



Weekly Special Report



Produced by the Public Affairs Section

INSIDE

Donation Ceremony Marks Support for Orphans and Vulnerable Children at Schools

TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 23, 2008 Addis Ababa (U.S. Embassy) – As part of its ongoing commitment to support Ethiopia’s education system, today the United States is donating school kits to 5,000 orphan and vulnerable children (OVCs) in 100 schools in Amhara, Oromiya and SNNP Regions. The school kits contain notebooks, writing tools, a dictionary and a uniform. The donation of school kits is part of a program administered by the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) under the President’s Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR), and implemented through World Learning Inc.



USAID-Ethiopia Mission Director Glenn Anders donating school kit to one of the beneficiary

Speaking at a donation ceremony held at Waserbee School in Addis Ababa, USAID-Ethiopia Mission Director Glenn Anders said, “This donation is made

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USAID and MoFED Sign \$151 Million in Agreements for Development Programs

MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 22, 2008 Addis Ababa (U.S. Embassy) – Today the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and the Ministry of Finance and Economic Development signed U.S. \$151 million worth of Grant Agreements to continue mutually agreed-upon support

for development programs in the areas of education, health, economic growth, and democracy and governance. This commitment from the United States is the latest installment of a five-year development assistance agenda supporting Ethiopia. To date, the total commitment under this

five-year plan has reached U.S. \$426 million, a 43 percent increase over the originally planned commitment of U.S. \$297 million.

“This assistance from the American people will continue to help millions of Ethiopians by providing

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USAID Health Project Shares Experience, Improves Health Care Service

MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 22, 2008 (Addis Ababa) – The American people, through the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), have supported child health services and strengthened the health care system through the Essential Services for Health in Ethiopia (ESHE) project. Over the past five years, the project has improved the lives of over 15 million Ethiopians through health initiatives at the community and national levels.

ESHE is coming to a close, the project shared lessons learned and highlighted the challenges and successes of project interventions at a meeting held September 17 at the Global Hotel. Participants included senior representatives from USAID, the Ministry of Health, Regional Health Bureaus, Woreda Health Offices, and local non government and community based organizations.

Since November 2003, ESHE has helped improve child health services

for communities in 101 woredas in the three most populated regions of Ethiopia: Amhara, Oromia, and Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples. The child health interventions of the project focused on improving immunization services, on promoting essential nutrition actions and on strengthening integrated approaches toward care of newborn and childhood illnesses.

For this, ESHE provided capacity building support to health workers and managers in the woredas, zones and regions, strengthened supervision and monitoring capabilities of those managers, helped intensify large scale community mobilization, and implemented strong behavior change communication aimed at improving community and household health practices. Since the project worked in very close collaboration with the Ethiopian Government's Health Extension Program, its contribution to the mobilization of more than 50,000 voluntary community health workers in

support of the prevention and promotion activities of the health extension workers was key to the overall success of the project.

In addition, ESHE celebrated with its Ministry of Health counterparts the progress that health care financing reform has achieved in Ethiopia. ESHE's support to the establishment of a legal framework for health facilities to retain and utilize fees was instrumental in laying the foundation for regional level implementation of different components of health care financing. The surveys disseminated during the meeting showed how health facilities start devoting resources to improving their infrastructure, their information systems, their human resource capacity and their supplies in drugs and medicine.

During the meeting it was also announced that the achievements of this projects would be build upon by two newly awarded projects. ♦

USAID and MoFED Sign \$151 Million in Agreements for Development . . .

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much-needed health and education services, more jobs and income-generating opportunities, and greater participation in democratic processes," USAID Mission Director Glenn Anders commented. Mr. Anders further stated, "The fact that this year's tranche of agreements goes well beyond USAID's original commitment five-years ago highlights the importance of the relationship between our two countries, as well as the critical economic and governance challenges Ethiopia faces today."

Through this year's grants, U.S. \$21 million will improve the quality of primary and secondary education, with special emphasis on increasing girls' access and developing schools in Muslim areas. The grants add U.S. \$115 million to larger U.S. Government efforts to combat HIV/AIDS, control malaria, improve water and sanitation, and support maternal, child and reproductive health. For economic growth, \$15 million will be applied toward expanding trade and enterprise, developing agriculture productivity and marketing, including for livestock, and protecting the

environment. A further \$317,000 will improve Ethiopia's governance and accountability, strengthen the judicial system, and help communities better manage and avoid conflicts.

These USAID grants are one mechanism through which the United States provides support for the Ethiopian people. In U.S. fiscal year 2008, the United States' total assistance to Ethiopia, through these grants and other programs, including PEPFAR and emergency humanitarian assistance, will total more than U.S. \$900 million. ♦

U.S. Government Provides Water and Sanitation Assistance to Ethiopia's Somali Region

MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 22, 2008
Addis Ababa (U.S. Embassy) – Addis Ababa, Ethiopia – On September 15, U.S. Ambassador Donald Yamamoto and U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) Mission Director Glenn Anders inaugurated a water system at a ceremony at the Kebridehar town high school. The water system serves the Korahe Zone in Somali Region. The water taps were installed by the non-governmental organization (NGO) Samaritan's Purse. The Kebridehar town water system, which serves the school and the town's approximately 10,000 residents, was rehabilitated by the International Rescue Committee as part of a water, sanitation, and hygiene interventions project funded by USAID's Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance. In addition to rehabilitating the town water supply, the

USAID-funded project is increasing access to safe drinking water in Korahe and Degehabur zones by rehabilitating non-functional boreholes and installing pumps and generators.

Ambassador Yamamoto and USAID/Ethiopia Mission Director Glenn Anders travelled to Somali Region on September 15-16, as part of a U.S. Government delegation that included the top official from the USAID Bureau of Democracy, Conflict, and Humanitarian Assistance, Michael Hess, and USAID Office of Food for Peace Director Jeff Borns. The group met with regional officials and USAID partners to assess the complex humanitarian situation and analyze the effectiveness of U.S. Government humanitarian assistance in affected areas. ♦

Donation Ceremony Marks Support . . .

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possible through USAID's response to HIV/AIDS as part of PEPFAR care and support to HIV/AIDS affected and infected children at schools. We believe that this support will substantially enhance performance at school and reduce the dropout of OVCs. We are proud to be working with school PTAs, teachers, students and communities to support OVCs to help this country's children to be better prepared for productive futures." ♦

Large Audiences Expected for Televised Presidential Debates

By Michelle Austein
Staff Writer

Washington – Polls show the presidential contest between John McCain and Barack Obama is extremely close, but upcoming debates could change that, political experts say.

Debates give Americans a chance to compare the candidates as they respond to tough questions and react to unscripted moments on live television.

Current poll numbers "can be wiped away in a second" during the debates, Stanley Greenberg, chief executive officer of the Democratic polling firm Greenberg Quinlan Rosner told journalists at the State Department's Foreign Press Center

September 16. Greenberg said he expects large audiences to tune in to the three presidential debates



Democrat Barack Obama and Republi-

and one vice presidential debate.

"I don't think the debates have ever been more important," Neil Newhouse, co-founder of the Republican polling firm Public Opinion Strategies told journalists.

"I think there is a huge amount at stake in these debates and I think people will be watching very carefully and making decisions," Newhouse said, adding that voters are asking themselves, "'Do I feel safe, do I feel secure with Obama? Is he experienced enough?' They are also asking themselves, 'Do I feel ... confident that the policies and programs of John McCain won't be similar to George Bush's?'"

"You're going to find voters looking

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Little Difference in Democratic, Republican Mideast Policies

By Stephen Kaufman
Staff Writer

Washington — In a presidential election in which candidates are trying to outdo each other in claiming who would bring greater change to Washington, John McCain and Barack Obama have more similarities than differences in their approaches to the Middle East. Those approaches are consistent with many policies of the Bush administration.

The two campaigns' stated views on the Israeli-Palestinian and Israeli-Arab conflicts and the use of economic sanctions to halt Iran's development of nuclear weapons are nearly interchangeable. One contrast is on Iraq, where Obama's promise to re-deploy U.S. troops there within 16 months runs counter to McCain's call for an eventual redeployment based on the advice of U.S. military commanders rather than a timetable set by the civilian leadership.

At their 2008 national conventions, the Democratic and Republican parties both affirmed the alliance and "special relationship" between the United States and Israel. They pledge to ensure Israel retains its "qualitative edge" in military prowess over its enemies, and support having Jerusalem remain Israel's capital as an undivided city under Israeli sovereignty. Both platforms also urge the continued isolation of the Palestinian Hamas movement until it renounces terrorism and recognizes Israel's right to exist.

