



Weekly Special Report



Produced by the Public Affairs Section

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Presidential Message on New Year's Day, 2008

December 31, 2007

New Year's Day, 2008

As we enter this New Year, we reflect on the past and look forward to a promising year ahead.

A future of hope and opportunity begins with a robust economy. Thanks to America's workers and entrepreneurs, our economy grew at a vigorous rate last year. Keeping



President George W. Bush

taxes low and exercising fiscal restraint helped ensure that the number of jobs increased and the deficit once again fell ahead of schedule. The underpinnings of our economy have proven strong, competitive, and resilient enough to overcome the challenges we face. In the coming year, we will continue to encourage growth in the economy so Americans

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Mosque Rehabilitated Through U.S. Ambassador's Cultural Fund Dedicated on Eid

As part of the Oromia Regional Government Ethiopian Millennium Festival at Dirre Sheikh Husein Shrine in connection with Eid Al Adha (Arafa) on December 19, the Oromia Culture and Tourism Bureau dedicated the rehabilitation of the shrine's mosque which was funded through the U.S. Ambassador's Fund for Cultural Preservation.



U.S. Embassy Cultural Affairs Officer speaks at the Dirre Sheikh Husein Shrine

The dedication of the
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have more money to invest in their businesses, spend on their families, and put aside for the future.

In addition to our efforts here at home, the United States continued its work to spread freedom and peace around the world. America is determined to defeat terrorists and extremists, and we will remain on the offensive against the enemies of freedom. In 2008, we will con-

tinue to stand beside our partners in the international community to lay a foundation of peace for our children and grandchildren.

America is grateful for the service and sacrifice of our Nation's troops and their families. During this hopeful time of year, we remain mindful of the courage and resolve of the fine men and women who protect our country and defend freedom's cause.

As we welcome this New Year, we move forward with trust in the power of the American spirit, confidence in our purpose, and faith in a loving God who created us to be free.

Laura and I send our best wishes for a happy New Year. May God bless you, may God bless our troops and their families, and may God bless America.

GEORGE W. BUSH

Embassy Information Resource Center Presents U.S. Islamic Studies Resources

On December 28, the U.S. Embassy's Information Resource Center (IRC) invited guests to a briefing and a power point presentation on Islamic Academic Resources in the United States. The presentation explained that Islamic Studies in the United States can be found in a variety of institutions, including universities, Muslim and non-Muslim seminaries, mosques, and community workshops. It included information about American Islamic Studies Academic Organizations, relevant Internet portals, databases and websites. The IRC staff gave tips on finding information about Islamic law, history, philosophy, education and Muslim Life in America, and also discussed Internet search basics. For more information on this topic, please contact the U.S. Embassy's Information Resource Center at (011) 517-4322/4029. ♦



Participants attending the Islamic Studies Resources presentation

American Architect and Artist Exchange Ideas with Ethiopian Students and Counterparts

On December 27-28, Michael Tavel, co-founder and CEO of Michael Tavel Architects, Architecture and Urban Design in Denver, Colorado, talked about American Urban Planning at Addis Ababa University (AAU) and Ethiopia's Federal Urban Planning Institute. At the two events Mr. Tavel spoke about "Trends in American Urban Planning" and exchanged ideas with students, architects, and civil engineers.

In a separate event on December 27, American ceramic artist, Tsehai Johnson, discussed the development of her work with students and faculty members of the School of Fine Arts and Design of Addis

Ababa University. In her talk, entitled "Strangely Familiar: The Work of Tsehai Johnson" she discussed how she adapted the objects of her environment to create modified objects which challenge the viewer to take see things from new perspectives. She showed her series of beautifully crafted condom dispensers and which forced viewers to confront the reality of HIV/AIDS by moving discussion of the issue into the public sphere.

Tsehai Johnson has exhibited widely. Her recent exhibitions include solo and group shows at Plus Gallery in Miami, Florida; Foothills Art Center, Golden, Colorado; Casa de la Cultura, Quito, Ecuador; Urban Institute of Contemporary Art, Grand Rapids, Michigan; and Santa Fe Clay, Santa Fe, New Mexico. She has taught ceramics at the University of Colorado, Boulder, Colorado and was a visiting assistant professor of art at Metro University, Denver, Colorado. ♦



Michael Tavel giving lecture at the Addis Ababa University

Mosque Rehabilitated Through U.S. Ambassador's Cultural Fund . . .

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rehabilitation project was part of the Millennium program following Eid prayers. It included speeches by Vice President of the Islamic Affairs Supreme Council, Sheikh Elias Redman; the President of Oromia Region, Mr. Abadullah Gameda; State Minister of Culture, Mr. Mahamuda El Gaas; Minister of Transport, Mr. Junaid Satto, Minister of Education; and many other dignitar-

ies. The U.S. Embassy's Cultural Affairs Officer also spoke at the event. She expressed pleasure with the rehabilitation work at the shrine and urged Ethiopians to let the world know about Sheikh Husein and the poetry, remembrances and praises associated with him. ♦

How Raucous Is the Caucus?

By Lea Terhune
USINFO Staff Writer

Washington -- When British writer Lewis Carroll wrote *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* in 1885, he satirized a homegrown American political process in "The Caucus-Race." Organized by the Dodo, it had no logical rules. At a signal, a motley group of animals ran in different directions. When the Dodo declared the race finished, contestants asked "But who has won?" After long thought, the Dodo answered, "Everybody has won, and all must have prizes."

To an outsider, the caucus may seem as nonsensical as Carroll's Caucus-Race: "the best way to explain it is to do it," the Dodo tells Alice. In fact, caucuses are all about doing: giving up personal time, talking, deciding and realigning loyalties when a favored candidate fails to win enough support to be "viable."

