

Santa Monica Daily Press

A newspaper with issues

LOTO

FANTASY 5

22, 29, 11, 18, 33

DAILY 3

Afternoon picks: 6, 8, 7

Evening picks: 8, 4, 6

DAILY DERBY

1st Place: 5, California Classic

2nd Place: 1, Gold Rush

3rd Place: 6, Whirl Win

Race Time: 1:46.58



NEWS OF THE WEIRD

by Chuck Shepard

In December, payoff checks started arriving from Citibank's class-action lawsuit settlement that required it to refund overcharges for credit-card fees, but since the \$18 million payout had to be split among 20 million customers and former customers, the checks were for as little as 4 cents, while the lawyers who brought the lawsuit shared \$7.2 million. A major Citibank "abuse" corrected by the lawsuit: It was charging interest from 10 a.m. on the payment-due date but agreed to start charging it only as of 1 p.m.



QUOTE OF THE DAY

"I think war is a dangerous place."

— George W. Bush



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People in the News

Barrymore pinned by U.N. 20

School boosters launch petition drive

They need 9,000 signatures to force an election this fall to fund schools

BY JOHN WOOD

Daily Press Staff Writer

SUNSET PARK — The well-oiled school fundraising machine hit the streets here on Friday, formally launching its most recent attempt to raise money.

More than a dozen leaders from the Parent Teacher Associations at area schools met in front of Bob's Market on Ocean Park Boulevard to pick up their marching orders from leading school boosters.

The idea is to gather 13,000 signatures by May 5. The group needs 9,000 signatures from registered Santa Monica voters to qualify a proposed charter amendment for the ballot this November.

The amendment would require City Hall to give the district at least \$6 million each year. It also would force the local government to increase its funding of local schools by 1 percent each year, assuming City Hall's overall budget — currently about \$350 million — grows by at least 3.5 percent.

See PETITION, page 6



David Hume Kennerly/Special to the Daily Press
Lauri Crane, left, co-chair of volunteer outreach and Louise Jaffe, CEPS co-chair, formally launch the signature-gathering effort on Friday for a proposed charter amendment. CEPS hopes to force City Hall to give schools at least \$6 million each year.

Officials not ready to check out on 'mini hotels'

Some say the rentals should pay a hotel bed tax

BY JOHN WOOD

Daily Press Staff Writer

CITY HALL — The fate of so-called mini hotels in Santa Monica is no closer to being resolved after officials this week formally agreed to disagree on the matter.

Planning Commissioners split 3-2 over whether new mini hotels should be allowed to set up shop in Santa Monica, if they apply for and receive a special permit from City Hall. The matter now will go before the City Council.

Mini hotels earned their name-sake because they offer rooms with hotel-like amenities, including maid service, gyms, shared

offices and valet parking. But unlike hotels, mini hotels require a minimum 30-night stay. What's more, they don't charge a 12 percent bed tax.

That difference is a sticking point for some local hoteliers, who are required to pay the tax. One spoke to the Planning Commission at this week's meeting.

"These type of short-term

rental housing units are in direct competition with the lodging, hotel rooms in Santa Monica," said John McKee, who works for the company that owns the Hotel Oceana at 849 Ocean Ave. McKee said his hotel paid \$576,000 in bed tax fees last year, making it the company's second largest expense behind labor.

See MINI HOTELS, page 7



Nicky Five Aces/Special to the Daily Press

There aren't many sightings of deer in Santa Monica, but there's one that is permanently stationed somewhere in the city. As part of a weekly contest, the Daily Press will give away a prize to the first reader who can accurately identify where the photo was taken. E-mail answers to sack@smcp.com

Las Vegas: 'Sin City' is also the city of suicides

BY ADAM GOLDMAN

Associated Press Writer

LAS VEGAS — Lawrence Orbe didn't come to the Las Vegas Strip looking to win big. He didn't come for the strippers or over-the-top shows.

He came to die.

Orbe, 64, checked into the exclusive Four Seasons Hotel on March 11 after driving his silver Jaguar from his condominium in Montecito, Calif.

Five days later, a maid found the businessman in his room, slumped in a chair with a gunshot wound to the head and a suicide note in his leather briefcase.

"Las Vegas was one of his very favorite places," said his former wife, Loni Chiarella. "They always treated him like a king. He loved Las Vegas."

Every year desperate men and women make the pilgrimage to the gambling capital to kill themselves. More than once a month, a visitor commits suicide here, according to Clark County coroner records dating to October 1998.

By comparison, Atlantic City, N.J., had about one-third as many nonresidents take their lives during that period. In the same six years, no one commit-

See VEGAS, page 14

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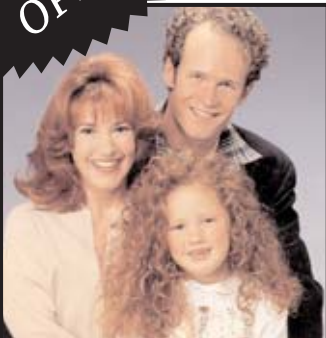


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JACQUELINE BIGAR'S STARS

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

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

ARIES (March 21-April 19)

★★★★ You wake up with a new insight that could direct your life or work differently. Try it on for size with those around you. You might feel that someone is dragging his or her heels. This person might even be you. Get a nap. Tonight: Don't push.

TAURUS (April 20-May 20)

★★★★ Your naughtiness emerges, despite yourself. You have some wild ideas, or at least become kidlike. Though someone might want to have a serious discussion with you, it might be close to impossible. Try to participate. Tonight: Put on your dancing shoes.

GEMINI (May 21-June 20)

★★★★ You might feel pushed between and betwixt. You need to express your feelings within your inner circle rather than hit the cat with a broomstick. Start restraining yourself financially. You will be happier ultimately. Tonight: Entertain at home, if at all.

CANCER (June 21-July 22)

★★★★ You could be more serious than those around you. Please don't rain on another's parade. Go with the moment. Accept an invitation that comes your way. You could be surprised how much fun you will have. Tonight: A male friend plays a significant role.

LEO (July 23-Aug. 22)

★★★★ Pressure builds between you and a partner. Certainly you do not have the same financial ideas. You could have quite a dispute or find a midpoint where you can both agree. The importance of this relationship will determine how you handle it. Tonight: Your treat.

VIRGO (Aug. 23-Sept. 22)

★★★★ You hit a power cycle, which might be a bit overwhelming. Others react strongly to your strength and ideas. Just go out and enjoy yourself. A friendship made right now could be karmic in nature and more burdensome than you might want. Tonight: Whatever pleases you.

LIBRA (Sept. 23-Oct. 22)

★★★★ Take your time getting up. You might have had a restless sleep and be a bit more tired than you realize. A partner or an associate pushes you very hard for what he or she wants. Feel free to say "no," especially as financing this request could be costly to you. Tonight: Vanish if you can. Mystery becomes you.

SCORPIO (Oct. 23-Nov. 21)

★★★★ What you want, you get. You're in a position to move a relationship to a new level. You might want to change your plans a bit so you can be with that special person. Be playful and add to the quality of your life. Tonight: Be a wild thing.

SAGITTARIUS (Nov. 22-Dec. 21)

★★★★ Value those around you. Stop and visit with others. You might want to check in with an older relative. You could decide to work, even if it is Saturday. Getting a head start or clearing off your desk makes you feel good. Tonight: A must appearance.

CAPRICORN (Dec. 22-Jan. 19)

★★★★ Take off for the day. You will be getting a new impression of an issue. With distance, a new perspective comes forth. Be very forthright with a child or loved one. He or she wants clarity. A partner could be touchy. Tonight: Read between the lines.

AQUARIUS (Jan. 20-Feb. 18)

★★★★ Deal with a close friend or associate on a one-on-one level. You might need to be more nurturing to this person. Your caring evolves with this contact and self-expression. Take a much-needed nap. Tonight: Be a team.

PISCES (Feb. 19-March 20)

★★★★ Listen to a partner who offers you many options, even if you don't like them. If you use your creativity and brainstorm with others, solutions come forward naturally. Hang out with a child or loved one. Tonight: Do what someone else wants to do.

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LOCAL



COMMUNITY BRIEFS

Library spreads love

By Daily Press staff

The Santa Monica library is spreading love for the upcoming Valentine's Day holiday.

The temporary library is offering its supplies, materials and poetry for those who want to make a valentine for their sweetheart or special someone.

The program will be held on Feb. 11 from 2 p.m. to 6 p.m. in the lobby of the temporary main library, 1324 Fifth St.

All ages are welcome.

Eat for education

By Daily Press staff

Those who want to dine and donate can belly up to The Counter.

The Counter, 2901 Ocean Park Blvd., will give 20 percent of its proceeds Sunday, Feb. 8 from 5 p.m. to 9 p.m., to Grant Elementary School's booster program.

"We're excited to be supporting Grant Elementary School and look forward to getting more involved in the community," Counter owner Jeff Weinstein said.

A non-profit seeks to improve race relations

By Daily Press staff

Multicultural understanding is the goal of the Friendship Circle, a dialogue series sponsored by Together, a non-profit organization based on the Westside.

The circle will begin Saturday, Feb. 21 at 1 p.m., and will be held for five consecutive Saturday afternoons at the Culver-Palms Family YMCA, 4500 S. Sepulveda Blvd. in Culver City.

Much of the dialogue will consist of people sharing their personal stories as they relate to identity, stereotypes, prejudice, racism, discrimination and solutions, said Together's founder Rebecca Rona.

"Sharing our stories is powerful," Rona said. "Tolerance isn't enough. We need to build respect and appreciation."

Registration for the Friendship Circle will continue throughout the month.