Obama himself told the American-Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) on June 4 that "regardless of party, Americans stand shoulder to shoulder in our commitment to Israel's security."

Either a McCain or an Obama administration would support a negotiated solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict that results in the establishment of a Palestinian



Senator McCain, pictured with Israel's Tzipi Livni, will debate foreign policy issues September 26.

state. The Democrats add the caveat that it is "unrealistic" to expect a return to the 1949 armistice line that separated Israel from the West Bank, and say Palestinian refugees should be resettled in a Palestinian state rather than return to places inside Israel's borders.

The Republicans say that for a Palestinian state to become a reality, "the Palestinian people must support leaders who reject terror, embrace the institutions and ethos of democracy, and respect the rule of law."

MOST AMERICANS SUPPORT ISRAEL

Advocates for an independent Palestinian state are likely to be disappointed with elements of both platforms, and with the omission of any comment on issues where the United States and Israel differ, such as the building or expansion of Israeli settlements in the West Bank.

Josh Block, a spokesman for AIPAC, which lobbies U.S. leaders on issues concerning the bilateral relationship, says the platforms reflect that 70 percent to 80 percent of Americans "self-identify themselves as 'pro-Israel,'" and more Americans "identify Israel as a close ally of the United States than any country except for Canada and England."

In evaluating candidates, Americans "use the question of being pro-Israel as a matrix to understand whether or not the candidates see the world and see our friends around the world in a way that they do," Block told America.gov.

He said both Obama and McCain have been to Israel "numerous times" and have developed a good understanding of Israel's concerns.

"They have gotten acquainted with the leaders there and that's an important thing to promote the understanding of those issues. But more importantly, even than visiting, is the positions that they have taken."

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Little Difference in Democratic, Republican Mideast Policies . . .

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ARAB AMERICANS PREOCCUPIED WITH THE ECONOMY

On the other hand, the U.S. voting block most likely to advocate for language more supportive of the Palestinians, the Arab-American community, largely places the conflict as a much lower priority than the troubled state of the U.S. economy for the 2008 election, according to James Zogby, the founder and president of the Arab American Institute, which conducts political and policy research on behalf of the community.

Zogby told America.gov that in a recent town meeting of Arab-American voters in Michigan to discuss key election issues, it was difficult to divert the discussion from the economy to other issues, including the Middle East. This is the case despite the fact that the U.S. involvement in Iraq, the 2006 fighting between Israel and Lebanon and the ongoing conflict between Israel and the Palestinians have been "quite painful" to Arab-American voters, he said.

Job losses and increased challenges to small business owners have trumped other issues, he said, and the economic situation has made many middle-class voters, including first-generation Americans from the Middle East, "not convinced that their children will have a life as good as theirs," Zogby said.

"Were they happy with the platforms? Those who have read them, and that's not a whole lot I would add, aren't. ... [B]ut overall, I think that's not what's driving the discussion right now," he said.



Senator Obama met with Palestinian leaders in June. The Democratic Party's platform is strongly supportive of Israel.

CAMPAIGNS AGREE ON IRAN SANCTIONS, DIFFER ON DIRECT TALKS

McCain and Obama have argued over whether the United States should enter into direct discussions with Iranian leaders, but both pledge increased pressure on Iran, mainly through tougher economic sanctions to dissuade it from acquiring nuclear weapons.

The Democratic platform calls for "tougher sanctions and aggressive, principled, and direct high-level diplomacy, without preconditions." The Republicans "support tighter sanctions" against Iran and its business partners, but "oppose entering into a presidential-level, unconditional dialogue with the regime in Iran until it takes steps to improve its behavior," namely dropping its support of terrorism and halting its uranium enrichment efforts.

Both parties also pledge to "retain all options," which is widely interpreted as a willingness to use military force should diplomatic efforts fail.

Because foreign policy is the main focus of the first presidential debate between McCain and Obama, scheduled for September 26, the two candidates will have the opportunity to differentiate their respective policies toward the Middle East and other areas.

But overall, the "change" theme of the 2008 campaign does not appear applicable to U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East.

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

Large Audiences Expected for Televised Presidential Debates . . .

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for answers to those questions in those debates," he said.

FORMAT OF DEBATES CAREFULLY PLANNED

Presidential debates are a mainstay of the American presidential campaign process. The first televised debate between major party nominees Richard Nixon and John Kennedy in 1960 was broadcast on television and radio. It illustrated the potential impact of debates and the importance of style and form as well as substance. Even though most of the radio audience believed Nixon had won the debate, the larger television audience thought Kennedy won, a response that likely contributed to Kennedy's narrow victory.

Debates were not held again until 1976 and have been held every presidential election year since. Since its founding in 1987, the Commission on Presidential Debates (CPD), a nonpartisan organization, has planned the debates.

The first presidential debate, scheduled for September 26 at the University of Mississippi, will focus on foreign policy. The second will be a town-hall style debate at Belmont University in Nashville, Tennessee, October 7. The third debate will focus on the economy and domestic issues and will be October 15 at Hofstra University in New York.

Vice presidential candidates Joe Biden and Sarah Palin will debate October 2 at Washington University in St. Louis. There is no set topic for this debate.

The CPD began planning the 2008 debates in December 2006. Nearly every detail – including how the candidates will be positioned on the stage and who will be in the audience – is worked out in advance with the cooperation of the presidential campaigns.

Each debate will be televised live for 90 minutes and will be moderated by a different television news personality. The moderators are familiar people to most Americans: Jim Lehrer of PBS, Tom Brokaw of NBC and Bob Schieffer of CBS. Gwen Ifill of PBS will moderate the vice presidential debate.

For the first and third debates, the moderator writes his or her own questions. Each question fuels a nine-minute segment: two minutes each for candidates to answer the question; and five minutes for discussion, during which the moderator ensures each candidate gets about equal time. This differs from past debates, which used shorter segments and more questions.

The second debate, the town-hall-style event, will feature questions from an audience of undecided voters. In the days before the debate, the Gallup polling organization will poll voters who live in the Nashville area to find those who remain truly undecided. These voters will pose their own questions to the candidates. The moderator sees the questions in advance, but is not allowed to alter them.

For the first time, the town-hall moderator also will pose questions submitted by people via the Internet. The CPD has partnered with MySpace to create MyDebates (<http://www.myspace.com/>

mydebates), a Web site that allows people to submit questions and participate in political forums. MyDebates also will offer videos and transcripts from the debates. As an additional feature, the moderator can select questions about health care submitted by Americans to the health Web site, WebMD (<http://boards.webmd.com/webx?thdx@@.89a84b85!thdchild=.89a84b85>).

Only the major-party candidates will participate in the debates. The CPD has rules guiding eligibility for debates, including a 15 percent threshold – a candidate must garner about 15 percent support in five major national polls in the days leading up to the debates. This tends to limit debate participation to candidates of the major parties, although Ross Perot participated in 1992 and John Anderson in 1980.

Over the past two decades, another important aspect of the debates has developed – the "spin." After each debate, campaign surrogates will speak to members of the press, making the case (or "spinning") for why their candidate "won" the debate.

More information is available on the Commission on Presidential Debates (<http://www.debates.org/>) Web site (<http://www.debates.org/>).

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

Presidential Contest Remains Close in Battleground States

By Michelle Austein
Staff Correspondent

Washington — As Election Day nears, the U.S. presidential race remains extremely close, particularly in battleground states, a Republican and a Democratic pollster agreed.

Polls suggest that many states favor Republican John McCain or Democrat Barack Obama so strongly that there is little doubt which candidates will win those states' Electoral College votes. This means the outcome of the presidential race will depend on who wins the battleground states, Republican pollster Neil Newhouse and Democratic pollster Stanley Greenberg reminded journalists at the State Department's Foreign Press Center September 16.

"This is not a national election, this is a state-by-state election," Newhouse, co-founder of Public Opinion Strategies said.

Many states have a history of their voters consistently favoring one party, but voters in battleground states, also called swing states, are divided so evenly in their political allegiances that statewide support often switches from one party to another. The candidates will focus most of their remaining campaign days on these states.

"It's basically ... a dead even race, which is why we find this all too exciting," Greenberg, chief executive officer of Greenberg Quinlan Rosner, said.

Most recent national polls indicate that Republican John McCain and Democrat Barack Obama are nearly

tied, and the findings are similar when examining swing states. Greenberg cited a September 8-10 Democracy Corps survey that indicates McCain is favored by one percentage point in battleground states.



