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Jimma, Ethiopia, Gains Access to Global Information

By Phillip Kurata
Staff Writer

Jimma, Ethiopia — When Michael McClellan, spokesman for the U.S. Embassy in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, stepped off a plane in the Ethiopian highland city of Jimma on October 24 and walked toward the terminal, a throng of people dressed in their best finery was walking toward him.

"This looks like a wedding procession," a col-

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Public Affairs Counselor Michael McClellan cuts the ribbon with the Deputy Mayor of Jimma, Ato Shemelis,Kebede, and Yerusalem Ashenafi, Director of the U.S. Embassy's Information Resource Center.

U.S. to Help Farmers in Vulnerable Countries Boost

By Kathryn McConnell
Staff Writer

Washington — Helping to increase the food production of farmers in 25 to 30 of the countries most vulnerable to food shortages is a key aim of the United States' increased focus on agricultural development and food aid, says Josette Lewis, the top agriculture official of the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID).

More than 920 million people worldwide do not get enough to eat. In 2007, the number of undernourished increased by 75 million because of rising food prices, according to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations.

Addressing the World Food Prize Symposium held in mid-October in Des Moines, Iowa, Lewis said USAID especially wants to help small farms in sub-Saharan Africa double their yields of rice, maize and other staple crops by 2015 and increase farm incomes. The international community agreed in 2000 to a goal of cutting in half the number of people living in poverty and hunger around the world by 2015.

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Jimma, Ethiopia, Gains Access to Global Information . . .

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league of McClellan's said.

"It might be for us," McClellan answered.

He was right, in one sense. A few seconds later, the welcoming party and McClellan met on the tarmac. Women filled his arms with bouquets of tropical flowers. The mayor, the police chief, the head of the tourism office and other dignitaries shook his hand and embraced him. In the parking lot, McClellan and his welcomers piled into a 13-vehicle motorcade led by a police truck with its red and blue lights whirling silently. The motorcade snaked through the city, then onto a rutted red dirt road lined with wild coffee bushes, goats and waving children to a small mosque on the summit of a mountain above the city. There, Jimma Mayor Mohammedamin Jemal made the first of many speeches that would be given that day.

After a tour of a former palace and a lunch of Ethiopian stews and injerra, the moist pancake-like food that is torn into chunks and used to pick up food and plunk it in the mouth, McClellan was driven to the Jimma Public Library. Musicians played and sang and women danced as McClellan entered the building.

The leaders of this city of 200,000, which is said to be the birthplace of coffee, organized the festivities to celebrate the opening of an "American Corner," a room in the local library outfitted with computer terminals, books, videos, and CD-ROMs. The purpose of the corner is to provide the local citizens with information about the United States, about HIV/AIDS and many other things.

Invited guests visiting the American Corner at the opening

"I am very, very happy," said Ilma Tamiru, a former teacher who now works in a public relations company. "I don't have words to express it. For many years, this library did not have new books and information."

Assefa Korsa, an official at the Jimma education office, said, "Everybody can get reference information and books. People will be able to improve their talents, thanks to the American Corner."

Until the 1970s, Jimma had a U.S. Information Service library that some locals still remember. It provided books and magazines and held film screenings and lectures to inform the people of Jimma about the United States. The communist military junta that took power in 1974 closed the library.

"I am delighted that in the case of the Jimma American Corner we are renewing and continuing a partnership that has a solid history of achievement and service in this historic community," McClellan said. He mentioned Andrew Carnegie, an American businessman and philanthropist who built thousands of public libraries in the United States and other English-speaking countries in the late 19th century and early 20th century. Carnegie believed that "the free public library is the strongest component of building democracy in the world," in McClellan's words.

The diplomat stressed that the American Corner operates as a partnership between the U.S. and Ethiopian governments for the benefit of the people of Jimma. He said the governments agree that the American Corner is open to anyone. With that in mind, the corner was established at a public library, where all citizens would have access.

McClellan said that he hopes users of the corner will also draw on resources and expertise of the Information Resource Center at the U.S. Embassy in Addis Ababa, particularly those who might be consider-

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U.S. to Help Farmers in Vulnerable Countries Boost Yields . . .

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Cutting hunger and poverty in half is "an achievable goal," Lewis said, and one envisioned in proposed legislation now before Congress that would significantly increase U.S. support for agriculture development.

Senators Richard Lugar of Indiana and Robert Casey of Pennsylvania have proposed $10 billion in new funding for international agriculture programs. For the period 2008-2009, the United States has committed $5.5 billion in foreign food and agricultural assistance.

The United States wants to "strengthen every link of the food-value chain," including agricultural research and information sharing, credit programs for small farmers and the use of new high-yield seeds that are resistant to diseases and drought, Lewis said.

Modesta Philipo tends to her cabbage crop, which her family hopes to sell at a good rate through new farmers' associations in Mgeta, Tanzania.

Lewis said the United States will support more training programs for farmers in developing countries to help them use modern food-production techniques.

The training will help developing countries reduce by 75 percent their reliance on food aid, she said.

Lewis said USAID also is focusing on improving the nutritional value of the food aid it gives for children under age 5 and is refining its community-based nutrition monitoring programs. In addition, USAID is refining its forecasting tools to obtain better information on where a food emergency is likely to occur.

The United States is already working with other donor nations on the implementation of a strategy presented in June at an international forum in Rome to address the food crisis. That includes providing immediate aid to countries most vulnerable to rising food prices. Between 2007 and 2008, global food prices rose 52 percent, according to the U.N.'s Food and Agriculture Organization.

The U.S. strategy also includes encouraging policies that can expand regional trade in farm products and ease infrastructure constraints such as poor roads and border checkpoints that slow trade, Lewis said.

In the long run, USAID plans to form partnerships with private-sector companies, she said.

She said a number of U.S.-based companies such as John Deere, Land O'Lakes Inc. and the Monsanto Company "have made it clear they are ready to step up" and partner with various organizations to help boost agricultural productivity and reduce poverty in developing countries.

"It's time for a second Green Revolution that enlists a broader array of actors," Lewis said, referring to the first Green Revolution in the early 1970s that increased agricultural yields through development of new varieties of grains. New types of disease-resistant wheat created then are credited with saving more than 1 billion people in Asia from starvation.

Also at the forum, U.S. Agriculture Secretary Edward Schafer and World Food Prize President Kenneth Quinn signed an agreement to enhance information sharing between the two entities and to bring more agricultural scientists and farmers from developing countries to the United States to learn about agricultural technology from their U.S. counterparts.

For information on the 2008 World Food Prize, see "Two Former U.S. Senators Named 2008 World Food Prize Recipients (http://www.america.gov/st/foraid-english/2008/June/20080616141640AKllennoCcM0.859997.html)."

(This is a product of the Bureau of International Information Programs, U.S. Department of State. Web site: http://www.america.gov)♦

United States Condemns Renewed Conflict in Congo

By David McKeeby
Staff Writer

Washington — As thousands flee a new outbreak of violence in the eastern provinces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the United States urges government and opposition forces to stand down and underlines America's support for United Nations peacekeeping and humanitarian efforts.

"The violence that has driven tens of thousands of civilians from their homes and placed their lives at risk is deplorable," State Department spokesman Sean McCormack said in an October 28 statement.

A man carrying his son and a few possessions is among thousands fleeing renewed conflict in eastern Congo.

Forces loyal to former Congolese General Laurent Nkunda have made gains against government forces in Kibumba and appear to be preparing an assault on the city of Goma, where 22 rebel groups, including Nkunda's, signed a January 2008 agreement to bring peace to the war-ravaged region.

McCormack urged Nkunda to return his forces to their pre-August 28 positions, rescind his party's call for open revolt and resume talks with the democratically elected and internationally recognized DRC government.

A 17,000-strong U.N. peacekeeping force drawn from 18 nations, including Bangladesh, India, Pakistan and Uruguay, has deployed attack helicopters in an attempt to stall the offensive. The United States is a leading supporter of the peacekeeping mission — the U.N.'s largest — contributing $200 million to the effort annually.

"The U.S. reaffirms its support for the United Nations Mission in the Congo, which has played a vital role in protecting civilian populations and ending violence," McCormack said. As many as 45,000 refugees have poured into a U.N. refugee camp outside Goma, where the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees, UNICEF and the World Food Programme are expediting deliveries of food aid and humanitarian supplies to meet emergency needs.

The United States is the world's leading provider of emergency food aid and a long-standing supporter of U.N. humanitarian efforts, including $123 million in contributions to U.N. and nongovernmental relief agencies operating in Congo during 2008.

One of Africa's largest countries, resource-rich Congo suffered nearly a decade of back-to-back wars and continuing instability that has claimed more than 5 million lives from fighting, disease and malnutrition. The United States has been an active supporter of diplomatic efforts to help Congo regain stability and consolidate democracy through its facilitation of the Tripartite Plus Joint Commission. The commission includes Congo, Burundi and Rwanda, nations that McCormack said could play a role in enhancing stability. The United States and the European Union played a role in the November 2007 Nairobi Communiqué, a U.N.-brokered agreement between Congo and Rwanda to address militant violence in the eastern Congo border region.