Together was founded in 1999 with the mission to counter prejudice and racism by encouraging understanding of others and genuine friendship among the diverse people of Los Angeles. The organization since its inception has been making a difference in the lives of more than 400 individuals, according to Together officials. The program has been offered on the Westside for nearly five years.

To register, or for more information, call (310) 285-3616.

Don't worry, be happy

By Daily Press staff

Santa Monicans can learn the importance of laughter during an even happier happy hour.

Blue Shield of California 65 Plus will present "Laughter as Good Medicine" on Wednesday, Feb. 11 from 2:30 to 3:30 p.m. at the Spectrum Club, located at 2425 Olympic Blvd.

To reserve a space, call Blue Shield of California at 1-888-277-8080.

Much art, long title

By Daily Press staff

Sometimes art exhibitions just need long names.

The Project Room of the Santa Monica Museum of Art presents Feb. 28 to May 15, Adrian Meraz: Donor (In the Drift, Coquet, Dab, Glacis Relish) Tracking Butcher Wrinkle, Bonesetter (Pole Position Erasure), an exhibition organized by Lisa Melandri.

Crystal Geyser Water Company, El Charro Tequila and Latino Weekly Review will host the opening reception on Feb. 27, from 7 p.m. to 9 p.m.

The exhibition is made possible in part by the city of Santa Monica Community Arts Grant Program — a project of the Santa Monica Arts Commission, the Rhoads Family Trust and Thomas Rhoads.

surf report

Look for NW swell to have filled in more today, with a boost in surf expected at the well-exposed winter breaks. Keep in mind that a 5.9' high tide around 9:15 a.m. will keep most spots pretty slow in the morning, but as the tide drops through the early afternoon look for inconsistent waist- to shoulder-high surf at the good winter breaks (especially South Bay).

OUTLOOK: A reinforcing shot of NW swell will keep the well-exposed spots in similar size surf on Sunday, before those waves fade on Monday.

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

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	LOW TIDES		HIGH TIDES	
	LOW ONE	LOW TWO	HIGH ONE	HIGH TWO
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MONDAY	4:30 AM	5:08 PM	10:28 AM	11:37 PM
TUESDAY	5:23 AM	5:38 PM	11:14 AM	N/A
WEDNESDAY	6:30 AM	6:06 PM	12:15 AM	12:15 PM
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Meraz will transform the Project Room into a cocoon-like environment inhabited by a series of unlikely sculptures, creating a macrocosm of skeletal interventions. He explains within this cavernous space, the sculptures "gather unsequentially, roamers, as notations emerge like cities that have come and gone."

The range of complex and fragile forms, as well as the memories and experiences they evoke, are reflected in Meraz's amalgamated and fractured title, according to museum officials.

Meraz constructs intricate objects and alternative worlds infused with humor and wonder from the likes of Popsicle sticks, felt, toothpicks, plywood and newspapers — a cityscape formed of paper bags, a book transfigured into the infinity of a Mobius strip and an unplayable musical instrument encased in a warren of top secret compartments, according to museum officials.

"My work investigates subtleties between motion and paralysis," Meraz said. He sees his art "as a vehicle to channel through or filter the ever accumulating of information." And an exploration of the relationship between "the malleability of an idea, and the potentiality of a thing that functions and dysfunction, both seen and unseen."

The Santa Monica Museum of Art is open Tuesday through Saturday from 11 a.m. to 6 p.m., excluding holidays.

For further information about exhibitions and educational programming, call 310-586-6488 or visit www.smmoa.org.

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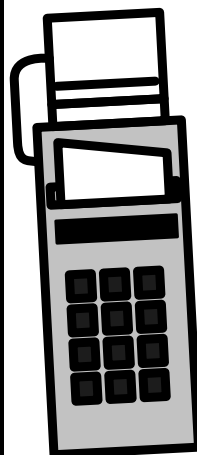


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OPINION

The Q-Line

Lack of intelligence found in White House

Here are your responses to this week's Q-Line question:

"Should an investigation be launched and who should be held responsible if, in fact, the intelligence doesn't support the war effort?"

■ "In this case, the fox is in the hen house and the White house knows all and sees all but they don't tell all. This is a case of, like the situation with the young lady, well she wasn't terribly young, but with the lady who was the wife of an ambassador, I believe she happened to be an employee of the CIA. I believe she was an agent, per se, who was ousted by the White House. They have never conducted an independent investigation into that matter and anything they do now will be purely cosmetic."

■ "In my opinion, Presidents Bush, Sr., who was in charge of the CIA, Bill Clinton and Bush Jr. were and are well aware that there was not a microscopic iota of a chance that Iraq had any chemical weapons or any other form of weapons capable of mass destruction. We

must understand when chemicals are used, all forces suffer. In World War I, both Germans and American forces suffered horribly when gas was used. The weapons inspectors that were sent into Iraq determined that Iraq had very little chance of defending itself against multiple country invading forces. The Pentagon would never send the American military into any area where there is the possibility of total troop annihilation of our multi-invading forces. The mission of the American military is to kill the enemy and not to be killed by the enemy. Saddam Hussein who cowered in a rat hole, certainly would not stock a pile of weapons that would have the possibility of backfiring."

■ "I feel that the president relied on his intelligence regarding his decision for

war. I do not think anyone should be held responsible, but rather that better intelligence should be developed for present and future intelligence gathering. I doubt that the intelligence community was able to infiltrate Iraq or were familiar with the language, etc. and this contributed to the failure. This has to be corrected in other circumstances if we are to be protected in this country and elsewhere."

■ "Absolutely not. There should be no investigation about who is responsible about the intelligence. It might be possible to have a low level inquiry about how to improve intelligence but not ever to see who is at fault. I think that everyone did the best they could and that we should just go forward and see if we can solve the problem in Iraq and forget planning to pin someone."

■ "The investigation should be an impeachment. The Congress should actually investigate this very serious matter where George Bush has sent 500 young men and women to their deaths in Iraq unnecessarily. Impeach Bush."

■ "I think President Bush and Vice President Cheney and their incompetent cabinet should be held responsible. And

also, I don't think the president should be choosing any investigating committee or whatever. What is the point of investigating if he is choosing the people? He will probably pay them off."

■ "We should definitely have an investigation be launched and see who should be held responsible, in fact, and I think the president of the United States, this so called George W. Bush, should be responsible for the whole thing and he should be impeached. There is no reason for him not to be impeached because he has put a lot of these boys, 500 at least of our men into harms way and into death. So we should support the war effort. The intelligence does not support the war effort and I also don't think we should."

■ "It doesn't surprise me that they found no weapons of mass destruction. I think it was all a plot to go over there and finish what Bush's father started. Anyway, I do feel they should have made sure there were weapons of mass destruction before invading a country and killing the women and children, but silly me. Anyway, as far as who should be held responsible, President Turban had a sign on his desk that said 'The buck stops

See Q-LINE, page 5

Memo to television industry: Leave the Amish alone



MODERN TIMES

By Lloyd Garver

You can no longer spoof reality shows. They're spoofing themselves. If I made up a ridiculous-sounding premise, we'd probably see it on TV next week. I'm not exaggerating. Is television really above putting on outrageous things like, "I Cheated With Your Mother" or "Let's Tempt The Amish Kids," or "Eat What Your Pet Eats?" Actually, I just tricked you. The Amish reality show will be on the air soon.

Traditionally, young Amish men and women go into mainstream society for a year before they decide whether to return to their community. In this show, during this important year, young Amish people will move into a city and live in a house with non-Amish young people. In other words, they'll be exposed to all kinds of temptations, and each week the audience

will presumably enjoy seeing if these young people will stray or not.

I'm not a fan of reality shows, but I've always felt that if you like them, watch them. If you don't, don't. But this Amish thing has made me think about reality shows far more than I ever thought I would.

Why do they even call them "reality shows?" How "real" is a date, a kiss, or falling in love when a camera crew is just a few feet away from the lucky couple? Does anybody believe that contestants are ever really in physical danger? In the real world, do we judge a person based on his or her ability to eat a bowl of worms topped with maggots?

I guess if you like these shows, your feeling is, "what do I care if they're real? I find them entertaining and fun." Good enough. But how much longer will you feel that way? How many of them can you watch? Each successful one begets several clones. And, the copies often lack the imagination and budget of the originals. So, if Donald Trump telling a young apprentice, "You're fired!" results in high ratings, another network will probably bring us Sal, from Sal's Groceries down the block, firing his after-school help.

But the networks know that audiences get bored watching the same old reality shows and their imitations. So the shows keep getting more and more outrageous. That's probably how the Amish show came about.

Again, I know there are more important things in the world to get upset about than television shows with questionable taste. But for some reason, the existence of the Amish show has been bugging me ever since I heard about it. After giving it considerable thought, now I know why: BECAUSE IT'S ABOUT THE AMISH!

Maybe we idealize them, but to many of us, the Amish symbolize a simple, pure, hard-working life. They don't use electricity or cars or other conveniences. One of the reasons why so many people admire and respect them is because part of us wishes we could live a life without modern encumbrances. Just knowing that their old-fashioned ways exist somehow connects us to an uncomplicated life. It's like if somebody took away farms and perfect houses with white picket fences. Even if we were never really going to move to one, we'd be upset because the fantasy would be gone.

I'm sure it's hard enough to keep the Amish community and culture thriving without throwing the temptations of body piercings, silicone breasts, and interviews on the E Channel at their young people. The list of people and situations that could be mocked or debased by TV is a long one. Can't television just leave the Amish alone?

But maybe I've got it all wrong. Maybe this is just a bigger test for Amish youth. Maybe if these kids are exposed to all that is superficial in today's showbiz world and they still want to return to their world, it demonstrates an even stronger faith.

