorest nations, study the issues, and plan actions at the Jubilee Northwest meeting. 7 p.m., St. Mark's Cathedral, 1245 - 10th Ave. E., conference room. Info: (206)382-3785.

Pulitzer Prize-winning playwright Suzan-Lori Parks made a personal commitment to write a play a day for a year. The resulting cycle, *365 Days/365 Plays*, is presented by 52 Seattle artists and performing groups, each producing a week of Parks' plays in the order of their creation. Ranging from three lines to three pages in length, her creations are a rich tapestry of political and cultural themes. 7 p.m., Town Hall, 1119 Eighth Ave. Info: www.365seattle.com.

Tuesday 1/9

The interfaith series *Sharing the Spiritual Path* features Muslim Sufi Minister Jamal Rahman's talk

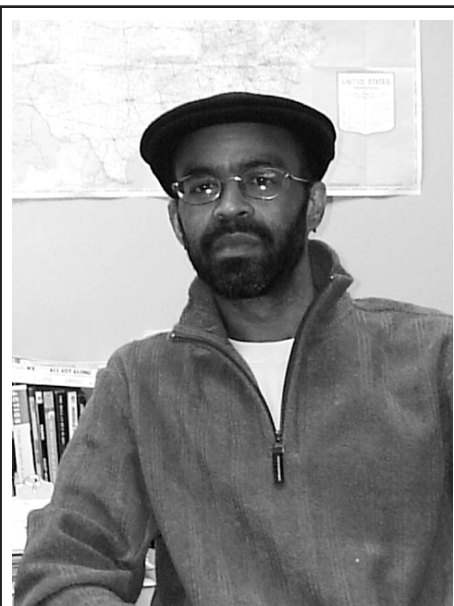
"How My Religious Faith Informs My Daily Life." Rahman's passion is embracing the beauty and wisdom of other faith traditions, and he recently authored *The Fragrance of Faith: The Enlightened Heart of Islam*. 7 p.m., St. Benedict School, 4811 Wallingford Ave. N Info: (206)784-8875.

What is the What is Dave Egger's fictionalized memoir of real life hero Valentino Achak Deng, a Sudanese civil war refugee who joins thousands of other boys suffering starvation, thirst, and squalor in refugee camps. When Valentino reaches America, he finds survival equally difficult. He searches for community and is beaten and robbed. Valentino's epic search for self, home, and fulfillment in the contemporary world becomes an epic icon of modernity; he reads from Eggers' book in a presentation by 826 Seattle at 7:30 p.m. at the Elliott Bay Book Company, 101 S. Main St.

Wednesday 1/10

Trying to understand the surge of right-wing, religiously influenced political strength, Washington State University professor Joan Burbick has written a socio-historical introduction to Ameri-

can gun culture, *Gun Show Nation*. She discusses the mythologizing of our frontier past, the belief that the gun itself is capable of stopping violence, and the gun industry's successful marketing with the image of the patriotic, law-abiding civilian shooter. Tickets \$5. 7:30 p.m., Town Hall, 1119 Eighth Ave.



Malcolm Cash, a scholar of English, multiculturalism, and African-American Studies, has joined Bellevue Community College as a Scholar in Residence. He will host Diversity Dialogue, a forum on education and popular culture in terms of diversity retention in universities. Monday, Jan. 8, 6 p.m., Bellevue Community College, Scholar in Residence House, 2450 145th Ave. SE. Info: (425)564-2381.

Dr. Karen Syrjala, Director of UW's Biobehavioral Sciences Department, discusses common medical, physical, emotional, and social issues that cancer survivors face in her talk "Now What? Life After Cancer." 7 p.m., Gilda's Club, 1400 Broadway.

Thursday 11/11

Earthome Productions' film *The Next Industrial Revolution* documents an exciting and hopeful future of reinventing technical enterprises to be safer and ever-renewing as a natural process. As the world's resources become scarcer, this film shows businesses transforming themselves to enhance

sustainability and profitability. 7 p.m., Northwest Environmental Education Council, 650 S. Orcas St., Suite 220.

Friday 1/12

The Last Atomic Bomb presents nuclear proliferation through the eyes of Nagasaki survivor Sakue Shimohira. The documentary interweaves the controversial decision to bomb, censorship of the effects, Japanese discrimination against the survivors, the build-up of arms during the Cold War, and today's anti-nuclear movement. 7 p.m., Keystone Church, 5019 Keystone Place N.

Tim Wise, activist and author of *White Like Me: Reflections on Race from a Privileged Son*, has trained teachers, government, media, and law enforcement officials on methods for dismantling institutionalized racism. He delivers his lecture "The Many Challenges and Accomplishments of Martin Luther King, Jr." at 7 p.m. The Bush School, New Gym, 3400 East Harrison St. Info: eddie.moorejr@bush.edu.

