

Lawmakers question value of spy program

Some wonder if al-Qaida has changed tactics

By NEDRA PICKLER
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

WASHINGTON

The House Intelligence Committee chairman on Sunday questioned the value of President Bush's secret eavesdropping program, saying al-Qaida undoubtedly has changed its means of

BRIEFS

NATION

WASHINGTON

House: Government played its part in Katrina failure

Unheeded warnings, poor planning and apathy in recognizing the scope of Hurricane Katrina's destruction led to the slow emergency response from the White House down to local parishes, a House investigation concludes.

The 600-page report by a special Republican-dominated House inquiry into one of the worst natural disasters in U.S. history concluded that late state and local evacuation orders exacerbated an untrained and inexperienced force of federal emergency responders.

It also said President Bush received poor and incomplete counsel about the crisis unfolding in the Gulf Coast.

Overall, the House report said, the federal government's response to Katrina was marked by "fecklessness, flailing and organizational paralysis."

ALEXANDRIA, Va.

Finding unbiased jury for Moussaoui no easy task

Prosecutors and defense lawyers in the death penalty trial of Zacarias Moussaoui are searching for the perfect jury, poring through hundreds of questionnaires from potential jurors and looking for clues to their perceptions of the case.

Jury selection will be difficult for the defense. The team must find an unbiased panel for a man who prosecutors say could have prevented the Sept. 11 attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, just a few miles from the Alexandria courthouse where the trial takes place.

"It'd be like trying Tim McVeigh in Oklahoma City," said criminal defense lawyer John Zwerling, referring to the 1995 bombing of the federal building in Oklahoma City that killed 168 people. A federal judge moved McVeigh's trial to Denver.

Moussaoui pleaded guilty in April to conspiring with al-Qaida to use aircraft to destroy buildings in the United States. Moussaoui denies any involvement in Sept. 11 and says he was preparing to fly a plane into the White House as part of a second wave of attacks.

NEW YORK

Record-setting snow buries Northeast

A record-breaking storm buried sections of the Northeast under more than 2 feet of snow on Sunday, marooning thousands of air travelers and making even a walk to the corner store treacherous.

The National Weather Service said 26.9 inches of snow had fallen in Central Park, the most since record-keeping started in 1869. The old record was 26.4 inches in December 1947.

Elsewhere, 21 inches of snow fell at Columbia, Md., and at East Brunswick, N.J., Hartford, Conn., and West Caln Township west of Philadelphia, the National Weather Service said. Philadelphia's average for an entire winter is about 21 inches.

IS SPY PROGRAM WORTH IT?

Changed tactics: The Republican chairman of the House Intelligence Committee says al-Qaida has undoubtedly altered the way its members communicate in response to disclosure of President Bush's secret eavesdropping program.

Continued questioning: Legal scholars and lawmakers from both par-

ties have questioned whether Bush had the authority to conduct the surveillance without a judge's approval.

Keeping it secret: The committee's leading Democrat said she couldn't consult experts on the legal underpinnings of the program because briefings she received were classified.

communication to avoid Washington's monitoring.

Bush said two weeks ago in his State of the Union address that the program of monitoring calls and e-mail between the United States and suspected terrorist associates

overseas "remains essential to the security of America."

But Rep. Pete Hoekstra, R-Mich., suggested that the public disclosure of the program's existence in December in the New York Times has undermined its effectiveness.

"Does anyone really believe that, after 50 days of having this program on the front page of our newspapers, across talk shows across America, that al-Qaida has not changed the way that it communicates?" Hoekstra said on NBC's "Meet the Press."

Hoekstra defended the program's legal standing. He said if Democrats who were briefed on the program before it became public thought the president was breaking the law, they should have tried to stop him.

Rep. Jane Harman, the leading Democrat on the Intelligence Committee, said she did not fully

understand the legal underpinnings of the program at the time of the classified briefings and was not free to consult with experts.

Meantime, Sen. Joseph Biden, a member of the Senate Judiciary Committee, said the eavesdropping program should not continue unabated without any review.

"We cannot say to a president, 'Mr. President, whatever you want to do, under any circumstances, tap anything, and you don't even have to tell us what you're doing.' That is bizarre," Biden told ABC's "This Week."



AP PHOTO
Vice President Dick Cheney accepts a rifle from National Rifle Association President Kayne Robinson on April 17, 2004, in Pittsburgh. Cheney accidentally shot and injured a man during a quail-hunting trip in Texas.