Regardless, I'm not going to watch the show. If it's a hit, maybe I'll watch the sequel. It will probably be something like, "Battle of The Religious Stars — the Amish vs. the Hassidic Nude Tug O' War." Think I'm exaggerating? Stay tuned.

(Lloyd Garver has written for many television shows, ranging from "Sesame Street" to "Family Ties" to "Frasier." He has also read many books, some of them in hardcover. He writes the "Modern Times" column for CBSnews.com's opinion page and can be reached at smdp@lloydgarvermoderntimes.com).

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OPINION

The Q-Line

Q-LINE, from page 4

here' so all of this is on George W. Bush. He's responsible. He's the headman, so it's on his head."

■ "I do not support an investigative committee or independent group to investigate whatever because there is no money to pay for all this investigation. I believe all that money should be sent to the schools, should be sent to the local areas, the cities need that monies. There should be no committees investigating anything else. We already know that the president was wrong. What else are we going to find with the investigation? We're going to find the same thing. I think we need to spend the money wisely. We are having crisis in the local communities and that is why I am not supportive of the investigative committee."

■ "I believe that an investigation should be launched by an independent counsel not appointed by the president and I think that the person that should be ultimately found responsible is our commander and chief, Bush."

■ "I think definitely an investigation should be launched to see if there was enough support for the war effort and, if in fact, there was not enough intelligence that ultimately the President of the United States is held responsible for all war efforts and he should be held responsible."

■ "You know what I say? I think it's pretty funny that the Republicans can be up in arms over some personal business going on, that whole Clinton mess, and impeach a president because of it. Then when one of their own screws up and costs this country upwards of \$300 billion, as well as our children's lives, nobody has anything to say? Where is Ken Starr? Why isn't he outraged? I still can't believe the man got elected, but what they are letting him get away with now is just disgusting. I mean really, is it worse to screw around with some intern or worse to screw with the whole world? Does anyone remember JFK? Do you have any idea how many interns he probably spent time with? Nobody cared then and I don't see why they care now. A useless war, now that is something to get upset about."

■ "Letting Bush investigate the intelligence failure is like letting the fox guard the hen house. What a waste of time and money, although the Bush administration is certainly good at wasting time and money."

■ "I think an investigation should be launched but they should let the democrats do it. Otherwise, the investigation will be as corrupt as the entire administration. There is a sad hypocrisy going on in America. They want us to agree to what they say but they don't want us to know what they do."

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CEPS plans to launch 'phase two' on March 2

PETITION, from page 1

"We should be able to slam dunk this in six weeks," said Rick Gates, a former PTA president. "I went way out on a limb and told the campaign to forget the paid signature gatherers. This is grassroots. We can do it."

The amendment has drawn criticism from public officials, some of whom are parents with children in the public school system. They maintain the city has done everything it can to help the district — and much more than other cities do. City Hall gives the schools upwards of \$5 million annually.

Mayor Richard Bloom criticized the school boosters for pushing forward their plan behind closed doors, even as the city council was exploring alternatives for finding consistent, long-term funding for the schools.

"One of the places where this measure falls seriously short, is it does not provide funding," Bloom said. "Parents of public school children know that one of the many problems that plagues the schools are unfunded federal and state mandates. This imposes an unfunded city mandate and it's fiscally irresponsible ..."

Bloom said he hopes residents and the individual PTA groups will consider both sides of the issue before they decide to support the charter amendment. He called for a community dialogue on the matter, something he said supporters have scrupulously avoided, choosing instead to conduct an internal dialogue.

"This is a measure that would fundamentally change the relationship between the city and the school district, and it will also have economic repercussions that go well beyond the funding of schools," he said. "If it passes, we will have to find the money somewhere, and that could mean fire, it could mean police, it could mean social services, it could mean parks and recreation — in fact that's the most likely."

Those possible repercussions haven't deterred members of Community for Excellent Public Schools, the group organizing the push for the charter amendment. CEPS has broad-based support in the community, bringing together political opposites like Denny Zane, the father of Santa Monicans for Renters Rights, long City Hall's ruling party, and Chris Harding, a prominent land-use attorney and critic of the SMRR establishment.

On Friday, the mostly female group of PTA leaders and other volunteers reiterated their commitment to raising more money.

Sheila Spencer, whose son is in kindergarten at Franklin Elementary School, said she moved to Santa Monica so her children could attend the local schools.

It's a good thing that parents aren't forced to send their children to private schools to get a good education, said Spencer, who added she spent \$5,000 a year sending her children to pre-school at the private Evergreen Community School on Colorado Boulevard. Tuition there is now close to \$9,000, she said.

"We should be able to slam dunk this in six weeks."

— RICK GATES
Former PTA president

Asked about her thoughts on the resistance to the charter amendment from city officials, Spencer replied, "I think there's been a tremendous surplus of money within the city and there's been significant funding on other projects — and schools should be a priority over other projects."

Volunteers on Friday were given materials highlighting what to tell residents to get them to sign their petition and detailing specific procedures about gathering signatures. They were told to take the instructions back to their schools and recruit more signature gatherers and other volunteers. Organizers said they will try the grassroots approach until March 2, when they will reassess their plan and determine how to proceed with "phase two," which may include hiring outside help and other strategies, organizers said.

CEPS leaders declined to share the documents that were handed out to volunteers, saying they didn't want to compromise their strategy in hopes of forcing an election. But one thing is certain — the boosters likely will employ organized, targeted signature drives, phone banking and other, more sophisticated political tools in their effort to pass the charter amendment, they said.

"It's really part of our very strategic, secret strategy," said Shari Davis, CEPS co-chair. "There are a lot of people that would like to stop this from passing — we don't want them to know our strategy."

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Santa Monica Daily Press



LOCAL □ STATE



'Mini-hotels' issue to be debated by City Council

MINI HOTELS, from page 1

Suzanne Frick, the city's top planner, explained to commissioners that the mini hotels, formally titled "short-term rental housing units," can be a nuisance to residents because tenants are often here for a short time and aren't vested in the community. Frick recommended that new mini hotels be allowed, but that they be limited to certain commercial corridors and required to apply for a special permit.

"We do not want to lose the more permanent housing stock to this form of rental housing," she said, later adding that banning them outright may be unwise. "We do know there is a demand for this type of housing."

Planning Commissioner Jay Johnson was the most verbal opponent of mini hotels. He said the commission should recommend no new mini hotels be allowed in Santa Monica.

"This is a solution searching for a problem. I don't see the need for this in this city," he said. "This is tourist serving ... We're just creating, in effect, mini hotels and a very questionable authority to enforce rules we do create."

Though Johnson had the support of two other commissioners, he could not gather the necessary four votes to push forward his motion.

Planning Commission Chair Darrell Clarke said he approved of Frick's recommendation, adding that it's unlikely a large influx of mini hotels will set up shop

in Santa Monica and pointing out each case will be reviewed by the commission before it is approved.

As the meeting dragged into the early Thursday morning hours, only four commissioners were left on the dais. After a series of other failed motions, commissioners agreed to disagree on the matter, prompting what's called a "technical denial."

"This is a solution searching for a problem. I don't see the need for this in this city."

— JAY JOHNSON
Planning Commissioner

Any commissioner can appeal the denial. Officials said an appeal sends the matter directly to the City Council. But with a temporary law banning mini hotels set to expire June 19, the matter was headed in that direction anyway.

City Councilman Kevin McKeown, who acts as a liaison to the Planning Commission, said he expects the issue to be heard at the March 11 meeting of the City Council. McKeown said he'll need to be convinced of the value of mini hotels before he votes for them.

CALIFORNIA BRIEFS

State money woes hurt cancer patients

By The Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — Budget cuts are slowly forcing the shutdown of a prostate cancer program for low-income men who lack health insurance.

State officials ordered doctors to stop enrolling patients on Dec. 26 in the program based at UCLA Medical Center. Since then, more than 20 men diagnosed with prostate cancer have been turned away.

State officials suggested the men turn to public health care in the counties where they live.

Last week, Dr. Mark S. Litwin and his staff at the Improving Access, Counseling and Treatment for Californians with Prostate Cancer _ IMPACT _ program began deciding which of their 320 patients would have to go without treatment by June 30, the end of the fiscal year.

Litwin said it's difficult to make the forced cuts.

"I didn't sign up to play God," he said. "The bottom line for me is I've got guys dying."

The program is being cut as part of a \$1.1 billion wave of California budget cuts initiated by former Gov. Gray Davis and adopted by Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger when he took office.

Man offers \$50K reward for his snakes

By The Associated Press

ANAHEIM — A man is offering a \$50,000 reward to get back 13 colorful pythons he says were stolen from his home.

Jeff Hanson says he discovered the pythons were missing when he returned home last week. Dozens of other snakes were left behind, including some that had been turned loose in the house, Hanson said.

None of the ball pythons, which typically grow to be three to six feet in length, are considered dangerous. Police estimate the loss at more than \$75,000.

"We've spent years raising these snakes, and it is just this season that we expected some of them to produce eggs," Houston said.

Houston, who owns a contracting firm, said he put up \$10,000 of the reward himself, with the rest of the money donated by snake owners who learned of his plight on the Internet.

The reward is for the return of the snakes and arrest and conviction of the thief, said Anaheim police spokesman Sgt. Rick Martinez.

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STATE

Federal appeals court rejects DEA bid to outlaw hemp foods

BY TERENCE CHEA

Associated Press Writer

SAN FRANCISCO — Rejecting one front of the government's drug war, a federal appeals court ruled Friday the United States cannot ban the sale of food made with natural hemp that contains only trace amounts of the psychoactive chemical in marijuana.

