

Santa Monica Daily Press

A newspaper with issues

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8, 23, 25, 6, 31

DAILY 3

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DAILY DERBY

1st Place: 1, Gold Rush
2nd Place: 12, Lucky Charms
3rd Place: 8, Gorgeous George
Race Time: 1:46.40



NEWS OF THE WEIRD

by Chuck Shepard

Timothy Paul Kootenay, 43, jailed in Aspen, Colo., in November on a California warrant for probation violation, said he would fight extradition on the ground that he is a citizen of the notorious "Republic of Texas" and that, actually, Aspen and Vail are located on a sliver of land that is also part of the Texas nation. Kootenay's separatist colleagues (some of whom have taken up arms) believe that Texas was never legally annexed by the United States and is thus a sovereign nation that should respond only to international law.



QUOTE OF THE DAY

"Three out of four doctors recommend another doctor."

— Graffito



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John Wood/Daily Press

Victims of the Farmers' Market crash hold a press conference in front of City Hall. They are suing the city for damages because it didn't set up protective barriers.

Law firm goes after Santa Monica City Hall

Farmers' Market victims say protective barriers should have been used

BY JOHN WOOD

Daily Press Staff Writer

CITY HALL — Victims of the July 16 Farmers' Market crash gathered here on Wednesday morning to demand the city pay for the carnage caused by elderly driver Russell Weller.

"My brother loved Santa Monica ... but the place that he loved, he also died here," said Dolores Kesse, whose brother Leroy Lattier was struck and killed when Weller sped through the market. "This is an accident — a major, catastrophic accident that could have been prevented."

Also speaking was Bertha Lattier, Leroy's mother; David Gong, whose sister Diana was killed and father Benny injured; Ilona Lettrich, whose finger was

"I have a lot of mixed feelings about all that's happened. But it comes down to responsibility."

— DAVID GONG
Relative of victims

torn off and ankle battered; Dina Richter, whose elbow and shoulder was broken and hip displaced; and Frank McCarthy, whose brother Kevin was killed in the afternoon accident.

The mid-morning press conference was staged by lawyers from Greene, Broillet, Panish & Wheeler, LLP, a Santa

See VICTIMS, page 6

Not everyone smiling over fluoride water

Routine matter turns into lengthy debate

BY JOHN WOOD

Daily Press Staff Writer

COUNCIL CHAMBERS — A plan to fluoridate the city's water was scheduled to be passed as a matter of routine here Tuesday but it ended up becoming the focus of an hour-long debate before the City Council.

More than a dozen people spoke to the council about the controversial decision to put fluoride in Santa Monica's drinking water, an action approved by politicians in October of 2001.

The issue came up because of a \$300,000 contract for the design of a city fluoridation system. Council members approved the contract and officials plan to begin delivering fluoridated water to residents by the end of the year.

Most of the speakers at Tuesday's meeting criticized the council for deciding to put fluoride, which many believe can cause negative health effects, into the drinking water. They said that even if one agrees with the purported benefits of fluoride, it should still be left to individual residents to decide if they want it in their drinking water.

"Santa Monica is supposed to

be progressive, not regressive. And I think this is a regressive move," Reina Alvarez said.

A handful of others at the meeting urged the council to approve

the \$300,000 contract, saying fluoride has been proven to help growing children develop stronger teeth.

City Councilman Bob Holbrook,

See WATER, page 5

Eight 'Johns' busted

By Daily Press staff

DOWNTOWN — Eight people were arrested last Friday night during an undercover prostitution sting on Lincoln Boulevard.

Female officers from the Santa Monica Police Department used themselves as bait to lure "Johns" to a street corner on Lincoln Boulevard where they were propositioned and brought to a nearby hotel room. Once the men solicited sex, they were arrested for hiring a prostitute, a misdemeanor offense.

Known as a "Reverse John" sting, the undercover officers wore a wire underneath their clothing so vice detectives waiting in a hotel room could hear their conversations with the men. The stings are conducted regularly by the SMPD.

Lincoln Boulevard is known as a strip for prostitutes, who come

from places like Hollywood to turn tricks in Santa Monica and Venice. Because it's a state highway and serves as a main thoroughfare, hookers find the busy street a profitable place to set up shop.

Residents and merchants off of Lincoln Boulevard know that well. Often times, they are greeted in the morning with drug paraphernalia and used condoms lying on the street. It is the SMPD's goal to eliminate prostitution in the city.

"It's a community livability issue for us," said SMPD Lt. Frank Fabrega. "We are not going to tolerate that type of activity in our city."

Since Jan. 7, the SMPD has arrested 20 people for prostitution, or given citations for loitering for the purposes of prostitution, according to police records.

— Carolyn Sackariason

Lesson in drinking, cleaning

By Daily Press staff

PICO NEIGHBORHOOD — A Santa Monica man who was cleaning a shotgun while drunk was arrested here on Tuesday after he accidentally shot into the floor of his apartment, alarming his downstairs neighbor.

Jaime Gomez, 38, was arrested

by Santa Monica Police for illegally discharging a firearm within the city limits, a misdemeanor.

Gomez's neighbor, who lives in the apartment below, called police at 10:56 p.m. after she heard a shot fired from above her ceiling. When police arrived, residents in

See ARREST, page 5

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JACQUELINE BIGAR'S STARS

The stars show the kind of day you'll have:

★★★★★-Dynamic ★★★★★-Positive ★★★-Average
★★-So-so ★-Difficult

ARIES (March 21-April 19)
★★★★ Relax from yesterday and allow someone else to run with the ball. An individual could approach you with an offer that feels too good to be true. Do your research. Unexpected developments reveal that much more is going on. Express your frustration in a positive way. Tonight: Make nice.

TAURUS (April 20-May 20)
★★★★ Deal with others directly, as they surface at your door or on the phone. You'll like the results you obtain by approaching life in this manner. A friend could surprise you. Go with the flow, and you will be happy. Tonight: Just don't be alone.

GEMINI (May 21-June 20)
★★ Bosses and those you look up to do the unforgettable, but not the unforgivable. How you see a situation could change as the day gets older. Work with others and don't buck trends — for now. In the long run, this method will work best. Tonight: Off to the gym.

CANCER (June 21-July 22)
★★★★ Use your dynamic creativity and imagination to get where you want to be. You have the ability to see beyond the obvious and hop over walls that others run into. Use this skill right now. Someone might feel more deeply than you do about your friendship. Tonight: Spice up your life.

LEO (July 23-Aug. 22)
★★ Stay anchored, knowing your objectives. You might feel tempted to do something one way and not the other. Stop, think and make a rational decision. Let your creativity come forth and speak for itself. You could be delighted by what happens. Tonight: Happy at home.

VIRGO (Aug. 23-Sept. 22)
★★★★ Investigate possibilities that surround you. You really don't need to go far. Others clamor around you. Think of yourself as king or queen for the day. You express your authentic self in a way that makes a big difference. Tonight: Out and about.

