

BOE
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the hourly rates for the firm, Environ, were left undisclosed even to the board members, who approved the contract unanimously.

Board members expressed a desire to approve the Environ contract—and perhaps amend it later—in order to hasten the process.

Environ requested that its hourly rates be withheld from the document, a request that was honored through, as school board member Oscar de la Torre put it, an “FBI-style blackout” of the information.

Jan Maez, chief business officer for the district, said that they would release that information to the board if requested.

“They may not have been comfortable with revealing the hourly rates but we do that routinely and everybody’s hourly rates are out there,” said board member Laurie Lieberman. “I would say that the next person who comes along and asks for that we should tell them that it’s just not our practice.”

District officials assured the board that they will be notified once an estimate is made. Costs for remediation and oversight will be included in the district’s bimonthly report to the board, they said.

Concerns about the Malibu campus arose last year when three teachers reported they had been

diagnosed with thyroid cancer and more than a dozen complained of negative health symptoms in a letter to the district.

The district performed numerous tests on the campus and found that the levels of PCB, a cancer-causing substance, in the dust and caulk samples were high enough to trigger oversight from the Environmental Protection Agency. EPA officials will oversee a clean-up process that ensures the rooms are free of PCB levels above their established threshold.

Over winter break the district tested, then cleaned, then tested again for PCBs. The EPA oversaw the testing of some of the rooms and deemed the results of the testing acceptable. Some parents cried foul when they learned that rooms were tested with the windows open. This, according to district officials, was meant to simulate the actual classroom environment where windows are sometimes left open.

At Thursday’s meeting, a handful of Malibu residents criticized the district and the board for its response to the health concerns, claiming a lack of transparency and that the school’s soils should have been tested for carcinogens.

Board member de la Torre also questioned how much of a role the

board would play in the clean-up and testing process.

“Let’s say we want to set parameters, like for example, we want the air to be tested with windows open, doors open, and then with windows closed and doors closed,” he said. “Getting into the detail of how to proceed with that type of investigation, is that something that we can do?”

“That’s why we hired a team of experts,” replied Superintendent Sandra Lyon.

She explained that the board would be able to give some direction.

“There are places where we have oversight and will have input but what we’ve been saying all along is that we need to hire the experts to guide us through this process,” she said.

Last month, a Washington DC-based advocacy group, Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility (PEER), issued a statement criticizing the district’s use of funds throughout the process.

Lyon responded with a letter defending the spending and asking the organization to work with the district in the process.

“We have indeed spent considerable resources with the sole purpose of answering questions raised by our

employees, parents and the community,” Lyon said. “Our goal, as it has been from the outset, is to be assured that our schools are healthy.”

PEER also suggested that soils could be contaminated as a result of World War II army training that occurred nearby. Lyon did not respond directly to this assertion in her letter.

Rosenthal clarifies prior knowledge of toxins at MHS

After fielding heavy criticism on the campaign trail for her possible knowledge of toxic soils at Malibu High School, Malibu Councilwoman Laura Rosenthal on Monday said she misspoke about when she said she served on a Measure BB advisory committee that was first made aware of toxins in 2010.

“I didn’t correctly remember [during a recent candidates forum]...I was already off the BB advisory committee when they discussed the contamination issue,” Rosenthal said at Monday’s city council meeting.

She said she resigned from the committee in April 2010 to focus on her first city council campaign. The BB committee was first informed of the toxins in November 2010.

Alito
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58-42, replacing Justice Sandra Day O’Connor on the high court. “To put on my robe and go out there, it was really a surreal experience,” Alito said.

Challenges as a Justice

When asked by Hiepler to reflect on some of the tougher cases he’s presided over, Alito recalled one involving the Westboro Baptist Church.

In the 2011 case of Snyder v. Phelps, the court had to decide whether Albert Snyder could recover damages for intentional infliction of emotional distress after Westboro Baptist Church members picketed his war veteran son’s funeral.

The majority of the court held that the 1st Amendment afforded protection to the picketers since

their comments fell within the ambit of free speech on matters of public concern.

Alito was the sole dissenter. “Our profound national commitment to free and open debate is not a license for the vicious verbal assault that occurred in this case,” Alito said.

“At the end, I had to cast the vote on what I thought was right,” he added.

Another challenge as a Supreme Court Justice, he said, is trying to keep a straight face during the president’s State of the Union address.

When the president makes a politically controversial statement, “We’re supposed to be motionless and stony-faced,” he said.

Alito skipped the most recent addresses, explaining that the State of

the Union has become a very partisan event, which can prove challenging for the Justices in attendance.

Graduating in today’s market

Despite a tough economy and competitive field, Alito advised young law students to keep at it.

“Our country needs lawyers,” he said.

While it’s not as simple to get started in the field as it once was, keeping law practices alive and well is crucial in the U.S.

“The Constitution and the law is one of the things that holds us together,” Alito said. Since things are constantly changing, lawyers need to respond to this change by filling a uniquely important role “for the country, for the profession, and for themselves.”

High hopes ahead

Ultimately, Alito said that he is optimistic about America’s future. American citizens possess a universal, deep-seeded belief in individual freedom, equal justice under the law, social mobility and cultural diversity, he reasoned.

By holding such a combination of beliefs, Americans will continue to make the county successful “without coercing people to give up their individuality, without coercing uniformity and without trying to homogenize everybody.”

“I believe that ordinary Americans from all walks of life, representing all segments of our society, still believe in the things that make our country the place that we love,” Alito said.



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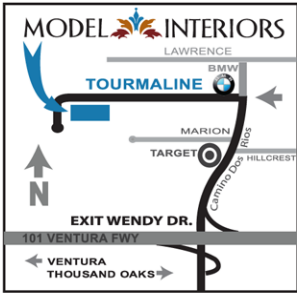
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