The decision overturns the Drug Enforcement Administration's ban on the domestic sale of hemp food products. The 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals had suspended the prohibition so judges could hear a challenge from the hemp industry, which has been allowed to sell its products while awaiting the court's decision.

On Friday, the court said that though the DEA has regulatory authority over marijuana and synthetically derived tetrahydrocannabinol, or THC, the agency did not follow the law in asserting authority over hemp food products as well.

"They cannot regulate naturally-occurring THC not contained within or derived from marijuana," the court ruled, noting it's not possible to get high from products with only trace amounts of the mind-altering chemical.

The Hemp Industries Association, which represents more than 200 companies, had challenged the legality of the ban and applauded Friday's decision.

"It validates what we've been saying along, that hemp foods have nothing to do with the drug war," said David Bronner, president of Dr. Bronner's Magic Soaps and chairman of the HIA food and oil committee. "Now we can concentrate on

"It validates what we've been saying along, that hemp foods have nothing to do with the drug war."

— **DAVID BRONNER**

President of Dr. Bronner's Magic Soaps,
Chairman of the HIA food and oil committee

marketing a tremendous nutritional product without the government out there harassing the marketplace."

The DEA was still reviewing the decision Friday and would not comment, spokesman Bill Grant said. Department of Justice spokesman Charles Miller said federal lawyers will review to "make a determination about what the next step should be in near future."

Hemp is an industrial plant related to marijuana. Fiber from the plant long has been used to make paper, clothing, rope and other products. Its oil is found in body-care products such as lotion, soap and cosmetics and in a platter of foods, including energy bars, waffles, milk-free cheese, veggie burgers and bread.

Friday's decision is the culmination of a complex case.

In October 2001, the DEA first declared that food products containing even trace amounts of THC would be banned under the Controlled Substances Act. The DEA ordered a halt to the production and distribution of all goods containing THC that were intended for human consumption.

But in March 2002, just before those products were to be destroyed, the 9th Circuit suspended that order to decide whether federal law can classify hemp food as an illegal controlled substance like heroin.

In April 2002, DEA attorney Daniel Dormont argued for the ban, telling a three-judge appeals panel that "there's no way of knowing" whether some food made with hemp could get consumers high.

Hemp food sellers say their products are full of nutrition, not drugs. They say the food contains such a small amount of the active ingredient in marijuana that it's impossible to feel any drug-like effects.

In June 2003, the court first overturned the DEA ban after finding the agency didn't provide enough warning or allow public comment before imposing it. In that decision, the court did not decide the ban's legality only that the government didn't follow proper bureaucratic procedure.

But by March 2003, even before the court had made its first ruling, the DEA had solicited public comment and issued a new ban. It was the legality of that second ban the appeals court ruled against on Friday.

Hemp industry officials said the decision would likely boost sales because many retailers had been reluctant to sell hemp products.

"Their ban was a real setback for the industry initially," said Eric Steenstra, president of the lobbying group Vote Hemp. "But I think this ruling makes it clear that hemp food is here to stay."

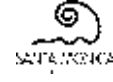
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STATE

Megan's Law report shows real reform remains elusive

BY KIM CURTIS

Associated Press Writer

SAN FRANCISCO — In the year since an Associated Press investigation found widespread flaws in California's sex offender registry, a state housecleaning has resulted in minor improvements to the Megan's Law database, but real reform remains elusive.

The AP report in January 2003 found that more than 33,000 rapists and child molesters had failed to register with police as required. Attorney General Bill Lockyer agreed the system had broken down, and said it would cost at least \$15 million annually to track down the missing.

A state audit later confirmed the AP's findings, and Lockyer's agency did pledge to work more closely with police to keep the database more accurate, for example by automatically notifying law enforcement when an offender fails to register.

Dozens of reform bills were proposed, but most died as politicians focused on the recall campaign that put Arnold Schwarzenegger in the governor's office. At this point, more money for the officers who try to keep track of the state's 67,357 convicted sex offenders is unlikely, given California's budget crisis.

In the year since the AP report, improved record-keeping by state and local officials has determined that 3,277 missing sex offenders had died; 1,742 were deported, 1,897 were back behind bars and 5,464 moved out of state.

As of Jan. 30, 2004, only 33 percent of the state's sex offenders had failed to check in with police, compared to 44 percent a year earlier. But that's still 22,060 missing rapists and child molesters, all of whom are committing the felony of failing to register. And few police departments spend the time and money it would take to put them back in prison.

"It's heartbreaking that nothing is being done," said a 64-year-old Novato woman who was raped by Patrick Ghilotti, a sexually violent predator who is campaigning to be released. That idea terrifies the woman, who asked not to be identified. "They're turning their backs on us. It's a law and no one's enforcing it."

Lockyer declined to comment for this story, but his spokeswoman said resources were redirected and many hours of overtime were dedicated to cleaning up the numbers.

"We've made many improvements to the accuracy of the information in the Megan's Law database, but we still have work to do," Halle Jordan said.

While Gov. Schwarzenegger also is "concerned about the accuracy of the database," according to his spokeswoman Ashley Snee, he hasn't decided whether to support providing more money to enforce Megan's Law.

California isn't unique in this regard — even the

biggest supporters of Megan's Law say the system remains fundamentally flawed across the nation, since almost all states rely on convicted sex offenders to check in with law enforcement and few agencies provide the resources to follow up.

A bill proposed by Sen. Dean Florez, D-Shafter, in response to the AP investigation would have required police to personally check in with sex offenders at their homes once a year. "The current 'honor' system of having sex offenders check in with local law enforcement has proven itself ineffective in tracking sexual predators," Florez said.

But that bill died. Only three minor changes were signed into law — two of them to avoid losing federal funding. Those measures require child pornographers to register and give college police the ability to warn the public about sex offenders. The third gave school district police access to the database.

Other bills that died would have:

- required the state Justice Department to report to the Legislature each year about sex offenders' compliance with registration requirements

- expanded the information the public can see while searching the Megan's Law database

- required juvenile sex offenders to register

- required police to confirm addresses of offenders

- required public notification on the whereabouts of all offenders.

Two measures remain alive, barely — making the database Internet accessible, which 40 other states already do; and providing state and local officials with \$30 million for Megan's Law enforcement.

California's children have been betrayed, says Laura Ahearn, executive director of Parents for Megan's Law, a national victims' rights group.

"Megan's Law can really help a community protect its kids if it's implemented properly," Ahearn said. "Lawmakers really had an opportunity to make things right."

For some reason, in California, it's just not happening."

Instead of improving the system and justifying the public's faith in it, state officials have gone to great lengths to remind citizens that the database is inherently inaccurate.

"The Department of Justice makes no representation, either implied or express, that all information on this site is accurate or complete," reads the disclaimer on the Megan's Law screen in bright red type.

California also still requires people to go to a local law enforcement agency, sign a form and, in many cases, make an appointment before searching the database. Once inside, they have to check a box acknowledging they've read the disclaimer before each search of a ZIP code or a particular offender.

People who do make the effort will see something new — as of Jan. 1, the public can see whether an offender has failed to register, and for how long. Until this change, only police could see that many offenders had long since disappeared. More than 9,000 have been in violation since 1996, and at least 800 more offenders have vanished every year since.

The law is named for 7-year-old Megan Kanka of New Jersey, who was raped and killed by a child molester who had moved in across the street. All states have similar laws designed to warn communities about the presence of such ex-cons.

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NATIONAL

Lawmakers happily work to divvy up \$1.2B surplus

BY ROBERT W. BLACK

Associated Press Writer

CHEYENNE, Wyo. — New schools. A big bonus for teachers. New water and sewer systems. While most states grapple with budget deficits, Wyoming is happily debating what to do with a \$1.2 billion projected surplus, and those items and more are on the table.

"It's a phenomenal opportunity to do things that the state has only dreamed of for decades," Gov. Dave Freudenthal said.

The windfall represents three-quarters of the state's current General Fund spending. By comparison, a surplus in California of the same proportion would be \$59 billion.

Despite a slowly improving economy, 30 states are projecting combined deficits of \$39 billion to \$41 billion, according to The Rockefeller Institute.

Wyoming, though, has enjoyed a revenue resurgence, primarily from higher oil and natural gas prices, leaving officials with spending and saving options they haven't seen in their lifetimes.

"Severance tax states — West Virginia for example, Wyoming, New Mexico, Oklahoma and Louisiana to some extent — have done better than most states," said Arturo Perez, fiscal analyst for the National Conference of State Legislatures.

The big surplus comes as Wyoming lawmakers convene their budget session on Monday. Their biggest question is deciding how much to spend and how much to save.

"We don't have money to throw away, but we do have money to allocate to real needs," Freudenthal said.

The needs include a prison expansion, rising Medicaid costs and a \$500 million backlog of public school construction and repairs.

Jami Nicotera, a Kemmerer homemaker, suggests spending a portion of the surplus on teachers.

"I'm not talking about computers and books," she said. "If nothing else, a bonus for educators that directly deal with our students — not administrators. Our kids

are our future."

Senate President April Brimmer Kunz, R-Cheyenne, cautions that with a large surplus come higher requests from state agencies and groups looking for a bigger slice of the pie. She suggests legislators focus on fixing schools and state buildings and helping local governments.

"We have a lot of failing water and sewer systems around the state and we need to take care of it while we have the money to do so," she said.

Rep. Wayne Reese, D-Cheyenne, House minority floor leader, agrees with the need to address deferred maintenance.

"Anyone that owns a home can tell you it's a lot cheaper to fix the roof today than it is to wait and fix the roof and the interior water damage later," he said.

