

This is KPTZ 91.9 FM in Port Townsend, Washington. I'm Diane Walker with your local news and commentary for Thursday, February 6, 2025.

Senator Maria Cantwell and congresswoman Emily Randall have gone on record objecting to Elon Musk's activities in the US Treasury Department. Cantwell has joined her fellow members of the Senate Committee on Finance and of the Senate Banking Committee in sending a letter to Finance Chair Senator Mike Crapo and Banking Chair Senator Tim Scott requesting immediate hearings about reports that officials associated with Elon Musk have gained access to sensitive U.S. Treasury payment systems.

"The Treasury Department's Bureau of the Fiscal Service's payment systems control the flow of more than \$6 trillion in annual payments to households, businesses and other entities nationwide," the lawmakers write. "Putting this system in the hands of unaccountable political actors raises significant economic and national security risks." Congresswoman Emily Randall joined several House and Senate Democrats at the U.S. Department of Treasury to demand answers regarding Elon Musk's access to sensitive, private information.

According to Congresswoman Randall, "The phones in my office have been ringing off the hook with calls from concerned Washingtonians about the hostile takeover of our government by an unelected billionaire. The American people did not elect Elon Musk nor did they consent to him having access to their private information. This is an egregious abuse of power and puts the families, seniors, and children who rely on these essential government programs at risk."

In local news, yesterday's snowy weather apparently resulted in multiple minor motor vehicle accidents, according to an announcement from Jefferson County Emergency Management. Given that snow is predicted to continue falling in various parts of the county, drivers have been advised to stay off the roads if possible and to drive with extreme caution if you must be out.

This week is National Burn Awareness Week, so East Jefferson Fire Rescue reminds residents if you are staying home and using space heaters to stay warm, be sure to keep flammable materials at least three feet from those space heaters. And, if your electricity is out, don't forget to extinguish those candles before going to bed.

The Port Townsend *Leader* reports that OlyCAP, the Olympic Community Action Program, is concluding its annual Point in Time (PIT) count in Jefferson County to determine the number of people experiencing homelessness, both sheltered and unsheltered. The nationwide count, which takes place every January, is conducted on the same night and is reported to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development in order to guide federal funding to develop effective housing strategies.

The 2024 count was published in December and showed Washington having the third largest homeless population, with 31,544 people experiencing homelessness. This year's count occurred on January 30, but OlyCAP continued interviewing unhoused community members about their sleeping arrangements through yesterday to allow for a more accurate count.

When asked if OlyCAP has noticed an increase in the homeless population during the count this year, Peggy Webster, housing project manager at OlyCAP, admitted it was hard to tell. “What has changed is that we are better organized and more on top of it. But we won’t know the results until way down the road.”

In tandem with the count, the joint Housing Fund Board of Jefferson County and Port Townsend, which distributes state funding to local homeless services like OlyCAP, hosted a conversation meeting with unhoused individuals on January 31 at the Winter Welcoming Center in Port Townsend. Participants were asked at the meeting to share what might have prevented their homelessness, how the Housing Fund Board could better assist them now, and what would help them end their homelessness. Many highlighted the need for better communication about available resources, a greater emphasis on individualized support, and access to essential services like showers and laundry. In addition, several participants mentioned the importance of addressing and minimizing the stigmatization of homeless individuals. The insights shared will play a crucial role in the Housing Fund Board’s Five-Year Homeless Housing Plan. The plan, aimed at improving housing affordability in the county, will be adopted in December.

KPTZ 91.9 FM broadcasts your local news Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday at noon and 5pm. You can contact us at news@kptz.org. I’m Diane Walker. Thank you for listening.