



Weekly Special Report



Produced by the Public Affairs Section

INSIDE

Bush To Call for Additional U.S. Forces To Support Iraqi Troops



By Stephen Kaufman
USINFO Staff Writer

Washington – In a televised address to the American people on the evening of January 10, President Bush announced the deployment of five additional U.S. Army brigades to Iraq to support Iraqi army operations in and around its capital, Baghdad, and two Marine brigades to Anbar province to assist in operations against al-Qaida.

President Bush Addresses the Nation

According to a senior administration official speaking January 10, the approximately 21,000 additional U.S. forces will be participating in an Iraqi plan to bring security to Baghdad. He said sectarian violence in Iraq is “synonymous with security in Baghdad since 80 percent of the sectarian violence occurs within a 30-mile radius of Baghdad.”

Attached Please find full text of President Bush's address.

The five U.S. Army brigades are expected to remain under U.S. command but will “work with and in support of the Iraqi forces” charged with patrolling, operating check-

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Dedication ceremony for Dire Dawa, Ethiopia, school

Story by U.S. Marine Corps Maj. Brett Hart
CJTF – HOA Strategic Communications

DIRE DAWA, Ethiopia – Interrupted in July by deadly floods that hit the region, a primary school renovation and construction project funded by Combined Joint Task Force–Horn of Africa in Dire Dawa, Ethiopia was dedicated Friday with repre-

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U.S. Navy Commander Theodore Summers and Dira Dawa Education Bureau Chief Fuad Mohammed walk past a greeting party of students prior to a dedication ceremony for the Medehane Alem primary school in Dire Dawa, Ethiopia, Jan. 5.

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Dedication ceremony for Dire Dawa, Ethiopia, school . . .

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representatives from CJTF–HOA and local government and education officials in attendance.

After several months of construction, the Friday ceremony marked the transfer of the completed project, the Medehane Alem Primary School from CJTF–HOA to the people of Dire Dawa.

“The purpose of the dedication was to demonstrate commitment to our partner nation, Ethiopia,” said U.S. Navy Cmdr. Ted Summers, representing CJTF–HOA.

Local officials including the education bureau chief for Dire Dawa, Fuad Mohammed, the school’s principal Kebede Teferi and Berhanu Mekonen, a Dire Dawa community leader, joined Cmdr. Summers for the dedication ceremony. About 40 students all in school uniforms attended along with about 150 people in the community.

“Our country’s plan is peace and development,” said Mohammed. “This school fits perfectly into that plan as education is of great importance in development.”

The completed two-story school has 10 classrooms and can now support about 1,200 male and female students from kindergarten to eighth grade.

In addition to a complete demolition and new construction of the new school, the construction team installed chalkboards, lighting and receptacles and electrical wiring for new fans and lights and painted in the classrooms. They also repaired three existing structures by fixing the electrical system, windows and



Ethiopian students perform a play during a dedication ceremony.



Medehane Alem primary school after renovation.

doors as well as adding more lighting and replaced two of the structures’ roofs.

Finally, the team demolished the old restrooms and constructed two new dry and wet restrooms and a food service room. An engineer with CJTF–HOA stayed in the area as the demolition and construction occurred.

The people of CJTF–HOA helped to furnish the school by donating 250 new student desks, 10 teacher’s tables and 10 teacher’s chairs

The mission of CJTF–HOA is to prevent conflict, promote regional stability and protect Coalition interests in order to prevail against extremism. The CJTF–HOA organization began operations at Camp Lemonier, Djibouti May 13, 2003. It works with Partner nations on humanitarian assistance, disaster relief, consequence management, civic action programs to include medical and veterinary care, school and medical clinic construction and water development projects. ♦

Secretary Condoleezza Rice Announces Humanitarian Assistance to Somalia

Washington -- The Office of the Spokesman of the U.S. Department of State issued the following statement on January 4, 2007, on the announcement by U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice of humanitarian assistance to Somalia.

The Somali people and the international community have an historic opportunity to begin to move beyond two-decades of warlordsim, extreme violence, and humanitarian suffering. As part of our effort to help parties resolve the ongoing political and humanitarian crises in Somalia, I have dispatched Assistant Secretary for African Affairs Jendayi Frazer to the Horn of Africa region to meet with regional partners and Somali representatives to urge inclusive political dialogue, reconciliation to build a legitimate, functioning government that will serve all Somalis, and to move forward with the urgent deployment of a regional stabilization force

(IGASOM). We will continue to work in the context of the Somalia Contact Group to mobilize the support of the international community in support of the Somali people. To support these goals and a peaceful consolidation of governance in Somalia, the United States will support the Transitional Federal Institutions and the deployment of a peace support mission through a robust assistance package.

In an initial response to humanitarian needs arising from the recent conflict, the United States is providing \$11.5 million in food aid through the World Food Program, \$1.5 million in non-food assistance through the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), and \$3.575 million through the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and implementing partners for assistance to Somali refugees. These resources will help an additional 18,000 people displaced by

recent floods and conflict. We intend to seek additional substantial assistance to help Somalia with humanitarian, security, and reconstruction efforts.

The United States urges all donor partners, both regional and international, to join with us to provide immediate capacity-building assistance for the Transitional Federal Institutions, as well as humanitarian assistance to respond to the needs of the Somali people. The United States further calls on Somalia's neighbors to meet their international obligations regarding refugees while ensuring that borders remain secure against all dangerous elements seeking to further destabilize the region. Somalia's neighbors and the rest of the international community also have an interest in Somalia not becoming a safe haven for terror. ♦

Bush To Call for Additional U.S. Forces To Support Iraqi Troops . . .

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points and demonstrating to the city's residents that "Iraqi forces are now providing security in the country," according to the official. The two Marine brigades will assist Iraqi forces and local Sunni tribes in Anbar province who are resisting al-Qaida's use of the area as its base of operations in Iraq, he added.

The official said the plan is "a different and better concept of operations," than in the past. He said it would be "adequately resourced first and foremost by the Iraqis," as well as by the additional U.S. forces who were requested by the Iraqi security officials and commanders. Also, Iraqi rules of engagement will be clarified to give Iraqi command-

ers "full authority" to carry out their missions "free of political and sectarian influence."

The official also indicated the president commented on how U.S. hopes at the end of 2005 for progress in Iraq were "dashed" in 2006 due to the sectarian violence that "overwhelmed the political progress that we expected," the official said, adding the situation in Iraq is "unacceptable to the American people and it's unacceptable to him [President Bush]. He made clear that our current strategy in Iraq is not working."

The official said another part of the new plan will be providing economic assistance and expanding provincial reconstruction teams

charged with helping Iraqis build up local governments, assisting local reconciliation efforts and providing local economic assistance.

Two conclusions resulting from Bush's recent consultations and review of U.S. policy in Iraq are "there are no silver bullets" instantly to solve the problem and that "America cannot afford to fail" in Iraq, the official said.

Bush also said that in combating sectarian violence, the Iraqi people themselves "will have to decide whether they want to live together in peace," and the Iraqi government will need to "step up" and bring security to its citizens, the official said. ♦

Save the Children, USAID Join to Help Returned Refugees in Sudan

The Nuba Mountains in central Sudan were as a front line in Sudan's long civil war, during which the region's children and families suffered greatly from the effects of violence and isolation. Save the Children, based in Connecticut, was the first international nongovernmental organization granted access to opposition-controlled areas and for some time was the only agency working in both government- and opposition-controlled areas.

One of Save the Children's many sustainable livelihood initiatives carried out in partnership with local communities to empower community-based groups is the Women's Community Gardening Project, funded by the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID). Approximately 25 women's community gardening groups have been established in rural villages throughout the Nuba Mountains.

