



Weekly Special Report



Produced by the Public Affairs Section

INSIDE

U.S. Embassy Hosts Orientation for Ethiopian Students Studying in the United States

On August 5, the Public Affairs Section of the U.S. Embassy hosted a pre-departure orientation and reception for Ethiopian students leaving for the United States on student visas at the Ethiopia Hotel. This event, the first of its kind, aimed to help students prepare for their study abroad and to understand cultural, consular and legal issues relevant to being international students in the U.S. Opening the program, Public Affairs Counselor Michael McClellan said the Ethiopian



Students chatting at the reception after the orientation

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Zimbabwe Urged to Allow Aid Groups to Provide Assistance

By Merle D. Kellerhals, Jr. Staff Writer

Washington -- Nearly 5 million Zimbabweans will require emergency food aid in the coming months, and as a result of recent presidential-election-related violence, thousands more have been displaced from their homes, according to a recent United Nations report.



Shoppers pass empty food shelves in Zimbabwe's capital Harare as the post-election political crisis continues. (© AP Images)

"A humanitarian crisis looms, yet the government of Zimbabwe con-

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U.S. Embassy Hosts Orientation for Ethiopian Students . . .

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students going to the United States would help strengthen people-to-people relations between the two countries. He commented that the students, in addition to studying, would help Americans learn about Ethiopia and its rich culture and long history of religious tolerance. Chargé d’Affaires Deborah Malac delivered a key note address. She explained the structure and types of institutions in the U.S. education system. Chargé Malac emphasized the importance of having international students in the U.S. and the important role of educational exchange in diplomatic relations. Consular Chief Paul Cantrell spoke about the student visa process and invited Vice Consul Scott Driskel to explain the entry procedures students will encounter when they arrive in the United States. Mr. Driskel also explained the legal context of staying in the U.S. as a student. The Embassy’s Educational Advisor, Yoseph Shiferaw, shared tips with the students about getting the best results out of U.S. education. He

discussed issues of cultural diversity and differences that the students are likely to encounter and gave hints about how to handle such cases. He emphasized the cultural differences that might appear very different for students when they first arrive in the U.S., and he encouraged students to mingle with local students in order to learn about the American culture. He also explained the academic procedures and culture of U.S. institutions. Desiree Cormier of the Embassy’s Political Section provided insight into American society and values. Her presentation aimed to help students understand the nature of the American community and its values and overall culture. Harvard University sophomore Yoseph Ayele, who came to Addis Ababa for a two month internship program, concluded the program with a presentation on being an international student in the US. He highlighted the challenges and opportunities of being an international student. He provided interesting insights and hints on how to manage social interactions and how to become a more involved active

member of the community. The event was followed by a reception, at which the 187 students and parents in attendance had a chance to meet and discuss study abroad issues with the presenters and their fellow students. In the last two years, the U.S. Embassy has expanded its cooperation with Ethiopian high schools and universities through its outreach programs, education fairs and education advising at the Embassy. The Embassy’s education advising services are available free of charge to the public. The Public Affairs Office disseminates free information about studying in the U.S. to interested students and hosts two informational sessions with Education Advisor Yoseph Shiferaw each week for graduate and undergraduate students. These free services help Ethiopian students learn about and prepare for their education options in the U.S. This year more than two dozen students who used the Embassy’s advising services were able to obtain some form of financial aid, including full scholarships.♦

Zimbabwe Urged to Allow Aid Groups to Provide . . .

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tinues to suspend most nongovernmental organizations' access to vulnerable people in dire need of life-saving humanitarian assistance," the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) said August 1.

USAID Administrator Henrietta Fore called for the Zimbabwean regime

to "immediately and completely rescind the June 4 NGO suspension order" that blocked nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) from providing humanitarian assistance. Zimbabwe's government ordered all humanitarian aid groups to suspend their operations, which relief agencies estimate will deprive 2 million people of food aid and other basic assistance.

In addition to rescinding its order, Fore also called on the Zimbabwean regime to advise all levels of government and Zimbabwean agencies that the NGO suspension has been lifted, guarantee the safety and security of all humanitarian aid workers, give unimpeded access for humanitarian aid work across the impoverished country, and respect the right of affected people to move

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“Pork Barrel” Spending Emerging as Presidential Campaign Issue

**By Michael W. Drudge
Special Correspondent**

San Antonio -- The San Antonio River Walk, or Paseo del Rio, is one of the most popular tourist attractions in Texas.

About 20 million visitors come to San Antonio each year, and most of them take a stroll along the banks of the scenic stream and patronize its many restaurants, clubs and hotels.

Very few of them realize the River Walk began as a federal government project. The initial grant was \$375,000 from the Depression-era Works Projects Administration in 1938.

Millions more federal tax dollars have been spent on the River Walk over the decades, fostering a tourism industry in San Antonio that now generates nearly \$9 billion in annual revenues and employs more than 90,000 people.

In some circles, that kind of spending of taxpayer money carries the disparaging name “pork barrel spending”, a term that traces its origins back to the era of slavery before the U.S. Civil War, when slave owners occasionally would present a barrel of salt pork as a gift to their slaves. In the modern usage, the term refers to congressmen scrambling to set aside money for pet projects in their districts.

Typically, much of Congress’ pork barrel spending is done in gigantic, multibillion-dollar omnibus spending

bills. Critics say most of the “pork” is included in the spending bills passed before an election year. That allows incumbents to go before their constituents and boast about projects that help the local community -- such as roads, dams or government installations.

A Washington-based taxpayer watchdog group called Citizens Against Government Waste publishes an annual Congressional Pig

“PORK” OR VALUABLE PUBLIC PROJECT?

Among the projects targeted by Schatz’s group was \$9.8 million earmarked for the San Antonio River Improvements Project being carried out by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

“The Army Corps of Engineers program has long been a bastion for pork, and this trend continued in fiscal year 2008,” according to the Pig Book’s summary.



A boat ride through downtown San Antonio is one the attractions on the city’s scenic River Walk.

The San Antonio project aims to improve the river’s channel south of downtown. It is part of a 21-kilometer extension of the River Walk that is going to cost tens of millions of dollars.

In July, a U.S. Senate committee approved legislation that would require the federal government to reimburse Bexar County, which includes San Antonio,

for as much as \$70 million being spent on the project. There is also \$10 million in federal funds set aside for construction in 2009.

Book that details pork barrel spending. The 2008 book listed 11,610 projects that totaled \$17.2 billion. Among the more controversial appropriations were \$188,000 for the Lobster Institute in Maine and \$148,950 for the Montana Sheep Institute.

“It’s business as usual, unfortunately,” said Tom Schatz, president of Citizens Against Government Waste.

A major sponsor of the project in Washington is Senator Kay Bailey Hutchison, a Texas Republican. She says the objective is “to beautify our already scenic river and open it to more recreational uses while protecting and restoring key portions of this precious resource.”

San Antonio Mayor Phil Hardberger says the federal money is essential

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United States at “Turning Point” as Voters Go to Polls November 4

By Eric Green
Staff Writer

Washington -- The 2008 U.S. presidential election campaign will reflect dramatic changes in American society, political analysts tell America.gov.

Iowa State University political science professor Steffen Schmidt said the 2008 vote will be a “watershed, seriously important election.”

The election would be important, he said, even without a global terrorism threat, or that the presumed presidential nominees are Republican John McCain and Democrat Barack Obama, who could be the first African-American U.S. president.

Important elections occur “when there is a general shift in the paradigm [basic structure] of society,” Schmidt said. Examples in U.S. history include the 1861-1865 Civil War and the Great Depression of the 1930s.

