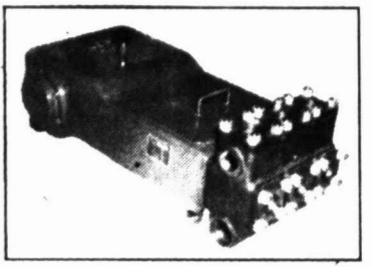


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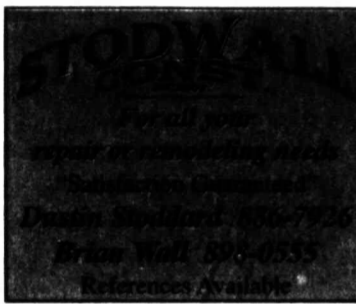
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THURSDAY, MAY 20

American troops raid Chalabi's home

BAGHDAD, Iraq (AP) — U.S. soldiers raided the home of America's one-time ally Ahmad Chalabi on Thursday, seizing documents and computers. U.S. officials disputed Iraqi claims that American aircraft bombed a wedding party near Syria's border, killing more than 40 people.

The raid and airstrike came amid rising public anger over the U.S. occu-

pation, which an increasing number of Iraqis consider oppressive. The Americans plan to install an interim Iraqi government June 30 and formally end the occupation but retain significant military forces and influence over Iraqi affairs.

In the search of Chalabi's home in Baghdad's Mansour district, U.S. soldiers surrounded the compound and

armed Americans in civilian clothes and flak jackets were seen milling about.

A Chalabi aide, Haidar Musawi, said a U.S. Iraqi force arrived about 10:30 a.m., while Chalabi, a member of the U.S.-appointed Iraqi Governing Council, was inside. They told Chalabi's aides they wanted to search for wanted officials in Chalabi's party.

the Iraqi National Congress.

Musawi also said U.S. forces searched INC offices.

A senior coalition official, speaking on condition of anonymity, said an Iraqi judge issued several warrants and would reveal details later.

Iraqi police were seen loading boxes into vehicles, and neighbors said some (See RAID, Page 3)

U.S. officials: Insurgency may worsen

WASHINGTON (AP) — For months, U.S. officials have warned that the insurgency in Iraq would grow deadliest as the June 30 political transition drew near.

Now, they are warning the violence might get even worse once the handover is completed. That could mean the need for more U.S. troops, the commander of U.S. forces in the Middle East says.

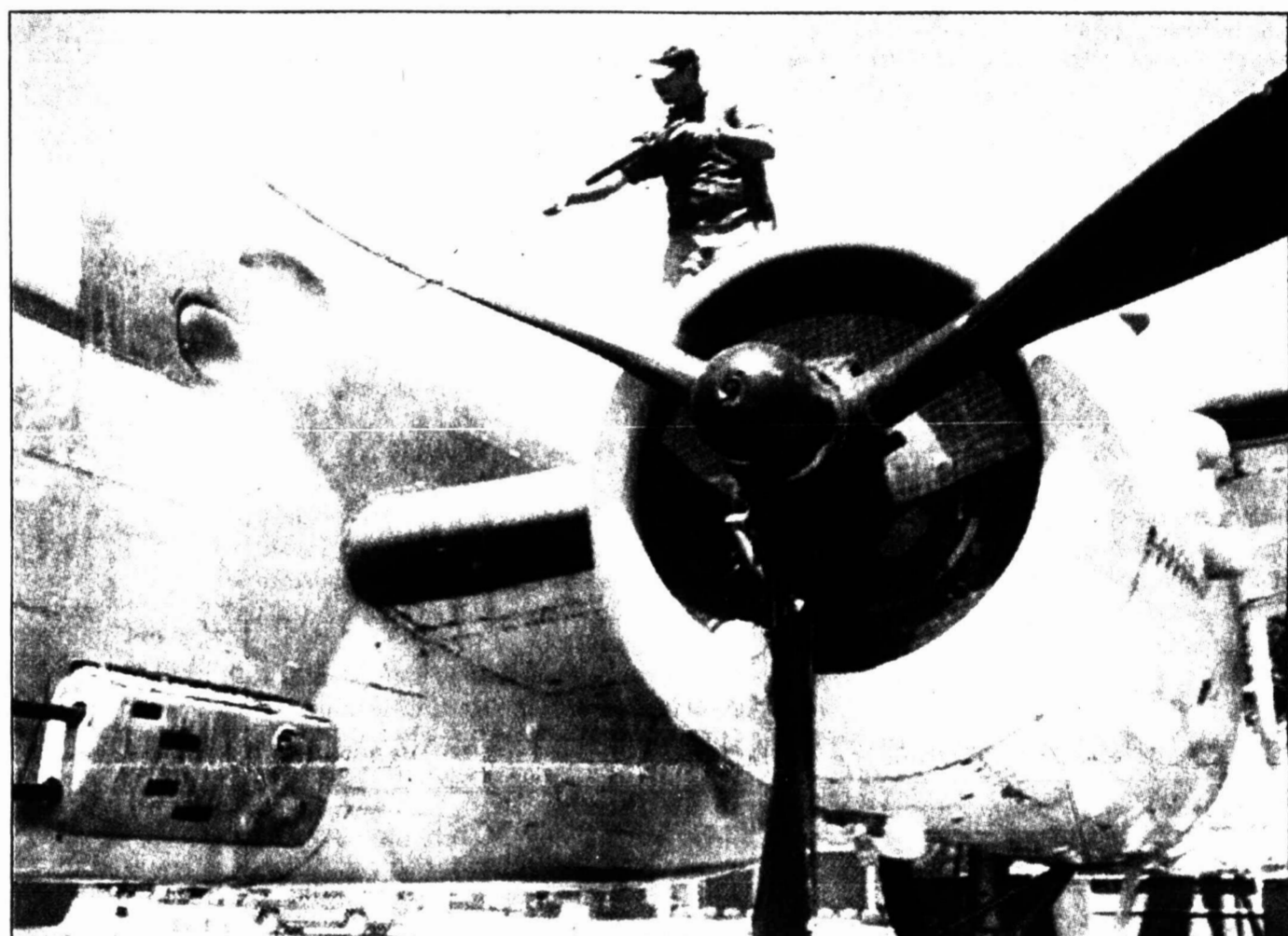
Iraq was the focus of President Bush's private meeting Thursday on Capitol Hill with Republican congressional leaders, a briefing by Defense Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld to senators and a conference at the State Department.

Bush also has acknowledged that Iraq could remain dangerous and unstable after the transfer of political power.

"It's tough work there now because killers want to stop progress," the president said following a White House meeting Wednesday with Silvio Berlusconi, premier of Italy, a strong ally in the war.

(See INSURGENCY, Page 3)

At the plane wash?



(Pampa News photo by Dee Dee Laramore)

A huge propeller decorated with yellow ribbon dwarfs Trey Lauderdale, owner of Superior Wet Blast of Pampa, as he washes down the 1943 B-25 bomber on display at the Freedom Museum, USA, Wednesday afternoon. Lauderdale donated his services to wash the vintage World War II airplane in preparation for Memorial Day observances, May 31.

Bush asks Senate to pass \$2.4 trillion budget

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Bush tried coaxing the Senate Thursday to pass a compromise \$2.4 trillion budget for next year, hoping to end a rebellion by moderate Republicans that has cast the measure's prospects into doubt.

During a private meeting with GOP lawmakers at the Capitol and in a written statement the White House issued afterward, the president praised the fis-

cal blueprint and urged the Senate to approve it. The House used a mostly party-line 216-213 vote on Wednesday to pass the measure.

The budget is a modest one-year plan shorn of any long-range policies on deficit reduction or job creation to minimize controversy and win votes. But it has weaker restrictions on future tax cuts than moderate GOP senators want, and none of them have shown

signs of changing their minds after weeks of lobbying.

Bush said the budget "meets our nation's highest priorities of winning the war on terror, protecting the homeland, and helping our economy continue to create new jobs."

He added, "I urge the Senate to follow the House's lead and pass this budget so that we can continue making progress on our shared agenda of

building a safer, stronger and better America."


In a morning meeting with Republicans in a Capitol basement meeting room, Bush said he wanted the budget to be passed, participants said.