Through the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), the United States has delivered more than $220 million in emergency aid since 1998, along with medical services for 10,000 survivors of the Congo conflict, help for ex-combatants returning to civilian life and programs to help Congo's people build democracy and improve health care, education and agriculture.

"The U.S. calls on all parties to the Goma Agreements and the Nairobi Communiqué to respect their commitments and renounce the use of arms," McCormack said. "We call on the countries of the Great Lakes region to work together to enhance stability and respect each other's sovereignty." ♦

Religious Groups Take Major Role in Human Rights Efforts

By Ralph Dannheisser
Special Correspondent

Washington — Sombet, a Masai girl in Kenya's Rift Valley, harbors high hopes: Some day, she says, she wants to be the president of the country.

Her ambition is all the more striking when one realizes that Sombet was an uneducated pre-teen in a forced marriage with an 80-year-old man when she first came to a rehabilitation and education center in rural Kajiado run by a Seventh Day Adventist-affiliated group.

Sombet's case, cited in an article on the Adventist News Network, provides just one example of the role many religious groups play in the effort to expand human rights worldwide.

The Kajiado center, opened in 2000, now boasts an enrollment of 160 girls in the primary and secondary levels. Many of them, director Jacinta Loki says, had "never even seen a bed" when they arrived. Now, she says, they "know what they want in life."

The precise definition of human rights may vary with the person enunciating it. But a generally accepted view — one endorsed by many religious groups — is presented in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted in 1948 by the U.N. General Assembly.

That declaration, endorsed by some 190 countries around the world, contains 30 articles that postulate such rights as life; liberty; security of person; freedom from slavery, servitude, torture and arbitrary arrest or exile; equality before the law; education; freedom of religion; and property ownership.

American churches of all denominations often work to promote human rights.

FIGHTING HUMAN TRAFFICKING

In recent years, combating human trafficking has become a focus for many religious groups seeking to expand human rights.

The National Council of Churches USA (NCC), for example, has addressed this issue through its Ecumenical Justice for Women Working Group.

A statement released by the group soon after the January 11 observance of Human Trafficking Awareness Day called on people of faith "to become more aware of the scourge of human trafficking, and engage in collaborative actions that will end this exploitation."

Concern continues, according to the statement, "as people worldwide are coerced into bonded labor, bought and sold in prostitution, exploited in domestic servitude, enslaved in agricultural work and in factories, and captured to serve as child soldiers."

An NCC policy statement issued in 1995 stated that, as Christians, group members believe that "every person is of intrinsic worth before God and that every individual has a right to the fullest possible opportunities for the development of life."

NCC and the Women's Division,

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Religious Groups Take Major Role in Human Rights Efforts . . .

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United Methodist Board of Global Ministries, jointly sponsored a conference on trafficking, attended by representatives of 15 denominations, in New York on September 29 through October 1. The Reverend Ann Tiemeyer, director of NCC's Program for Women's Ministry, predicted the session would lead to "more coordinated ecumenical advocacy partnerships ... that will support victims/survivors."

WORK IN THE FIELD

Much church-initiated activity on human rights involves education, advocacy and calls for legislation, but direct efforts to enhance human rights also are ample.

In the Dominican Republic, for example, Church World Service (CWS) runs the Regional Program on Vulnerable Children, which in turn sponsors the work of groups like Caminante ("One who walks the path"). Caminante, CWS says, "provides a safe space where hundreds of youths and their families receive counseling and participate in recreation and formation programs."

Founded in 1946, CWS is a cooperative ministry of 35 Protestant, Orthodox and Anglican denominations that describes itself as "providing sustainable self-help and development, disaster relief, and refugee assistance in some 80 countries."

DARFUR

The ongoing genocide in the Darfur region of Sudan provides another major focus for religious groups' human rights efforts.

An array of Protestant, Catholic and Orthodox churches has combined efforts — under a partnership formed in 2004 between Action by Churches Together (ACT) International and Caritas, an international Catholic group — to empower families, partner with communities and support the lives of people caught up in the crisis.

In 2008, the ACT-Caritas Darfur Emergency Response reported, it is assisting more than 250,000 people with programs in the areas of water and sanitation; health and nutrition; emergency preparedness and response; psychosocial aid, peace-building and protection; agriculture; and school support.

While pursuing efforts on the ground in Sudan, the church groups also have sought to raise awareness in the United States.

At one of many "Save Darfur" rallies held around the country in April 2006, Cardinal Theodore McCarrick, then Catholic archbishop of Washington, told a crowd of more than 10,000 gathered on the National Mall, "Let us make sure we get our message through . ... What happens to the people of Darfur happens to us. It's time now to say, 'No more.'"

Jewish organizations also have placed Darfur high among their human rights concerns.

The American Jewish World Service (AJWS) Web site says the group — an international development organization that "fosters civil society, sustainable development and human rights for all people" through grant programs, volunteer service, advocacy and education — is focusing in late 2008 on countering "the continued flow of weapons into Darfur in violation of a U.N. arms embargo."

"As the violence and devastation continues," the AJWS says, "Darfur must remain a priority on the U.S. agenda and within the international community." ♦

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ing going to university in the United States.

The American Corner in Jimma is the fourth in Ethiopia. The U.S. Agency for International Development, through its Ethiopia Education Fund, provided most of the $32,000 needed to open it.

The deputy mayor of Jimma, Ato Shemelis, said that more meaningful than the informational materials provided by the American Corner is the U.S. commitment to help improve the academic performance of the students of Jimma. "It gets us to think globally and act locally. It is the beginning of a new relationship with the American people," he said. ♦

Obama Presidency Would Bring New Dimension to Africa Policy

By Charles W. Corey
Staff Writer

Washington — Electing Barack Obama the next president of the United States would bring a new dimension to U.S. foreign policy, particularly with regard to Africa, according to Howard Wolpe, director of the Africa program and the Project on Leadership and Building State Capacity at the Woodrow Wilson Center for International Scholars in Washington.

"Obama's ascendancy to the presidency will have enormous symbolic political power throughout the African continent," Wolpe told America.gov. "The fact that someone of African ancestry can be the president of the United States is going to substantially increase our moral stature and enable us, I believe, to have much more greater sway in our relationships with African states."

Barack Obama with Nobel Peace laureate Wangari Maathai during his visit to Kenya in August 2006

Wolpe, a former member of the U.S. House of Representatives and a specialist in African politics, chaired a House subcommittee on Africa for 10 of his 14 years in Congress. He also served as President Clinton's special envoy to Africa's Great Lakes region. He recently shared his views with America.gov on what an Obama administration would mean for Africa, with the preface that these are his personal opinions as a career Africanist and he was not speaking for the nonpartisan Wilson Center.

In a separate conversation, America.gov asked former Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs Herman Cohen what a John McCain presidency would mean for Africa.

Africans are very excited about the U.S. presidential election, Wolpe said, and are watching this race as closely as their own elections. An Obama presidency will "greatly facilitate the diplomacy required to try to make some progress on these difficult issues," such as the humanitarian crisis in the Darfur region of Sudan or the political situation in Zimbabwe.

In the long term, Wolpe said, the central challenge facing Africa is the building of cohesive states. An Obama administration would be particularly focused on helping Africans search for common ground and eliminate conflict across the continent, he predicted. "Unless you can tackle that issue, the prospects for long-term sustainable economic development will be constantly compromised," he said.

Obama has a "general sensitivity about the nature of the economic, social and political challenges that are facing the so-called Third World, not just Africa but Asia and Latin America. He has demonstrated ... a much deeper appreciation of the kinds of issues that need to be tackled than many of our national leaders have heretofore."

In addition, Obama's African heritage (his father is Kenyan) enhances his cultural sensitivity and his understanding of the challenges facing developing countries, according to Wolpe.

BUILDING ON ACCOMPLISHMENTS OF PREVIOUS ADMINISTRATIONS

Wolpe credited the outgoing Bush administration with making great strides in Africa. "As sharply as I and others have disagreed with many facets of Bush foreign policy, there has been much more continuity than discontinuity of Bush administration African policies and initiatives with the previous Clinton administration policy and initiatives." Aid has been increased through programs like the Millennium Challenge Corporation and the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR).

"That," he said, is "reflective of the point that Africa is no longer subject to partisan war," as it was during the Cold War. There is now broad bipartisan consensus in the Congress in support of expanded trade relationships, the danger of

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McCain Presidency Would Likely Expand Bush Africa Policy

By Charles W. Corey
Staff Writer

Washington — If elected as the next president of the United States, Republican Party nominee John McCain most likely would pursue and possibly expand upon many of the policies put in place during the Bush administration, according to Herman J. Cohen, former assistant secretary of state for African affairs.