Schmidt said 2008 is a “threshold year when the full impact of globalization is making itself felt in full force, and the U.S. economy has now shifted so that most Americans are no longer working in stable lifelong jobs.” Instead, Schmidt said, “we are becoming a very fast-moving, innovative and novel economy -- the first 21st century economy.”

The election, he said, marks the “end of the cheap energy period and the need to shift to new energies and technologies which can be accelerated or slowed by good or bad national government policies.” These challenges face “whoever

becomes U.S. president in 2008,” Schmidt said.

Schmidt said older Americans will be “critically important in 2008 simply because their numbers are huge and they are facing the economic [income, job and pension] and health consequences of the 21st



Iowa State University professor Steffen Schmidt says the 2008 vote for president will be a “watershed, seriously important election.”

century economy and they are very concerned” about those issues.

The candidate who “can see what the next 50 years will require to keep us competitive, wealthy, and strong and who can articulate that to voters will win the election,” said Schmidt.

UNITED STATES FACES ENORMOUS CHALLENGES

Allan Lichtman, a history professor at American University in Washington, said 2008 ranks “among the most important elections in U.S. history because America is at a turning point today.”

“There are enormous challenges abroad with two wars raging” in Iraq and Afghanistan, and the United States faces an “enormous challenge in terms of how we get

off the fossil fuel economy and ensure our children a future,” said Lichtman, who will be in Russia September 15-30 for the State Department’s U.S. Speaker and Specialist program. Lichtman will “impersonate” Obama in the staging of up to five U.S.-style presidential debates to heighten Russian awareness of the American election process.

The presidential election will show the conflicting pressures older voters face in casting their votes, Lichtman said. Many older voters, he said, identify with McCain because the Arizona senator is 71, but have views on the issues more compatible with those of Obama, who will be 47 when the election occurs. Lichtman said the Illinois senator showed during the Democratic primaries that he can motivate younger voters “but the open question is whether they will show up at the polls and vote where they haven’t in the past.”

Young people “are the hardest voters to turn on and the easiest voters to turn off,” said Lichtman.

OBAMA CAMPAIGN OF HISTORIC SIGNIFICANCE

Cary Covington, a political science professor at the University of Iowa, said the election is important on at least two levels.

“First, and most obviously, the symbolism of an African American running for the highest office in the country is, regardless of whether he wins or loses, of historic significance,” said Covington.

On a substantive level, Covington

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United States at “Turning Point” as Voters Go to Polls . . .

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said, the country’s choice between McCain and Obama will be “critical to foreign affairs. Differences between the two candidates on domestic issues are, of course, impor-

tant. But presidents cannot determine our path in domestic affairs the way they can in foreign affairs.”

Covington said presidents can use their leadership role in foreign affairs to pressure the U.S. Congress to “endorse their preferred policies in ways that they cannot do in domestic policy.”

McCain is more attuned to President Bush’s “unilateral approach to foreign policy” and his “reliance on ‘hard’ foreign policy tools like the military,” Covington said.

Obama, in contrast, “appears to prefer to act multilaterally, much like” the first President Bush as he prepared for the 1991 Gulf War, Covington said.

He added that Obama also seems “inclined to lead with the ‘soft’ foreign policy tools of diplomacy and to rely on military force only if the diplomatic efforts fail.”

This difference, Covington said, is “important because the rest of the world is likely to respond quite differently to a continuation of the Bush approach than to the change embodied by Obama,” who will give U.S. allies a “sense of inclusion and a stake in outcomes.”

Covington said the differences in the approaches of McCain and Obama are likely to influence foreign policy more significantly than domestic policies.

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



President Franklin Roosevelt signing Social Security Act of 1935. Also shown, left to right: Rep. Robert Doughton (D-NC); Sen. Robert Wagner (D-NY); Rep. John Dingell, Sr. (D-MI); Unknown man in bowtie; Secretary of Labor, Frances Perkins; Senator Pat Harrison (D-MS); Congressman David L. Lewis (D-MD). Library of Congress photo.

“Pork Barrel” Spending Emerging as Presidential . . .

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“to ensure the continued success of this project,” and strongly objects to suggestions that the river project is “pork.”

He says the federal government changed the river’s course many decades ago, and the project will restore the river to its natural course.

PUBLIC SPENDING AS A CAMPAIGN ISSUE

On the national level, the debate over pork barrel spending is getting a lot of attention in this election year. (See “McCain’s pork barrel game fun and educational (<http://blogs.america.gov/campaign/2008/06/23/mccain%E2%80%99s-pork-barrel-game-fun-and-educational/>).”)

The Pig Book says Democratic Party presidential candidate Barack Obama, a senator representing Illinois, sponsored 53 earmarks in 2007 that totaled \$97 million. The presumed Republican Party presi-

dential candidate, Senator John McCain of Arizona, opposes pork barrel spending and sponsored no projects earmarked for his constituents.

Because effectively serving their constituents is an important criterion for re-election, prospects are dim for totally eliminating pork. Critics say the next best thing is transparency.

“In the fight against wasteful earmarks in federal spending, infor-

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2008 Presidential Race Shatters Old Barriers for Candidates

*By Eric Green
Staff Writer*

Washington -- In 2008, U.S. politics is moving beyond the influence of the Cold War and Vietnam War eras, analysts say, adding that this shift and the expected nomination of an African American to the presidency makes the upcoming election different from previous presidential campaigns.

Carl Pinkele, a politics and government professor at Ohio Wesleyan University, told America.gov that 2008 is likely the last election where a Vietnam War veteran, such as presumed Republican nominee John McCain, will play the leading role for either major political party. Pinkele added that this probably is also the last election "without some significant lingering impact of the old Cold War."

The professor said there is no way to measure the long-term significance of Barack Obama becoming the first African-American presidential nominee from a major political party. The 2008 vote is also unique in that New York Democratic Senator Hillary Clinton came very close to being the first female nominee from a major party.

Even though Obama defeated her for the nomination, Pinkele said Clinton's run in the Democratic primaries has "tremendous long-term consequences" in inspiring more women and members of minorities to make bids for the White House.

For the last 48 years, Pinkele said, "it's been a real small club on both sides" of the political fence of Americans who have been serious contenders for the U.S. presidential nomination.

He said from that perspective, both McCain and Obama are candidates "outside the fraternity" of previous elections. "Obama, in a sense, is integrating a fraternity," Pinkele said.

Pinkele said that if Obama wins the election and Democrats control both chambers of the U.S. Congress by increased margins following the November 4 vote, the likelihood is high that public policy "across the board will shift some to the left" of the political spectrum "on virtually all the issues."

Senior citizens, with whom Pinkele said he can identify because he is four years younger than the 71-year-old McCain, are "always very important" in American elections, both because of their large numbers and because they are very likely to vote.

Even though older voters remain very concerned about Social Security, the federal system to guarantee income after retirement, seniors also have concerns in a time of "rationing scarce dollars" about being able to pay their energy and health care bills, said Pinkele. The very old and the very young put the most financial strain on the country's health care system, he said.

RISE OF OBAMA, MCCAIN REFLECTS NEW U.S. DEMOGRAPHICS

Dan Schnur, who was national communications director for McCain's unsuccessful presidential bid in 2000, told America.gov that Obama's expected nomination, while "incredibly important in itself," reflects broader demographic changes in the U.S. population.