Essentially a neighborhood meeting, the name "caucus" derives from an American Indian word for a conference of tribal leaders. In U.S. electoral politics, the tribes are political parties; the leaders are party activists and concerned citizens. Iowa is the first of more than a dozen states that will hold caucuses to select the candidate their states will support at the 2008 Democratic and Republican Party national conventions. Most states use the more straightforward primary election: citizens vote, and the candidate with the most votes wins.

The caucus is a potentially confus-

ing ritual that vies with the Electoral College as the quirkiest American political practice. Both date back to the nation's early days, before primaries emerged in the early 20th

was not always this way. Originally, only party operatives decided who to nominate, according to Cary Covington, another Iowa University elections expert. "When the parties



Iowans debate merits of a candidate at a typical small-town caucus meeting, Slater, Iowa, 2004. (© AP Images)

century. Caucus procedures differ from state to state and party to party.

The common element of caucuses is talk. Supporters gather to back their candidate and convince others to do the same. In Iowa, "Democrats caucus publicly, while Republicans have a secret ballot -- and Democrats must be willing to state publicly their preference, unusual in American politics," says political science professor and director of Iowa University's Hawkeye Poll David Redlawsk. The poll tracks presidential candidates' progress ahead of the caucuses.

Today, a working mother can caucus beside a party activist, but it

became established political actors in the 1820s and '30s, they [saw] themselves as acting on behalf of the people rather than having the people do the acting themselves," he says; parties viewed nominations as "a private organizational affair and the voters really don't have any business being involved until the general election."

That all changed in 1972 when the Democratic Party required state delegations to be demographically representative of voters. "The representation of previously excluded groups made it a more open and public process," Covington says. The Republican Party soon followed suit, and state caucuses were de-

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Major Parties Work To Recruit Winning Candidates for Congress

By **Ralph Dannheisser**
USINFO Special Correspondent

Washington -- Not everyone, it seems, is eager to be a congressman.

Campaign committees for both major political parties spend substantial time and effort recruiting the best potential candidates for key election districts around the country.

Their drive to recruit winning candidates comes against the background of a 2006 congressional election in which Democrats took over 30 previously Republican seats in the 435-

member House of Representatives, moving into majority status after 12 years of Republican control.

The majority party sets the House agenda, holds the chairmanships of the legislative committees and is allotted more members on those committees.

While candidate selection is done largely at the local level, the national parties provide input through the National Republican Congressional Committee (NRCC) and the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee (DCCC).

Spokesmen for both those groups use surprisingly similar language in

describing what they look for in a candidate.

"We look first and foremost for someone who is a good fit for the district and who enjoys the support of local activists and rank and file Republicans in the district," says Ken Spain, press secretary for the NRCC.

Doug Thornell, the DCCC press secretary, concurs. "The important thing is to find candidates who fit the district," Thornell says.

Noting that the nature of the voters and the local problems vary widely in different areas, Thornell says the proper "fit" implies "sharing the views, values and priorities in terms of the particular district."

While neither side would acknowledge that it is writing off any districts as unwinnable, both, in fact, focus their efforts on districts they believe offer a real chance of victory.

Spain puts it in terms of game strategy. "We look at the map like a chessboard and we look to maximize potential opportunities," he says.

It is not surprising that both sides are convinced that their efforts will pay off in success in 2008.

Outside observers generally see the battle as a more difficult one for the Republicans. Their newfound minority status, perhaps coupled with

low poll numbers for the party's leader, President Bush, have pushed a number of members into retirement -- including former Speaker of the House of Representatives Dennis Hastert.



Democrats recruited Texas state legislator Rick Noriega to run against Republican Senator John Cornyn. (© AP Images)

Consequently, Republicans seek to retain 19 open seats -- where no incumbent is running -- with new candidates; the Democrats seek only five.

Spain exudes optimism despite the disparity.

"I think we've exceeded expectations when it comes to candidate recruitment," he says. "Coming off the election cycle the Democrats recently experienced, one would think that they would have been able to out-recruit us in terms of quality candidates. But we've been very fortunate in the number of excellent candidates who have stepped forward."

Reeling off congressional districts like squares on his metaphorical chessboard -- "Texas 22, Florida

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Major Parties Work To Recruit Winning Candidates for Congress . . .

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16, Pennsylvania 10" -- Spain sees success ahead, based on what he calls "pent-up ambition" on the part of prospective candidates.

"There are strong Republican infrastructures in those districts, with Republicans representing the area in state legislatures and in county and municipal offices. So now, many of them see an opportunity and are willing to step forward and jump into the race," he says. "They believe they can win; so do we."

Those challengers are offered demographic breakdowns of the district "providing a road map to victory" as well as a "candidate school" involving advice and assistance in fundraising, polling and media consultants, according to Spain.

"Pent-up desire and a strong recruiting effort have made for an excellent combination when it comes to finding candidates," Spain says. "Democrats are not going to get two 2006s in a row," he declares.

Thornell stresses the home area-

based nature of the DCCC's candidate recruitment campaign.

More than a dozen sitting congressional representatives from around the country meet weekly to consider the overall effort, he says, with individual members providing guidance on their own areas.

"If we're looking at a race in the Midwest, for example, we'll work very closely with the delegation in the particular state, and then they work very closely with people on the ground. This isn't a [Washington]-driven thing, this is working with local elected officials, activists, to try to identify people who are interested in running for Congress," he says.

Some may be ambivalent because entering the race could require them to resign from existing positions as state legislators or to sacrifice family time and income. When strong candidates are identified, Thornell says, the recruitment role can rely heavily on "talking with them about the benefits of being in a Democratic majority, being able to pass legislation that really will make a difference in their district."

Thornell says the Democrats have more than 30 strong challengers running against Republican incumbents and another 11 vying for open seats.

And unlike Spain, he is confident the Democrats can build on their 2006 success.

