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The Voice

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Articles translated
into six languages

The newspaper of Neighborhood House

Steps toward final federal budget taken

Legislation could mean more housing changes

By VIRGINIA FELTON
Seattle Housing Authority

Uncertainty about the federal budget and housing spending remain the watchword in Washington, D.C., as senators and congress members struggle with the President's suggested budget, hold hearings and consider housing reform legislation.

When all of the political smoke clears, where will funding for housing assistance stand? It is still impossible to know, but a few trends are emerging.

The 2006 budget President Bush proposed in February eliminated the Community Development Block Grant program, which provides funds for food, shelter and health services programs that serve the nation's most vulnerable people. This proposal met with strident opposition from citizens and their local governments. (See "County Council" on page 3.)

In late April, the House and Senate narrowly adopted a budget resolution conference report which restored CDBG funding. The House approved the measure, which will form the basis for the final federal budget, on a 214-211 vote. The Senate voted 52-47 in favor of adoption. The final budget will likely be approved sometime this fall.

The restoration of CDBG is good news for low-income people, but may ultimately pit housing advocates against social service advocates when it comes to carving up what little budget authority remains.

Washington Senator Patty Murray played a prominent role in hearings that led up to the conference report. She has been steadfast in her support of low-income housing and spoke out against the budget.

"Looking at this budget it's hard to reach any other conclusion than that housing is not a priority for this Administration," she said. "The cuts and problems in this budget will affect the lives of some of our most vulnerable neighbors."

On the legislative front, identical bills that would make big changes to Section 8 and public housing have been introduced in the House and the Senate.

The bills would transform Section 8 into a block grant program, promising fewer regulations and greater local control, but still cutting funding.

Other proposals would allow for time limits on assistance and would change income levels for eligibility so that 90 percent of vouchers in a year would be reserved for families at or below 60 percent of median

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Marchers mourn the past and call for a better future for Vietnam

By ALYSSA MARTIN
Voice reporter



PHOTO BY ALYSSA MARTIN

Thanh Tran came to the United States as a small boy, he said he looks forward to watching his son Truc grow up and take advantage of a good education.

Thirty years after the fall of Saigon, Seattle is home to a Vietnamese immigrant population of around 40,000, one of the largest in the country. A crowd of 150 gathered at Union Station in late April to remember the end of the Vietnam War.

They marched to Seattle City Hall carrying bright yellow and orange posters with messages about their homeland, mourning the past, scorning the present and urging political change.

They also listened to speeches from refugees, veterans of the war and Vietnamese-Americans that touched on the challenges faced by Vietnamese people as they rebuild their war-torn country or adjust to life abroad.

The diverse group of participants did not all agree on how to remember the past. Another remembrance event took place along side the official ceremony, but it was clear that everyone's concerns for the future united around the protection of human rights and religious freedom for those still living under a communist party.

War veterans, refugees and their American-born children joined together in chanting "religious freedom for Vietnam," and waving their striped flags through downtown.

Eight-year-old Tiffany Bui seemed proud as she walked to the front of the marching crowd, carrying a bright orange poster commemorating the death of her grandfather in the war. Her young cousins giggled as they chased after her,

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City Council relaxes home buyer rules

SEATTLE CITY COUNCIL

The Seattle City Council eased some requirements last month to make it easier for many low-income families to become home owners under the city's Homebuyer Assistance Program.

The legislation reduces down payment constraints and allows sweat equity to count towards eligibility.

"Seattle's working families deserve an opportunity to become homeowners," said Councilmember Tom Rasmussen, chair of the Council's Housing Committee. "This is a clear message that we believe home ownership should be attainable for as many people as possible."

The requirements had been established in the 2002 Housing Levy, in which taxpayers set aside money to ensure affordable housing for everyone.

Until 2009, the Homebuyer Assistance Program will set aside \$7.8 million to help low-income home buyers secure low interest loans and make down payments on their first home.

With the eased requirements, program participants earning less than 60 percent of the median income will not have to come up with a down payment of \$2,500 or 2 percent of the purchase price of their new home.

Instead, they can offer "sweat equity," or the contribution of physical labor toward the construction of their new home. This enables families participating Habitat for Humanity to access Homebuyer Assistance funds.

"Our city's working families who are first-time home buyers need the kind of assistance (that) easing this requirement provides," said City Council President

Jan Drago.