John McCain waves as he gets a tour of the General Motors car plant in Ohio

Political experts and pollsters have differing opinions over which states should be considered battlegrounds. Greenberg and Democracy Corps call the following states battlegrounds: Colorado, Florida, Indiana, Iowa, Michigan, Missouri, Minnesota, Montana, Nevada, New Hampshire, New Mexico, North Carolina, North Dakota, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Virginia and Wisconsin.

Demographic shifts mean there are new battlegrounds in 2008. In the 2006 midterm elections, groups that once heavily favored Republicans, such as upscale suburban voters and white rural voters, shifted to support Democrats. If these Democratic gains hold, some traditional Republican states could

vote Democratic, Greenberg said.

Additionally, the Hispanic population — 40 percent of which supported President Bush in 2004 — now leans heavily Democratic. This shift "changed the map," Greenberg

said, making western states like Colorado and Nevada swing states for the first time in decades.

Some populations that favored Democrats in the 2004 presidential election are not strong supporters of Obama. And, in battleground states, Obama is not earning the support of as many older white Americans as Democratic presidential candidate John Kerry did in 2004, according to Greenberg's research. Nor is Obama performing as well as Kerry did with blue collar male voters.

The Democracy Corps survey found that voters in battleground states believe Obama is better prepared to

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Presidential Contest Remains Close in Battleground States . . .

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handle the economy; these voters also believe McCain is better able to handle national security issues.

ECONOMY STILL DOMINANT CAMPAIGN ISSUE

The candidates are courting independent voters, who make up about 25 percent to 30 percent of battleground states' voters, Newhouse said. "Their issues are no different than anyone else's issues ... it's the pocketbook issues, it's the economy."

"The economy drives these [poll] numbers," Newhouse said.

Battleground voters are also seeking change, a common theme in the 2008 election. This is

indicated by the low approval rating of President Bush and the high number of Americans who feel the country is on the wrong track — numbers that have been sustained throughout the presidential campaign, Newhouse said.

"The election will be decided on who is the right kind of change," Greenberg said.

Battleground voters still have concerns about each candidate, the pollsters said. In the Democracy

Corps survey, half of respondents said Obama is too inexperienced. Half the respondents also said they are concerned McCain will continue the same policies as President Bush.

The pollsters believe the presidential

feel ... confident that the policies and programs of John McCain won't be similar to George Bush's?"

"You're going to find voters looking for answers to those questions in those debates," he said.

With the race so close, it is difficult to predict who will win the presidency, the pollsters said.

"I don't think we know what's going to happen," in the remaining weeks of the campaign, Newhouse said. "This is not a campaign that has gone on a straight and narrow path. It's a campaign that has zigzagged and the issues have changed dramatically depending on external events."

Newhouse said the presidency is "still up for grabs."



Barack Obama greets workers as he visits United States Steel Corporation's Mon Valley Works-Edgar Thomson Plant March 28, 2008 in Pennsylvania.

candidates' debates will be an important opportunity for the candidates to ease voters' concerns. The first of three presidential debates is September 26.

"I think there is a huge amount at stake in these debates and I think people will be watching very carefully and making decisions," Newhouse said, adding that voters are asking themselves, "Do I feel safe, do I feel secure with Obama? Is he experienced enough?" They are also asking themselves, "Do I

A transcript of the briefing (<http://fpc.state.gov/fpc/109359.htm>) is available on the State Department's Web site.

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

Senior Citizens Most Reliable Group of U.S. Voters

By Eric Green
Staff Writer

Washington — U.S. presidential nominees Barack Obama and John McCain are vying for the vote of senior citizens, who political analysts tell America.gov are the most reliable group to vote in American elections.

Curtis Gans, director of the nonpartisan Center for the Study of the American Electorate at American University in Washington, said seniors vote at a rate of about 60 percent more than young people and about 10 percentage points higher than the national average.

Gans added that seniors are the only group in America that has been increasing its rate of voter turnout, especially in the 75-and-older range where modern medicine is keeping people alive longer.

Senior citizens' effect on the 2008 presidential election, Gans said, "really depends on whether there is a decided split" in which the senior vote helps turns the tide in favor of the Republican McCain or the Democrat Obama. If the vote is split evenly, other voting blocs might have more effect than the elderly, said Gans, whose center seeks bipartisan approaches on how to increase U.S. voter turnout.

Like much of the general electorate, older Americans are not single-issue voters, unless they feel a particular candidate threatens their Social Security retirement and Medicare health benefits, Gans said. Otherwise, he said, seniors vote on a candidate's experience on the economy, America's role in the world,

health care issues and "a whole series of things that are 'senior citizen issues.'" (See "2008 Presidential Race Shatters Old Barriers for Candidates (<http://www.america.gov/st/elections08-english/2008/August/200808051453521xeneerg0.4588739.html>).")

The crisis in the U.S. financial markets, Gans said, will hurt McCain and the Republicans if history serves as a guide; economic troubles typically rebound against the



Senior citizens vote in the 2008 presidential election at a Florida retirement community. (Andrew Itkoff/The New York Times)

political party in power. Republican President Bush has held the White House since 2001.

The crisis will help Obama with seniors if they find the Democrat credible on how to resolve the country's economic problems, Gans said. "In this economic climate people are looking for change."

Gans said his guess is that the elderly "will react somewhat negatively" to Sarah Palin, McCain's vice presidential pick, because seniors "do value experience, and they're more attuned to the fact that there's fragility in one's life

expectancy."

According to Gans, Palin has yet to prove to seniors that she has command of the problems America faces nationally and internationally. He said Palin, Alaska's governor, could "perform wonderfully" in her October 2 debate with Democratic vice president nominee Joe Biden and mitigate some of the concerns held by senior citizens about her.

SENIORS CONCERNED ABOUT HEALTH CARE, ECONOMY

David Woodard, a political science professor at Clemson University in South Carolina, said he thinks the 72-year-old McCain is the favorite among seniors because the Arizona senator is from the "geriatric era of elderly voters."

But Woodard, who previously worked as a political consultant for Republican candidates, said many Democrats will vote for that party's ticket regardless of age.

Woodard said health care clearly is a major issue for seniors. He added that "given the state of Wall Street" (New York's financial district), which includes the Lehman Brothers investment firm declaring bankruptcy on September 15, the economy also weighs heavily, especially for people living on a fixed income.

Woodward said he expects McCain to win all 11 states of the American South, including the so-called battleground (closely contested) state of Florida with its large elderly population.

"My suspicion is that Florida is not

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Senior Citizens Most Reliable Group of U.S. Voters . . .

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a battleground state," Woodard said. "I think it's moving closer" to McCain "than it has been for some time."

Allan Saxe, a political science professor at the University of Texas, said seniors always have been an important voting group "since they vote regularly and in great numbers."

This group, he said, is also of "great importance" to McCain because the younger voters (18-26) "seem to be for Obama."

Saxe said seniors "may indeed vote for McCain because of his age and his experience and his pro-life posture" regarding abortion.

He added that the pro-life stand on abortion by McCain and Palin will appeal to seniors who may be "a bit more conservative on abortion issues" than younger people. Also, McCain's military experience in Vietnam could win over "many seniors who are veterans or married to veterans," Saxe said.

Robert Binstock, professor of aging, health and society at Case Western Reserve University in Ohio, said, as in the past three decades, "older voters will distribute their votes much like other age groups do, except for the youngest age group, 18-29," who favor Obama according to public opinion polls.



Democratic presidential candidate Sen. Barack Obama talks to seniors in Columbus, Ohio, on Friday.

"There are no particular senior issues" in this election, said Binstock, co-author of *Aging Nation: The Economics and Politics of Growing Older in America*.

Binstock said seniors are not "one-dimensional, single-issue voters. ... They are people of all races, religions, partisan attachments, socioeconomic status, region, etc. They have much the same range of issues on their minds as American adults in general."

SENIOR ADVOCACY GROUP SEEKS TO BYPASS WASHINGTON GRIDLOCK

Drew Nannis, a spokesman for AARP, a Washington-based nonpartisan advocacy group for seniors, told *America.gov* that "health care

and long-term financial security are of the utmost concern for older Americans. Therefore, we need to hold the presidential candidates to higher standards to be sure that they'll address these vital issues and change them for the better."

He said AARP has created the "Divided We Fail" campaign "to push party politics aside and bypass the gridlock plaguing Washington in order to make advancements" on those issues. "The only way this goal can be achieved is if we let partisanship fall by the wayside and truly commit ourselves to improving these fundamental issues," Nannis said.