Rowda Khalifa is a lively young woman with a baby parked on her hip. She participates in the women's group in her village, and, like all of the women involved in the gardening project, is a hard worker. Most of the women in the gardening groups are heads of their households. Many have several children.

Through the group, Khalifa received training from Save the Children on irrigation, cultivation, harvesting, family nutrition and basic business skills for selling vegetables in local



Refugees in Sudan

markets and budgeting so she can purchase the next year's seeds. Through nutrition workshops, she learned about the benefits her children would receive from being able to eat vegetables all year round.

Save the Children provided the group with a land assessment, basic farming tools, an irrigation pump and an assortment of vegetable seeds. The women managed everything else themselves.

This year was a great success. Khalifa's group was able to harvest vegetables three times in four months.

Khalifa expressed the sentiments of her group when she shared her appreciation of being able to use her

new income to buy desperately needed items, such as sugar and shoes for her children. "Growing and selling vegetables together is much better work than collecting firewood," she added.

Save the Children initiatives like this are providing vulnerable women in this war-torn region with sustainable hope for the future.

Additional information (<http://www.savethechildren.org/>) is available on the organization's Web site.

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

Political Parties in the United States

Washington -- When America's founders wrote the U.S. Constitution in 1787, they did not envision political parties playing a role in the government. Rather, they expected constitutional provisions such as separation of powers, checks and balances, federalism and indirect election of the president by an electoral college would deter the formation of parties.

Despite these provisions, the United States in 1800 became the first nation to develop political parties organized on a national level and to transfer executive power from one party to another via an election. By the 1830s, political parties were an established part of the U.S. political environment.

Today, the Republican and Democratic parties are the two main political parties in the United States. Most elected officials serving as president, congressional representative, state governor or state legislator are members of one of these parties. The Republicans and Democrats have dominated American politics since the 1860s, and every president since 1852 has been either a Republican or Democrat.

In the 110th Congress, which convened January 4, the House of Representatives has 233 Democrats and 202 Republicans. The Senate has 49 Democrats, 49 Republicans and two independents, both of whom will meet to determine and implement policy (caucus) with the Democrats.

In a November 2006 Gallup Poll (a leading barometer of public opinion operated by the Gallop Organization), approximately 59 percent of Americans identified themselves as either Republicans or Democrats. Those who say they are independ-

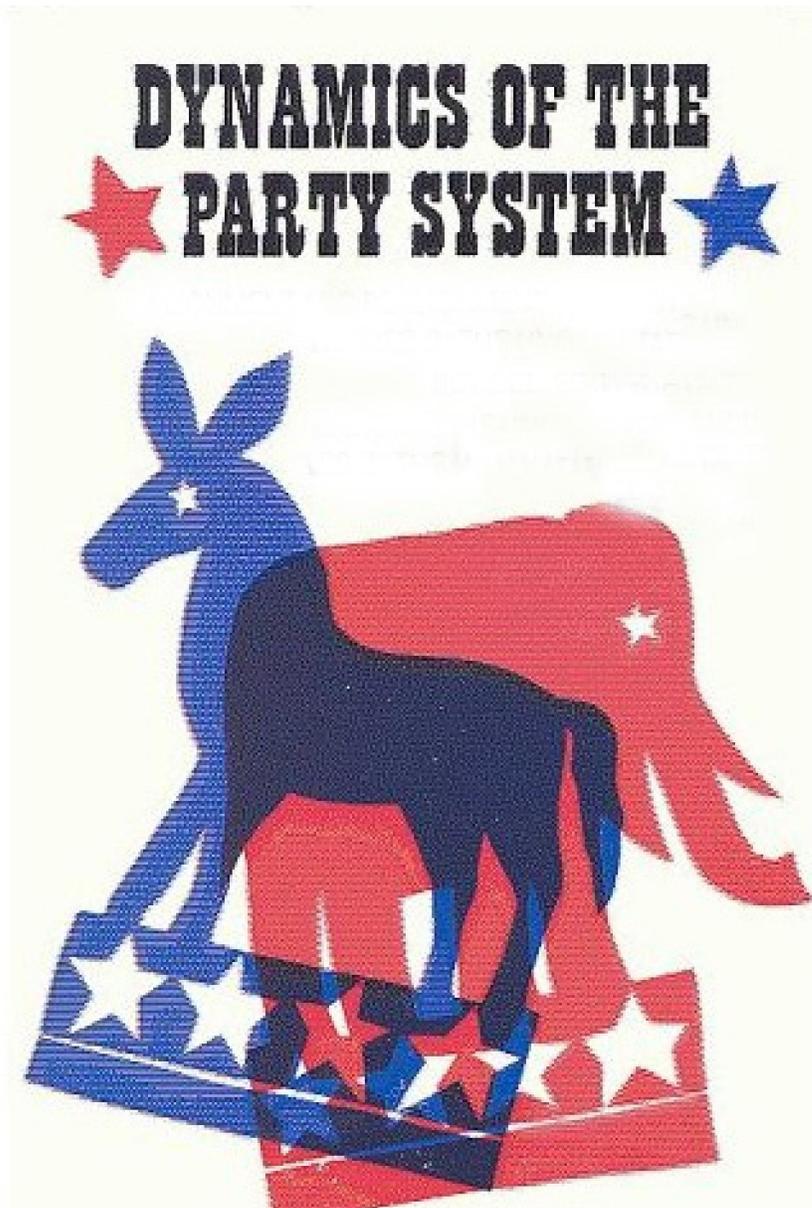
ents normally have partisan leanings and often are more loyal to one of these two political parties than to the other.

The most common method for electing national and state legislators in the United States is the "single-member" district system. This means that whoever receives a plurality of the vote (that is, the greatest number of votes in any

given voting district) is elected. Unlike proportional systems, the single-member district arrangement permits only one party to win in any given district. The single-member system thus creates incentives to form two broadly based parties with sufficient popular appeal to win legislative district pluralities.

Support for American parties is mul-

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Political Parties in the United States . . .

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ticclass and broadly based. With the exception of African-American voters -- about 88 percent of whom voted for the Democratic candidate in the 2004 presidential election -- both the Republican and Democratic parties draw significant levels of support from virtually every major U.S. socioeconomic and ethnic group.

DIVERSITY WITHIN PARTY RANKS THE NORM IN U.S. SYSTEM

Compared to political parties in other democratic nations, political parties in the United States tend to have relatively low internal unity and lack strict adherence to an ideology or set of policy goals. Generally, Republicans have tended to support limiting federal powers and protecting the authority of state and local governments, to take a conservative approach to taxation and spending, and to oppose government interference with free enterprise. In contrast, Democrats have tended to take a more expansive view of the powers of the federal government, to support raising and spending money to address social ills on a national basis, and to favor federal regulation as a tool to improve business practices. But these are broad generalizations: In U.S. politics, "conservative" Democrats and "moderate" or even "liberal" Republicans are not unusual.

The major focus for both political parties is winning elections and controlling the personnel of government. Given their broad sources of

support in the electorate and their need to operate within an ideologically moderate society, American parties tend to adopt centrist policy positions and demonstrate a high level of policy flexibility. This enables the Republicans and the Democrats to tolerate great diversity within their ranks.

U.S. presidents cannot assume that their party's members in Congress will be loyal supporters of presidential programs, nor can party leaders in Congress expect all members of their party to vote along party lines. In addition, national party organizations do not involve themselves routinely in party affairs at the state level.

Although American parties tend to be less ideologically cohesive and programmatic than parties in many democracies, they do play a major and often decisive role in shaping public policy.