Also, those who have long-term disabilities and rely on Supplemental Security Income can use monetary gifts from family and friends for up to 75 percent of the minimum cash downpayment. For many, that minimum was difficult to accumulate and jeopardized their eligibility for SSI. This policy change is critical for helping more people with disabilities become independent home owners.

For those who have Individual Development Accounts, the downpayment requirements were reduced to a flat \$2,500. IDA programs are administered by nonprofit organizations to give low-income families with a financial match for every dollar they save. These combined funds are then available

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"I learned late in life that political advocacy is the name of the game. If you're not out there your needs won't be met."

Kirkland Senior Council member John Barnett on why civic involvement is important.

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One to grow on

Garden tips for community gardeners

Watch out for pesky slugs

By ANZA MUENCHOW
Special to the Voice

Who would have thought we'd have so much rain in April and May? After the mild winter and wet, wet spring, we are having a bumper crop of slugs!

They really go for small seedlings, especially cilantro, lettuce and the brassicas like broccoli, cabbage, turnips and mustard. I have had to replant some of these crops three times now, but I am trying new ways to get rid of the slugs and snails.

I've tried hand picking the little critters off my plants in the early evening and maybe again in the morning if I have time. I've already removed a couple pounds of slugs from my farm this way.

I never use the attractive slug baits like Deadline because they are so toxic to other animals. I've known several dogs that have almost died from eating the stuff. The other snail and slug predators go for it and die also.

I have used the non-toxic, iron phosphate slug bait Sluggo. It doesn't really attract the pests, but if they do come across it around the base of your plants and eat it, they'll die. The problem is it may also be killing my favorite slug predator, the ground beetle.

So instead I tried preparing covered plastic containers filled with beer. I made these from cottage cheese-sized containers and cut three little windows in the sides. I left the lids on to keep the rain out.

The slugs enter through the windows where they drink the beer, get drunk and end up falling in and drowning. I have to dump them out about every three days and re-fill. I've killed hundreds of slugs this spring with these traps, and I've seen no ground beetles in them.

I've also removed all the nooks under which slugs like to hide, including wood, rocks and cardboard. On the flipside, I've taken advantage of knowing where they hide, leaving out some cardboard and then

picking off the slugs during the day.

Generally, I've planted more seedlings than I need so that I can share them with these sluggy pests.

I imagine you are enjoying your first harvest of peas now. Do you ever stir fry the peas, or do you just eat them fresh off the vine? Well, the tender vines will not last long in the warm weather of July, so you will soon have room to plant more of your favorite summer veggies.

I particularly like to plant a trailing squash, like the tromboncino (aka zucchini) which enjoys climbing the same pea trellis after the peas are gone.

I will plant the tromboncino or a delicata (or another trailing, not-too-heavy squash) at the beginning of June right next to where the peas are growing. A couple weeks later as the peas are dying, I will encourage the squash vine to climb along the trellis.

I love saving the time and energy of trellising and maximizing the use of space in the garden. By the end of August I will be ready to harvest delicious squash.

Speaking of trellising, you may want to try planting pole beans instead of bush beans this year. You will have so many more beans if you grow them up a tipi fashioned set of poles. They will usually keep producing for four to six weeks.

That is a lot of picking, but you can eat them in so many ways. I like to roast the green beans for 10 minutes at 475 degrees with a light coating of olive oil and a touch of salt. Keep them in a single layer on your tray and maybe stir them once.

I roast a lot of vegetables like this in the summer. It is so fast and simply delicious. It seems to bring out the flavor of fresh home grown produce.

Enjoy your gardening and e-mail me if you have special questions.

Anza Muenchow is an avid gardener and a volunteer with the P-Patch program. You can reach her by e-mail at mahafarm@speakeasy.net

Federal budget

Continued from front page

income and 10 percent could go to families at or below 80 percent of median income. Under current law, 75 percent are reserved for families earning no more than 30 percent of median income and 25 percent for families earning up to 80 percent.

The section of the bill on public housing would also allow for "rent flexibility and simplification" in public housing rents. Rents could be calculated in different ways, including as flat rents.

The "Moving to Work" portion of the bill would create a permanent MTW program. Both King County and Seattle housing authorities are already MTW agencies, which means they have more flexibility in administering programs than they would otherwise. Seattle's MTW status will ex-

pire next year, unless it is extended or legislation such as this proposal is enacted.

National public housing associations applauded the recommendations to expand MTW and simplify laws governing rent calculations. Still, they criticized the bill for not addressing funding for Section 8, which has already been cut.