LIBRA (Sept. 23-Oct. 22)
★★★★ Indulge yourself, you deserve it. Though you often like to treat yourself, a developing work or health situation might be stressful and/or very exciting. Flow with the moment and let your spontaneity emerge. Tonight: Enjoy yourself, sharing a preferred pastime.

SCORPIO (Oct. 23-Nov. 21)
★★★★ The Moon in your sign adds vigor and happiness to your life. The unexpected occurs with a child or loved one. Investigate possibilities that surround a new form of communication. Tonight: Say what you want.

SAGITTARIUS (Nov. 22-Dec. 21)
★★ You might have a lot going on that you choose not to share, which is unusual for you. Be discreet. What you share now as well as what someone else shares with you need not be public knowledge just yet — or perhaps ever. Tonight: Vanish discreetly if you can.

CAPRICORN (Dec. 22-Jan. 19)
★★★★ Be sensitive to a friend, especially if you decide to ask a lot of questions. How you ask could make a big difference in your future relationship with this person. Give others the benefit of the doubt until you have proof otherwise. Tonight: Where the gang is.

AQUARIUS (Jan. 20-Feb. 18)
★★★★ Think before you leap on a good deal or purchase a present for someone (or could this be you?). A friend shares a new perspective. Give his or her feedback some thought. Decisions don't need to be made right now. Tonight: Work late.

PISCES (Feb. 19-March 20)
★★★★ Do research before answering a question or coming to a final decision. In fact, don't feel pressured in the least. Make it OK to reverse your decision at the last moment. New information comes along that could change your view. Tonight: Make an important call.

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LOCAL



Doctor, lawyer accused of cheating insurance companies

By Daily Press staff

LOS ANGELES — A Brentwood physician, an Encino attorney and two others were arrested by the District Attorney's Bureau of Investigation Tuesday. They and two others were charged with theft, conspiracy and insurance fraud.

The doctor, Parviz Kahn Berjis, 70, the attorney, Fariba Rahimi, 41, and the others were arrested without incident and are being held on bail ranging from \$50,000 to \$5 million. Their arraignments are expected today in Los Angeles Superior Court.

The arrests of Berjis and five others follows a nearly three-year investigation into allegations of fraudulent medical claim billings on automobile insurance claims.

The case, handled by the District Attorney's Automobile Insurance Fraud Division, was investigated by the Bureau of Investigation with the assistance of the California Highway Patrol, the Department of Insurance and insurance companies themselves. The complaint, in overt acts relating to one count of conspiracy to commit grand theft and insurance fraud, outlined an undercover investigation by District Attorney's investigators that started in the spring of 2001.

Berjis and the other five defendants all were charged with one count each of grand theft and conspiracy. Berjis, an internist and rheumatologist, additionally was charged with four counts of insurance

fraud and two counts of Medi-Cal fraud. His bail was recommended at \$5 million.

Rahimi additionally was charged with five counts of insurance fraud. Her bail was recommended at \$50,000.

Also arrested today were Katayoun Jahangani, 35, a medical office administrator from Encino, and Fereydoun Mehran Razy, 49, an accountant from Agoura Hills. Two other people named in the complaint have not yet been arrested.

Besides the grand theft and conspiracy counts, Jahangani was charged with three counts of insurance fraud and Razy with one count of insurance fraud. Bail for Jahangani was recommended at \$2 million. Razy's bail was recommended at \$50,000.

The complaint alleged the crimes occurred between Jan. 1, 1996, and Dec. 17, 2003. Named victims included several 11 insurance companies, the Automobile Club of California and the State of California.

Deputy District Attorney Michael Grosbard, the assistant head of the Automobile Insurance Fraud Division, said that losses may amount to more than \$2 million, but an exact dollar figure was not included in the complaint.

He said that if convicted, Berjis faces a possible maximum sentence of 12 years and eight months in state prison. Jahangani faces a possible term of 10 years and eight months, while the others face possible terms of five years and eight months.



New W swell starts to arrive throughout the day today, with most spots showing surf in the 3-5' range. Best breaks pick up the West swell early and see bigger waves before sunset.

OUTLOOK: This swell will hold overnight and by Friday morning the west-facing spots will see some serious bombers. It drops Saturday.

Write us at wood@smdp.com and tell us what the surf is doing today at your local break.

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	LOW ONE	LOW TWO	HIGH ONE	HIGH TWO
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MONDAY	5:32 AM	6:23 PM	12:43 AM	11:21 AM
TUESDAY	6:49 AM	7:06 PM	1:24 AM	12:15 PM
WEDNESDAY	8:31 AM	7:48 PM	2:07 AM	1:41 PM
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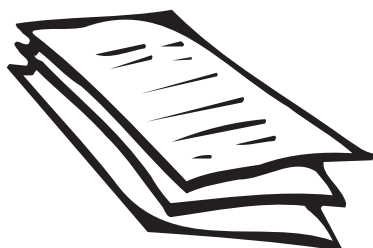


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Santa Monica Daily Press

The Q-Line

Last week, a very well organized group of school supporters filed an amendment to the city charter that would mandate City Hall fork over a minimum of \$6 million annually to the local school district, which faces severe budget cuts from the federal and state governments.

School supporters have continuously thanked the City Council for financially helping the district out in past years, but they want to ensure they get more money to keep local schools top-notch. Voters most likely will be asked in November if taxpayer money should be dedicated to

the schools. City officials, however, aren't too keen on the idea of not having control over the cash.

So this week, Q-Line wants to know, "Should the schools have a set amount of money put aside every year or should the discretion be left up to the City Council?"

Call (310) 285-8106 with your response before Thursday at 5 p.m. We'll print them in Friday's paper. Please limit your comments to a minute or less. It might help to think first about the wording of your response.



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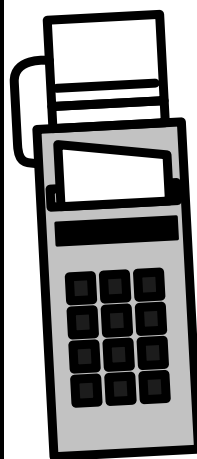
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OPINION

LETTERS

What about the Weller family?

Editor:

I am the child of an 82 year old. I had to take the car keys away from my mother. It was a miserable decision, she hated me for it. It was necessary, her attention was not sufficient enough to allow her to drive in westside traffic. She still holds a grudge. But she is still alive and maybe someone else is too. Cars equal independence to most seniors, sometimes the price is too high.

In the matter of Mr. Weller and the market crash tragedy: I am more than a little perplexed by the willingness I see for people to just write the entire event off as one of those unfortunate, unavoidable events and run to the City of Santa Monica to sue for its deep pockets insurance. No one is picking on Mr. Weller. It was completely avoidable.

No one mentions the responsibility of the family in the matter. Mr. Weller killed 10 people with a car. Had he not been driving they would not be dead. A cold hard fact. Explain away what you want, blame what you will.

