

FROM THE FRONT PAGE



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Leonard Woolsey, publisher for the Galveston County Daily News in Texas, on attending a Northwest Passages book club event in Spokane

CONFERENCE

Continued from 1

newspaper, Curley told his day-drinking audience. Spokesman-Review staff are often at Northwest Passages events in their various capacities: covering the event, watching it on their own time, or interviewing the featured guest. It's good to have attendees see the people behind the bylines they read, Curley said. “The interviewer is one of either our reporters, editors or columnists, because we want the people who come to the events to see an act of journalism happen in front of them,” Curley said. It's that relationship, fostered in part through Northwest Passages, that America's Newspapers CEO Dean Ridings said other publications could learn from and implement in their own communities. Ridings is working with Curley to create a “playbook” to make this happen. It's good for business and for people, he said. “The way that you engage with the community is fundamentally the most important thing that you're doing,” Ridings said. “Whether a newspaper is for profit, not for profit, a hybrid or completely setting the model like you are doing now, you've got to have engagement. You've got to listen to your community. You've got to respond to your community. And I feel like you all are doing it off the charts.” Though now exclusive to Spokane, Northwest Passages events are “hitting the road” and may soon be in other states. Leonard Woolsey, publisher for the Galveston County Daily News in Texas, thinks the event would fit right at home on his island community after he attended a Northwest Passages in Spokane featuring author and rancher Craig Johnson. “I stood up and turned around and looked backward, and what I saw were hundreds of people who shared a love for community and literature, and they were our readers; they were our people,” Woolsey said. “It was like, ‘This is a thread that pulls people together.’”

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PHOTOS BY COLIN MULVANY/THE SPOKESMAN-REVIEW

Anne Cowles, left, wife of Spokesman-Review Publisher Stacey Cowles, and Spokesman-Review Editor Rob Curley speak with donor Nancy Schaub on Tuesday after the announcement of the newspaper's nonprofit Comma during the News Industry Mega-Conference in Orlando, Fla.



At the News Industry Mega-Conference being held in Orlando, Fla., owners of No-Li Brewhouse, John and Cynthia Bryant, brought cases of their special 1AB First Amendment Beer to share with conference attendees Tuesday.

ST. MARIES

Continued from 1

concerns about a specific staff member's decision to arm themselves in the classroom. “The whole idea is not knowing who is carrying,” Stoke said, adding that parents always have the right to remove their child from the school. Staff members who are approved to bring a gun to their school job must have an Idaho concealed carry license, which requires a national background check. Employees must use their personal firearms; guns will not be provided by the school district. The board had a brief debate Monday about the final language for the staff application. Trustee Beth Halvorsen wanted to require all participants be employed by the district for at least two years before qualifying. Other trustees believed that should only apply to new employees who are also inexperienced carriers. “It takes time to get to know somebody, their character, when things happen, how they react,” Halvorsen said. “I don't think it's a prudent idea to have a brand-new employee.” Halvorsen said there have been past examples of the district hiring teachers who looked good on paper, but had issues that no one could have predicted before they were gone within two years. Stoke and the other trustees pushed back and said that concerns about building trust are irrelevant since armed school employees will be anonymous. Only building principals will know which of their staff are carrying guns. Halvorsen said it is still important for the employee, even if they are experienced in both education and firearms, to get to know the district first. Stoke said he absolutely would trust someone new to the district with sufficient firearms experience and the defensive mindset that comes with it. Halvorsen was outvoted 3-1 on the application portion of the policy. A previous draft of the policy was