The 2008 election also produced the first "plausible" Hispanic candi-



Republican presidential candidate and former Massachusetts governor Mitt Romney speaks as his wife Ann Romney listens during their Super Tuesday night party at the Boston Convention and Exhibition center. (Joe Raedle/Getty Images)

date in New Mexico Governor Bill Richardson, and a plausible Mormon candidate in Republican former Massachusetts Governor Mitt Romney, said Schnur, who has been named the new director of the Jesse M. Unruh Institute of Politics at the University of Southern California.

Schnur said 2008 will be the country's most important election since 1980, because of "some fundamental choices to be made about America's role in the world -- militarily, economically and diplomatically."

As in 1980, Schnur said, the U.S. economy is in a downswing, but in 1980 the American and global

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Decaying Infrastructure on the Minds of Minnesota Voters

By Kathryn McConnell
Staff Writer

Winona, Minnesota -- On August 1, local television, radio and newspapers focused on "the bridge" -- the section of elevated highway over the Mississippi River that catastrophically crumbled August 1, 2007, during evening rush hour.



Reopened Winona Bridge again joins Minnesota with Wisconsin. (Courtesy of Explore Minnesota Tourism)

The accident killed 13 and injured many more in one of Minnesota's largest urban areas, which is also the site of the Republican National Convention September 1-4.

On the first anniversary of the collapse, the community came together in a day of observance with prayers, speeches and shared memories. The event reinforced for Minnesotans and other Americans the need for more public investment

in the nation's infrastructure. One in four U.S. bridges is in need of some repair, according to a national study released in July.

In Minnesota, within months of the August 2007 incident, all the state's bridges were inspected and their safety ratings posted on the Minnesota Department of Transportation Internet site. A few were closed for repairs, including one linking Winona, 90 miles south of Minneapolis-St. Paul, to Wisconsin. That one-month closure required drivers to detour up to 120 miles.

In February, Minnesota's legislature passed a bill to increase funding for roads, bridges and other transportation projects through increased gasoline taxes and taxes on motor vehicle sales and rentals. The 10-year, \$6.5 billion measure was passed over the veto of Republican governor and potential vice presidential candidate Tim Pawlenty.

DECAYING INFRASTRUCTURE A KEY POLITICAL CONCERN

Like the rest of the country, Minnesotans are concerned about high gasoline prices and would prefer to avoid higher taxes. But, with the bridge collapse fresh in their memories, they seem supportive of their legislature's commitment to spend public money on infrastructure projects that will keep them safe.

Robin, who declined to give her surname, works in a small Winona hotel blocks from the bridge. She said the closure did not harm her employer's business, but did hurt her

father, who owns a small manufacturing business across the Mississippi in Wisconsin. The Winona bridge repair meant he had to drive extra miles for materials for weeks, costing him fuel and time away from production. But the inconvenience was outweighed by the added safety repairs created, she said.

Jamie, who also declined to give her last name, works at a restaurant across the road and is enrolled in a paralegal studies program at one of the river city's three colleges. She said she is leaning toward voting for Barack Obama in the presidential race because she feels the country needs new energy in its leadership.

She said she knows little about the Senate candidates, Republican Norm Coleman, the incumbent, and Al Franken, the endorsed Democrat. Nor does she know much about her congressional representative, Tim Walz, a Democrat, or his Republican Party-endorsed challenger, Brian Davis. Davis still faces a primary challenge from Dick Day in a September 9 Republican primary.

It is still summer in this northern state and attention now is more on boating, fishing and sport than on politics. But that focus likely will shift as cooler temperatures announce the arrival of fall and the national election season picks up momentum.

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

Different Faiths Team Up to Bridge Differences in New York

By Carrie Loewenthal
Special Correspondent

New York -- For the past three years the Free Synagogue of Flushing, New York, has organized a choral concert. Community members gather to honor and enjoy their neighbors' talents. But the audience doesn't just hear Jewish music: Buddhists, Christians, Hindus, Jews and Muslims share the stage.

"It's interesting when you hear the music of somebody else's culture other than your own," said a Flushing resident who attended the concert last year.

Located 16 kilometers east of Manhattan, Flushing is home to more than 200 places of worship within 6.5 square kilometers. In recent decades Asian immigrants, as well as those from Europe, the Middle East, Latin America and Africa, have established their homes and religious centers in the community. (See "One New York City Neighborhood Is a World of Religious Diversity" (<http://www.america.gov/st/diversity-english/2008/July/20080729171918xlrennef0.9129907.html?CP.rss=true>).")

The concert is one of several interfaith activities that take place in Flushing. Multicultural musical showcases, Indian dance classes and storytelling workshops draw people from around the community and are designed to reflect a diversity of interests.

"We have people of different religions and backgrounds on the committee itself that actually put together the programs," said Paul Engel, executive director of the

Flushing Jewish Community Council.

A team of interreligious leaders also works under Engel's direction to run Queens Counseling Services, a program of the Foundation for Religion and Mental Health. (Flushing is lo-



*Emmy Catedral's interactive piece, **Germinalia** (garden tags), was part of an exhibition at the Queens Museum of Art on the Flushing Remonstrance, religious diversity and interfaith connections in Flushing, New York. Catedral's work involved planting beech saplings at various religious sites. The pennants are paper mulch made from discarded religious pamphlets.*

cated in Queens, one of the five boroughs that make up New York City.)

Mental health professionals and pastoral leaders provide services to people of various faiths. Supported by roughly a dozen community-based organizations, the program offers counseling in English, Persian, French and Spanish. In the past, providers have also spoken Chinese, Russian and Korean.

"I have worked with people of Catholic, Christian, Muslim and Hindu faiths," Engel said. "We work with everyone and have used their religions as a strength in their therapy."

Although Queens Counseling Services thrives, other interfaith alli-

ances have struggled in recent years to achieve longevity in Flushing. The Network for Intergroup Harmony formed in 1987, but participation waned, Engel said, as other groups began organizing different activities. Before folding, the network hosted a program at a mosque in Flushing in response to the September 11 terrorist attacks. Religious leaders spoke out to dispel misconceptions about Muslims that arose in the wake of the tragedy.

Engel attributes the difficulty of revitalizing an initiative like the Network for Intergroup Harmony to several factors, including lack of resources and the inclination of community groups to focus on their own constituents' needs.

"I don't know if [interfaith activity] is a priority for everyone," Engel said. "Some groups do work together, but still very much their own community is primary. There are different levels of interest."

Language can at times form another hurdle to intergroup collaboration as more and more people from different parts of the world come to Flushing.

Katherine Williams, the executive secretary at Macedonia AME (African Methodist Episcopal) Church for 42 years, said she has seen an increase in the number of languages spoken in Flushing. In the past, she said, a program brought Sunday schools from all of the churches together each June,

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Different Faiths Team Up to Bridge Differences . . .

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but that program has since ended. Williams senses "a lot of distance because of the language barrier."



*One of the installations at the Queens Museum of Art's exhibition on the religious landscape of Flushing, New York, was an interactive spiritual space -- a nondenominational chapel entitled *Feel Free to Believe* by Jose Ruiz. It featured a dark room with music, a large screen with pulsating colored shapes, and a video of a flickering candle cupped by a pair of hands.*

The language diversity in Flushing has also produced some surprises, Williams said. She attended a service that Macedonia AME's Reverend Nicholas Tweed helped lead at a neighboring Korean Presbyterian church.

"We were singing the song 'Amazing Grace.' They were singing in Korean and we were singing in English. It was weird to hear what they're saying and what you're saying and it's the same. It was good weird," Williams said. "It was a good, good service."

Williams came away from the service with a

realization about her culturally expanding community. "It goes to show you can get along with anybody as long as you're on the same page," she said.