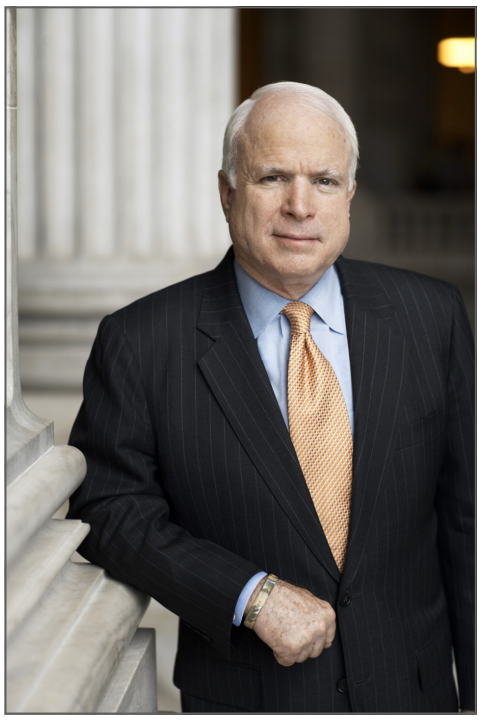
In a recent interview with America.gov, Cohen offered his thoughts — drawing on his extensive background in African affairs — on what a McCain presidency would mean for Africa.

In a separate conversation, America.gov asked Howard Wolpe, career Africanist and former chairman of the Subcommittee on Africa in the U.S. House of Representatives, to offer his opinion on what an Obama presidency would mean for Africa.

Much of Cohen's diplomatic career was focused on U.S.-Africa relations. He spent 38 years in the U.S. Foreign Service and served as assistant secretary for African affairs from 1989 to 1993 in the administration of President George H.W. Bush. He previously served as the U.S. ambassador to Senegal and deputy chief of mission in Kinshasa.

Cohen said the current President Bush is enjoying great popularity in Africa as a direct result of his administration's policies toward the region.

"The Africans have been very happy and most people who follow African affairs in the United States have given the Bush administration pretty high marks. So what I see is the continuation of a lot of emphasis on health care, such as the HIV/AIDS program known as PEPFAR [the President's Emergency Plan for Aids Relief] and ... an effort to get stronger relations with South Africa."



Republican John McCain, if elected president, seems likely to continue Bush administration policies toward Africa.

During the government of former South African President Thabo Mbeki, who recently left office, relations were "a bit cool," Cohen said. "Now, with the change, a McCain administration would try very hard to establish more healthy and warm relations with South Africa."

Cohen speculated that a McCain administration also would continue the joint military training, counter-terrorism programs and peacekeeping training now under way in Africa.

EMPHASIS ON PRIVATE-SECTOR DEVELOPMENT

A McCain administration would place even more emphasis on promoting private-sector economic development in Africa, Cohen said.

"The Millennium Challenge Corporation is very strong on private-sector [development], and I think you will see the United States Agency for International Development moving to finance even more private-sector activity to help even more Africans themselves become investors," he predicted.

"Now that Africa is becoming more open to the private sector, they need the infrastructure to make it work. You know, for many years they were kind of suspicious of the private sector and had all sorts of socialist economies. Now that they are becoming more open," they need help in this area, Cohen said.

"People are not going to invest unless they have reliable electricity, reliable telephone service that does not cost so much, reliable roads and water supplies. Now that they want to do private-sector development, we have to help them with the means to make it more attractive to get investors."

When asked if a McCain administration might have even closer links with Africa's business and investment sector, Cohen replied: "I think so. Not that the current administration has been lacking, but I think there will be a greater emphasis."

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McCain Presidency Would Likely Expand Bush Africa Policy . . .

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Cohen said he is now working as a private consultant on a power project in Togo that will be privately owned and financed through the U.S. Overseas Private Investment Corporation. "They provided 100 percent financing for this private project, so I think this is going to happen more and more."

Assessing the U.S.-Africa relationship, Cohen said that Africans and Americans have long shared close bonds of friendship because the United States has never been a colonial power in Africa. That makes a difference.

Additionally, he said, Americans have done a lot of good things in Africa — projects that have a direct positive impact on "the man in the street." They have eliminated smallpox and are working very hard to fight HIV/AIDS through PEPFAR, have fed millions of starving Africans through billions of dollars in food aid, are helping Africans in their fight against terrorism and have long worked for the good of all Africans through programs such as the Peace Corps.

"Africans feel very vulnerable" on terrorism, Cohen said. "Africans don't believe in jihad, and even in the Muslim countries, they want to stay away from that, so they are very anxious for the Americans to cooperate with them in prevention of religious extremism.

"So, all of these things added together means that the United States is seen very favorably," he said. Thus, many of the positive trends that were put in place during this Bush administration are likely to continue and grow during a McCain administration.

Cohen acknowledged his worries about the ongoing financial crisis and its possible impact on aspects of U.S. foreign policy such as foreign assistance.

"Whoever wins the presidency is going to be faced with this very severe issue" that could affect some U.S. programs significantly, he said. ♦

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failing states and the need to address the significant health threats and human rights concerns that still linger, he said.

"That is good because there is much more of a bipartisan foundation for pursuing a much more informed, and I would argue effective, policy towards Africa," Wolpe said.

Conflict resolution is an area that still needs work, he said, and it could receive particular attention from Obama.

According to Wolpe, an Obama administration would focus on three key themes for Africa:

Accelerating Africa's integration into the global economy. Wolpe said opening markets through the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) is only half the problem. "The other half of the equation is building capacity in Africa so that the African states and economies can take advantage of those new markets. That is the fundamental challenge now."

Enhancing the peace and security of African states. "The challenge in Africa is that these are divided societies. The challenge in Africa is not to help people compete well — that they have got down. ... The challenge is to build collaborative capacity and not competitive capacity. That requires a different approach to our diplomacy and new techniques to bring leaders together to help build their own relationships to help them get beyond the zero-sum mentality of conflict."

Strengthening relationships to deepen democracy and accountability and reduce poverty. "During the past there has been a tendency in the West to romanticize civil society as the 'good guys' and the counterpoint to government power. So the model we have had is strengthening civil society organizations to keep governments honest." ♦

Democrats Hoping for Major Senate Gains

By Michelle Austein
Staff Writer

Washington — As Election Day nears, many Democrats are hoping for more than Barack Obama's victory in the presidential race. U.S. voters will also elect more than one-third of the U.S. Senate, and the Democratic Party could make gains that will enable it to pass more legislation.

Among the thousands of U.S. officials to be elected November 4 are all 435 members of the U.S. House of Representatives and 35 members of the U.S. Senate. Political pundits and party members are watching dozens of highly competitive contests throughout the country.

Hillary Clinton campaigns with Minnesota Democratic Senate candidate Al Franken. Democrats hope to pick up new Senate seats.

Democrats currently are the majority party in both houses of Congress, having won control with big wins in the 2006 midterm elections, but hold the slimmest possible majority in the Senate. Political experts expect Democrats to not only retain control of both chambers in 2009, but to increase the size of their majorities.

In the Senate, 12 Democratic incumbents are seeking re-election, and only one seems to be facing a serious challenge. Republicans are defending 23 seats, including five held by members who are retiring. Many of the remaining incumbents are facing tough re-election battles.

Currently, 49 Democratic senators and the Democratic-voting independents Joe Lieberman and Bernie Sanders give the Democrats their narrow edge. But the party expects its majority to increase in the 111th Congress, which takes office in January 2009. Democrats are poised to pick up seats currently held by retiring Republicans in places like Virginia and New Mexico — states where the Democratic candidate is polling well ahead of the Republican. They are likely to win in some other states as well.

DEMOCRATS HOPING TO WIN 60 SENATE SEATS

The Democratic Party is hoping for enough Senate victories to increase their coalition of Democrats and Democratic-leaning independents from 51 to 60.

Holding 60 seats is important because 60 votes are needed to end a filibuster — a parliamentary procedure that allows senators to continue a debate indefinitely and block or delay a vote on a measure or nomination. Filibusters have been used effectively throughout U.S. history. It was a tactic frequently used by Southern senators seeking to block civil rights legislation in the 1960s. More recently, filibusters have been used a record number of times in the 110th Congress, effectively preventing the Senate from holding votes on certain issues.

The term filibuster, coined from the Dutch word for pirate, came into use in the 1850s. But the practice of filibustering to keep the legislative body from voting on a bill predates this term. In 1917, senators adopted a rule allowing debate to end with a two-thirds majority vote. This device, called "cloture," can halt filibusters, but it was used rarely because as it was so difficult to gain the support of that many senators. In 1975, the Senate reduced the number of votes needed for cloture to three-fifths (60).

Prominent Democrats have been campaigning for senators across the country, reminding voters of their party's 60-seat goal. Campaign surrogates are saying that if Obama wins the election, he will be able to pass more of his campaign proposals with 60 senators on his side.

"Sixty is the magic number. If we

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No Major Shakeup Likely in U.S. Two-Party Political System

By Ralph Dannheisser
Special Correspondent

Washington — Is the two-party system in U.S. politics on the verge of extinction?

