

WEATHER



63 31

Seasonal with sunny periods

TOMORROW

Milder and mostly dry. High near 69, and low near 30.

Full forecast on Page C6

TOP STORIES

Obama coming to Fort Collins

Barack Obama will come to Fort Collins on Sunday as part of his statewide effort to encourage early voting. He will appear in the Oval on the Colorado State University campus on Sunday afternoon.

The event will be free and open to the public. Tickets are not required but an R.S.V.P. is strongly encouraged. Members of the public are invited to R.S.V.P. at www.co.barackobama.com.

Space is available on a first-come, first-served basis.

For security reasons, bags and personal items are discouraged. No signs or banners will be permitted.

Limited public parking is available around the Jack Christianson Memorial Track and surrounding areas. Limited parking is available on campus at Lake Street and Mason Street as well as University Avenue and Mason Street.

MORE ELECTIONS, A12-A13

Federal parking fines go unpaid

WASHINGTON — The FBI and U.S. armed forces are institutions in which following the rules is supposed to be a given. Except when it comes to paying their parking tickets.

According to a congressional report scheduled to be released today, federal workers in Washington, D.C., and New York City failed to pay \$176,000 in fines for 1,147 tickets issued last year to their U.S. government vehicles.

Leading the way in Washington were the Army, Navy and Air Force — whose employees ignored 158 tickets for \$28,000 in 2007. In New York, FBI agents set the bad example, accumulating \$35,000 in fines and comfortably besting the Department of State (\$28,000) and the Marine Corps (\$20,000) in unpaid violations.

Job losses accelerating

WASHINGTON — Unemployment claims, already well into recession territory, are rising even faster than expected, leading economists to warn Thursday that the worst is yet to come.

As the Labor Department released bleak new numbers on the job market, Goldman Sachs, Chrysler and Xerox announced they were cutting workers.

FULL STORY, B8

Times-Call wire reports

YOU SAID IT

"People inevitably perceive ballet as something they don't like. ... What we want to say is 'Come see this, because this isn't something like you've ever seen before.'"

— GARRETT AMMON, CHOREOGRAPHER FOR BALLET NOUVEAU COLORADO

FULL STORY INSIDE DAY & NIGHT

INSIDE

Take your pick of local safe or scary Halloween events



SPORTS, C1

Niwot gets chance to make statement against Greeley West



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TIMES-CALL

No. 298 FRIDAY, OCTOBER 24, 2008 | LONGMONT, COLORADO 50 cents

Legal or not, council to close doors

Executive session to be held Tuesday

By Rachel Carter Longmont Times-Call

LONGMONT — When the Longmont City Council meets in closed session Tuesday night to receive legal advice, it should sound familiar.

They received the same advice this week during a public meeting.

Mayor Roger Lange asked to have the executive session to hash things out among arguing council members.

However, resolving differences of

opinion behind closed doors isn't legal, according to Colorado open-meeting laws.

During its most recent meeting, the council agreed — with the exception of members Sarah Levison and Gabe Santos — to hold a closed-door meeting Tuesday night.

City attorney Clay Douglas told coun-

cil members that, per state open-meeting laws, they could schedule an executive session to receive legal advice on specific legal questions.

But the council already received that legal advice Tuesday night and only agreed to have the closed meeting when they couldn't agree how to interpret or

Please see DOORS on A8

REST STOP



Morgan Varon/Times-Call

Monarch butterflies from east of the Rocky Mountains migrate through Longmont on Saturday on their way to the high mountains of Mexico for the winter. According to www.monarchwatch.org, monarchs from North America travel much farther than any other species, with their trips extending up to 3,000 miles.

Crowd to RTD: Be on time

Last hearing held to gauge support for FasTracks

By Scott Rochat Longmont Times-Call

LONGMONT — A Longmont audience said Thursday that it wanted the Regional Transportation District to build FasTracks on time and in full, and find ways to make up the additional cost.