"Housing authorities (have been) forced to make retroactive budget cuts, to lower rent payments and terminate or rescind vouchers," the organizations said in a statement. "Wary landlords have left the program, waiting lists have been frozen."

Wrangling over this proposed legislation will likely continue well into the fall. The prospect of continued funding cuts remains likely, and King County's local housing authorities will continue to struggle to provide assistance with inadequate resources.

Market days are here



PHOTO BY STACY SCHWANDT

Plenty of produce is available on the first day of the Columbia City Farmers Market.

By VOICE STAFF

The emerald green of crisp lettuce, the deep red of tomatoes and other shades of fresh produce can be found all summer long at weekly neighborhood farmers markets.

Thanks to consumer demand, many markets will remain open longer this year. Local farmers are growing more varieties to extend their seasons, and many markets feature farm foods available year-round, such as organic eggs and meats, preserves, baked goods, honey and cheeses.

Markets typically operate one day a week and feature between 20 to 40 vendors. Vendors and farmers offer customers a variety of fresh foods, including Puget Sound produce, Eastern Washington fruit, local berries, organic produce, farmstead cheeses, pasture raised beef, free-range chicken, fish, eggs and honey.

Most of the markets are run by nonprofit organizations, and in 2004 an estimated 260,000 shoppers visited them to shop.

"Fresh food shoppers just can't get enough of the farmers market experience," said Chris Curtis, director of the Neighborhood Farmers Market Alliance, which runs a handful of the local markets.

Low-income people can also do their grocery shopping at the markets, which are authorized to accept electronic food stamps and WIC and Senior Farmers Market Nutrition Program coupons.

After the markets close, many farmers donate leftover produce to the neighborhood food banks. According to the Neighborhood Farmers Market Alliance, last year farmers collectively donated more than 39,000 pounds of food to the food banks.

Consider taking a trip to the farmers market today.

For a listing of farmers markets in King County, call (206) 296-7824 or visit <http://dnr.metrokc.gov/wlr/farms/index.htm>. For Seattle markets, call (206) 632-5234 or visit <http://www.seattlefarmersmarkets.org>.

Home owners

Continued from front page

for purposes such as buying a home.

IDA programs are only available for a limited time and the cash downpayment requirements currently in place for the City's Homebuyer Assistance Program are too difficult for many participants to achieve within the program's time period.

The current requirement is \$2,500 or 2 percent of the purchase price of the home, whichever is higher. The policy change will allow more IDA program participants to use the Homebuyer Assistance funds.

"Easing our Homebuyer Assistance Program requirements gives many people a chance to have a home they can call their own," said Rasmussen. "(This step) speaks loud and clear that we've made increasing home ownership a priority in Seattle."

March

Continued from front page

waving their flags and enjoying the attention from photographers and onlookers.

Behind these youthful marchers were veterans and refugees from an older generation, carrying heavier hearts and sharp opinions about the communist politics in their home country.

The harshest feelings were voiced by a group of mostly prisoners of war, who dressed in their old military uniforms and gathered across the street in order to distinguish their voices as more solemn and serious than the others.

Lynda Bui, a 20-something student living with her parents in West Seattle, said she grew tired of hearing endless political debates while growing up and doesn't consider herself a very political person.

She said she attended the march "to show respect for all that my parents went through, the sacrifices they made."

While reflecting on 30 years of living in the United States, many Vietnamese marchers expressed their gratefulness for

living in Seattle and only humbly acknowledged the tremendous success they've brought to the region.

In the event's keynote address, Seattle Mayor Greg Nickels remembered a year when every public high school in the city graduated a Valedictorian born to Vietnamese parents.

He said that Vietnamese immigrants and their families are fully embracing the American dream and continue to infuse the Northwest with a commitment to hard work, education and service.

After coming to the United States after the fall of Saigon as a young boy with his parents, Thanh Tran learned English and eventually graduated from Chief Sealth High School.

"(My parents) encouraged me to study hard, but when I couldn't afford college courses after high school I joined the Navy," he said.

He returned to Seattle to raise his family, and he is determined to take advantage of the benefits of living in a peaceful democracy. Here, he said, his son Truc will have access to a good education and "the opportunity to make something of himself."

The Voice

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The Voice, the newspaper of Neighborhood House, is published monthly with the support of the Seattle and King County Housing Authorities. Neighborhood House helps diverse communities of people with limited resources attain their goals for self-sufficiency, financial independence and community building. The Voice contributes to that mission by providing low-income people, immigrants, refugees and other concerned parties with timely, relevant news. Opinions expressed do not necessarily reflect those of the staff, Neighborhood House, SHA or KCHA. We welcome articles and tips from the community and reserve the right to edit all submissions.