Not likely, analysts on a bipartisan panel agreed at a discussion hosted by the National Archives October 14. But the three panelists predicted the end is near for a conservative cycle in U.S. governance that began with the 1980 election of President Ronald Reagan.

The United States has followed the two-party model since the early days of the nation. Since the demise of the Whigs and the rise of the Republican Party in the 1850s, the two dominant factions have been the Republicans and the pre-existing Democratic Party.

Third-party candidates sometimes have performed well in presidential elections — former president Theodore Roosevelt, whose Bull Moose Party candidacy in 1912 helped throw the election to Democrat Woodrow Wilson; Wisconsin Governor Robert La Follette as a Progressive in 1924; Alabama Governor George Wallace on the segregationist American Independent Party ticket in 1968; and businessman Ross Perot as an independent in 1992. None were elected.

Panelist E.J. Dionne, a liberal Washington Post columnist and senior fellow in governance studies at the Brookings Institution, declared the two-party system "so durable it takes an enormous crisis to break it up." The most recent realignment in the 1850s reflected the crisis over slavery, he observed.

Until an issue of equal magnitude develops, "there'll be local challenges that are successful, but it's hard to see the whole system breaking up," he said.

The political parties of Barack Obama and John McCain are likely to dominate presidential contests for decades to come, analysts say.

Dionne lauded political parties as "a democratizing force" and "an effort to organize choices in a rational way in a mass democracy."

He contrasted the two-party approach favorably to multiparty systems common to many other countries. In Italy, where he reported on politics, "voters voted for parties ranging from Communist to Fascist, various shades of Social Democratic and Christian Democratic and Liberal and Republican." That resulted in government by undemocratic coalitions assembled after the fact, often behind closed doors, he said.

"Now, our two parties are messy coalitions" within themselves, "but you know who is in the messy coalition when you cast your ballot on Election Day," Dionne said. "So you know more or less what you're going to get, and I think that is ultimately more democratic."

David Brooks, New York Times columnist and commentator on The NewsHour with Jim Lehrer, agreed that major realignment in the two-party system is unlikely. "I don't see a change to where we're going to have three parties, or two and a half parties or one party," he said.

Brooks, generally considered a conservative, was less enthusiastic about parties than Dionne.

"One of the things corrupting politics right now is an obsessive loyalty to party ... loyalty to team displaces loyalty to the truth ... [and undermines] individual thought and individual conscience," Brooks said. He cited regular party policy lunches in the Senate, where members are given "the message of the week, and they all go out and say it."

Douglas Brinkley, a professor at Rice University and author of American Heritage History of the United States, cast his lot with the two-party system. Despite problems like lobbying and the excessive party loyalty that Brooks addressed, "it serves us pretty well," he said.

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No Major Shakeup Likely in U.S. Two-Party Political System . . .

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As for the issue of longevity, Brinkley predicted "the Democratic and Republican parties will be here for a long time; I don't see either self-destructing any time soon."

Dionne argued that recent problems in the party system result from "a radicalization of American conservatism."

A pattern in which "Democrats passed programs and Republicans made them efficient ... seems to have broken down in the last eight years," he said.

"I think that what's gone haywire is what's happened on the Right," Dionne said, adding, "This election, if the Republicans lose, will create a very useful ferment in the Republican Party."

Dionne said that a conservative cycle, which began with Reagan, "has just run out of steam. It ended in 2006." With issues of religion versus secularism also in the forefront, "I think we are at two hinge points right now, which is why this election is so exciting."

Brinkley concurred that 2008 "will mark the end of the Age of Reagan," predicting that the United States is "entering into a new realm."

"I totally agree we're at the end of the conservative era; it's what comes next I'm confused about," Brooks said. One possibility, he said, is "an age of progressive corporatism, essentially subsidizing a lot of companies and then using the revenue from those corporations for progressive causes — environmentalism and other things."

Asked whether the party system has become too reliant on money, Brooks rejected the idea that money is the primary corrupter of American politics. "Obviously, people with money have more access, but I don't think it's nearly as corrupting as the power of friendship and personal connection, and ... of blindly following the team," he said.

The most serious problem is not the money in politics, but rather "how long these campaigns are," Brinkley said. "It never ends. Our best politicians are spending their whole lives just running, running, running. The second this election is over, they're going to ... [start] running for another four years." ♦

Democrats Hoping for Major Senate Gains . . .

(Continued from page 10)

reach 60 Democrats in the Senate, then the days of Republican obstruction are over," New York Senator Hillary Clinton said in an e-mail to supporters October 21. "Barack Obama needs [these senators] to reach a filibuster-proof majority."

"Republicans have filibustered a record-breaking 94 times in the last two years," former NATO commander and 2004 Democratic presidential candidate Wes Clark said in an e-mail to Democratic voters October 22. "Imagine what they will do when faced with Barack Obama's agenda for change."

Democrats are not the only ones campaigning on this topic. North Carolina Republican Elizabeth Dole, who faces a competitive re-election match against State Senator Kay Hagan, recently released a television ad encouraging voters to keep in mind what the impact of a 60-seat majority would mean for Republicans.

"These liberals want complete control of government in a time of crisis," the ad's narrator says. "All branches of government. No checks and balances, no debate, no independence. If [Hagan] wins, [Democrats] get a blank check."

The ad suggests that if Obama wins the presidency and the Democrats have enough members to invoke cloture, the Democratic president's proposals could pass through the Senate with minimal debate.

Even if the next U.S. Congress has 60 Democratic or Democratic-leaning independent senators, this does not mean the party will always be able to prevent filibusters. Senators hold a wide range of political views, and not all party members will favor cloture on the same issues. Alternatively, even if the Democrats do not earn 60 seats, on certain topics they may be able to invoke cloture with the help of some moderate Republicans. ♦

Improved Voting Technology Has Not Won Trust of U.S. Voters

By Ralph Dannheisser
Special Correspondent

Washington — Some U.S. jurisdictions are backing away from using electronic voting systems even as many other democracies are adopting them, panelists at a discussion sponsored by the National Archives said.

But while they decried this development, the panelists also agreed that techniques to assure the integrity of elections must be improved to gain public confidence in the high-tech systems.

Moves to update election systems and procedures gained steam as public trust declined after the presidential election in 2000, when a court fight over alleged voting irregularities in Florida kept the outcome in doubt for more than a month. A Supreme Court ruling ultimately suspended an ongoing recount, leaving George W. Bush with a 537-vote margin in the state, thus giving him a paper-thin 271-267 Electoral College victory.

U.S. presidential elections are run at the state level as essentially 51 different contests, with each jurisdictions setting different rules and using a variety of equipment. The Florida problems included equivocal results in several counties that used punch-card ballots. (See "Presidential Race Statistical Tie in Swing State Florida (http://www.america.gov/st/elections08-english/2008/September/20080910185610snirog7.575625e-02.html).")

Lance Trammell leans out of his car for drive-through voting outside the Orange County Registrar of Voters office in Santa Ana, Calif. on Monday, Oct. 20, 2008. (AP Photo/Mark Avery)

The screen of one of the voting machines set up for drive through voting outside the Orange County Registrar of Voters office in Santa Ana, Calif (AP Photo/Mark Avery)

"Coming out of the controversies of 2000 was a desire ... to ensure that votes are properly cast and accurately reported. It's absolutely essential to the functioning of a healthy democracy," Thomas Mann, a senior fellow at the Brookings Institution, said in introducing the October 17 panel session.

Paul DeGregorio, former chairman of the U.S. Election Assistance Commission (EAC), said he is troubled by declining use of innovative systems, even after the spending of "$3 billion of taxpayer money in the last few years on electronic voting." The EAC, set up in 2002, serves as a national resource for administering federal elections and sets standards for state and local governments.

"I would argue we can trust this technology, and that it's no less safe than paper ballots or the optical systems," DeGregorio said.

He proposed voting via the Internet, contending this would be especially helpful for 6 million Americans who live abroad and currently depend on a slow and unreliable mail system. Of 993,000 ballots sent out in the last election, 330,000 ended up being counted, he said. "That's 5.5 percent of the 6 million being able to participate. ... We're still using the methods that we used in World War I," DeGregorio said.

In contrast, he said, Australia used online voting in 2007 for troops serving in Iraq and Afghanistan, raising participation by the military from 20 percent to 75 percent "in a very secure manner." Estonia, the United Kingdom, Switzerland, Canada and the Netherlands also are introducing online voting, and the

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Improved Voting Technology Has Not Won Trust of U.S. Voters . . .

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Philippines and Romania will follow suit in 2009, he said.

DeGregorio quoted the chairman of India's election commission as recently telling him, "We got rid of paper and pencil, and 600 million Indians voted on electronic devices. ... We really didn't have any problems. I don't understand why your country is going backwards."

Using an example closer to home, DeGregorio declared: "When 93 million people can vote in four hours on their favorite American Idol contestant by telephone, I think the younger generation is going to demand from election officials, 'Why can't I use that kind of technology to cast my ballot in elections? Why should I have to wait in line for an hour to vote?'"