ROLE OF "THIRD" PARTIES

Despite broad political influence of the Democratic and Republican parties, so-called "third" parties and independent candidates remain a feature of American politics. Most third parties have tended to flourish for a single election and then die, fade, or be absorbed into one of the major parties.

There is evidence that third parties can have a major impact on election outcomes. For example, a third-party candidate might draw votes more votes away from the candidate of the party more closely

aligned with to the position of the third-party candidate, thus enabling the other party to win the election -- often without receiving a majority of the vote.

Public opinion surveys since the 1990s consistently have shown a high level of popular support for the concept of a third party. But in spite of such support for a third party, these parties face many obstacles. The most significant is the fear among voters that if they vote for a third-party candidate, they, in effect, will be "wasting" their votes. Voters have been shown to engage in strategic voting by casting ballots for their second choice when they sense that a third-party candidate has no chance of winning.

The preceding article was adapted from the publication article "Political Parties in the United States (<http://usinfo.state.gov/products/pubs/election04/parties.htm>)" by John F. Bibby in the electronic journal, United States Elections 2004 (<http://usinfo.state.gov/products/pubs/election04/>).

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Democrats Assume Control of U.S. House of Representatives

By David Anthony Denny
USINFO Staff Writer

Washington -- The 110th Congress convened January 4 with a majority of its members affiliated with the Democratic Party. That change in party control brings with it a change in the leadership of the House and its committees and will influence U.S. foreign policy over the next two years.

The House of Representatives is the larger house of Congress, composed of 435 members, apportioned on the basis of population within each of the 50 states, with each state guaranteed at least one representative, regardless of population. The most populous state, California, has the largest delegation, 53 members. House members -- referred to as representatives, congressmen or simply members -- serve two-year terms.

Although the Constitution assigns the Senate a larger role in international affairs than the House, the House's constitutional role in initiating all federal revenue legislation also gives House committees dealing with international affairs importance.

As a result of the November 2006 national elections, members of the Democratic Party hold a majority of House seats for the first time since 1995, enabling Democrats to chair committees and set the broad House agenda.

The House apportions its workload among 21 committees and four joint committees, which further are subdivided into numerous subcommittees. The chairman of each committee and a majority of its members represent the majority party. The chairman controls a committee's agenda and presides over committee hearings. Several thousand bills and resolutions are

referred to committees during each two-year Congress.

Within each committee, the minority party is led by a ranking member who serves as spokesman for his party's position on issues before



Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi wields the Speaker's gavel after being elected as the first woman Speaker during a swearing in ceremony for the 110th (AFP)

the committee. Committees select a small percentage of proposed legislation for consideration, and those not addressed usually receive no further action. The bills that committees report help to set the House's agenda.

HOUSE LEADERS

Speaker of the House
Nancy Pelosi of California, Democrat
Acts as leader of the House and combines several roles: presiding officer and administrative head of the House, the partisan role of leader of the majority party in the House, and the representative role of an elected member of the House. By statute, the speaker is second in

line, behind the vice president, to succeed to the presidency. Pelosi is the first female speaker in U.S. history; in the 109th Congress, she was the first female minority leader in the House.

Majority leader

Steny Hoyer of Maryland, Democrat
Represents House members of his party on the floor of the chamber, advocates their policies and viewpoints, coordinates their legislative efforts, and helps determine (with the speaker) the schedule of legislative business

Majority whip

Jim Clyburn of South Carolina, Democrat
Assists the majority leader

Minority leader

John Boehner of Ohio, Republican
Serves as spokesman for his party's position on issues and coordinates party votes

Minority whip

Roy Blunt of Missouri, Republican
Assists the minority leader

HOUSE COMMITTEES

International Relations

Oversees the international diplomatic and political relations of the U.S. government; meets with foreign political leaders, U.S. administration officials and representatives of key constituencies; addresses issues related to international security, the United Nations and peace-keeping

Chairman: Tom Lantos of California
Ranking Republican: Ileana Ros-Lehtinen of Florida

Appropriations

Formulates the U.S. government budget, usually by means of 13 separate pieces of legislation (appropriation bills)

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Democrats Assume Control of U.S. House of Representatives . . .

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Chairman: David Obey of Wisconsin
Ranking Republican: Jerry Lewis of California

Agriculture

Oversees issues and legislation related to rural development, disaster assistance, nutrition, crop insurance, conservation, international trade, futures market regulation, animal and plant health, agricultural research and development, renewable energy, bioterrorism, forestry and other issues; writes, with its Senate counterpart, multiyear legislation that encompasses the income safety net for U.S. farmers, promotion of U.S. food and textiles in international markets, rural development, agricultural research and conservation programs, and nutrition and feeding programs for the needy.

Chairman: Collin Peterson of Minnesota
Ranking Republican: Bob Goodlatte of Virginia

Armed Services

Oversees the U.S. armed forces and the Department of Defense; hears testimony from senior civilian and military Defense Department officials on various aspects of military and defense policy, including terrorism and unconventional threats and capabilities.

Chairman: Ike Skelton of Missouri
Ranking Republican: Duncan Hunter of California

Energy and Commerce

Oversees issues and legislation related to telecommunications, consumer protection, food and drug safety, public health, air quality and environmental health, the supply and delivery of energy, and interstate and foreign commerce; through its five subcommittees, addresses commerce, trade and consumer protection; energy and air

quality; environment and hazardous materials; health; oversight and investigations, and telecommunications and the Internet.

Chairman: John Dingell of Michigan
Ranking Republican: Joe Barton of Texas

Financial Services

Oversees issues and legislation related to valuation of the U.S. dollar; international finance and international financial and monetary organizations; monetary policy, money, currency and credit; securities and securities exchanges; banks and banking; economic stabilization; defense production; and financial aid to commerce and industry.

Chairman: Barney Frank of Massachusetts
Ranking Republican: Spencer Bachus of Alabama

Homeland Security

Oversees the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, which works with foreign government counterparts and international organizations dealing with security matters; conducts hearings and craft legislation on issues specific to homeland security; conducts investigations and subpoenas witnesses to testify before the panel.

Chairman: Bennie Thompson of Mississippi
Ranking Republican: Peter King of New York

Intelligence

Oversees the 16 U.S. agencies (plus the Office of the Director of National Intelligence) that collect, analyze and disseminate intelligence information; and appropriates and authorizes the classified budgets of the intelligence agencies.

Chairman: Silvestre Reyes of Texas
Ranking Republican: Peter Hoekstra of Michigan

Judiciary

Oversees international affairs through its purview over subversive activities affecting U.S. internal security; also provides oversight on matters related to espionage, criminal law enforcement, immigration policy, and claims against the United States.

Chairman: John Conyers Jr. of Michigan
Ranking Republican: Lamar Smith of Texas

Transportation and Infrastructure

Oversees issues and legislation related to aviation safety and security, international civil aviation agreements, including open skies agreements; foreign investment in U.S. airlines; management of emergencies and natural disasters; railroad safety and security; ocean shipping; maritime and port safety and security; merchant marine; marine and some other environmental protection programs; federal highway and transit programs; commercial road transportation and safety; and pipeline transportation safety.

Chairman: James Oberstar of Minnesota
Ranking Republican: John Mica of Florida

Ways and Means

Responsible for tax, revenue, conditions on the authority of the federal government to borrow money, and international trade policy, with the power to levy tariffs and to regulate international commerce, including the tariff schedules and all tariff preference programs, laws dealing with unfair trade practices, general and specific trade negotiating authority, implementing authority for trade agreements, the granting of normal-trade-relations status, trade-assistance programs, and customs administration and enforcement.

Chairman: Charles Rangel of New York
Ranking Republican: Jim McCrery of Louisiana ♦

House Committee Leaders Announce Foreign Policy Priorities

By David Anthony Denny
USINFO Staff Writer

Washington -- As the 110th Congress gets under way, military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan will be a focus of the four House committees with primary responsibility for foreign relations and military matters, according to committee chairmen.

