



# Weekly Special Report



Produced by the Public Affairs Section

## INSIDE

### Top-level Health Delegation Visits Ethiopia, Highlights Power of Partnership in Fighting Disease

August 14, 2008, Addis Ababa (U.S. Embassy) -- U.S. Secretary of Health and Human Services Michael Leavitt and a high-level delegation visited Ethiopia August 9-13 to witness the strong cooperation between the U.S. and Ethiopia in reducing the spread of diseases including HIV/AIDS, TB, and malaria. The visit, conducted in close cooperation with Ethiopia's Minister of Health, Dr. Tewdros Adhanom, showcased the power of

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*Secretary of Health and Human Services Mike Leavitt (center) accompanied by CDC Director Dr. Julie Gerberding (right) meets Patriarch of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church Abune Paulos at St. Peter's Hospital.*

### Urban Gardens Provide Nutrition, Income to Community

*PEPFAR Urban Agriculture Program highlights achievements at closing workshop*



*Urban garden program beneficiaries*

On Friday, August 8, 2008, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID)'s PEPFAR Urban Agriculture Program shared lessons learned in using urban gardens to help vulnerable adolescent orphans and women improve their nutritional status and increase their income level. In total, over 60,000 family members have been supported in the six urban areas of Addis Ababa, Dessie, Gonder, Bahir Dar, Adama, and Awassa.

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## Top-level Health Delegation Visits Ethiopia, . . .

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partnerships between the American and Ethiopian people in promoting global health.

In Addis Ababa, the delegation met with Prime Minister Meles Zenawi, Minister of Health Tewdros, and His Holiness Patriarch of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, Abune Paulos. Secretary Leavitt joined Minister Tewdros and His Holiness the Patriarch for a tour of the U.S.-funded anti-retroviral therapy (ART) clinic at St. Peter's Specialized TB Clinic. The delegation also visited the holy water site on Entoto Mountain and a USAID-supported urban garden producing food for people living with HIV/AIDS.

On August 11, the Medical Faculty of Addis Ababa University welcomed Secretary Leavitt and Minister Tewdros for a 90-minute "health diplomacy" discussion. Secretary Leavitt talked about his own and his Department's work, and about the longstanding partnership between our two countries to fight disease, build local capacity, and improve health care infrastructure. In the subsequent discussion, Medical Faculty students and faculty raised important points and questions about health education, training and retention of health professionals, provision of current and appropriate medications, vaccine development and expanding medical laboratory technical expertise.

On August 12, Secretary Leavitt's delegation accompanied health extension workers in Axum as they

visited households in the community to provide health promotion services to families and household members. Ethiopia's innovative health extension worker program, supported in part through the U.S. President's Emergency Fund for

Supporting Ethiopia's fight against infectious diseases is one aspect of the U.S. partnership with the people of Ethiopia. Ethiopia is an important partner for the U.S. in the global fight against HIV/AIDS and



*U.S. Secretary of Health and Human Services Michael Leavitt (C) talking to journalist with His Holiness Patriarch of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church Abune Paulos (L) and Minister of Health Tewdros Adhanom (R) at the St. Peter Hospital.*

AIDS Relief (PEPFAR), helps provide health care to people who live in remote areas and do not have regular access to health clinics.

Later the same day, the delegation met with religious leaders in Lalibela. At the meeting, Secretary Leavitt emphasized the key role religious leaders play in helping their followers prevent the spread of disease, reduce stigma and care for the sick. The religious leaders reiterated a message from His Holiness Patriarch Abune Paulos that holy water and anti-retroviral therapy for HIV/AIDS can be taken together and "neither contradict nor resist each other."

This year, the U.S. Government, through the PEPFAR program, has provided more than U.S. \$350 million to Ethiopia in support for the prevention, care, and treatment of HIV/AIDS. The U.S. Presidential Malaria Initiative has provided an additional U.S. \$20 million in support of anti-malaria efforts. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services programs to deliver HIV/AIDS health care and services to the people of Ethiopia and build local capacity are implemented through the U.S. Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), which has an office in Addis Ababa.

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## Many Americans Change Religious Beliefs

By Sonya Weakley  
Staff Writer

Washington -- Sitting in Saturday school at age 10, John Mesirow began to disagree with what he had been taught throughout the early years of his childhood. The more he listened, the less it made sense. "People are responsible for their own actions," he said. "To try to blame things on God or take comfort in God seemed irrational to me."

Though he went through the Jewish rituals of bar mitzvah and confirmation, the world of religion remained illogical and ambiguous to Mesirow. "I like things to make sense," Mesirow, now an attorney in Washington, said.

According to the U.S. Religious Landscape Survey, released in two parts in February and June by the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, Mesirow is one of 28 percent of U.S. adults who have changed their religious affiliation from that of their childhood, and he is one of 1.6 percent of U.S. adults who describe themselves as atheist.

The survey results indicate that people who are not affiliated with any particular religion make up 16.1 percent of the adult U.S. population and constitute the fourth largest "religious" tradition in the United States. Within that group, beliefs about the notion of God are diverse. One-fourth describe themselves as atheistic or agnostic, and the rest are evenly divided between those who say religion is not particularly important in their lives and those who say it is either somewhat or very important.



*Sister Edith Bogue was raised as an atheist but converted to Catholicism as an adult.*

Among those who are not affiliated with a particular religious group, 70 percent indicated they believe in God or a universal spirit. In the unaffiliated group, 21 percent of self-described atheists and 55 percent of the self-described agnostics said they believe in God or a universal spirit.

### FLEXIBILITY OF AMERICAN ATTITUDES

A critical finding of the extensive survey, based on interviews with more than 35,000 Americans, is that 70 percent of Americans agree that theirs is not the only way to believe.

Tasnim McCormick Benhalim could not agree more. Raised in a close-knit, "deeply spiritual" Christian Protestant Methodist family in the small town of Mahomet, Texas, near Austin, she began to ask a lot

of questions about religion at a young age. "I wanted to know about God. I asked my parents. I asked my Sunday school teachers. I even tried to talk to my friends about it."

Her interest continued in high school, where she read about many religious topics, including mysticism, American Indian rituals and the Baha'i faith. In college at the University of Oklahoma, she took comparative religion courses, studied Islam and Hinduism and read works of the poet Rumi, who founded the Sufi order of Islam.

It was then that an Islamic professor told her that Sufism "is really the heart of Islam." Benhalim at the time said that she did not want



*Chris Bevenuto, who grew up Catholic, converted to Judaism*

to be a

Muslim, and told her family that she would not convert, "but I kept meeting and studying," she said.

Benhalim became more absorbed in  
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## Urban Gardens Provide Nutrition, Income to Community . . .

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Dr. Kebede Worku, State Minister of Health, and Meri Sinnitt, USAID Chief of Health, AIDS, Population and Nutrition delivered remarks at the event, which was held at the Sheraton.

The program, which began four years ago, has helped over 15,000 women and children generate income and food from their garden plot, remain in school, and adhere to AIDS treatment. Women and children receive not only a plot of land to create a vegetable gardening, but also training on drip irrigation management, HIV/AIDS education and, most importantly, a renewed sense of purpose and hope. Urban garden beneficiaries are also

linked to other PEPFAR Ethiopia-supported HIV/AIDS prevention, care and treatment services.

In addition to the benefits from the food and income produced by the gardens, HIV positive women and children are building relationship with their neighbors by selling vegetables and teaching them about the benefits of gardening. This reduces stigma and discrimination, sending a positive message that HIV positive individuals can learn new skills, be productive, and support their families.

The USAID Urban Agriculture Program is funded through the U.S. President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR), the largest international health initiative in history dedicated to a single disease.

