



TNS

Appalachian Trail looks to redefine what it means to ‘take a hike.’

In today’s paper
SPORTS: What QB Sam Darnold worked on during the Seahawks’ bye week. **1B**



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The Olympian

Why state education leaders are all in on using AI in classes

BY SIMONE CARTER
scarter@mcclatchy.com

Washington is leaning hard into using AI in the classroom. The goal: to embrace the inevitable as artificial intelligence becomes more ubiquitous — a change-up from the approach to the advent of social media.

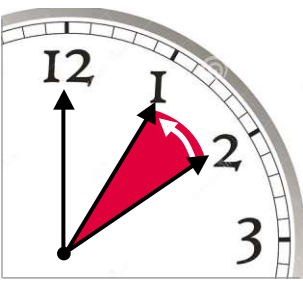
Microsoft President Brad Smith on Tuesday explained at the Cascadia Innovation Corridor Conference in Seattle that his Washington-based tech company has been working with schools and technical and community colleges to view AI as a tool.

School districts, he said, can harness it to create streamlined bus schedules, for instance, or to make the most of tight budgets.

“It’s enabling educators to figure out how to put together lesson plans that are better tailored for students of multiple needs,” Smith said. “And it is the future for students themselves.”

Washington was among the first states to kick off AI guidance to the field, State Superin-

SEE LEADERS, 4A



TIME CHANGE FALL BACK

We hope you remembered to set your clocks back one hour. Daylight saving time ended Sunday at 2 a.m.



STEVE BLOOM The Olympian

The renovated Thurston County Ballot Processing Center on Oct. 30 in Tumwater.

Look inside improved ballot processing center in Tumwater

BY MARTÍN BILBAO
mbilbao@theolympian.com

When a voter casts their ballot in Thurston County, it eventually ends up at an unassuming warehouse building in Tumwater, just west of South Puget Sound Community College.

Once there, the ballot undergoes a rigorous inspection process before being counted in election results. For the Nov. 4 general election, that process is occurring in a greatly improved facility.

This year, the county Auditor’s Office oversaw a major remodel and expansion of their Ballot Processing Center. Originally budgeted at about \$10 million, the project crossed the finish line last week at a total cost of about \$8.2 million, Auditor Mary Hall said on Thursday. That milestone marks the fruition of Hall’s years-long effort to meet her office’s space needs and bring greater security to the center.

“We’ve been in this facility since about 1985 and we’ve grown significantly from that time,” Hall said.

The Olympian toured the improved Ballot Processing Center on Thursday to get an inside look of the improvements.

Visitors to the center will



STEVE BLOOM The Olympian

Auditor Mary Hall conducts a tour the renovated Thurston County Ballot Processing Center on Oct. 30 in Tumwater.

notice a new entrance with a security check point. Hall said her office will employ a guard, as the Superior Court does, to screen visitors and usher them through a metal detector.

“They will be part-time employees of the Auditor’s Office when we’re in an election,” Hall said. “I don’t know that we’ll do that for little elections, but certainly midterm and

presential elections. That depends on budget.”

Once inside, visitors can walk through a length observer corridor with reinforced windows into the facility. Vertical screens are spaced out along this corridor, each of which cycle through text describing the ballot processing step in view.

The process starts in the north part of the building. There’s a new mail room there with a separate HVAC system. Hall called it a “negative pressure room.”

She said her office needs such a room in the event someone submits an envelope with a dangerous substance.

During the 2023 general election, the Auditor’s Office received a suspicious envelope with a white powdery substance. Hall said it contained fentanyl, a dangerous, synthetic opioid that’s 50-100 times stronger than morphine.

The envelope matched the description of similar ones sent to several other Washington counties, so Hall was able to anticipate it before it arrived and disrupted operations.

“I actually intercepted it at our mail processing room, and it never made it here, but it was a real wake-up call,” Hall said. “Had we received that, we

SEE BALLOT, 4A

Owners: Future uncertain for bars, restaurants under Prop 1

BY TY VINSON
tvinson@theolympian.com

Brandon Weedon, owner of Fatso’s Bar & Grill in Olympia, said he’s been getting hateful messages from the community since he voiced his opposition to the Workers’ Bill of Rights on the Nov. 4 ballot.

He said he’s not so bothered by an increase in the minimum wage that’s being proposed alongside the measure, but he sees the business regulations as Olympia’s own “Big Beautiful Bill.”

Weedon said his family has been running Fatso’s for 35 years and has 16 employees, which means it would fall un-

der the medium-sized business category in the Workers’ Bill of Rights.

He said he thinks the intent behind the initiative is great — he previously worked with labor unions to draft a minimum wage increase proposal years ago. But he sees unintended adverse consequences for small businesses if the pro-

posals were to pass.

“It’s really about wanting the best overall for our community. And with us being smaller employers, we want the best for our workers,” he said. “And I think that gets misconstrued quite a bit in that they are saying, ‘Oh, you don’t support us,’ and that can’t be further from the truth. I wouldn’t be doing this for over 30 years if I didn’t care about my community and if I didn’t support my employees.”

Weedon quoted City Manager Jay Burney saying Olympia is

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