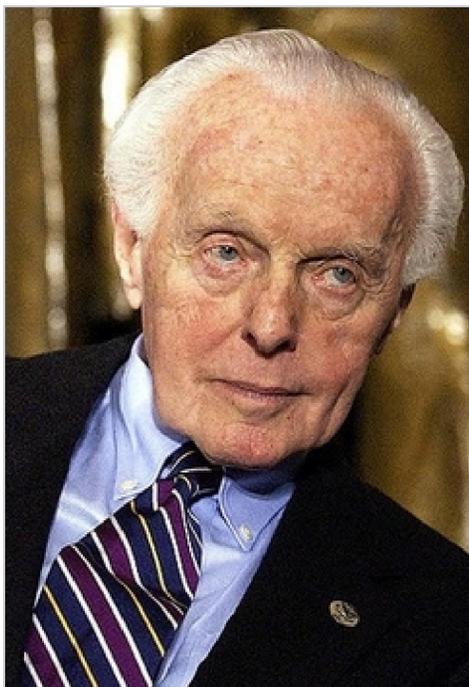
"Now that Democrats are in charge of Congress, you can expect to see the foreign policy aspect of the Legislative Branch take a new direction," Representative Tom Lantos of California, the chairman of the newly renamed House Committee on Foreign Affairs, said in remarks released January 4. "There will be substantially more oversight of the Executive Branch, with greater emphasis on holding this administration accountable," he said.

Lantos said his committee, which oversees the international diplomatic and political relations of the U.S. government, will hold hearings on implementation of the 9/11 Commission recommendations to strengthen the effort against al-Qaida and other terrorist groups; a new strategy toward North Korea, including bilateral talks if necessary; and ways to make the United States less dependent on foreign sources of energy. The committee also is expected to stress preventing the spread of nuclear technologies to countries and groups that could use them for terrorism. Some lawmakers also have written to Bush calling for a boost in foreign aid spending.

Under Lantos, a naturalized U.S. citizen and the only Nazi Holocaust survivor who is a member of Congress, the committee also is ex-

pected to push for decisions on economic sanctions and other diplomatic tools to promote religious freedom and urge the international community to establish a robust civilian protection regime in the Darfur region of Sudan.

The committee also will challenge an expected decision by the administration temporarily to increase troop levels in Iraq, urging instead a



Representative Tom Lantos of California, the chairman of the newly renamed House Committee on Foreign Affairs

focus on diplomacy. Lantos also said he will focus on Iraq reconstruction efforts and said the program "has been riddled with waste, fraud and abuse."

In a September 4, 2006, letter to President Bush, Lantos said he favors:

Transitioning the U.S. mission in Iraq to counterterrorism, training, logistics and force protection;

Implementing a "phased redeployment of U.S. forces from Iraq";

Working with Iraqi leaders to disarm militias and develop a broad-based and sustainable political settlement, which would include amending Iraq's Constitution; and

Convening an international conference and contact group to support a political settlement in Iraq.

On Afghanistan, Lantos said the United States must do a better job monitoring Afghan reconstruction and must bolster the government against the Taliban. "The United States is on the verge of losing Afghanistan once again," he said. The chairman plans to advocate renewal of the 2002 Afghan Freedom and Support Act, which was not renewed in 2004. The act sets human rights rules and other guidelines for spending billions of dollars in foreign and U.S. aid in Afghanistan.

The new House Armed Services chairman, Representative Ike Skelton of Missouri, announced December 19, 2006, that his priorities will be Iraq, Afghanistan, the war on terrorism, improvements to the state of the U.S. armed forces, nuclear nonproliferation and the future structure of the Department of Defense. Skelton's committee oversees the U.S. armed forces and the Department of Defense.

For Iraq, Skelton said his focus will be "the missions of U.S. forces and force protection, the training of Iraqi Security Forces, and the current status of reconstruction and rebuilding efforts." He also said the committee will look into whether the war against terrorism "is getting the right priority within the services."

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U.S. Swearing-in Ceremonies Highlight Religious Freedom Legacy

By Lea Terhune
USINFO Staff Writer

Washington -- Minnesota Congressman Keith Ellison's declaration that he would swear his oath of office on the Quran, the Muslim holy book, led to new interest in the protocol for swearing in members of Congress.

Ellison is the first Muslim to be elected to the U.S. Congress, and it is the first time that the use of the Quran in oath-taking has gained national attention.

Although historically oaths often have been taken with one hand on the Bible, the Constitution of the United States prohibits linking an individual's ability to serve with religion: "The senators and representatives ... shall be bound by oath or affirmation to support this Constitution; but no religious test shall ever be required as a qualification to any office or public trust under the United States."

America's founders acutely were aware of the importance of religious freedom. The first colonists, the Pilgrims, members of a Christian sect, migrated to North America to escape religious persecution in England, many sacrificing their lives. Waves of others seeking religious freedom followed, people from many different countries and creeds. Making religion a requirement of public service was unthinkable and illegal from the first days of the republic.

The first bill passed by Congress in 1789 was the Oath Act, which de-

finied a simple oath of office: "I do solemnly swear that I will support the Constitution of the United States." The oath was expanded



Congressman Keith Ellison, the first Muslim to be elected to the U.S. Congress

after the Civil War to include a loyalty clause. Today, members of Congress, as a group, raise their right hands to affirm the oath of office while the speaker of the House administers it. No book of scripture is necessary. Those who wish may have a separate oath-taking ceremony on their book of choice, and some commemorate the moment in a photo.

Because America has been predominantly Christian, its became customary, but not mandatory, for U.S.

presidents and other public officers to carry or place their hand on the Bible while taking the oath of office. Fiercely secular, John Quincy Adams took his oath on a book of laws containing the U.S. Constitution. Theodore Roosevelt used no book at all. Franklin Pierce and Herbert Hoover, a Quaker, did not swear but affirmed the oath of office. Jewish office-holders have brought Hebrew texts, while others acknowledge the Bible's Old Testament as part of Jewish scripture and settle for that. President John F. Kennedy, a Catholic, placed his hand on the Catholic Douay Version of the Bible.

The introduction of the Quran into congressional oath-taking is evidence of the growing religious diversity of the United States. The Quran used by Ellison during his January 4 ceremonial swearing-in is unique. It once belonged to Thomas Jefferson, drafter of the Declaration of Independence and third U.S. president. The Library of Congress, which obtained the book from Jefferson in 1815, loaned it to Ellison for the occasion. It is an English translation from the Arabic first published in London in 1734.

Jefferson, who gave much thought to religion, in 1802 wrote to the Danbury Baptist Association: "Believing with you that religion is a matter which lies solely between man and his God, that he owes account to none other for his faith or his worship, that the legislative powers of government reach actions only, and not opinions, I contemplate with sovereign reverence that act of the whole American peo-

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U.S. Swearing-in Ceremonies Highlight Religious Freedom Legacy . . .

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ple which declared that their legislature should 'make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof,' thus building a wall of separation between church and State."

Muslims first arrived in the United States in slave ships from Africa. One of these, Abdur Rahman Ibrahim ibn Sori, was brought from Guinea to Mississippi in the early 19th century. He won his freedom through the intercession of Mississippi Senator Thomas Reed and the sultan of Morocco, who



The Quran used by Representative Keith Ellison during his swearing-in ceremony was once owned by Thomas Jefferson. (AP Images)

successfully petitioned Secretary of State Henry Clay and President John Quincy Adams to free Sori.