Still, spending for ongoing government operations would increase 19 percent, or \$285 million, under Freudenthal's budget proposal.

Rep. Randall Luthi, R-Freedom, House majority floor leader, said that while Wyoming's finances are in much better shape than most states, he is concerned his colleagues might be harboring a false sense of security. Minerals prices can drop just as rapidly as they have risen, he cautions.

He hopes the Legislature approves a plan to put more money into the \$2 billion Permanent Wyoming Mineral Trust Fund, interest earnings of which help defray the cost of government. By law, about \$197 million of the surplus will flow automatically into the fund. Luthi and others want to contribute another \$100 million to the fund.

"If we don't put at least \$100 million into the trust fund, we're setting ourselves up for a tax increase in the next few years," he said.

Freudenthal does not want any more money than necessary put in the permanent fund. Once the money is placed in the fund it cannot be withdrawn.

But the debate over what to do with the surplus beats the alternative of working with a deficit.

"I think it's a wonderful time to be president of the Senate," Kunz said. "I feel so lucky."

Utility chief: Wind power will always be niche industry

BY DAN D'AMBROSIO

Associated Press Writer

DENVER — Environmentalists and utilities are clashing over how much the West should use wind-powered electricity.

"We're a big supporter of wind," said Wayne Brunetti, the chairman and chief executive of Xcel Energy. "But at the time when customers have the greatest needs, it's typically not available."

Wind power has been championed for decades because it is a free, renewable resource that doesn't pollute the air or water. But some wind farms don't produce electricity efficiently enough to compete with oil, coal and natural gas. Even some environmentalists say the turbine blades kill too many birds.

Xcel has contracted to buy 162 megawatts of electricity from the nation's fifth-largest wind farm south of Lamar, Colo. The Colorado Green Wind Project covers 11,840 acres and is jointly owned by PPM Energy of Portland, Ore., and

Shell WindEnergy Inc. of Amsterdam, Netherlands.

The power generated by Colorado Green from 108 wind turbines is enough to serve the energy needs of about 50,000 homes and businesses.

Speaking at the annual National Western Mining Conference, Brunetti said there is only so much wind can do to help meet the growing demand for power in the West.

He said for every 10 megawatts of capacity for wind power, the utility effectively gets one megawatt of power comparable to coal-fired generation because of wind's intermittent nature.

Once a coal-fired plant is turned on, it essentially generates electricity around the clock for the life of the plant.

Another problem with wind power, Brunetti said, is that it's often not where the people are.

"Where there's wind, there's no load," he said.

NATIONAL



Environmentalists call Bush budget an illusion

BY MATTHEW DALY

Associated Press Writer

WASHINGTON — With the November election looming, the Bush administration is touting plans to boost spending on environmental programs crucial to the West.

From preventing wildfires in national forests to restoring salmon in the Columbia and Snake rivers, the president's budget proposal includes a host of new spending for the region.

The \$2.4 trillion spending plan for the budget year that begins Oct. 1 also would boost spending for land and water conservation programs and maintenance and construction in national parks.

It's all part of an effort to showcase the president's commitment to the environment, the White House says, noting that overall spending on the environment and natural resources would jump to a record \$46.9 billion — 3 percent higher than the amount Bush proposed last year.

But environmentalists and some Democrats say the administration's budget numbers don't add up.

They accuse the president of trying to make up for a weak record on the environment by placing a "green sheen" on a budget they say would actually cut money for most environmental programs.

Most of the increases — including a much-touted plan to spend \$760 million to fully fund the new Healthy Forests

"The president is not suddenly going to become an environmentalist after all these years of rolling back protections for the environment."

— REP. JAY INSLEE
D-Wash.

Restoration Act — amount to little more than accounting tricks aimed at helping Bush win re-election, critics say.

"A leopard doesn't change its spots," said Rep. Jay Inslee, D-Wash., a longtime Bush critic. "The president is not suddenly going to become an environmentalist after all these years of rolling back protections for the environment."

Jay Ward, conservation director for the Oregon Natural Resources Council, called the shift in emphasis an election-year conversion, saying the administration would pay for forest thinning by diverting money from other accounts.

Administration officials dispute that. Mark Rey, the agriculture undersecretary who oversees forest issues, said the proposed budget includes at least \$80 million in new spending for forest-thinning and other activities.

The money would be used to treat up to 4 million acres at risk of fire — an increase of about 300,000 acres over current efforts and quadruple the amount treated in 2000, when 8 million acres of forest land burned. Most of the thinning

projects — which include prescribed burns and removal of underbrush that fuels wildfires — would be focused near homes and communities.

Chad Kolton, a spokesman for the White House budget office, calls the healthy forest law one of Bush's top priorities.

"This is a bill that the president proposed and worked with the Congress to ultimately pass, and so he's committing resources to a program he has championed," Kolton said.

But environmentalists called the \$760 million figure misleading. They said it applies to a range of activities that go beyond projects to remove small trees and underbrush.

The budget for so-called hazardous fuels reduction is actually \$475 million, environmentalists say — \$33 million more than this year's figure but far short of the \$760 million authorized by Congress.

At the same time, the budget increases timber industry subsidies and cuts grants to state and private forestry programs by 42 percent, to \$77 million, they said.

The cut for state and private forestry

shows the administration's true priorities, said Tiernan Sittenfeld, a spokeswoman for the U.S. Public Interest Research Group, an advocacy organization. "That's the line item that really does protect local communities and homes," she said.

Environmentalists also questioned the administration's promise to increase spending for Pacific Coast salmon recovery by 10 percent — to \$100 million — saying that is just a fraction of the overall budget for salmon recovery in the Northwest.

The administration's \$607 million proposal to recover endangered salmon in the Columbia and Snake River Basin is 8 percent less than the White House requested last year and 4 percent less than enacted by Congress, said Pat Ford, executive director of the Save Our Wild Salmon Coalition.

At \$900 million, the administration says its budget request would fully fund land and water conservation programs.

But environmentalists say the true figure is closer to \$314 million. The administration's figure includes more than a dozen other, ongoing programs as part of the Land and Water Conservation Fund, a "smoke and mirrors" trick that masks its true intentions, said Bonnie Galvin, director of budget and appropriations programs for The Wilderness Society.

"National treasures from the Everglades to our neighborhood parks will suffer from the resulting net loss in funds for expanding ... parks, refuges and forests," she said.

DID YOU KNOW?: Brooklyn is the Dutch name for broken valley.

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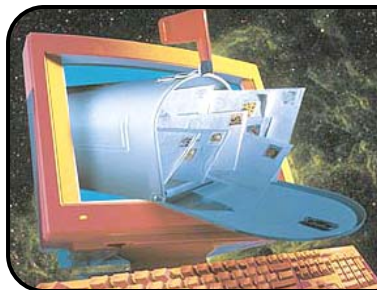


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NATIONAL

Will Janet Jackson change broadcast standards?

BY DAVID BAUDER

AP Television Writer

NEW YORK — The one-second flash of Janet Jackson's breast at the Super Bowl could end up putting the brakes on years of plunging standards in the down-and-dirty entertainment industry.

"This particular event might be, for the moment, the straw that broke the camel's back on the patience of the audience," said talk show host Carson Daly, a veteran presence on MTV, which produced the offending halftime show. "Tolerance of this sort of sexual imagery may have reached its peak."

Unlike other milestones of indecency — rock star Bono using the f-word on the 2003 Golden Globes, or Madonna and Britney Spears tongue-kissing on MTV — Jackson chose to reveal herself before the largest TV audience of the year.

And she did it precisely when federal authorities are mulling a crackdown on broadcast indecency.

The Jackson case could have a "galvanizing effect" on the move to toughen standards, said FCC Commissioner Michael Copps, who has complained his commission has been toothless in responding to complaints.

At the very least, he said, it punctures the argument of people who say that those who are bothered by things on TV just shouldn't watch.

"How do you turn off the Super Bowl?" Copps asked.

"There is going to be a national conversation on this," said Brent Bozell, president of the Parents Television Council, which has long complained about sex and violence on the tube. "I think what this has done is sensitized the public."

The fallout continued Thursday:

■ CBS, already facing an FCC probe for the halftime show, said it would broadcast Sunday's Grammy Awards with a five-minute delay to allow time to edit out any offensive images. Jackson had been scheduled to appear on the show, but her publicist, Steven Huvane, said Thursday she would not attend.

■ A banker from Knoxville, Tenn., filed a class action lawsuit against Jackson, dance partner Justin Timberlake, CBS, halftime show producers MTV and the networks' parent company, Viacom. Terri Carlin said the "sexually explicit conduct" by the performers caused millions of people to "suffer outrage, anger, embarrassment and serious injury."

■ NBC cut a scene from Thursday's "ER" that showed an elderly patient's breast, saying the current atmosphere made it too difficult for affiliates to air the segment.

■ ABC said it would add a delay for its Feb. 29 broadcast of the Academy Awards. TNT also said it was considering a delay for the entertainment portion of the NBA All-Star Game, featuring Beyonce, OutKast and Christina Aguilera.

■ The NFL cut a halftime production number by one of Timberlake's 'N Sync bandmates, JC Chasez, planned for Sunday's Pro Bowl in Honolulu, because Chasez's song contained the words "horny" and "naughty." He'll be replaced by hula dancers and local singers.

■ AOL spokesman Jim Whitney declined to comment on reports that the company would seek a refund of the \$7.5

million it paid to sponsor the halftime show. Shock and titillation in popular culture is nothing new.

From Elvis Presley's scandalously swiveling hips to Ozzy Osbourne's bleep-fest on his MTV show, performers have banked on outrageousness to excite and incite an audience.

