

National Day of Mourning



The Victoria Fire Department colour guard marches at Monday's National Day of Mourning ceremony in Centennial Square to honour those killed or injured at the workplace. The B.C. Federation of Labour said 128 people suffered job-related deaths in this province in 2013.

DARREN STONE, TIMES COLONIST

Foster kids need aid beyond 18: report

LINDSAY KINES
Times Colonist

The B.C. government should support foster children into their early adult years rather than showing them the door once they turn 19, a new report says.

Representative for Children and Youth Mary Ellen Turpel-Lafond said youth in care experience a range of problems if they lose all supports after becoming an adult.

They are more likely to drop out of school, suffer mental-health problems, struggle to find work and end up homeless and on social assistance. They are also prone to substance abuse and conflicts with the criminal justice system.

"The costs of our society not helping them are far higher than the cost of providing adequate support at a time when they need it

most," Turpel-Lafond states in her 56-page report, *On Their Own*.

She recommended the province create a youth secretariat to ensure better transitions for the 700 young people "aging out" of the child welfare system every year.

The secretariat would lead efforts to establish a minimum income support level until they reach age 25 as well as better access to health, dental and vision care.

Turpel-Lafond recommends legislation to permit the government to extend foster care up to age 25 on a case-by-case basis for youth in college, university or other training programs.

"In our province, these kids are aging out of care into social assistance which is so low, the pit is so deep for them, that they're not going to climb out," Turpel-

Lafond said in an interview. "I think the idea of transitioning foster care on a case-by-case basis to 24 is the decent and human thing to do. And it will save us a lot of money in the end because it's a wise investment."

The report, however, received a cool response from Minister of Children and Family Development Stephanie Cadieux.

She said her ministry has no money to create a new secretariat or support youth to age 25.

"The reality is that we don't, at this point, have either the legislative mandate to serve kids over the age of 18, nor do we have the budget to do so," she said.

Instead, she said the government will focus on reinvigorating the adoption process for children in care and making sure they get

access to the limited services that do exist.

NDP children's critic Carole James accused government of behaving like an "irresponsible" parent.

"It's not a good enough excuse to say there's no money," she said.

"They find money for advertising. They find money for Bollywood parties. They find money when they seem to need it. But when it's important for children and families, there's no money to be found."

James said the government has a duty to care for children and youth, who through no fault of their own, ended up in the child welfare system.

"And I don't know any parent, who the day their child turns 19, they say, 'You're out on your own and you're expected to manage without any support.'" lkines@timescolonist.com

Sewage plan soundly rejected: poll

Group says CRD proponents are on a collision course with residents

CINDY E. HARNETT
Times Colonist

A new poll says those guiding the Capital Regional District's \$783-million sewage treatment plan are on a collision course with citizens.

The Sewage Treatment Action Group commissioned the poll, carried out by research company Popular Change. The poll found 76 per cent of 2,311 respondents from Victoria, Saanich and Oak Bay are concerned about the sewage plan.

"These results clearly show that the mayors and councillors sitting on the CRD board from these three key municipalities are on a collision course with their citizens," Richard Atwell, director of the Sewage Treatment Action Group, which opposes the CRD plan, said in a statement.

"Citizens have lost confidence in the CRD as the regional waste manager. Seventy per cent want to see an independent review and they want time taken to develop an innovative plan."

Victoria Coun. Geoff Young, chairman of the CRD's liquid waste management committee, said the poll questions were leading.

But he said the CRD and some municipalities are indeed on a collision course if the regional government can't be allowed to make economic decisions about where the sites are going to be.

The current sewage treatment plan, which would see a plant built at McLoughlin Point in Esquimalt, evolved after estimates for a decentralized plan in 2009 were considered too expensive.

The options considered then were four sewage-

treatment plants at a cost of about \$1.2 billion, six plants for \$1.6 billion and 11 plants for \$2 billion.

Young said he took the job as chairman because he knew there was the potential for a lot of money to be spent wastefully, which he is striving to prevent.

"If there is going to be co-operation regionally, there has to be some way to reach agreement. And if we can't, we have to go by majority rule," Young said.

Representatives of Seaterra, the civilian commission overseeing the project, estimate that costs are mounting at a rate of \$1 million every month the project is delayed.