Seemingly short of the votes they need, Senate Republican leaders said they had not decided whether to begin (See BUDGET, Page 3)

HOME of the BRAVE

Pfc. Jeremy Stephen Godwin
Branch of Service: U.S. Army
Rank: Private First Class
Job: Fire support specialist, COI Platoon, 1st Armored Division
Stationed: Geissen, Germany
Deployed: Baghdad, Iraq
Graduated: Pampa High School 1996

Family: Wife, Melanie Godwin, Geissen, Germany; parents, Dennis and Norma Godwin and sister, Charly Godwin, all of Pampa; brother, Johathan Godwin, Burleson; grandparents, Sam and Grace Godwin, Pampa; and Elvin and Betty Black, Chaparral, N.M.



Texas unemployment rate dips to 6 percent

AUSTIN (AP) — The state unemployment rate dipped to 6 percent in April as non-farm jobs increased for the seventh straight month, the Texas Workforce Commission said Thursday.

The Texas jobless rate fell from 6.2 percent in March. It remained higher than the national unemployment rate of 5.6 percent.

The commission said new claims for unemployment benefits fell in the week ended May 8 and have declined every week since July 2003.

The state added 17,000 non-farm jobs in April after adjusting for seasonal hiring

and firing, the commission said. The jobs growth rate was the highest since August 2001, according to the commission.

Professional and business services gained 6,600 jobs, trade, transportation and utilities added 5,700 jobs, and the leisure and hospitality industry increased by 4,500 jobs in its biggest advance since February 2001.

Construction, however, lost 2,000 jobs in April. Job losses in construction this year are still lower than a year ago.

Manufacturing added 200 positions in April (See JOBS, Page 3)

Brown's Shoe Warehouse

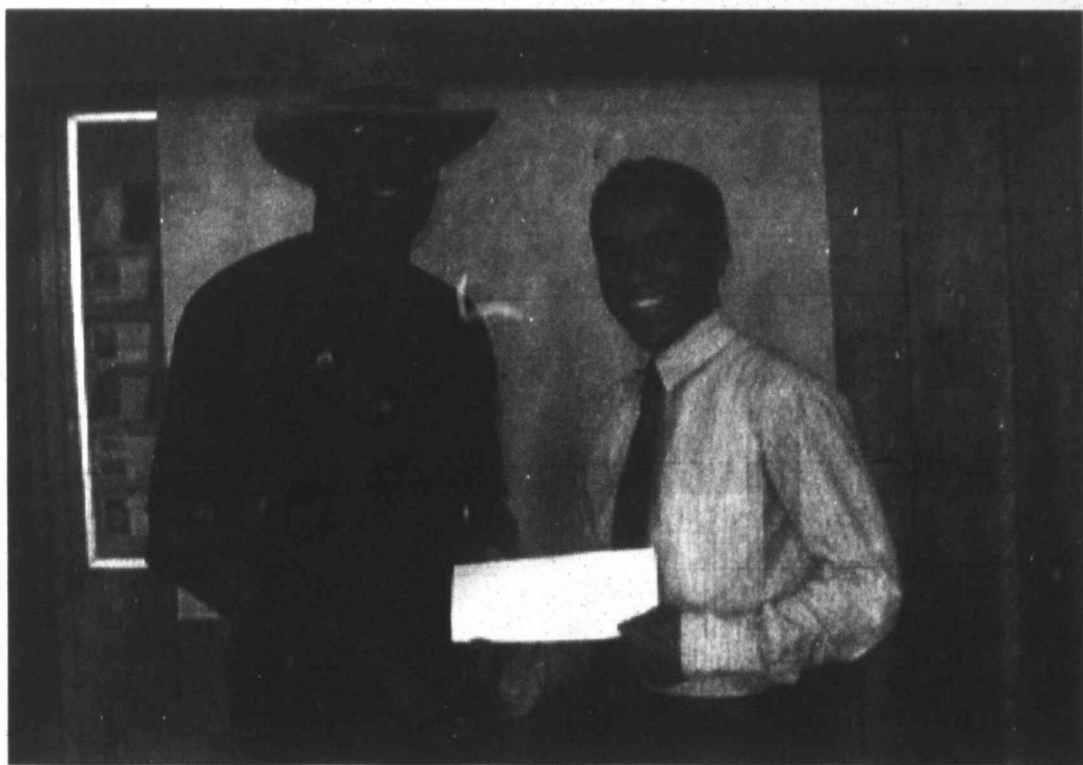
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Recognizing scholastic excellence



(Pampa News photo)

Shawn DeBarge Goodin, right, accepts a \$400 scholarship from Willie Nickleberry of Pampa, representing "Three Regular Fellows." Nickleberry said the funds came from three members of the now-closed local chapter of the NAACP who wanted to recognize Goodin for his outstanding scholastic achievements. Goodin, Pampa High School valedictorian, will be reporting at West Point Military Academy on June 27. He was recommended for acceptance to the prestigious school by U.S. Rep. Mac Thornberry.

RAID

members of Chalabi's entourage were taken away. Police took documents and a computer, according to an American witness. A portrait of Chalabi hanging on the wall had a bullet hole in the forehead.

Chalabi said American soldiers burst into his bedroom carrying pistols.

"I am America's best friend in Iraq," Chalabi told a news conference. "If the (coalition) finds it necessary to direct an armed attack against my home, you can see the state of relations between the (coalition) and the Iraqi people."

U.S. officials declined to comment on the raid. Privately, however, American authorities have said Chalabi is interfering with a U.S. investigation into allegations that Saddam Hussein's regime skimmed millions of dollars in oil revenues during the U.N.-run oil-for-food program.

Chalabi complained recently about U.S. plans to retain control of Iraqi security forces and maintain widespread influence over political institutions after the transfer of power from the U.S.-led coalition to an Iraqi interim administration.

"It's a provocative operation, designed to force Dr. Chalabi to change his political stance," said Chalabi aide Qaisar Wotwot.

Later Thursday, U.S. military officials said a pre-dawn attack Wednesday near the Syrian border targeted a suspected safehouse for foreign fighters from Syria.

The desolate, desert region is populated only by shepherds but is popular with smugglers, and the U.S. military suspects militants use it as an entry route. About 15 miles from the Syrian border, the area is under constant American surveillance.

Iraqi police and witnesses said the

CONTINUED FROM PAGE ONE

attack killed dozens of innocent people, many of them women and children. Some said the bride and groom also were killed.

People who said they were guests said the wedding party was in full swing when U.S. fighter jets roared overhead and U.S. vehicles started shining their high-beams.

Worried, the hosts ended the party; men stayed in the wedding tent, and women and children went inside the house nearby, the witnesses said.

About five hours later, the first shell hit the tent. Panicked, women clutching their children ran out of the house, they said.

Lt. Col. Ziyad al-Jbouri, deputy police chief of Ramadi, the provincial capital about 250 miles to the east, said the attack happened about 2:45 a.m. He said between 42 and 45 people were killed, including 15 children and 10 women.

Salah al-Ani, a doctor at a Ramadi hospital, put the death toll at 45.

A shepherd who attended the wedding, Madhi Nawaf, said his daughter and at least one of his grandchildren were killed.

"Mothers died with their children in their arms. One of them was my daughter. I found her a few steps from the house, her two-year old son Raad in her arm. Her one-year-old son, Ra'ed, was lying nearby, his head missing," he said.

"Where are the foreign fighters they claim were hiding there?" asked Nawaf. "Everything they said is a lie."

U.S. military officials disputed those accounts.

"Ten miles from Syrian border and 80 miles from nearest city and a wedding party? Don't be naive," said Marine Maj. Gen. James N. Mattis in Fallujah. "Plus they had 30 males of military age with

them. How many people go to the middle of the desert to have a wedding party?"

Brig. Gen. Mark Kimmitt said the attack was launched after U.S. forces received "specific intelligence" about foreign fighters slipping into the country. "We sent a ground force in to the location," he told Associated Press Television News. "They were shot at. We returned fire."

U.S. soldiers recovered satellite communications gear, foreign passports and a large amount of Iraqi cash at the site, he said.

Military officials in Washington refused to say whether anyone from a wedding party was killed.

Iraqis interviewed by APNT said revelers fired volleys of gunfire into the air in a traditional wedding celebration before the attack. American troops have sometimes mistaken celebratory gunfire for hostile fire.

The footage showed a truck containing bloodied bodies, many wrapped in blankets and piled atop one other, after it arrived in Ramadi. Several were children. "The body of a girl who appeared to be younger than 5 lay in a white sheet, her legs riddled with wounds and her dress soaked in blood."

Two Iraqis said to have been killed in the attack were buried Thursday in Baghdad. One of them was the wedding singer, mourners said.

