

Bush to request \$439B for defense budget

\$84B would be earmarked for weapons program

By LOLITA C. BALDOR
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

WASHINGTON

President Bush next week will request a \$439.3 billion Defense Department budget for 2007, a nearly 5 percent increase over this year, according to senior Pentagon officials and documents obtained Thursday by The Associated Press.

The spending plan would

include \$84.2 billion for weapons programs, a nearly 8 percent increase, including billions of dollars for fighter jets, Navy ships, helicopters and unmanned aircraft. The total includes a substantial increase in weapons spending for the Army, which will get \$16.8 billion in the 2007 budget, compared with \$11 billion this year.

Senior defense officials provided the totals on condition of anonymity because the defense budget will not be publicly



BUSH

released until Monday.

The figures did not include about \$50 billion that Bush administration officials said Thursday they would request as a down payment for the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan in 2007. The administration said war costs for 2006 would total \$120 billion.

Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld would not provide any details of the budget Thursday but called it appropriate, adding: "We have been able to fund the important things that are needed. It is a sizable amount of money."

The budget proposal represents the fifth year in a row that spending on weapons has increased, after years of cutbacks during the 1990s.

It also provides funding for 42 Army Brigade Combat Teams as part of the ongoing effort to increase the number of combat units from 33. The expansion would allow soldiers to spend two years at their home station for every year they are deployed to a war front.

Overall, the Army would receive \$111.8 billion, including \$42.6 billion for personnel. The Army National Guard would receive about \$5.25 billion for personnel, and the Army Reserves would receive \$3.4 billion.

The documents say the budget plan will provide the funding needed to win the long war on terror, recruit and retain troops, and continue the transformation to a

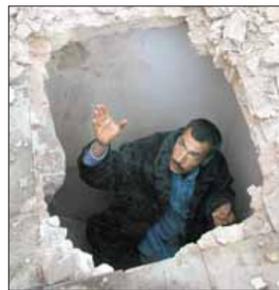
more agile fighting force for the 21st century.

The Army's key weapons program, the Future Combat System, will be funded at \$2.2 billion, and there will be \$583 million to buy nearly 3,100 more heavily armored Humvees. The budget also includes nearly \$800 million for 100 Stryker transport vehicles.

During a speech Thursday, Rumsfeld said the Pentagon is learning to do more with less.

"We are finding ways to operate that department in ways that are considerably more efficient and more respectful of taxpayers' dollars," he said.

"We are getting much more for the dollar today than we were five years ago."



A man looks at damage from a U.S. military helicopter attack on a home Thursday in Sadr City, near Baghdad, Iraq.

Five U.S. troops reported killed

By PAUL GARWOOD
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

BAGHDAD, Iraq

Two bombings killed at least 11 Iraqis on Thursday, and the U.S. military announced five more American battle deaths.

A car bomb exploded at about 5 p.m. outside a gasoline station in the eastern New Baghdad neighborhood, killing two people and wounding 13, police said.

About 20 minutes later, a suicide attacker apparently trying to target a Shiite mosque exploded his bomb-packed car in a nearby open-air market killing at least nine people and wounding 57, police said.

The bombings followed a morning barrage of rockets fired by a U.S. helicopter into the nearby Baghdad area of Sadr City, power-base of anti-American Shiite cleric Muqtada al-Sadr.

A 20-year-old woman was killed when a rocket crashed into her home, said her father, who was wounded along with a woman and a 2-year-old child.

The five American troops all died Wednesday in separate attacks, the U.S. command said.

A roadside bomb blast killed three U.S. soldiers south of Baghdad, while a fourth soldier died from wounds suffered in a small-arms fire attack in Baghdad, the military said. A U.S. Marine was killed during combat near Fallujah.

Al-Qaida still major concern

By KATHERINE SHRADER
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

WASHINGTON

Al-Qaida is the leading terrorism threat to the United States followed by the nuclear ambitions of Iran and North Korea, the nation's intelligence chief said Thursday during a forum.

National Intelligence Director John Negroponte tried to focus on terrorist threats, but lawmakers repeatedly returned to the uproar surrounding the National Security Agency's surveillance program.

Negroponte and his top deputy, Gen. Michael Hayden, defended President Bush's authorization allowing the NSA to eavesdrop, without first obtaining warrants, on international communications of people on U.S. soil who may be linked to al-Qaida.

Also during the hearing, Negroponte said more than 40 terrorist groups, insurgencies or cults have obtained or pursued chemical, biological and nuclear weapons.

He said the battered but resourceful al-Qaida organization remains a top concern, particularly with its added reach and appeal through its merger with terror leader Abu Musab al-Zarqawi's operations in Iraq.

AT THE STATEHOUSE: 2006 GENERAL ASSEMBLY

Moving time for ISTEP

House approved giving test in spring

By DEANNA MARTIN
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

INDIANAPOLIS

Statewide student testing would move from fall to spring under a bill the Indiana House approved Thursday, although lawmakers are not sure how much the change would cost.

State Superintendent of Public Instruction Suellen Reed has estimated that switching ISTEP to the spring would cost more than \$45 million. The Legislative Services Agency, which provides financial estimates on proposed legislation, said the change would cost more than \$11 million.

But Republicans who supported the move said it might not cost the state anything.

"I really don't care whether we do testing in the spring or fall. Whenever I buy something, I want to know how much it costs," said Rep. Joe Micon, D-West Lafayette.

"To this very moment, I still don't know how much this change is going to cost the people of Indiana."

