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Detroit teachers strike

DETROIT (AP) — One day before the start of classes, Detroit's teachers yesterday refused to extend contract talks and called a strike, despite a state law barring them from walking out.

The strike vote represented a setback for a bold attempt to reform the school system and improve Detroit's struggling schools.

The talks are the first contract negotiations with the teachers since Detroit's elective school board was replaced earlier this year with one appointed by Mayor Dennis Archer.

"I would have to say the rejection today does reflect an unwillingness by some teachers to engage themselves in significant change," David Adamany, the interim chief executive of the 172,000-student district said.

The previous contract between the Detroit Federation of Teachers and the school system expired June 30, and an extension ran out yesterday.

School and union negotiators had agreed early yesterday on a new, 10-day extension while talks continued. However, thousands of teachers took a vote later in the day, rejected the extension and called a strike.

Adamany said he would wait to see how many teachers reported to work today before deciding whether to hold classes.

The union has not walked out since 1992. Under a 1994 Michigan law, public school employees who strike lose a day's pay in addition to being fined a day's pay. The law has never been tested.

Union president John Elliot said he was disappointed with the vote.

The issues still unresolved included salary increases, merit pay, extended work days and a dress code. Teachers said merit pay was the most contentious issue. Many prefer to keep the old standards of experience, seniority and education.

"I don't understand merit pay. I think it needs a lot of explanation,"

Jennifer Poole, 52, a school social worker with more than 12 years' experience, said.

Among those opposing the new extension was Anita Griggs, 40, who has taught elementary classes at St. Ann's Academy for 15 years.

"Once they get us in the classrooms, there's no reason to bargain in good faith. They've got the labor," Griggs said.

The mayor said in a statement that he is troubled by the strike vote after all of the hard work the district had done to prepare for the school year.

The appointed school board — an idea pushed by Republican Gov. John Engler and approved by the Legislature — followed decades of declining performance and alleged mismanagement and pork-barrel politics in Detroit schools. Supporters said an appointed school board would be better able to make the hard political decisions that need to be made.

'Fugitive' wife to be exhumed

CLEVELAND (AP) — The body of a woman whose husband was a fugitive in a 1960s TV series is being exhumed to help identify her.

Prosecutors want to identify the woman's body to help identify her. The woman's husband was a fugitive in a 1960s TV series.

Sheppard spent a year in prison after being convicted of murdering his wife in 1954. He was acquitted in 1966.

The younger Sheppard's mother and his father's name are among the names of the new wrongful imprisonment suit, damages could reach \$2 million.

Sheppard, 52, of California, is upset about the exhumation because he feels the case has been handled in a way that is not fair.

Sheppard's attorney, Gilbert, said the exhumation was not worth fighting.

"We feel it's going to be a waste of money and time," he said.

Killer confesses to assault

FRESNO, Calif. (AP) — A motel handyman who admitted beheading a Yosemite naturalist also confessed to sexually assaulting two teen-age sightseers before they were killed, the government said in court documents filed yesterday.

Cary Stayner told the FBI he sexually assaulted Silvana Pelosso and Juli Sund in their room at the Cedar Lodge before killing them, according to a six-page affidavit to support a request for bodily fluid samples. A judge ordered Stayner to comply.

Stayner also led the FBI to the knives he said he used to decapitate Joie Armstrong and slash the throat of Juli Sund, the affidavit said. The weapons had dried blood and fingerprints on them.

The affidavit is the first public acknowledgment by investigators that the two teen-age victims were sexually assaulted before they and Sund's mother, Carole Sund, were killed. Stayner is the prime suspect but has not been charged in their deaths.

Stayner, 38, has been charged with murder in the July 21 death of Armstrong, a naturalist who led outdoor education programs at the park.

In a jailhouse interview with a television reporter, he claimed he did not sexually assault any of the women.

Stayner has fought a request to give samples of his blood, hair and saliva to the FBI.

Stayner lived and worked at the Cedar Lodge, the last place the three sightseers were seen alive in February. Analysis by the FBI crime lab has yielded trace evidence including "hairs in vacuum sweepings" and "possible bodily fluid stains on a blanket seized in the room," the affidavit said.

The crime lab has also recovered two partial fingerprints from the anonymous letter that Stayner claims to have authored and mailed to the FBI's Modesto office in March, directing investigators to Juli Sund's body.

Conference: Decrease in AIDS deaths slowing

Researchers question continued effectiveness of so-called drug cocktails as therapy for disease

ATLANTA (AP) — The drop-off in AIDS deaths since the introduction of powerful drug cocktails has slowed dramatically, raising questions about whether the combination of medicines is reaching the limits of what it can do.

Last year, researchers were stunned to learn that AIDS deaths nationwide dropped 42 percent from 1996 to 1997 — a drop attributed to the potent drug cocktails that can subdue the virus.

Yesterday, however, statistics released at the first national conference on AIDS prevention showed that the decline in deaths slowed to 20 percent from 1997 to 1998, when AIDS killed 17,047 people.

"As we anticipated, we are now seeing the first signs of a slowing in this trend," Dr. Helene Gayle, director of HIV prevention at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, said during the National HIV Prevention Conference.

"In a period of only two years, new combination therapies cut the annual level of death in half. But for the time being it appears that much

of the benefit of these new therapies has been realized."

"AIDS drugs don't work for everyone and aren't a cure for anyone."

— Steven Fisher
AIDS Action

The CDC blamed the slowdown on three factors:

- Some people still are not getting tested and treated for the AIDS virus.
- Some are finding it difficult to stick to the complicated regimen of pills, which must be taken at certain times of the day, sometimes with food, sometimes without.
- Drug-resistant strains of the virus are emerging as patients fail to keep on schedule with their medicine.

Officials at the CDC, which released the numbers, said it is still too early to tell if the current treatments have pushed AIDS deaths as low as they can go.

But one worrisome sign is that the decline in deaths last year occurred mostly in the first three months of 1998. After that, deaths leveled off for the rest of the year.

"We might continue to see that decline," Gayle said. "But it is at least a concern that most declines were in the first quarter of 1998 and not in the last quarter."

After AIDS killed 49,351 in 1995, deaths dropped 25 percent in 1996 to 36,792. They then plummeted to 21,222 deaths in 1997, a drop of 42 percent.

The numbers caused experts to toast the so-called AIDS cocktails that combine older drugs with newer medicines known as protease inhibitors. The drug combinations reduce the level of the virus in the blood so low that it can not be measured.

Some advocates pointed to the CDC's latest numbers as proof the

drugs are not as effective as hoped.

"Our worst fears have been confirmed," Steven Fisher, director of AIDS Action, said. "AIDS drugs don't work for everyone and aren't a cure for anyone."

The CDC acknowledges the problems with the pill-resistant strains and noted people make it harder to reduce deaths even more.

"We have gotten the drug to the people that know the best," Gayle said. "I think we've got to do a better job for the people who don't know the best, which means getting more people tested."

The CDC estimates there are many as 900,000 people in the United States with HIV in the United States, new infections holding steady at roughly 40,000 a year for a decade.

The latest numbers show AIDS continues to kill black people at much higher numbers than white racial groups.

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