THE NEED TO BUILD VOTER CONFIDENCE

David Beirne, executive director of the Election Technology Council trade association, argued that "no voting system can be made 100 percent foolproof. ... To think that paper is somehow a panacea to concerns about voting integrity is a gross oversimplification of the complexities involved in election administration," he said.

Beirne endorsed testing procedures and post-election auditing, but stressed that such confidence-building techniques must not violate the intellectual property rights of the software developers.

Thomas Dahan takes part in an inspection of a sampling of the approximate 3,500 voting machines to be used in the upcoming elections, in Philadelphia, Friday, Oct. 24, 2008. (AP Photo/Matt Rourke)

He later told America.gov he agreed there is a "potential threat" that electronic voting could allow for broader-scale tampering. But, he said, "There's always been risk with every type of voting system. If an insider to a local election office wants to fix an election, they don't need to hack a system to do that."

In a brief interview, Mann cited the very fragmentation of the voting system as something of a mitigating factor against widespread tampering. "Because our system is so decentralized," he said, tampering typically could not expand beyond the county level.

Patrick Merloe, director of electoral programs for the nonpartisan National Democratic Institute for International Affairs, said the primary issue is not the choice of technology, but whether systems are in place to assure trust.

The problem is "the lack of public confidence in the process, and the only way to establish that confidence is transparency," he said.

It is essential, Merloe said, that both candidates and the public are brought into the process early enough "to be involved in the design ... and that you can say afterward that it's accurate."

Roy Saltman, a specialist in voting technology who served for 27 years at the National Bureau of Standards, called for a shift from the current "haphazard system of private parties registering voters" to one involving interstate coordination and a role for the national government.

"In my opinion, we ought to have in every state a nonpartisan or multipartisan body that supervises elections," Saltman said. "In this I believe the United States is way behind other democratic countries."

(This is a product of the Bureau of International Information Programs, U.S. Department of State. Web site: http://www.america.gov)♦

United States Focuses on Corruption-Terrorism Connection

By Andrzej Zwaniecki
Staff Writer

Washington — The international community needs to apply multiple capabilities in a strategy designed to tackle more effectively the threats posed by the convergence of transnational criminal networks and terrorist groups, U.S. officials say.

The United States will emphasize this theme and the impact of related issues on national security — along with the U.S. Strategy to Internationalize Efforts Against Kleptocracy, the U.S. policy to deny refuge to corrupt officials, and other initiatives — at the October 30-November 2 International Anti-Corruption Conference in Athens, Greece. David Luna, the director for anti-crime programs at the State Department's Bureau of International and Law Enforcement Affairs, heads the U.S. delegation to the meeting organized by nongovernmental groups.

So far, according to Luna, transnational crime — such as narcotrafficking, kleptocracy and arms smuggling — and international terrorism mostly have been viewed as separate threats.

But there is growing evidence of convergence: terrorist organizations evolving into crime enterprises and criminal organizations resorting to radical tactics. This is particularly true in countries where corruption is rife and institutions are weak, he told America.gov.

According to the U.S. Drug Enforcement Agency, 19 of the 44 groups that the U.S. government has designated as foreign terrorist organizations participate in the drug trade and other criminal activities. The engagement of the Taliban in heroin and opium trafficking in Afghanistan and of the FARC in coca trafficking in Colombia has been well publicized. In October, U.S. and Colombian investigators dismantled an international cocaine-smuggling and money-laundering gang that used part of its profits to finance Hezbollah, the Lebanon-based Shiite militia, according to Colombian officials.

A member of a counternarcotics police force observes the destruction of an illegal airstrip used by drug traffickers in Colombia.

"The terror-crime nexus cripples not only a government's ability to make progress in the fight against terrorism, but also undermines government institutions and general law enforcement efforts," Luna said.

In recent years, Mexico has been terrorized by powerful drug cartels, and some Central American republics have faced a threat from growing gang violence and increased radicalization.

The huge amount of money generated by the global drug trade allows drug lords to corrupt police, customs and other public officials and establish structures and networks that can be used to facilitate other criminal or terrorist activities, said Robert Leventhal, the director of anti-corruption programs at the same bureau.

This indicates the need for a new approach to the terror-crime nexus that combines anti-corruption, counterterrorist and anti-crime measures, he told America.gov.

Luna said the United States works with partners to elevate the awareness of the challenge posed by threats stemming from transnational illicit activities. It also wants to ensure better international cooperation in taking the fight directly to criminals and terrorists and dismantling their operations and networks. Luna also said the international community needs to be "smarter" in confronting transnational threats; he urged communities to enhance intelligence and evidence collection to better understand the linkages between organized crime networks, corruption nodes and terrorist organizations.

"We cannot come up with solutions if we fail to comprehend the full dimension of a challenge," he said. "We need to simultaneously drain the swamp and illicit cesspools associated with crime, corruption and terrorism."

Luna said the international community will not make much progress unless it dismantles the illicit sup-

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Bush, NATO Secretary-General Address Pressing Issues

By Jacquelyn S. Porth
Staff Writer

Washington — President Bush signed the accession protocols for Albania and Croatia during a ceremony at the White House on October 24 in a step bringing those two nations closer to joining the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO).

Bush has supported Albanian and Croatian aspirations to join the alliance since the beginning of his administration nearly eight years ago. Both countries were invited to join NATO at the April 2008 summit in Bucharest, Romania.

The Bucharest communiqué said Albania and Croatia "have demonstrated a solid commitment to the basic principles set out in the [1949] Washington Treaty, as well as their ability and readiness to protect freedom and ... shared values by contributing to the alliance's collective defense and full range of missions."

The U.S. Senate ratified the accession protocols for Albania and Croatia in September. All 26 NATO members must ratify before they can join the alliance, as soon as 2009.

White House press secretary Dana Perino said an invitation to join NATO recognizes "a country's achievements on the path to prosperity and peace." Both Croatia and Albania have been working with NATO on defense and security sector reforms as well as on democratic institutional reform.

Macedonia is another would-be NATO member, but its entry has been sidetracked in a dispute with alliance member Greece over the official name for Macedonia.

Defense Secretary Robert Gates traveled to Skopje, Macedonia, in October and urged the Macedonians and Greeks to resolve their differences. He encouraged the Macedonians to be as creative as possible "so we can try and get their NATO membership done at the foreign ministers meeting in December" in Brussels, Belgium.

President Bush is joined by NATO Secretary General Scheffer as he addresses his remarks to invited guests Friday, Oct. 24, 2008 in the White House, prior to signing the NATO accession protocols. White House photo by Chris Greenberg

NATO Secretary-General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer said a mutually acceptable solution to the naming convention is needed soon so that Macedonia can be welcomed as a new member of the alliance.

De Hoop Scheffer flew to Washington for private talks with President Bush and to witness the protocol signing ceremony along with diplomats, members of Congress and representatives of Albanian-American and Croatian-American organizations.

PRESSING CONCERNS FOR NATO

The growing global financial crisis is putting increased pressure on the alliance to pool its resources and find shared solutions to pressing problems.

NATO now is looking for ways to cooperate more closely with the United Nations and the European Union, as well as other international organizations.

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Bush, NATO Secretary-General Address Pressing Issues . . .

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Pressing issues for the December meeting include an assessment of nations participating in the alliance's Membership Action Plan (MAP), relations with Russia and progress in Afghanistan.

MAP is a NATO program to provide advice, support and assistance for nations seeking to join the alliance. The foreign ministerial meeting is supposed to consider the readiness of Georgia and Ukraine to take part in the MAP process. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice made reference to this in August after the North Atlantic Council meeting at NATO headquarters.

At the White House October 24, Perino said: "We see no reason that they shouldn't get MAP status." In fact, she said, there has been growing support for both countries to be integrated into MAP, "given what happened this summer when Russia invaded Georgia."

MAP is the next step for these two countries en route to NATO membership, but some European nations are concerned about how this process might increase tensions in the Caucasus.

NATO Deputy Secretary-General Claudio Bisogniero told an audience in Poland on October 23 that in spite of the turmoil Georgia faced because of Russia's actions and the political crisis in Ukraine, NATO's membership door "remains open to them." But, he said, that door is not automatic and NATO members may want to see that those two countries "are firmly on the path of democratic and internal reforms before they are admitted."

NATO's relationship with Russia has been upset by Moscow's actions in Georgia. A recently planned NATO-Russia Council meeting was postponed indefinitely. Various NATO leaders have said the alliance and Russia cannot pursue business as usual for now.

But Admiral Michael Mullen, chairman of the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, met with his Russian counterpart, General Nikolai Makarov, in Finland in October to discuss, among other subjects, Moscow's relationship with NATO.

Mullen's trip also included a pass through the Baltic region, where countries such as Lithuania are keen to conduct more joint NATO military exercises in the wake of Russia's invasion of Georgia. Lithuania, Estonia and Latvia joined NATO in 2004.