See "U.S. Religious Freedom Owes Debt to Colonists' Radical Document" (<http://www.america.gov/st/diversity-english/2008/July/20080728133100xlrennef0.9696466.html>)."

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

2008 Presidential Race Shatters Old Barriers for . . .

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economies were not "fundamentally changing" the way they are today. Another difference from 28 years ago is that the United States was engaged in a "fairly static Cold War with the Soviet Union," as opposed to now having to confront a global terrorist threat.

In addition, the contemporary "effects of globalization and emerging economies" present a more challenging set of circumstances for the United States than did the conditions in 1980, Schnur said.

Schnur said that just as Obama's expected nomination reflects broad

demographic changes in America, so does McCain's presumed nomination reflect the makeup of the country's older population.

Since Ronald Reagan ran for president in 1976, Schnur said, medical advances and lengthening life spans mean that older Americans now play a fundamentally different role in society than before.

Today's older voters, many of whom are "baby boomers" having been born after the end of World War II in 1945, "have a much different idea than their parents of what it means to be a senior citizen" in American society, Schnur said.

Schnur said some older Americans will not vote for McCain because they will say "'it's not good to have someone of my age'" as president. But those people, he said, probably would not vote for McCain no matter his age.

Overall, Schnur said, older voters will "almost certainly" form McCain's "strongest base of support" for president.

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

U.S. Megachurches Thrive in Climate of Faith, Tolerance, Bigness

By Ralph Dannheisser
Special Correspondent

Washington -- The United States is fertile ground for questing, experimental religious congregations. In recent decades, one of the most striking trends has been the emergence of so-called megachurches that serve the needs of an increasingly suburban culture.

These new-style churches offer their members a broad range of religious and social services. They also provide a sense of community and fellowship -- not to mention parking, child care and, often, some high-tech entertainment.

Megachurches owe much to the late management expert Peter Drucker, who urged evangelical pastors to create a more customer-friendly institution, lighter on overt religious symbolism and providing plenty of facilities. In a 1998 *Forbes* magazine article, Drucker termed megachurches "the most important social phenomenon in American society in the last 30 years."

As the prefix "mega" suggests, size is a key factor in categorizing these church groups. A standard definition is a congregation with a weekly attendance of more than 2,000, although many boast adherents in the tens of thousands. The very largest, the nondenominational Lakewood Church in Houston, Texas, claims average weekly attendance of 47,000.

If the worshippers can't come to the church, the church comes to the worshippers; about a third of the megachurches hold services at satellite locations via live video feeds of the pastor's sermons. In central Florida, the 12,000 congre-

gants of Northland, A Church Distributed, watch sermons from four locations, including a high school auditorium and -- in a spirit of interdenominational cooperation -- a Presbyterian church.

Discussion of megachurches tends to focus on Protestant congregations. To be sure, other religions often have large houses of worship, but it is generally Protestant churches that seem to have adopted the megachurch model:

-- Most share a conservative theology and more than half are evangelical, a 2005 survey conducted by the Hartford Institute of Religious Research found.

-- Although located in almost every state, megachurches are most highly concentrated in the "sunbelt" states of California, Texas, Florida and Georgia, and are heavily in the suburbs of sprawling cities like Los Angeles, Dallas, Houston, Orlando, Phoenix and Houston. Many are near major traffic arteries; most provide large parking lots for worshippers.

-- The senior pastor "often has an authoritative style of preaching and administration and is nearly always the singular dominant leader of the church," the Hartford study found.

-- Megachurches typically provide multiple social, recreational and aid ministries. And, Hartford reported, most "employ intentional efforts at enhancing congregational community, such as home fellowships and

interest-based small group meetings."

Megachurches have proliferated since the 1970s, in what some researchers see as a response to societal shifts in an industrialized, urban and suburban-oriented culture. The Hartford Institute estimates that 1,363 churches fit the category by 2007.

The institute also says, "A large and growing number of megachurches are multi-ethnic and are intentionally so." And it points



One of U.S. Megachurches

out that megachurches grow "because excited attendees tell their friends."

Rick Warren, senior pastor of the Saddleback Valley Community Church, which attracts 22,000 worshippers weekly to its services in Lake Forest, California, put their growth in a historical context in a 2006 interview on NBC-TV's *Meet the Press*.

"The history of America ... is faith-friendly, it's pragmatic and it's pluralistic," said Warren, a pioneer of the megachurch movement and author of the bestselling *The Purpose*

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U.S. Megachurches Thrive in Climate of Faith, . . .

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Driven Life. "I believe that the reason why faith has thrived in America is because we have a free market economy for religion, not just for economies, that [declares] 'may the best idea win.'"

In the case of megachurches, those ideas include the use of high-tech sound and video projection systems at services, contemporary worship music played on electric instruments, and such auxiliary services as book stores, coffee shops and child care facilities.

Warren calls Saddleback's Sunday morning services "the least significant part of the church." Far more important are the 3,300 small groups that meet in 95 cities and towns across Southern California, and "over 400 ministries [that] reach out into the community," he told an interviewer in December. Saddleback's mission has expanded to include hosting an annual global conference on AIDS and the church; last year the conference attracted an in-person speech by Senator Hillary Clinton and video

messages from other presidential candidates, including senators John McCain and Barack Obama.

The megachurch movement is not restricted to America's South. The New Yorker magazine recently reported on Faith Church in New Milford, Connecticut, which, while not yet at the "official" megachurch level of 2,000 worshippers, should reach it within two years.

Faith's brochure advertises many accoutrements of the megachurches: Bible-study classes, a day-care center, a pre-kindergarten-to-12th-grade school, and a variety of ministries. The church has a coffee shop, a bookstore and a sanctuary set up like a concert hall with more than a thousand seats surrounding a stage. A band plays during services. The church runs groups for "single women, basketball players, scrap-

book-makers, museumgoers, and... people learning to trade on eBay," the New Yorker reports.



Worshippers of megachurch

Megachurches, say the authors of the Hartford study, "offer a form of organized religious life that responds to the needs of modern Americans. There is considerable resonance between what ordinary people in society value and what the megachurches have to offer."

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

Zimbabwe Urged to Allow Aid Groups to Provide . . .

(Continued from page 2)

freely to seek and receive protection and assistance.

"For two months now, humanitarian workers have been ordered to stay in their offices instead of delivering aid to vulnerable children and families," said Ky Luu, director of USAID's Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance.

"U.N. agencies have been blocked when trying to access areas of greatest need. Humanitarian workers are routinely harassed and intimidated, and the financial resources of many organizations have been impounded by the Zimbabwean authorities," Luu said. He recently traveled to Zimbabwe and consulted with humanitarian agencies, U.N. agencies and donor representatives.

On July 25, President Bush signed an executive order expanding sanctions against the "illegitimate" regime of Zimbabwe's president, Robert Mugabe, and his supporters. "No regime should ignore the will of its own people and calls from the international community without consequences," Bush said. The U.S. Treasury Department designated 17 entities and one individ-

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Religious Organizations Go High-Tech

By Jessica Hilberman
Special Correspondent

Los Angeles -- Type "Bible podcast" into a search engine and you get more than 300,000 results -- that's enough to download prerecorded verses from a new Web site every day for more than 800 years. The abundance of these podcasts, coupled with tens of thousands of Quran podcasts and even Bhagavad-Gita downloads suggests that people are looking toward technology to facilitate their relationships with religion.