Director's Corner

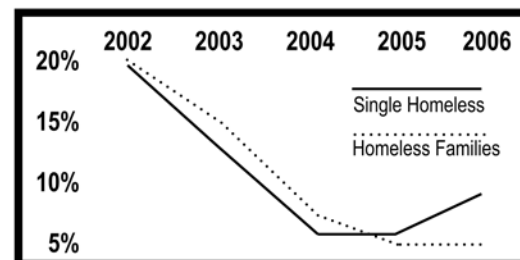


For more than 20 years, I've eagerly awaited publication of the United States Conference of Mayors' (www.mayors.org) Report on Hunger and Homelessness each December.

While the methodology is less than consistent (the participating cities vary from year to year, and each tend to assess the needs differently), the report has still been a useful benchmark as to whether we're winning or losing the war on poverty. For the last few years, we've been losing less badly, which, given the consistent double-digit increases of 2003 and prior, is welcome news. The chart below shows the trend since 2002.

This year, however, the numbers again went up. The overall increase went from 6 to 9 percent, while the increase in family homelessness remained even at 5 percent. Were I to glibly hypothesize from insufficient data, here's what I'd say: "A strong economy coupled with new approaches to reducing homelessness has slowed the increase, but the inevitable creaming that comes with a focus on producing results may leave some behind."

We'll see what happens next year.



First things First

Get Involved • Take Action

March on Olympia

Issue: The Statewide Poverty Action Network, *Real Change*, and other anti-poverty groups are hosting the second annual Poverty Action Summit, march, and rally in Olympia on Jan. 15, Martin Luther King, Jr. Day. Please join us and help tell legislators that ending poverty should be their first priority.

Background: This event is a little different. It's one of the few advocacy days when we have the opportunity not just to ask for change, but to march in the streets and demand it loudly!

After registration and breakfast, the day will begin with a legislative briefing at 9:15. This is your chance to learn about the issues we're working on, including stopping predatory payday lenders, increasing funding for affordable housing, and making sure everyone has access to health care.

Then, a panel of speakers who are struggling with those issues will talk about their experiences. Legislators will be there to hear their stories and gain a better understanding of the human impact of the bills and budget they're considering.

Over lunch, participants will choose from one of three great workshops: how a bill becomes a law, with former Poverty Action lobbyist Julie Watts; how to meet with your legislators, with citizen advocate extraordinaire Nancy Amidei; and a new workshop this year, how to use your personal story to be an advocate, with Leo Artalejo, a former executive speechwriter and speaking coach for Microsoft.

After lunch, we'll rally with music, inspiring speakers, and then march and chant our way to the capitol steps, where we'll be joined by the Speaker of the House, Frank Chopp, and Senate Majority Leader Lisa Brown.

After the rally, constituents will head off to meetings with their legislators that will be arranged in advance. You'll have the chance to join others to talk directly with your legislators and let them know that you care about ending poverty.

This is a great chance to get involved if you're new to advocacy. And it's a great chance for everyone to help bring Martin Luther King, Jr.'s dream to life.

Action: Attend the full day, or just the march and rally. For the full day, including breakfast and lunch, register at www.povertyaction.org or contact Marcy Bowers at (206)694-6794. Registration is \$15 per person, and low-income scholarships are available. Workshops and the rally will be held at St. John's Episcopal Church, 114 - 20th Ave. SE, Olympia, WA 98501.

If you're only attending the rally and march, no registration is necessary. Just bring a carload of friends and show up at the church at 1 p.m. There's no parking available at the church, but street parking is free because it's a holiday.

If you're coming to the rally and march only, consider writing a note to your legislators and the governor ahead of time and leaving it at their offices. A simple note that lets them know you were there because you want everyone to have access to basic necessities like affordable housing and health care, and that you want payday lenders to stop preying on low-income people, is perfect. It would be a missed opportunity to visit Olympia and not let your legislators know! Find out who represents you and get their office addresses at www.leg.wa.gov.

Calendar compiled by Dena Burke. Have a suggestion for an event? Email it to calendar@realchangenews.org.

BLOG, Continued from Page 6

RC: Do you think it is unethical for blogs to claim to be objective and then not be?

Goldstein: It depends on what they want to be. If their goal is simply to spin elections and politics, it's clever. I don't know if it's unethical. I think it's dishonest.

In many ways, as a blogger, we have a freedom that journalists don't have that allows us to be more honest because we're allowed to be biased. I can come out and say, Yes, I'm a liberal Democrat. My goal is to help Democrats win, help progressive Democrats win, to shape politics locally and nationally, and in that way to have a more progressive government. The balance in blogging comes from there being people on both sides.

RC: You're not paid by the Democrats?