The emergency plan works in more than 120 countries around the world to combat HIV/AIDS through programs to prevent HIV infection, and provide comprehensive care and treatment to those affected and infected by HIV/AIDS.

Globally, PEPFAR has supported care for more than 6.6 million people, including 2.7 million orphans and vulnerable children. On July 30, 2008, President George W. Bush signed legislation that will increase the U.S. financial commitment to the fight against global HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, and malaria, authorizing up to \$48 billion to combat the three diseases over the next five years. ♦

## Many Americans Change Religious Beliefs . . .

*(Continued from page 3)*

the teachings of Islam and keeping the prayers. Five years after graduating from college, she converted from Protestant Christian to Muslim.

According to the Pew Forum survey, she had followed another trend. Results from the survey indicate that the proportion of the U.S. population that is Protestant has declined markedly in recent decades. Protestants account for roughly half (51.3 percent) of the adult population. According to the survey summary, "the United States is on the verge of becoming a minority Protestant country."

### KEEPING AN OPEN MIND

Neither Mesirow nor Benhalim has

experienced criticism for changing their religious beliefs.

"My parents were not pleased, but they were not un-pleased," Benhalim said. "They were not surprised." Her family has remained close, she said. Her parents were supportive of her marriage to a Muslim and "adore our children."

As they learned more about Islam, Benhalim said, her family concluded that "our beliefs around God are parallel, even though the practices differ." Between Islam and Christianity, "the nature of God and life and why we are walking on Earth have real points of agreement, but we respect each other's differences."

Benhalim, who operates DiversityWealth.com, a consulting firm that

helps businesses implement diversity initiatives, believes her children and others of their generation do not carry the same cultural blinders as did earlier generations. When her son invites friends to visit, "I see a little United Nations walking through my door."

Mesirow said he openly discusses his beliefs with friends and family if the subject comes up, and he encourages his two children to read about and discuss religion and decide for themselves what works for them. "I am open-minded about it. Religion does help a lot of people."

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

## Interfaith Marriages Fairly Common in United States

By Sonya Weakley  
Staff Writer

**Washington** -- Mark and Meris Steele gave little thought to the role of religion in their marriage until three years after their first child was born. It was then that Mark, a Catholic, and Meris, born Jewish, started sending their son Spencer to Jewish Sunday school.

They now realize it was at that point they decided to raise their children in the Jewish religion. Neither recalls the decision being difficult or explicit, nor did they discuss pros and cons.

"Maybe I did that in my head," Mark said, "but somewhere in the back of my mind was the idea that whatever the mom is, the kids are. I was 100 percent OK with raising them Jewish."

Their daughters, Kellan, 13, and Brenna, 10, attend the same Jewish school their brother, now 16, attended. All three have knowledge of Hebrew and have participated or are participating in the Jewish rites of passage, including bar and bat mitzvahs.

According to the recent U.S. Religious Landscape Survey, conducted by the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, 60 percent of Americans with children under age 18 living at home send their children to religious education programs, including 35 percent of those who describe themselves as unaffiliated with a particular religion. The sur-

### ACCEPTANCE OF INTERFAITH MARRIAGE

Interfaith marriages like that of the Steele family are fairly common in the United States. The Pew survey indicates that among married adults, 37 percent are married to someone from a different religious affiliation.

One reason interfaith marriage is fairly common may be related to one of the survey's key findings: Of those participants affiliated with a religion, 70 percent agreed that many religions can lead to eternal life. An earlier Pew Study shows that generally Americans are tolerant of other religions.

"I think interfaith marriage works in this country because we have a history of practicing tolerance of

other faiths," said Andrew Tevington, assistant pastor at the United Methodist Church of the Servant in Oklahoma City and author of *Our Faiths: A Peace Offering*.

Also, because religion often matters to both people in the marriage, each is willing to find ways to take part in the religious activities of the other. "What is important is respect," he said.

For example, he said, a couple plan-

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*Jeff Burlington and Jyoti Mahapatra blended Christian and Hindu traditions during their 2004 wedding celebrations.*

vey also indicates that a majority of adults -- 56 percent -- say religion is very important in their lives and 82 percent say it is somewhat important.

The Steeles, who live in Maryland, describe themselves as not particularly religious, but they believe religion teaches important morals, ideals and values. They also believe it provides guidance to children, whether or not they continue to be religious as adults.

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## Interfaith Marriages Fairly Common in United States . . .

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ning an interfaith marriage should work out in advance the details of where holidays will be spent, which holidays of each religion will be celebrated and how all members of each person's family will know what to expect.

"Not too long ago, I performed a ceremony for a woman who was Muslim and a man who was Jewish, and both wanted to continue to practice their own faiths. They planned to expose their children to both and let them make their own choices," Tevington said.

### BLENDING THE FAMILIES

Meris said her two brothers married non-Jewish women and are raising their children as Christians. Although her parents never asked, she suspects they hoped one of their children would raise their grandchildren Jewish, if for no other reason than to maintain a cultural awareness.

"Many of their relatives died in the Holocaust and our kids will know

about their history," she said. "But they accepted Mark from day one and would not have really cared either way."

Mark said he has never heard a critical comment from his family about his decision, even though his brother married a devout Catholic and is raising his children in that religion.

Mark's mother, who is Catholic, attends grandparents' days and other programs at the Jewish school for all three of the Steele children, Meris said. "She's really interested in all the things they are learning."

The Steeles said Christmas Eve is spent with Mark's family and includes singing Christmas carols and reading part of the Christmas story,

and that the Jewish High Holidays are often spent at the beach with family and friends.



*Judy and Fred Cohen, an inter-faith couple, decorate their home with both Christmas and Hanukkah cards during the holiday season.*

When it became clear the children would follow the Jewish religion, Meris began to search for a synagogue. Her primary criterion was that it be a place where Mark would be accepted and not be asked or expected to convert to Judaism.

"I was careful to look for one where everyone in the family would be comfortable and that would be completely accepting of Mark," she said. "I wanted to be sure he would never feel out of place, and I was extraordinarily lucky" to find the right place.

*(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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## America's Eastern Orthodox Communities Show Tolerance, Diversity

**By Jaroslaw Anders**  
**Staff Writer**

**Washington** -- Among more than 200 places of worship in Flushing, Queens, arguably the most religiously diverse neighborhood in the United States, there stands St. Nicolas Orthodox Shrine Church, the largest Greek Orthodox parish in America. It is just one of many Eastern orthodox parishes in the larger New York metropolitan area.

Among them are the parishes of the independent Orthodox Church in America and the Moscow-affiliated Russian Orthodox Church in the USA, as well as Bulgarian, Serbian, Romanian and several other Eastern Orthodox churches.

This diversity within religions is encountered in many areas in the United States with large immigrant populations, and reflects the rich, complex and sometimes contentious history of orthodox Christianity in North America.

### TOLERANCE AND INCLUSIVENESS

Today, Eastern Orthodox Christians constitute less than 1 percent of the adult U.S. population, with the highest percentage in Alaska. But orthodox Christian communities can be found nearly everywhere in the United States, especially in the Northeast and the West.

According to the Pew Research Center's U.S. Religious Landscape Survey, the majority of American orthodox church members belong to the middle class and nearly 30 percent report annual family income

higher than \$100,000. About 50 percent have college educations.

According to the survey, orthodox Christians in America are committed to their faith but also tolerant and inclusive.

While more than 70 percent declared their belief in God to be "absolutely certain" and about 34 percent participate in religious ser-



*North America's oldest Orthodox monastery, Saint Tikhon's in South Canaan, Pennsylvania, celebrated its centennial in 2005.*

vices at least once a week, 68 percent said they believe there is more than one true way to interpret the teachings of their religion.