If this man was not capable of driving, he should not have been driving, and everything I have read points to the fact that he should have given up the car a while ago. I know hindsight is a wonderful thing ... but it is the responsibility of the family to monitor these things and watch the parent. I have yet to see anyone address that. You can't place all the blame on the DMV, which some seem to want to do. The DMV doesn't see mom and day every Sunday, they don't know they wrecked the garage, smashed the trash cans or hit the fence. Assume the responsibility that comes with being a human being and part of a community. It's a terrible burden to live with but it did not have to happen. There is shared responsibility there.

Mr. Weller's previous good actions do not excuse his responsibility for what happened that terrible day and in Santa Monica, we have too many other ways to get around if the family is not willing. Driving is not a right it is a privilege, people seem to forget that in California these days.

Dorothea Warren
Santa Monica

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Just keep telling yourself that 'it's only a movie'

NEWS
on the
EDGE

By Ron Scott Smith



■ Lockheed Martin has been awarded a \$769 million contract by the Pentagon to develop what is officially called the "Miniature Kill Vehicle" and I leave it up to you to imagine the mischief that little devil will be capable of. Sounds like a Dr. Evil contraption designed for "Mini Me" to do battle with Austin Powers. In a related matter — and I leave it up to you to do the relating — the Smithsonian Institute recently unveiled a fully restored and spit-polished Enola Gay, the B-29 World War II bomber that dropped the big one into the middle of Hiroshima, reducing the world population by some 200,000 with one burgeoning mushroom cloud. "Mommy, what did that cool Enola Gay airplane do?" might ask the young, inquiring minds, field-tripping through America's showcase historical museum. And mommies will squirm in their shoes as they obediently answer, "Well, honey, it saved lives is what it did."

■ What Pat Robertson does, is save lives too — saves them from the burning eternal fires that may await them if they don't heed his word and cast their vote in the upcoming national election for his chosen one. The Preacher from the Black Lagoon said this last week: "The Lord has just blessed him (President Bush). It

doesn't make any difference what he does, good or bad, God picks him up because he's a man of prayer." And those of you who might have a lesser opinion of the president might just as well forget about participating in America's quadrennial self-correction in November. The reverend-seer has seen, and it's a done deal. "George Bush is going to win in a walk. I really believe I'm hearing from the Lord that it's going to be a blowout election in 2004."

■ Now one slight problem with this Lord-choosing-sides-thing is that only about a trillion or so just-as-devout souls from around the globe happen to be of the opinion that their chosen one, a guy named Bin Laden, is "just blessed" no matter what he does, too. All he said last week in his latest taped release to his own revering masses was this: "My message is to incite you to continue the Jihad against the conspiracies, especially those uncovered by the occupation of the crusaders in Baghdad under the pretext of weapons of mass destruction." And they were glued to their radios. But when it comes right down to it, right down into the earthly gutters where well-intentioned men lay each other out in seas of blood in the name of their Lord, do you think their Lord really wants his name attached to any of it?

■ There's a scene in "Young Frankenstein," the Mel Brooks movie, where the deaf Peter Boyle title character stumbles into the hut of the blind Gene Hackman peasant, and all comic hell breaks loose. When ex-Secretary of the Treasury Paul O'Neill revealed to the world this week that cabinet meetings with

President Bush were like "a blind man talking to the deaf," I couldn't help but think of that scene, and that these guys are running the planet, and that if your boy, Robertson, is right, Lord, then please be prepared to help us all for four more years.

■ And soon, ours might not be the only planet they run. When the president on Tuesday unveiled his ambitious new space program that would yield us Mars, he announced to the world that, first, "We will gain a new foothold on the moon," and damn if it didn't sound like a threat to the moon.

■ Meanwhile, back at the run-down Golden State ranch, it looks like an epic Predator vs. Sitting Bull clash is brewing. Gov. Schwarzenegger has drawn the battle line in the state budget wars, and along with community college students not paying enough tuition, and senior citizens not paying enough to the doctor, he's identified the sovereign Native American tribes running gaming halls in the desert as a major source of our financial woes. In a remarkable turn of events, it seems the Indians have discovered an age-old white man's harvesting secret. They've figured out how to get money to grow on trees. But now the governor is telling them — just like a good daddy has to — money doesn't grow there. According to Schwarzenegger, those taxes you haven't been paying because you were broke and got a pass when you were kicked out of mainstream America back when the more ambitious folks came along — well, you're going to have to start paying them. Nobody down here in that mainstream wants to pick up the entire tab for those

slacker students and elderly, so ante up. Those nifty little lights around the roofs of the Hummers don't come cheap.

■ The city of Santa Monica, seemingly the Hummer capital of the world, decided on Tuesday night to get into the dental care business. City Council approved a \$300,000 plan to begin dumping HydroFlouroSilicic acid into our water supply so that every time you turn on the faucet and take a drink, your teeth will get a little happier. Nice of them to be thinking of our teeth and all, but what about the fact that the stuff requires a hazardous waste permit and special clothing for those that handle it? If we can't buy it or touch it, why run it through our faucets? And if healthy teeth are suddenly such a priority around here, how about the rest of the body? I hereby propose that the city pay to have a multi-vitamin — something along the lines of the Wild Oats Basic Multi — run freely through the same faucets. And I run into stressed out fellow Santa Monicans all the time. Why not throw in a tad of valium while you're at it, Mayor Bloom? And with all the documented benefits of a glass-of-red-wine-a-day, yeah — you got it — how about rolling a little cabernet through those pumping stations? A modern-day, water-into-wine miracle. All of Santa Monica would cheer up. It might even be enough to get a colleague, "Won't You Come Home" Bill Bauer, to give a buck to a bum.

(Ron Scott Smith is on edge and could use some cheering up with all the injustices in the world. To reach him, e-mail to EdgeoftheWest@aol.com).

YOUR OPINION MATTERS!

Send your letters to Santa Monica Daily Press Attn. Editor:

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LOCAL



Fluoridated water on tap coming by end of year

WATER, from page 1

who voted for the contract, said fluoridated water is considered one of the top 10 medical achievements of the 20th Century.

"There is a core group of people who are concerned about water fluoridation and there are some council members who are as well," Holbrook said. "I don't think their fears are grounded in science and that's why I voted to approve it."

When the debate was in full swing three years ago, the council split 4-3 in favor of fluoridation. City Councilman Mike Feinstein said on Tuesday he feels so strongly against fluoridation that he intends to buy bottled water to use once

"Santa Monica is supposed to be progressive, not regressive. And I think this is a regressive move."

— REINA ALVAREZ
Santa Monica worker

the fluoridation kicks in.

Others, like City Councilman Ken Genser, said he believes in the benefits of fluoride but doesn't think it should be forced on residents. Genser proposed a motion that City Hall staffers review the proposed fluoride levels. That motion failed.

"I recognized that this was going forward and I wasn't trying to stop it," Genser later said. "However, we had a member of the Environmental Task Force (a City Hall commission) ... who said he'd like to look at what the optimum levels are."