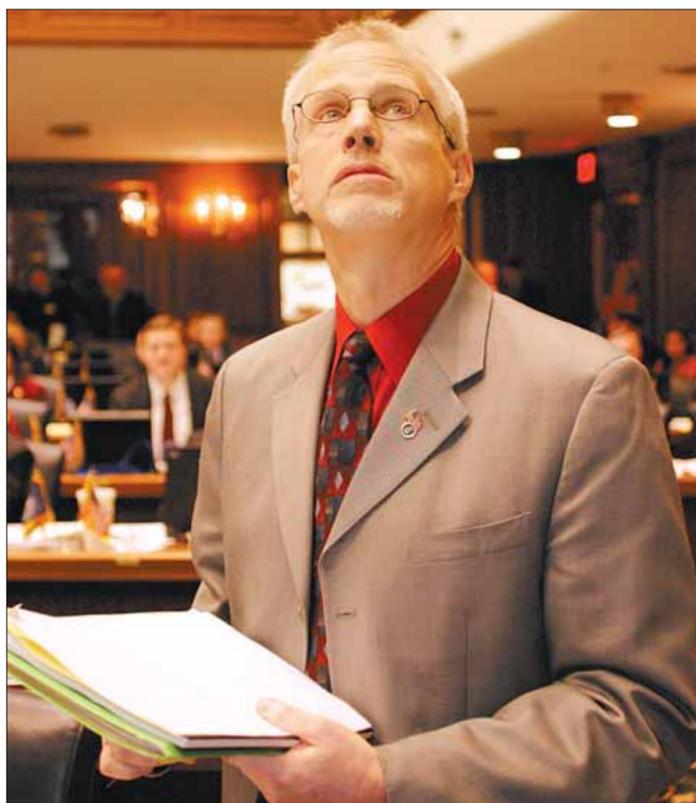
Gov. Mitch Daniels administration officials and other Republicans have said the cost would be minimal. Testing companies have already agreed to pay the cost of moving the test, which would eliminate the immediate fiscal ramifications of the bill, they said.

"There's a good possibility that the cost could be zero," said bill sponsor Rep. Robert Behning, R-Indianapolis.

All 52 House Republicans for the bill, while 47 Democrats voted against it. The bill now moves to the GOP-controlled Senate for consideration.

Daniels has pushed for a spring ISTEP test, and until this week, Reed, a fellow Republican, has not taken a strong stance against the move.

But Wednesday, Reed bucked her party and sided with Democrats who say the test should stay in the fall. She said lawmakers should use the estimated \$45 million the bill could cost to help



Rep. Robert Behning, R-Indianapolis, watches the tally board as a bill he sponsored which would move Indiana's ISTEP test from the fall to the spring is voted on during the house session at the Statehouse in Indianapolis on Thursday. The measure passed along party lines.

fund other education programs.

Supporters of spring testing say it makes sense to test children in May, after they have had a full year of instruction.

Opponents say moving the test is expensive and unnecessary. They say fall tests show what children have understood and retained from their last school year.

Others worried the test would be dumbed down because of the change. To get scores back quickly after a May test, the writing portion would be given separately and not count toward scores.

"We don't need to dummy down the

test," said Rep. Gregory Porter, D-Indianapolis.

The bill also requires the Indiana Department of Education to develop a 10-year testing plan that could create diagnostic "testlets," small tests that could be given throughout the school year so teachers know what students need to work on.

Supporters say any costs for future tests are covered in the bill, which allows the transfer of money from the Build Indiana Fund to the state general fund for spring testing.

Bills on hunting, fireworks pass on deadline day

By MIKE SMITH
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

INDIANAPOLIS

It would be legal to hunt deer and elk inside fenced areas for seven more years under legislation approved by the Indiana House on Thursday.

The House also passed a bill that would make it a criminal offense bring knives to school, and another one that would make it legal for people to set off fireworks on their own property or someone else's if they have approval to use it for that purpose.

The Senate, meanwhile, unanimously passed a bill that would impose lifetime parole for convicted child molesters. The bill also requires those with two such convictions and those classified with certain

mental disorders to wear electronic tracking devices as part of their lifetime parole.

The bills were among several lawmakers considered before a midnight deadline for legislation to clear its house of origin and move to the other chamber.

The bill on fenced hunting, which passed 54-28 and moves to the Senate, would keep what opponents call "canned hunts" legal for seven years.

Under a bill sponsored by Rep. Chet Dobis, D-Merrillville, having a knife on school property would be a misdemeanor punishable by up to 180 days in jail or a \$1,000 fine.

Currently, students can be expelled if they bring a knife to school but cannot be charged criminally unless they threaten or harm someone with it.

The bill, which passed 94-2 and moved to the Senate, stemmed from a 2004 attack in which a 15-year-old Valparaiso High School student slashed five classmates with a knife during a Spanish class. Dobis' daughter was teaching the class.

The fireworks bill would override current law that requires people who buy certain fireworks in Indiana such as firecrackers and bottle rockets to sign a statement pledging to use them outside the state or set them off at certain controlled locations. Legal fireworks in the state include sparklers, noisemakers and smoke bombs.

Critics of the law say it is difficult to enforce, and the bill's sponsor, Republican Rep. David Frizzell of Indianapolis, called it a sham. The bill passed 64-30 and moves to the Senate.

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The Daily Journal is an award-winning newspaper published daily except Sundays and Christmas at 2575 N. Morton St., Franklin, IN 46131.

Founded in 1963, the Daily Journal is owned by Home News Enterprises L.L.C. and is one of Indiana's most widely recognized and honored community newspapers.

The Daily Journal is committed to responsible reporting, professional business practices and dedicated community service.

The newspaper is a member of the Associated Press, Hoosier State Press Association, Inland Press Association and Certified Audit of Circulations.

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