"At about 3 a.m., we were sleeping and the planes started firing," said one mourner, who gave his name only as Bassem. "They fired more than 40 missiles ... I was running ... There are no fighters. These are lies."

Arab media portrayed the airstrike as an example of what is widely seen in this part of the world as an American campaign against Arabs.

BUDGET

debating the measure. "We're working to try to get the votes," said Sen. Rick Santorum, R-Pa.

Many House moderates heeded their GOP leaders' appeal for support on the spending measure. Four of their Senate colleagues — plus moderate Democratic Sen. Ben Nelson of Nebraska — were not as ready to accommodate.

Sen. Susan Collins, R-Maine, on Wednesday became the last of the group to say she would oppose the budget, leaving GOP leaders two votes shy, at least for now, of what they need for approval. The moderates said record federal deficits mean tax cuts should be constrained.

A failure by the GOP-run Congress to complete a budget would be an election-year embarrassment for the party, whose leaders pledged to pass a spending plan to highlight their ability to govern. It is also

a slap at President Bush, who has opposed the tax-cut curbs GOP moderates and Democrats want.

Without a budget, it would be harder for Congress to cut taxes and raise the government's borrowing limit later this year.

The budget is a guide for future tax and spending bills. The compromise version, reached in House-Senate negotiations, would pave the way for more modest tax cuts than what Bush proposed.

It would impose constraints on tax cuts for one year, although exempting a single-year \$27.5 billion tax bill Congress is expected to pass this year. That measure keeps the lowest 10 percent tax bracket, the \$1,000 per child tax credit and breaks for two-income married couples from getting smaller, as scheduled under current law.

Bush proposed a more ambitious tax cutting agenda — nearly \$1.3 trillion in tax cuts over the next decade,

mostly by making recent tax reductions permanent.

The budget also claims to leave next year's deficit at \$367 billion — just below last year's \$375 billion record, and \$4 billion more than what forecasters expect without the budget's proposed policies. The measure also would bestow big boosts on defense and anti-terrorism programs, with only slight increases for other domestic programs.

In March, Democrats and moderate Republicans forced into the original Senate version a requirement that tax cuts and expanded benefits be paid for with either spending cuts or tax increases for five years.

That passed the Senate. The House version had no such restrictions.

Bush also proposed halving this year's huge deficit in five years. The compromise congressional plan achieves that goal, but partly because its tax cuts would last only for one year and it lacks a long-range defense buildup.

CONTINUED FROM PAGE ONE

INSURGENCY

"It will be tough work after sovereignty is transferred because there will still be people there trying to derail the election progress," Bush said.

He plans a visit Monday at the Army War College at Carlisle Barracks, Pa., for the first in a series of speeches laying out the details of the handover of political power.

Secretary of State Colin Powell said Thursday he is confident that the United States can win approval of a U.N. resolution that will endorse the interim government being assembled by U.N. envoy Lakhdar Brahimi.

Powell said a Security Council endorsement will bring legitimacy to that government.

"We have a lot of work to do in the next 42 days" before the transfer, Powell told diplomats whose countries are part of the U.S.-led coalition in Iraq. "We have to put in place an Iraqi government," the secretary said at a daylong conference to discuss the next steps in Iraq.

Powell said he believes Brahimi is getting closer to the designation of individuals who will serve in the new government.

"We hope that when he brings forward this slate of officers, we can quickly move that slate to the Security Council, to Secretary-General (Kofi) Annan, for all of us to take a look at and examine the quality of these individuals," Powell said.

On Wednesday, Gen. John Abizaid predicted that the violence likely would continue and perhaps get worse in the second half of the year.

"It could very well be more violent than we are seeing today, so it's possible that we might need more forces," Abizaid told the Senate Armed Services Committee. He said he hoped more countries would contribute troops.

There now are about 155,000 coalition troops in Iraq, of which about 135,000 are American.

The Army is struggling to find enough forces to maintain the 135,000 level. Even if Abizaid decides more are needed, the strain would be enormous.

Bush administration officials had stuck for months to the publicly expressed hope that June 30 would be a turning point in moving Iraq toward democracy and improving security.

The insurgency began to intensify in late March, highlighted by the killing and mutilation of four American private security contractors in the city of Fallujah on March 31. In April, more than 130 U.S. troops died. So far this month, at least 47 additional troops have died.

Earlier this month, Defense Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld first mentioned the possibility that the violence would continue or worsen after June. He said it was inevitable that the violence would last at least until December.

CONTINUED FROM PAGE ONE

JOBS

Workforce Commission member Ron Lehman said employers in many areas continued to expand their production or services.

"Our statistical information and anecdotal reports from employers both point to an expanding economy that is gaining strength," he said.

The unemployment rate is adjusted for seasonal patterns of hiring and firing, which most economists believe gives a more accurate reading of the job market.

The state unemployment

rate was 5.6 percent without considering seasonal hiring and firing.

The following are the preliminary April unemployment rates and revised March rates in parentheses for Texas metropolitan areas. The figures are not seasonally adjusted.

Abilene 3.3 (3.8)
Amarillo 3.1 (3.2)
Austin-San Marcos 4.3 (4.7)
Beaumont-Port Arthur 8.3 (8.6)
Brazoria 7.6 (8.2)
Brownsville-Harlingen 9.2 (10.1)
Bryan-College Station 1.7 (2.0)

Corpus Christi 6.1 (5.9)
Dallas 5.8 (6.2)
El Paso 7.3 (7.8)
Fort Worth-Arlington 5.3 (5.7)
Galveston-Texas City 7.2 (7.7)
Houston 6.0 (6.3)
Killeen-Temple 4.3 (4.7)
Laredo 6.5 (6.8)
Longview-Marshall 5.3 (5.5)
Lubbock 2.9 (3.2)
McAllen-Edinburg-Mission 10.9 (12.4)

Odessa-Midland 4.6 (5.0)
San Angelo 3.1 (3.3)
San Antonio 4.7 (5.1)
Sherman-Denison 5.8 (6.5)
Texarkana not available
Tyler 4.1 (4.4)
Victoria 4.3 (4.5)
Waco 3.9 (4.3)
Wichita Falls 3.7 (4.1)

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

If good roads bring business, Pampa doesn't have a chance

To the editor:
 In the past few years it has been a continuing comic strip to drive north on Hwy. 70 out of, or into, Pampa. This highway was widened and redone starting about six years ago and has not been completed all that long ago.
 One section was being repaired before the public even got to drive on it. When the road gets a hole in it, the state highway department circles it with orange paint so it can be repaired or maybe to keep it from spreading. Traveling this highway daily, we get to see some of the repairs.
 One day, the state sent out the Super Compactor. The hole was patched by hand and super compressed by stepping on it, and he brushed the gravel away by hand. It seems the repairs were made on a Thursday or Friday and the holes are back by Monday. These disgraceful repairs are a waste of the taxpayers' dollars. The orange paint is no longer used, so this will save us a little.
 About a month ago, gravel was applied and the road is so rough, it is like driving on a rub board. Big equipment has been brought in and we are down to two narrow lanes while more repairs are being made. The pot holes are winning the battle on a road that is not that old and should not need this many repairs so soon.
 I'm in the process of getting in touch with Ned in the First Reader to see if he and his friends could get a contract to keep the holes filled in the asphalt.
 Most highways have a sign that says "Do not drive on the shoulder," but this is the smoothest place to drive. The state highway department should give out vouchers for windshield chip repairs and front end alignments.
 Before the construction started, we mowed our own bar ditches with a riding lawnmower and kept them looking very nice. Now we have to use a tractor and brush hog because of all the rocks and weeds. One night, while watching the news, we saw a state highway department official from Austin talking about the highways going into your city. He said, if you had nice highways, it would attract business.
 Well, if this is true, Pampa does not have a chance.
Keven Romines
 Pampa

TODAY IN HISTORY

By THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Today is Thursday, May 20, the 141st day of 2004. There are 225 days left in the year.
Today's Highlight in History:
 On May 20, 1861, the capital of the Confederacy was moved from Montgomery, Ala., to Richmond, Va.
 On this date:
 In 1506, Christopher Columbus died in poverty in Spain.
 In 1861, North Carolina voted to secede from the Union.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR POLICY

The Pampa News welcomes and encourages readers to express their opinions on issues of public interest and concern. However, we also reserve the right to accept or reject any letter for publication.
 Letters must be **300 words or less**. Letters submitted for publication must be neat and legible, typed if possible, or at least handwritten in a clear manner. All letters will be edited for length, clarity, spelling, grammar, and taste. We will not publish anonymous letters, letters that are potentially libelous, or personal attacks. Submission of a letter does not guarantee its publication nor can we guarantee a date of publication.
 Letters submitted must include name, address, phone number and signature for verification. Addresses and telephone numbers will not be printed, unless requested for a specific reason.
 Due to volume and repetition, we will limit submissions from the same person to two letters per month.
 Poetry, candidate or political endorsements, letters to third parties and "thank you" letters will not be published except at the discretion of the editor, depending on general interest.
 Letters may be dropped off at the office, 403 W. Atchison, or mailed to *The Pampa News*, Letters to the Editor, P.O. Box 2198, Pampa, TX 79066.