With the contract approved, plans are

underway. Utilities manager Gil Borboa said construction of a fluoride treatment system likely will begin in June and Santa Monica's drinking water will be fluoridated by year's end. Currently, the drinking water contains .2 to .4 parts per million of fluoride. But according to government health officials, the dental hygiene benefits are optimal at .8 parts per million.

"There are a lot of people that are very passionate on both sides of the issue," Borboa said, adding, "The dosage rate of the fluoride, as planned to be applied, is consistent with the Center of Disease Control guidelines, which are consistent with the State Health Department."

Local man fires gun into floor, alarms neighbor

ARREST, from page 1

the building were evacuated and officers called Gomez's home, informing him on an answering machine that the complex was surrounded and demanding that he surrender.

Gomez came out of the apartment and admitted to officers that he accidentally pulled the trigger. Police quickly realized Gomez had been drinking and took him into custody. The shotgun was recovered and placed into evidence, SMPD Lt. Frank Fabrega said.

No one was in the apartment at the time of the incident. And although no children were in the apartment, the accident serves as a reminder that guns should be locked and away from

a child's reach, police said.

"Firearms should be cleaned at a secure location such as a public range, not your apartment," Fabrega said. "A discharge can cause serious injury."

The SMPD is involved in a national program called "Project Childsafe," which gives out free gun locks. The locks are available in the lobby of the Public Safety Facility behind City Hall, the Pico neighborhood and Second Street police substations. The SMPD is distributing 2,000 of the locks, which come with a pamphlet detailing safety tips for gun owners.

"It's better to be safe than sorry when handling firearms," Fabrega said.

— Carolyn Sackariason



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LOCAL

City Hall: Bollards wouldn't have stopped Weller

VICTIMS, from page 1

Monica law firm that on Wednesday filed 10 claims against City Hall seeking compensation for victims. Lawyers said the city is responsible for the crash because it should have erected a protective barrier at the ends of the market.

"You'd think that'd be a good idea to put up on Arizona Avenue when you invite 10,000 people," attorney Geoff Wells said. "There's nothing there to prevent

that from happening."

Wells said removable metal "bollards" similar to what's at intersections on the Third Street Promenade should have been set up at the market, instead of wooden sawhorses. He called the accident, which left 10 dead and 63 injured, "totally avoidable" and said City Hall failed to take "necessary, simple, reasonable safety measures."

In a prepared statement, Wells and partner Brian Panish said City Hall's conduct was egregious and the city should therefore bear total responsibility for the crash. City Hall either knew or should have known about elderly and other confused motorists driving into the market in the past through the alleyways that run parallel to the Third Street Promenade, Wells said. And Weller should be considered another victim of the crash, he added, because there were no signs warning drivers they were approaching a closed-off area.

Deputy City Attorney Jeanette Schachtner, who is handling the claims for City Hall, said the protective barriers used at the Promenade wouldn't have stopped Weller, who reportedly entered the market gaining speeds of up to 60 mph. What's more, using bollards would slow emergency vehicles, she said, adding that on the Promenade ambulances and fire trucks are able to drive around the bollards onto the sidewalk.

"People at the Farmers' Market are in far less danger than any of us who cross the street," Schachtner said. "We all have to hope that motorists will obey the law."

Wells said most metal bollards are designed to sustain the impact of a vehicle traveling 20 to 30 mph. City Hall officials reiterated that the Promenade bollards wouldn't have stopped Weller's 1992 Buick LeSabre.

"They're not solid stainless steel," City Councilman Bob Holbrook said. "They're hollow. He would have shaved them off just like he was shearing a beard with a razor."

With Wednesday's filings, claims against City Hall now total 48. Schachtner said the city plans to reject all the claims against it because it doesn't feel it's responsible for the accident. Once a claim is rejected, lawyers are able to file formal lawsuits in Superior Court.

The claims filed Wednesday didn't list a specific amount of money. Wells said it was too soon to say how much in damages they will seek from City Hall and the Bayside District Corp., a nonprofit also being targeted because it manages downtown and may have been responsible for safety and security.

Though City Hall indemnifies Bayside — meaning it would likely be responsible for any cash judgment — Wells said the two entities potentially represent two different pools of money because they have separate insurance coverage. City Hall must pay the first \$1 million of any judgment and the second \$1 million is covered by a pool of California municipalities. After that, City Hall's insurance policy covers up to \$20 million.



John Wood/Daily Press

Lawyers say barriers like these should have been set up at the ends of the Farmers' Market because City Hall should have known an accident could occur.

But that may be only a portion of what's at stake if City Hall is found liable for the crash. Tens of millions of dollars have been awarded in various wrongful death suits in recent years and often that amount is higher when an individual is seriously injured and requires a lifetime of intensive care or nursing.

Greene, Broillet, Panish & Wheeler, with offices atop the tower at Ocean Avenue and Wilshire Boulevard, won the largest product liability suit in history — \$4.9 billion in 1999 against General Motors for a defective engine — and has won numerous cases worth millions of dollars. And they're not alone in the civil arena. West L.A.-based attorney Michael Piuze also is representing a handful of victims and has filed claims against the city. Piuze got the largest single-person jury award of all time, \$28 billion against Phillip Morris for a cancer victim in 2002.

An unexpected speaker took center stage briefly during Wednesday's press conference. Halil Parlar, a local resident and peach vendor at the Farmers' Market, walked in front of about a dozen news cameras and several reporters and told the Lattiers that he was a witness to Leroy Lattier's death.

Parlar, 72, said he had gathered signatures from more than 700 people — residents, shoppers, vendors, even council members, he said — demanding some type of barricade be erected. He pointed to the Santa Monica Pier, where pedestrians aren't protected from motorists, and said something needs to be done.

Asked if City Hall or Weller should be liable for the crash, Parlar replied, "both."

While civil suits surrounding the crash gather momentum, Weller, 87, pleaded not guilty last week to 10 counts of vehicular manslaughter with gross negligence, a felony. Piuze has said the Los Angeles District Attorney's Office might have pushed for those charges because, if Weller is found guilty, it could be used to protect City Hall.

But victims on Wednesday said they weren't interested in behind-the-scenes maneuverings. They said they simply wanted to make sure no one else is hurt.

"It's been a hard couple of months," said Gong, whose sister and brother-in-law had moved from New York a year earlier to pursue their careers as independent filmmakers. "It's been difficult adjusting ... I have a lot of mixed feelings about all that's happened. But it comes down to responsibility."

Richter, a former marathon runner and swimmer who leaned on a cane as she spoke, agreed.

"I guess I'm one of the fortunate people," said Richter, an English teacher at Hamilton High School in L.A. "I was at the Farmers' Market and I did not lose my life. However, the last six months have been very difficult for me. We should do everything we possibly can to make sure this never happens again."

"If that means (suing) the city — so be it."

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STATE

High Court asked to end clean-air vehicle requirements

BY TIM MOLLOY

Associated Press Writer

LOS ANGELES — Business groups with the Bush administration's backing will argue before the U.S. Supreme Court on Wednesday that a Southern California agency overstepped its bounds when it began requiring large vehicle fleets to buy low-emission or alternative fuel vehicles to reduce smog and toxic emissions.