These days, two words you never would have heard on TV or the radio 10 years ago — which rhyme with itch and pass — are everyday occurrences.

TV executives are also desperate to reach a young audience; it's no coincidence that CBS and the NFL turned to MTV, the network of "Punk'd" and "Jackass," to produce its halftime show, said social historian Neal Gabler.

"In a sense, they asked for this," Gabler said. "This is not something that happened out of the blue."

Entertainers may be unaware of a growing repulsion over content, Bozell said. The PTC's membership shot up after the FCC ruled that Bono's f-word didn't violate indecency rules because it was used as an adjective and not a noun or verb, he said.

In flashing her breast at the Super Bowl, Jackson picked a broadcast that was seen by nearly 90 million people, compared with the 11 million people who saw Madonna and Spears' liplock live.

Sunday's audience included millions of parents and childrens watching together — parents who aren't used to MTV, and who might already have been uncomfortable by the skimpy costumes and suggestive dancing leading up to Jackson's finale, Bozell said.

"Parents wouldn't know to turn their television off before that happened," first lady Laura Bush said in an interview with CNN on Thursday.

Some, however, are disgusted by the reaction, noting the show came amidst a spectacle feature bone-crunching violence, sexed-up cheerleaders and TV ads for pills to cure impotence.

"Give me a break," former NBA star Charles Barkley said. "There are a lot more trashier things on television than Janet Jackson."

One father who watched the game with his 12-year-old son said the Jackson dance passed uncomented upon, but he was caught short when the boy asked, "Dad, what's erectile dysfunction?"

Like those ads, the political context can't be ignored.

Congress held hearings last week on indecency standards and legislation was proposed sharply increasing fines on broadcasters. The FCC last week also proposed a record \$755,000 fine against Clear Channel Communications for a "Bubba the Love Sponge" program that included graphic discussions about sex and drugs.

The Washington rumblings explain some of the network skittishness, such as the new delay systems and the "ER" editing, said Martin Kaplan, a professor at the University of Southern California's Annenberg School for Communications.

"The excision of that ('ER') scene shows that people have not grown up enough to make a distinction between artistic expression and vulgarity for profit," Kaplan said. "That's what happens in the context of a witch hunt."

NATIONAL



GOP wary of Bush's slump but poised for election fight

BY DAVID ESPO
AP Special Correspondent

WASHINGTON — His support slumping in the polls, President Bush is campaigning more vigorously for re-election at the same time Republicans unleash their surrogates to take the shine off Democratic front-runner John Kerry.

"The polls are where we expected them to be," Republican Party chairman Ed Gillespie said Friday in an interview, one of several GOP officials to attribute Bush's slippage to months of attacks by Democrats. "Our political season hasn't really begun yet."

While other GOP officials privately acknowledged concern about Bush's political standing, several sources said Republicans intend to begin airing television commercials soon after Democrats settle on a nominee — whether that occurs as early as the Feb. 17 Wisconsin primary or later.

Eventually, Republicans hope to depict Kerry as a liberal whose rhetoric is often at odds with his record, according to several party strategists.

Terry Holt, a spokesman for the president's re-election committee, declined to discuss plans for advertising. At the same time, he said, "There won't be such a free ride" for the president's Democratic challenger in the fall campaign.

For his part, Bush has taken to shadowing Democrats, and officials say he'll soon embark on a heavier round of travel.

He flew to New Hampshire two days after the state's presidential primary, hoping to erase any damage inflicted by

"The polls are where we expected them to be."

— ED GILLESPIE
Republican Party chairman

weeks of Democratic campaigning. A few days after the South Carolina primary, he flew to Charleston in an appearance designed to regain the political spotlight in that state as well.

On Sunday, Bush is booked for an hour-long interview on NBC's "Meet the Press," the first for a chief executive who has set a modern record for fewest full-scale news conferences. Next week, he also goes to Florida for the Daytona 500 — a high-profile event in a sport that has expanded its appeal in recent years beyond Southern white conservatives to a more diverse audience.

First Lady Laura Bush is also raising her profile, and told CNN in an interview this week that the couple's 22-year-old daughters, Jenna and Barbara, are contemplating a role in what may be their father's last campaign.

The increased activity comes at a time when a spate of polls show the president's support is slipping, and some surveys put Kerry in the lead.

The decline is particularly noticeable in The Associated Press poll conducted by Ipsos-Public Affairs earlier this week. Bush's approval rating stood at 47 percent in the survey, with 50 percent of those polled saying they disapprove of his performance in office.

A month earlier, Bush's approval stood at

56 percent, with disapproval at 42 percent.

In the poll completed this week, 37 percent of those surveyed said they would definitely vote to re-elect Bush, while 43 percent said they would definitely vote for someone else. Another 18 percent said they would consider voting for someone else.

Bush's campaign aides attribute the decline to months of ceaseless Democratic criticism of the president, largely left without a counter.

"For several weeks, John Kerry and the other candidates have had center stage and have issued a lot of angry attacks against the president," Holt said. "As the race narrows to a two-man contest we expect that it will be very tight, very competitive all the way down to the end."

"We've been prepared for that from the very beginning," he said, noting, for example, that the re-election committee began the year with \$99 million in the bank.

Several officials also concede that Bush has been buffeted by other factors, as well.

While economic growth has picked up dramatically in recent months, job creation has been slow. That is particularly true in the Midwest, where the AP-Ipsos poll shows Bush's approval is 39 percent, weaker than in any other regions.

While Bush's campaign conducts statewide polls rather than regional sur-

veys, several Republicans familiar with the findings said the president faces difficulties in states such as Michigan and Ohio.

While Bush got a modest gain in certain polls following Saddam Hussein's capture, that has worn off, and recent reports suggesting that no weapons of mass destruction may ever be found in Iraq have not been helpful, in the view of some Republicans.

As well, some conservatives in Congress have been openly critical of Bush's new budget, calling for additional steps to rein in large, recurring deficits. Others criticized Bush's new immigration proposal, calling it amnesty.

Still, Republicans say Kerry's record offers them ample areas to attack.

Ken Mehlman, Bush's campaign manager, indicated Republicans might target his proposal to roll back tax cuts for those making more than \$200,000 in income. "Higher taxes as a way to grow jobs was rejected in an election 20 years ago," he said, referring to Democrat Walter F. Mondale's proposal to raise taxes in the 1984 campaign.

Mehlman and other Republicans also indicated that they will attempt to depict Kerry as beholden to the special interests he routinely denounces in his campaign appearances.

Already, Gillespie has made speeches that question Kerry's record on defense and national security issues, at the same time he notes the Massachusetts senator's service in Vietnam. His "long record in the Senate is one of advocating policies that would weaken our national security," Gillespie said last month.



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NATIONAL

Vegas a final stop for hundreds of suicidal people

VEGAS, from page 1

ted suicide at Disney World.

"They pick Las Vegas and kill themselves," former Clark County Coroner Ron Flud said. "It's a fact."

But saying exactly why is not so straightforward.

Experts and family members have their thoughts — from the city's culture of anonymity to despair, in some cases, over gambling losses. But each case is different.

As one suicide note said, "Here there are no answers."

■ Orbe married Chiarella in Las Vegas three years ago and found the city luxurious.

"They always showered him with the attention he felt he deserved," she said.

The two had separated and planned to divorce. Chiarella said Orbe was also despondent over recent financial setbacks. But what he was thinking will always be unclear.

"Lawrence remained a mystery to those close to him," she said.

Four months after Orbe's suicide, Gloreah Hendricks, 30, jumped from the ninth floor of the Aladdin hotel-casino parking garage on July 19, 2003.

Her family thought Hendricks was on vacation in Las Vegas, which she considered beautiful, said her mother, Rosemary Pitts of Montgomery, Ala.

In her car, police found a note that said: "One stop and away I go."

Matthew Naylor didn't leave a note before killing himself on June 21, 2002, at the Plaza hotel-casino.

The 31-year-old lost hope, said his father, Lewis Naylor, an engineer in Baltimore: "He just had a lot of challenges in life and gave up. He couldn't see how it was all going to come together to make a life worth living."

David Strickland, a 29-year-old Hollywood actor, whose wrists were scarred from previous suicide attempts, toured strip clubs and partied before he put a bed sheet around his neck at the Oasis Motel on March 22, 1999.

Strickland was depressed he "had fallen off the wagon," his friend and fellow actor Andy Dick, told investigators. Strickland, who was in Alcoholics Anonymous, was worried his girlfriend

would leave him after his relapse.

But why Las Vegas?
"I've asked myself that 100 times," said Judi Kagiwada of Middleboro, Mass., whose 39-year-old husband, Terrence, hanged himself at a downtown casino on March 5, 2003.

Relatives suggest their dead loved ones might have been attracted to a place where you can get lost, and be found only when it's too late.

Experts say some might have been looking for one last sign not to pull the trigger or tie the noose: A jackpot, blackjack or smile. Anything.

"You're in a place that nobody cares. It's not famous for being warm and fuzzy. It's a place you can be anonymous and die," said David P. Phillips, a sociologist at the University of California at San Diego, who co-authored a 1997 study that found Las Vegas had the highest level of suicide in the nation for residents and visitors.

Still, he said, "I wouldn't bet big money on any particular explanation" behind the deaths.

Victims included a banker, musician, immigration officer, pharmacist, exotic dancer, taxi cab driver, disc jockey, car salesman and professional gambler. Most came from California, same as the tourists. Others hailed from Texas, Wisconsin, New York, Utah, Kansas, Maine and Oklahoma — 26 states and two foreign countries in all.