A little humor goes a long way

Humor is essential to the health and well-being of humans, especially in troubled times. I love being around people with a well-developed sense of humor who can tell a funny story well.

I've been accused of having a dry sense of humor, and it's true that straight-faced joke-tellers with a deadpan delivery are among my favorites.

Here is one of my all-time favorite stories, told by an over-the-road trucker with a face like chiseled stone and a voice as dry as dust.

"The first time I drove through Louisiana, I stopped to eat supper at a big truck stop in Baton Rouge. I took my big insulated coffee mug in with me, and asked to have it filled with coffee as I waited to pay my bill.

"The lady behind the counter asked me if I was sure I wanted it filled with coffee, or if I wanted half coffee, half water. I told her that heck, yes, I wanted it filled with coffee, and what did she mean by offering to water it down like that.

"You see, I didn't know about Cajun coffee, the chicory coffee that can get up and walk off by itself and is about like liquid tar in color.



MARILYN POWERS
 STAFF WRITER

"I paid out and left, and started sipping on the coffee as I headed on east.

"After awhile, I could feel my eyeballs pushing up against the windshield.

"It took me 450 miles to drink that mug of coffee.

"I couldn't go to sleep for two days.

"I wondered when I was going to be launched through the roof of the cab."

Another chuckler has to do with pets and state-of-the-art medical equipment. This story does not have a happy ending, though, so read with caution.

"One day a man arrived home from work to find his dog lying at the curb and a small group gathered around it. They told him the dog had just been hit by a car.

"The man scooped up the dog and raced to the vet's office with it. The vet asked the man to bring his pet into a special examination room for a thor-

ough going-over.

"The man laid the dog on an examination table in the room, and the vet checked for signs of life.

"The vet stood looking at the lifeless dog for a moment, then bent down and reached under the table.

"He straightened up with a dead cat in his hands, holding it by the front paws in one hand and the back paws in the other.

"He dragged the cat back and forth over the dog a couple of times, and then conceded defeat, replacing the cat back in its box underneath the table.

"He shook his head and told the frantic dog owner that he was sorry, but there was nothing more he could do—the dog was beyond all hope.

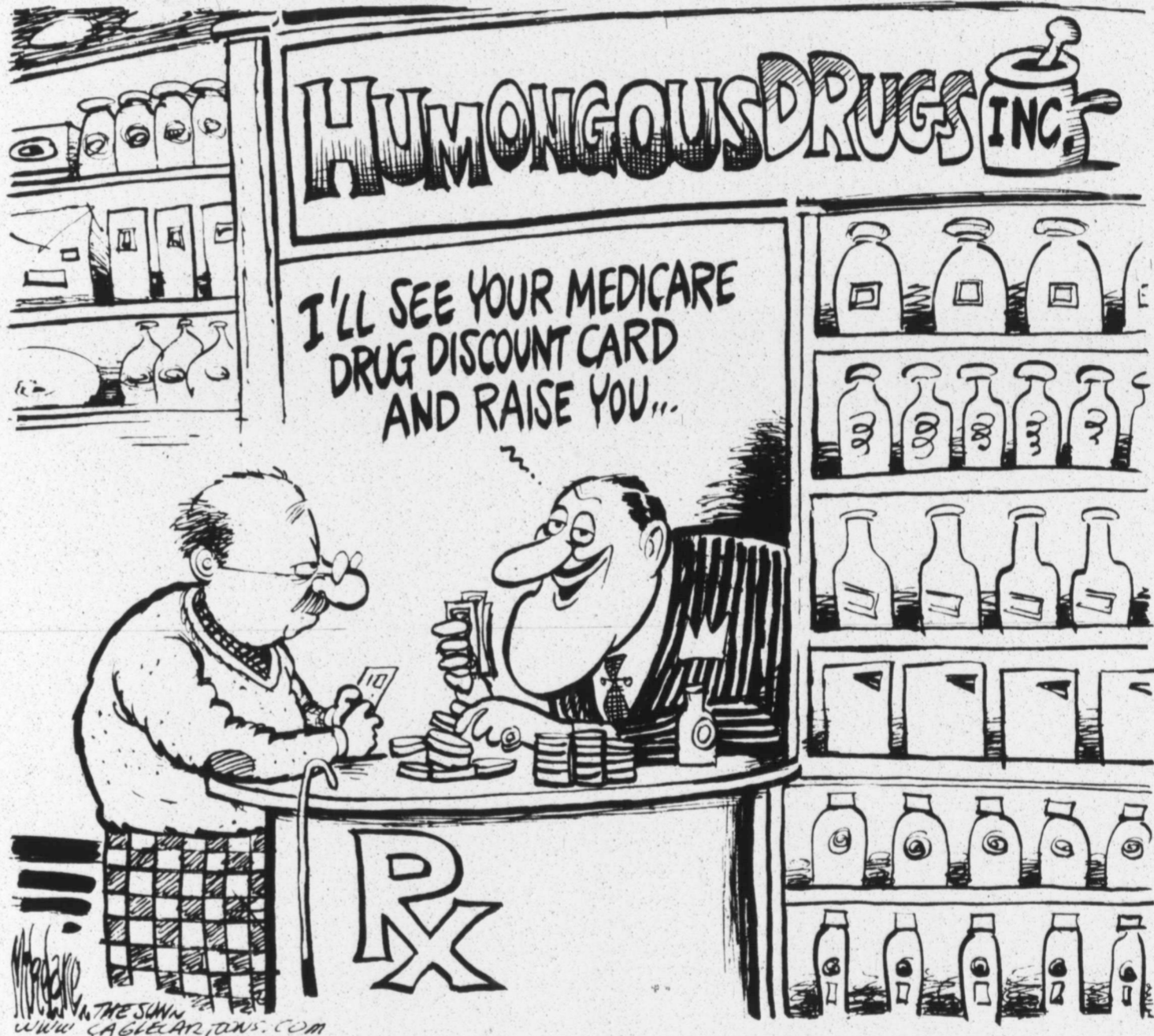
"The dog owner, tears rolling down his face, said, 'That's okay, Doc, I know you did all you could. What do I owe you?'

"The vet said, 'That'll be \$220, please.'

"The dog owner looked at him a moment in shock and asked, 'Why so much?'

"Well, it's \$20 for the office visit and \$200 for the cat scan,' the vet replied."

I hope you enjoyed these stories. I enjoyed retelling them.



Unfortunately, the WMDs found us

It's beginning to look as if we don't have to find the missing Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) after all — they appear to have found us.

The liberal Democrats, Ted Kennedy, John Kerry, the loud-mouthed anti-war crowd and all these people who've been shouting "WMDs, WMDs — there are no WMDs the President lied to us," — what are they going to say now that this 155 mm shell with four liters of deadly Sarin gas — enough to kill thousands of people — landed on our feet in Baghdad last Saturday.

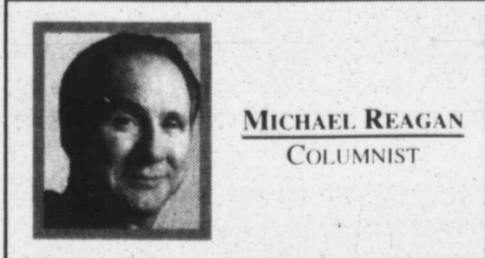
The shell was specifically designed to be a "binary chemical projectile," having two chambers that keep the chemical components inside separate until they are fired by an artillery piece. In other words it was not just an ordinary artillery round filled with Sarin gas.

Naturally this bombshell of a development in the WMD controversy was all but ignored by the liberal mass media. Had John Kerry been president and this same thing had happened, you can bet that it would have been all over the front pages, and the network news broadcasts would be telling the world that President Kerry had found the WMDs. Hallelujah!