The majority of Eastern orthodox believers in the United States describe their political views as "liberal" or "moderate" and take middle-of-the-road positions on such issues as abortion or social acceptance of homosexuality, according to the survey.

In those respects, Eastern Orthodox Christians in the United States fall well within the American mainstream. But despite attempts to create a single, multiethnic Ameri-

can orthodox jurisdiction, most of them worship in churches affiliated with mother churches in Europe and the Middle East.

### FRONTIER SAINTS

Russian Orthodoxy in America started when a group of monks arrived in Alaska in 1794 to start missionary work among the native Aleuts, Eskimos and American Indians. Among them was Father Herman, an ascetic and defender of native rights against exploitation by Russian traders. In 1970, Herman became the first saint to be glorified by the Orthodox Church in America.

The first Native American saint was one of St. Herman's converts, an Aleut trapper Cungagnaq, known as Peter, the martyr of San Francisco. Captured by the Spaniards in California in 1815, he refused to renounce his orthodox faith and died under torture.

Those hardy frontiersmen of faith included quite a number of colorful personalities. One of the most celebrated is Father Ivan Evseyevich Popov-Veniaminov, bishop of Kamchatka, the Kuriles, and the Aleutian Islands, and later the senior bishop, or metropolitan, of Moscow.

Veniaminov came to Alaska in 1824 and gained recognition as a tireless missionary, and author of scholarly books on Aleut languages and culture. In 1977, he was glorified as St. Innocent, enlightener of the Aleuts and apostle to the Americas.

In 1870, the American mission of

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## First Trial of Guantanamo Detainee Ends with Conviction

**Washington** -- Al-Qaida member Salim Hamdan was sentenced to five and a half years in prison after a military commission found him guilty August 6 on five of eight charges of providing material support to terrorism. The court proceeding at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, was the first U.S. war crimes trial since World War II.

White House deputy spokesman Tony Fratto said August 6 that Hamdan had "received a fair trial," after U.S. authorities presented their case against him, and that the government "bore the burden of proving his guilt beyond a reasonable doubt."

In his statement, Fratto said Hamdan had been presumed innocent until he was found guilty and described the military commission system as "a fair and appropriate legal process for prosecuting detainees alleged to have committed crimes against the United States or our interests," adding, "We look forward to other cases moving forward to trial."

According to an August 6 statement by the Defense Department, along with being cleared on three of the eight counts of providing material support for terrorism, Hamdan also was found not guilty on the charge of conspiracy to commit terrorism.

Hamdan faced a maximum sentence of life in prison, the Defense De-

partment said. However, his jury of six U.S. military officers sentenced him to five and a half years on August 7. Media reports indicated that, with time already served, he could be eligible for release in five months, but still could remain at Guantanamo Bay as an "enemy combatant."



*The White House said August 6 that Guantanamo detainee Salim Hamdan, shown in an artist's sketch, "received a fair trial."*

The Defense Department statement said Hamdan's case next will be reviewed by the military court's Convening Authority to evaluate the "legal sufficiency" of the court's findings and to review the appropriateness of the sentence.

"Hamdan will still be represented by counsel and have the opportunity to submit matters for consideration on his behalf. Then his case will receive an automatic review by the Court of Military Commission Review. Thereafter, he could appeal to the Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia and the Supreme Court," the Defense Department

said. The capture of a large number of nonuniformed combatants who were engaged in armed hostilities and terrorism in Afghanistan and other countries has posed a thorny set of legal problems. The United States, drawing on both domestic and international military law, has used the military commission process to protect the rights of the accused and afford them fair trials.

On June 12, the U.S. Supreme Court affirmed the right of those detained at Guantanamo to challenge their detention in U.S. courts.

According to the Defense Department, military commissions are "constituted courts, affording all the necessary judicial guarantees which are recognized as indispensable by

civilized peoples for purposes of Common Article 3 of the Geneva Convention."

The full text of the Defense Department statement ( <http://www.defenselink.mil/releases/release.aspx?releaseid=12118> ) is available on the department's Web site.

For more information, the Defense Department's Military Commission Web site also has the list of charges ( [http://www.defenselink.mil/news/May2007/Hamdan\\_Charges.pdf](http://www.defenselink.mil/news/May2007/Hamdan_Charges.pdf) ) that were brought against Hamdan.

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## Immigration Reform Major Issue in Minnesota Food-Processing City

**By Kathryn McConnell**  
**Staff Writer**

**Austin, Minnesota** -- One election issue grabbing Austin voters' attention is immigration reform. This city of 27,000 people in southern Minnesota is home to two large pork-processing companies: Hormel Foods and Quality Pork. Those companies and Weyerhaeuser, a large paper-products firm, employ many of the immigrants who live in Austin.

The city's voters want elected officials to pass immigration laws that would lead to better control of the flow of immigrants into the United States and to their agriculture-based community.

"People are worried about losing their jobs to immigrants," said Karen Colbenson, who works for the Austin Post-Bulletin newspaper.

Some voters also suspect some immigrants in Austin may be in the country illegally. They don't want illegal residents to receive taxpayer-supported services like education and health care.

Some Austin voters believe the United States should build a fence along the country's border with Mexico, which they believe would keep people from crossing the border illegally to work, Colbenson said.

Other voters want elected officials to pass legislation that would help illegal immigrants who have been living and paying taxes in the country for several years to obtain legal residency status.

Austin Mayor Tom Stiehm reported to the city in September that the

immigration system is broken and it is the federal government's responsibility to fix it. He said "lack of direction" from federal agencies makes it difficult for local officials to enforce immigration laws.

The candidates for Minnesota's 1st District congressional seat have varying views. Republican Dick Day, who is challenging the party-endorsed Republican candidate Brian Davis in a September primary, says a fence is the way to go. He also believes in heavy fines for employers if they are found to have hired workers illegally.

Davis also favors a fence and enforcement of existing laws. He says a "tamper-proof system" should be created to determine if employees and people applying for work are legally entitled to work in the United States.

Both Davis and Democrat incumbent Tim Walz favor a system that would allow people in America illegally to return to their home countries and apply for permanent residency. Davis also thinks knowledge of English should be required to obtain U.S. citizenship.

At FarmFest, an annual agricultural show in Redwood Falls, northwest of Austin, Republican Senator Norm Coleman, who is facing re-election, said August 6 that border security and law enforcement must come before establishing a program that would make it easier for immigrants to come to America for seasonal work such as in agriculture. Coleman's main challenger is Democrat Al Franken.

Austin voter Jacob Vela, a graphic designer, said a border fence would not keep out people who want to come to America. He also said an

English requirement for citizenship is impractical because most people coming to the United States are adults and "adults have more difficulty learning a new language."

Voters in Austin and other cities in southern Minnesota, where corn is the main crop, also want their legislators to do something to help lower gasoline prices by supporting the adoption of alternative energy sources such as corn-based ethanol.

Davis said at FarmFest that America needs to start offshore drilling as soon as possible and to explore for oil in a wildlife preserve area in Alaska. Walz has said he supports offshore drilling but not a plan that would let oil companies gain huge profits. He would like some of the potential offshore profits to go to biofuel research.

Vela said he likes the idea of developing alternative energy sources because he does not want America to be dependent on oil-exporting countries. And "alternative energies cause less pollution," he said.

Coleman said he supports drilling off America's coastlines, developing more nuclear energy and boosting ethanol production, including from sugar beets, a crop grown in western Minnesota.