U.S. Solicitor General Ted Olson was expected to argue on behalf of the fuel and engine manufacturing trade groups that want to overturn the vehicle requirements established by the South Coast Air Quality Management District. The government has submitted a brief for the plaintiffs, who believe only the federal government can set those standards.

AQMD attorney Barbara Baird said the federal involvement in the case was "ironic" given that the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency set the clean air rules the district is trying to meet. The government could take away billions of dollars in federal highway money if Southern California, which has the worst air pollution in the country, doesn't meet federal clean air standards by 2010.

"The federal government is holding this very large hammer over Southern California's head, and yet the Bush administration wants to take away one of our most essential tools for meeting those goals," AQMD spokesman Sam Atwood said.

Since the program began in 2000, 5,500 heavy-duty clean fuel vehicles have hit Southern California roads, the district said. Fleets aren't required to have the new vehicles until old ones are ready for replacement, and the rules don't apply when no clean-fuel vehicles are available.

The rules apply to fleets of more than 15 vehicles

including garbage trucks, school buses, transit buses, and airport taxicabs and shuttles. Most are run by public agencies or people with public contracts, and the AQMD, state and federal government have helped pay replacement costs, Atwood said.

The rules were created largely in response to a 1999 study that found diesel exhaust accounted for 70 percent of the carcinogenic toxins in the air inhaled by residents of the Los Angeles Basin, Atwood said.

But the trade organizations and the federal government said that under the Clean Air Act, only the federal government can set requirements on what vehicles must be used. A provision allows California to ask the EPA for permission to set rules on what manufacturers build, but the plaintiffs said it doesn't apply to local agencies such as the AQMD.

"Right now we can produce one engine and sell it throughout the country," said Joe Suchecki, spokesman for the Chicago-based Engine Manufacturers Association, one of the plaintiffs. "If South Coast or any other local jurisdiction or state could develop their own

emission standards, it would just be impossible for industry to try to meet every standard."

The federal government said in a brief it was getting involved because it was responsible for enforcing clean air rules, and because its own fleets would be affected by the rules. It said the Clean Air Act prohibited local agencies from making rules on new vehicle emissions.

AQMD said its regulations are legal because they tell people what to buy, not what manufacturers shouldn't build.

Companies that don't meet the fleet standards are free to sell their products outside the district, which includes Orange County and parts of Los Angeles, Riverside and San Bernardino counties. The rules were designed to apply to vehicles with relatively fixed routes through the region, not to those just passing through, AQMD officials said.

A district court upheld the rules because the clean-fuel vehicles had been certified by a state air quality board with the EPA's permission, not by the AQMD. An appeals court agreed, prompting the plaintiff's appeal to the Supreme Court.

Budget woes stall plan for environment

BY DON THOMPSON

Associated Press Writer

SACRAMENTO — California's budget woes have stalled plans to create an 1,100-mile necklace of coastal marine reserves to protect and renew the environment along the length of the state.

Planning for the reserves is required by a 1999 law, but wildlife officials said Tuesday that the state can't afford the estimated \$1.7 million to \$2.3 million it would take to complete planning by the Jan. 1, 2005, deadline.

The state's hiring freeze also has sapped about a third of the technical staff at the Department of Fish and Game, officials said.

Resources Secretary Mike Chrisman said he's soliciting private contributions to proceed, something environmental groups said they've been pushing since delays first surfaced nearly a year ago.

"This is a model nationally for bringing back endangered ecosystems," said Richard Charter, a marine conservation advocate with Environmental Defense.

Scientists and environmentalists say California needs

to create more reserves to join the 12 created last year around the Channel Islands off Los Angeles.

The state already had a network of more than 100 other tiny reserves, though this "hodgepodge" with conflicting fishing limits means "they've been pretty ineffective up to this point," said department spokeswoman Chamois Andersen.

The reserve plan could put up to a fifth of California coastal waters off-limits to fishing. This has prompted sharp protests from commercial and charter fishermen who fear for their livelihood.

The department will continue reorganizing rules for the reserves and conducting research about the effects of the Channel Islands reserves while it waits for money to study the new reserves, Andersen said.

Warner Chabot, vice president of The Ocean Conservancy, said environmental groups met with Chrisman two weeks ago to urge him to seek private financing to augment dwindling state funds and staff to keep planning proceeding.

"We do the Volkswagen version instead of the Cadillac version," Chabot suggested. "We refuse to accept that the solution is to stop the process completely and indefinitely."

Scientists projected that as much as 20 percent of the state's 1,100 miles of coastal waters might deserve protection. But Andersen said the actual reserves would result from consensus among the 150 representatives assigned to seven subgroups that divided up the state's coastline.

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NATIONAL



Feds to delay delisting of gray wolves in Rockies

BY BECKY BOHRER
Associated Press Writer

BILLINGS, Mont. — The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service will not proceed with plans to remove gray wolves from federal protection under the Endangered Species Act until concerns about Wyoming's plans for eventually managing the animals are addressed, officials told The Associated Press Tuesday.

An official announcement was expected this afternoon by the agency's director. But Joan Jewett, chief of public affairs for the agency's Pacific Region, told the AP that concerns with Wyoming's plans "will need to be corrected before we can move forward with delisting."

Fish and Wildlife Service Director Steve Williams, in a letter to the Wyoming Game and Fish Department director obtained by the AP, said the agency is confident that plans submitted by Montana and Idaho for managing wolves are adequate "to maintain their share of the tri-state wolf population above recovery levels."

But Williams said the agency needs to consider the management plans by the

three states together.

"As a result, delisting cannot be proposed at this time due to some significant concerns about portions of Wyoming's state law and wolf management plan," Williams wrote.

Williams said that the agency intended to move ahead with the proposed delisting of gray wolves in the Northern Rockies if Wyoming adequately addresses the concerns.

Among the concerns is Wyoming's plan to classify wolves in part of the state as predators, which could be killed virtually at will; the Fish and Wildlife Service said that must be changed.

"The unregulated harvest, inadequate monitoring plan and unit boundaries proposed by the state's management plan do not provide sufficient management controls to assure the service that the wolf population will remain above recovery levels," Williams wrote.

Wyoming Gov. Dave Freudenthal said he is disappointed with the government's decision, but is prepared to work

with the state Legislature and congressional delegation to develop a response.

Gray wolves have made a remarkable recovery since first being reintroduced to the Yellowstone ecosystem in 1995 after being nearly wiped out by hunting and trapping across the West. The Fish and Wildlife Service considers their recovery a success. There are about 760 wolves in the three states, where they currently are classified as "threatened" under the Endangered Species Act in some areas, and as an "experimental population" in and immediately around Yellowstone National Park.

If the agency had found all three state plans acceptable, it planned to propose removing all federal protections for the animals, turning management over to Montana, Wyoming and Idaho, all of which were officially hostile to wolf reintroduction from its start.