But with George Bush in the White House it's just another ho-hum news story.

As the House Armed Services Committee has observed, the news regarding sarin and mustard gas discoveries in Iraq serve to remind us that Saddam Hussein did have a vigorous WMD program. And there isn't a shred of evidence that he ever destroyed them. So where did they go?

Consider this: On April 17, Jordan's



MICHAEL REAGAN
 COLUMNIST

King Abdullah said that captured vehicles containing deadly chemical weapons and poison gas — part of an al-Qaida bomb plot — came from Syria which former U.S. weapons inspector David Kay said last year was a likely repository for Iraq's weapons of mass destruction.

According to an April 17 NewsMax.com report, last year Kay told Congress that U.S. satellite surveillance showed substantial vehicular traffic going from Iraq to Syria just prior to the U.S. attack on March 19, 2003. While cautioning that investigators couldn't be sure the cargo contained WMDs, one of his top advisers described the evidence as "unquestionable."

This latest discovery in Jordan was all but ignored by the liberal media. They'd rather concentrate on trying to keep the prisoner abuse scandal alive in the hopes it will damage the President's chances of re-election.

I was talking about Iraq with Lt. Gen. David D. McKiernan, author of the new book "The End Game," on my radio show the other day. We discussed the fact that we have already uncovered 1 million metric tons of ammunition in Iraq. Now to put that in perspective, the U.S. has 1.5 million metric tons. And where is the news story about that startling fact? Little Iraq

had two-thirds the amount of ammo possessed by the mighty U.S.?

According to the House Armed Services Committee, "By Hussein's own admission, Iraq possessed thousands of chemical weapons and tons of chemical weapon agents:

- Some 4,000 tons of ingredients to produce poison gas, including sarin.
- 550 artillery shells filled with mustard gas.
- At least 3.9 tons of VX, a deadly nerve gas, and 805 tons of precursor ingredients for the production of more VX.
- 8,500 liters of anthrax.
- 500 bombs fitted with parachutes for the purpose of delivering poison gas or germ payloads.
- 107,500 casings for chemical weapons.
- At least 157 aerial bombs filled with germ agents.
- 25 missile warheads containing germ agents (anthrax, aflatoxin, and botulinum).

"In each case, Hussein claimed to have destroyed the weapons and materials of mass destruction in accordance with U.N. resolutions.

But the regime, which kept tens of thousands of pages of detailed information about its illegal weapons of mass destruction programs, offered no proof of their destruction — not a piece of paper convincingly documenting the alleged destruction, not a dismantlement site, not a single smashed chemical warfare bomb."

It's no wonder Sen. Kerry recently speculated that WMDs may soon be found, but I don't think he believed that while we were looking they'd find us.

SOFTB

PAMP

Pampa Departme the follo Summer Open, M Church.

The ee sor's fees per team (rently san er's fee is a minimu Men's Op and 12 p Open.

The en 4 at 5 p.m. teams add Schedu able after the Recrea Play w of June 14 Roster and by-lav the Recrea Hall, Room hours of 8 Monday th

If you h or would l tion on the Leagues, 5740 durin

FOOTB

WHEE head coach ing to take position at Verden, has coached the past 1 advanced to times und Mustangs Class 1A 1998.

Verden's 80-46. Be Wheeler, he and was an Taylor and Wheeler man to 6-m

1983: Pa

Spence adv 4A regiona ment after the Distric Brownfield

Spence v matches a

HAPPY BIRT 21, 2004:

Your energy c what you do, work and maki wild card finan to overstep you that you have to use them. Y zero in on wha responses draw will either work independence, a big organizatio second part of suitors. The qu you want to se such a flirt. If more downtim life or family g learn to share other. CANCE money.

The Stars Show Have: 5-Dyn Average: 2-50-ARIES (March) ★★★★★ Speak Your lively si spurt out somet Others respon and relax. Bei you release s Hang out close TAURUS (Apr) ★★★★★ Kno spend before yo end. You migh friends is s Whatever you c A friend becom es you. Tonig knocking on yo GEMINI (May) ★★★★★ Use th

SPORTS

NOTEBOOK

SOFTBALL

PAMPA — The City of Pampa Recreation Department will be offering the following leagues for Summer Softball: Men's Open, Mixed Open, Men's Church.

The entry fees or sponsor's fees for teams are \$200 per team (\$185 if team is currently sanctioned). The player's fee is \$15 per player with a minimum of 11 persons for Men's Open & Men's Church and 12 persons for Mixed Open.

The entry deadline is June 4 at 5 p.m. There will be no teams added after this date.

Schedules will be available after 1 p.m. on June 9 at the Recreation Office.

Play will begin the week of June 14.

Roster Forms, fact sheets and by-laws are available at the Recreation Office at City Hall, Room 204 between the hours of 8 a.m. and 5 p.m. Monday through Friday.

If you have any questions or would like more information on the Summer Softball Leagues, please call 669-5740 during business hours.

FOOTBALL

WHEELER — Wheeler head coach Jim Verden is leaving to take the head coaching position at Class 3A Pottsboro.

Verden, a Wheeler native, has coached the Mustangs for the past 10 years. Wheeler advanced to the playoffs nine times under Verden. The Mustangs advanced to the Class 1A finals in 1997 and 1998.

Verden's career record is 80-46. Before coming to Wheeler, he coached at Hutto and was an assistant at Katy Taylor and Texarkana.

Wheeler is going from 11-man to 6-man next season.

Flashback

1983: Pampa senior Mike Spence advanced to the Class 4A regional tennis tournament after placing second in the District 3-4A meet in Brownfield.

Spence won three of four matches at the district meet.

HAPPY BIRTHDAY for Friday, May 21, 2004:

Your energy comes through no matter what you do, but especially in your work and making money. You pull the wild card financially, so be careful not to overstep your boundaries. Recognize that you have unusual abilities. Learn to use them. Your charisma helps you zero in on what you want. Your bright responses draw attention at work. You will either work at a position with more independence, or for yourself or for a big organization. If you are single, the second part of the year draws many suitors. The question will be whether you want to settle down. You can be such a flirt. If you are attached, spend more downtime together. Your home life or family gains in importance. You learn to share much more with each other. **CANCER** helps you make money.

The Stars Show the Kind of Day You'll Have: 5-Dynamic; 4-Positive; 3-Average; 2-So-so; 1-Difficult. **ARIES** (March 21-April 19) ******** Speak your mind at work. Your lively side emerges when you spurt out something you didn't mean to. Others respond positively. Brainstorm and relax. Being at home could help you release some tension. Tonight: Hang out close to your turf. **TAURUS** (April 20-May 20) ********* Know what you want to spend before you cruise into this weekend. You might discover that joining friends is slightly more costly. Whatever you do, you'll enjoy yourself. A friend becomes flaky. Do what pleases you. Tonight: Could romance be knocking on your door? **GEMINI** (May 21-June 20) ********* Use the daylight hours to your



Pampa boxers (from left) Jose Nunez, Cris Larrazolo, David Meyers and Badillo Vasquez enjoy themselves at a San Angelo toy store before stepping into the ring.

Perry set to defend crown at Colonial

FORT WORTH, Texas (AP) — Kenny Perry knows he will always be remembered as the player who won Annika Sorenstam's tournament.

That's fine with Perry, whose win last year at the Colonial started the best stretch in his 17 years on the PGA Tour.

It came after he missed the cut at the Byron Nelson Championship. "I was kind of coming in here on an all-time low," Perry said Wednesday, a day before the Colonial's first round. "So it's a funny game. I don't know why all of a sudden it broke loose for me."

Perry followed his record win at Hogan's Alley, his fifth

overall victory and first in three years, by winning the Memorial and at 42 becoming the PGA Tour's oldest back-to-back winner since 1990.

"It was just a magical two weeks," he said.

But he wasn't finished.

Perry tied for third at the U.S. Open and at the Greater Milwaukee Open won for the third time in four events. He never had won more than once in a year, and went on to finish sixth on the money list with \$4.4 million — more than double what he had ever earned in a season.

So Perry did a lot more than just win the tournament in which Sorenstam became the first woman in 58 years to play on the PGA Tour.

Pamcel Golf Course releases 2004 Open tourney schedule

PAMPA — Pamcel Golf Course has released its schedule of 2004 Open Tournaments, starting June 12-13 with a 4-man scramble.

Teams will be flighted by handicap and a hole-in-one, worth \$10,000, will be sponsored by Matheson-Tri Gas. There will be bonus prizes on all par 3's.

