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Hispanics targets of harassment talk

Lawsuit filed claiming Oregon school singled out students after a highly publicized

PORTLAND, Ore. (AP) — Three teenagers have filed a federal lawsuit against their high school, where they say Hispanic boys were singled out for a lecture on sexual harassment and warned not to touch white girls.

Seniors Mario Rosales and Joshua Corron, of South Salem High School, and Edgar Pozos, who graduated last year, asked a U.S. District Court on Tuesday to stop the school from targeting Hispanic males.

According to court papers, they also want unspecified damages for being among 30 dark-haired students rounded up in November 1999 for a lecture held in the school auditorium by an advocate for migrant workers who promised to "civilize the boys."

Some students singled out last fall were not Hispanic; others did not understand parts of the speech, delivered in Spanish.

In the lawsuit, South Salem Principal Kris

Olsen and the Salem-Keizer School District are accused of arranging the session following complaints that Hispanic boys had bothered non-Hispanic girls in the hallway. It was also after a highly-publicized rape at the school.

"We really want all students in the district to have positive experiences, and we take any complaint very seriously."

— Kay Baker
Superintendent

After the assembly, parent Tammy asked the principal why Hispanic males were targeted and if he knew it was illegal. He allegedly admitted the assembly was a "scare tactic."

The lawsuit also alleges that Rubin, consultant on migrant worker issues, had volunteered to discuss "the problem of Hispanic males touching Caucasian girls."

He warned audience members not to harass "Americans" or they'd get kicked out of school, the lawsuit claims.

The assembled students said that if the purpose was to teach about sexual harassment, then all male students — regardless of their race — should have been forced to attend, the paper says.

Superintendent Kay Baker said the district had not seen a copy of the lawsuit.

"We really want all students in the district to have positive experiences, and we take any complaint very seriously," she said.

Inflation causes 2001 Social Security to raise

WASHINGTON (AP) — Retirees will get the biggest cost-of-living increase in their Social Security checks in nine years — an average of \$29 a month — beginning in January.

The cost-of-living announcement, affecting 45.2 million Americans getting Social Security checks, came Wednesday, just weeks before a hotly contested presidential election in which senior votes could make the difference in several crucial states.

The 3.5 percent boost — an adjustment the Social Security Administration always announces in October — is aimed at preventing rising inflation from eroding beneficiaries' buying power.

"I'm always glad to get a raise," said retiree Robert Simmons, 81, of Pendleton, Ind. "In 1936, when my Social Security card was made out, I thought I'd never live long enough to collect a dime. I've been blessed by having it."

The elderly are the segment of America most likely to vote, and of the five states with the largest percentage of people 65 and over in their populations, four — Florida, Iowa, Pennsylvania and West Virginia — are close battlegrounds in this election. Other states with large senior populations such as Arizona, Arkansas, Michigan, Missouri and Ohio are also very competitive.

Texas Gov. George W. Bush, the Republican presidential nominee, and Vice President Al Gore, the Democrat, have repeatedly clashed over Social Security. Bush proposes allowing individuals some control over how to invest their retirement funds, while Gore says that would threaten the long-term solvency of the nation's huge retirement system.

The annual adjustment is tied to the government's estimate of increases in consumer prices.

"Inflation is one of the worst enemies of the elderly," said Social Security Commissioner Kenneth Apfel. "The past eight years, which have seen low inflation rates and a strong economy, have been particularly good for the elderly."

The 3.5-percent increase was the largest since a 3.7-percent rise in 1992. It means the average monthly check for retirees will rise to \$845 next year, up from \$816 this year.

That compares with an increase of 2.4 percent for 2000, which translated into an average of \$19 a month more for retirees.

While many seniors complain about the rising costs of heating their homes, of more concern to them are rapidly rising costs for medical care, economists say.

For the first nine months of this year, costs for medical care, including prescription drugs, have been rising at an annual rate of 4.5 percent compared with a 3.7 percent rise for all of 1999.

ing at an annual rate of 4.5 percent compared with a 3.7 percent rise for all of 1999.

"Any additional income is a plus," said June Meadows, a 67-year-old retiree from Edgemere, Md.

"We're very fortunate, we're on a prescription drug plan. If it weren't for my husband's illness, one of his prescriptions cost \$1,000 for two weeks," she said.

Simmons said his insurance has buffered him from rising medical care costs, but both he and Meadows said they worry about those less fortunate. And while they would see soaring energy costs going up, Simmons and Meadows said they do not strain their lifestyles.

When they go to the polls next month, Simmons said he will vote for Gore and Meadows said she will vote for Bush.

In addition to retirement checks, Social Security payments will increase for disabled workers and families whose breadwinners have died.

"In 1936, when my Social Security card was made out, I thought I'd never live long enough to collect a dime. I've been blessed by having it."

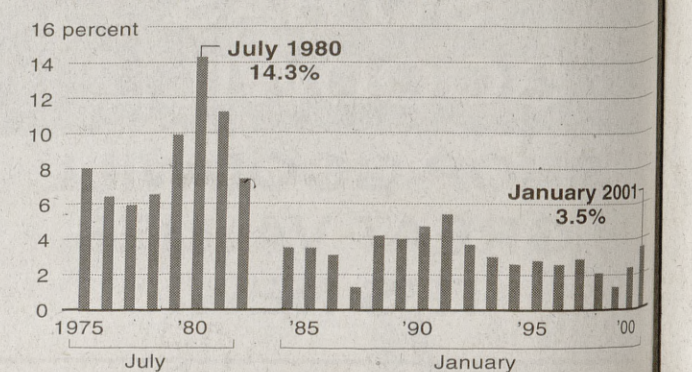
— Robert Simmons
Pendleton, Ind., retiree

The maximum monthly payment for the 6.3 million low-income individuals receiving Supplemental Security Income, known as SSI, will rise by 3.5 percent. The boost the maximum monthly check by \$18 to \$530. For a couple, the SSI maximum goes up to \$796. Increased payments to SSI recipients will begin Dec. 29.

Separately, the Department of Health and Human Services announced that the monthly Medicare premium deducted from most elderly and disabled Americans' Social Security checks for insurance coverage of doctors' office visits will increase by \$4.50 to \$50 in 2001. The increase, which takes effect Jan. 1, reflects higher health-care costs and changes in Medicare law. It is not based on cost-of-living adjustment.

Social Security raises in 2001

Social Security checks will increase 3.5 percent next year — the biggest cost-of-living increase in nearly a decade. Here are the annual cost-of-living increases that beneficiaries have received since the system was linked to the Consumer Price Index in 1975.



Note: There was no cost-of-living adjustment for six months in 1983 in order to help bail Social Security out of a financial crisis.

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