In turn, religious institutions are using Web applications, high-tech public address systems and even text messages to reach out to their congregants. Shelagh Rogers, founder of Technologies for Worship Magazine, says the Internet has become the most effective tool for church outreach and development. "It has created a whole new set of ways in which churches can reach out and stay in touch with their congregants."

e-CHURCH

Reverend Richard Hong of the First Presbyterian Church of Englewood, New Jersey, says technology is taking hold in community churches the same way it is penetrating the general population. "Basic technology use in churches is cost-driven and mostly internal: it is simply cheaper to send a newsletter as an e-mail blast than as paper; it is cheaper to maintain a Web site than pay for a Yellow Pages ad," he says. "E-mail is replacing the telephone as an organizational tool for coordinating church events. I can't live without my Blackberry; my parishioners are learning to text me -- the younger ones do it naturally."

Hong also says churches like his are moving away from traditional advertising outreach. "When you Google church-related topics, you are beginning to see more churches appear as "sponsored links," meaning that more churches are paying Google through their ad-words program to appear at the top of the search results," Hong says. Churches also are accepting donations via a PayPal link on their Web site, allowing people who use the church's resources, such as listening to sermon podcasts, to contribute.

GODCASTING: SOUND BYTES AND SOCIAL NETWORKS

While the trend among churches is to make sermons available via podcast, Hong says many churches are skipping the video podcasts. With notable exceptions, including major U.S. Christian minister Joel Osteen, Hong says sermons are far less exciting to watch than to listen to, so providing audio is most common.

Churches also rely heavily on their Web sites to reach out. Hong says, "A little known factoid is this: On most church Web sites, the page with the most hits is the pastor's biography. Worshippers need information of things like directions and service times after you decide that they might like a particular church. And a primary decision point is, 'will I like the pastor?' People want to know: 'What does it feel like? What kind of people go there?'"

A good way to find out about fellow parishioners, at least younger ones, is through social networks. On the Web site Facebook.com, all types of religions organize by building groups. There are groups for Buddhist fellowships; church,

mosque, and synagogue youth groups; groups of friends who went to religious summer camps who want to stay connected; and even groups for Hindu pride and Shinto hip-hop. Hong says these kinds of groups allow both members and clergy to bring people into a religious community simply by showing that they are members. "Adding a church as either a Facebook group or a virtual 'person' is an accepted technique. The advantage is that your friends get to see that one of the groups you belong to is a church -- and that's a natural conversation starter."

According to Hong, "The number one reason why someone attends a new church is through personal invitation. The number one reason why people don't invite their friends is fear of approaching the topic of religion. Facebook lets your friends see that you're associated with a church, so the ice is already broken."

The anonymity of the Internet also enables people not only to learn more about specific congregations and leaders, but to explore other religions. Laura Kwerel, producer for InterFaith Voices, a nationally syndicated public radio show, says people who play the Internet-based game Second Life can attend religious services online -- and they sometimes use the opportunity to attend services of other faiths.

RELIGIOUS TECHNOLOGY AND THE FUTURE

Rogers says religious organizations are pulling out all the stops when it comes to incorporating new technology into their programs. Churches "understand that in order

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U.S. Olympic Team Reflects America's Global Roots

By Domenick DiPasquale
Staff Writer

Washington -- When the U.S. Olympic team marches onto the field for the opening ceremonies of the Summer Olympics in Beijing August 8, the 596 American athletes will not just join fellow athletes from more than 200 nations around the world -- they will, in a very real way, be a microcosm of that world.

In sports as varied as boxing and table tennis, archery and track, gymnastics and rowing, U.S. Olympic athletes' prospects for the gold are enhanced by the presence of athletes who trace their roots to other nations. Whether they or their families came to the United States to pursue economic opportunities, continue their education or escape war and civil strife, all of these athletes will proudly represent their adopted country in Beijing.

At least 33 such foreign-born athletes from virtually every region in the world are on this year's U.S. Olympic team, according to the U.S. Olympic Committee.

Khatuna Lorig, who will compete in women's archery, has the very rare honor not just of participating in four separate Olympic Games but also of representing three different countries.

Lorig was a member of the Unified Team of the former Soviet Union at the 1992 Olympics in Barcelona. At the 1996 games in Atlanta and 2000 games in Sydney, she represented her native country of Georgia. Lorig is now a resident and representative of the United States for the 2008 games. The 34-year-old does not see Beijing as the cul-

mination of her Olympic career; she hopes both she and her husband will be competing together at the 2012 Olympics in London.

Gymnast Nastia Liukin also traces her family roots to the former Soviet Union. Her father, Valeri Liukin, won four medals for the



Demetrius Andrade, a member of the United States Olympic Boxing team, poses for a photo during the 2008 U.S. Olympic Team Media Summit in Chicago April 14, 2008.

USSR at the 1988 Olympic Games in Seoul; her mother, Anna, was the 1987 rhythmic gymnastics world champion. At the 2005 World Championship games, Nastia, who moved to the United States as a young child and currently resides in Texas, was champion in two individual gymnastic routines, the balance beam and the uneven bars. She secured her spot on the 2008 U.S. Olympics gymnastic team with a strong second-place performance at the U.S. Olympics trials this June.

Heather Corrie and Giuseppe Lanzone hope to make waves, figuratively and literally, in Beijing this

summer. Corrie, a native of Loughborough in the United Kingdom, is on the U.S. women's kayaking team. Lanzone, who was born and raised in Lima, Peru, is a graduate of the University of Washington in Seattle and a member of the U.S. men's rowing team.

A late addition to the U.S. roster is Raj Bhavsar, who was named to the U.S. Olympic gymnastic team in place of the injured Paul Hamm. "The first feeling that comes to mind is that dreams can come true," said Bhavsar, of Indian-American heritage, who was also an alternate on the 2004 team.

For some American athletes, the trip to Beijing will represent a homecoming of sorts. Table tennis occupies a unique niche in the U.S.-Sino relationship, since the diplomatic thaw between the two nations began in the early 1970s with the visit of a U.S. table tennis team to China. Now, some four decades later, all four members of the 2008 U.S. Olympic table tennis team -- Gao Jun, Chen Wang, Crystal Huang and David Zhuang -- were born in China. Their full-fledged immersion in American life is evident, however, in such things as Zhuang naming Titanic his favorite movie, the comedy classic Seinfeld his favorite television program and basketball legend Michael Jordan his role model.

Some of the greatest human-interest stories come from those U.S. athletes with ties to Africa. Demetrius Andrade, whose nickname of "Boo Boo" seems slightly incongruous for a welterweight boxer, is of Cape Verdean descent. He hails from Providence, Rhode Island, home to many immigrants

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U.S. Olympic Team Reflects America's Global . . .

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from this island nation located off Africa's west coast. Andrade won the gold at the World Amateur Boxing Championships in 2007 and hopes for a repeat performance this year in Beijing.

East Africa long has been renowned for world-class long distance runners, and the U.S. Olympic men's track and field team will be strengthened by the presence of three such athletes originally from nations in that region. Bernard Lagat twice won Olympic medals, in 2000 and 2004, for his native Kenya. A U.S. resident since 1996, when he received a scholarship to study at Washington State University in Pullman, Washington, Lagat won the 1,500- and 5,000-meter races at the 2007 World Outdoor Championships in Osaka, Japan. Abdihakem Abdirahman, a native of Somalia, has been

the U.S. 10,000-meter champion three times since 2001.