A meal will be included and rental carts are available.

Other tournaments scheduled include 2-man low ball, July 24-25; 2-Man Scramble, Aug. 14-15, and Community Care 4-person scramble, Sept. 18.

The Pamcel Course is located at Celanese Chemical Plant seven miles west of Pampa on highway 60.

To enter, call Don Alexander at 663-4942 or Gard Gershmel at 663-4479.

benefit. You find that good news will come forward if you keep conversations rolling. You might wind up spending more than you are aware of. Check out an investment carefully. Tonight: Let your hair down.

CANCER (June 21-July 22) ******** Clean up your desk and, if possible, do quiet work. In fact, you will need some downtime during the daylight hours. Expect a big splash and change of direction by late afternoon. Your energy peaks to a new level. Tonight: Accept the center stage.

LEO (July 23-Aug. 22) ******** Use the daylight hours to the max. Success and you become twins at this time of the day. Assume a lower profile as the day gets older, when you might have some very strong words for another. Do not risk financially. Tonight: Vanish.

VIRGO (Aug. 23-Sept. 22) ******** You move from one point of view or responsibility to another with unusual ease. A boss recognizes the quality of your work. Accept the compliment, but ask for that pay raise if you feel the moment is right. Network your way out the door. Tonight: Where the party is.

LIBRA (Sept. 23-Oct. 22) ********* Your ability to see the big picture tosses you in a position you would prefer not to be in. You cannot always handle the responsibilities that are heading your way because others don't see them. Prepare to work late and steer a project to the end. Tonight: Join friends late.

SCORPIO (Oct. 23-Nov. 21) ********* Work with a partner. Make plans to either take off this weekend or sometime in the near future. Another perspective can help you zero in on a money question and resolve it. Break

past traditional thinking. Seek other opinions. Tonight: Follow the music. **SAGITTARIUS** (Nov. 22-Dec. 21) ********* Call upon your people skills, even if you find a child or loved one argumentative. Work with associates, perhaps giving them more of what they want. Your ability to read through problems lands you in a position of responsibility. Tonight: Chat over dinner with a special friend.

CAPRICORN (Dec. 22-Jan. 19) ********* Clear out paperwork, return calls and handle everything you must. Your efficiency comes into play. Network this afternoon or take a long lunch. Express your interest in others. If you can, leave the office early. Tonight: Out and about.

AQUARIUS (Jan. 20-Feb. 18) ********* You might have difficulty settling in and getting more of what you want done. A case of spring fever could be overwhelming. What becomes obvious is that you must finish your work. Count on working late. Tonight: Head home.

PISCES (Feb. 19-March 20) ********* Your mind is on a family member or a real estate investment. Make needed inquiries and get the information you need and want. Use the afternoon and weekend to toss an idea around, trying to decide if it is workable. Tonight: Have fun.

BORN TODAY Actor Mr. T (1952), actor Raymond Burr (1917), actor Anthony Steel (1920)

Jacqueline Bigar is on the Internet at <http://www.jacquelinebigar.com>.

(c) 2004 by King Features Syndicate Inc.

Pampa boxers qualify for national tournament

SAN ANGELO — This past weekend, the Pampa, Tex. Boxing Club traveled to San Angelo for the Junior Olympics Tournament. The tournament is for boxers ages 15-16 years old with more than eight fights.

The winner advances to the Junior Olympics National Tournament.

Pampa boxers eligible for this tournament were Jose Nunez and David Meyers. Other boxers who participated in the tournament were Badillo Vasquez and Chris Larrazolo.

Larrazolo was matched against Micodermus Alvaro, but their bout was canceled because Larrazolo had too much experience.

Meyers was matched against

Juan Soto from the No Limit Boxing Club.

"Juan was frightened by David and pulled out just as the match was ready to begin," said Pampa coach Lupe Larrazolo. "David gave his opponent the eye and had him shaking in his boxing trunks."

Nunez, who has just nine fights, went against Jaime Villa from TOP Boxing Club.

"Jaime had over 100 fights. Jose fought hard against such an experienced boxer, but lost," coach Larrazolo said.

Nunez was commended by the judges who said he had the will and heart of a champion, added Larrazolo.

"A champion isn't only a fighter who keeps winning, but a

fighter who keeps trying," he said.

The next Pampa fighter was Badillo Vasquez, who stepped into the ring for the first time. He fought against Tino Martinez from the C-City Boxing Club.

Badillo fought hard, but lost, coach Larrazolo said.

"Badillo just needs to try harder next time," he said. "He needs to realize that it's not just about knocking some out. It's about boxing and making points."

The Pampa Boxing Club currently has 12 licensed fighters and more prospects who come to the gym for practice.

The club thanked Rick's Body Shop, Jiffy Cleaners, A & T Yard Service and Dunlap's for their sponsorship.

Softball pitcher



Amanda Loya of Ware Chevrolet pitches against the Triangle Well Service team in an Optimist softball game at Pampa's Optimist Park.

Major League Standings

National League				
East Division	W	L	Pct	GB
Philadelphia	21	17	.553	—
Florida	21	18	.538	1/2
New York	19	21	.475	3
Atlanta	17	21	.447	4
Montreal	14	26	.350	8
Central Division	W	L	Pct	GB
Houston	24	15	.615	—
Chicago	23	16	.590	1
Cincinnati	21	18	.538	3
St. Louis	21	19	.525	3 1/2
Milwaukee	20	19	.513	4
Pittsburgh	17	20	.459	6
West Division	W	L	Pct	GB
Los Angeles	22	16	.579	—
San Diego	23	17	.575	—
Colorado	17	22	.436	5 1/2
Arizona	16	23	.410	6 1/2
San Francisco	16	24	.400	7
Wednesday's Games				
San Diego 6, Pittsburgh 3, 1st game				
San Diego 7, Pittsburgh 3, 2nd game				
Milwaukee 6, Montreal 3				
Arizona 6, Atlanta 4, 11 innings				
Houston 10, Florida 2				
Chicago Cubs 4, San Francisco 3, 10 innings				
Philadelphia 9, Los Angeles 4				
St. Louis 1, N.Y. Mets 0				
Cincinnati 4, Colorado 3, 10-innings				
Thursday's Games				
St. Louis (Marquis 2-3) at N.Y. Mets (Seo 2-3), 1:10 p.m.				
San Francisco (Hermanson 1-2) at Chicago Cubs (Maddux 3-3), 2:20 p.m.				
Milwaukee (Obermueller 2-1) vs. Montreal (Ohka 1-5) at San Juan, 2:35 p.m.				
Detroit (Knotts 1-0) at Oakland (Hudson 4-1), 3:35 p.m.				
Boston (Lowe 3-3) at Tampa Bay (Zambano 3-4), 7:15 p.m.				
Kansas City (May 1-5) at Texas (Rogers 5-2), 8:05 p.m.				
Chicago White Sox (Loarza 4-3) at Minnesota (Greisinger 1-2), 8:10 p.m.				
Baltimore (Lopez 3-1) at Seattle (Moyer 1-2), 10:05 p.m.				
N.Y. Yankees (Mussina 4-4) at Anaheim (Colon 4-2), 10:05 p.m.				
(Washburn 7-1), 10:05 p.m.				
American League				
East Division	W	L	Pct	GB
Boston	24	16	.600	—
New York	23	16	.590	1/2
Baltimore	20	16	.556	2
Toronto	17	24	.415	7 1/2
Tampa Bay	10	28	.263	13
Central Division	W	L	Pct	GB
Minnesota	24	15	.615	—
Chicago	22	17	.564	2
Detroit	19	20	.487	5
Cleveland	18	21	.462	6
Kansas City	13	24	.351	10
West Division	W	L	Pct	GB
Anaheim	26	14	.650	—
Texas	22	17	.564	3 1/2
Oakland	21	18	.538	4 1/2
Seattle	13	26	.333	12 1/2
Wednesday's Games				
Minnesota 6, Toronto 5				
Chicago White Sox 15, Cleveland 3				
Boston 4, Tampa Bay 1				
Kansas City 5, Texas 3				
Baltimore 5, Seattle 2				
N.Y. Yankees 4, Anaheim 2				
Oakland 6, Detroit 2				
Thursday's Games				

Golf

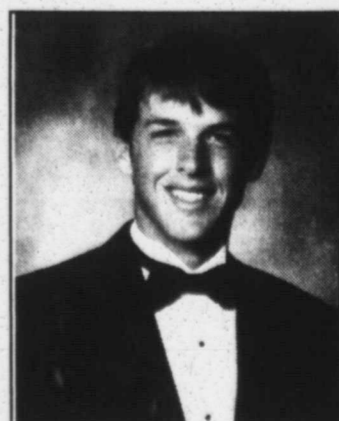
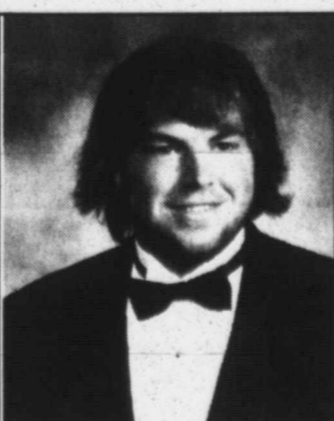
Hidden Hills Seniors Salt Scramble (May 19)

1. Bill Hammer, Howard Wells, Morris Driver and Reece Field, 111.
2. Bob Swope, Kenneth Williams, Callens George and Bill Brown, 121.
3. Pat Montoya, Buddy Epperson, B.F. Dorman and Lucio Moreno, 122.
4. Gerry McCabe, Ron Parnell, Charlie Terrell and Jess Mathis, 122.