At least 60 people came to the Longmont Public Library to see what RTD was considering for the commuter rail service, whose projected costs have ballooned from \$4.7 billion to \$7.9 billion while RTD's sales tax growth has declined. This was the last of 16 public meetings held by RTD to gauge support for the agency's various options and to hear additional ideas.

"We're in this together, folks," said Lee Kemp, the Longmont area's representative on the RTD board. "We are in this together. Let's figure out how we can get 'er done."

Five ways to "get 'er done" were presented Thursday, but only one — find a way to pay for doing the whole project as planned — received majority support. In an electronic vote on each one, 70 percent of the audience backed that choice, while no other proposal got more than 37 percent support.

Even so, RTD came in for its share of scolding, especially after FasTracks spokeswoman Pauletta Tonilas spoke about

Please see FASTRACKS on A6

Explosion in car injures 3 teens

Huffing, lighting cigarette to blame

By Pierrette J. Shields and Jason Gonzales Longmont Times-Call

LONGMONT — An explosion inside a car that injured three teenagers Thursday afternoon was sparked when one of the girls lit a cigarette and ignited fumes from aerosol air fresheners the teens had been huffing, police said.

The explosion totaled the Toyota sedan they were sitting in at a parking lot at McIntosh Lake near Harvard Street and Wedgwood Avenue during the lunch hour. An 18-year-old woman and 16-year-old girl suffered first-degree burns, while a 16-year-old who was in the back seat suffered second-degree burns. They were all treated at Longmont United



Lewis Geyer/Times-Call

Longmont police investigate a car that exploded while parked in the parking lot on the east side of McIntosh Lake on Thursday. Three teen girls, who were in the car at the time of the explosion, were transported to Longmont United Hospital with burn injuries.

Hospital, Longmont police Cmdr. Tim Lewis said.

"It appears that the people in the vehicle were abusing household aerosol chemicals and that was ignited when one

of the girls lit a cigarette," Lewis said.

Some people inhale fumes from common household chemicals, like aerosols, to get

Please see EXPLOSION on A8

They can't vote but can be heard

2 Niwot teens organize rally for bond and mill override

By Scott Rochat Longmont Times-Call

LONGMONT — Two Niwot High School students are speaking out for school finance. And they're hoping to bring more than a few friends with them.

Becky Stischer, 16, and Sam Dugan, 17, are organizing a student rally for 2 p.m. Sunday at Roosevelt Park to support a proposed \$16.5 million mill-levy override and \$189 million bond issue for the St. Vrain Valley School District. Both girls are expecting a decent

turnout — they've been in contact with at least 200 people through Facebook and still more via e-mail.

"This is something I'm really passionate about, that every

"We could actually bring change to something that affected us."

— Becky Stischer, 16, one of the rally organizers

student should have the best education possible," Dugan said.

"We want to be above adequate," Stischer added. "We want to be excellent."

The two began discussing the issue last year in history class.

Dugan had brought in an article on the mill-levy override and bond (now local ballot issues 3A and 3B), and it caught Stischer's interest.

"I saw an opportunity," Stischer said. "We could actually bring change to something that affected us."

The fervor slowed a little over the summer. But when school restarted and one of them saw a mailing on the issues during a sleepover, the girls decided it was time to get serious.

Please see RALLY on A7



Jill P. Mott/Times-Call

Sam Dugan and her friend Becky Stischer are organizing an all-school student rally in support of the St. Vrain Valley School District mill-levy override and bond issues. The rally begins at 2 p.m. Sunday at Roosevelt Park, 700 Longs Peak Ave., in Longmont. The purpose for the rally is to show support for measures 3A and 3B.

INSIDE

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# DOORS: 'The public has a right to ask the council to explain itself'

**From A1**  
act on Douglas' legal advice.

The issue revolves around a vote to cut \$60,000 for the Longmont Area Economic Council, a vote from which both Lange and Benker recused themselves because they serve on the LAEC board.