Perhaps the most dramatic personal story belongs to 1,500-meter runner Lopez Lomong. A native of Sudan, Lomong was 6 in 1991 when



U.S. Olympic competitor Nastia Liukin

he was abducted by a militia faction that wanted to turn young boys into soldiers. He escaped the militia and ended up in a refugee camp in Kenya. One of the so-called "Lost Boys of Sudan," Lomong lived in the refugee camp for 10 years before being resettled with a foster family in New York and blossoming into a track star.

"I came to this country without expecting anything," he told the newspaper USA Today. "Now I want to return the favor by being a good runner."

From running for his life to running for Olympic gold: It's a story that epitomizes the opportunities America bestows on its newest citizens.

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

Zimbabwe Urged to Allow Aid Groups to Provide . . .

(Continued from page 11)

ual identified as supporting Mugabe's regime as subject to the sanctions.

"In light of the continued intransigence of the brutal Mugabe regime, the [United States] is imposing further sanctions against this regime and its supporters," said Adam Szubin, director of the Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control. "These actions send a clear warning to those who would protect Mugabe and his assets at the ex-

pense of the Zimbabwean people." The sanctions effectively block any individuals closely associated with Mugabe from operating in U.S. financial markets, directly or indirectly.

The European Union on July 22 expanded similar sanctions against Zimbabweans, adding 37 new individuals and companies to the existing list of 131.

On June 30 Bush issued a statement reiterating that the United States "stands ready to support a

legitimate government in Zimbabwe through a robust package of development assistance, debt relief, and normalization with international financial institutions. In the meantime," he added, "we will continue to support the people of Zimbabwe by providing food assistance to more than 1 million people and AIDS treatment to more than 40,000 people."

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

United States Continues Fight Against Spread of Nuclear Weapons

By Julie Hyman
Staff Writer

Washington -- The United States continues to work to eliminate the spread of nuclear weapons, and is focusing on weaknesses in proliferation pathways, according to a senior U.S. official.

"Developing a deep understanding of these networks is an essential first step toward the goal of eliminating the threat that they pose to U.S. and international security," said Mary Alice Hayward, the deputy assistant secretary of state for nuclear non-proliferation. "Starting in its earliest days, the Bush administration worked hard to identify and address these so-called gaps in the international non-proliferation regime."

In 2002, President Bush unveiled both the National Security Strategy of the United States and the National Strategy to Combat Weapons of Mass Destruction. These documents outline the country's strategy toward nuclear proliferation and focus on prevention, counterproliferation and managing the consequences of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) use, Hayward said at a July 17 conference hosted by the University of Maine's School of Policy and International Affairs.

The United States has worked to abolish proliferation networks and prevent new networks from forming, she said. This includes reducing the amount of nuclear materials

available, which involves helping to secure and eliminate stockpiles from the Cold War.

The Global Threat Reduction Initiative is another U.S. effort to protect sources of nuclear materials, keeping materials from civilian sites out

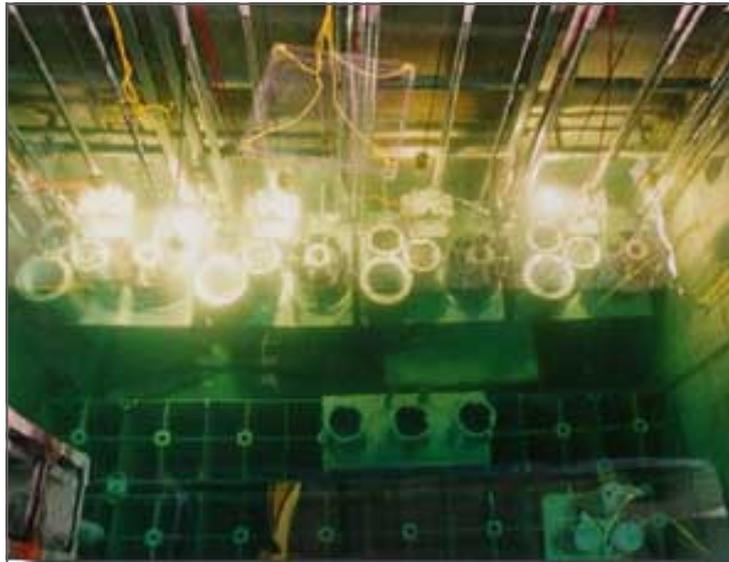


Photo above: This 1996 file photo shows spent nuclear fuel rods in a cooling pond at facilities in Yongbyon, North Korea. The photo was released in 2003 by the South Korean news agency, Yonhap. (AP Wide World Photos/Yonhap)

of the hands of rogue states and terrorists.

The United States recognizes that "predicting every existing gap and future gap is impossible," Hayward said. Stopping illegal nuclear shipments once they are under way is important.

The Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI) was launched in 2003 to halt the transport of WMD and related materials that already are traveling along known proliferation paths. The more than 90 countries involved have agreed to stop questionable shipments, Hayward said.

"The commitment by more than 90 nations to PSI creates a deterrent effect, as it demonstrates to proliferators that a large number of responsible nations will not tolerate their activities," Hayward said.

The United States and Russia recognized the importance of this global partnership and established the Global Initiative to Combat Nuclear Terrorism. The initiative combines 75 countries' resources to develop new efforts to combat nuclear terrorism and improve existing activities, Hayward said.

An important aspect of fighting the threat of WMD proliferation is maintaining "strong relationships around the world so that when new gaps in our defenses emerge, we can act quickly and in coordination with our partners and allies to address them," Hayward said.

Coping with nuclear weapons in the wrong hands is another important part of the U.S. nonproliferation strategy. Hayward said the United States would use missile defense systems if other efforts to combat proliferation fail.

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New Defense Strategy Focuses on Terrorism, Extremists

By Merle D. Kellerhals Jr.
Staff Writer

Washington -- The most significant threat to U.S. national security for the foreseeable future will come from terrorists and violent extremist ideology, according to the 2008 National Defense Strategy released recently by the Pentagon.

"Violent extremist movements such as al-Qaida and its associates comprise a complex and urgent challenge," the strategy says. "Like communism and fascism before it, today's violent extremist ideology rejects the rules and structures of the international system.

"Its adherents reject state sovereignty, ignore borders, and attempt to deny self-determination and human dignity wherever they gain power."

To counter this threat, the Defense Department has developed a new national defense strategy that is designed to defeat this unconventional challenge as well as conventional military challenges, Defense Secretary Robert Gates said at a July 31 Pentagon briefing.

"I firmly believe that in the years ahead, our military is much more likely to engage in asymmetric conflict than conventional conflict against a rising state power," Gates said. Meeting unconventional and conventional challenges requires resources and funding capabilities to do both, he said.

The national defense strategy serves two critical national security functions for the United States: It helps define the threats, and it helps policy planners develop strategies and resources to meet those threats. While the current administration leaves office next January, Gates said, this document will provide a blueprint for the next



Defense Secretary Robert M. Gates, left, and U.S. Navy Adm. Mike Mullen, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of staff- Photo by U.S. Navy Petty Officer 1st class Chad J. McNeeley.

administration.

"For the foreseeable future, winning the long war against violent extremist movements will be the central objective of the [United States]. We must defeat violent extremism as a threat to our way of life as a free and open society and foster an environment inhospitable to violent extremists and all those who support them," the strategy says.

Gates described the new document as a balance between the range of capabilities needed to persist and prevail in an irregular conflict, like Iraq and Afghanistan, and the need to sustain conventional and strategic forces' superiority against rising powers.

It is also essential that the lessons being learned in the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan not be forgotten when they are over, he said.

"The principal challenge is how to ensure that the capabilities gained and counterinsurgency lessons learned from Iraq and Afghanistan, as well as the lessons we learned from other places where we have engaged in irregular warfare over the last two decades, are institutionalized within the defense establishment," Gates said.