Just last month, about a dozen wildlife managers and scientists, in individual reviews of the state plans, said the proposals should be enough to ensure the wolves' survival in the Northern Rockies

once the animals are removed from federal protection. But some of the experts, who were asked by the Fish and Wildlife Service to give their assessments, said they were concerned with such things as whether there will be enough money to properly manage the wolves and how the states plan to monitor the animals.

Some reviewers also had concerns with how Wyoming planned to classify wolves. Under that state's plan, gray wolves in some areas would be protected, while in other areas they would be classified as predators and could be killed with few restrictions. Wolves would be protected in the national parks.

Oregon, which has no confirmed wolves but lists them as a state endangered species, is also working on a wolf management plan, preparing for the time when enough migrate across the Snake River from Idaho to establish a resident population. However, Oregon's plan has no bearing on the federal decision over protecting wolves under the Endangered Species Act, Jewett said.

Conservation group names the 10 most 'endangered' parks

By The Associated Press

WASHINGTON — A conservation group's annual list of the 10 "most endangered" national parks has six holdovers from last year, still considered victims of dirty air, inadequate funding and bad policy.

The National Parks Conservation Association again named Big Thicket National Preserve in Texas as well as five national parks: Great Smoky Mountains in North Carolina and Tennessee; Joshua Tree in California; Shenandoah in Virginia; Everglades in Florida; and Yellowstone in Wyoming, Montana and Idaho.

The group said air pollution threatens many of the parks. In addition, it said there are problems with private land sales and potential oil and gas drilling in Big Thicket; development along park borders in Joshua Tree; nonnative species damage in Shenandoah; management and funding questions in the Everglades; and lack of money and bison slaughters in Yellowstone.

Thomas Kiernan, the association's president, said the main problem is the annual \$600 million shortfall for operating needs in the National Park Service's \$2.3 billion budget.

Park Service spokeswoman Elaine Sevy said the association's interest in parks is appreciated. "We'll look at what they have to say, and see how it compares with what our research is showing, and with how we're addressing many of the issues they raise," she said.

The group had three new places and one program on its list this year:

- Biscayne National Park in Florida, due to overfishing and water pollution.
- Oregon Pipe Cactus National Monument in Arizona, from lack of money for protecting plants and wildlife.
- Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve in

Alaska, because of land scarred from ATV use and potential road-building.

■ National Underground Railroad Network to Freedom Program, cited for inadequate money for preserving the history of slavery and the civil rights movement.

The four they replaced from last year's list are Denali National Park and Preserve in Alaska; Virgin Islands National Park; Glacier National Park in Montana; and Ocmulgee National Monument in Georgia.

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NATIONAL

Source: Fastow to plead guilty in Enron debacle

BY KRISTEN HAYS

AP Business Writer

HOUSTON — A plea deal worked out for former Enron finance chief Andrew S. Fastow includes his cooperation with prosecutors, which could break open the investigation into the failed energy giant's top management, a source familiar with the talks said Wednesday.

Fastow and wife, Lea, a former Enron assistant treasurer, were expected to plead guilty Wednesday afternoon to charges related to their roles in Enron's stunning 2001 collapse, two sources told The Associated Press on condition of anonymity Tuesday.

The assistance of Andrew Fastow, who allegedly masterminded a complicated web of partnerships to hide Enron's debt and inflate its profits, could lead the Justice Department to former Chairman Kenneth Lay and former Chief Executive Jeffrey Skilling, who led Enron when it was considered the nation's seventh-largest corporation in 2001.

"They have the opportunity to get to the 50th floor," the source said on condition of anonymity.

Lawyers for Lay and Skilling have maintained their clients' innocence. Michael Ramsey, Lay's attorney, has said he has nothing to worry about as long as Fastow and others are truthful.

The Fastow plea deals had stalled last week after a judge refused to guarantee Lea Fastow a five-month prison sentence, as agreed to with prosecutors. Her attorney said the couple insisted on the five-month sentence to ensure that their two young sons have at least one parent at home. U.S. District Judge David Hittner demanded that he retain the right to alter Lea Fastow's sentence.

Under federal sentencing guidelines, Hittner is supposed to consider a range of 10 to 16 months for the tax crime, said Kirby Behre, a former federal prosecutor in Washington D.C. But Hittner can depart from the range, and a 10-month sentence could require Lea Fastow to serve half the time in prison.

Andrew Fastow, 42, whose case is being handled by Judge Kenneth Hoyt, would become the highest ranking executive to plead guilty in the Justice Department's two-year criminal investigation into the Enron collapse.

"Unquestionably, this is the breakthrough that the government has been pursuing" to possibly lead them to Lay and Skilling, said Robert Mintz, a former federal prosecutor and an expert in white-collar crime.

"There is nobody besides Fastow who can make this case for the government and that's why they have been pursuing him for so long and so aggressively."

It wasn't immediately clear how much help Fastow's plea requires him to give the government to develop cases against Lay, Skilling or others.

Bryan Sierra, spokesman for the Justice Department, declined comment. Mike DeGeurin, Lea Fastow's lead attorney, and John Kecker, her husband's lead attorney, didn't return calls for comment. Fastow family spokesman Gordon Andrew also declined comment.

Andrew Fastow was charged with 98 counts of insider trading, fraud, money laundering, tax violations and others for allegedly running a complicated web of partnerships and financing methods that hid debt, inflated profits and funneled millions of dollars to him, his family and chosen friends and colleagues. His trial was slated for April 20.

Lea Fastow was charged with six counts of conspiracy and filing false tax forms for allegedly helping to hide income and make one of those partner-

"There is nobody besides Fastow who can make this case for the government and that's why they have been pursuing him for so long and so aggressively."

— ROBERT MINTZ
Former federal prosecutor

ships appear independent of Enron so the failed energy giant could continue getting tax benefits for wind farms after buying a utility. Her Feb. 10 trial was to be the first in a string of Enron cases this year.

Michael Kopper, Fastow's one-time top lieutenant at Enron, led prosecutors to Fastow when he pleaded guilty to conspiracy in August 2002. Fastow was indicted two months later, and his wife was indicted last May.

The day after Kopper's plea, a federal judge froze more than \$23 million in bank and brokerage accounts held by the Fastows, their family foundation, his brother, several former Enron employees and two holding companies. Also frozen was \$3.9 million from the 2002 sale of a three-story, 11,493-square-foot mansion the Fastows built in Houston's wealthiest neighborhood, River Oaks, where Skilling and Lay live.

Also last week Enron's former chief accounting officer, Richard Causey, was slated to face criminal charges after the Fastows entered their guilty pleas. Sources close to the probe said Tuesday that Causey's surrender remains the next step, but it was unclear when that would occur.

Causey was supposed to review all Enron deals with one of the partnerships Andrew Fastow devised.

Behre called a 10-year sentence for Andrew Fastow "excellent" — given that "what drives sentencing is predominantly the amount of the fraud." Fastow is accused of pocketing at least \$45 million from the Enron deals.