Cheney shoots hunter by accident

By NEDRA PICKLER
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

WASHINGTON

Vice President Dick Cheney accidentally shot and wounded a companion during a weekend quail hunting trip in Texas.

Harry Whittington, a millionaire attorney from Austin, was alert and doing fine in a Corpus Christi hospital Sunday after he was shot by Cheney on a ranch in south Texas, said Katharine Armstrong, the property's owner.

Armstrong said Whittington, 78, was mostly injured on his right side, with the pellets hitting his cheek, neck and chest during the incident on Saturday.

Cheney's spokeswoman, Lea Anne McBride, said the vice president was with Whittington and his wife at the hospital on Sunday.

The shooting was first reported by the Corpus Christi Caller-Times. The vice president's office did not disclose the accident until nearly 24 hours after it happened.

Whittington "came up from behind the vice president and the other hunter and didn't signal them or indicate to them or announce himself," Armstrong said.

"The vice president didn't see him," she continued. "The covey flushed and the vice president picked out a bird and was following it and shot. And by god, Harry was in the line of fire and got peppered pretty good."

Armstrong said Cheney is a long-time friend who comes to the ranch to hunt about once a year. She said Whittington is a regular, too, but she thought it was the first time the two men hunted together.

Bill aimed at creating 'reverse 911'

By DEANNA MARTIN
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

INDIANAPOLIS

The tornado that ripped through the Evansville area last November struck when many residents were asleep and never heard the warning sirens.

Twenty-four people died, and hundreds of homes were destroyed. Now some are wondering if lives might have been saved if residents had received a late-night phone call warning them that an F3 twister was headed their way.

The General Assembly is considering legislation that would allow counties to use emergency telephone system fees to set up phone call warning systems, sometimes referred to as "reverse 911."

If there is a natural disaster, chemical spill or other emergency, counties could send out batches of automatic phone calls warning residents.

The bill allows counties to use emergency telephone fees to set up such warning systems. It does not provide separate funding for the programs.

THE WAR IN IRAQ

Second time's a charm

Shiites give al-Jaafari another term as prime minister

By QASSIM ABDUL-ZAHRA
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

BAGHDAD, Iraq

Shiite lawmakers Sunday chose incumbent Ibrahim al-Jaafari to be Iraq's prime minister, endorsing the physician and longtime exile for a second term by a single vote, thanks in large part to support by a radical anti-U.S. faction.

Al-Jaafari's selection paves the way for the Shiite alliance to begin talks with parties representing Sunni Arabs, Kurds, secularists and others to form a broad-based government, which the U.S. hopes can calm the insurgency so American and other foreign troops can begin leaving.

Al-Jaafari edged out Vice President Adil Abdul-Mahdi during the balloting, largely thanks to support from followers of Muqtada al-Sadr, the cleric whose militia has staged two uprisings against U.S. forces since 2004.

Al-Jaafari, who spent years in exile in Iran and Britain, is virtually assured of the top job once the new parliament convenes and a new president is elected in the coming weeks. The constitution states that the president must appoint a prime minister from the largest bloc in parliament.