Franken said he is not opposed to offshore drilling but that it is not a long-term solution to America's energy problems. He called for more investment in developing renewable energy sources.

*(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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## With Gas Prices Rising, Candidates Consider Energy Alternatives

By Michelle Austein  
Staff Writer

Washington -- As Americans' opinion about drilling for oil off U.S. shores has shifted, the presidential candidates changed their views on whether it is appropriate to seek oil along American coastlines.

With concerns about gas prices weighing heavily on voters' minds, both presidential candidates, John McCain and Barack Obama, reversed their opposition to drilling for offshore oil. Poll numbers indicate a growing number of Americans supports offshore drilling as a way to lessen the United States' dependence on foreign oil.

High gas prices affect Americans' transportation, food and heating costs at a time where many face other economic troubles. It has been a dominant topic on not only the presidential campaign trail but in local races across the country.

At a campaign event in Lansing, Michigan, August 4, Democratic candidate Obama introduced a new \$150 billion energy plan that he says will "within 10 years save more oil than we currently import from the Middle East and Venezuela combined." Initially an opponent of offshore oil drilling, Obama's plan says that even though "the U.S. cannot drill our way to energy security," offshore drilling would increase domestic oil supply.

Presumed Republican nominee McCain shares Obama's view on offshore drilling, having ended his longtime opposition to it in June.



*Both Barack Obama and John McCain now support drilling for oil off American shores.*

"Anybody who says that we can achieve energy independence without using and increasing these existing energy resources either doesn't have the experience to understand the challenge that we face or isn't giving the American people some straight talk," he said in a Pennsylvania campaign event August 4.

Obama's new energy plan also calls for a \$1,000 per family energy rebate, an expense that would be offset by a new tax on certain profits earned by the largest U.S. oil companies. Opponents of this so-called windfall profits tax, including McCain, say this measure proved counterproductive when it last was used in 1980 to quell rising gas prices.

### CANDIDATES PROMOTE CLEANER ENERGY SOURCES

In his new energy plan, Obama says global climate change stems from use of fossil fuels for energy. He says "we have a moral, environmental, economic and security imperative to address our dependence on foreign oil and tackle climate change in a serious, sustainable manner."

The presumed Democratic nominee says he will increase automotive fuel economy standards 4 percent per year, put 1 million electric vehicles on the road by 2015, advance biofuel technology and provide a tax credit to encourage Americans to purchase cars that run on cleaner energy.

If elected, he would aim to replace the entire White House fleet with plug-in hybrid vehicles within the first year of his presidency.

The Illinois senator also calls for 10 percent of electricity to come from renewable sources such as wind or solar power by 2012. Among the buildings Obama would like to see go green would be those owned by the federal government, which is believed to be the largest single consumer of energy in the world.

Obama says his initiatives not only would create cleaner energy but add 5 million new jobs for green industries. The Illinois senator says that proposed job training and placement programs would help youths and veterans obtain work in

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## With Gas Prices Rising, Candidates Consider Energy Alternatives . . .

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these fields.

Like his opponent, McCain favors advancing biofuel technologies and promoting the use of hybrid and electric automobiles. He says he would offer a \$300 million prize for the development of a better battery package that can improve the commercial viability of electric cars. He would provide a \$5,000 tax credit for those purchasing a zero emissions vehicle.

McCain also believes that new green industry jobs can help the lagging U.S. economy. He would



*Both presidential candidates want to expand the use of electric and hybrid vehicles.*

encourage companies to think green by providing tax credits for research and development. He also wants the federal government to lead the way in creating energy-efficient

buildings.

The Arizona senator calls for a \$2 billion annual commitment to advance clean coal technologies. If elected, McCain says he would construct 45 new nuclear power plants by 2030. Obama says the United States should better secure nuclear waste before considering expanding nuclear power.

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

## America's Eastern Orthodox Communities Show Tolerance, Diversity . . .

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the Orthodox Church of Russia was transformed into a North American diocese. In 1900, its site moved from Sitka, Alaska, to San Francisco, and in 1905 to New York. As it expanded its jurisdiction over all of North America, it attracted increasing numbers of non-Russian orthodox faithful from Eastern Europe, the Balkans and the Middle East.

### COEXISTING JURISDICTIONS

After the October Revolution of 1917, the Church of Russia faced political pressures, persecutions, property destruction, and for several years its administration practically was paralyzed.

In 1924, the North American diocese declared autonomy from the mother church and assumed the name of the Russian Orthodox

Greek Catholic Church in America, also known as the Metropolia. The move met with objections from parts of the Church of Russia, which established its own missions in the United States.

In the early decades of the 20th century growing numbers of non-Russian immigrants from Eastern Orthodox countries sought affiliation with mother churches in their native countries.

In 1970, the ruling body of the Church of Russia granted the Metropolia full autocephaly (autonomy where the head bishop does not report to any higher church authority) as the Orthodox Church in America (OCA), one of 15 independent orthodox churches in the world.

Today, OCA and the Church of Russia work side by side in many parts of the United States and cooperate,



*The Church of the Holy Ascension on Unalaska Island, Alaska, was built in 1826 for Father Veniaminov.*

together with several other independent orthodox churches in America, on educational, charitable and missionary activities. ♦

## Journalist Daniel Schorr Says Youth Vote Key to 2008 Election

By Eric Green  
Staff Writer

Washington -- Record-breaking voter registration by young people will be "one of the big stories" of the 2008 U.S. presidential election, famed journalist Daniel Schorr tells America.gov.

The senior news analyst and commentator for National Public Radio said the youth vote could decide the election. Polls suggest a majority of young Americans support presumed Democratic nominee Barack Obama over presumed Republican nominee John McCain.

Schorr said he found it "electrifying" that young people have expressed a desire to vote in this year's election in much greater numbers than in other years. Increased voter turnout among young people in 2008, as shown during the primary season, is an "important new fact," said Schorr.

In a journalism career of more than six decades, Schorr has reported on major news events from the U.S. Congress' anti-Communist hearings of the 1950s to the President Bill Clinton impeachment hearings of the 1990s. He won three Emmy awards for excellence in coverage of the Watergate scandal in the 1970s, and was inducted into the Hall of Fame of the Society of Professional Journalists in 1991.

Schorr said McCain might secure a majority of the older American vote, which, depending on the closeness of the election, also could decide who wins the White House.

As to the importance of the 2008 vote, Schorr said that "every time

we come up to a presidential election people say this is the most crucial one" in U.S. history.



*Journalist Daniel Schorr says the 2008 U.S. election marks a "turning point" in America.*

"[What] I would say about this election is that it marks some great turning point" in America, said Schorr. He said that in the mid-1990s, the country realigned to the right of the political spectrum, but "now we have begun to see a realignment going back the other way."

The key to this election is "change," said Schorr, elaborating that most Americans want a "big change" in their government.

### NEWS MEDIA BIAS FOR OBAMA?

Schorr, discussing allegations that the news media is biased in favor Obama, pointed to a study by American University politics and journalism professor Richard Benedetto who calculated the number of times Obama's picture had appeared from June 4 through July 13 in the Washington

Post relative to that of McCain.

The study showed an "enormous advantage for Obama," Schorr said, which showed the Democrat is "very clearly a favorite of the press."

Schorr said this advantage does not necessarily mean the press wants Obama to beat McCain. Rather, he said, the press "simply finds Obama more interesting" to cover than his Republican rival.

In August 5 commentary on National Public Radio, Schorr said that over the past three years, Obama has been featured on the covers of Time and Newsweek magazines 12 times to McCain's five.

