

BRIEFS

NATION

HOUSTON

Wanted: Impartial jurors for Enron leaders' trial

Of the more than 100 potential jurors slated to pack a cavernous federal courtroom in Houston today, attorneys must ferret out a dozen who aren't already convinced that Enron Corp. founder Kenneth Lay and former CEO Jeffrey Skilling are crooks and liars.

Jacob Frenkel, a former federal prosecutor, said the biggest concern is choosing a panel that aims to draw conclusions based solely on what they hear in court and avoid getting consumed with participating in the showcase trial.

Jury selection was slated to begin this morning, and U.S. District Judge Sim Lake told attorneys he expects a panel to be seated by day's end.

Skilling faces 31 counts of fraud, conspiracy, insider trading and lying to auditors for reportedly lying about Enron's financial state before the company crashed. Lay faces seven counts of fraud and conspiracy for reportedly perpetuating the scheme after Skilling resigned in August 2001.

WASHINGTON

Republicans want Bush to release Abramoff records

Republican lawmakers said Sunday that President Bush should publicly disclose White House contacts with Jack Abramoff, the lobbyist who has pleaded guilty to felony charges in an influence-peddling case.

Releasing the records would help eliminate suspicions that Abramoff, who helped raise more than \$100,000 for Bush's re-election campaign, had undue influence on the White House, Republicans said. The president has refused to reveal how much access Abramoff had to the White House but has said he does not know Abramoff personally. Bush has said federal prosecutors can see the records of Abramoff's contacts if they suspect something inappropriate, but he has not released them publicly.

U.S. Rep. Mike Pence, R-Ind., appeared on "Fox News Sunday," saying all White House correspondence, phone calls and meetings with Abramoff should be released. Bush adviser Dan Bartlett said on CNN's "Late Edition" that prosecutors investigating Abramoff have not asked for any White House records. "They haven't done that because they're not relevant," Bartlett said.

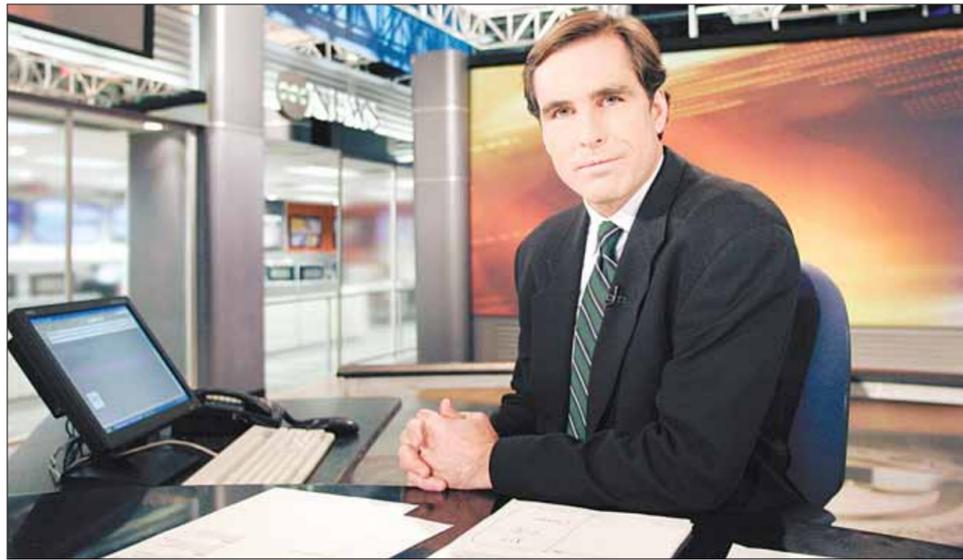
He rejected Democratic calls for an independent prosecutor to investigate.



LAY



SKILLING



Bob Woodruff sits in a studio at ABC news headquarters in New York in 2001. Woodruff and a cameraman were seriously injured

Sunday in an explosion while reporting from Iraq, the network said. The pair was traveling with a military convoy north of Baghdad.

