

This is KPTZ 91.9 FM in Port Townsend, Washington. I am Casey Dolan with your local news and commentary for Friday, April 5, 2024.

Last Thursday, Governor Jay Inslee signed several workplace protection bills against employers holding mandatory meetings on religious and political issues. The *Washington State Standard* reports that the Employee Free Choice Act makes Washington the sixth state to prohibit employers from disciplining or firing employees who refuse to attend “captive audience” meetings, which employers often use as a union-busting tactic. Inslee also signed a bill that will allow the Department of Labor & Industries to investigate pay equity discrimination claims made on the basis of age, race, disability, and other classes protected under Washington’s anti-discrimination laws. Another bill Inslee signed, Senate Bill 5793, expands Washington’s paid sick leave law, which states that “an employee shall accrue at least one hour of paid sick leave for every forty hours worked as an employee.” The law also allows employees to use paid sick leave to care for ailing family members. Washington has a union membership rate of 16.5% among all employees, which means the state has about 576,000 union members, according to Bureau of Labor Statistics data from 2023. Inslee said, “There’s a reason we have the third-highest union membership in the state of Washington and we won’t rest until it’s number one.”

Several news outlets report that Clallam detectives arrested a suspect, 37-year-old Cory Tyler Blake of Port Hadlock, last Tuesday who allegedly had three other suspects commit a home robbery in Sequim on his behalf to settle a debt. The three robbery suspects were arrested last month. According to the Clallam County Sheriff’s Office (CCSO), deputies and Sequim Police officers responded to a home invasion robbery near Riverside Road on March 28. Authorities say the person who called 911 reported seeing people wearing face masks and carrying guns drive up to his house in a white SUV. The caller was inside the main house, but the suspects were in an unattached mother-in-law house where they held three victims at gunpoint. The CCSO says the suspects ordered the victims to empty their pockets, stealing car keys and phones. The suspects also stole power tools and batteries, but when they tried to get away they were stopped by police. All three suspects – 32-year-old Esco I. Rhode of Kent, 44-year-old Eloy Estrada-Morales of Tacoma, and 40-year-old Maryah R. Faletego of Tacoma, were arrested and booked into jail for first-degree robbery, first-degree burglary, and third-degree theft. The initial investigation suggested that the home invasion was a result of drug trafficking.

After the initial arrests were made, the CCSO and the Olympic Narcotics Enforcement Team continued to investigate. Eventually, detectives obtained information that a fourth suspect, Blake, had directed the three men to commit the robbery on his behalf. On April 2, police located Blake at an apartment in Kent, arrested him, and booked him into the Clallam County Jail for first-degree burglary with two firearm enhancements and first-degree robbery.

Tomorrow is – Hurrah! – the opening day of the Port Townsend Farmer’s Market from 9am to 2pm in Uptown, with a ribbon-cutting ceremony, more than 80 vendors and (this reporter’s favorite event) the Goat Parade on Tyler Street with goats provided by Ground Control Goats. Speaking to the *PT Leader*, Amanda Milholland, executive director of the Jefferson County Farmers Markets (JCFM), said that more than 100 vendors and nearly 1,000 community members participated in the JCFM’s community survey last fall. Milholland said, “Excitement for everything our markets bring, as well as the desire for more prepared food and diverse farm products, came through in survey responses loud and clear.” According to the vendors’ survey responses, the top three ways the Market can support vendor businesses are by drawing crowds, offering affordable market

space, and providing public awareness and marketing. Eleven businesses will make their Port Townsend Farmers Market debuts this year, with Ground Control Goats bringing farm-inspired art, while Jefferson County chef Li Ying Jing serves up homemade Chinese dumplings, dim sum, and snacks that are vegetarian, gluten-free, and all organic.

KPTZ 91.9 FM broadcasts your local news Monday through Friday at noon and 5pm and at noon on Saturday. You can contact us at news@kptz.org. I'm Casey Dolan and I thank you for listening.