But Schorr added in his commentary that alleged pro-Obama bias is



*Professor Richard Benedetto questions whether the media favors Barack Obama.*

not reflected in conservative talk shows on American radio.

Schorr said the United States used to have a "legislated fairness doctrine meant to ensure political balance on the airwaves," but it was "abolished by the [U.S.] Fed-

eral Communications Commission in 1985 in the interest of journalistic freedom."

*(Continued on page 15)*

## Terrorism Cannot Destroy Strong U.S.-Africa Ties

By Charles W. Corey  
Staff Writer

Washington -- The "unspeakable" bombing by al-Qaida of the U.S. embassies in Nairobi, Kenya, and Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, 10 years ago strengthened the long-standing ties that bind the American, Kenyan and Tanzanian people, U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice said August 7.

Speaking on the 10th anniversary of the bombings, Rice said the nearly simultaneous terrorist attacks on both facilities "did not destroy our spirit."

"Today, we remain partners with the people of Tanzania and Kenya, and I witnessed the spirit of that partnership when I visited both Kenya and Tanzania earlier this year," she said at a memorial service held at the Department of State in Washington.

"Secure new embassies have now been built in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam reflecting the enduring strength of these relationships. Bombs and bullets and terror can never and will never break our bond," she said.

In Nairobi, the blast killed 218 Kenyans and Americans, while thousands were injured in the streets around the embassy. In Dar es Salaam, nine Tanzanians, one Kenyan and one Somali citizen were killed and 85 people were wounded.

"On that dark day 10 years ago," Rice said, "the bombings of our embassies seemed merely to be the



*Ambassador Ranneberger exhorted those in attendance to "recommit ourselves to preserve the memory of all the victims, reaffirm our determination to bring those responsible to justice and rededicate ourselves to advance democracy and prosperity for all people."*

senseless violence of evil men, an organization called al-Qaida. When seen from today, however, 10 years later, after the bombing of the World Trade Center in 1993, the attack on Khobar Towers in 1996, the attack on the USS Cole in 2000 and, of course, the terror of September 11, we now see those bombings of our embassies in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam in a new light. We see them as they were, as the opening of a new twilight struggle between hope and fear, peace and hatred, freedom and tyranny, a struggle that has now finally fully been joined."

and Tanzania remind us that al-Qaida and its terrorist affiliates continue to want to attack the United States and our allies," President



*Some of the children of one Embassy employee, Lydia Mayaka, serenaded the crowd that was gathered "not in sorrow but in faith, not in anger but in determination" to move forward with their lives.*

Bush said. He said the anniversary "reinforces the need to confront the terrorists, to work with our allies to bring them to justice, and to pre-

*(Continued on page 19)*

## Rice Welcomes Progress Toward Resolving Georgia Crisis

**By David I. McKeeby**  
**Staff Writer**

**Washington** -- The United States welcomes reports that Russian President Dmitry Medvedev has ordered a halt to Russian military operations in Georgia, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice said.

"Calm needs to be restored," Rice said August 12 after she briefed President Bush on U.S. diplomatic efforts to resolve the crisis. "There then will be international efforts to facilitate the withdrawal of forces from the zone of conflict. We can then look to the issue of how to resolve the long-standing frozen conflicts of South Ossetia and Abkhazia."

Rice also announced that the United States would step up humanitarian aid and reconstruction assistance as part of its continuing support for the emerging South Caucasus democracy nestled between the Black Sea and the Caspian Sea. "The United States stands for the territorial integrity of Georgia, for the sovereignty of Georgia. ... We support its democratically elected government and its people," Rice said.

Rice's statement follows Medvedev's talks with French President Nicolas Sarkozy, who currently holds the rotating European Union presidency. Sarkozy brought the Kremlin a cease-fire proposal brokered by envoys from the EU and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe. The pro-

posal was signed by Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili.

"Finally the international community began to speak with one voice and is beginning to get the message through that this behavior is unacceptable," Sarkozy told journalists following his meeting in Moscow on August 12.



*People hold national flags at a rally in support of Georgian President Mikhail Saakashvili in Tbilisi, Georgia, Tuesday, Aug. 12, 2008.*

Russia has come under increasing international pressure since launching a major air and ground assault in Georgia on August 8.

"Russia has invaded a sovereign neighboring state and threatens a democratic government elected by its people. Such an action is unacceptable in the 21st century," President Bush said at the White House on August 11.

The truce came as Russian troops continued their push out of the South Ossetia conflict zone and deeper into central Georgia, routing Georgian defenders from the central city of Gori and launching a new offensive from Abkhazia, a second breakaway region bordering Russia along Georgia's Black Sea coast.

In Tbilisi, U.S. special envoy Matt Bryza praised Moscow's announcement as "extremely positive" after meeting with senior officials to assess Georgia's recovery needs, while leaders from Poland, Lithuania, Estonia, Ukraine and Latvia arrived to express their support for Saakashvili.

Russia's handling of the crisis in Georgia is "worrisome," Estonian President

Toomas Hendrik Ilves told the Wall Street Journal. "That's why we wanted to be in NATO. That's why Georgia wanted to be in NATO. And still does."

Ambassadors from the 26-nation NATO alliance met in Brussels, Belgium, to discuss the crisis. In a statement following the meeting, NATO Secretary-General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer called for a cease-fire and return to pre-conflict boundaries, warning of a "dire" humanitarian situation.

As many as 100,000 people have been displaced after five days of fierce fighting, according to the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees, which is joining the International Committee of the Red Cross to rush humanitarian aid into the region.

"The situation on the ground is deteriorating, sparking a significant movement of population," said Elisabeth Byrs of the U.N. Office for

*(Continued on page 15)*

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## Rice Welcomes Progress Toward Resolving Georgia Crisis . . .

(Continued from page 14)

the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. "We need unrestricted humanitarian access to the civilian population and to the wounded and to enable medical personnel and ambulances to take care of the dead and wounded."

Meanwhile, the White House rejected comments from Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov that Georgia's Saakashvili must leave office as a condition for peace.

"President Saakashvili is the duly elected president of a sovereign



*Demonstrators call for peace outside the Russian Embassy in Paris.*

democratic nation, and so the determination of him as president is his decision and a decision for the Georgian people and not for any

outside nation to make," White House spokesman Tony Fratto said.

A transcript of Rice's remarks ( <http://www.america.gov/st/texttrans-english/2008/August/20080812152740eaifas0.5007135.html> ) is available 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>)* ♦

## Journalist Daniel Schorr Says Youth Vote Key to 2008 Election . . .

(Continued from page 12)

American University's Benedetto said he began his study out of personal curiosity about whether Obama was getting bigger and better-placed photos than McCain.

The findings show, Benedetto told America.gov, that Obama photos on the Washington Post's main news section outnumbered those of McCain by 57-47, Obama had six front-page photos as opposed to five for McCain, Obama had more color photos by a margin of 38-27 and Obama had more large photos, three columns or wider, by a difference of 31-19.

Whether the results indicate a news media bias toward Obama is a "hard question to answer," said Benedetto, who is a former White House correspondent and columnist

for USA Today and author of the book, *Politicians Are People, Too*.

"It's hard to accuse somebody of being outwardly biased" toward Obama, said Benedetto. But he added that "I'm willing to bet if you took a survey of journalists today who you favor and would vote for, I'm sure it would be an overwhelming response for Obama."

That does not necessarily mean, said Benedetto, that journalists "are all biased in their reporting." But he added there may be "a certain subconscious bias" in favor of Obama who "happens to be very charismatic, photogenic and telegenic."

Reporters want to cover Obama, Benedetto said, because the Democrat is a "historical and sociological phenomenon" and his story line is more newsworthy than McCain's.