approved 4-1, with Trustee Jody Hendrickx voting against it. Hendrickx had to leave Monday's meeting before the final vote. At the March meeting, Hendrickx said he is not totally against the policy, but was concerned about feedback from staff and suggested tabling it for a few years to see how some of the district's other safety measures work out. “I would think you'd want to listen to your people on the front lines,” Hendrickx said. “They're not real comfortable with this. They're the people that are going to be there dealing with it, whether it's good or bad.” The policy is part of a larger strategy to improve security at the district including facilities upgrades. At Monday's meeting the board also signed a three-year agreement with Panacea NW Region Corp., a Hayden-based school security consultant that will conduct emergency response trainings with staff and parents. A clear majority of community members that responded to a district survey supported the policy while staff were about evenly split. Hendrickx said he believes the community and parent survey sample size was too small compared to the number of registered voters. Many of the staff who are opposed commented they support the presence of an armed police officer instead. The survey was taken before the Benewah County Sheriff's Office hired a school resource officer last month. “I don't believe it is a good idea for teachers to carry firearms at our school,” one staff member said. “With the behaviors being displayed at an elementary school level I fear an accident may happen.” Others feared what could happen without the policy. “We are sitting ducks and have zero protection if something terrible should happen,” another staff member wrote. “I want the ability to protect my students and myself.” James Hanlon can be reached at (509) 459-5467 or by email at jamesh@spokesman.com.

PERMIT

Continued from 1

happening more and more. It's about making sure that guns are not lying in a closet. It's about making sure that people actually know how to handle a gun when they get it.” If adopted, the bill would require a potential buyer to obtain a permit to purchase a firearm and prove that the purchaser has completed a firearms training course, among other requirements. Proponents of the bill have argued that 12 other states have adopted similar legislation and that it has been shown to reduce gun violence. “It has also curbed illegal gun trafficking, and it makes sure that our firearms in this state are in the hands of responsible gun owners,” Sen. Marko Liias, D-Edmonds, said on the Senate floor Monday. “It is ultimately about saving lives. That is the most important mission.” According to Liias, the 12 states that previously implemented permit-to-purchase have seen an 11% decline in firearm homicides in urban counties and 56% fewer mass shootings. Liias said the process to obtain a permit before purchasing a firearm is “designed to be relatively simple.” Liias added that the system would be checked annually to ensure that the holder remains legally eligible for the permit, adding a “critical safety layer.” Detractors, though, fear the new live-fire training requirements to obtain a permit would result in backlogs at firing ranges and with the Washington State Patrol, which will oversee the implementation of the new permit. Jeremy Ball, owner of Sharpshooting Indoor Range and Gun Shop, previously told The Spokesman-Review that “without a massive, massive, investment from Washington state in order to develop these programs and execute them, it's going to be at an extreme cost.” “And the premise of them doesn't really make sense anyways,” Ball said after the bill cleared the House last month.

Under the bill, an applicant would need to prove that they have completed a certified live firearm safety course in the previous five years, or that they are exempt from the requirement. The permit would also need to be renewed every five years. Sen. Jeff Holy, R-Cheney, said on the Senate floor that the bill will likely “generate litigation immediately,” adding that similar legislation has been challenged in other states. “So it's not just ‘Yes, everything is going full speed ahead on this.’ This is a controversial issue,” Holy said. Sen. Mark Schoesler, R-Ritzville, said the bill is an “assault on the hard-working taxpayers.” In his remarks, Schoesler cited several other proposals to increase fees in Washington that have been introduced, including increasing the price of a yearly Discover Pass to use state parks and hunting licenses. “There is absolutely no way that that average taxpayer out in Othello isn't going to get hit trying to legitimately buy a firearm, upgrade a firearm,” Schoesler said. “There's absolutely no way.” The bill, Schoesler said, will also create unnecessary delays and referred to the bill as “poorly designed.” The proposal is among several gun and ammo-related pieces of legislation lawmakers have considered this session, though many others failed to gain traction and will not advance in 2025. Bills that would have imposed a new 11% tax on ammo and banned the bulk sale of ammunition died in committee earlier this session. Lawmakers also are considering a bill to restrict open carry of firearms in areas “where children are likely to be present,” which includes playgrounds, zoos, transit centers, county fairgrounds when the fair is open to the public and certain state and local public buildings. The bill would require warning signs to be posted where weapons are prohibited. The legislation previously cleared the Senate and is under consideration in the House. Mitchell Roland can be reached at mitchellr@spokesman.com.