Closest to pin: Howard Wells, No. 8.

Closest to pin: Jerry Dorman, No. 15.

Tennis Scholar-Athletes



Three Pampa High seniors (l-r) Zach Hucks, Tara Jordan and Britton White, have been recognized as All-American Scholar-Athletes in tennis by the National High School Athletic Institute. Hucks is the son of Tim and Debra Hucks. Jordan is the daughter of Royce and Kim Jordan. White is the son of Scott and Jamie White. The selection is based on high academic excellence, overall athletic performance and moral force of character.

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The Pampa News Comics

DEAR ABBY

written by Pauline Phillips and daughter Jeanne Phillips

DREAM TO BE PRESIDENT IS NOT OUT OF GIRL'S REACH

DEAR READERS: I'm still receiving fascinating letters in support of the 13-year-old girl who was ridiculed by her teacher and classmates for revealing that she'd one day like to be president of the United States. Read on:

DEAR ABBY: I read the letter from "I Have a Dream" and would like to offer her encouragement:

DEAR "I HAVE A DREAM": I was touched by your letter to Dear Abby, and I want you to know that you can become the president of the United States because of who you are, not in spite of it. I have no doubt a woman will be president one day, and America would be lucky to have you leading us every step of the way.

When young people like you express such a desire to make a difference in people's lives, you should be applauded. Your teacher and your classmates were wrong to laugh at your dream.

What you already know, but they seem to have forgotten, is that we live in a country where every child, girl or boy, has an equal chance to grow up and become president, or a teacher, or a doctor, or a CEO, or the shopkeeper down the street. That is what makes our country unlike any place on Earth. Anything is possible.

But to do the things we believe in, we all have to work hard, do our best, and fight those who do not always believe in us. It is not easy to ignore their criticism, and it is tough to look beyond their doubts. But remember, doubters never made America a better place. It is people like you -- people who dream big and are filled with hope -- who make a difference in this world.

Always remember that the great thing about America is that you can become president, and you should never let anyone tell you different. -- SEN. JOHN KERRY, WASHINGTON, D.C.

DEAR SEN. KERRY: To say that you are a busy man these days is an understatement. That you would still reach out to help a child says volumes about you as a person.

DEAR ABBY: As the first woman elected Illinois state treasurer, the first woman re-elected to a statewide office in Illinois and the first woman to lead a major party in Illinois, I was appalled by the negative response the 13-year-old girl ("I Have a Dream") received from her teacher, her guidance counselors and fellow students when she shared her dream of becoming president of the United States. As a woman who has fought hard to succeed in politics and government, I truly believe that service to your nation is a most rewarding career.

It is true a woman in politics does have disparities to overcome. For years, women fought for the right to vote, and today we continue to fight for equality in many careers.

Women in government can bring creativity, vision and commitment to the table. We come with a different mind-set than our male counterparts, which makes for better debate and legislation. Both parties need more recruitment of qualified females. Schools need to encourage young women to become interested in public service through career days and mentor programs.

I know that the first woman president is alive. Somewhere out there, a young girl is sitting in her classroom interested in becoming our nation's first female commander in chief, and I wouldn't be surprised if it's her. Best of luck to you, Mrs. President! -- JUDY BAAR TOPINKA, ILLINOIS STATE TREASURER

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For Better Or Worse



Zits



Garfield



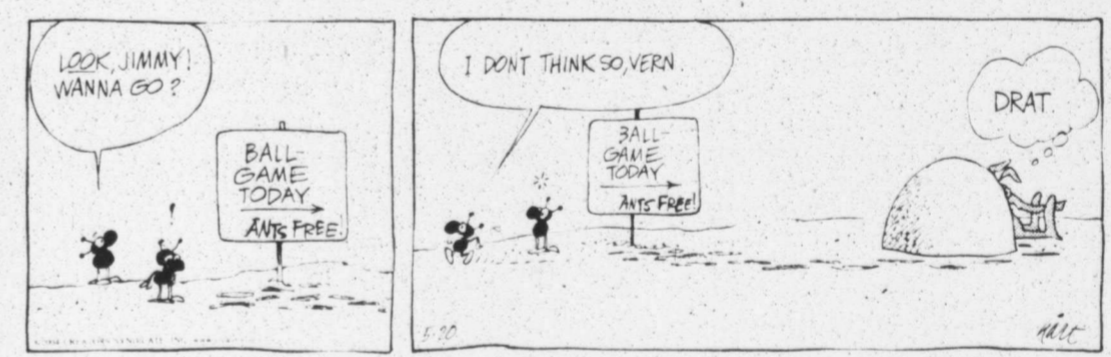
Beetle Bailey



Marvin



B.C.



Hagar The Horrible



Peanuts



Blondie



Crossword Puzzle

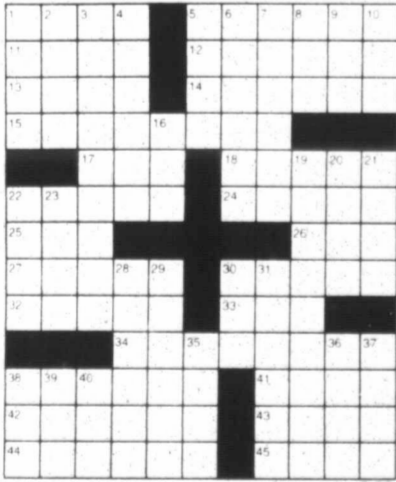
CROSSWORD

By THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS 45 Plan part

- 1 Cops' bulletins
- 5 Utters impulsively
- 11 Miami team
- 12 Go ballistic
- 13 Friend
- 14 Eventually
- 15 Roared
- 17 Stick out
- 18 Yokels
- 22 Helpful push
- 24 Sudden rush
- 25 Cherbourg chum
- 26 Indulgent
- 27 Monopoly railroad
- 30 Tom's aunt
- 32 Stage direction
- 33 Nile serpent
- 34 Newspaper parts
- 38 Henner of "Taxi"
- 41 Blackout worry
- 42 Opposed
- 43 Fascinated with
- 44 Plains homes

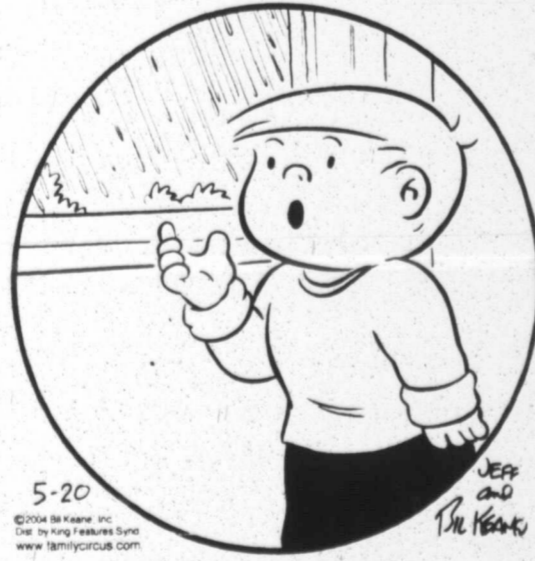
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Dance, gymnastics recitals



(Courtesy photo)

Madeline Graves Dance and Gymnastics Center will hold "Dancing Disney and All That Jazz" recital at 7:30 p.m. Saturday, May 22, at M.K. Brown Auditorium. A gymnastics recital will be held at 6 p.m. and at 7 p.m. May 24 at M.G. Gymnastics Center. Admission will be charged on all performances. Above: (front row) Gabriella Rodrigues, Sarah Gordzelik, Harli Jernigan, Jessica Hiberd, Indy Sullivan, (second row) Hope Brass, Jacie Studebaker, Alysse Simpson, Mady McLanahan, (back row) Ashely Stark, Danna Eppison and Claire Abraham. Admission to the dance recital is \$4 for adults and \$3 for children; to the gymnastics recital, \$2 for adults and \$1 for students.