Today, Muslim Americans number several million. Ellison's election and his inclusion of the Quran in his swearing-in ceremony highlight the legacy of religious freedom enshrined in the Constitution and the contributions to American society made by people of diverse faiths.

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

House Committee Leaders Announce Foreign Policy Priorities . . .

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The House Select Intelligence Committee deals with matters important both to foreign and military policy, and its new chairman, Representative Silvestre Reyes of Texas, has said the committee's agenda includes examining U.S. involvement in Iraq and the nation's terrorist surveillance program.

On December 6, 2006, after being briefed by the Iraq Study Group, Reyes said the group's report found that neither the Defense Department nor the intelligence community has "invested sufficient people and resources to understand the political and military threat" to U.S. troops in Iraq. "One of my first actions when I assume the Chair of the House Intelligence Committee in January will be to convene a series of comprehensive hearings examining the state of intelligence support

to our troops deployed in Iraq," Reyes said.

Incoming House Homeland Security Chairman Bennie Thompson of Mississippi said a significant focus will be placed on immigration and border security issues. His committee is responsible for oversight of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, where most of its focus is domestic security issues.

Speaking from the floor of the House on September 14, 2006, Thompson provided insight as to his concept for border security. Addressing a rule for consideration of key homeland security legislation, Thompson said that he had offered an amendment to the bill that would include 3,000 more Border Patrol agents, 2,000 new Immigration and Customs Enforcement officers, 250 more detention officers, plus helicopters, all-terrain vehicles, radio communications, GPS devices

and night vision goggles. His would be, he said, "an all-encompassing approach to border security and [would] ensure that every mile of the border is monitored and secured 24 hours a day, seven days a week." Thompson's amendment, which was considered before the 2006 mid-term elections returned control of Congress to the Democrats, was not approved at the time.

For more information on the priorities of the 110th Congress, see The U.S. Congress (<http://usinfo.state.gov/dhr/democracy/congress.html>).

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

Capital Punishment in United States Continues To Be Debated

Washington – The number of executions in the United States in 2006 dropped to its lowest number in 10 years, in part due to legal challenges resulting in many states reviewing their capital punishment policies and procedures.

There were 53 executions in 2006, according to the Death Penalty Information Center, a Washington-based nonprofit organization that studies and provides analysis on capital punishment.

STATES REVIEW LETHAL INJECTION PROCEDURES

Due to concerns over how lethal injections are administered, some states are reviewing the process to ensure that lethal injection does not violate the U.S. Constitution's Eighth Amendment provision against cruel and unusual punishment.

On December 19, 2006, Maryland's Court of Appeals halted executions in the state until a legislative panel reviews the manual detailing the lethal injection procedure.

In California, a federal judge December 15, 2006, determined the state's lethal injection process to be unconstitutional. This ruling extends the moratorium on executions in the state, which was implemented in February 2006. On December 19, 2006, Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger said his administration plans to modify California lethal-injection procedures so that they are constitutional. His administration is reviewing the current process and will seek to establish better implementation and review procedures.

On the same day as the California ruling, Florida's governor, Jeb Bush,

announced that his state also would halt lethal injections. The decision came after a medical examiner's report showed that the drugs used to execute convicted killer Angel Nieves Diaz December 13, 2006, were administered improperly. Because of this, Diaz, who received two doses of the lethal drugs and



witnesses said was visibly in pain, took 34 minutes to die. A commission will review whether the state's process constitutes cruel and unusual punishment.

SUPREME COURT RULINGS IMPACT DEATH ROW INMATES' RIGHTS

Courts throughout the country, including the U.S. Supreme Court, made a number of rulings during 2006 that have impacted state capital punishment policies.

The court's unanimous June 12, 2006, ruling in *Hill v. McDonough* determined that inmates can challenge lethal injections as a civil rights issue. However, the judges did not rule on whether this method of execution constitutes cruel and unusual punishment.

Clarence E. Hill, who had been on death row in Florida since 1982 for

murdering a police officer, argued that death by lethal injection would violate his civil rights because the U.S. Constitution's Eighth Amendment bans cruel and unusual punishment. Florida's method of executing inmates, which uses combinations of chemicals in sequence, could subject him to undetected pain, Hill claimed. The case was sent back to the lower courts to rule on the inmate's claim. Hill was executed in September 2006.

In a separate June 12, 2006, decision, the Supreme Court ruled that death-row inmates can challenge their convictions if DNA evidence found after their trials end shows that they might be innocent.

In the 5-3 ruling in *House v. Bell*, the justices held that evidence, including DNA evidence, raised enough doubt to merit a new hearing in U.S. federal court for Paul Gregory House, who has been on death row for 20 years in Tennessee for the rape and murder of a neighbor. The Supreme Court's decision marks the first time the justices have considered DNA in re-examining a death-sentence conviction. As a result, House can seek a new trial.

CAPITAL PUNISHMENT IN THE UNITED STATES

More than 1,000 people have been executed in the United States for certain federal crimes and by some states for murder and violent crimes since the death penalty, or capital punishment, was reinstated in 1976.

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Nonprofit Group Promotes Literacy by Book Distribution to Kids

By Lauren Monsen
USINFO Staff Writer

This article is the fourth in a series on U.S. nongovernmental organizations.

Washington -- Over a period of 40 years, the largest nonprofit children's literacy organization in the United States has been introducing youngsters in disadvantaged communities to the joys of reading, and transforming lives in the process.

Founded in 1966, Reading Is Fundamental (RIF) aims to reach underprivileged children from birth to age 8 through a series of literacy-promotion activities, beginning with its book distribution program. According to Stephen Leach, RIF's director of government relations and community outreach, the organization provides 4.5 million children with free books and other literacy resources each year. RIF programs currently operate in all 50 U.S. states and in the U.S. territories of Guam, Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands.

Leach told USINFO that RIF's top goal is to get children "excited about books." In fact, the RIF Web site states that all RIF programs "combine three essential elements to foster children's literacy: reading motivation, family and community involvement, and the excitement of choosing free books to keep."

Several times a year, RIF distributes new books to children -- usually through a "bookmobile" van that travels to participating schools and other sites -- while local RIF coordinators organize the book distribution events and oversee the efforts

of other RIF volunteers. "Our objective is to make these events fun for the kids," said Leach. "At the end [of each event], kids choose their books."

Because RIF is a well-known presence in the communities it serves, the organization never has had trou-



Brian Terpay reads to Omar Zamora, left, and Isaiah Leon, right, at the Salk Elementary School in Mesa, Arizona. (AP Images)

ble attracting volunteers, Leach said. Many volunteers benefited from RIF programs when they were growing up, so they are enthusiastic about enriching young lives through the gift of literacy, he added. "Volunteers are up for renewal each year," and they frequently re-enlist, said Leach.

RIF has established partnerships with the U.S. Department of Education, and with corporate sponsors and private donors as well, so its reach is considerable. The U.S. Congress provides federal matching funds to sites -- such as schools and child care facilities -- that qualify for RIF's national book distribution program, and those funds are disbursed through the Department of Education.

"RIF gets \$30 million each year in funding, 85 percent of which is from the federal government," said Leach. "About 90 percent of our budget goes directly to providing books and literacy resources to individual RIF programs" throughout the United States and its territories.

Yet even federal funding, corporate sponsorship, and private donations do not enable RIF to help every community that needs its services.

"Right now, we do have a waiting list of a million or so kids that we unfortunately don't have the resources to serve," said Leach. "There is a need, an overwhelming need."

RIF coordinators "work with a book selection committee to select the book vendor to purchase from, and then select from the titles available from that vendor," he said. "Local coordinators have a lot of

flexibility in determining which titles are most appropriate for the kids in their communities." And "vendors sell books at a significant discount to RIF programs," he added.

