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The Columbian

WEEKEND EDITION

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Cost of plastic bags to rise 4 cents

Success of WA effort to ban single-use plastic up for debate

By SHARI PHIEL
The Columbian

Shoppers in Washington will soon begin paying 4 cents more per plastic bag at grocery stores and other

retailers. The price for plastic bags will increase to 12 cents a bag, plus tax, on Jan. 1, but the bags themselves won't be any thicker.

Bags were allowed to remain a minimum thickness of 2.25 mils after the Legislature postponed an increase to 4 mils until 2028. The previous single-use bags were 0.5 mils. According to the state Department of Com-

merce, about 800,000 businesses will be affected by the price increase.

The price of paper bags will remain 8 cents per bag. Retailers and restaurants using bags that are 4 mils thick or greater must charge an additional 4 cents (16 cents total) until Dec. 31, 2027.

Customers who shop with food assistance benefits

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cards are exempt from paying the per-bag fees. Additionally, the single-use plastic bag ban does not apply to food banks.

It's now been four years since the state's ban on single-use plastic bags went

into effect, but the success of the ban remains up for debate. The goal of the ban was to reduce the amount of plastic ending up in landfills and recycling centers, in streams and along shorelines.

A recent study from University of Washington researchers hired by the state Department of Ecology found that although the total

number of plastic bags sold during the first two years of the ban dropped by half, the total weight of plastic bags used by shoppers actually increased by 17 percent.

"Unfortunately, the study presents insufficient data on the overall quantities of bags distributed, carryout bag prices paid by retailers,

PLASTIC, Page A2

'Tears of joy'

Low-cost legal aid helps woman facing deportation



Photos by TAYLOR BALKOM/The Columbian

A woman The Columbian is identifying only as Katherin has struggled her way through immigration court, mostly without representation. After receiving a deportation order, she finally found legal help.

Vancouver resident lived in fear after missing court date, struggling to find representation

By EMILY ROGERS
The Columbian

A Vancouver woman who missed a court date necessary for her visa found herself in a conundrum that affects many immigrants who live here.

Unlike in criminal court, those going through immigration proceedings aren't entitled to a court-appointed lawyer at government expense. And, until recently, Vancouver residents have fallen through cracks in the legal aid system.

"Since I entered the country, I've been going to court. Normally, when I've gone to court, I haven't had legal representation, neither private nor nonprofit," the woman said speaking in Spanish, translated

to English through an app.

Those living in Vancouver usually report to immigration court in Portland, but most legal aid is based in Seattle and Tacoma. And they aren't eligible for legal aid funded by Oregon.

"Clark County and Vancouver specifically face a unique situation when it comes to pro bono or low-cost immigration services," Nathaniel Belachew, an attorney for the Portland-based Immigrant & Refugee Community Organization, said. "The Vancouver area has generally been an underserved population."

His organization can now help Vancouver residents thanks to a grant from the Washington State Department

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A woman The Columbian is identifying only as Katherin missed a date in immigration court, which then issued a deportation order for her. Her case has since been reopened.

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State's lawmakers to gather in Olympia

Work sessions during 'committee days' preview for legislative session

By JERRY CORNFIELD
Washington State Standard

How best to spend, save and raise money will be a recurring theme when Washington lawmakers convene in Olympia next week for their annual "committee days."

The state is facing a budget shortfall that's poised to dominate the 2026 session, which begins Jan. 12.

Data centers, vaccine safety, bridges hit by trucks, and the state's mounting legal payouts are other issues to be tackled in the three days of work sessions, which start Wednesday.

This year, both chambers will be in town at the same time. It will provide a sense of the pace and tenor of policy debates to come in next year's 60-day session.

Wednesday is reserved for meetings of seven committees composed of House and Senate members. On Thursday and Friday, individual House and Senate committees will meet starting at 8 a.m. each day.

Data centers will grab the spotlight at 1:30 p.m. Wednesday. That's when the Joint Committee on Energy Supply, Energy Conservation, and Energy Resilience will hear recommendations of the data center work group established by an executive order from Gov. Bob Ferguson. A report from the work group is due to the governor by Dec. 1. Data centers consume large amounts of electricity, and more are coming online as artificial intelligence technology expands.

Also Wednesday, health insurance costs and vaccine safety will be on the agenda when the Joint Select Committee on Health Care and Behavioral Health Oversight meets at 3 p.m.

Thursday will be dominated by budget-related conversations.

This year, Democratic lawmakers pushed through billions in new and increased taxes, along with spending cuts, to bridge a projected gap around \$16 billion over four years.

Concerns about one of the largest new business taxes that took

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Fixer-uppers require time, money, patience

HOME & GARDEN, E1



Clark College athletics face reduced scholarship funding

SPORTS, B1



Danny Westneat: New mayor doesn't take Trump's bait

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51°/36°

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