See Obama's (<http://www.barackobama.com/issues/seniors/>) policy positions on senior citizens and McCain's (<http://www.johnmccain.com/Informing/Issues/19ba2f1c-c03f-4ac2-8cd5-5cf2edb527cf.htm>) proposals on health care on the candidates' respective Web sites.

More information about the Divided We Fail (http://www.aarp.org/issues/dividedwefail/about_us/about_divided_we_fail.html) campaign is on the AARP Web site.

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

Arab Americans Encouraging Community to Make Voice Heard

By Michelle Austein
Staff Writer

Washington — As part of its Yalla ("Let's go") Vote campaign, the Arab American Institute (AAI) is encouraging its community to engage in the political process and make its voice heard.

Many in the community are doing just that, saying that, like other Americans, their top concern in the 2008 election is the economy.

At least 3.5 million Americans are of Arab descent, and about one-third of Arab Americans live in battleground states — including Michigan, Virginia, Ohio, Florida and Pennsylvania.

AAI field organizers in five states with large Arab-American populations are visiting community, religious and political gatherings to encourage Arab Americans in their states to get involved in the electoral process.

Organizers like Nadia Zaiem, a 20-year-old student at Case Western University in Cleveland, have been attending iftaars (the evening meal to break the daily fast during Ramadan) and visiting mosques, churches and Arab restaurants to encourage people to vote.

"It doesn't really matter who you vote for, as long as you vote," Zaiem told America.gov. "If you don't vote, then your elected officials will realize you're not voting and they won't be as eager to listen to you in the future. ... By voting you're showing the strength and the power to re-elect them in the future."

"The more people who vote, the stronger our voice is and the better we'll be heard," Zaiem said.



Mia Kamal encourages Arab Americans in Florida to register to vote and learn how to get involved in political parties.

GETTING OUT THE VOTE, REACHING OUT TO POLITICAL PARTIES

Field organizers are gathering signatures for a national declaration, drafted by 50 Arab organizations, that outlines the issues of importance to their community. Those who sign the declaration pledge to vote.

"The point of the declaration is to get as many Arab Americans as possible to sign this document and say 'We're out here, we're voting, our issues are important to us and we're worth paying attention to,'" 21-year-old Matt Elias, a student at New York's Fordham University and AAI's New York field organizer, told America.gov.

"It's proven to be such a mobilizing, moralizing thing," Elias said. "They read the language, they get excited about the declaration and it's almost like they get something special out of it from putting their name on it."

"It makes them more likely to want to get involved, more likely to want to volunteer and more likely to actually vote," he said. The full text of the National Declaration is available on the AAI Web site (<http://www.aaiusa.org/page/s/YallaVote2008Pet>).

Field organizers also have been helping connect community members with political parties, encouraging them to volunteer or attend local meetings.

"It's important for us to show the politicians we want to be involved," Mia Kamal, a 24-year-old graduate student at the University of Central Florida, told America.gov.

"In Florida we could swing the election. We are a community that people need to pay attention to because we do have that power," Kamal said. "People here recognize this."

ARAB AMERICANS CONCERNED ABOUT ECONOMY

Nearly two-thirds of Arab Americans say the economy is their top concern, according to a recent poll.

Discussing the findings of a Zogby International poll conducted between September 8 and 13, James Zogby, director of AAI, said Arab Americans are focused on the same

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Songwriter Kareem Salama Combines Muslim Faith and Country Music

By Howard Cincotta
Special Correspondent

Washington — For Kareem Salama, home is the American Southwest, where country music provides much of the soundtrack to daily life. But home also meant growing up in a devout Muslim household and studying the rich textures of classical Arabic literature and poetry.

So when Salama, 30, started writing and singing his own songs, it was quite natural that he would combine a sensibility rooted in his Muslim faith with a compelling voice and a distinctive Southern accent — even if others find the combination startling.

OKLAHOMA AND MUSIC

Salama's parents are Egyptians who moved to Oklahoma, where they raised him along with two brothers and a sister. As a child, Salama traveled to rodeos, county fairs and Indian powwows, and he was exposed to traditional bluegrass and country music in places like Branson, Missouri, and the legendary Grand Ole Opry in Nashville, Tennessee.

"Oklahoma, like me, is a place where cultures meet and dance," Salama wrote on his Web site. "Oklahoma is a hybrid of southern, western and Native American culture, and thanks to my mother's insatiable desire to learn and experience new things, she made sure that I and everyone in my family were immersed in it."

FAITH AND MUSIC

At the same time, Salama's parents didn't neglect his Muslim religious

training. Despite his distinctive Southern accent and American music style, he is serious about his faith and draws on its rich religious and cultural heritage in his compositions.

His songs are neither overtly political nor religious, but they do reflect his remarkable background, which the Web site alt.muslim.com calls "a living dichotomy" on the American musical landscape.



Country singer Kareem Salama

In one song dealing with the theme of tolerance, for example, Salama quotes the proverb of the noted Islamic scholar and poet Imam Shafi'ee: "I am like incense — the more you burn me, the more fragrant I become."

He acknowledges how his father's example shaped both his outlook and music: "He lives the maxim, 'Be hard on yourself, but easy on others.'"

He finds the songwriting process deeply intertwined with his faith. "I

pray before and after I write a song," he said in a University of Iowa interview. "I choose each word carefully. I try to be very honest and hope that God brings this song into people's hearts."

COUNTRY CONNECTIONS

Salama's perspective on country music can be surprising, especially for those familiar only with the dominant commercial strain that leans toward lyrics celebrating the open road, honky tonk bars, and lost loves.

"There is a kind of soul in country music ... something that comes from deeper down. ... You can still hear something very old and very traditional," Salama said in an alt.muslim.com interview.

In fact, Salama is drawing on a much older tradition that harkens back to the roots of so-called bluegrass from the Appalachian region of the southeastern United States. Salama also studied English literature, especially a celebrated spiritual poem by John Donne (1572-1631), "A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning," for which he wrote a melody to help himself memorize it.

COMPOSING AND PERFORMING

Salama wrote songs and lyrics while earning an engineering degree at the University of Oklahoma and then attending law school at the University of Iowa, where he met musician Aristotle Mihalopoulos.

In a quintessential American moment, the sons of Egyptian and Greek immigrants decided to collaborate on American country mu-

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Arab Americans Encouraging Community to Make Voice Heard . . .

(Continued from page 11)

issues as the rest of the U.S. electorate. Other top issues are the war in Iraq, health care and gas prices.

Sometimes people think the Middle East is the only thing Arab Americans care about, Kamal said. "People are talking about health care, education ... gas being \$4 a gallon, the economy. Arab-American issues are American issues."

Nearly two-thirds of those polled said that if they agreed with a presidential candidate on most issues but strongly disagreed with the candidate's Middle East policy, they would not consider changing their vote.

Democratic candidate Barack Obama seems to be heavily favored by Arab Americans, but that support is "soft," Zogby said. When asked to select between Obama and Republican John McCain, 54 percent selected Obama and 33 percent picked McCain. But when asked to choose among Obama, McCain, Libertarian Bob Barr and independent Ralph Nader, Obama's numbers drop, with 46 percent favoring Obama, 32 percent favoring McCain, 1 percent for Barr and 6 percent for Nader.

One reason why McCain is not faring well with this demographic is the declining number of Arab Americans who consider themselves to be Republican. In 2000, 40 percent

identified themselves as Democrat and 38 percent as Republican. In 2008, 46 percent identified as Democrat while only 20 percent called themselves Republicans.

Zogby said the Obama campaign is reaching out to Arab Americans in ways he's "never seen before" such as hiring Arab Americans for his field staff in states with large Arab-American populations. The campaign also has created an "Arab Americans for Obama" Web page. "My sense is the McCain campaign will catch up, but they have not started yet," he said.

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

Songwriter Kareem Salama Combines Muslim Faith and Country Music . . .

(Continued from page 12)

sic. Over the next several years, Salama performed before predominantly Muslim audiences in the United States and Europe, accompanied by Mihalopoulos on the guitar.

With his trim good looks, conservative haircut and country-classic black cowboy hat, Salama recognizes that people may come for the novelty of a Muslim country-music singer. He hopes they'll stay because they find his songs compelling.

He may be succeeding. On his summer 2008 tour in Europe, Salama played to enthusiastic Muslim and non-Muslim audiences in London,

Berlin, Paris (at Euro Disney), Rome, Genoa, Italy, and Amsterdam, Netherlands.

Salama's first album, *Generous Peace*, appeared in 2006, followed by *This Life of Mine* a year later. His song "A Land Called Paradise" provided the soundtrack for an award-winning music video celebrating the diversity and vitality of the American Muslim community.