The American public is already familiar with the 71-year-old McCain, who has been in American political life much longer than the 47-year-old Obama, he said.

Benedetto wrote in a July 17 article on his blog, *News Not Spin*, that newspaper editors need to be more discerning in their picture selections and "ask themselves if they are giving the two candidates an even break. Right now, they are not."

*(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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## Bush Reflects on Solid Foundation of U.S.-China Relations

**Washington** -- The new U.S. Embassy complex in Beijing reflects the solid foundation underpinning U.S.-Chinese relations, President Bush says, and "is a commitment to strengthen that foundation for years to come."

The \$434 million, eight-story embassy is the second largest U.S. diplomatic post in the world after the new compound in Baghdad. The 500,000-square-foot (46,000-square-meter) structure is situated on 10 acres (four hectares) in the new diplomatic zone and is enclosed in free-standing, transparent and opaque glass. It was designed with traditional Chinese elements that include narrow walkways lined with bamboo that link diplomatic "neighborhoods."

"No doubt this is an impressive complex. To me it speaks of the importance of our relations with China," Bush said during dedication ceremonies at the embassy August 8. The dedication is set

against the backdrop of the 2008 Summer Olympic Games in Beijing and the surrounding area.

"Tonight [August 8] the Olympic torch will light the home of an ancient civilization with a grand history," Bush said. "Thousands of years ago, the Chinese people developed a common language and unified a great nation. China became the center for art and literature, commerce and philosophy.

"China advanced the frontiers of knowledge in medicine, astronomy,

navigation, engineering, and many other fields."

Bush also noted that the United States and China fought side by side in World War II. "We share a long history. The first American ship arrived in China just after the



*President Bush and his father, former President George H.W. Bush, participate in a dedication ceremony for the new U.S. Embassy in Beijing, China Friday, Aug. 8, 2008. (AP Photo/Gerald Herbert)*

year [1783] we won our independence," he said.

"Today the United States and China have built a strong relationship, rooted in common interests. China has opened its economy and begun to unleash the entrepreneurial spirit of its people," Bush said. "America will continue to support China on the path toward a free economy."

In Washington, China opened its new 250,000-square-foot (23,000-square-meter) embassy a week ago. The glass and limestone compound,

designed by the noted architect I.M. Pei's two sons, is the largest embassy in the city.

"The completion of the two new embassies not only reflects the good shape of our relationship, but also signals broad prospects for its further growth," Chinese Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi said at the opening, according to the official Xinhua News Agency.

The new U.S. Embassy will have a staff of 700 representing more than 20 federal agencies. An annex is being planned that will provide an additional 70,000-square-foot (6,500-square-meters) of space for another 230 staff and 10 more federal agencies.

Bush said the relationship between the Chinese and Americans has been constructive, cooperative and candid.

"We'll continue to be candid about our mutual global responsibilities," he said. "We must work together to protect the environment and help people in the developing

world; continue to be candid about our belief that all people should have the freedom to say what they think and worship as they choose.

"We strongly believe societies which allow the free expression of ideas tend to be the most prosperous and the most peaceful."

*(Distributed by the Bureau of International Information Programs, U.S. Department of State. Web site: <http://www.america.gov>)*◆

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## Trade Facilitation Offers Path for Expanding Commerce

**By Phillip Kurata**  
**Staff Writer**

**Washington** -- With global trade negotiations at a standstill, countries can increase trade flows by taking unilateral steps to speed up the movement of goods across international borders.

Stephen Creskoff, a former Treasury Department official and veteran trade lawyer, says trade facilitation, or administrative and logistical measures designed to cut the cost and time of handling and processing exports and imports, often generates more trade than tariff cuts.

A weak administrative support for trade has an opposite effect.

"Countries with inadequate trade infrastructure, burdensome administrative processes or limited competition in trade logistics services are less capable of benefiting from the opportunities of expanding global trade," according to Daniel Ikenson of the Cato Institute in Washington. In his view, "man-made" barriers to trade have the same effects as "natural" barriers, such as distance, marshes, rivers and bad roads.

"Too many frictions related to document processing or cargo inspection at customs, antiquated port facilities, logistics bottlenecks, or limited reliability of freight or trade-financing services" deter companies from investing, buying or selling in local markets, Ikenson said in an article, "While Doha Sleeps: Securing Economic Growth through Trade Facilitation."

Creskoff, who has helped scores of

countries improve their trade procedures, said that in the United States and other developed countries the key to trade facilitation progress is an active partnership between customs inspection officials and business. The key is creating a "less

tors, video monitoring, electronic customs seals, specialized aircraft and vessels, digital identification cards and others has the potential to substantially speed the movement of goods and facilitate trade," Creskoff writes.



*U.S. Customs and Border Patrol officers use a portable gamma-ray imaging machine to examine cargo containers.*

intrusive but more effective regulatory environment," he said in another article, "Trade Facilitation: An Often Overlooked Engine of Trade Expansion."

Creskoff said the central components of this partnership are comprehensive automation and the use of other new technologies such as scanners and "smart" containers, sophisticated risk management systems, self-declarations and the use of simplified procedures for qualified traders.

"The adoption of a fully computerized customs administration and new technologies, such as web-based secure communications, cargo-tracking, mobile X-ray technology, gamma ray cavity detec-

Creskoff said that trade facilitation holds greater benefits for developing countries than developed countries. If, for example, Rwanda could cut its transit times for exports (60 days) and imports (95 days) to those of South Africa (31 days for exports and 34 days for imports), then Rwanda's exports could rise by 29 percent and its imports by 61 percent, he said. He cites similarly dramatic figures for Bangladesh and Egypt.

It is critically important for policymakers in developing countries to understand the economic growth potential offered by trade facilitation as they decide how to allocate foreign assistance funds, he said.

*(Continued on page 19)*

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## High Oil Prices Herald Era of Hard-to-Get Resource

*This is the first article in a series on the oil crisis.*

**By Andrzej Zwanecki**  
**Staff Writer**

**Washington** -- The energy apocalypse has arrived, say doomsayers. In fact, it came a few years ago, when the world reached the maximum rate of petroleum production, known as the peak oil. Output has been declining since then. The doomsayers say the trend will only accelerate, with grave consequences for the world economy.

But most mainstream energy economists throw cold water on what they see as these overheated predictions.

The peak oil theory is highly controversial, not least because reliable data are difficult to find in the oil markets. While some say a peak in oil production is unlikely before 2020, others claim it is already here or will come very soon.

But beyond the issue of the exact timing of peak oil production, experts agree that the era of easy oil, and by the same token of cheap transportation fuel, is over.

Michelle Foss, the head of the Center for Energy Economics at the University of Texas at Austin, told America.gov that in the medium and long term, petroleum supply will stay behind demand, keeping prices high. And most energy experts agree.

### 2008 OIL CRISIS: NO SENSE OF DÉJÀ VU

The current situation looks deceptively similar to the oil crises in the 1970s. But this time, more pronounced, long-term trends are behind price increases, not singular political events, such as the 1973 oil embargo imposed by the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC). The decline of the U.S. dollar -- the currency with



which oil is priced worldwide -- and financial speculation have contributed to recent price increases. But most experts believe that the main reason is oil supply not catching up with rapidly rising demand driven increasingly by booming emerging markets, such as China and India.

According to the U.S. Energy Information Administration (EIA), the world has enough oil to satisfy demand at least until 2030 (that is how far its forecast goes). Saudi Arabia has the largest proven reserves. Estimates of its future production capacity vary widely from a little more than the 12.5 million barrels per day it plans to achieve by

the end of 2008 to as much as 23 million barrels per day. Iraq has the second-largest proven reserves and may triple its production. Untapped oil reserves still exist, for example, off the shore of Brazil, West Africa and the U.S. Outer Continental Shelf, the area off the shores of the Atlantic and Pacific oceans as well as the Gulf of Mexico.