The question of whether that vote was taken improperly led the council into an argument — and that argument led them to schedule the closed meeting next week.

Lange was not available for comment Thursday because he, along with Santos, is on a trip to visit Longmont's sister city in Mexico.

But during Tuesday night's meeting, Lange said he wanted to have the closed meeting because he's "trying to get some clarity and consensus on what we will or won't do." "I sure don't want to go into next Tuesday's meeting with a sense of disagreement on what we should do and how we should do it," Lange said last Tuesday night.

"Would it be helpful if we got together in an executive session to try to iron this out before next Tuesday's meeting? ... I think we are philosophically butting heads

## CLOSED MEETINGS

- The Longmont City Council has held 17 executive sessions in the 11 months since the new council met for the first time Nov. 13, 2007, according to a Times-Call analysis.
- It took the previous City Council more than two years — from August 2005 to October 2007 — to hold 17 closed-door meetings.

here."

He urged other council members to come to Tuesday night's executive session "with your can-do hats on because, when showtime comes at 7 p.m., I want us to come together as a team."

Colorado Sunshine Laws gives elected officials only six reasons to meet behind closed doors, one of which is to "receive legal advice on specific legal questions."

The law says "the mere presence of participation of an attorney at an executive session of the local public body is not sufficient to satisfy (this) requirement."

State open-meeting laws also say that "no adoption of any proposed policy, position, resolution, rule, regulation or

formal action ... shall occur at any executive session that is not open to the public."

During Tuesday night's meeting, Benker first questioned whether it would be legal to hold a closed meeting to discuss the voting issue.

But based on the city attorney's comments, Benker then agreed to it, saying it is "important to talk this out."

"Clearly, there are some things here that are not being said; I think it's important to try to bring people together," she said Tuesday night.

"I think it's important that we solve this problem. We need to figure out how we can work together as opposed to pulling apart."

During a phone interview Thursday, Benker said she supported Lange's request for a closed meeting after Douglas said it would be legal and is going by the city attorney's advice.

"If we should not have an executive session, I am fine with that," Benker said.

Councilwoman Mary Blue on Thursday said she supported the mayor's suggestion to have an executive session because "we couldn't figure out what we were doing. We have a difference of opinion about a

legal opinion and interpretation."

Blue said that she would like to clarify the city attorney's legal advice "without the pressure of us in the public or the press so we can legally understand what we can or cannot do."

"I think we're just going to figure out how we're going to be nice to each other," she said, then added, "The purpose of it, the argument of it, is we need to find out from the attorney how we interpret his legal advice. There seems to be a difference of opinion about that."

Douglas gave his written legal opinion to the council Tuesday night; council members discussed it, questioned it and even asked Douglas to explain it.

Douglas said Thursday that he understands the limited scope and purpose of executive sessions, and what can and cannot occur during a meeting that is closed to the public.

Douglas said he will make sure the council "is appropriately advised."

Receiving legal advice and agreeing with it — or even understanding it — are different things, he said. Douglas took

council members' comments on Tuesday night to mean they need more clarification from him, he said.

"There wasn't necessarily full understanding," Douglas said Thursday. "Just because a lawyer said it once doesn't mean you can't ask him to explain it again or rehash it."

Chris Beall, an attorney for the Colorado Press Association, said Thursday that the question of whether council members are legally obliged to recuse themselves from a vote would be considered a "specific legal issue."

But, he noted, although the council has the right to receive its legal advice behind closed doors, it does not have to.

"The council could well choose to allow the public to hear that advice as well," he wrote in an e-mail to the Times-Call. "At a minimum,

the public has a right to ask the council to explain itself."

And that's what both council members Levison and Santos wanted Tuesday night.

Levison said Thursday that, while it is difficult to argue in public, the public deserves to know where their elected officials stand.

"We both want all this discussion to happen in the open because it's part of the dialogue," she said. "What's happening is all of us are all over the place on all these things."