Anchor, cameraman injured in bomb blast

ABC's Woodruff, Vogt stable after surgery for head wounds

By DAVID BAUDER
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

NEW YORK

The serious injuries suffered by ABC "World News Tonight" anchor Bob Woodruff and a television cameraman Sunday were a reminder of the danger hundreds of journalists work through every day as they tell the story of the Iraq war.

The family of Christian Science Monitor freelance reporter Jill Carroll knows it all too well as they await news about the young woman, kidnapped at gunpoint Jan. 7.

Woodruff and Doug Vogt were riding in an Iraqi military vehicle Sunday so they could better understand the war from the perspective of the Iraqi forces when an improvised explosive device blew up near their convoy of U.S. and Iraqi troops north of Baghdad.



VOGT

IN OTHER VIOLENCE

Churches bombed

Five car bombs exploded within a half hour Sunday near four Christian churches and the office of the Vatican envoy in Baghdad and Kirkuk, killing three people and wounding at least a dozen.

Attacks kill medic, police

On Sunday, bombings and ambushes killed eight policemen and a medic in attacks across Baghdad and in the northern cities of Baqouba and Beiji.

Both men were wearing body armor and helmets, but they suffered serious head injuries and were in stable condition following surgery at a U.S. military hospital. Woodruff also has broken bones. They were expected to be evacuated to medical facilities in Germany, said ABC News President David Westin.

The next few days will be critical, he said. "Obviously, this is very tough news for all of us here at ABC," said "This Week" anchor George Stephanopoulos. "It gives

us a taste of what so many military families are going through every day."

Dozens of journalists have been injured, killed or kidnapped in Iraq since the 2003 invasion that toppled Saddam Hussein.

David Bloom of NBC News was covering the war on April 6, 2003, when he died from an apparent blood clot while traveling south of Baghdad. His family and the Woodruffs were known to be close, and when NBC News executives had to tell Bloom's widow that her husband had died, they made sure Woodruff's wife, Lee, was there to offer support.

When Woodruff and Vogt's convoy was attacked, the two were standing in the hatch of an Iraqi mechanized vehicle. Experts say the Iraqi vehicles aren't as secure as U.S. military vehicles, and Iraqi security forces have been frequent targets of insurgents during the war; a danger colleagues said Woodruff and Vogt understood.

Their ABC News colleague, Martha Raddatz, said they were traveling that way to better understand how Iraqi forces face the war.

Chaos erupts at Saddam's trial despite tough, new judge

The Associated Press

BAGHDAD, Iraq

A new judge cracked down Sunday in a chaotic session of Saddam Hussein's trial, ordering a co-defendant and a lawyer expelled from the courtroom. The entire defense team left in protest and Saddam was escorted out after a

shouting match in which he yelled, "Down with America!"

Despite the turmoil, chief judge Raouf Rasheed Abdel-Rahman pushed ahead, replacing the defense lawyers with court-appointed attorneys and hearing three prosecution witnesses before adjourning the trial until later this week.

It was Abdel-Rahman's first session at the helm, and he wasted little

time in distinguishing himself from his predecessor, Rizgar Mohammed Amin, telling the court at the start of the proceedings that anyone who broke the rules would be thrown out.

The session, which was the first since Dec. 22.

After 4½ hours, Abdel-Rahman adjourned the trial until Wednesday or Thursday, depending on when the Islamic new year's holiday falls.



ABDEL-RAHMAN

State bill would let victims' families witness executions



Kelly Eckart was murdered in 1997. A new law could allow Eckart's family to witness the execution of her murderer, Michael Dean Overstreet, if it takes place.

By DEANNA MARTIN
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

INDIANAPOLIS

Dale and Connie Sutton's 18-year-old daughter, Kelly Eckart, was abducted, raped and murdered in 1997.

Eckart, a freshman at Franklin College from Boggsstown in Shelby County, was abducted on the way home from her job at a Wal-Mart. After days of searching, her body was found in a ravine in rural Brown County.