Also worrisome, the strategy document says, is that physical pressures -- demographic, resource, energy, climatic and environmental -- could combine with rapid social, cultural, technological

and geopolitical change to create much greater uncertainty.

"Whenever possible, the [Defense] Department will position itself both to respond to and reduce uncertainty," the document says.

The last strategy issued by the Pentagon was in March 2005 under then-Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld.

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World Community Renews Call to Free Prisoners of Conscience

By Jane Morse
Staff Writer

Washington -- The United States and 63 other U.N. member states are renewing their commitment to secure the release of prisoners of conscience the world over.

Dozens of countries imprison thousands -- perhaps tens of thousands -- prisoners of conscience, according to U.S. Ambassador Joseph Rees. "The good news is that there are fewer countries now than was the case 60 years ago, but there are still too many," he said.

Rees is the special representative for social issues (which include human rights) and acting deputy assistant secretary at the State Department's Bureau for International Organizations. He talked with America.gov about the recently issued U.N. Declaration on Prisoners of Conscience, which calls for a global commitment to release prisoners being detained solely because of the peaceful expression of their beliefs.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights adopted by the U.N. General Assembly on December 10, 1948, declares that everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression, freedom of peaceful assembly and association, and freedom of thought, conscience and religion. But 60 years later, Rees said, "There are still countries that hold prisoners who have done nothing other than to exercise their God-given and internationally recognized rights."

There are still countries that use imprisonment as a strategy to deal with opposition to a government or

its policies, Rees said. The U.N. Declaration on Prisoners of Conscience issued in June 2008 recognizes, Rees said, that "we ought to promise to make the release of such prisoners a major priority of our bilateral relationships with countries that still do this."



Prisoner of conscience panelists gather at the United Nations in New York.

PUTTING A HUMAN FACE ON THE PROBLEM

To drive home the compelling personal dynamic of prisoners of conscience, the U.S. Mission to the United Nations in New York hosted on July 24 a panel discussion called "Courageous Voices: Speaking Out for Prisoners of Conscience." Panelists from Belarus, Burma, Cuba, Eritrea, Syria and Uzbekistan spoke to more than 120 diplomats, journalists and representatives of non-governmental organizations about their experiences and those of family members as prisoners of conscience.

Responses to the panel discussion varied dramatically, according to Rees. The government of Cuba con-

demned the remarks of Bertha Antúnez Pernet, calling her brother "a common criminal" and accusing the United States of having encouraged his "crimes."

On the other end of the spectrum was Pawel Herczynski, Poland's deputy permanent representative to the United Nations in New York. Rees said Herczynski, who attended the discussion, praised the event.

"As someone who had lived in a country that had a dictatorship, that kept prisoners of conscience, and that had emerged from that, [Herczynski] told the six witnesses that there was hope for their home countries as well," Rees said.

The U.S. ambassador said the message of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights is that even when citizens and their government disagree, the proper remedy for a government is to put out the facts and answer the questions of the people. "You don't put them in jail for what they say or what they think," he said.

To those cynics who question the effectiveness of the U.N. declaration, Rees had this message: "There will always be evil in the world, but that doesn't mean we don't have to keep fighting it."

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

Egypt Convicts Democracy Activist Saad Eddin Ibrahim

By Stephen Kaufman
Staff Writer

Washington -- The Bush administration, expressing disappointment over the August 2 conviction of Egyptian democracy activist Saad Eddin Ibrahim, said the action is "harming Egypt's reputation" and urged global protection for the rights to free speech and due process.

In an August 4 statement, the State Department's acting deputy spokesman, Gonzalo Gallegos, said Ibrahim was sentenced in absentia to two



Saad Eddin Ibrahim served 10 months of a seven-year sentence in 2002 and 2003 before winning his release on appeal

years in prison because of his writings published in the foreign press.

"Lawsuits should not be used to undermine the principles of freedom of expression," Gallegos said. "We strongly advocate -- in all countries -- the protection of civil and political rights, including freedom of speech and due process."

Ibrahim, who is 69, has both Egyptian and American citizenship, according to press reports. He has been a professor of sociology at the American University in Cairo and founded both the Ibn Khaldoun Center for Development Studies and the Arab Organization for Human Rights.

Ibrahim's August 2 conviction reportedly concerns articles and speeches he made urging the United States to link its bilateral aid to Egypt to democratic reforms in the country.

In 2002, he was sentenced to seven years in prison for "tarnishing Egypt's image," embezzlement and receiving foreign funds without au-

thorization after the Khaldoun Center used funds from the European Union to monitor Egyptian elections. After 10 months in prison, Ibrahim was released and cleared of charges. He currently is living in the United States and has remained active in promoting democracy in the Middle East.

Ibrahim has insisted that true Islam is fully compatible with democracy. At a 2003 conference sponsored by the Center for the Study of Islam and Democracy, he said the prophet Mohammed signed the Charter of Medina, containing "all the aspects of pluralism, which is the prerequisite of democracy," some 500 to 600 years before the Magna Carta was written. That charter, entered into with 14 non-Muslim groups living in Medina, established the principle of "equality in worldly matters," Ibrahim said.

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"Pork Barrel" Spending Emerging as Presidential . . .

(Continued from page 5)

mation is the most effective weapon," the San Antonio Express-News newspaper said in a recent editorial.

The newspaper praised bipartisan legislation sponsored by Senators Obama and Tom Coburn, an Oklahoma Republican, which set up an Internet database where details can be found on how federal tax dollars are spent.

The Web site, USASpending.gov, lists information on government purchases and grants, along with the names and locations of businesses and institutions that receive government money.

Obama and Coburn are supporting new legislation that would post federal contracts on the Web site for public scrutiny, along with details on the bidding process and the quality of the work performed.

McCain has joined them as a co-sponsor of the bill.

Watchdog groups are hailing the proposal as a way to shed more light on the often shady process of doling out the pork.

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

Efforts to Fight HIV/AIDS Combine Treatment, Prevention, Care

By Kathryn McConnell
Staff Writer

Washington -- When President Bush proposed a large-scale, multiyear effort to fight HIV/AIDS in January 2003, only 50,000 people living with HIV in sub-Saharan Africa were receiving anti-retroviral treatment.

Congress subsequently approved the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief -- known as PEPFAR -- and authorized an initial \$15 billion in funding for five years. It recently reauthorized the program, approving \$48 billion in new funding for PEPFAR through 2014.

PEPFAR's approach to combating HIV/AIDS combines treatment with prevention and care. Nearly half -- or 47 percent -- of PEPFAR's funding in 2007 was focused on treatment, and by March approximately 1.64 million people in 15 targeted countries had received anti-retroviral therapy.

Globally, PEPFAR-supported treatment has reached 1.73 million men, women and children, and another 33 million have received counseling and testing. Thirteen of PEPFAR's target countries are in sub-Saharan Africa, home to more than two-thirds of all people living with HIV/AIDS.

Other PEPFAR funding supported programs to prevent HIV transmission from mother to child during pregnancy and among injection drug users and to ensure safety of blood supplies.

A total of 6.6 million people infected or affected by HIV/AIDS,

including nearly 3 million AIDS-vulnerable children, have received some type of care through PEPFAR-supported programs, according to PEPFAR's 2008 annual report.