But new major discoveries have been rare, and although they cannot be excluded in the future, they are unlikely. At the same time, production from the old fields is either declining (the North Sea and Mexico) or reaching a plateau (Russia and Venezuela).

There are still large reserves of unconventional oil -- rich in heavy oil tar sands (a dense and viscous form of petroleum mixed with sand, clay and water) and oil shale (a rock that contains a solid mixture of organic chemical compounds). EIA projects that unconventional oil will make up 9 percent to 20 percent of the global oil supply by 2030. Production of biofuels is also forecast to rise significantly. But the extraction of unconventional oil is costly, time-consuming, energy-intensive and damaging to the environment, and production of biofuels has contributed to food price increases.

### THE WORLD LOOKS AT RIYADH

As for the near future, Saudi Arabia is the only country with a signifi-

*(Continued on page 19)*

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## High Oil Prices Herald Era of Hard-to-Get Resource . . .

*(Continued from page 18)*

cant spare capacity of conventional oil. However, the margin by which it can ramp up production on demand has declined to 2 percent of global demand from 15 percent in 1988.

This is one reason why pleas from leaders of industrialized nations for more output have limited effect, experts say.

Another reason is the huge profits earned by major oil-producing coun-

tries, according to John Deutch of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. He told America.gov these countries' profits exceed what they need to fund their national programs.

Steve Andrews, co-founder of the nonprofit research group Association for the Study of Peak Oil and Gas - USA, said pumping up more oil on short notice is not always in the best interest of oil-rich nations. It can hinder their efforts to diversify their economies and manage their resources with the welfare of

future generations in mind, he told America.gov.

The Saudis have been criticized in the U.S. media and Congress for not doing enough to increase production. But Foss said that behind the scenes they actually have done a great deal to put more oil on the market. Oil producers know that they must tread carefully because, at a certain point, high petroleum prices can push consumers toward alternative fuels and conservation, depressing demand for oil and causing prices to drop steeply. ♦

## Terrorism Cannot Destroy Strong U.S.-Africa Ties . . .

*(Continued from page 13)*

vent such attacks from happening again."

Memorial ceremonies also were held in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam.

In Nairobi, U.S. Ambassador Michael E. Ranneberger told those gathered, "These unprovoked attacks by a hitherto largely unknown terrorist group called al-Qaida galvanized the United States, Kenya,

Tanzania and countries throughout the world to undertake cooperative, coordinated efforts to fight terrorism.

"Today we recommit ourselves to preserve the memory of all the victims, we reaffirm our determination to bring those responsible to justice, and we rededicate ourselves to advance democracy and prosperity for all people," Ranneberger said.

The full text of the president's statement ( <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2008/08/20080807-9.html> ) is available on the White House Web site. A transcript of Rice's remarks ( <http://www.state.gov/secretary/rm/2008/08/107997.htm> ) is available on the State Department Web site. ♦

## Trade Facilitation Offers Path for Expanding Commerce . . .

*(Continued from page 17)*

Likewise, he said, rich countries would be well-advised to earmark foreign assistance grants to developing countries for improving trade facilitation if the political will exists in the target nations to make improvements.

Nevertheless, the trade expert has no illusions that trade facilitation is easy to transplant to countries

where unofficial payments to customs and border officials are a common practice. When undertaking to reform customs agencies, he cautioned, it is important to keep in mind the Japanese maxim, "never break a rice bowl."

Customs and border officials who are stripped of their authority to charge "unofficial" fees would have to have their official salaries raised to compensate for the loss of in-

come in order for the customs reforms to succeed, he said.

"Vested interests are strong, and they fight vigilantly to maintain the existing income flow from unofficial payments. This is a fundamental problem that must be addressed by governments, businesses, international donors and others seeking to improve trade facilitation," Creskoff said. ♦

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## First Lady Laura Bush Urges Burma Reforms

**By Deidra Avendasora**  
**Staff Writer**

**Washington** -- Thousands of Burmese families living in neighboring Thailand underline the need for Rangoon to engage political opposition and embark on the path to reform, says first lady Laura Bush.

"A lot of these families would rather go home, but because of the situation in Burma, they can't," Mrs. Bush told reporters during her August 7 visit to the Mae Sot refugee camp and the Mae To medical clinic along the Thai-Burmese border.

Mae Sot is one of the largest communities of refugees fleeing the repressive rule of Burma's ruling military junta led by General Than Shwe. Most of the camp's 39,000 residents come from Burma's persecuted Karen ethnic minority and have lived in the camps for 20 years.

When Mae Sot's families crossed the border, Mrs. Bush said, they came together as a community, electing a camp council and constructing all of the camp's buildings. Today, many support themselves through the sale of hand-woven textiles and traditional crafts.

"I think those things are very encouraging, and I think they also say something about the people of Burma, that the people of Burma will be able to run the country once they have a chance," Mrs. Bush

said.

Meanwhile, in Bangkok, Thailand, President Bush met with exiled Burmese journalists and democracy activists, received a briefing on efforts to help the Burmese people recover from May's devastating Cyclone Nargis and called on re-

the U.N. secretary-general's special adviser on Burma.

In 2008, the United States delivered \$50 million in U.S. government assistance for the cyclone relief effort as well as \$65.5 million to help the people of Burma in the areas of democracy-building, humanitarian

assistance, health and education. Washington also has provided an additional \$12.7 million in 2008 in aid to Burmese refugees living in Thailand, according to an August 7 White House fact sheet.

The human cost of Burma's refugees has had serious economic implications for a country that was once the agricultural breadbasket

for the entire region but where half of its population now faces malnutrition, says Mrs. Bush. Though the country is rich in natural resources, she added, "the junta uses those resources to prop themselves up for their own benefit, not for the benefit of the people of Burma."

The United States has long worked to convince Burma's rulers to pursue reforms, appealing to Rangoon directly, as well as through the United Nations and regional bodies such as the Association of Southeast Asian Nations. In 2003, Congress passed the Freedom and Democracy Act after an attack on Suu

*(Continued on page 23)*



*First lady Laura Bush meets with Burmese refugees in Mae Sot August 7.*

gional leaders to press for reforms in Rangoon.

"America reiterates our call on Burma's military junta to release Aung San Suu Kyi and other political prisoners," he said in a speech later in the day. "We'll continue working until the people of Burma have their freedom that they deserve."

Mrs. Bush says that she was inspired by Suu Kyi's writings and in recent years has been an active advocate on behalf of the Burmese people. She hosted a 2006 U.N. roundtable on their plight and meets frequently with Ibrahim Gambari,

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## Sacrifices of Prisoners of Conscience Should Not Be in Vain

**By Jane Morse**  
**Staff Writer**

**Washington** -- The sacrifices of those who have been jailed in Syria for their beliefs must not be made in vain nor forgotten, says Ausama Monajed, who was himself a prisoner of conscience.

Monajed spoke of his experiences and those of his compatriots in Syrian jails during a special panel discussion hosted July 24 by the U.S. Mission to the United Nations in New York.

The other panelists, who represented Belarus, Burma, Cuba, Eritrea and Uzbekistan, were all former prisoners of conscience or family members of people imprisoned for peacefully expressing their internationally recognized human rights. They spoke to a room packed with more than 120 diplomats, journalists and representatives of nongovernmental organizations.

Although they have received very little publicity, there are many prisoners of conscience in Syria, according to Monajed.