Fastow would face at least 20 years in prison if convicted at trial, Behre said.

"For someone facing more than 20 to get an offer that locks in 10 years with possibly good time off, and could get lower if he cooperates with prosecutors, that's as close to a sweet deal you can have in this kind of case," he said.

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Legality of U.S. attempts to transform Iraq questioned

BY GEORGE GEDDA

Associated Press Writer

WASHINGTON — The old Iraq wasn't particularly hospitable to foreign investors, but L. Paul Bremer III, the U.S. administrator in the new Iraq, is making it clear that times have changed — and a new era for outside entrepreneurs is at hand.

"This Order replaces all existing foreign investment law," Bremer said in a directive issued last September as part of the Coalition Provisional Authority's ongoing makeover of the nation Saddam Hussein once ruled.

Other U.S.-initiated decrees for Iraq include a free market economy, a 15 percent tax ceiling and a new banking code.

But questions are being raised about whether these and other moves are consistent with international law, particularly the Geneva conventions of 1949 and the Hague Resolutions of 1907, both ratified by the United States.

The Hague accord, for example, directs occupying powers to respect, "unless absolutely prevented, the laws in force in the country."

Section 4 of Bremer's September directive, known as Order 39, states: "A foreign investor shall be entitled to make foreign investments in Iraq on terms no less favorable than those applicable to an

Bush administration officials say U.S. actions in Iraq were authorized in general terms by U.N. Security Council resolution 1483, adopted May 22.

Iraqi investor."

The changes planned for Iraq aren't only about economics. On the political front, the Bush administration envisions a one-person, one-vote system that it hopes will serve as a model for other Arab countries.

David Scheffer, a Clinton-era ambassador-at-large for war crimes, believes the administration, along with co-occupier Britain, is carrying things too far.

"The whole point of an occupation is to create a temporary stabilizing system on a foreign society and then transform that very quickly to sovereign status," Scheffer said in an interview.

Scheffer, now a Georgetown University professor, said occupation law was designed to discourage countries which may be tempted to invade, occupy and transform another country.

They can "tinker around the edges" but not much more, he said in an article in a forthcoming issue of the American Journal of International Law.

Without restraints, "the door would be wide open for abuse by aggressive and benevolent armies alike."

Bush administration officials say U.S. actions in Iraq were authorized in general terms by U.N. Security Council resolution 1483, adopted May 22.

It permits occupying nations in Iraq "to promote the welfare of the Iraqi people" by "working toward the restoration of conditions of security and stability ... in which the Iraqi people can freely determine their own political future."

Beyond that, a State Department official said basic decision-making in Iraq these days is in the hands of the 25-member Iraqi Governing Council and the ministries under its control.

The council is acquiring more power each day from the Coalition Provisional Authority, which, in any case, is due to hand over authority to Iraqis on June 30, the official said.

At that time, Iraqis will be free to reverse

any dictates by the provisional authority, the official noted. Left unchecked in the interim, Iraq could once again revert to a "bastion of terrorism," said the official, who spoke on condition of anonymity.

Existing occupation laws may have been reasonable early in the past century but not in the terrorism era, the official added.

A Jan. 10 New York Times article said there are few precedents to guide experts on the legality of U.S. actions in Iraq because the number of self-declared occupiers is small.

It pointed out that the United States did not claim occupier status in Germany and Japan after World War II because both had surrendered.

The Times account said coalition concerns about legal overreach in Iraq prompted the administration to scrap a plan to privatize inefficient state-owned enterprises. Decisions on those issues will be made by Iraqis.

Scheffer says the Iraq's occupiers could be subject to civil or criminal liability under the Hague and Geneva accords.

They have failed, he wrote, "to establish and maintain public order," to restore in a timely manner electricity and other services, and "to create unemployment on a massive scale" by demobilizing Saddam's police and military.



WORLD BRIEFLY

America wins back some friends

By The Associated Press

MONTERREY, Mexico — Rich and poor nations alike walked away from this week's 34-nation summit with victories: The developing world kept the meeting focused on social issues, while the United States regained several old friends in the region.

The democratically elected heads of state attending the special Summit of the Americas signed a declaration Tuesday pledging to stick to their timetable on ending negotiations for a hemisphere-wide trade zone known as Free Trade of the Americas.

Canada and Mexico won the biggest prizes from the United States. President Bush told Canada it will be eligible for a second round of U.S.-financed reconstruction contracts in Iraq.

On Monday, Mexican President Vicente Fox accepted an invitation to visit Bush's Texas ranch and praised his proposal to allow migrants to work temporarily in the United States.

The mention of a timetable for the free trade agreement was a victory for the United States, but it did not go as far as U.S. officials wanted. It eliminated any mention of a 2005 deadline for the accord — mentioned in earlier drafts — but called for nations to stick to their "original timetable."

In previous trade negotiations, ministers agreed to try to complete the agreement by next year. However, some Latin American nations say that is too soon.

Woman suicide bomber kills five

By The Associated Press

EREZ CROSSING, Gaza Strip — A female Palestinian suicide bomber blew herself up Wednesday at the major crossing point between Israel and the Gaza Strip, killing at least four Israelis and wounding seven other people, Israeli rescue services and media said.

The bomber set off the explosion in the area where thousands of Palestinian laborers and foreigners pass between Israel and the coastal strip, Israeli officials said. At least two of the wounded were Palestinians, the army said.

Hamas and the Al Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades, linked to Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat's Fatah movement,

issued a joint claim of responsibility.

They identified the bomber as Reem Raiyshi, a 21-year-old Hamas militant. She apparently is the first female suicide bomber from the militant Islamic fundamentalist group.

Two men arrested in cheerleader's death

By The Associated Press

KAANAPALI, Hawaii — Two California men were arrested in the death of an 18-year-old New Jersey cheerleader whose naked body tumbled from the ninth floor balcony of a Maui hotel.

The two men, who were not identified, were arrested Tuesday on charges of second-degree murder in the death of Lauren Crossan, of Randolph, N.J., said Lt. Tivoli Faaumu.

Crossan was part of a group from the National Association of American Cheerleaders that had arrived on Maui to participate in Saturday's Hula Bowl college football game.

The two men, ages 19 and 20, were registered to the room from which Crossan fell. They were on vacation and not connected to the game or to the cheerleaders' group, Faaumu said.

Crossan's body was discovered Monday morning on the grounds of the Hyatt Regency Maui Resort after a hotel guest reported seeing it.

The men told police that Crossan was in their room when they fell asleep early Monday. Her clothes and personal belongings were still in the room when police arrived to question them, but the men said they didn't know what happened to her, Faaumu said.

An autopsy confirmed Crossan died of injuries suffered in the fall, Faaumu said. An investigation was continuing.

U.S. considers giving contracts to allies

By The Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The Bush administration is considering whether to award lucrative reconstruction projects in Iraq to allies who opposed the U.S.-led war — possibly including Germany, France and Russia — in a major change of policy.