He is now working on a commercial debut album that will feature the best material from the first two albums and several new songs.

But Salama is not focusing exclusively on a singing career. Having completed law school, he is preparing for the licensing (bar) examina-

tions, and is interested in practicing patent law.

He summarizes some of his thoughts about his music on his MySpace page: "My hope is that my words will fall upon ears and hearts that may be seeking the same thing I am seeking ... the inspiration to live a virtuous life that is pleasing to God."

For more on this subject, see *American Music* (<http://amlife.america.gov/amlife/arts/music.html>) on America.gov.

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

TV Journalist Kiran Khalid Covers News from Texas to Pakistan

By Howard Cincotta
Special Correspondent

Washington — As a child, according to her mother, Kiran Khalid used to sit inside a cardboard box facing outward — “so that I was literally in a TV, if not on it,” Khalid said. Since then, Khalid, 35, has pursued a career as a television journalist, news broadcaster and producer that has taken her from local news reporting to covering major national and international news events.

“I was the first Pakistani-American woman in broadcast news in the United States,” she said. “If I’m wrong about that, I would love to meet the true pioneer because as far as I’ve been told, my road was untraveled.”

GROWING UP IN TEXAS

Khalid’s father was born in New Delhi, India, and her mother in Karachi, Pakistan, but Khalid herself grew up in suburban Houston, Texas, where her father was a land developer.

She focused on journalism early in life. “My interest was ignited through a love of writing,” she said. “I was often busy writing short stories growing up.”

Khalid, like her two brothers and her sister, excelled in school. The siblings’ high performance helped them overcome the strain of being the only minority family in their small community.

“It was often a situation where you simply accepted that that’s the way the world was,” she said, “and I’m grateful for those early encounters because they prepared me for the post-9/11 backlash.”

LOCAL TV NEWS

Khalid graduated from the University of Texas in Austin with a major in journalism, where she said she fell “for the immediacy of television, the idea of being on the air with breaking news.”



Kiran Khalid

In 1996, she went to work for the local CBS station in Corpus Christi, Texas, a job that was both exciting and frustrating. Corpus Christi provided many news opportunities — storms, drug smuggling and immigration — but the station had antiquated equipment, which made work difficult.

“Still, I enjoyed the work, being in front of the camera,” she recalled. “I just knew I could be good at this.”

At another TV station in Lake Charles, Louisiana, Khalid found the reverse situation: state-of-the-art equipment but a relatively quiet news environment. “I worked hard

and became the weekend anchor,” she said

She also became something of a local celebrity. “Walking into the mall would be like walking on stage,” she said with a laugh. “Everybody seemed to recognize me.”

In Mobile, Alabama, Khalid was on the air as many as four or five times a day, but she found herself exhausted. “I felt I was just going in circles.” She decided to try the riskier but freer life of a freelance journalist.

Looking back, “the most gratifying aspect of local news is consumer investigative reporting,” Khalid said. “Holding shady businesses and people accountable for their actions through the glare of a television lens is a community service local news provides that is often overlooked.”

She added, “The pressures are often immense as more and more news outlets value the breaking-news model over the virtue of substantive, thoughtful reporting.”

FREELANCING

In 2005, Khalid reported on the grim lives of subsistence farmers threatened by famine in Niger and Mali. Her documentary, *The Hunger Gap*, was a finalist in a United Nations film festival.

In the United States, Khalid worked as a field producer for a very different kind of news operation, Court TV, which covers major criminal and civil trials.

Khalid also became an active member of the South Asian Journalists

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Imam Khalid Latif Builds Communities of Faith and Diversity

By Howard Cincotta
Special Correspondent

Washington — At age 25, Imam Khalid Latif already has achieved important leadership responsibilities as chaplain and director of the Islamic Center at New York University and the Muslim chaplain for the New York Police Department.

“The university and police department are obviously very different,” Latif said. “But they’re also very similar, as American institutions with growing Muslim populations who are trying to find their way.”

Latif is deeply committed to interfaith dialogue and community service as integral parts of what it means to be Muslim in a modern, multicultural world. “Each of these interactions can be an opportunity for spiritual growth,” he said.

As head of the rapidly growing Islamic Center at New York University (NYU), Latif is planning an ambitious fundraising campaign that he hopes will allow him to hire a full-time staff and appoint a scholar-in-residence within three to five years.

However, Latif never forgets he is, above all, the spiritual leader of a young and varied congregation. Most are students seeking to find their spiritual path as Muslims while also facing the challenges of young college-age people anywhere.

In 2007, he was named as only the second Muslim chaplain to the New York Police Department. Latif, who serves with Catholic, Protestant and Jewish clergy, already has been called to hospitals several times to comfort injured officers and their families, none of whom has hap-

pened to be Muslim.

Latif grew up in Edison, New Jersey, the son of Pakistan-born parents. He was one of only a small number of Muslim students at school. But in a pattern that has



Imam Khalid Latif

carried on through his life, Latif also sought out wider leadership positions, becoming student council president and captain of his football and track teams.

INQUIRY INTO FAITH

Latif majored in Middle Eastern and Islamic studies at New York University and found himself continuing his inquiry into his faith and his role as a Muslim American in perhaps the most ethnically and religiously diverse metropolitan area in the world. (See “One New York City Neighborhood Is a World of Religious Diversity” ([<http://www.america.gov/st/diversity-english/2008/0729171918xlrennef0.9129907.html?CP.rss=true> \).”\)](http://www.america.gov/st/diversity-english/2008/Au-</p></div><div data-bbox=)

He also began to perceive the extraordinary diversity of Islam itself. “As a freshman, I met an Indonesian with a scraggly beard — and a surfboard. That was something new. But I also met Muslims who were African American, African, converted Muslims and the children of converts.”

Throughout his university years, Latif continued his informal study of Islam, and at age 18 he was cajoled into giving his first sermon. “It seemed to go fairly well, and I was asked to give them on a regular basis,” he said.

In 2005, after graduating from NYU, Latif entered the Islamic Chaplaincy Program at the non-denominational Hartford Seminary in Connecticut, the only accredited program of its kind in the country. (See the America.gov video Training for a Religious Call (<http://www.america.gov/multimedia/video.html?videoid=1659857618>).)

Around the same time, Latif volunteered as the first chaplain of NYU’s Islamic Center. He also co-taught courses on conflict resolution at Abraham’s Vision, a Muslim-Jewish interfaith organization for young people.

In 2006, Latif accepted a part-time position as the first Muslim chaplain of Princeton University in New Jersey; soon he was commuting between Princeton and NYU. Both schools offered him full-time positions, and Latif accepted NYU’s offer to serve as director of its Is-

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Muslim Designers Create Clothes That Combine Fashion with Modesty

By Howard Cincotta
Special Correspondent

Washington — Nyla Hashmi, 23, and Fatima Monkush, 25, are uncommon women with a lot in common. They grew up best friends in Hartford, Connecticut. Both of them have Muslim fathers from South Asia and American mothers who converted to Islam.

And now, both are committed to designing chic clothing that offers Muslim women a way to dress both modestly and fashionably.

The two hope to launch their new clothing line, called Eva Khurshid, in February 2009. Although the designers have a specific market in mind, they also hope to reach a broad base of potential customers.

"The name will be recognizable as Muslim, but any woman would look great in our clothes," said Hashmi. She describes the line as "American clothing for working women 25 to 34 years old with an on-the-go lifestyle."

CLOTHING DILEMMAS

Hashmi and Monkush first became interested in clothing design in their teens. Hashmi's family moved to Pakistan in 1995, when she was 10, although she continued to spend summers in Connecticut. (The family moved back to the United States permanently after the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001.)

"When we came back the summer I was 13, I went through a huge culture shock," Hashmi said. "I saw how different the Pakistani and American adolescent cultures were.

My parents wanted me to start dressing more modestly, because I was growing up. I wanted to dress cool like the other kids, but there was nothing in the stores."



Designers Nyla Hashmi and Fatima Monkush

Monkush had a similar experience. "It was really difficult to find anything ready-made that I could wear," she said. The girls often resorted to layering, "the Muslim girl's best friend," Monkush said with a laugh.

Both Hashmi and Monkush learned to sew from their mothers. "My mom taught me to follow a pattern and also to change it to create something completely different, something that was exactly what I wanted," Monkush said. "I was 16 when I started making all my own clothes. That was the summer Nyla and I set our course."