Afghanistan is also at the forefront of future alliance discussions, given the increasing toll on NATO, U.S. and Afghan soldiers in the face of resurging violence.

A draft communiqué for the December ministers meeting has yet to begin circulating through the capitals of NATO members.

Besides the NATO foreign ministerial in December, alliance defense ministers will meet in February in advance of the 60th anniversary meeting of NATO, which is being co-hosted by Germany and France in April. ♦

United States Focuses on Corruption-Terrorism Connection . . .

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port structure that enables financing of terrorism activities, international travel by terrorists and criminals, and other crime and terror business functions. For example, anti-money-laundering measures can help expose the infrastructure of criminal organizations or a conspiracy to commit terror acts; recover drug or terror money; and create an effective deterrence.

According to Leventhal, the full spectrum of measures must be combined in an integrated approach because soft measures such as strengthening institutions and hard measures such as law enforcement reinforce each other. Institutional measures that enhance legitimacy of a government contribute to stability, which limits terrorism, he said. Intelligence and law enforcement efforts help not only in exposing terrorist and criminal activities but also in getting rid of corrupt public officials.

He said the United States has worked with many developing countries to boost their ability to combat corruption, crime and terrorism, based among other things on the U.N. Convention against Corruption. The convention provides a road map for anti-corruption reform. The U.S. also has promoted the involvement of nongovernmental groups in the fight against corruption and the ills it breeds. Civil society has expertise, will and energy to push for integrity and good governance and hold governments accountable, Leventhal said. ♦

Media Analyst Urges Revival of "Independent" Journalism

By Stephen Kaufman
Staff Writer

Washington — News coverage of the 2008 U.S. election campaign illustrates the crossroads at which American journalism now stands, according to one veteran journalist, who urges the industry to reassert its role as an independent provider of verified information while taking advantage of the many new communications opportunities.

Bill Kovach taught a master class for Missouri Journalism students on Nov. 1, the same day that he received the Missouri Honor Medal for Distinguished Service in Journalism.

Election coverage beyond basic reports of what candidates are saying and doing largely has been turned over to political advocates who are telling audiences what to think and how to interpret campaign statements. "That's not journalism," says Bill Kovach, the former Washington bureau chief of The New York Times and now a senior counselor to the Project for Excellence in Journalism.

Kovach was speaking October 23 in Washington to a group of journalists from outside the United States who are participating in a State Department program that gives them access to campaign battleground areas across the United States for their coverage of the November 4 election.

Journalism exists to provide its audience with the information necessary to make informed decisions, Kovach said. Journalists' devotion and dedication must be "to the citizen first," using the key principles of verification and impartiality to provide "the nearest approximation to the truth that they can discover and develop."

Coverage of the 2008 U.S. elections prominently features former politicians, campaign managers and others who cannot or will not be "completely open about what they know" and "have a vested interest in the outcome of this election on one side of the equation or the other."

Instead of offering an independently verified message of what the candidates stand for or an impartial account of their history, "you have a journalism now that is moderated, in effect, by advocates of one side or the other, which is the antithesis of the journalists' role."

As a result, Kovach said he has less confidence that he truly knows what a John McCain or a Barack Obama administration would entail than he knew about potential administrations from coverage of previous presidential campaigns.

At the same time, even though journalists who check the facts on what the candidates are saying have done "a better job than ever before," their work is having less effect than in years past because the campaigns continue to repeat statements after they have been exposed as false, and news outlets dutifully repeat the misinformation without including the information provided by the fact checkers.

"I don't get that part," Kovach said. "It's not just lazy. It's stupid."

THE QUEST FOR QUALITY JOURNALISM

He said he and other longtime monitors of American journalism are troubled by the current situation and plan to organize meetings with journalists and academics "to start some serious discussion" about trying to get political coverage focused on journalism's core responsibilities and away from "this road where the search for the mass audiences is leading them."

The financial pressure to attract advertising revenue has led to the news media's overarching goal of keeping the largest possible audience. This has meant an increase in light "infotainment" stories that appeal to a broad audience, coupled with a decrease in harder-hitting — but less-entertaining — news pieces that could offend some and drive them away from being exposed to the advertiser's pitch.
The quest of today's journalism is to "find an economic model that will support quality journalism on

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Reporters Overcome Obstacles to Report on Human Rights Issues

By Eric Green
Staff Writer

Washington — Reporters covering human rights issues worldwide can help stimulate beneficial reforms in a country even though they sometimes have to navigate attempts to block their coverage, several journalists tell America.gov.

Aaron Goodman, a Bangkok-based Canadian video journalist who for the last 10 years has covered news and humanitarian issues in Asia, says he is fortunate in never having been attacked or censored by state authorities or other groups.

However, Goodman said, local journalists in Asia encounter "a lot more immediate threats than I do as a foreign reporter."

"Governments that are launching attacks on their own people or committing serious rights abuses may be reluctant to target a foreign reporter because that could potentially create a lot of bad press for them," Goodman said. "This hasn't outright prevented a lot of attacks on [local] journalists."

Goodman said the risks for journalists are increasing, but, "hopefully, some international efforts to afford journalists greater protections and rights through international frameworks will help add to the safety of reporters in the field."

The most difficult problem he sometimes faces involves access, Goodman said.

"There are some important human rights stories that I would like to cover, such as Sri Lanka and the ongoing civil war there," Goodman said. "I am sure there are ways into the stories, but governments can make it very difficult for reporters to reach affected areas."

Goodman said he cannot assess whether his work helps improve a country's human rights situation.

"The best I can hope for as a reporter and filmmaker is that the work I produce helps create awareness about the situation that I focus on," Goodman said. "Media and storytelling has the power to inform and move people, and hopefully inspire others to create positive change."

REPORTERS FACE OBSTACLES IN RUSSIA, POST-SOVIET REPUBLICS

Former foreign correspondent Stephen Handelman spoke of his experience reporting from Moscow. "I, like many others, covered dissidents" in the former Soviet Union, he said.

But after the Soviet Union disappeared in 1991, Russia's human rights situation was "a lot harder to cover, because there were so many ambiguous issues: a lot of freedom for dissent on paper, but tougher for human rights advocates to make their points heard," said Handelman, now director of the Center on Media, Crime and Justice at the City University of New York's John Jay College of Criminal Justice and a former columnist and senior writer for Time magazine and the Toronto Star.

As he worked to bring the attention of overseas audiences to criminal justice issues and economic crimes occurring in Russia, Handelman said, the "pressures rarely let up for people in the grassroots, including local journalists."

Handelman said he found it difficult "to command attention from an overseas audience" about human rights issues in Russia. That audience, he said, was "largely convinced that the collapse of the Soviet Union had brought about the promised free-market democracy. Internally, reporting on crime issues was very difficult because so few sources felt safe enough to talk."

Handelman, whose books include Comrade Criminal: Russia's New Mafia, an analysis of post-Soviet corruption and organized crime, said the "saddest trajectory" in Russia is the "tenuous and risky position" of Russian journalists. "It's been downward since the late 1990s."

He added that "things are considerably worse in many of the post-Soviet republics, particularly Central Asia, which has experienced, if anything, a further constriction of human rights since the collapse of the Soviet Union."

BARRIERS TO HUMAN RIGHTS COVERAGE IN LATIN AMERICA

Alvaro Vargas Llosa, a nationally syndicated columnist for the Washington Post Writers Group who has covered Latin America extensively, said he faced three types of obstacles as a journalist: governments denying access to people "who can give testimony" to a human rights situation, victims of human rights abuses who are too scared to speak out, and lack of definitive and credible information.

Vargas Llosa, a Washington-based senior fellow and director of the Independent Institute's Center on Global Prosperity, said a big prob-

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U.S. Democracy Has "Come a Long Way," State's Glassman Says

By Michelle Austein
Staff Writer

Washington – America's Founding Fathers would be "astounded" to see the presidential race of 2008, James Glassman, under secretary of state for public diplomacy and public affairs, said October 27.

"But I believe, as well, that they would be very proud," of the political developments, Glassman told a group of participants in the International Visitors Observe the Elections (I-Vote) program.

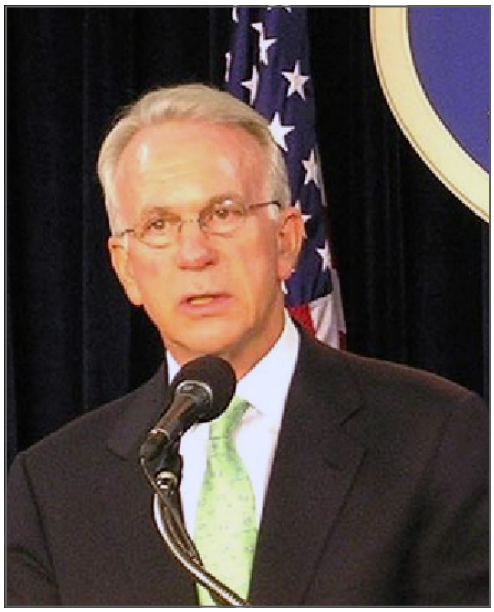
As part of his duties, Glassman oversees the State Department's international exchange programs. In this position, Glassman said he has learned how closely people around the world are following the 2008 election.