"The conventional wisdom at the beginning of this cycle was that the Democrats were going to be on defense," he says, "but that's kind of flipped." Thanks to the party's ability to field strong candidates, coupled with "the unpopularity of George Bush," Thornell says, "we've been able to put a significant number of Republican seats in play."

For more information, see U.S. Elections (<http://usinfo.state.gov/politics/elections/>).

(USINFO is a product of the Bureau of International Information Programs, U.S. Department of State. Web site: <http://usinfo.state.gov>) ♦

Benjamin Franklin Viewed Invention as Form of Public Service

By Peter Sisler
USINFO Special Correspondent

Washington -- U.S. Founding Fathers George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, Alexander Hamilton and John Adams all made contributions of a practical kind to the nascent American society, but it was Benjamin Franklin who embodied the inventiveness and sheer creative energy that would mark the American character.

Franklin (1706-1790) was a self-made man who rose to international prominence in equal parts as inventor, scientist, revolutionary and statesman. The remarkable course of Franklin's life, from his humble upbringing as the 10th son of a Puritan soap-maker in Colonial New England to his place as the era's most celebrated scientist and diplomat, revealed quite a bit about the opportunity and promise for advancement the young American nation offered its enterprising sons (and, a bit later, also its daughters).

A one-time penniless runaway, Franklin strove throughout his life to improve society, including founding the first lending library, a university, the first postal service and a respected scholarly society. He became a devoted citizen of his adopted hometown of Philadelphia, which when he arrived in 1723 was a far larger city than either New York or Boston. Franklin considered his scientific experiments and inventions, including bifocal lenses and a smoke-free wood-burning stove, as a type of public service and he never patented or took money for

any of his inventions.

"An inventor is someone who sees the world for what it can be, not what it is now," says Saul Griffith, a young engineer and inventor who holds a 2007 MacArthur Fellowship for creative entrepreneurs, and Franklin's life proves that invention really is about change, dissatisfaction with the status quo and a drive to create a better way of doing things.



Seth Hendrix, 3, plays at the statue of Benjamin Franklin, in Smithfield, Virginia. (© AP Images)

It was in this spirit that Franklin and his younger colleagues, such as Jefferson, Adams and John Hancock, in the Continental Congress set about inventing a new nation to be led by a representative form of governance in the years preceding the Declaration of Independence from Britain in 1776. Franklin, whose only son was a royalist governor, initially sought a form of autonomous union with the British Empire, but soon he came to recognize that a new nation of free citizens had been born in the American Colonies and only through independence could its destiny be fulfilled.

In drawing up the founding documents, Franklin was inspired by his background in experimentation, invention and the rationality he found in the physical world, according to Walter Isaacson, author of *Benjamin Franklin: An American Life*. He was instrumental in designing the federal system of government whereby the states would share power with a central authority. But it was his inclusion of the line, "We hold these truths to be self-evident" into Jefferson's draft of the Declaration of Independence, which referred to the inalienable rights of man, that stamped the United States as a society based on rational examination of reality.

Franklin was a proud member of the "middling classes" and he viewed his inventions and publications as a method to develop and improve the merchant middle class through an embrace of technology and democratic institutions. Thriving on the free flow of information and an unencumbered flow of new ideas both in his own life and in the society around him, Franklin foreshadowed much of what America would become.

Isaacson believes Franklin, who famously flew a kite during a storm to prove the theory that lightning is electricity, would have embraced the technology-laden modern world and he would have made extensive use of the Internet to spread information. "He was a great inventor; he was very technologically advanced. He believed in figuring out business plans or how you could make some new technology work. So I suspect he would be sort of publishing his own Web site; he

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Benjamin Franklin Viewed Invention as Form of Public Service . . .

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would be enjoying the new technology. This is why we relate to him," Isaacson said in an interview with U.S. public television during a celebration of Franklin's 300th birthday in 2006.

Franklin's legacy continues today also because he had a knack for combining practicality with fun, which is said to be another "American" trait. He invented swim fins for his feet and hands because he wanted to move faster in the water. He planted the first willow trees in America from an imported

basket that had sprouted leaves. He is believed to be the inventor of the glass armonica, a sort of spinning glass organ. He even used his newly discovered method of conducting electricity in an attempt to cook a turkey, but instead gave himself a strong jolt. Remarkably, Franklin also first diagnosed the source of lead poisoning among glass and ceramic artisans, used electro-shock therapy to treat convulsions and correctly determined that dark-colored clothing conducts more heat than light-colored cloth.

Throughout the 19th century, as America expanded, it became a hot-

bed of innovation as the groundwork of the founders provided an environment for creative thought. A recent Internet survey found that 88 percent of the 262 "Great Inventions" (since 1800) listed by the Encyclopedia Britannica Almanac occurred in democratic societies, despite the fact that the majority of people lived in nondemocratic states during much of this time.

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How Raucous Is the Caucus? . . .

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mocratized.

It is one example of how American political institutions evolve to reflect the voice of the people, a process that was not built into the Constitution. The Founders were protective of the fledgling democracy. "Our nation's leaders had a mistrust of the average citizen," Covington says, "They were afraid they would be too prone to act on rash emotion rather than by rational calculation."

Democrats trump the Republicans in caucus complexity. Simply explained, the Democratic caucus employs proportional representation. Only candidates who clear the high threshold of 15 percent support are considered viable. Backers of losers "realign," a stage that Redlawsk, who has served as a Democratic caucus chair, calls "lively."

"A lot of discussion goes on, a lot of lobbying each other; nonviable groups can try to bring people in to become viable, other groups will go after nonviable people." Supporters physically assemble for the count in different corners of the room designated for their candidates.

Caucuses demand a significant time commitment. "Those who do participate in caucus are probably the most politically aware and knowledgeable voters anywhere in the country," Redlawsk says. Most Democratic caucuses use proportional representation; Republican caucuses tend to use the ballot.