(Courtesy photo)

Madeline Graves Dance and Gymnastics Center will hold "Dancing Disney and All That Jazz" recital at 7:30 p.m. Saturday, May 22, at M.K. Brown Auditorium. A gymnastics recital will be held at 6 p.m. and at 7 p.m. May 24 at M.G. Gymnastics Center. Admission will be charged on all performances. Above: (front row) Sarah Gordzelik, (second row) Ashley Stark, Danielle Zuniga, Caylee Steward, Meganne Longo, Jessica Hiberd, (third row) Hayley Burnett, Stephanie Ronquillo, Mandy Cross, Jonah Munsell, Victoria Bybee, Cynthia Schepp, Jacie Ketcherside, (fourth row) Jenna Munsell, Jake Callaway, Courtney Ward, Leah Wilson, Micah Wilson, Braydn Burris, Alex Collins, Hunter Hughes and Monica Schepp. Admission to the dance recital is \$4 for adults and \$3 for children; to the gymnastics recital, \$2 for adults and \$1 for students.

Families of victims blast Sept. 11 commission, Giuliani

NEW YORK (AP) — Families of World Trade Center victims say the Sept. 11 commission and former Mayor Rudolph Giuliani failed them by "sugarcoating" their questions and answers in a public hearing.

Relatives jumped out of their seats and shouted at the panel and the former mayor, who testified Wednesday on the second and final day of the hearing examining the city's emergency response.

They said the commission feebly addressed crucial issues like malfunctioning firefighter radios and what they see as the city's lack of disaster preparation, failing to

push Giuliani as he testified that New York was "unbelievably capable" and "terrifically effective."

"He could have been a great source for what needs to be changed," said Wells Noonan, whose brother died in the north tower. "The panel didn't press hard enough."

Monica Gabrielle, whose husband was killed, said the panel and Giuliani spent the morning "cloaking everything in heroism."

When asked on NBC's "Today" show Thursday morning about addressing specific problems, like inadequate fire drills, Giuliani said, "All of those things should be

reviewed."

"All of those things in the future should be changed. All of those things should be worked on," he said, citing the inability of people to make telephone calls on overloaded bandwidths as a key problem.

The former mayor said he had "a real understanding and empathy with the anger" of victims' relatives but restated the cornerstone of his testimony before the commission: that blame for the attacks should fall on the terrorists alone.

"Here's the mistake: Nobody anticipated a catastrophic attack, planes being used as missiles, being driven

into those buildings, and that's the reason for the losses," he said.

During Wednesday's hearing, commission members repeatedly saluted Giuliani's leadership and refrained from challenging his positive portrayals of the Sept. 11 rescue operations.

"There was not a problem of coordination on Sept. 11," Giuliani said. "We got a story of heroism, we got a story of pride, and we got a story of support that helped get us through."

Several relatives of victims said they were "disgusted that the 10 members of the commission, each allowed about

five minutes to question Giuliani, wasted time with redundant praise. One statement thanking Giuliani should have been enough, the families said.

"The commission members don't press hard at all," said Beverly Eckert, whose husband was killed.

"We leave frustrated," Gabrielle said. "They made a huge faux pas in letting Rudy Giuliani polish his crown."

Targeting Giuliani is a reversal for many of the victims' relatives, who since the attack have generally praised him as a steady leader through the chaos. After leaving office at the end of 2001, Giuliani

has consistently sided with family coalitions on issues involving the trade center site, once even calling for the entire 16 acres to become a memorial.

Asked after his testimony about the outbursts from the victims' relatives, Giuliani said he expected that reaction. "I attribute it to the stress and the trauma that they're going through," he said.

Lee Ielpi, a retired firefighter whose son died in the attack, said he understood the emotional reaction some families had on Wednesday, but he said he thought Giuliani was "solid and stayed to the point."

Economic indicators up in April

NEW YORK (AP) — A private research group's closely watched indicator of future economic activity edged up in April, providing more evidence of a sustained recovery.

The Conference Board said Thursday its Composite Index of Leading Economic Indicators rose 0.1 percent in April, after a revised gain of 0.8 percent the previous month. The latest increase was slightly lower than the 0.2 percent rise forecast by analysts.

Together with a March reading that was notably stronger than first reported, the April uptick points to an economy with plenty of momentum, economists said.

"If you look at where the index stood before today's number and where it stands now, it's showing a good potential for growth," said Gary Thayer, chief economist with A.G. Edwards & Sons in St. Louis. "We're still growing at an above average rate and it looks like that kind of growth can continue."

The index is tracked as a measure of the economy's direction during the coming six months. Of the 10 components making up the index, four increased last month, including the real money supply, building permits and stock prices.

In other economic news Thursday, the Labor Department reported that initial claims for unemployment benefits rose by 12,000 to 345,000 last week. That was higher than the 326,000 forecast by analysts. But the more stable, four-week moving average of claims declined to 333,500, the lowest level since November 2000.

The economic reading reported by the Conference Board Thursday means the leading index has risen 1.8 percent over the past six months, and signals a likelihood of strong growth through the third quarter of this year.

"While there are growing concerns about rising gasoline prices this spring, as well as worries about what happens after all the tax refunds have been spent, the indicators are not signaling any softening in America's basic economic fundamentals," said Ken Goldstein, an economist for the Conference Board.

The Conference Board also said its gauge of current economic activity continued to strengthen in April, rising 0.3 percent.

At the same time the group's lagging index, which reflects the economic climate in the recent past, increased 0.2 percent last month, following a 0.1 percent dip in March.

The slight rise in the leading indicators in April follows a significant increase in the previous month. The board had originally reported a 0.3 percent increase, but revised that figure up to 0.8 percent.

While investors are fretting about rising interest rates, the reading shows the higher borrowing costs are not likely to slow growth in the economy or jobs, Goldstein said.

Stocks were higher following release of the report. In morning trading, the Dow Jones industrial average rose 20.16 to 9,957.87. The Standard & Poor's 500 index gained 2.77 to 1,091.45, and the Nasdaq composite index was up 9.73 to 1,907.90.

Court denies media bid to drop Jackson gag order

LOS ANGELES (AP) — The California Supreme Court said it will not consider arguments from news organizations trying to end a gag order in the Michael Jackson child molestation conspiracy case.

The court issued a one-line order Wednesday that said only, "Review and application for stay denied."

The gag order bars Jackson, his accuser, and attorneys on both sides from publicly commenting on the case, except

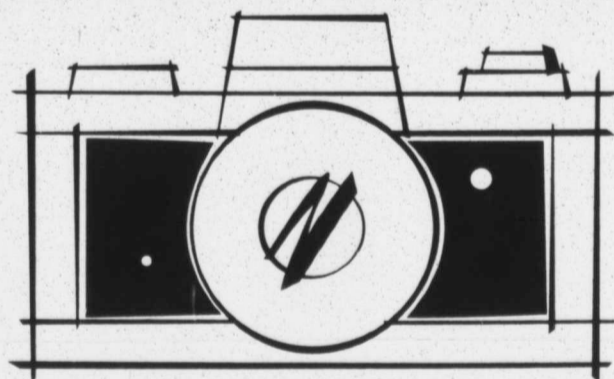
through statements approved in advance by the judge.

Attorney Theodore Boutros Jr., who represents a coalition of media organizations including The Associated Press, said the conflict over the gag order between the court and the press would not go away. He had argued that a blanket gag order imposed by Santa Barbara County Superior Court Judge Rodney Melville was an unconstitutional restriction of freedom of speech and press.

The state's highest court had expressed interest in the case at first, requesting letters from the defense and prosecution explaining their positions. District Attorney Thomas Sneddon's office responded with a letter alleging that journalists covering the Jackson case were pandering to a "gossip hungry" audience.

Boutros said lifting the gag order would "ensure that more accurate information will be disseminated..."

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