The organization's success in the United States has spawned similar efforts in other countries. The organization is affiliated with programs in Argentina and the United Kingdom, said Leach, "and we have a great relationship with those programs. We bounce ideas off each other and share best practices. We try to keep in contact with them as often as we can. They do share our name, but they operate independently from us."

(Continued on page 21)

United States Sees Key Role for United Nations in 2007

By Judy Aita

USINFO United Nations Correspondent

United Nations -- In 2007, the U.N. Security Council must be ready to deal with terrorism, cross-border violence, widespread and systematic human rights violations, refugee flows and political instability before these issues escalate into wars, the United States says.

U.S. Ambassador Alejandro Wolff said January 8 that as the challenges facing the international community grow more complex, the council must act not only to manage conflicts but to prevent them, and then help countries emerging from crisis situations consolidate peace based on economic and political development.

In facing these challenges, said Wolff, the current head of the U.S. delegation to the United Nations, the Security Council "must be prepared to act quickly to respond to emerging threats or developing crises; but ... must act in a way that improves the situation on the ground."

Wolff spoke during the Security Council's first meeting with U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, who began a five-year term at the beginning of January, to discuss the council's priorities for 2007. In 2006, the council grappled with human rights abuses in Burma, conflicts in the Middle East and Africa, nuclear weapons programs in North Korea and Iran, and political and security challenges in Afghanistan and Iraq -- all of which remain on the council's agenda.

The United Nations has 18 peace-keeping missions, with an all-time

high of 100,000 personnel and increases scheduled for some missions in 2007. The United Nations is engaged to some degree in another 12 peace operations, the secretary-general reported.

In Washington, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice on January 8 announced the nomination of Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad to be the

In a statement from Baghdad, Iraq, Khalilzad pledged to advance "an agenda to promote our common interests -- a world in which we take collective action against threats to security, in which freedom and democracy are expanding, in which the rule of law becomes more widespread, and in which all nations enjoy economic prosperity."



United Nations Headquarters

chief envoy to the United Nations, highlighting the importance of the organization to the United States. (See related article (<http://usinfo.state.gov/xarchives/display.html?p=washfile-english&y=2007&m=January&x=20070108164236esnamfuak0.3502313>).)

The challenges facing the United Nations demand a skilled and experienced diplomat with proven ability to lead from principle and to build consensus -- attributes Khalilzad has demonstrated as the current U.S. ambassador to Iraq, former envoy to Afghanistan and former special assistant to President Bush, Rice said.

Ban told the council that the Darfur region of Sudan -- where the humanitarian situation is growing worse despite international efforts over the past three years -- is a top priority. One of his first initiatives was to appoint former Swedish Foreign Minister Jan Eliasson as his special envoy for Darfur and immediately send him to the region.

Ban said the council must do more to invigorate nonproliferation efforts, including addressing the special challenges Iran and North Korea pose. Terrorism, he continued, de-

(Continued on page 21)

Bush Nominating New Ambassadors to the United Nations and Iraq

By Stephen Kaufman
USINFO Staff Writer

Washington -- The Bush administration announced its intention to nominate Zalmay Khalilzad, current U.S. ambassador to Iraq, to be its ambassador to the United Nations, and Ryan Crocker, ambassador to Pakistan, to succeed Khalilzad in Baghdad.

Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice said January 8 that if the U.S. Senate confirms their nominations, "Ryan and Zal will have two of the hardest and most consequential jobs in the world," and both enjoy the "utmost confidence" of President Bush and herself.

She said the personnel changes are designed to strengthen U.S. diplomacy.

Khalilzad also has served as ambassador to Afghanistan and has held other senior positions in the Bush administration. Rice said international events and resolutions passed in 2006 have "shown how clearly important the U.N. is for America and the world and how important American leadership is to the U.N."

In a State Department media note, Khalilzad said if the Senate approves his nomination, he hopes to continue efforts to reform the United Nations and "strengthen its ability to fulfill its mission." He also said he would advance an agenda

with fellow U.N. representatives to promote common interests.

"[I seek] a world in which we take collective action against threats to security, in which freedom and de-



Zalmay Khalilzad

mocracy are expanding, in which the rule of law becomes more widespread, and in which all nations enjoy economic prosperity," he said.

Crocker, Bush's nominee to serve as Khalilzad's successor in Baghdad, is one of America's "most distinguished Foreign Service officers," Rice said, citing his four previous ambassadorships -- in Lebanon, Kuwait, Syria and Pakistan.

Rice said Crocker "is known and respected throughout our government, throughout the Middle East, and throughout the world."

She said Crocker's appointment is part of President Bush's changes to the U.S. military and diplomatic efforts in Iraq.

"The next two years may well be the most significant ones in this mission so far. New challenges on the ground call for changes to our strategy," Rice said.

Crocker, in a State Department media note, said he previously had been assigned to Iraq in the late 1970s and had returned in 2001, 2002 and 2003.

"If confirmed by the Senate, I look forward to the critical challenges ahead. It is a privilege to serve," he said.

Further biographical information on Crocker and Khalilzad is available, respectively, at the U.S. Embassy in Islamabad (<http://islamabad.usembassy.gov/pakistan/ambassador.html>) and the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad (<http://iraq.usembassy.gov/iraq/ambassador.html>) Web sites.

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U.S. Continues To Help Build Disaster Response Capacities

By Kathryn McConnell
USINFO Staff Writer

Washington -- The United States continues to help Indian Ocean countries affected by the December 2004 tsunami expand their national and local capacities to respond effectively to the crisis and similar ones in the future, says a U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) official.

In December 2006, the United States deployed the first deep-sea monitoring communication buoy in the Indian Ocean that provides real-time observation data. Two more buoys are planned for deployment in the region, said Mark Ward, USAID senior deputy administrator for Asia and the Near East. The data the buoys provide can be used to help national governments warn their communities of potential natural disasters, allowing them time to prepare a response, Ward said.

Ward and Eric Schwartz, United Nations special envoy for tsunami recovery, briefed reporters January 4 at the National Press Center in Washington on joint accomplishments to date and on lessons learned from the disaster that killed more than 200,000, displaced an estimated 2 million and destroyed or damaged 370,000 homes.

The United States also is providing training for police officers, firefighters and medical professionals in emergency medical care, collapsed structure search and rescue techniques, and hospital preparedness in Bangladesh, India, Indonesia, Nepal and the Philippines, Ward said.

The United States continues to attempt to get other countries to commit to providing humanitarian



USAID has provided computer laboratories for Islamic boarding schools in Indonesia.

assistance, including those that historically have not given aid, Ward said.

The United Arab Emirates became the first Gulf-region country to commit to provide humanitarian aid during the 2005-2006 period when the United States chaired the U.N. Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), he said.

Ward said he hopes other countries will follow the United Arab Emirates' example.

In other continuing efforts, the United States is working to tap the resources and expertise of the private sector, secure greater involvement of international groups and nongovernmental organizations, and push for common operating principles, Ward said.

Since the tsunami, the United States has helped secure \$30 million in private-sector funding to help the affected countries, he said.

"Corporations are often able and willing to quickly channel monetary or in-kind resources for immediate disaster relief as well as near or long-term reconstruction."

And if a company does not already have a presence in a country in need, USAID helps the donor get its contribution to where it best can be used, Ward said.

Ward said the massive Indian Ocean tsunami provided valuable lessons for long-term disaster preparedness.

One lesson, Schwartz said, is that countries together must do more to manage risk "as climate change and patterns of human behavior ensure we haven't seen the last of these natural hazards."

Another lesson is that disaster recovery efforts can be used to promote equality by ensuring that vulnerable communities and ethnic minorities are protected in the aid-distribution process, Schwartz said.