COMFORT AND CLOTHES

Both women have developed their

own definitions of appropriate attire. "I grew up in a very conservative home, and my parents were adamant about dressing modestly," Hashmi explained. "I eventually found my comfort zone. I will wear short sleeves, but nothing low cut or body hugging. Everyone has their own comfort level."

Monkush's approach "is not about rules, but about what feels right," she said. "For myself, I'm not going to walk around in a tank top or a short dress — I'm just not comfortable. I do cover my hair and have since I was 14."

GROWING UP IN A MIXED FAMILY

Nyla Hashmi's mother was raised a Catholic. Her father, a Pakistani, came to the United States in the 1970s and is a U.S. citizen. "My mother was studying to be a nurse when she met my father, who's a heart surgeon. My mother was so inspired by him — he is so kind and generous — that she became interested in his religion and converted," Hashmi said.

Hashmi attended Islamic school on Sundays in Hartford, along with her three siblings.

Monkush's father is from Bangladesh. He came to the United States in 1971 to stay with a cousin in West Virginia. Monkush's mother met him while visiting a friend, and she, too, converted to Islam before the two married.

PATH TO THE FASHION WORLD

After public high school, Monkush went to the University of Connecticut and Central Connecticut State

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Muslim Designers Create Clothes That Combine Fashion with Modesty . . .

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University, where she majored in art. After graduation she moved to New York City and shared an apartment that first summer with Hashmi, who was a student at the Fashion Institute of Technology (FIT).

Armed with a bachelor's degree from FIT, Hashmi found a job creating women's sweaters for noted Israeli designer Elie Tahari. Monkush, too, is working in fashion, first with Coogi, which makes hip-hop urban menswear, and then with Married to the Mob, an edgy streetwear label for women, where she is today.

Hashmi and Monkush have been working in the evenings and on weekends to put together their fledgling collection. It's a struggle — Hashmi lives in Queens and Monkush lives in Brooklyn with her husband — but both women are committed to their dream.

The thought behind their clothing extended to their choice of a name. "Eva is the name of Fatima's maternal grandmother," Hashmi explained, "and Khurshid is my dad's mother's name." Like their designs, it marries the two cultures.

The Eva Khurshid line will debut in February at Coterie, a major fashion trade show in New York City.

Hashmi and Monkush aren't quitting their day jobs just yet, but they're hopeful their collection will fill a need in the industry. "We want to be the biggest and best in what we're doing," Hashmi said. "This is not like any other brand."

A related video on America.gov features young American fashion designer Brooke Samad (<http://www.america.gov/multimedia/video.html?videoid=1564335193>).

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

Imam Khalid Latif Builds Communities of Faith and Diversity . . .

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Islamic Center.

SCHOOL CHAPLAIN

In many respects, Latif is a pioneer at a time when the growing Muslim student population, coupled with large numbers of international students, has greatly increased the need for Muslim chaplains on campus.

One of Latif's most successful undertakings was almost an afterthought: podcasts of his 20-minute Friday sermons. A friend suggested they record and post them on the Islamic Center Web site.

The response far exceeded expecta-

tions. The podcast Web site averages 15,000 visits a month. He has listeners from 40 to 50 different countries, notably Indonesia and Malaysia, although he also receives appreciative messages from schoolteachers and followers in Europe.

Latif regards his commitment to interfaith activities as central to his mission as an imam in today's multicultural world. "Interfaith work can be frustrating at times," Latif said, and requires both time and hard work.

He cites a trip to New Orleans with members of the Islamic Center and NYU's Jewish Bronfman Center to help with Hurricane Katrina recovery efforts.

By working and living together over a period of time, he said, they overcame their mistrust, "and they all learned not to define students by religion or background, as the 'Other.'"

"This is real, effective change," Latif said, "change that can emanate into the broader community."

For more information, see Diversity at Worship (<http://amlife.america.gov/amlife/diversity/atworship.html>).

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

Bush Seeks Quick Congressional Action on Financial Crisis

By Elizabeth Kelleher and Merle D. Kellerhals Jr.
Staff Writers

Washington — Saying “hundreds of billions” of taxpayer dollars are needed to buy bad mortgage loans and shore up the U.S. financial system, Treasury Secretary Henry M. Paulson Jr. pledged to spend the weekend of September 20 working with Congress on legislation he hoped would be passed as early as the following week.

In speaking to the media September 19, Paulson said the relief package has to be “big enough to make a real difference and get at the heart of the problem.”

Paulson, Federal Reserve Chairman Ben Bernanke and Securities and Exchange Commission Chairman Christopher Cox met with congressional leaders late into the evening September 18 to explain the crisis, where it is headed if no further action is taken and what kind of legislative remedy is needed to achieve a comprehensive recovery.

President Bush, speaking at the White House September 19, thanked congressional leaders for their willingness to consider sweeping legislation recommended by Paulson, Bernanke and Cox.

Bush said the three briefed Congress on the urgent need for legislation to allow the federal government to buy up illiquid assets, such as faulty mortgages, from banks and other financial institutions.

“This is a decisive step that will address underlying problems in our financial system,” he said.

Referring to the proposed legislation



US President George W. Bush (L) speaks alongside Treasury Secretary Henry Paulson (R) regarding the economy in the Rose Garden at the White House in Washington, DC, on September 19. (AFP/File/Saul Loeb)

as a “troubled asset relief program,” Paulson told the media that the government would like to buy the bad debt with taxpayer money, thus freeing up financial institutions to make productive loans, which would aid individuals and businesses and spur economic growth.

He said that just as the type of homeowners delinquent on mortgage loans has expanded from those caught up by subprime lending to those who took out “less-risky mortgages,” a similar scenario is playing out among lenders. The crisis increasingly is harming more responsible lenders that have exer-

cised sound practices.

Bush said the crisis has become a pivotal moment for America's economy. What began as a crisis in the credit markets and first appeared in the housing industry, caused primarily by risky mortgage lending, now has spread throughout the entire financial system and threatens global economic stability, Bush said. It was the third time in a week that Bush has made remarks on the escalating financial crisis.

The president canceled travel and campaign stops to focus on the economic crisis. In recent days, the government has addressed problems at mortgage packagers Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac, worked with market participants to prepare for the failure of investment banking firm Lehman Brothers and loaned money to insurer AIG so that it can sell assets in an orderly manner. The U.S. Federal Reserve joined several other central banks to pump money into short-term credit to bolster world credit markets. On September 19, the U.S. Treasury announced a temporary guaranty program for the U.S. money market mutual fund industry.

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Bush Seeks Quick Congressional Action on Financial Crisis . . .

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"Despite these steps, more is needed," Paulson said.

Recent measures were designed primarily to stop the problems of individual firms from spreading more broadly, Bush said. The measures to be taken next will address the root causes that have triggered instability in the credit markets — the mortgage assets that have lost value during the housing decline and that now restrict the flow of credit, he said.

Bad loans are "parked, or frozen," on the balance sheets of banks and other financial institutions, making it impossible to determine the worth of mortgage assets or the financial condition of institutions that own them, according to Paulson.

While the administration's proposal involves a "significant investment of taxpayer dollars," it will result in stability for the U.S. financial system, which Paulson called the "ultimate taxpayer protection."

Congress appears ready to act. Senator Christopher Dodd, chairman of the Senate Banking Committee, said, after meeting with administration officials about the financial crisis, "I am committed to working with the administration and my Democratic and Republican colleagues in Congress to develop robust solutions to these serious problems." He called the administration's proposals "constructive," but cautioned that legislation "must include relief for millions of American home-

owners facing foreclosure." (Five million U.S. homeowners are now delinquent or in foreclosure on their loans.)

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi said September 19 that she had spoken to the president in the morning and had told him, "We are committed to quick, bipartisan action." She said Congress stands ready to work beyond its targeted adjournment date the week of September 22 to consider legislative solutions to the crisis.

Even if Congress quickly passes relief legislation, there still will be work to do. "Our next task must be to improve the financial regulatory structure so that these past excesses do not recur," Paulson said. But he hinted that he expects the next administration and post-election Congress to take up regulatory reform: "That is a critical debate for another day," he said.

Pelosi, for her part, said she already has asked Representative Barney Frank, the chairman of the House Financial Services Committee, and Representative Henry Waxman, the chairman of the House Oversight and Government Reform Committee, to hold hearings in September and October to investigate regulatory failures and mismanagement.

Speaking of the need to remove illiquid assets from the books of financial institutions, Bush said that the risk of failing to act now is enormous.

"Further stress on our financial markets would cause massive job

losses, devastate retirement accounts and further erode housing values, as well as dry up loans for new homes and cars and college tuitions," Bush said. "Government intervention is not only warranted, it is essential."