"They are not terrorists, or extremists, or rabble-rousers or foreign agents," he said. "They are like you here in this room: decent people who believe in the same things as you believe in -- freedom of expression, the right to elect one's government, a just and independent judiciary, and equality before the law. They are conscientious individuals fighting for their human, political and social rights in Syria. They want to restore pride in Syria and in themselves as Syrians."

He shared the names and told the stories of the many doctors, busi-

nessmen, poets and artists who endure torture and detention under what Monajed called "a sadistic regime."

"The United Nations," he said, "as representing the will of the international community, bears a responsibility to these prisoners that they shall not be forgotten, and that the regime which imprisons them shall not be allowed to continue in its repressive practices unchecked."

The declaration seeks to reinforce commitments made by nations under the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted by the U.N. General Assembly in 1948. Among its 30 articles, the Universal Declaration recognizes that all people have the right to freedom of thought and freedom from unlawful detention.

### FIGHTING FOR REFORM IN SYRIA

Monajed has been persecuted, interrogated and detained several times because of his activities as a university student in Syria.

During his last detention by political security forces in Damascus in 2004, he was interrogated and tortured for a week. He was arrested while doing interviews and taking photos in rural and poor areas in Syria. His goal had been to highlight the plight of poor people in these areas by telling their stories in regional and international media.

It was only after Monajed signed an oath promising not to be involved in any further political or social activities that he was released.

Now Monajed refuses to be silenced. Fortunate enough to have survived his prison experience, he said he feels it is his "duty to tell the whole world what is happening to those who are still in prison, and who have chosen to make a stand knowing full well the price that they will have to pay."



*Ausama Monajed*

Today Monajed, a frequent commentator on Syrian politics, serves on the National Council of the Damascus

Declaration, an umbrella group of leading Syrian opposition parties, prominent figures, intellectuals and reformers.

He is the director of public relations for the Movement for Justice and Development, which leads the struggle for peaceful and democratic change in Syria and the creation of a modern state that respects human rights and promotes economic and social development.

"Regimes which stunt the growth of democracy and civil society and continue to respond to their people's legitimate calls for change with harsh repression should not be welcomed but shunned," Monajed said.

"Prisoners of conscience should be recognized as such by the international community and should be afforded support and encouragement," he said. ♦

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## Dissent Takes Many Forms in United States

**By Lea Terhune**  
**Staff Writer**

**Washington** -- On any day in the nation's capital, one group or another may be seen expressing either dissent or agreement with U.S. government policies. The forms of expression vary, and organizations dedicated to guiding dissent help activists channel their energies constructively through education and outreach.

The Friends Committee on National Legislation (FCNL) is one such organization, which focuses on "grassroots lobbying" of elected representatives, according to communications officer Jim Cason. Members also participate in public protests and distribute a well-known peace poster depicting a dove, an olive branch and the slogan "War is not the answer."

Cason says the FCNL helps people "better engage with government" by organizing at the community level and effectively contacting politicians.

"We believe it is important to be respectful, to recognize that legislators play a role, to thank them for their service to government, but at the same time to say that they ought to consider other points of view," Cason said.

The FCNL, a nonpartisan organization, offers tips on how to meet elected representatives and write letters. The lobby was founded by members of the Religious Society of Friends, or Quakers, a pacifist religious group since its inception in the 17th century.

The American Friends Service Committee likewise engages in pacifist

and public service activities that are meant to replace military service for Quakers and other "conscientious objectors" to war and military service.

The FCNL encourages people to articulate their views in public, "but also figure out ways in which you can engage in the political process, because if dissidents disengage from the political process, then they are not part of that debate," Cason told America.gov.



*Immigration policy protest in west Detroit*

FCNL also supports "fairly mainstream stuff," like increasing the number of diplomats. "We sometimes end up lobbying on the side of the Pentagon, with the State Department, if we think they are doing something that is likely to prevent war."

He said a recent success was the reaffirmation of a congressional prohibition on establishing permanent U.S. military bases in Iraq.

Advocacy group Peace Action also lobbied against permanent bases in

Iraq and a potential naval blockade of Iran. Spokeswoman Barbara Bearden described three tactics for dissent. The first is the legislative way, which is "dissenting through normal channels: going to your representative." The second is dissemination of information. "If someone [in a position of power] is lying, we feel it's our duty to do rigorous research on that topic and get that information out to as many people as possible so that they can make informed decisions," she said.

The third tactic is public protest, which may be a mass rally or direct action. The latter "is much more coordinated and requires a good bit of training," Bearden said, both for personal safety and "for the conciseness of your message." A sit-in -- where one or more people nonviolently occupy an area to press for an action -- a policy change or other action -- is an example of direct action.

Nonviolent protest is a cornerstone of Peace Action and other leading dissident groups in the United States. So in addition to training in sign making -- "to maximize your visual impact" -- Peace Action schools participants in safety and "the number one thing ... to de-escalate the situation rather than antagonize a police officer."

"Protest is about showing the public appeal of your opinion" in a constructive rather than negative way, she said.

"I think that dissent is the ultimate expression of patriotism. Our country was founded by a group of people who looked at a tyrannical leader and said 'no.'"

"The independent spirit of America

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Telling America's story

## First Lady Laura Bush Urges Burma Reforms . . .

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Kyi's motorcade, while in a 2005 speech, President Bush placed Burma among several "outposts of tyranny," including Cuba, Belarus, Iran, North Korea and Zimbabwe.

Since the government's repression of the September 2007 "Saffron Revolution," the White House has stepped up the pressure by imposing sanctions against 84 Burmese government agencies and leaders -- a move followed by several European countries. "We do think some of those are being effective," says Mrs. Bush.

On July 29, President Bush signed the Burma JADE Act, targeting trade in Burma's gems and precious stones, another major source of income for its rulers.

As the president and first lady headed to Beijing for the 2008

Olympics and millions worldwide observe the 20th anniversary of Burma's August 1988 crackdown on pro-democracy activists that claimed more than 3,000 lives, Mrs. Bush called on regional leaders -- particularly China -- to urge the junta to engage Burma's opposition parties by imposing additional sanctions.

"We think that the way we can be most effective is financially, is for the countries that are propping the regime up by their large trade with them to discontinue that for some amount of time at least to really put the squeeze on the junta so that they would finally start the dialogue that everyone has been calling for," she said.

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

## Dissent Takes Many Forms in United States . . .

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is central here in the peace movement and Peace Action and our grassroots network," Bearden said. Nonpartisanship is important. "We criticize and applaud issues, not a candidate."

Judith LeBlanc is organizing coordinator for United for Peace and Justice (UFPJ), an umbrella organization that helped orchestrate and train participants in the March 19th protests against the war in Iraq. "We are doing many different types of voter engagement work," she said. UFPJ, like the other groups, encourages citizens to build relationships with sympathetic legislators, to oppose those who are not and influence those who might swing either



*Anti-Iraq war demonstrators hold hands during a protest, a few blocks from the White House in Washington*

way. The 1400 UFPJ member groups come from "across the political spectrum. We have Iraq vets, we have military families, we have people who voted for George Bush," to people on the left, "kind

of a snapshot of the body of politics in the country."

"There is a broad cross-section of people in motion who are utilizing many different kind of tactics, from resolutions, to congressional pressure to mass demonstrations to nonviolent direct action, but the sum total is, we have a very invigorated electorate," LeBlanc said.

"No policy of the government has ever been changed without a combination of tactics that included marching in the streets, pressuring public officials, galvanizing public opinion" through community groups, she said.

"It's the way democracy works. That's what democracy looks like." ♦