Ten students graduate from child care training

By MIKE SKINNER
Special to the Voice

Ten excited women graduated from a day care providers' training program in the Rainier Vista neighborhood last month.

"I love to work with children," said student Samira Ahmed, as she celebrated her accomplishments.

The child care training is a long-standing collaboration between Refugee Women's Alliance and Child Care Resources.

As part of the program, students attended over 150 hours of early childhood training and spent 100 hours interning at local child care centers. A WorkFirst Instructor gave 16 hours of training in job search, resume writing and interviewing skills.

"We have been coordinating community-based child care training (together) for almost eight years now, and women have been very successful with finding jobs and operating family child cares in their homes," said Faye Melton, special projects coordinator for Child Care Resources. "This success is a true testament to the pre-enrollment screening, the intensive training and the ongoing support the women receive after graduation."

The training program is one of several WorkFirst job training classes offered by ReWA which provide vocational ESL training. Students are required to have reached ESL Level Two prior to enrollment, but all are encouraged to build English skills by taking additional classes at ReWA.

All of the women graduating from the program said they plan to find jobs in child care centers or in family child care programs. Several said they hope to open child care businesses in their homes.



PHOTO BY MICHAEL SKINNER

A happy class graduates from child care training.

Over the past eight years, more than 50 graduates of the child care training class have successfully gone on to operate licensed family child care businesses, Melton said. This has increased the supply of culturally-specific child care services available in the community.

In addition to the child care training, the nonprofit program JumpStart offers business training and loans to refugees and asylees in the program.

"JumpStart is perfect for people who want to run a small business out of their homes, such as sewing and tailoring businesses, hair cutting or weaving businesses and child care businesses," said Greg Hope, director of the program.

For more information about the child care training classes, contact Melton at (206) 329-1011 ext. 213 or Maggie Sung at ReWA at (206) 721-0243 ext. 249.

Those interested in learning more about home-based business opportunities should call Jenelle Landgraf, JumpStart Program Coordinator, at (206) 323-3152 ext. 104.

Mike Skinner is a JumpStart VISTA program developer working with the Refugee Resettlement Office.

East African group focuses on helping youth

By VOICE STAFF

About a dozen East African community members met in late April to discuss the steps they are taking to ensure East African youth are successful in school and in the greater Seattle community.

"They are lost, but they do not have to be lost," said Maikela Mengesha, a member of the East African Youth Advocacy Group, which organized the event. "What we want to do is to find the names of these kids and grab them. Find speakers who can motivate them, give them some hope."

Senait Ogbe Habte of the University of Washington's Office of Minority Affairs spoke to those gathered about college entrance requirements and the importance of parent involvement in education.

An Eritrean immigrant herself, Habte said East Africans face steep challenges as they adjust to their new culture. Often, parents who do not speak English lose authority over their children, who are asked to serve as translators for their parents, even in matters of discipline.

Many East African parents are too willing to leave their children's education up to the teachers, she said. "In this culture you have to participate because there's no one there looking out for your student."

Those gathered also heard about crime prevention efforts in their neighborhoods, including the Seattle Police Department's East African Communities advisory council, which allows East Africans to meet

with police department officials to discuss issues of concern. The council will meet next on July 7.

The East African Youth Advocacy Group was formed in 2004 when an Eritrean parent approached the Nonprofit Assistance Center with concerns that East African youth weren't succeeding in school and in life. He wanted to organize a group to address these needs. The group now includes individuals from Somali, Eritrean, Oromo, Tigrean and other East African ethnicities.

In December, the group won a neighborhood matching grant from the City of Seattle to continue its work. Members plan to develop a speakers bureau of adults and youth. Speakers will present to school officials, police officers and others on the special experience of East African youth, promoting cross-cultural understanding and appreciation.

The group also plans to organize a job fair where East African adults will meet with youth to explain their jobs and act as positive role models. The group will also create a video documenting their work, providing valuable resources to others.

For more information on the group, contact Rosie O'Brien-Ochs at (206) 324-5850 or by e-mail at robrienochs@nacseattle.org. For more information on the police advisory council, contact Mark Howard at (206) 684-7727 or by e-mail at EastAfricanliaison@seattle.gov.