Ward said other countries could learn from India how communities can prepare for a disaster such as a tsunami, typhoon or earthquake.



Playgrounds Project by USAID in Sri Lanka

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

Bush Steadfast on Free Trade Agenda, Commerce Secretary Says

By Jaroslaw Anders
USINFO Staff Writer

Washington—While searching for common ground with the new 110th Congress, President Bush will remain committed to his open-trade policy and will push for new free trade agreements, U.S. Commerce Secretary Carlos M. Gutierrez says.

Addressing concerns about the alleged loss of jobs in the United States caused by free trade, Gutierrez said protectionism does not protect jobs. "The only way to protect American jobs is to encourage innovation, expand job training, promote private investment and compete. Doing so requires that we continue opening markets throughout the world," he said at the U.S. Chamber of Commerce in Washington, D.C., January 5.

Congress will have to address four new free trade agreements (FTAs). Three of them concern Latin American countries -- Columbia, Peru and Panama. (See related article (<http://usinfo.state.gov/xarchives/display.html?p=washfile-english&y=2006&m=December&x=20061220153509SAikceinawz0.2609674>).) The fourth one is with South Korea, which, according to Gutierrez, "will be the largest Asian FTA and our largest FTA since [the North American Free Trade Agreement]." (See related article (<http://usinfo.state.gov/xarchives/display.html?p=washfile-english&y=2006&m=September&x=20060928151619ASesuarK0.2929651>).)

The commerce secretary said U.S. exports have increased at an annual rate of 5.8 percent since President Bush took office:

"In 2005, the U.S. was the largest exporter of goods and services in the world with \$1.3 trillion dollars. 2006 will be another record year. Through October, overall exports grew 13.1 percent from the same period last year, while imports grew 11.7 percent. Exports to China surged 34 percent. Imports from China grew 17.6 percent," he said.

Gutierrez attributed those increases in U.S. exports to free trade agreements. "Although FTA countries only make up 7.3 percent of the world's [gross domestic product], exports to these countries comprise 42.5 percent of U.S. exports," he said.

The commerce secretary also said the United States remains committed to the further opening of international markets and is "working hard" on advancing the World Trade Organization's now-stalled Doha trade negotiations. (See related article (<http://usinfo.state.gov/xarchives/display.html?p=washfile-english&y=2007&m=January&x=20070105120526esnamfuak0.8614771>).)

Gutierrez mentioned the importance of extending the presidential Trade Promotion Authority (TPA), under which the U.S. president negotiates trade agreements and Congress restricts itself only to approving or rejecting them without amendments. Some experts say TPA extension faces an uphill battle in the new Democratic-majority Congress.

Critics have claimed TPA places too much power in the hands of the president and curtails the oversight authority of the legislative branch. Gutierrez, however, said that TPA is "critical" for free trade promotion and "no president should go with-

out it." (See related article (<http://usinfo.state.gov/xarchives/display.html?p=washfile-english&y=2005&m=March&x=20050330165659ebyessedo0.8797571>).)

The commerce secretary also said the U.S. economy has begun to experience labor shortages, including that of high-skilled workers, with the unemployment rate at 4.5 percent. "We need to attract and keep the talent that currently comes to the U.S., studies in our great universities and returns home to compete against us. So we need immigration reform for high-skilled workers," he said.

Gutierrez reiterated the Bush administration's call for comprehensive immigration reform that would include, apart from better border control, a temporary worker program and "a path to legalization for workers who can achieve the appropriate requirements."

The full text (<http://www.osec.doc.gov/>) of Secretary Gutierrez's remarks is available on the Commerce Department Web site.

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

Bush Optimistic on Achieving WTO Trade Deal

By Stephen Kaufman
USINFO Staff Writer

Washington -- The United States remains committed to the Doha round of World Trade Organization talks that are designed to lower international trade barriers, and President Bush said that even though obstacles remain, "I believe we can get a deal done."

Speaking with German Chancellor Angela Merkel in Washington January 4, Bush said trade "is the best way to help poor nations develop their economy so that people can realize the benefits of wealth moving throughout their society."

To combat global poverty, the United States and the European Union need to bring the Doha negotiations to a successful conclusion. Bush said that while "a lot of will and a lot of hard work" will be necessary, he and the German leader "had a good, frank discussion on the subject."

The two leaders also discussed climate change, and Bush said he has been "going full steam ahead" in promoting new technologies designed to promote energy efficiency and that he is committed to "do a better job of protecting the world's environment."

"I believe there's a chance now to put behind us the old, stale debates of the past and focus on technological developments that will enable us to be good stewards of the environment, and at the same time enable us to become less dependent on oil and hydrocarbons from parts of the world that may not like us," he said.

Merkel said Germany, which has assumed presidency of the European Union, wants to cooperate "very closely" with the United States on the Doha trade talks.

"We are all aware of the fact that this window of opportunity that we have is closing fast. We need to act swiftly," she said.



President Bush welcomes German Chancellor Angela Merkel to the Oval Office January 4. (White House)

She said views also will need to be exchanged with the Group of 20 developing nations "to achieve an objective that is in our interest and is in their interest, that helps them to get access to our markets and that also helps us."

Germany will also host the 2007 Group of Eight (G8) summit, and Merkel said there she plans to discuss economic growth and its relation to climate change.

"On the one hand, we obviously need economic growth. But on the other hand, a reduction, also, of

greenhouse gases," she said.

The German chancellor said she was delighted that the United States is ready to work with the Europeans on the issue. "We were at one on this," she said, adding there is "a wide scope for further talks" on the issue of energy efficiency, including cooperation on biofuels and new technologies.

Bush also discussed his reaction to the execution of former Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein, which generated criticism because of sectarian taunts and exchanges during the proceedings. The president said a "horrific chapter" in Iraq's history had been closed, and Saddam had been given a fair trial, unlike "the thousands of people he killed."

"I wish, obviously, that the proceedings had been done in a more dignified way," he said, but added that Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki told him there would be a "full investigation of what took place."

A transcript (<http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2007/01/20070104-2.html>) of remarks by Bush and Merkel is available on the White House Web site.

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

U.S. Health Agency To Fund New Influenza Anti-viral Drug

By Cheryl Pellerin
USINFO Staff Writer

Washington -- The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) awarded a \$102.6 million, four-year contract to Alabama-based BioCryst Pharmaceuticals January 4 to develop the company's influenza anti-viral drug, peramivir, and the National Institutes of Health (NIH) has begun testing in people of a DNA vaccine that could prevent avian flu.

In laboratory studies, peramivir has been effective against several influenza strains. Funding under the contract will support studies to determine if peramivir can be an effective treatment for seasonal and life-threatening influenza, including H5N1.

Other research also may examine the drug's potential to prevent influenza infection.

H5N1 is the highly pathogenic strain of bird flu that has reached pandemic levels among birds in Asia and has spread to Africa and Europe, causing the deaths of more than 200 million birds. Since 2003, the virus has been transmitted to 261 people in 10 countries, killing 157, according to the World Health Organization.

Nearly all human cases have come from direct contact with infected poultry. There have been a few cases of person-to-person transmission, but the virus does not transmit easily among people. Experts fear that if the virus mutates to become easily transmissible among people, a worldwide pandemic could result.

"Our anti-viral strategy includes not only stockpiling existing antiviral

drugs but also seeking out new antiviral medications to further broaden our capabilities to treat and prevent all forms of influenza," said HHS Secretary Michael Leavitt in a January 4 statement.