The Iowa caucus began in 1846 but it did not become an election bellwether until the 1970s, after its date was moved up to make it "first in the nation." Jimmy Carter, the future 39th president, campaigned

hard there, using Iowa as a springboard to success. Despite current media and party publicity, the caucus is not a true indicator of voter preference. Caucus turnout is routinely low and participants are often the most motivated party members. "They aren't general elections for everybody. They are a process for the party to determine who's going to represent it," Redlawsk explains.

The Iowa caucus winnows the field, he says, "What it doesn't necessarily do is predict who's going to actually win in the end. It may weed out losers, but for those who continue from Iowa, the contest continues to be up in the air."

(USINFO is a product of the Bureau of International Information Programs, U.S. Department of State. Web site: <http://usinfo.state.gov>) ♦

American Life, Diversity Explained, Point by Data Point

By Elizabeth Kelleher
USINFO Staff Writer

Washington -- America is changing in big ways. It's getting older, and it's getting more racially and ethnically diverse.

The median age of the U.S. population is roughly 38 years old, up from 30 in 1980, and will continue to inch up as the large "baby boom generation" reaches retirement age.

The total population grew by roughly 6 percent from 2000 to 2006, to reach 300 million. But the non-Hispanic white population grew at a much slower rate (1.6 percent) during the same period while Hispanics grew by 26 percent, Asians by 24 percent and blacks by 7 percent.

These and other statistics were released December 20 by the U.S. Census Bureau in its annual Statistical Abstract of the United States, a compendium of data on American life that includes everything from how much Americans volunteer (27 percent of the population volunteers an hour per week) to how much they pay for a gallon of unleaded gasoline (\$2.59) to which U.S. cities are most popular with travelers from abroad (New York wins by far).

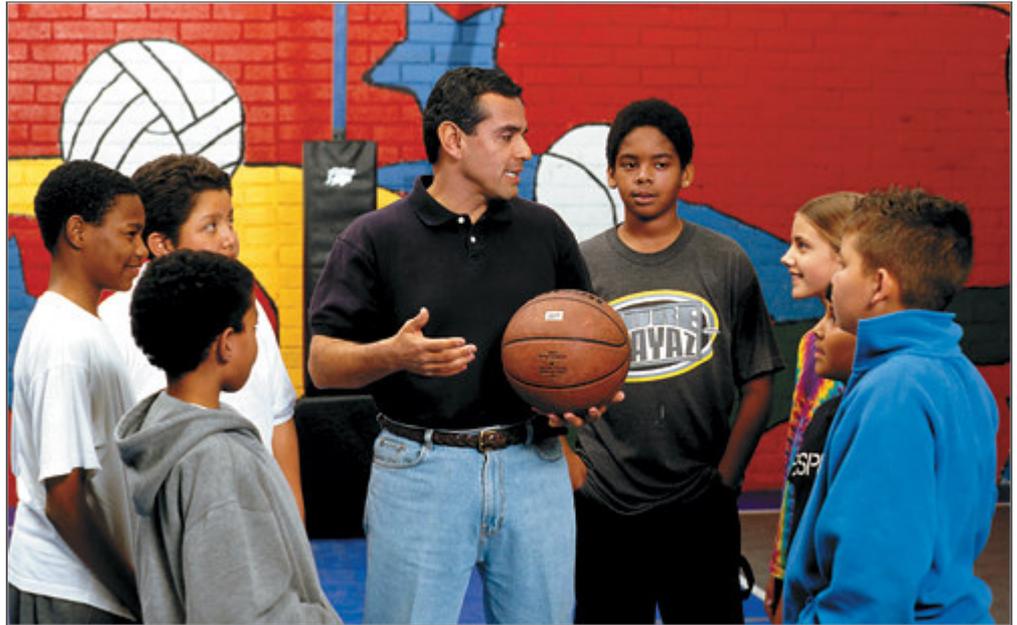
The book's data -- 1,366 tables from government and private sources -- show that U.S. households spend far less of their budgets on food than households in most other countries. America also happens to have the largest share of fat people of any country -- nearly a third of American adults

are obese.

Americans consume less tobacco than Japanese or Europeans. Compared to citizens of other countries, Americans pay a small percent of

lic office has risen from roughly 3,000 in 1985 to 5,000 today.

These Hispanic officials represent 1 percent of the half million elected officials in the United States, ac-



Los Angeles Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa, who won votes from many diverse groups, speaks to young constituents. (Courtesy Mayor's Office)

wages in taxes and are more likely to own their homes, but Americans' cell phone usage pales in comparison to that of many European and Asian countries.

PROOF OF GROWING DIVERSITY

There are 36 million foreign-born in the United States, the majority from Central American countries, followed by a large group from Asia. Roughly one-fifth of children in elementary and secondary schools have a foreign-born parent. An equal share speaks a language other than English at home.

The Abstract shows the effect of such diversity on politics. The number of Hispanics elected to pub-

lic office has risen from roughly 3,000 in 1985 to 5,000 today. According to Arturo Vargas of the National Association of Latino Elected Officials, a share he expects to rise quickly. He said that, today, California and Texas, which have political districts where Latinos are the majority, account for more than half of Hispanic officeholders.

"The Voting Rights Act has worked," said Vargas, referring to the 1965 law to increase the voter registration of minorities. "Latino-majority areas are represented by Latinos."

Vargas said he expects to see more "crossover candidates" who can win in non-Hispanic districts. Antonio Villaraigosa, the Hispanic mayor

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Americans Celebrate Christmas in Diverse Ways

By Michael Jay Friedman
USINFO Staff Writer

Washington -- Christmas, celebrated by most Christians on December 25, commemorates the birth of Jesus of Nazareth. Americans, like many of the world's peoples, have developed their own Christmas traditions and observances, and these have changed greatly over time.