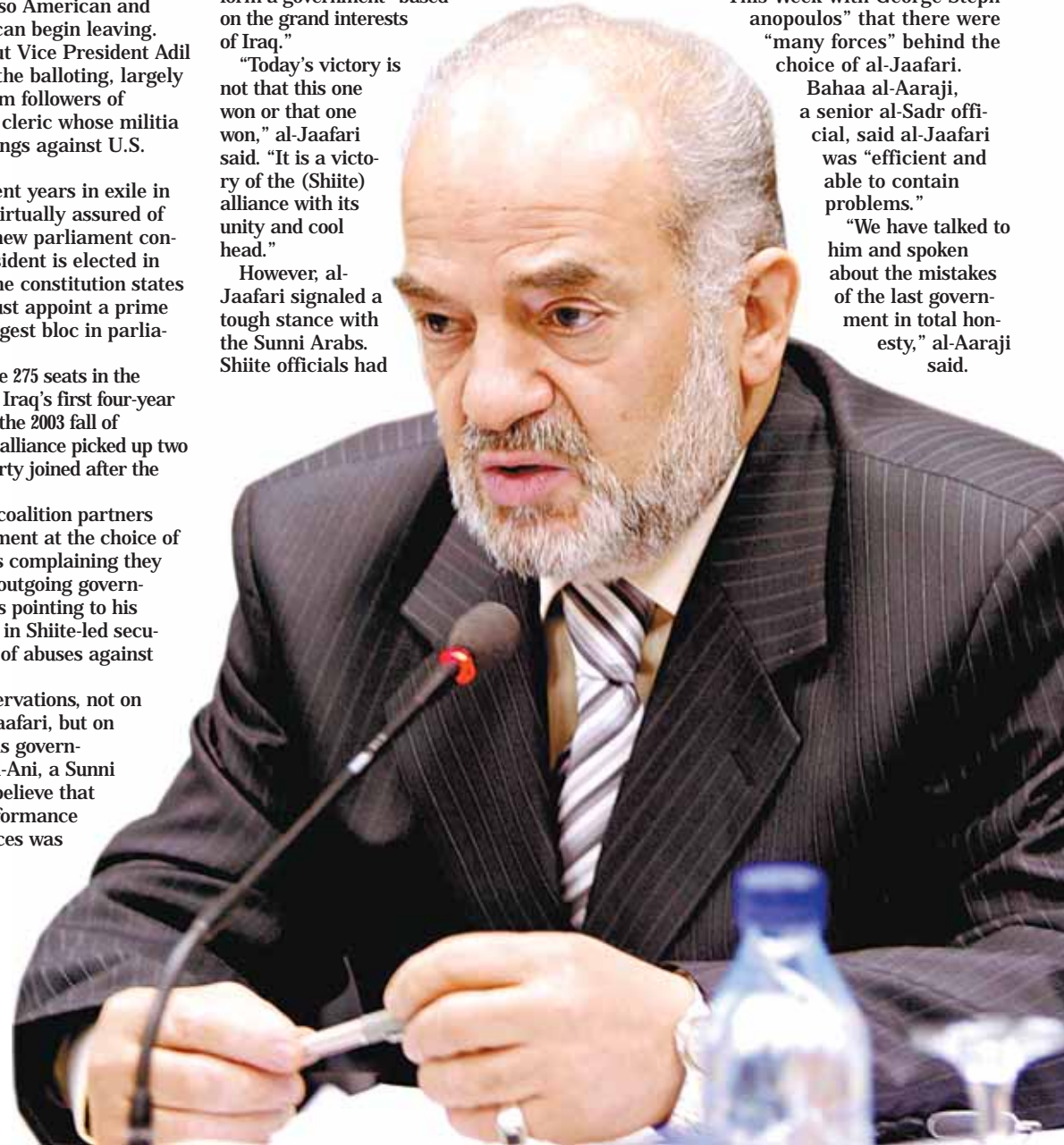
Shiites won 128 of the 275 seats in the December election for Iraq's first four-year term legislature since the 2003 fall of Saddam Hussein. The alliance picked up two more when a small party joined after the vote.

However, would-be coalition partners expressed disappointment at the choice of al-Jaafari, with Kurds complaining they were sidelined in the outgoing government and Sunni Arabs pointing to his alleged failure to rein in Shiite-led security services accused of abuses against Sunnis.

"We have some reservations, not on the person of Dr. al-Jaafari, but on the performance of his government," said Naseer al-Ani, a Sunni Arab politician. "We believe that his government's performance on security and services was irresponsible."

AP PHOTO

Iraqi Prime Minister Ibrahim al-Jaafari was selected to be Iraq's prime minister for a second term. The vote has created tension among coalition partners who wanted a new face.



Will Bayh run? Politicians wonder about White House bid

The Associated Press

Sen. Evan Bayh, who's expected to decide after this fall's elections whether he'll run for president in 2008, is giving political pundits in both parties plenty to talk about these days.

The Indiana Democrat was touted as a possible White House contender in 2000 and 2004, but chose not to run. As speculation grows for the 2008 race, he is

once again making the lists of potential Democratic primary candidates.

In the past month, Bayh has been busy outlining his views on big issues from foreign policy to ethics reform.

Last week, during a foreign policy speech at the Center for Strategic and In-



BAYH

ternational Studies in Washington, D.C., he advocated stronger economic and diplomatic sanctions against Iran and a reduction in American dependence on oil.

Bayh's spokeswoman, Meghan Keck, said Bayh is seriously considering throwing his hat into the ring, but no decision would be announced until this fall at the earliest, after mid-term elections.

Indiana Republicans say Bayh's

previous votes, particularly his votes against the nominations of U.S. Supreme Court Chief Justice John Roberts and Justice Samuel Alito, are indications he will run.

"The fact that Sen. Bayh is seeking the Democrat nomination for President is the only explanation for his otherwise inexplicable attempts to block" Roberts' and Alito's nominations, said Indiana Republican party Chairman Murray Clark.

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