County council urges more federal funding for housing

KING COUNTY HOUSING AUTHORITY

The Metropolitan King County Council backs federal funding for housing, economic development and human services.

Last month, the council passed a motion opposing funding cuts to the Community Development Block Grant, Section 8 Housing Choice Vouchers programs and to local housing authorities.

The motion, sponsored by Councilwoman Julia Patterson of SeaTac had bipartisan support and passed unanimously. The council urged Congress to provide full funding for the Department of Housing and Urban Development in the federal budget for fiscal year 2006.

The Council sent the motion to Washington senators and all the U.S. representatives with districts in King County.

"This motion lets our delegation in Washington, D. C. know that the 12th largest county in the country supports full funding for programs that help our most vulnerable," Patterson said.

The CDBG program has provided King County with more than \$24 million annually to provide vital programs and services,

including food, shelter and health services, for the county's most vulnerable residents. The Section 8 program means affordable housing for more than 15,000 households in King County.

Over the past several years the federal government has been cutting the budgets for both the CDBG and Section 8 programs.

"The elimination of the CDBG program or significant reductions in funding of this program would have dire consequences for the county's low- and moderate-income residents and for the quality of life for all residents," the council said in the motion.

Regarding possible cuts to Section 8, the motion said, "It is significantly more cost-effective for local, state and federal governments to ensure families and individuals have affordable housing choices and therefore never enter the cycle of homelessness."

The County Council asked that these programs and local housing authorities receive the funding they need in 2006 and that "unwarranted" cuts to the programs in 2005 be restored.

Workshop addresses civics

By VOICE STAFF

About 130 low-income seniors gathered at the Yesler Community Center in late April for a conference on how public policy and civic engagement can change lives.

Seattle Housing Authority residents from Rainier Vista, Beacon Tower, Olympia Place, Yesler Terrace, and others joined King County seniors to discuss issues ranging from Medicare to registering to vote.

The workshop was organized by the Healthy Aging Partnership, a coalition of 40 government and nonprofit agencies dedicated to improving the lives of seniors.

Speakers encouraged those gathered to take a position on issues that matter to them, writing letters to the editor of their local newspapers or inviting legislators to coffee to share their point of view.

John Barnett, a member of the Kirkland Senior Council, explained in his presentation that he had never talked face-to-face with an elected official until he was 70.

"Those in the back who maybe were born in other countries, it may be helpful for them to know that they can still have the chance," he said. "I learned late in life that political advocacy is the name of the game. If you're not out there, your needs won't be met."

The workshop was geared toward low-income individuals over 60. The idea was to empower them to take an active role in civic life.

"One of the goals of the Healthy Aging Partnership was to get more seniors involved in advocacy," said Jessica Leake, one of the partnership members who organized the event.

The workshop included a keynote presentation by Nancy Amidei, director of the University of Washington's Civic Engagement Project and a discussion of community engagement in action by Jim Diers, author of a book on building communities in Seattle. King County Executive Ron Sims addressed the group at lunchtime.

The meeting included simultaneous translation in Vietnamese, Cantonese, Mandarin and Spanish. Immigrants wore headsets to listen to the translation.

Barton Place resident and Chinese immigrant Yong Hy Uy said she was amazed by the effort.

"I've never seen that before, I didn't think it existed," she said through a translator. She added that the prevalence of all-English meetings sometimes prevents community members from getting involved.

Rainier Vista Resident Christine Anderson said she's already deeply involved in her community. However, she said she was pleased when workshop speakers reaffirmed her point of view about the importance of civic engagement.

"In general, it keeps you upbeat and your outlook is better," she said. "It keeps you up and going."

Community notes

Make good government happen

Good government needs the vigilance and dedication of its citizens.

This summer you can play a major role in building good government by helping the Municipal League of King County rate candidates for office.

For the past 95 years, League volunteers have rated candidates using four criteria: involvement, character, effectiveness and knowledge.

In contrast to other organizations, which rate or endorse based on political party, platform or position on issues, the League's ratings are solely meant to determine fitness for office. We neither endorse nor compare candidates.

This year, five committees will evaluate candidates from throughout King County. Our five committees meet in Seattle, South King County and East King County.

Everyone is encouraged to apply. High-quality and unbiased ratings depend on having people with diverse backgrounds and views participate as volunteers.

Call the Municipal League offices at (206) 622-8333 or visit our Web site at <http://www.munileague.org> for an application or for more information.

Candidate interviews will be held from July 25 to August 12. Applications are due by July 15.