Today, most Americans blend religious and secular customs with their own family traditions. Thus, even though Christmas is for many Americans a religious occasion, the federal courts have upheld its status as a legal holiday. As one court reasoned, "by giving federal employees a paid vacation day on Christmas, the government is doing no more than recognizing the cultural significance of the holiday."

DEVELOPMENT OF THE AMERICAN CHRISTMAS

The early New England Puritans frowned on the often boisterous Christmas celebrations they witnessed in Britain. In 1659, the Massachusetts colony briefly criminalized observance of the day and Christmas remained a regular workday in much of New England and Pennsylvania. Other parts of British North America, however, celebrated with gusto, with costumed revelers passing door to door and receiving small gifts of food and drink.

The modern, more commercialized Christmas began to emerge in the 19th century with the new custom of purchasing gifts for young children. Seasonal "Christmas shopping" began to assume economic importance.



Americans either purchase a cut, fresh evergreen tree or a reusable aluminum and plastic model. Placed in the family living room, the Christmas tree is decorated with lights and various ornaments, typically small orbs depicting angels and other figures associated with the holiday. In some families, Christmas gifts appear under the tree on the morning of December 25, deposited there by family members, or, as smaller children might believe, delivered by Santa Klaus after landing reindeer and sleigh on the roof and traversing the chimney -- all after the children are fast asleep!

Other Christmas traditions similarly began during the 19th century. Santa Claus -- derived from the Dutch Sinter Klaas and the German Saint Nicholas -- assumed the persona of a jolly dispenser of gifts and pilot of a reindeer-drawn sleigh through such works as the 1823 poem "A Visit from Saint Nicholas" and an 1863 Harper's Weekly portrait by the illustrator Thomas Nast. Many organizations, from the Salvation Army charitable organization to the Coca-Cola Company, since have employed Santa's image.

According to legend, Christmas trees date back to Martin Luther, the 16th century German cleric whose critique of established Catholic Church practices precipitated the Protestant Reformation. According to legend, Luther brought home to his children and lit with candles a fir tree one Christmas Eve to remind them of the wonders of God's creation.

The custom spread to Britain and the United States in the 19th century. Today, many contemporary

Mass-produced Christmas cards began to appear in the last quarter of the 19th century. In 1996, Americans purchased and mailed an estimated 2.6 billion Christmas cards. These might depict religious scenes or else convey more secular, often humorous, messages. With the rise of the Internet, electronically transmitted "e-cards" are an increasingly popular option.

CONTEMPORARY OBSERVANCES

With Christmas shopping vitally important to some retailers, Christmas has expanded into a "season" of its own. During the Great Depression in the 1930s, President Franklin D. Roosevelt proposed moving the Thanksgiving holiday to extend the shopping period between that holiday and Christmas. Today, the day after Thanksgiving is known as "Black Friday." An important shopping day (some stores open hours before their normal time), it pushes some businesses into profitability, or "in the black," and can account for a substantial proportion of annual profits.

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Americans Celebrate Christmas in Diverse Ways . . .

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This extended Christmas season is about far more than shopping. For many Americans, it is a period of general good will and an occasion for charitable and volunteer work. To some extent, non-Christian holidays celebrated at roughly the same time of year -- most prominently the African-American Kwanzaa and the Jewish Hanukkah -- blend into a broader "holiday season."

Seasonal popular entertainment includes a number of perennial favorites. Popular telecasts of the motion pictures *A Miracle on 34th Street* (1945) and *It's A Wonderful Life* (1946) have been joined in recent years by *A Christmas Story* (1983), based on the tales of the radio rac-

onteur Jean Shepherd.

Christmas-themed animated programs often appear on television. Some, like *A Charlie Brown Christmas* and *Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer*, date to the mid-1960s, and are enjoyed by today's children and their nostalgic parents alike.

An increasing number of radio stations now adjust their formats to feature Christmas music, sometimes exclusively, during the four weeks to six weeks before the holiday. Live and recorded performances of such classical favorites as the "Hallelujah Chorus" from Handel's *Messiah*, Tchaikovsky's *Nutcracker Suite* and J.S. Bach's "Christmas Oratorio" peak during the weeks before Christmas.

The holiday's original religious meaning remains for many its most important element. Some congregations create manger scenes -- dioramas of the stable where Jesus was born, complete with figurines representing the infant Jesus and those present at his birth. Many churches hold well-attended Christmas Eve candlelight or midnight services. Some include a Mass of the Nativity or a dramatization of the birth of Jesus.

As with so many aspects of U.S. cultural life, Christmas in the United States reflects the values of a free and diverse people. ♦

American Life, Diversity Explained, Point by Data Point . . .

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of Los Angeles won in a city that is half Hispanic but in which only one-fourth of voters are Hispanic. There are three Hispanic U.S. senators, who hail from both political parties -- Robert Menendez, a Democrat from New Jersey; Mel Martinez, a Republican from Florida; and Ken Salazar, a Democrat from Colorado. They won in states where Hispanic voters are not numerous enough to determine the outcome of an election.

NEW YORK CITY'S GLOBAL APPEAL

The Abstract also includes several tables of data regarding recreation and tourism, one of which shows

that New York City remains the top U.S. destination city for overseas travelers. It is the only city among the top 10 destinations that has surpassed its international visitor numbers from the year 2000 -- the year before terrorist attacks on U.S. targets.

"After [September 11, 2001], we saw some patriotic tourism, where New York City, being the world's 'second home,' saw an increase in tourists from around the world -- people wanting to support the city," said Christopher Heywood, spokesman for NYC and Company, the city's tourism organization. "There's a global appeal about the city," he said.

In 2007, New York City launched

an overseas ad campaign, which particularly targets potential visitors from the United Kingdom, Ireland and Spain. "The international visitor stays longer and spends more money," said Heywood. "They represent 17 percent of the city's visitor volume but more than half of visitor spending."