Almost all had medical, financial or domestic problems. In some cases, victims appeared to suffer from gambling addiction or killed themselves only after Las Vegas took their money.

Elton Beamish, 24, drove to Las Vegas from Ann Arbor, Mich., where he was a student at the University of Michigan. He checked into a motel Jan. 12, 2000. Four days later he was dead. His checkbook told the story.

Beamish lost his financial-aid money and became depressed. He bought a 12-gauge shotgun from Kmart, put it in his mouth and pulled the trigger.

■ Suicide destinations exist around the world, the most famous of which is the Golden Gate Bridge, where more than 1,000 people have jumped to their deaths since the bridge was constructed in 1937.

It averages about 20 suicides a year.

Other places resonate with the suicidal, such as Mount Mihara in Japan and the Empire State Building in New York.

Las Vegas is different. It has no association with death, even though in 2001 Nevada ranked third behind New Mexico and Montana in suicide rates, according to the American Association of Suicidology. For many years it was No. 1.

From 1991 to 2002, 4,994 people killed themselves in Nevada. Of those, about 11 percent, or 547, were from out of state. Most suicides take place in southern Nevada's populous Clark County, home to the Strip and its decadence and debauchery.

"Vegas is a canvas for American neurosis," UNLV history professor Hal Rothman said. "It's a place where we paint our hopes, dreams, fears and apprehensions. ... It's the city of excess. What could be more of an excess than killing yourself?"

"The average person who comes here still sees it as Sin City, where the rules of their lives have been suspended, where their actions have no consequences."

There are consequences to suicide, of course.

The body of William L. Mauldin III was discovered Aug. 2, 1999, in a swath of rocky dirt next to New York-New York hotel-casino's 10-story parking garage.

In the 32-year-old disc jockey's pocket was a note for his mother: "Tell her I'm sorry and I love her with all my heart. I have been depressed for almost a year now. Don't blame anyone but me."

Finding the body would have devastated family members, and that may partly explain why William chose Las Vegas, brother Rob Mauldin said. "He was probably trying to protect love ones from the horror."

Nothing protects families from the long-term hurt that follows the death notification, and yet county Coroner Michael Murphy said the news doesn't always come as a shock.

"Some even expect the call," he said.

■ More than 90 people, both tourists and locals, have committed suicide inside a casino or on hotel properties in Clark County since 1998. Twenty have jumped from casinos and parking garages, includ-

ing three from the Stratosphere hotel-casino, the tallest building west of the Mississippi.

Casino companies could do more, but they "don't want to be connected to us," says Dorothy Bryant, director of the Suicide Prevention Center in Las Vegas. Hotels could place the center's hot line number in rooms or other places for guests, she says.

Alan Feldman, MGM Mirage senior vice president for public affairs, said saving people who are suicidal once they arrive in Las Vegas probably is impossible.

"If a person's closest friends and family ... can't prevent it," Feldman said, "How is the bellman at the hotel all of a sudden going to have this miraculous cure? I don't know if there is very much we can do."

■ It was not a hot line but coincidence that saved one 51-year-old Texas man's life. Seven and a half years ago, he bought a one-way ticket to Las Vegas to kill himself.

"I came here knowing I was going to do it," he said at his Las Vegas apartment, speaking on condition that he not be identified. "I felt very comfortable with it. All of sudden nothing bothered me."

He checked into the Westward Ho hotel-casino on the Strip and wandered the city drinking and gambling for about two weeks before finally deciding to die July 19, 1996.

He cut some nylon rope from the room's curtains, looped it around a pipe and tied a noose. A maid caught him testing the rope. Police arrived and there was a standoff. He told officers he had a bomb so they wouldn't rush him.

Thinking of his mother, he later changed his mind and surrendered.

The Vietnam veteran, who suffers from post traumatic stress disorder, according to his doctor, was institutionalized, given treatment and eventually released.

Suicide is never far away — he's tried it twice since.

Las Vegas will be his final stop, though it's hard for him to say precisely why.

"I always felt something lured me here. This was my destiny. I can't get away from it. I can't get out from under it. It's going to end here. I can tell you that."



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Bush picks seven members for study commission on Iraq

BY KEN GUGGENHEIM

Associated Press Writer

WASHINGTON — President Bush named seven people Friday to sit on an independent study commission to look into intelligence failures on Iraqi weapons, choosing former Democratic Sen. Charles S. Robb and retired judge Laurence Silberman, a Republican, to head the panel.

"We must stay ahead of constantly changing intelligence challenges," Bush said. "The stakes for our country cannot be higher."

Robb was a former U.S. senator and governor of Virginia and son-in-law of the late President Johnson. He is married to Lynda Bird Johnson and has been practicing law since leaving the Senate. Silberman is a conservative who served as deputy attorney general in the Nixon and Ford administrations. He was named to the appeals court by President Reagan in 1985.

Bush directed federal agencies to cooperate with the commission, which will report to the nation by March 2005. Bush said he has yet to select the remaining two members of the nine-member panel.

Bush also picked Sen. John McCain,

R-Ariz., to be a member of the commission.

Bush had come under increasing pressure from Democrats in recent days in the wake of the admission by chief weapons inspector David Kay that he could not substantiate that Saddam Hussein had the kind of weapons arsenal the administration maintained was in existence, and which it used to justify the invasion of Iraq.

Bush also named Lloyd Cutler, former White House counsel to Presidents Carter and Clinton; former federal judge Patricia M. Wald; Yale University president Richard C. Levin, and Adm. William O. Studeman, former deputy director of the CIA.

Wald, a respected former chief judge for the U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia, served as a judge on the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia.

In a visit to the United Nations, where he relied on Tenet's intelligence in a futile attempt for Security Council backing for the war, Powell said Friday: "I don't think any apologies are necessary."

"It represented the best judgment we had" and "there is no evidence to suggest we were wrong," he said. And yet, Powell acknowledged "we could not be sure of

the nature of the stockpile."

U.N. Secretary General Kofi Annan said, "It is ironic that Secretary of State Colin Powell is in the building. There has been some damage. Damage that probably will take some time to heal. People are going to be very suspicious when we try to use intelligence to justify certain actions."

Annan also said that intelligence is necessary for government work and said that "we need to be careful not to throw everything out of the window."

Bush had initially opposed a commission, but agreed to do so as calls grew from Republican lawmakers as well as Democrats. But the White House said the commission would look beyond problems in Iraq and examine the handling of intelligence on terrorists and U.S. adversaries.

Democrats said any commission appointed solely by Bush could not be considered independent and objective. They have called for an examination not only of the work of intelligence agencies, but whether the White House pressured analysts and manipulated data to boost the case for war.

Kay, the former CIA adviser for the Iraqi weapons search, has said he does not believe analysts were pressured. But he

said Thursday that the commission should look into whether political leaders manipulated intelligence data.

"I think that is an important question that needs to be understood," he said Thursday at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

CIA Director George Tenet offered a forceful defense of prewar intelligence in a speech at Georgetown University Thursday. He said the intelligence was mostly on target and that the analyses were reasonable given the information available to the United States and other nations.

He made clear that analysts differed on important aspects of Saddam Hussein's chemical, biological and nuclear programs. Tenet said analysts had never claimed Iraq posed an imminent threat, but provided an objective picture of Saddam's efforts to build and conceal weapons programs. He also said that no one told analysts "what to say or how to say it."

On Friday morning, Bush met with Charles Duelfer, who is taking over the weapons search in Iraq, and told him that he "wants him to find the truth ... it is important that we know all the facts," McClellan said.



WORLD BRIEFLY

U.S. forces search for militants

By The Associated Press

BAGHDAD, Iraq — American forces are tracking a shadowy militant group that claimed responsibility for suicide bombings earlier this week while U.S. and Iraqi forces say they've captured more than 100 suspected guerrillas in raids across the country.

Separately, of well-wishers gathered Friday near the house of Iraq's most powerful Shiite cleric, Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Husseini al-Sistani, in the holy city of Najaf to check reports of an attempt on his life. They were assured that their spiritual leader is safe and accounts of a failed assassination were a lie.

U.S. Army Brig. Gen. Mark Kimmitt said the military is following up on claims by a group calling itself the Ansar al-Sunna Army that it carried out the bombings on Sunday that killed at least 109 people at Kurdish political offices in the northern city of Irbil.

The group said it targeted the "dens of the devils" because of the Kurds' ties to the United States. Kimmitt said the U.S. military believes Ansar al-Sunna is a splinter group of Ansar al-Islam, which is believed to be linked to the al-Qaida terrorist network.

Exiled Taylor may suffer frozen assets

By The Associated Press

UNITED NATIONS — The United States wants to freeze the assets of exiled Liberian President Charles Taylor, who has been indicted by the United Nations for war crimes, a U.N. diplomat said Friday.

Secretary of State Colin Powell was expected to appeal for new sanctions against Taylor, his family and associates later Friday in a speech to a donors conference organized to solicit nearly \$500 million to rebuild Liberia after a 14-year civil war.

Taylor fled into exile in Nigeria on Aug. 11 as rebels laid siege to the Liberian capital, Monrovia. His departure cleared the way for a power-sharing deal between his government and the rebels after a war that claimed more than 150,000 lives.

Taylor has been indicted by a U.N.-backed war-crimes court in Sierra Leone for supporting that country's vicious rebel movement, the Revolutionary United Front. Powell wants the assets of the former Liberian leader and his close associates frozen, the U.N. diplomat said, speaking on condition of anonymity.

Taylor's host in exile, Nigerian President Olusegun Obasanjo, has said Nigeria would persuade the former Liberian leader to return home to face trial if Liberians set up a war-crimes court. But Liberia's interim government leader, Gyude Bryant — who also was to address Friday's donors conference — has said Taylor should go to Sierra Leone for trial.