See "Government Rescues Two Biggest Mortgage Companies" (<http://www.america.gov/st/econ-english/2008/September/20080911160721berehell0.5592157.html?CP.rss=true>),

"Federal Reserve Holds Funds Rate Steady Amid Market Turmoil" (<http://www.america.gov/st/econ-english/2008/September/20080916171509dmslahrellek0.2851526.html?CP.rss=true>),

"Central Banks Pump Billions into Short-Term Credit" (<http://www.america.gov/st/econ-english/2008/September/20080918114632dmslahrellek0.2236292.html?CP.rss=true>).

See also the text (<http://www.america.gov/st/texttrans-english/2008/September/20080919103922eaifas0.4600489.html>) of the Treasury Department announcement of a guaranty program for money market funds.

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

Women's Professional Soccer Starts in 2009 in United States

By Paul Levitan
Staff Writer

Washington — In the 2002 film *Bend It Like Beckham*, two British girls, one of Punjabi origin, dream of playing professional football in the United States. At the end of the movie, they leave to study at California's Santa Clara University on soccer scholarships. The sad irony is that in 2003, before they would have even finished college, the Women's United Soccer Association (WUSA), the only professional women's soccer league in the world, had folded.

Women's Professional Soccer (WPS), formed in 2007, again will give young women worldwide a chance to play professional football. The first season is scheduled to start in April 2009. The game known as football in most of the world is called soccer in the United States.

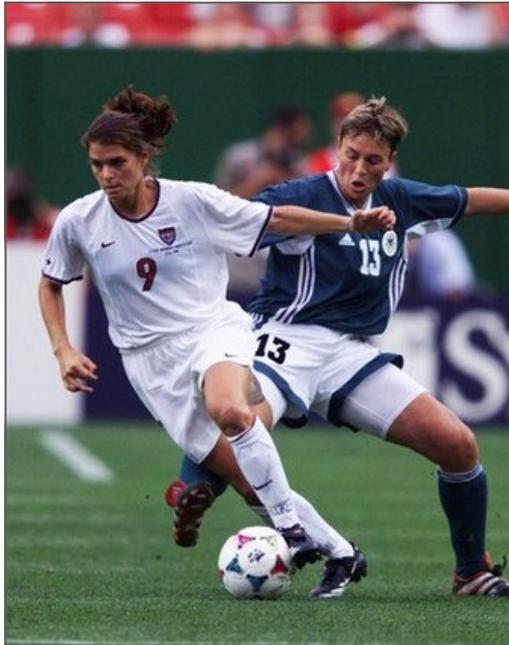
The football league has notable investors, including two-time National Basketball Association most valuable player Steve Nash and former Yahoo chief operating officer Jeff Mallett.

"I am really excited to play a role in bringing professional women's soccer to North America," Nash said. "As a father of twin girls, I'm especially pleased to help young women around the world realize that their dreams of being a pro soccer player can indeed come true."

Seven teams will compete in the 2009 season. The teams will be located in the San Francisco Bay area, Boston, Chicago, Los Angeles, New Jersey, St. Louis and Washington. In 2010, the WPS plans to

expand to Philadelphia, Atlanta and Dallas.

Twenty-one players, many from the Olympic gold medal-winning U.S. national women's team, were as-



The United States' Mia Hamm (9) dribbles past Germany's Sandra Minnert (13) at the 1999 Women's World Cup quarterfinal match.

signed to the seven WPS teams on September 15. Players include such stars as Abby Wambach, Hope Solo, Heather Mitts and Carli Lloyd.

Each team received three players, with consideration given for players' current homes and the former WUSA teams for which they played.

A draft that will put two top international stars on each team will take place at the end of September. A general draft of other U.S. and international players will take place October 5 through the beginning of 2009.

Each season will have 20 matches, followed by playoffs involving the top four teams. Two All-Star Games — one in the middle of the season and the other after the season concludes — also will be played.

The WPS recognizes its American roots. Its logo features a silhouette of Mia Hamm, who is one of the best players ever. Hamm is the all-time leading scorer among both men and women in international football, having scored 158 goals for the U.S. national team. Hamm was a leading player in WUSA and helped popularize women's football in the United States and abroad.

"I am extremely honored and humbled to personify the WPS brand, knowing full well that this league will be revered by generations of soccer fans around the world," said Hamm. "Above all else, this league represents opportunity — not just for female soccer players, but for women everywhere."

For more information, see the Women's Professional Soccer (<http://www.womensprosoccer.com/>) Web site.

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

World Must Stand Against Terrorism, Bush Says

By David McKeeby
Staff Writer

Washington — The international community must redouble efforts against terrorism by supporting emerging democracies, alleviating poverty and continuing progress toward the United Nations Charter's global vision of peace and security, says President Bush.

"Instead of only passing resolutions decrying terrorist attacks after they occur, we must cooperate more closely to keep terrorist attacks from happening in the first place," Bush said in his eighth and final address as president to the 192-nation U.N. General Assembly in New York on September 23. "Instead of treating all forms of government as equally tolerable, we must actively challenge the conditions of tyranny and despair that allow terror and extremism to thrive."

Since 2001, when terrorists killed nearly 3,000 people from more than 90 countries a short distance from the United Nations building, member states have come together to share intelligence, freeze terrorist finances and conduct joint operations to bring terrorists to justice, Bush said. He urged "clarity of vision" among nations as they continue the struggle in the years ahead.

"We must see the terrorists for what they are: ruthless extremists who exploit the desperate, subvert the tenets of a great religion and

seek to impose their will on as many people as possible," Bush said.

Bush praised U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and the U.N. Security Council for confronting terrorism, as well as other international organizations, including the G8, NATO and the 56-nation Organisation of the Islamic Confer-



President George W. Bush addresses the 63rd session of the United Nations General Assembly at UN headquarters, Tuesday Sept. 23, 2008. (AP Photo/Frank Franklin II)

ence, which recently declared that suicide bombing is contrary to the teachings of Islam. "The message behind these statements is resolutely clear: Like slavery and piracy, terrorism has no place in the modern world."

The governments in Afghanistan and Iraq replaced regimes that supported terrorists, while intensive diplomacy has convinced Libya to abandon past ties to terrorism and nuclear weapons and rejoin the international community, Bush said. "Regimes like Syria and Iran continue to sponsor terror, yet their numbers are growing fewer and

they're growing more isolated from the world."

Bush pledged continued U.S. commitment to international efforts confronting poverty and hunger, treating disease and promoting education — initiatives that honor the U.N.'s highest humanitarian ideals while enhancing stability.

"Extremists find their most fertile recruiting grounds in societies trapped in chaos and despair, places where people see no prospect of a better life," he said.

From Afghanistan and Iraq to Georgia, Ukraine, Lebanon and Kyrgyzstan in recent years, the world has seen a rising tide of nations embarking on the path to democracy, said Bush, who called on nations to "challenge tyranny as vigorously as we challenge terror."

ously as we challenge terror."

"History shows that when citizens have a voice in choosing their own leaders, they are less likely to search for meaning in radical ideologies," Bush said. "And when governments respect the rights of their people, they're more likely to respect the rights of their neighbors."

U.N.-mandated security missions in Afghanistan and Iraq are helping both countries to emerge from decades of tyranny, while U.N. civilian missions are supporting reconstruction, delivering humanitarian aid and

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Annual Report Turns Spotlight on Abuses of Religious Freedom

By Jane Morse
Staff Writer

Washington — Burma, China, North Korea, Iran, Sudan, Eritrea, Saudi Arabia and Uzbekistan are named “countries of particular concern” in the State Department’s 2008 Annual International Religious Freedom Report.

At a State Department press briefing September 18 marking the release of the report, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice said the United States believes religious freedom is the “highest of ideals” and “a source of strength and stability” for the United States and all countries.

John V. Hanford III, the U.S. ambassador at large for international religious freedom, told reporters that the United States remains a “friend of the persecuted” and said there are hundreds of thousands of people around the world denied this fundamental human right.