Every edition of the *Statistical Abstract* (<http://www.census.gov/compendia/statab/>), dating from 1878, is available on the Census Bureau's Web site.

(USINFO is a product of the Bureau of International Information Programs, U.S. Department of State. Web site: <http://usinfo.state.gov>) ♦

Women Setting New Records as State Supreme Court Judges

By Michelle Austein
USINFO Staff Writer

Washington -- Although it has taken a long time in U.S. history, today women commonly serve on the highest courts in the country. Many of these women overcame great obstacles to achieve their positions.

The composition of the American judicial system is "very different than when I joined the court and there were all white men," said Leah Ward Sears, chief justice of the Supreme Court of Georgia. "That is not the America I know today."

Born in Germany when her father was stationed there as an Army officer, Sears was surprised when she moved to the United States in 1955 and found that African Americans were struggling to achieve equal rights. She watched as courts ushered in sweeping civil rights changes and was inspired to attend law school.

"Being the first was always a little difficult," Sears said. Throughout her career as a lawyer and a judge, Sears has been the first many times, including the first woman and youngest person appointed to the Georgia Supreme Court in 1992 and the first female to win a statewide contested election. In 2005, she was sworn in as the first African-American woman to serve as the state's chief justice after winning the position in 2004.

"I had to fight to be accepted," Sears said. "I didn't do it by having a chip on my shoulder; I just worked hard."

Patricia Timmons-Goodson, associate justice of the Supreme Court of North Carolina, was also often the



Leah Ward Sears, chief justice of the Georgia Supreme Court, reviews court documents.
(© AP Images)

first, whether as the first person in her family to attend law school or as the first African-American woman to serve on North Carolina's highest court.

"I have ancestors that were every bit as smart as I feel that I am," Timmons-Goodson said, but the opportunities for them to pursue the same career path were not available.

Timmons-Goodson chose a career in law because "when individuals had problems ... they found their way to a lawyer seeking advice. That excited me then and it excites me even today."

Carol Hunstein, presiding justice of the Supreme Court of Georgia, took a much different path to becoming

a judge.

Hunstein contracted polio at age 2 and then spent much of her childhood battling bone cancer. As a single mother at age 22, Hunstein's cancer returned. Doctors amputated her leg and told her she had about a year to live.

Despite these hardships and a constant struggle to make ends meet, Hunstein earned a scholarship to attend college and paid for law school with Social Security benefits she received after her former husband's death.

"I never thought [being a judge] was a possibility for me," Hunstein said. "Each step along the way has been a happy surprise."

As a female lawyer, Hunstein felt some judges did not treat her fairly. One in particular commonly addressed her as "little lady" in court,

which she viewed as unfair to both her and her clients. "I thought ... I can be a better judge than he can be," Hunstein said, so in 1984, she ran in her first judicial election.

In at least 35 states, citizens elect their judges. Each state has its own set of guidelines for these elections. In some states, judges be-

long to a political party; in others they do not.

"Campaigning is a very humbling experience, in which each citizen has a vote," Timmons-Goodson

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Carol Hunstein, presiding justice of the Georgia Supreme Court
(© AP Images)

Bush Administration Promises "Sprint to the Finish" in 2008

By David McKeeby
USINFO Staff Writer

Washington -- "I'm going to work hard to the finish," President Bush told White House reporters at an October 17 press conference. "I'm going to sprint to the finish line."

In a series of recent interviews, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice mapped out the foreign policy road ahead for 2008, the Bush administration's final year in office.

KEEPING UP MOMENTUM IN THE MIDEAST PEACE PROCESS

Keeping up the momentum from the November 2007 Annapolis Conference will be a top priority, said Rice, and Bush will begin the year with a tour of the Middle East January 8-18 with stops in Israel and the West Bank, as well as Kuwait, Bahrain, the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia and Egypt. (See Middle East Peace: A Half-Century of Engagement (http://usinfo.state.gov/mena/middle_east_north_africa/me_peace.html).)

In a December 20 interview with Germany's Die Zeit, Rice said the United States would spend the year "actively and aggressively" supporting the peace process. Rice added that she saw many challenges ahead as Israelis and Palestinians resume talks with the goal of concluding a peace treaty by the end of 2008.

"I have never known, studied, read about, or participated in a negotiation that wasn't pretty tough at the beginning," Rice told the Associated Press December 12.

In addition, Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas and Palestinian Prime Minister Salaam Fayyad will face the additional challenge of using \$7.4 billion pledged to the Pal-



U.S. Army Pfc. Michael Garner, a medic from Charlie Troop, 4th Squadron, 9th Cavalry Regiment, 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 1st Cavalry Division, splints an elderly man's arm during a humanitarian assistance mission on Haifa Street in Baghdad, Iraq, Feb. 13, 2007. U.S. Army photo

estinian Authority at a donors conference in Paris to build the foundation of a future democratic Palestinian state as part of the "two-state solution" envisaged by the Bush administration since 2002.

"The Israeli-Palestinian issue ... is a very big issue," Rice said. "And to leave that in a much better place than it was when we came would, I think, reverberate in many important ways throughout the region."

CONTINUING SUPPORT FOR DEMOCRACY IN LEBANON

Rice also identified continued U.S. support for democracy in Lebanon as another leading policy priority in the region, urging countries that came together to support the Annapolis Conference, especially Syria, to join in supporting Lebanon as it continues its recovery from a series of crises, including the 2006 Hezbollah-Israeli conflict, assassinations

of prominent leaders and political stalemate in electing a new president. (See Lebanon Assistance (<http://usinfo.state.gov/mena/lebanon.html>).)

"All of Lebanon's neighbors need to play a constructive role and encourage all of their allies to

let that happen and, in fact, not interfere with it," Rice said. "This is a time of testing for Lebanon, but it's also a test for Lebanon's neighbors, including for Syria."