Seaterra program director Albert Sweetnam denounced the poll results Sunday before they were released, saying the automated telephone poll contained loaded questions that were misleading and emotionally charged. He said they will lead to an inaccurate portrayal of public opinion.

"I made a firm commitment that we will correct any misinformation that's out there in the media," Sweetnam said.

"This is complete misinformation, so I thought it needed to be addressed."

The CRD has asked the province to intervene after Esquimalt council rejected the CRD's bid to rezone a former oil tank farm at McLoughlin Point for a \$230-million sewage treatment plant.

The site is zoned to allow wastewater treatment, but the CRD was seeking encroachments into a shoreline buffer and to increase the allowable height.

The rejection came after an extended public hearing that included more than 100 presentations. charnett@timescolonist.com

Warrant issued for alleged masked robber

Times Colonist

A man who allegedly used underwear to cover his face during a failed robbery attempt failed to show up for a scheduled appearance in Victoria provincial court Monday.

A warrant has now issued for Christopher Edwards, 29, who is charged with one count of robbery in connection with an April 14 robbery at the Petro-Canada gas station in the 3900-block of Shelbourne Street.

Saanich police spokesman Sgt. Steve Eassie said the suspect in that robbery was sporting men's underwear and sunglasses to disguise his face.

The male clerk saw the man enter, pushed the panic button and told the would-be robber that the police were on their way. The intruder took a box cutter and swung it at the clerk, police said. The clerk dodged the swing and was not injured.

The masked man ran north on Shelbourne Street and was followed by a witness, who alerted police.

Saanich police officers arrived at the scene and arrested a man in a parking lot near McKenzie Avenue and Cedar Hill Road.

Man arrested in store holdup

Saanich police have made an arrest in connection with a robbery Friday in which the suspect had a knife and covered his face with what was believed to be a balaclava.

The incident happened about 2:20 a.m. at a convenience store at Wilkinson and Interurban roads. The suspect escaped with a quantity of cash. Sean Michael Muir, 31, faces charges of robbery and disguise with intent to commit a crime.

— Times Colonist

Greater Victoria school board approves budget

JEFF BELL
Times Colonist

Even Greater Victoria school board chairwoman Peg Orcheron was surprised at the unanimous approval from trustees for this year's district budget, especially because of the difficult cuts that had to be made to ensure it was a balanced document.

All of the B.C.'s 60 school boards are required to pass balanced budgets each year by June 30.

"I expected the budget to pass but I didn't expect it to pass unanimously, so that was great," Orcheron said.

The Greater Victoria district, home to 47 schools and about 19,000 students, was faced with a \$1.5-million shortfall on a budget of \$170.8 million for 2014-15. There was an \$8.1-million structural or ongoing deficit, but that was brought down to \$1.8 million with \$6.3 million in one-time, carry-forward funds.

Just over \$300,000 was pared last month with a decision to close Sundance Elementary School. The rest of the total was lopped with unanimity on cutting such things as the school-supply budget (\$337,764 in savings), the district resource centre (\$52,601 in savings) and school learning mentors (\$397,480 in savings).

The resource centre distributes such things as software and science kits but is not used regularly, while learning mentors are part of a 10-year-old program that sees teachers work with colleagues in planning, classroom support and other areas.

In total, the board

accepted 11 cost-saving measures.

District superintendent Sherri Bell has said that retirements and other factors could eliminate the need for any layoffs.

Orcheron said the budget is being sent to the Ministry of Education with a letter "expressing our significant concerns about being forced to make these cuts."

The letter said that the cost of education has exceeded provincial funding for over a decade.

Greater Victoria's tough round of cuts for the 2014-15 budget follows an equally demanding process in 2013-14, where trustees worked out a balanced \$172-million budget with only \$16,000 to spare.

Saanich trustees are scheduled to approve their annual budget of about \$80 million on Wednesday, while their Sooke counterparts are looking at their May 27 board meeting as the budget-approval date. The Sooke board has passed first reading of the budget in a unanimous vote.

Sooke district superintendent Jim Cambridge said a \$3.5-million deficit has been worked down on an overall budget of about \$82 million.

Cuts include four fewer principals and vice-principals for next year, the cutting of custodial-manager position and cost-sharing a transportation manager with the Saanich district.

Budget approval will be May 14 in the Gulf Islands school district, which has about 1,700 students and a budget just under \$20 million. jbwell@timescolonist.com

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