




New eats in
Washougal
LIFE, B1



Apartment complex planned
near upcoming Vancouver
Station Food Carts
CLARK COUNTY, A3

The Columbian

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Thousands in WA forgoing insurance

Rise in cost of health
care premiums
drives many away

By **JESSICA FU**
The Seattle Times

Ambrose Bittner, 63, didn't want to go uninsured. But the self-employed travel planner has been without health coverage since the

beginning of the year. Bittner, who lives in Issaquah, is one of thousands of Washington residents who decided to disenroll from health insurance, following the expiration of subsidies that helped millions of people afford high premiums.

At the start of open enrollment in November, Bittner logged on to the state insurance portal to

look at future costs. He was already enrolled in the cheapest option available, a bronze plan with a monthly premium of \$218. But without action from Congress, that plan was slated to jump to \$800 per month for him in 2026.

"My premium was going to quadruple in price," he said. "So I decided to forego insurance."

For months, Washington

lawmakers and local officials have been warning about potentially steep price hikes for people who buy their insurance with the help of subsidies, formally known as enhanced premium tax credits. Many projected that high premium increases would drive people to go uninsured.

As open enrollment closed on Jan. 15, early data is providing a glimpse

at just how accurate those predictions were.

Compared to last year, new enrollment for 2026 dropped 17 percent. Meanwhile, 28,000 people actively canceled their coverage — a 38 percent increase, according to preliminary numbers shared with the Seattle Times by the Washington Health Benefit Exchange, which operates the state's health insurance

marketplace.

Taken together, that means there are significantly fewer people enrolled in individual plans right now compared to this time last year.

According to the exchange, there are 290,000 Washingtonians currently enrolled, a figure that includes new customers,

INSURANCE, Page A2

'DEMONSTRABLE HARM and DESTABILIZATION'

Vancouver City Council
denounces actions of
Homeland Security, ICE in city



Garrett Washburn, second from right, and Emily Hancock, both of La Center, stand with signs protesting U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement activity Dec. 8 on Fourth Plain Boulevard outside of El Antojito Vancouver.

Photos by **TAYLOR BALKOM**/The Columbian files

By **KELLY MOYER**
The Columbian

The Vancouver City Council has formally denounced the actions of federal immigration enforcement agencies, saying the conduct of U.S. Department of Homeland Security and U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement personnel in the Vancouver area "has caused demonstrable harm and destabilization."

In a statement released Tuesday evening, city councilors said they are prepared to respond to the crisis with the full force of their legal authority.

"The city of Vancouver's position is grounded in constitutional principles, including the Fourth Amendment's protection against unreasonable searches and seizures and the 10th Amendment's prohibition against federal commandeering of local governments," city councilors said in the statement.

"When residents are afraid to leave their homes, attend school, seek medical care, report crimes, or go to work, public safety is actively undermined."

Statement from the
Vancouver City Council

"Immigration enforcement is a federal responsibility," they added. "Local government exists to protect the health, safety, and dignity of the people who live and work here. We remain committed to our responsibility to provide a safe and welcoming community for our residents."

The statement follows months of ICE actions in and around Vancouver that have resulted in residents being mauled by a dog, run over by a vehicle and arrested



Mayor Pro Tem Erik Paulsen, center, answers a question Nov. 24 during a Vancouver City Council community forum at City Hall. The council on Tuesday released a statement denouncing ICE actions in Vancouver.

ICE ACTIONS, Page A2

Initiative
Process

Officials object to proposed changes

Former and current
secretaries of state:
System has integrity

By **MITCHELL ROLAND**
The Spokesman-Review

OLYMPIA — Former Secretary of State Sam Reed and current Secretary of State Steve Hobbs differ in many ways.

"Democrat, Republican. Husky, Cougar," Reed said Wednesday, seated next to Hobbs as he testified before the House State Government Committee. "But we agree in opposing this bill."

The bill Reed referred to, which brought the current and former top election official in the state to testify in opposition this week, would amend the state's initiative process in a way opponents say would make it much more challenging to gather enough signatures to qualify statewide initiatives.

If passed, the bill would require that at least 1,000 signatures be submitted with a filing to the secretary of state's office when submitting a proposed initiative or referendum. The bill also seeks to ban signature gatherers from being paid per signature they receive, though they still could be paid an hourly rate or some other agreed-upon rate.

By law, initiative organizers must gather 309,000 signatures to qualify an initiative for the Legislature, though it's recommended they submit at least 385,000.

State Rep. Sharlett Mena, D-Tacoma, the prime sponsor of the legislation in the House, said Wednesday that the goal of the bill is to make the initiative process "more perfect."

"I believe in our system of checks and balances, and co-equal branches of

INITIATIVES, Page A2



'Sinners' earns
record 16 Oscar
nominations

NATION, A10



Mark Morris girls
put it all together
to beat Woodland

SPORTS, B7



Froma Harrop:
Bullying U.S.
will lose this
fight

OPINION, A4