Three women dead, police clueless

By The Associated Press

SHELBY, N.C. — Police Chief Charlie VanHoy isn't quite sure what he has on his hands, but he's worried.

From August to November last year, three elderly women were found dead in their beds, dressed in their nightclothes, with no sign of forced entry into their homes. Phone lines were severed, yet medical examiners found no foul play.

Further confusing matters, jewelry, pocket books — even loaded guns — were not taken.

"This is just baffling and very frustrating," VanHoy said Thursday.

Lottie Mae Ledford, 85, was found dead in August. The body of Margaret Tessner, 79, was discovered about a month later. And Lillian Mullinix, 87, was found dead in November.

Dollar value still down

By The Associated Press

BOCA RATON, Fla. — The Bush administration, hoping to reverse the loss of 2.8 million U.S. manufacturing jobs since mid-2000, is resisting pressure from its European allies to step in and halt a steep slide in the value of the U.S. dollar.

While the greenback's drop to record lows against the euro, the common currency of 12 European countries, is causing economic heartburn among European executives faced with increased competition from now cheaper-priced American goods, it is bringing hope of an export revival to beleaguered American manufacturers.

The sagging dollar and America's soaring trade and budget deficits were expected to be top discussion topics as U.S. Treasury Secretary John Snow and Federal Reserve Chairman Alan Greenspan serve as hosts for a two-day meeting of America's major economic allies at an exclusive Florida resort.

The top finance officials of the United States, Japan,

Germany, France, Britain, Italy and Canada — the so-called Group of Seven countries who meet four times a year to assess the global economy — were also scheduled to hear firsthand reports from their counterparts in Iraq and Afghanistan on efforts to revive those two war-torn economies.

Former rival Gephardt may back Kerry

By The Associated Press

UNDATED — Already flush with endorsements from establishment Democrats, presidential front-runner John Kerry is poised to secure the backing of former rival Dick Gephardt and his once-loyal labor unions, further clearing the Massachusetts senator's path toward the nomination.

His opponents, meanwhile, are seeking to slow his rapid rise and establish themselves as his alternative. A fallen Howard Dean is camping out in Wisconsin with hopes of resurrecting his struggling campaign. And, sons of the South, John Edwards and Wesley Clark, are stumping in that region.

The upcoming campaign calendar likely will heap even more momentum and more delegates onto Kerry as well. His rivals haven't made much of an effort in Michigan, Washington or Maine, where contests this weekend offer 228 delegates combined.

Edwards, who won South Carolina's primary, and Clark, who found victory in Oklahoma, both looked to Tuesday's primaries in Tennessee and Virginia, with 151 delegates, to keep Kerry winless in the South and keep their own candidacies alive.

Co-eds learn homeland security

By The Associated Press

PHILADELPHIA — With classes like "Terrorism Risk Assessment" and "Radioactive Materials" already in course catalogs, community colleges are trying to cement their position as the country's leader in homeland security education.

About 20 community college presidents from around the nation will gather in Washington, D.C., this weekend to develop a long-term strategy and national standards.

"Five years ago if you wanted to take a course on terrorism you basically had to go to the military," said Dan Snyder, president of Lehigh Carbon Community College in Schnecksville, 60 miles north of Philadelphia. "Today I think you're seeing a lot more training, and the facilities that are necessary to provide that high-level training."

Homeland security classes are now offered nationwide. Surging interest after Sept. 11, 2001, has fueled new degree programs and the building of homeland security training centers.

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 - 2 Los —
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 - 17 Painter
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 - 23 Prepares leftovers
 - 25 Western howler
 - 26 Reps
 - 27 Dominion
 - 28 Honked
 - 29 Disgusted
 - 31 Calls for
 - 33 Craggy hills
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 - 38 Umbrella part



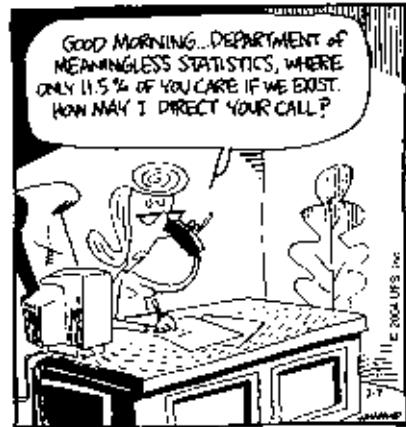
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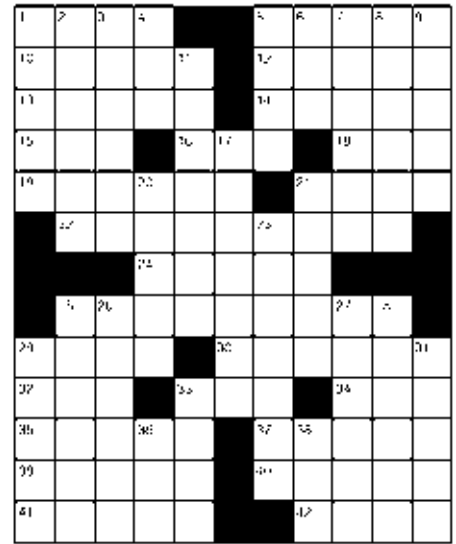


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PEOPLE IN THE NEWS

Drew Barrymore gets pinned by United Nations

By The Associated Press

■ **UNITED NATIONS** — Drew Barrymore got pinned for the first time — but not by a boyfriend.

The actress received a Dove of Peace pin Thursday as a new member of "Artists for the U.N.," an initiative of Global Vision for Peace founded at the start of the Iraq war last year by Hollywood writer HeathCliff Rothman and designer Xorin Balbes.

"We believe that bringing together artists in a collective voice to support the U.N., and to support the missions of the U.N. globally, is very, very powerful," Rothman said.

At last year's Academy Awards, nearly three dozen film artists wore the Dove of Peace pin — inspired by Pablo Picasso and created by Henry Dunay — including Meryl Streep, Adrian Brody, Martin Scorsese, Daniel Day-Lewis and Susan Sarandon.

Gillian Sorensen, a former U.N. assistant secretary-general who's now senior adviser to the United Nations Foundation, said 30 or 40 artists at this year's Oscars are expected to wear the pin, not only as a symbol of the organization but as part of its effort "to salute and support the United Nations."

When Barrymore received her Dove of Peace, she gushed, "This is the first time I've ever been pinned — I'm serious."

The 28-year-old "Charlie's Angels" star added, "We wake up every morning thinking, like, what more can we do in this world to make it a better, happier, more peaceful and beautiful place?"

"I always say — this is so silly — but I wish there were, like, little boxes at every corner that you could list the thing that speaks to you, like: I love the environ-

ment, I want to protect it! I care about animals! I care about the AIDS epidemic!" she said.

■ **NEW YORK** — Kiley Dean will sing the national anthem at the Pro Bowl, replacing JC Chasez of 'N Sync, who pulled out in a dispute with the NFL.

The 21-year-old R&B singer will perform before the annual all-star game Sunday in Honolulu, Pro Bowl spokesman Brian McCarthy said.

The NFL had asked Chasez to sing "The Star-Spangled Banner" after removing him from the halftime show out of concern that some of his lyrics may be too suggestive.

The league said it was being extra cautious following the Super Bowl halftime show in which Chasez's bandmate, Justin Timberlake, ripped off a piece of Janet Jackson's top and exposed her right breast.

Chasez responded angrily on Thursday: "That's not the America I love. Nor is this the NFL I love. I'll sing the national anthem anytime, anywhere, but not for this NFL."

Dean, a former backup singer for Britney Spears, went to the same high school as another 'N Sync member, Joey Fatone. Hip-hop producer Timbaland's label is releasing her debut album, which will feature the single "Make Me a Song."

■ **LOS ANGELES** — Jamie Foxx will return for the second consecutive year as host of the ESPY Awards, given to top athletes.

"I'm excited. We're going to make lightning strike twice," he said. "I had a great time last year and we're gonna take it up a notch."

This year's show will be taped July 14 at the Kodak Theatre in Hollywood. It's scheduled to air July 18 on ESPN.

The 36-year-old comedian, who co-starred in the Oliver Stone football film "Any Given Sunday," is an avid sports fan. During last year's ESPYs, he saluted tennis player Serena Williams with a musical tribute titled "Can I Be Your Tennis Ball?"

Foxx appears in the upcoming movies "Redemption," airing April 11 on the FX cable channel; "Collateral" with Tom Cruise; and "Breakin' All the Rules" with Gabrielle Union.

■ **NEW YORK** — Tyra Banks was accustomed to people staring at her long before she became a supermodel.

The 30-year-old said people used to tease her about her forehead, saying it was so big it could be a "five-head."

"I used to try to wear bangs and cover it up," she told reporters in Los Angeles recently, according to AP Radio. "When I walked into a modeling agency, that was the first thing they said was special about me."

Banks hosts and produces the second season of "America's Next Top Model" on UPN, a reality show in which 12 women compete for a deal with IMG Models.

She said what makes a person beautiful is "something that is not so typical."

Former model Janice Dickinson, who said she was the first to coin the term "supermodel," is among the judges. She said one unique thing distinguishes a "supermodel" from a "model."

"It could be the attitude, it could be the nose, it was Lauren Hutton's gap. It's just that one thing that differentiates a model in making her a super model," Dickinson said.

The other judges are Eric Nicholson, an editor at Jane magazine, and fashion photographer Nigel Barker. Makeup artist Jay Manuel is a guest judge.

DID YOU KNOW?: Bob Dylan's real name is Robert Zimmerman.

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