BUILDING ON THE SURGE IN IRAQ

In Iraq, 2007 saw a decline in violence in part due to the U.S.-led coalition's "surge strategy," which deployed more than 20,000 additional troops, as well as the "Awakening" of Iraqi tribal leaders in Anbar province and elsewhere,

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Bush Administration Promises "Sprint to the Finish" in 2008 . . .

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who began taking back their country from the forces of extremism.

Helping the Iraqi government build on these gains with tangible progress toward key reforms and stronger governing institutions will be another top priority for 2008, Rice said. (See Iraq Update (http://usinfo.state.gov/mena/middle_east_north_africa/iraq.html).)

"The Iraqis are going to need the support of international partners, they're going to need support in training their forces, they're going to need support in guaranteeing, in effect, their territorial integrity because they live in a difficult neighborhood," Rice said in a December 11 interview with USA Today.

Provincial Reconstruction Teams -- groups of U.S. soldiers and diplomats dedicated to supporting Iraqi authorities -- have made a difference in Iraq, Rice said, by helping leaders in Baghdad understand local needs and channeling resources to repair and rebuild key infrastructure more effectively and by delivering essential services to area residents.

"I think over the next year, there is a way ahead in Iraq that could build significantly on the improved security situation," Rice said, "to really have the major beginnings of a political renovation in the country."

HALTING NUCLEAR PROGRAMS IN IRAN AND NORTH KOREA

Yet another challenge, Rice said, will be continuing diplomatic efforts to resolve questions surrounding controversial nuclear programs in Iran and North Korea.

Although the November 2007 release of a U.S. National Intelligence Estimate (NIE) indicating that Iran halted its nuclear weapons program in 2003 has led some critics to

NIE." In North Korea, the Six-Party Talks saw a major breakthrough with Pyongyang's February 2007 agreement to shut down and disable nuclear facilities in exchange for humanitarian assistance, the first step toward stabilizing the Korean Peninsula.

The United States will remain committed to working with China, Japan, Russia, and South Korea to continue moving the process forward, Rice said.

"I don't think that there are any people in the world who are more isolated than the North Koreans and it would be a very good thing if there could be some sunshine into that world," Rice said.



A U.S. Army soldier gives a child a toy while providing outer security during a medical mission in Radwania, Baghdad, Iraq, June 24, 2006. The soldier is assigned to Alpha Battery, 3rd Battalion, 6th Field Artillery and is working with Iraqi army soldiers in providing free medical assistance to the local citizens. U.S. Army photo by Staff Sgt. Kevin L. Moses Sr.

OTHER CHALLENGES

downgrade Tehran as a threat, Rice said the country's continued efforts to enrich nuclear fuel and develop missiles concern not only the United States, but also U.N. Security Council partners China, France, Russia and the United Kingdom, who with Germany make up the P5 + 1.

"I've talked to everybody engaged in the P5 + 1 process and we're continuing to work on a Security Council resolution," Rice said. "We have not had anyone say that ... we should abandon the two-track strategy because of what was in the

foreign policy challenges in 2008, Rice identified ongoing efforts to promote stability in Afghanistan and Pakistan; resolve the status of Kosovo; and address Russia's concerns over a proposed missile defense system based in Europe.

(USINFO is a product of the Bureau of International Information Programs, U.S. Department of State. Web site: <http://usinfo.state.gov>) ♦

Bhutto Assassination Condemned by World Leaders

By David McKeeby
USINFO Staff Writer

Washington -- President Bush joined world leaders in shocked condemnation of the assassination of former Pakistani Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto and called for continued progress toward democratic reforms in Pakistan.

"The United States strongly condemns this cowardly act by murderous extremists who are trying to undermine Pakistan's democracy," Bush told reporters at his ranch in Crawford, Texas. "Those who committed this crime must be brought to justice."

Bhutto was killed at a December 27 political rally after addressing thousands of supporters in a park in Rawalpindi, Pakistan, ahead of January 8, 2008, parliamentary elections. She was killed by a suicide bomber who reportedly shot her at close range then detonated explosives, killing at least 15 other people and injuring several others.

Bhutto was no stranger to death threats. The December 27 attack was the second attempt on Bhutto's life since she returned to Pakistan from Dubai, the United Arab Emirates, October 18 to lead her Pakistan People's Party (PPP) -- the country's largest opposition group -- in elections. She blamed extremist groups for the suicide attack on her supporters in Karachi the same day that killed 134 people.



Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice signs a condolence book for slain Pakistan opposition leader Benazir Bhutto, seen in portrait, December 28 at the Pakistan Embassy in Washington. "This is a day of great tragedy, great mourning," Rice told reporters after her visit to the embassy. "She was a champion for democracy. She was a courageous woman." Bhutto was assassinated December 27. (@ AP Image)

"She knew the risks of her return to campaign but was convinced that her country needed her," said British Foreign Secretary David Miliband.

"In targeting Benazir Bhutto, extremist groups have in their sights all those committed to democratic processes in Pakistan," Miliband added. "They cannot and must not succeed."

The Muslim world's first democratically elected female leader, Bhutto was educated at Harvard University in Massachusetts and the University of Oxford in Great Britain and served twice as prime minister, from 1988 to 1990 and from 1993 to 1996. She followed in the footsteps of her father, PPP founder Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, who served as both president and prime minister before being deposed in a 1977 coup. After spending five years in

prison, Bhutto left for London, where she organized her first political campaign.

Bhutto's October 18 return to Pakistan in a power-sharing agreement with Musharraf was part of an effort to restore democracy in a country considered a key entity in the international struggle against terrorism.

"Benazir Bhutto may have been killed by terrorists, but the terrorists

must not be allowed to kill democracy in Pakistan," said British Prime Minister Gordon Brown. "This atrocity strengthens our resolve that terrorists will not win there, here, or anywhere in the world."

Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf, himself the target of several assassination attempts, condemned the attack, calling for a three-day period of national mourning.

Afghan President Hamid Karzai, who had just met with Bhutto during his visit to Pakistan, praised Bhutto as a "daughter of Pakistan," and condemned her assassins as "enemies of prosperity, of peace, and the well-being of Pakistan and the Muslim world."

"In her death, the subcontinent has lost an outstanding leader who worked for democracy and reconciliation in her country," said Indian

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Pakistan Should Move Forward with Democratic Process, U.S. Says

By David McKeeby
USINFO Staff Writer

Washington -- The United States is reaching out to political leaders across Pakistan in the wake of former Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto's assassination, urging them to move forward with the democratic process.

"She was a champion for democracy," Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice said of Bhutto after signing a condolence book at the Pakistan Embassy in Washington. "In my conversations with her, her commitment and her dedication came through very clearly, and most especially her love for her people and for her country."

"The way to honor her memory is to continue the democratic process in Pakistan so that the democracy that she so hoped for can emerge," Rice continued.

Bhutto was killed at a December 27 political rally after addressing thousands of supporters in a park in Rawalpindi, Pakistan, ahead of January 8, 2008, parliamentary elections. She was killed by an assailant who reportedly shot her at close range then detonated explosives, killing at least 15 other people and injuring several others.

Since then, as many as 32 people have been killed in rioting in several major cities across the country. Pakistani authorities report that al-Qaida militant Baitullah Mehsud, one of the country's most wanted

terrorists, was responsible for Bhutto's murder.

State Department deputy spokesman Tom Casey said December 28 that he had no information that could confirm an al-Qaida connection to the assassination, but reported that U.S. officials have spoken with leaders of Bhutto's Pakistan People's Party, as well as the political parties of former Prime Minister Nawas Sharif and President

been delayed after Musharraf declared a state of emergency from October 3 to December 16.

"We would certainly encourage him as well as all others, as well as all political parties to participate in the process," Casey said, "with an eye toward ensuring that there is the broadest possible opportunity for the Pakistani people to choose among a variety of legitimate political actors in the country."



"What we want to see happen is the development of a democratic system in Pakistan, the development of democratic institutions and one of the key ways to ensure that the Pakistani people have a government that reflects their will and has a govern-

ment that is capable of fighting extremism," Casey added.

Pervez Musharraf, appealing for calm and urging them to continue to move forward with the political process.

"We encourage all moderate forces in Pakistan to work together and to cooperate in what is a common fight against extremism and a common desire to see Pakistan move forward as a moderate modern Islamic country," Casey said.

Sharif, who like Bhutto recently returned to Pakistan as part of the transition from military rule, has stated that his party will boycott the January 8 election, which had

ment that is capable of fighting extremism," Casey added.

"We believe that if elections can proceed as scheduled, smoothly and safely, then we would certainly encourage that happening," Casey said.

The full text (<http://www.state.gov/secretary/rm/2007/12/98131.htm>) of Rice's December 28 statement is available on the State Department Web site.♦

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Bhutto Assassination Condemned by World Leaders

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Prime Minister Manmohan Singh.

Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice said, "We urge the Pakistani people, political leaders, and civil society to maintain calm and to work together to build a more moderate, peaceful, and democratic future."

State Department deputy spokesman Tom Casey said the attack "shows that there are people out there who are trying to disrupt the building of democracy in Pakistan."

In a letter to Musharraf, French President Nicolas Sarkozy echoed Brown, condemning Bhutto's assassination as an "odious act" and declaring that "terrorism and violence have no place in the democratic debate and the combat of ideas and programs."

Italian Prime Minister Romano Prodi agreed, memorializing Bhutto as "a

woman who chose to fight her battle until the end with a single weapon -- the one of dialogue and political debate."

"The difficult path toward peace and democracy in that region must not be stopped, and Bhutto's sacrifice will serve as the strongest example for those who do not surrender to terrorism," Prodi said.

Earlier in the day, at least four people were killed ahead of another election rally staged outside Rawalpindi by supporters of another prominent opposition figure, former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif.

"We stand with the people of Pakistan in their struggle with the forces of terror and extremism," Bush said. "We urge them to honor Benazir Bhutto's memory by continuing with the democratic process for which she so bravely gave her life." ♦

Women Setting New Records as State Supreme Court Judges . . .

(Continued from page 12)

said. Running a statewide campaign takes a tremendous amount of effort, time and travel she said. While campaigning in North Carolina, Timmons-Goodson said she visited places and met people she otherwise may not have known.

Judges are expected to be fair and impartial, which can make running a judicial election campaign uniquely difficult.

"Our masters are the law. When we run, we don't run as politicians," Sears said. "I'm very careful when I run for office that I not say 'vote for me and I will do this.'"

"I am not beholden to those people who contributed to my campaign," Hunstein said. "I really, truly am

not." In fact, Hunstein once recused herself from a case when a donor was a party to the lawsuit.

The women described their experiences on the bench as both difficult and rewarding and said judges perform an important community service.

"Judges make very difficult decisions that have an incredible impact on people's finances, their property, on their future, on their families, on their children," Hunstein said. "These are important decisions to the people who are in front of you."

Serving as one in a group of judges on a supreme court requires good interpersonal skills, Timmons-Goodson said. All the justices on her court are involved in every decision. "You need to be able to get

along with others. You need to know how to listen. You need to know how to communicate. You need to know how to compromise and when to compromise."

When a group makes a decision, it is critical to have a diversity of ideas represented, Timmons-Goodson said. "Women often offer a perspective that is different than men."

"It's really important for women to serve ... so that we'll be viewed as equals," Hunstein said. "We have something to offer."

"That's what I've done," she said, "and that's what a lot of other women in the state of Georgia and across the United States have done." ♦