Bush outlined his new policy Tuesday as he announced that Canada would be allowed to bid on some of the \$18.6 billion in reconstruction work from which it had been excluded.

Defense Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld said three or four other countries, which he declined to name, also would be eligible to bid for a second wave of reconstruction contracts, which U.S. officials estimated were worth roughly \$4.5 billion.

Later, White House press secretary Scott McClellan said any country that, like Canada, had been excluded because of opposition to the Iraq war could now qualify if it had made a pledge toward Iraq's reconstruction at the donors' conference held in October in Madrid, Spain.

Bush cited Canada's pledge of \$225 million toward Iraq's reconstruction — one of the largest at the conference — and its expressions of support for the U.S.-led political efforts in Iraq as the reason it won a spot on the contracting list.

Paul O'Neill wants to fix 'broken process'

By The Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Paul O'Neill says he wanted to participate in a book that reveals the inner workings of the Bush administration because he believes the current political system badly stifles meaningful debate on public issues and needs to be fixed.

"I hope people will read it because I think it makes a contribution to illuminating, especially for young people, what I consider to be a bipartisan, broken political process," O'Neill said Tuesday, the day the book, "The Price of Loyalty," began appearing in bookstores nationwide.

However, the Bush administration and its supporters, unhappy with the unflattering portrait of the president that emerges from the book, written by former Wall Street Journal reporter Ron Suskind, stepped up their attacks, charging that a disgruntled O'Neill was seeking retribution for his dismissal as Treasury secretary in December 2002.

Defense Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld told reporters at the Pentagon on Tuesday that he tried to caution O'Neill, his longtime friend, not to participate in a tell-all book.

Now that it is out, Rumsfeld said he disagrees with O'Neill's characterization of Bush as a disengaged chief executive who left Cabinet members having to guess what policy course he wanted them to pursue.

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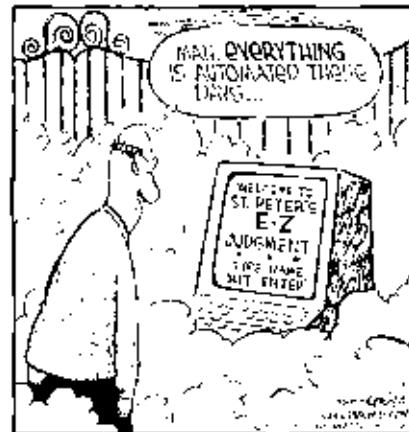
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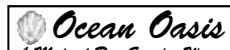


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PEOPLE IN THE NEWS

Oliver Stone retells the story of Alexander the Great

By The Associated Press

■ BANGKOK, Thailand — Oliver Stone will begin shooting scenes for his historical epic "Alexander" in Thailand this week, a publicist said Wednesday.

Hundreds of Thai and foreign cast and crew members will gather Thursday to start filming scenes for the movie about the life of Alexander the Great, which stars Colin Farrell as the Macedonian conqueror, said a spokesman for the production, Michael Singer.

"Alexander" also stars Angelina Jolie, Anthony Hopkins and Val Kilmer. It wasn't immediately known whether any of the actors is visiting Thailand for the filming.

"It is a large-scale movie. We are shooting large-scale scenes here. We are involving elephants," he told The Associated Press, without elaborating. "We have a lot of participants, both in front of and in back of the camera, who are Thai."

The shoot is expected to last several weeks and end in early February.

This is the final stop for the "Alexander" production crew, which began shooting last September and already has shot parts of the film in Morocco and at studios outside London, Singer said.

■ NEW YORK — James Carville is writing a children's book: "Lu and the Swamp," based on a true story about his mother, which Simon & Schuster will publish this fall.

"What guy is lucky enough to write a book about his mother's childhood?" the political consultant said Tuesday. "She was a strong little girl, and now that I have two little girls of my own, I want to share one of my mama's stories with them and with other children across America."

Carville's mother, Lucille, grew up in rural Louisiana during the Great Depression. Patricia C. McKissack, an

award-winning children's writer whose works include "Color Me Dark" and "A Picture of Freedom," will co-write the book.

Carville, a Democrat who emerged as a key adviser to Bill Clinton's 1992 presidential campaign, is married to Republican consultant Mary Matalin. His other books include "We're Right, They're Wrong" and the current "Had Enough?"

■ NEW YORK — George Clooney says reports that his girlfriend, actress Krista Allen, is having a baby are greatly exaggerated.

"She is not pregnant and she never was pregnant," Clooney tells Us Weekly in the issue coming out Friday. "Krista has a 6-year-old (Jacob) in school. I don't want kids saying, 'Oh, you're having a brother or sister' if it's not true. Happy, yes. Pregnant, no."

Clooney, 42, and Allen, 31, met on the set of "Confessions of a Dangerous Mind," the 2002 film he directed and co-starred in. Allen had a small role in the movie.

Previously, she played Billie Reed on the NBC soap "Days of Our Lives" for three years and has appeared in several "Emmanuelle" movies on Cinemax.

■ NEW YORK — Jennifer Aniston says she and her mother, who've been estranged since 1999, aren't much closer to reconciling.

"I never thought my mom would not know my husband," Aniston says, referring to Brad Pitt, in an interview airing on ABC's "Primetime Thursday."

The actress says she and Nancy Aniston haven't been close since her mother granted an interview to a tabloid television show and wrote a book about her relationship with the "Friends" star.

"She made a mistake ... I don't think she knew any better — obviously," Aniston says.

As for patching things up, the 34-year-old actress

says, "I've definitely tried, I made the efforts, and I've sort of started ... you know, it's that stubborn thing of, 'Well, I tried ... I tried enough. Now it's your turn.'"

Aniston co-stars with Ben Stiller in the romantic comedy "Along Came Polly," opening Friday.

■ PALM SPRINGS — Kevin Costner said it was Richard Burton who inspired him to pursue an acting career.

Costner was boarding a plane decades ago when he had a chance meeting with Burton and asked the actor if one could have an acting career without the turmoil that surrounded Burton's life.

"I think it's possible. It hasn't been for me, but I think it's possible," Costner said Burton told him.

The brief comment was the inspiration he needed, Costner said Monday during a question-and-answer session at the Palm Springs International Film Festival, where earlier he received the event's Career Achievement in the Art of Cinema Award.

The 400 people participating also watched screenings of his films "Dances With Wolves" and "Open Range," both of them Westerns that embody an independent spirit.

"I would like to have a big fat hit," Costner said, explaining, however, that he wasn't willing to compromise himself for that hit. "Otherwise, I would be spitting on my life."

Costner said he refuses to cut the heart and soul out of movies.

"I'm not a fearful person, and Hollywood operates on fear," he said. "I would be afraid in Vietnam, on the beaches of Normandy, and I'd be afraid in Iraq. But I'm not going to be afraid to bring you an original piece of entertainment that I thought was worth fighting for."

The 48-year-old actor-director-producer also spoke of his love for the Western genre, and he recalled watching "How the West Was Won" at the Cineramadome in Hollywood when he was 7 years old.

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