The 100 visitors from across the globe participating in the I-Vote program, an initiative sponsored by the Department of State's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, will get a close view of the political action. In the days leading up to and including Election Day, the participants will observe the political activity in some of the country's most competitive swing states, including Missouri, Colorado and Ohio.

"As our country prepares to elect the 44th president of the United States, members of Congress and thousands of officials in state and local contests, you will witness history in the making," Glassman told the participants. "You will have the opportunity to observe democracy in action as Americans' exercise their rights."

"You will see firsthand the American political process that has endured the test of time since it was first imagined by Benjamin Franklin and the Founding Fathers in 1787."

"Americans from coast to coast, young and old, are energized about this election in a way that we have not seen in recent memory," Glassman said. "This is why I'm so pleased we can share this important moment in our history with all of you."



Glassman says women's long struggle for the right to vote is an example of the United States' progress on the path of democracy.

AMERICAN DEMOCRACY "NOT PERFECT"

Glassman said the path of democracy in the United States has "not been a particularly easy one," but that the 2008 election reminds people the country has "come a long way."

The under secretary said the framers of the Constitution opted to not address the issue of slavery. This decision was one that contributed to the Civil War and decades of struggles for African Americans to receive full liberties. Women also faced a long struggle for the right to vote.

"Just imagine the significance of what we are experiencing as Americans today," Glassman said. "Whatever the outcome on November 4 ... be it a Republican or Democratic victory, our country will be electing either its first African-American president or its first woman as vice president."

"The true genius of our founders was not that they set up a perfect system of governance, but that they embraced and institutionalized the great self-correcting mechanisms of democracy," Glassman said.

"Democracy is not easy, democracy is never perfect. We're absolutely not perfect in the United States, nor do we believe that our system is right for everyone. What we believe is that free people with free choices devise the best systems."

Find out more about U.S. democracy in U.S. Elections (http://uspolitics.america.gov/uspolitics/elections/index.html) and U.S. Government (http://uspolitics.america.gov/uspolitics/government/index.html).

(This is a product of the Bureau of International Information Programs, U.S. Department of State. Web site: http://www.america.gov)♦

European Award Shows World Esteem for Chinese Dissident

By Stephen Kaufman
Staff Writer

Washington — The European Parliament's decision to award its Sakharov Prize to Chinese dissident Hu Jia demonstrates the international community's esteem for his work and might help lead to his release, a State Department official says.

The Bush administration remains deeply concerned about the imprisonment of the 34-year-old human rights activist. "[We] have pressed Chinese authorities for his immediate release on many occasions and at the highest levels," Darby Holladay, a spokesman for the State Department, told America.gov October 24.

Hu Jia, who has brought attention to causes in China including AIDS, the environment and the 1989 massacre of pro-democracy demonstrators, has been held in a Chinese prison since late 2007 after being convicted of subversion. According to press reports, he was arrested after providing video testimony on the state of human rights in China to the European Parliament's human rights subcommittee.

Parliament President Hans-Gert Pöttering said October 23 that by awarding its prestigious Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought to Hu Jia, "the European Parliament firmly and resolutely acknowledges the daily struggle for freedom of all Chinese human rights defenders."

The European Parliament has awarded a prestigious rights prize to Hu Jia, seen here in 2007, on the eve of a key Beijing summit and amid allegations of Chinese pressure not to honour the jailed Chinese dissident. (AFP/File/Frederic J. Brown)

The award will be given in Strasbourg, France, on December 17 and comes with a 50,000 euro ($64,000) prize.

"We hope that the recognition ... will demonstrate to China's leaders the enormous esteem the international community holds for his important work as a human rights defender, and that China will release him immediately," the State Department's Holladay said.

The United States will continue to work with the international community to encourage improvements that would bring China's human rights practices "into compliance with international human rights standards," Holladay said. U.S. officials hope China someday will recognize the contributions of its human rights activists "who work on some of the most difficult problems facing Chinese society."

"No one should be imprisoned for expressing his or her views or for working within China's legal system to improve the lives of his or her fellow citizens," he said.

Previous winners of the Sakharov Prize include Burmese democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi, former South African leader Nelson Mandela and former U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan.

(This is a product of the Bureau of International Information Programs, U.S. Department of State. Web site: http://www.america.gov)♦

International Pollinator Conference Highlights Importance of Bees

By Daniel Gorelick
Staff Writer

Washington — Numbers of bees, birds and other pollinating animals are declining, posing a threat to the survival of thousands of plants used for food, fibers and medicines, according to scientists and government officials at the eighth annual international conference of the North American Pollinator Protection Campaign (NAPPC).

Scientists, farmers and environmental advocates met in Washington October 22-24 to find ways to increase public awareness of what Robert Lang, chairman of the Pollinator Partnership, termed "a potential health crisis for the planet."

Flowering plants require pollination, the transfer of pollen grains between flowers of the same species, in order to reproduce and bear fruit. Birds, bees, bats, butterflies, moths, beetles and even the wind transfer pollen among flowers.

The worldwide economic value of pollination is estimated at more than $215 billion, or about 9.5 percent of total agricultural production, according to a recent study in the journal Ecological Economics.

Pollinator Partnership is a nonprofit organization that oversees the NAPPC, a group of more than 120 organizations, government agencies and individuals that promote and implement activities to protect the population of all pollinating animals in North America. The U.S. Department of State hosted the 2008 NAPPC conference.

COMMERCIAL POLLINATION

Honeybees in particular are central to pollination. Farmers frequently rent commercial honeybee colonies: bee colonies are driven to the farms, allowed to pollinate crops

and then removed. Commercial colonies can be driven around the country to pollinate multiple farms.

The number of commercial honeybee colonies dropped 31 percent in 2007, according to bee researcher Jeffery S. Pettis at the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

A 2006 report from the National Research Council found that bee numbers were so low that honeybees were imported from outside North America for the first time since 1922, in an exception to the Honeybee Act, which banned imports for fear that they would introduce non-native pests.

Such alarming statistics have led some advocates to compare declining pollinator populations to economic indicators that warned of the 2008 financial crises.

Laurie Davies Adams, executive director of the Pollinator Partnership, told conference participants that pollinator decline is a warning sign of an impending agricultural collapse. The Pollinator Partnership wants to raise public awareness to prevent a pollinator crisis. "If one out of every third cow was falling over, we'd do something," Adams said.

COLONY COLLAPSE

One of the primary causes of honeybee death is Colony Collapse Disorder (CCD), characterized by a nearly complete absence of adult bees with little or no dead bees in and around the colony. Without adult bees to work, the colony is doomed to collapse.

Scientists are unsure as to the causes of CCD. A 2007 study published in Science magazine found a correlation between collapsed colonies and infection with the Israeli acute paralysis virus. However, researchers did not show that the virus causes CCD. Other scientists speculate that a combination of factors, such as poor nutrition, pesticide exposure and mite and viral infections leads to CCD.

At the conference, Adams said that while scientists continue to examine the causes of pollinator declines, it is crucial to improve the habitats of pollinating animals.
The State Department has partnered with NAPPC since 2001 and

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International Pollinator Conference Highlights Importance of Bees . . .

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is currently working to conserve pollinators by planting native pollinator-friendly plant species and using integrated pest management techniques at diplomatic missions outside the United States, according to Daniel A. Reifsnyder, deputy assistant secretary in the Bureau of Oceans, Environment and Science.

"Some United States embassies are leading the way in pollinator-friendly landscapes," Reifsnyder said, citing embassies in Athens, Bangkok, London, Niamey (Niger) and Yaounde (Cameroon) for their efforts.

The United States also donated $26 million in 2008 to the Global Environment Facility (GEF) as part of a five-year project to conserve and manage pollinators in Africa and South Asia. The GEF is a partnership among 178 countries, international institutions, nongovernmental organizations and the private sector that addresses global environmental issues while supporting national sustainable-development initiatives. The partnership has provided $7.6 billion in grants since 1991.

In North America, NAPPC and the Pollinator Partnership produced free eco-region guides that suggest appropriate pollinator-friendly plants based on geographic location. Available online, these guides identify ecological regions based on city or postal code.

Eco-region guides for Canada, Mexico and Puerto Rico are in the works, Adams said. "This is what we mean by 'think globally, act locally.'"

THE FUTURE OF BEES

As part of their conservation efforts, NAPPC presents an annual Farmer-Rancher Pollinator Conservation Award to an individual or family who has "contributed significantly to pollinator species protection and conservation on working and wild lands." The 2008 winner is Chuck Hurd of Lister Acre Farms in Harrington, Delaware.

Hurd developed and uses pollinator-friendly farming practices, such as using minimal amounts of pesticides and only after sunset, to protect foraging bees from contact. He also maintains a native wildflower meadow and installed a butterfly garden on part of his property. This is "the first time I've planted and watered weeds on purpose," he said.