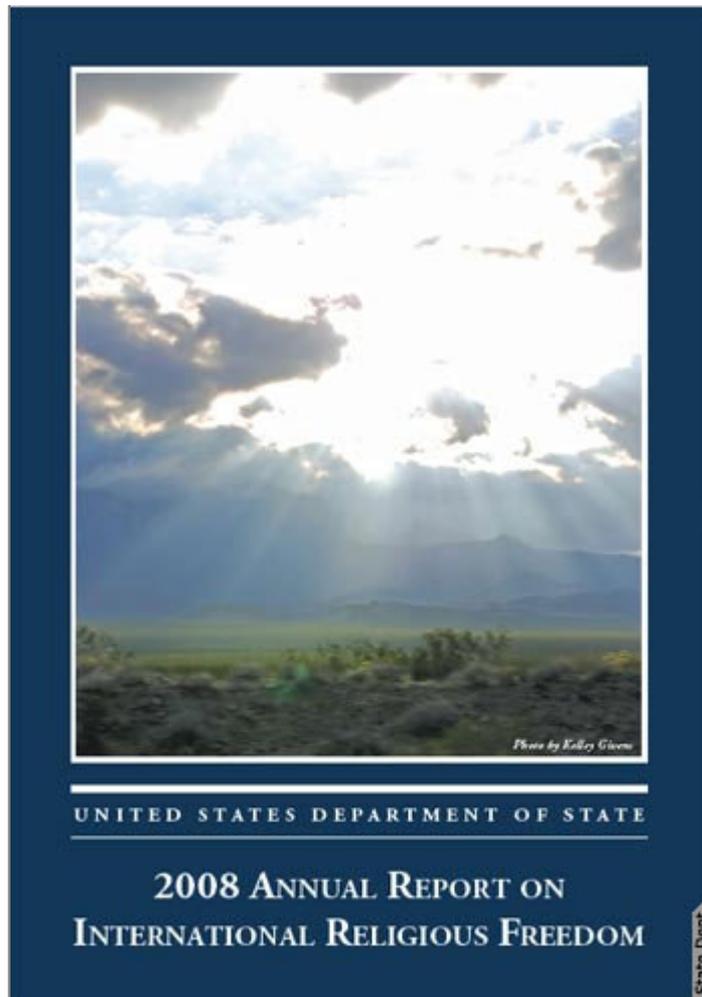
The promotion of religious freedom is “a core objective of U.S. foreign policy,” both officials emphasized.

The United States’ International Religious Freedom Act, enacted in 1998, reinforces the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted by the United Nations in 1948, which includes religious freedom in the 30 articles it lists as essential

human rights for all individuals worldwide.

Burma, China, Iran and Sudan have been named countries of concern in each of the annual reports since their debut in 1999. North Korea joined the list in 2001; Eritrea and Saudi Arabia in 2004.

Once a nation is named as a country of particular concern, the U.S. government attempts to negotiate with that nation’s leadership to bring about improvements for religious rights. The United States also can impose financial sanctions against nations reluctant to broaden religious freedoms for their citizens.



ABUSES “BOTH BLATANT AND SUBTLE”

Saying the abuse of religious freedom can be “both blatant and subtle,” the U.S. report outlines five broad categories of abuse:

- Severe abuse by totalitarian regimes that regard religious beliefs as threats to their control;

- Government intimidation of religious minorities;

- Failure by governments to address intolerance and attacks against certain religious groups;

- Government enactment of discriminatory legislation or favoritism toward majority religions; and

- Discrimination against certain religions by identifying them as dangerous “cults”

or “sects.”

Hanford said there have been encouraging improvements in religious freedom among some countries, especially Vietnam, in the past year. But he expressed disappointment

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that Jordan, which he described as having been a very tolerant country, recently increased its harassment of some religious practitioners.

MULTILATERAL THREATS

Both Rice and Hanford expressed concern about actions taken by the Organization of the Islamic Conference, an intergovernmental organization comprising 57 states with majority or significant Muslim populations.

The conference, they said, has worked through the U.N. system to weaken religious freedom protections. Member nations, especially Pakistan, have raised the concept of "defamation of religions" in U.N. resolutions and reports. Islam, however, remains the only specifically mentioned faith in the resolutions passed on this topic at the U.N. Human Rights Council and General Assembly.

Rice said the U.S. fear is that calls for the prohibition of religious "defamation," in actual practice, will limit freedom of speech, which will restrict religious freedom.

"The United States rejects actions that are offensive to particular religious traditions, but we do not condone the prohibition of free speech. That only weakens societies," Rice said. "We welcome the opportunity to collaborate on new initiatives that both respect human rights and foster a climate of religious tolerance. But we are concerned by efforts to promote a so-called defamation of religions concept, which has been the focus of numerous resolutions passed at the United Nations. Instead of protecting reli-

gious practice and promoting tolerance, this concept seeks to limit freedom of speech and that could undermine the standards of interna-



A U.S. Postage Stamp commemorating religious freedom and the Flushing Remonstrance.

tional religious freedom."

Efforts to export anti-blasphemy laws to an international level, Hanford said, will exert "a chilling effect" on the ability to discuss religion openly.

According to the report, the "flawed concept" of defamation of religions, "despite a pretense of protecting religious practice and promoting tolerance," does, in fact, represent an attempt "to limit freedom of religion and restrict the rights of all individuals to disagree with or criticize religion, in particular Islam."

Some governments, according to the report, have used this concept to curtail civil dissent selectively, halt criticism of political structures

and restrict religious speech of minority faith groups.

The 800-page report, which covers 198 countries and territories, represents the work of hundreds of State Department officers at embassies and consulates around the world and includes the contributions from religious groups, nongovernmental organizations and individual human rights activists.

The reporting period covered by the 2008 Annual Religious Freedom Report is July 1, 2007, to June 30, 2008.

See also "Religious Discrimination in Russia Remains Important Issue." (<http://www.america.gov/st/hr-english/2008/September/20080919173838clwod9.507388e-02.html&distid=ucs>)"

For additional information, see the report's introduction (<http://www.america.gov/st/texttrans-english/2008/September/20080919153629eaifas0.8071558.html&distid=ucs>) and executive summary (<http://www.america.gov/st/texttrans-english/2008/September/20080919153432eaifas0.64555.html&distid=ucs>).

The full report (<http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2008>) is available on the State Department's Web site.

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

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See also

<http://www.america.gov>

Telling America's story

World Must Stand Against Terrorism, Bush Says . . .

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protecting human rights, he said.

Bush highlighted the U.N.'s role in helping the Iraqi government prepare for upcoming elections. "Whatever disagreements our nations have had on Iraq, we should all welcome this progress toward stability and peace, and we should stand united in helping Iraq's democracy succeed."

Bush also urged nations to stand united in support of Georgia. "The United Nations Charter sets forth the equal rights of nations large and small. Russia's invasion of Georgia was a violation of those words. Young democracies around the world are watching to see how we respond to this test."

As the United Nations faces further challenges, Bush urged attention to institutional reform and accountability, calling for a review of the U.N. Human Rights Council and stronger Security Council efforts on behalf of

the people of Burma as well as Sudan's Darfur region.

"The United Nations and other multilateral organizations are needed more urgently than ever," Bush said. "To be successful, we must be focused and resolute and effective."

A transcript (<http://www.america.gov/st/texttrans-english/2008/September/20080923153432eaifas0.6974146.html>) of Bush's remarks and a related fact sheet (<http://www.america.gov/st/texttrans-english/2008/September/20080923123932xjsnommis0.943432.html>) are available from America.gov.

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

TV Journalist Kiran Khalid Covers News from Texas to Pakistan . . .

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Association (SAJA). "I'm very proud of my role on SAJA's board," Khalid said. "I love working with an organization that does so much for young journalists, such as mentoring and scholarships."

PAKISTAN AND AMERICA

Following the September 11 terrorist attacks in 2001, Khalid quickly recognized that "Pakistan was going to a central player and I knew it was now or never to be part of the story."

Fluent in Urdu, she traveled to Pakistan and became one of the first Western journalists to report from inside the Pakistani religious schools, or madrassahs, that many

accused of encouraging terrorism.

In 2007, Khalid returned for her most dangerous assignment, to film a documentary, called We Are Not Free, on media censorship and attacks on journalists by the Musharraf government in Pakistan.

In an interview with AsiaMedia, she said, "The thing that really struck me was how brave they were ... willingly to put their safety at risk in order to pursue what they think is a noble calling."

Since January 2008, Khalid has been working as a producer for one of television's most popular news and feature programs, ABC's Good Morning America (GMA).

"I like the intensity of the work," she said, which may mean prepar-

ing a story on gas prices one day and one on the 2008 presidential campaign the next.

"GMA has afforded me the opportunity to write and produce stories that are seen by millions," she said. "In 10 years I hope to still be working on stories that are relevant and serve a greater purpose."

Also see Kiran Khalid's 15-minute documentary on media censorship in Pakistan, We Are Not Free (<http://pkpolitics.com/2008/03/05/we-are-not-free-the-future-of-media-in-pakistan>).

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