PEPFAR EXPANDING ITS REACH THROUGH PARTNERSHIPS

In 2007 PEPFAR expanded its scope by integrating with food and nutrition programs its care programs for people living with HIV/



George W. Bush signs the United States Leadership Against HIV/AIDS, Tuberculosis, and Malaria Act of 2003

AIDS, HIV-positive pregnant and lactating women, and vulnerable children.

PEPFAR also supports programs to strengthen coping and prevention curricula in schools. In 2007, approximately \$180 million supported education activities, some of it as grants to buy educational materials in exchange for the schools' dropping attendance fees for vulnerable children.

Working with other U.S. government programs and agencies such as the President's Malaria Initiative, the Millennium Challenge Corporation, the U.S. Agency for International Development and the Peace Corps, PEPFAR partners with host country governments, nongovern-

mental organizations and the private sector.

One partnership with PlayPumps™ International, the Case Foundation and other organizations supports a \$60 million effort to bring clean water to families in Africa. The partnership is installing merry-go-rounds attached to community water pumps at nearly 700 schools and health centers in 10 countries. The energy of children using the play equipment then pumps safe water for communities.

PEPFAR also partners with PepsiCo and the International Labor Organization to increase awareness of HIV/AIDS among PepsiCo employees in India. Like many other employers, PepsiCo wants to retain a healthy work force.

Another partnership involving Motorola, Accenture Development Partners, GSM Association Development Fund and MTN Voxiva is using technology to connect health care systems in 10 PEPFAR-supported countries. The \$10 million Phones-for-Health program will make timely, accurate information available to HIV/AIDS program managers and service providers.

In 2007, PEPFAR invested approximately \$638 million in health care infrastructure improvements, including building construction and renovation, laboratories and medical equipment, and training for service providers. Through 2007, PEPFAR supported nearly 2.6 million training sessions for health care workers.

PEPFAR also supports country ef-

(Continued on page 21)

U.S. Law Extends Global Assistance for HIV/AIDS by Five Years

By Cheryl Pellerin
Staff Writer

Washington -- President Bush signed into law July 30 a five-year extension of the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR), launched in 2003 as a five-year, \$15 billion multifaceted approach to fighting the disease around the world.



Children at a PEPFAR visit to Reach-Out Mbuya Kinawataka Clinic in Uganda (PEPFAR)

The new legislation increases the U.S. financial commitment, authorizing up to \$48 billion from 2009 to 2013 -- the largest commitment by any nation to fight a single disease.

"Just a few years ago, HIV/AIDS raged out of control," Bush said July 30 at the ceremony where he signed the legislation. "An entire continent was caught in the pandemic's merciless grip. In countries like Botswana, AIDS had cut the average life expectancy by 15 years."

Today, "the outlook is really different," Bush said. "HIV/AIDS is still one of the world's greatest humanitarian challenges, no question about it, but it is a challenge we're meeting. And a lot of it has to do with PEPFAR."

In 2003, only 50,000 people in all of sub-Saharan Africa were receiving anti-retroviral treatment. PEPFAR now supports treatment for nearly 1.7 million people in the region -- and tens of thousands more

around the world, from Asia to Eastern Europe.

The Bush administration initially sought \$30 billion to extend the program, which targets HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis (TB) and malaria; Congress added \$18 billion.

"This new legislation will expand access to lifesaving anti-retroviral drugs, prevent millions of new HIV infections, provide compassionate care to millions of people affected by HIV/AIDS, including orphans and vulnerable children, and bolster efforts to help developing nations combat other devastating diseases like malaria and tuberculosis," Ambassador Mark Dybul, U.S. global AIDS coordinator, told America.gov.

"PEPFAR is one piece of a broader development agenda that is having a major impact in Africa," he added, "and is giving Africans a window into the hearts of the American people."

The measure allows the United States to spend the money, but lawmakers must pass a separate appropriations bill to provide the funds. The law also eliminates a statutory restriction that has kept HIV-positive people from entering the United States without a waiver.

MULTIFACETED APPROACH

Over the next five years, PEPFAR will make it possible to treat at least 3 million people, prevent 12 million new infections and care for 12 million people, including 5 million orphans and vulnerable children.

The law also will expand health care systems by committing to train at least 140,000 new health care workers in HIV prevention, treat-

ment and care. It also commits \$4 billion to TB, the leading killer of Africans living with HIV, and will help expand international TB programs, promote TB-HIV program integration and address multidrug-resistant TB and the growing threat of extensively drug-resistant TB.

The bill pledges another \$5 billion to the President's Malaria Initiative. In 2007, the program reached 25 million people in Africa with malaria prevention or treatment interventions, including more than 17 million people protected with indoor spraying programs.

PEPFAR SUCCESS

The initiative's success, according to a PEPFAR fact sheet, is rooted in support for local programs that use the power of partnerships among governments, foundations, nongovernmental organizations, faith-based groups and the private sector. In 2007, 87 percent of PEPFAR partners were indigenous organizations and nearly 25 percent were faith-based.

PEPFAR has also supported:

More than 33 million counseling and testing sessions for men, women and children.

Care for nearly 7 million people, including millions of orphans and vulnerable children.

Prevention of mother-to-child HIV transmission for women during nearly 12.7 million pregnancies from 2004 to 2007

Prevention of about 194,000 infant infections.

In June 2007, the United States

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See also

<http://www.america.gov>

Telling America's story

**Efforts to Fight HIV/AIDS
Combine . . .**

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orts to better survey and evaluate the health of their populations, and to map the locations of treatment and care sites to identify geographic gaps.

Nearly 2 million people have received treatment through programs jointly supported by PEPFAR and the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria. PEPFAR provides approximately one-third of the Global Fund's budget – approximately \$2.5 billion so far, more than any other contributor.

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

U.S. Law Extends Global Assistance for HIV/AIDS . . .

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and other G8 nations set ambitious goals to support treatment for 5 million HIV/AIDS-infected individuals, prevent 24 million new infections and care for 24 million people, including 10 million orphans and vulnerable children, and cut malaria-related deaths by 50 percent in 30 countries.

"I want to speak directly to those around the world who have, or think they may have, HIV," Bush said. "A positive diagnosis does not have to be a reason for shame. So don't let shame keep you from getting tested or treated. Your life is treasured by the people who love you. It is precious in the eyes of God. It matters to the people of the United States."

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

Religious Organizations Go . . .

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to communicate to a media-riddled culture, they have to create familiar environments and remain technically relevant. In some cases, churches are modeling their setups after organizations like Cirque du Soleil; their aim is to create incredibly powerful worship experiences." Kwerel agrees: "Some of the megachurches are the most technologically advanced places you've ever seen. They have jumbotrons [large video projection screens] and stadium seating."

In addition to taking advantage of social networks and the up-to-the-minute status update appeal of Web sites like Twitter, a micro-blogging site, Rogers says churches are developing unique

social networking solutions of their own to pull congregants together and increase the effectiveness of their outreach. A recent development is the networked church, where one main facility's service is broadcast to several satellite facilities over fiber optic networks, enabling several local communities to worship together without having to be in the same physical building. This practice is also called "video venue."

"And then," Rogers says, "there's the holographic pastor."

On his church's blog, Lead Pastor Eddie Johnson of Cumberland Church in Franklin, Tennessee, writes of religious lessons from life-sized, 3-D holograms. As religious organizations continue to

take full advantage of outreach solutions from the Internet, they soon may be able to bring a whole virtual world into satellite communities or even individuals' homes. It's the ultimate high-tech outreach: Casting a net so wide that anyone looking to be touched by a religious community would be enabled to join.

For more information on religion in the United States, see Diversity-At Worship (<http://amlife.america.gov/amlife/diversity/atworship.html>).

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