NAPPC also funds research on bee health, some of which was featured at the 2008 meeting. Marla Spivack, an entomologist at the University of Minnesota, studies propolis, a tree resin that protects leaf buds from infections.

Propolis has anti-microbial properties and has been shown to suppress HIV replication in the laboratory. Bees line their hives with propolis like caulk. Spivack's preliminary studies suggest that treating laboratory bees with propolis reduces the number of bacteria and helps their immune responses. She is now repeating these studies in the field using more bees, hoping that propolis may be a useful tool in the fight to save the bees. ♦

Reporters Overcome Obstacles to Report on Human Rights Issues . . .

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lem with human rights in Latin America is that the nongovernmental organizations and news organizations that care the most about this issue "tend to lean to the left [politically] and therefore look the other way when the violations are committed by leftist governments. There are not enough organizations willing to look at human rights based on the merits of each case regardless of the political implications."

Vargas Llosa said a documentary series on Latin American politics with a heavy emphasis on human rights that he completed for the National Geographic Channel has begun airing across the region. However, a portion of that documentary did not air in Caracas, Venezuela, he said, because cable television operators in that country had been threatened with losing their licenses.

Cuba, he said, is the only nation of 15 countries where he has worked that has denied him permission to shoot documentary footage.

(This is a product of the Bureau of International Information Programs, U.S. Department of State. Web site: http://www.america.gov)♦

United States Contributes $320 Million to Global Avian Flu Fight

By Cheryl Pellerin
Staff Writer

Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt — Against a backdrop of palms and craggy mountains along the Red Sea, the U.S. government announced at the International Ministerial Conference on Avian and Pandemic Influenza it would pledge $320 million to help pay for global efforts to fight avian influenza and prepare people everywhere to face a future pandemic.

The contribution will bring to $949 million the total amount the United States has given since January 2006 to support international efforts in more than 100 nations to improve pandemic preparedness and communication, disease surveillance and detection, and outbreak response and containment.

In 2004, the avian flu struck and killed thousands of birds in 10 Asian nations, including Vietnam (an egg farm in Ho Chi Minh City ... formerly Saigon ... is pictured above), touching off international paranoia about the disease.

"Let me assure you that the United States continues its focus on the threat we all face," Paula Dobriansky, under secretary of state for democracy and global affairs and head of the U.S. delegation, told the gathered attendees October 25. "It is in that light that I am pleased to let you know now what our delegation will announce officially during the pledging session on Sunday [October 26] — that the United States is pledging an additional $320 million in international assistance for avian and pandemic influenza."

U.S. CONTRIBUTION

The pledge encompasses activities by the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), the Department of Health and Human Services, the Department of Agriculture and the Department of State. International assistance will be targeted as follows:

$94 million to support lead international organizations — including the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, the World Health Organization (WHO) and the U.N. Development Programme — for capacity- building and avian and pandemic flu preparedness activities.

$86 million to support ongoing bilateral activities in 48 countries.

$83 million to address the evolving nature of the avian flu threat in the event of a global contingency.

$57 million for international flu research, ongoing support to regional sites of the Global Disease Detection network, and international coordination.

The U.S. delegation at the conference includes senior officials from the departments of State, Health and Human Services, Agriculture and Defense, and USAID. ♦

Alcohol Causes 2 Million Deaths Annually; Many Preventable

By Erika Gebel
Special Correspondent

Washington — There are more than 2 million alcohol-related deaths worldwide each year — a staggering but preventable statistic. To address this issue, the World Health Organization (WHO) is holding a Web-based public hearing October 3 to October 31.

Everyone interested in reducing the global burden of alcohol abuse is invited to contribute views to the hearing. The WHO will use this information to develop a global strategy on combating alcohol abuse.

Dr. Benedetto Saraceno, director of WHO's Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse, said in a press release that the organization especially is interested in "integrated approaches that can protect at-risk populations, young people and those affected by harmful drinking by others."

Alcoholism, a physical dependence on alcohol, is a chronic disease. There are four main features that people with alcoholism share, according to the U.S. National Institutes of Health (NIH): craving (a need to drink), loss of control (being unable to quit after starting to drink), physical dependence (evidenced by withdrawal symptoms), and tolerance (the need to drink increasing amounts of alcohol to feel its effects).

The risk for alcoholism is linked to both genetic and environmental factors. Alcoholism is considered genetically complex, involving the interactions of numerous genes as opposed to a single gene. There are treatments available for alcoholism, which include therapy and medications, but no cure.

In addition to its toll on health, alcohol abuse has a high financial cost. In 2002, the WHO estimated, costs related to alcohol abuse were between $210 billion and $665 billion.

Some research suggests that alcohol consumption in small quantities is healthy; however, excessive drinking can wreak havoc on the body. Alcohol accounts for 3.7 percent of total global deaths and 4.4 percent of global disease, according to the WHO, and 140 million people throughout the world suffer from alcohol dependence.

In addition, alcohol abuse is responsible for more than 60 types of disease and injury. The WHO estimates that 20 percent to 30 percent of esophageal cancers, liver cancers, and cirrhosis of the liver, homicides, epilepsy and motor vehicle accidents are alcohol related. Alcoholism is also a risk factor for one of the top killers worldwide: cardiovascular disease.

UNDERSTANDING THE PROBLEM

The National Institute for Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA), a branch of the NIH, is the U.S. agency charged with reducing alcohol-related problems through supporting research, disseminating findings and collaborating with other institutions, nationally and internationally.

One NIAAA grant, for the International Research Collaboration on Alcohol and Alcoholism, aims to foster collaborations between U.S. and international alcohol-research scientists. For its next grant cycle, the NIAAA intends to commit $1 million to fund three to five collaborative projects.

The Division of Intramural Clinical and Biological Research is the internal research branch of the NIAAA. According to its mission statement, it employs a number of investigators to do "basic and applied alcohol research, including metabolic, preclinical and clinical investigations, on the multiple determinants and processes of alcoholism and other alcohol-related problems and in the areas of prevention, diagnosis, treatment and rehabilitation."

In addition, the NIAAA promotes external research on alcohol abuse through the creation of NIAAA-funded alcohol research centers and programs. As of May 2007, there were 18 research centers set up at universities and institutes throughout the United States.

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Telling America's story

Media Analyst Urges Revival of "Independent" . . .

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the Internet," Kovach said.

This is something that needs to be done soon and done well, he said. The new communications mechanism allowed by the Internet is very powerful, and can "provide the most thorough, the most careful, the most deeply documented information ever." But it is also creating plenty of confusion and distortion of information, Kovach said.

"Sooner or later it is either going to serve the people or we're all just going to step back and turn the world over to an oligarchy that tells us what to think and where to go and what to do and how to do it," he said, drawing a comparison to the pre-17th-century era in Europe, before the Enlightenment, when the ideas and thoughts of the common people were irrelevant and they had no reliable information from which to form opinions.

Journalists should be striving to provide a middle ground of verified information in the midst of an increasingly polarized and frustrated audience.

"We've got to keep a sharp, clear, deep and strong flow of information that has been verified, that has been documented, that says, 'No, this is not what I think, this is what I know, and here's how I know it,'" he said.

"We can create that kind of journalism with this new technology, if we can find an economic base that will support it."

(This is a product of the Bureau of International Information Programs, U.S. Department of State. Web site: http://www.america.gov)♦

Alcohol Causes 2 Million Deaths Annually; Many Preventable . . .

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One example of a NIAAA-supported research program is the Collaborative Studies on Genetics of Alcoholism (COGA). Established in 1989, COGA aims to identify susceptibility genes for alcoholism. The program has enlisted the help of more than 300 families with a high tendency toward alcoholism. Family members have undergone a series of cognitive, genetic and biochemical tests in hopes that researchers can understand the biology of alcoholism better. This data is distributed to researchers who request it.

COGA researchers have found "hot spots" for alcoholism risk on several chromosomes. At least one protective area — associated with a lower risk for alcoholism — has been located on a chromosome near the gene for alcohol dehydrogenase, the enzyme in the body responsible for metabolizing alcohol.

TREATING THE PROBLEM

The WHO is using other methods — population data and policy — to reduce worldwide alcohol problems. The WHO has initiated the Global Information System on Alcohol and Health, which is a resource that contains information about worldwide alcohol use, problems and policies. The source data comes from epidemiological surveillance efforts, published data and information provided by WHO member states.

In a March 2008 report, the WHO reported strategies to reduce the harmful use of alcohol. The suggestions, based on numerous studies and data, include raising awareness, seeking political commitment, screening measures, community action and addressing public policies about drunk driving, alcohol availability, marketing, pricing and illegal production. In response to this report, member states mandated the drafting of a global strategy for the reduction of alcohol abuse.

With the current Web-based hearing and future consultation plans, the WHO is well on its way to meeting the goal of submitting a draft of the strategy to the World Health Assembly in 2010. ♦