Levison added, "(Santos) and I both agree this needs to be done absolutely above-board; we owe it to the public because they realize there are some disagreements about things."

Councilman Brian Hansen did not return a phone call seeking comment Thursday, and Councilman Sean McCoy declined to comment, referring questions to Lange.

Rachel Carter can be reached at 303-684-5216 or rcarter@times-call.com.

# EXPLOSION: 'Dash was just disintegrated inside that car'

**From A1**  
high. The practice is commonly called huffing.

"We have not charged them, obviously, but there is that potential," Lewis said. "It is illegal to huff toxic vapors."

He said fire officials remarked it was miraculous that the force of the explosion didn't more seriously injure or kill any of the teenagers, given the extensive damage to the Toyota. The force of the explosion blew out all of the windows, launched the sunroof into a nearby tree and badly damaged the car's body. A city forester helped investigators retrieve the sunroof from the tree, Lewis said.

The fumes from the strawberry-raspberry and mango-pineapple aerosols also had worked their way into the car's ventilation system, according to police.

"The dash was just disintegrated inside that car," Lewis said.

Two men working on an underground electrical line near an outbuilding at the lake were the first to reach the teens after the explosion.

Josh Schafer and C.J. Earhart said the teens were at the lake's parking lot for about an hour listening to music loudly before the explosion.

"We were working on the other side of the building and after the boom, it sounded like a cat was screaming. After we came around the corner we saw it was a girl," Schafer said.

When the men reached the car, the girl who was sitting in the back seat was already crawling out of a window and the other two girls were sitting in the car, they said. Both men said there was no fire

and they noticed a sweet scent just before it was overpowered by the smell of burned hair.

The men said they tried to help the other passenger and driver out of the car.

"The driver just wanted to leave. She put it in reverse, and I told her to stop the car," Earhart said. "After she stopped the car, she told us she was fine. She was acting weird and trying to stuff stuff

behind the center panel."

After getting the teens out of the car, Earhart called police.

Investigators said neighbors said the explosion was so loud that they initially believed it was from an electrical station near the lake.

Lewis said none of the victims attends school.

Jason Gonzales can be reached at 303-684-5253 or tcreporter2@times-call.com.

"Katie Witt...is a strong proponent of business and jobs, wanting the business personal property tax repealed. Witt has run an enthusiastic campaign for the District 17 seat."

—Times-Call Editorial Board



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## Semi-Annual Event for MEN & WOMEN

A.

B.

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## T-C Line

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### TIME TO LEAVE IRAQ?

The administration has long said it would leave Iraq if asked. The

Iraqi prime minister, cabinet and a majority of its parliament sound like they are asking. The chosen date is Dec. 31. Let's see if we are true to our word and if "Iraqi Freedom" was more than a scam slogan. We could give our new president a clean foreign policy slate. Come on, boys, start packing. You won.

### OPEN SPACE

For the writer to Johnnie St. Vrain who's tired of open space in his backyard, maybe it's time to consider moving to the middle of Manhattan in New York. There isn't a lot of open space there. Maybe you can find a space that you like there. A lot of us appreciate having the open space instead of having everybody living on top of each other.

### NEW CITY COUNCIL

Can we just vote for a new City Council? Because it seems like nothing is getting done, arguments and everything like that. And we have these people controlling what happens to the town of Longmont. It sounds like we need some new people in there.

T-C Line policy: The T-C Line is intended as a readers' forum for brief comments on current issues. Calls that are highly critical of local individuals or organizations or that disagree with opinions stated in signed letters to the editor will not be used. Calls that cite statistics, facts or figures that are not generally known or easily verified will not be used. Calls regarding local candidates for office will not be used. Short calls will receive preference. If you wish to address issues in more depth, you are invited to fax, e-mail or send written comments to the newspaper's Open Forum along with your name, address and daytime telephone number. T-C Line calls may be edited. Due to the number of calls received on a given day, not all T-C Line calls can be printed.

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