ANTIVIRAL DRUGS

Four anti-viral medications -- amantadine (brand name Symmetrel®), rimantadine (Flumadine®), zanamivir (Relenza®) and oseltamivir (Tamiflu®) -- are approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration to treat and prevent influenza. When used for prevention, they are 70 percent to 90 percent effective in preventing illness in healthy adults, according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

People can be infected with influenza types A, B and C viruses. H5N1 is a subtype of influenza A. Wild birds are the natural hosts for all known subtypes of influenza A viruses.

All the anti-viral medications may be effective for influenza A viruses, but only oseltamivir and zanamivir are effective for influenza B viruses. According to CDC, recent evidence shows that a high proportion of circulating influenza A viruses in the United States have developed resistance to amantadine and rimantadine.

Peramivir is a member of the same class of antiviral drugs as oseltamivir, which is taken by mouth, and zanamivir, which is used in an inhaler. But peramivir is being studied as a drug that can be administered parenterally, meaning by using a needle to inject the drug into a vein or muscle.

The injectable drug may be espe-

cially useful in hospital settings, where it can be given to people with life-threatening flu on admission to emergency rooms. Other advantages are the potential for high levels of the drug to travel quickly through the body and its ability to be given to people too ill to take medications by mouth.

DNA VACCINE FOR AVIAN FLU

The first human trial of a DNA vaccine designed to prevent H5N1 avian influenza infection began December 21, 2006, at NIH in Maryland.

Scientists from the Vaccine Research Center (VRC) at the NIH National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID) designed the vaccine. The vaccine does not contain infectious material from the flu virus.

Unlike conventional flu vaccines, developed by growing the flu virus in hens' eggs and administered as a weakened or killed form of the virus, DNA-based vaccines contain only parts of the flu virus's genetic material. In the body, the DNA tells human cells to make proteins that act as a vaccine against the virus.

"An effective H5N1 influenza vaccine would provide a potentially life-saving advance against a global health threat," said NIAID Director Anthony Fauci in a January 2 statement.

VRC Director Gary Nabel and VRC scientists recognized the potential for using new vaccine technology against influenza. Effective vaccines long have been available for flu, but supply reliability and manufacturing capacity have been problems.

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Capital Punishment in United States Continues To Be Debated

(Continued from page 12)

The U.S. Supreme Court ruled in 1976 that the death penalty is not a violation of the Eighth Amendment to the Constitution, which bans cruel and unusual punishment. That ruling came in the wake of a 10-year moratorium on executions.

Today, criminals in 38 states and those convicted of federal crimes could face the death penalty in the United States. Twelve states and the District of Columbia have abolished the death penalty. Death-penalty statutes in New York and Kansas were declared unconstitutional in 2004; however, in a 5-4 ruling on June 26, 2006, the U.S. Supreme Court let the death penalty stand in Kansas.

Some states, including New Jersey, currently have death penalty moratoriums. In New Jersey, a state study commission held public meetings on the issue and heard testimony from those both for and against capital punishment. On January 2, 2007, the commission

issued a report calling on the state to abolish the death penalty. The report cites high financial burdens for the state and concerns that the death penalty does not deter crime as reasons for eliminating capital punishment. Governor Jon Corzine, an opponent of the death penalty, said in a statement that he will work with the New Jersey Legislature to make the commission's recommendation a law. The state's moratorium is expected to expire 60 days after the commission completes its work, although because of pending legislation it is unlikely that any executions will occur soon. There are currently nine people on New Jersey's death row. The last execution in the state was in 1963.

The reauthorization of the USA PATRIOT Act, signed by President Bush in 2006, extends the federal death penalty to individuals involved in deadly terrorist attacks, including those who transport materials used in a terrorist attack, those who help plot an attack on a mass-transit system and those who participate in an attack on ships and

maritime facilities.

Individual states have guidelines for imposing the death penalty. In general, criminals convicted of first-degree murder face the death penalty in all states with capital punishment on the books.

Arguments in favor of the death penalty in the United States include deterrence and retribution. Opponents say that the risk of executing the innocent should preclude use of the death penalty. They also question the fairness in the way the death penalty has been applied.

The most common methods of execution in the United States are lethal injection and electrocution.

A June 2006 Gallup Poll reports that two out of three Americans support the death penalty for convicted murderers. ♦

U.S. Health Agency To Fund New Influenza Anti-viral Drug . . .

(Continued from page 19)

With the spread of avian flu, new strains have emerged that have drifted genetically from initial strains detected in Southeast Asia. With this study, the investigators hope to learn whether new technologies, such as DNA vaccines, can protect against such viruses.

"This vaccine," Nabel said, "is aimed at newer strains of the H5N1 virus that currently pose a threat in Indonesia and represents an exam-

ple of our ability to respond to shifting viruses with modern technology."

The study will enroll 45 volunteers between ages 18 and 60; 15 will receive placebo injections and 30 will receive three injections of the investigational vaccine over two months and will be followed for a year.

More information (<http://www3.niaid.nih.gov/news/focuson/flu>) about influenza is available on the NIAID Web site.

For ongoing coverage of the disease and efforts to combat it, see Bird Flu (Avian Influenza) (http://usinfo.state.gov/gi/global_issues/bird_flu.html) (http://usinfo.state.gov/gi/global_issues/bird_flu.html).

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United States Sees Key Role for United Nations . . .

(Continued from page 14)

mands "urgent, sustained and comprehensive attention from the international community."

Wolff said in the past few years the council increasingly has dealt not only with conflicts between states, but conflicts within states. Citing Darfur as a prime example, he said internal conflicts create unstable borders, increase regional tensions and result in significant economic and social burdens.

"Not only does this council need to act to protect civilian populations that are the targets of their own government, but experience has demonstrated many times over that in today's world, events occurring in one country affect the world beyond its boundaries," the ambassador said.

Wolff also said the terrorist group al-Qaida has issued an explicit threat

against the United Nations and its peacekeepers. "We know that terrorists still work to kill innocent civilians around the world and [the Security Council] has a responsibility to meet these threats with unity of purpose and clear resolve," he said.

The 15-nation Security Council is responsible for maintaining international peace and security. Its decisions are binding on all U.N. members. It has no set schedule of meetings and its members are on call at all times.

Members of the 2007 Security Council are Belgium, China, France, Ghana, Indonesia, Italy, Panama, Peru, Qatar, Republic of the Congo, Russia, Slovakia, South Africa, the United Kingdom and the United States. ♦

Nonprofit Group Promotes Literacy by Book Distribution to Kids . . .

(Continued from page 13)

But perhaps the most gratifying tribute of all is the evidence that RIF has made a real difference to the children it serves. Leach said RIF officials receive a steady stream of letters from "kids, parents, caregivers, and [program] coordinators ... who developed a love of reading" thanks to RIF activities. "Children's reading scores have improved, and their attitude toward reading has improved," he said. "Early exposure to books through RIF can improve academic performance later on."

Leach himself is a "RIF alumni," having grown up in a small town in North Carolina that profited from RIF's book distribution program. "We had RIF events in school," he

recalled. "I remember sharing RIF books with my younger brother." Several other RIF staffers also have fond memories of their childhood RIF experiences, he said.

Among the many inspirational examples of "RIF kids" who went on to achieve their dreams are Juwan Howard, a star athlete with the National Basketball Association's Houston Rockets, and television producer Hank Mendheim, who works for the National Broadcasting Company.

Writer/poet/activist Tanzania Nevels, a native of the Delta region of Mississippi, described how RIF changed her life in a posting on RIF's Web site. "I was in the RIF program" while attending primary school, she wrote. "As a child,

reading took me way beyond the boundaries of Mississippi. This introduced me to all the possibilities of what I could be when I grew up. ... But without reading, I wouldn't have known that all those prospects were out there."

Leach said, stories like those of Nevels "are what motivates us" to continue reaching out to children.

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