Goldstein: Oh God, no, but they should pay me. Some people make huge financial sacrifices to blog, and I have been terribly financially irresponsible. I provide an awful lot of value to the Democratic Party. The Democrats can send out a press release on a scandal, and reporters look at it as a press release from the Democrats. If bloggers start writing about it, then it's not coming from the Democrats. It's coming from people with some degree of independence. No one tells us what to cover. If the Democrats feed me a good scandal on a Republican, then by golly I'm going to cover it, but that's not where most of the stories come from.

RC: Do you do investigative stories?

Goldstein: I try not to, but sometimes I have to. An example of an investigative story is recently a blogger did a long critique of Dave Reichert's latest ad and one of the things he pointed out was that Reichert had a quote attributed to *The Seattle Times*, but that quote was not in *The Seattle Times*. The blogger had many other points, but that one piece was the money. I highlighted that in my blog, and within hours the *Times* was in touch with the Reichert campaign, which then said they would fix their ad.

RC: Is there a natural balance between liberals and conservatives monitoring each other's blogs for errors?

Goldstein: If you get something wrong in a blog, people will point it out in the comment threads.

RC: Have comment threads influenced you?

Goldstein: I don't think you can not be influenced by the comment threads. Mine are a cesspool, for the most part. Some commentators I respect more and read what they have said. I am careful about facts, but I am happy to spin, exaggerate, and hype. There have been a couple occasions when I have been wrong and found out through the comments and corrected it. There is a self-correcting aspect of blogging.

RC: Are professional journalists losing their role as the gatekeepers to information?

Goldstein: Absolutely. Journalists and bloggers will tell you that. The newspapers, TV, and radio are reading us all the time and getting stories from us.

RC: Do you think there is a sameness with the Associated Press and shared video feed that blogs are responding to?

Goldstein: One little blogger can create a media stampede. I learned that from the Horse's Ass initiative. It was just a joke. It deserved, if anything, a little 30-second laugh at the top of the hour, but it got press coverage for six weeks. I think there's this sense that people haven't been getting the whole story and they want the whole story. Blogs might not be the best source to get

it, because you can get untruths and misinformation from both sides, but consumers are coming to us because they don't trust the media anymore.

RC: Do readers seek out blogs promoting opinions they already agree with?

Goldstein: Yes, I think there has been a natural progression of media fragmentation that began with cable TV. When I was growing up there were three networks, and now there are hundreds of channels. It's why the media was so pro-war at first: people wanted to feel good about invading another country. It is dangerous to have a public that seeks out only what it wants to hear, and I know I play a role in that.

RC: Do you think that mainstream journalists have more of an obligation to be unbiased?

Goldstein: They have an obligation, but they don't do it consistently enough. The idea of objectivity is a fairly modern construct. Go back to the pamphleteers, to colonial days: It was politicized and biased. Go back to the early 20th century: There were a half dozen papers in every town. There was the labor paper and the business paper and the Republican, Democrat, and maybe even a Socialist paper. With consolidation to one or two papers, that's when they had to create the construct of objectivity. People can't

be objective. It's not possible. You can try. With blogging, you blow away the idea that reporting should be objective. It's honest and in context, and that makes our jobs [as bloggers] easier than their jobs [as journalists].

RC: What is the future of blogging?

Goldstein: Over the next decade you will see a convergence. Traditional news coverage will become more blog-like. From a business model perspective, as the model for traditional newspapers disintegrates, there's more opportunity for making money on the blogging side. As a local blogger, I don't think I could ever make a living just blogging. ■

[HorsesAss on Air]

David Goldstein hosts a talk show on KIRO 710 AM from 7 to 10 p.m. Sundays.

[Blog Catalog]

Read Joshua Marshall on U.S. politics from a liberal perspective at www.talkingpointsmemo.com.

Outfitted with a snarky sense of humor that keeps the political talk lively, Duncan Black, better known as Atrios, writes from a similar perspective at atrios.blogspot.com.

Daily Kos (read: daily chaos) talks about the state of the nation at www.dailykos.com.

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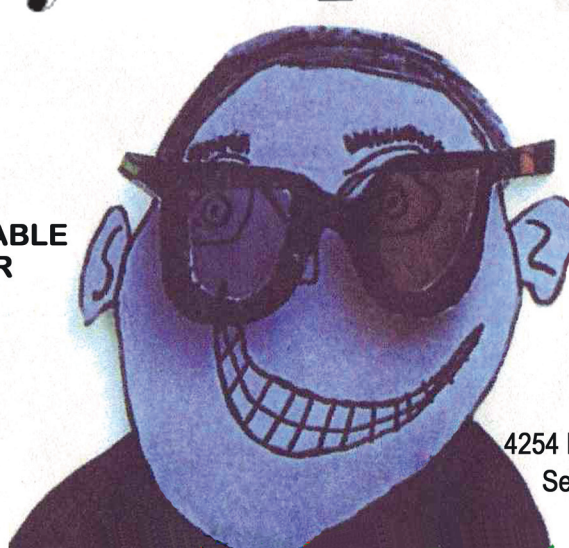
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