Dale Sutton said he and his wife have been working through the grieving process ever since the killing. Part of the process was attending the trial of the man convicted of Kelly's murder, Michael Dean Overstreet,

who is now on Indiana's death row. Sutton said he's not sure if he and his wife would want to witness Overstreet's execution if it ever occurs, but they do want the option.

Current Indiana law allows condemned inmates to decide who witnesses their executions. Family members of

AT A GLANCE

Current law: Convicted death row inmates can select up to 10 witnesses for their execution.

The proposal: Would allow up to eight members of a murder victim's family to witness an execution without asking permission from the prisoner. Inmates would select five witnesses.

Supporters say: Viewing the execution could bring closure to some of the family members of murder victims.

Opponents say: Death row inmates deserve to select who watches their final moments, and watching an execution would not bring healing to victims' families.

victims are not allowed to attend unless the inmate grants them permission.

The General Assembly is considering a bill that would allow family members to witness executions, something Sutton said could help bring closure to some people. "I think victims deserve that choice,"

Sutton said. "There's a hole in your heart that never heals. The sharp edges get a little smoother over time, but that hole is always there."

State Sen. Tom Wyss, R-Fort Wayne, is sponsoring the bill, which would allow up to eight members of a murder victim's family to witness an execution without asking permission from the prisoner. Inmates would select five witnesses instead of the 10 allowed now.

Wyss says murder victims' families should not be victimized again by having to ask permission from the loved one's killer.

Most of the 38 states that have the death penalty allow victims' witnesses at executions, according to the Death Penalty Information Center.

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Israel: No talks until no violence

Hamas must renounce attacks if they are to get funds, official says

By JOSEF FEDERMAN
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

JERUSALEM

Israel ruled out contacts with a Palestinian government led by Hamas unless the Islamic group renounces violence and threatened Sunday to "liquidate" militants if they resume attacking Israelis.

Acting Prime Minister Ehud Olmert said Israel will stop the monthly transfer of tens of millions of dollars in tax rebates and other funds to the Palestinian Authority if a Hamas government is installed.

With the latest comments, Israel showed no signs of backing down from the hard line it has taken since Hamas won a surprising landslide victory in Palestinian legislative elections last week.

Hamas, which opposes the existence of Israel and has killed hundreds of Israelis in suicide bomb attacks, is expected to lead the next Palestinian government, hurting the chances for a peace deal.

Also Sunday, about 7,000 Israeli security forces, anticipating violent resistance, were training to dismantle two small West Bank settlement outposts later this week, police said. Resistance is expected to be fierce in Amona and among Israeli squatters who took over an abandoned market in the Palestinian city of Hebron.

Israel's Supreme Court rejected a request from Jewish settlers to delay the order, clearing the way for the operation to proceed. It will mark Israel's first evacuation of Jewish settlers since withdrawing from the Gaza Strip and part of the West Bank in August.

Olmert, addressing his Cabinet, said he has been in touch with world leaders in recent days and received support for the tough Israeli stance against Hamas.

"We clarified that without a clear abandonment of the path of terror ... Israel won't have any contact with the Palestinians," Olmert said. "On this issue, I don't intend to make any compromises."

Hamas refuses to disarm or recognize Israel, though it has hinted that it could reach a long-term truce or other accommodation with the Jewish state.

Israeli officials said the ban on contacts did not extend to Palestinian leader Mahmoud Abbas, who accepts the Israeli conditions and is eager to resume peace talks. Abbas was elected to a four-year term last year and remains in power.

Rice says U.S. will not give money to Hamas

LONDON — U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice on Sunday ruled out any American financial aid to a Hamas government in the Palestinian territories and said Washington wants Arab nations and others to cut off money as well.

Humanitarian aid to the Palestinians, many of whom are poor and unemployed, is likely on a case-by-case basis, Rice said. She indicated that the Bush administration would follow through on aid promised to the current, U.S.-backed Palestinian government led by President Mahmoud Abbas.

"The United States is not prepared to fund an organization that advocates the destruction of Israel, that advocates violence and that refuses its obligations," under an international framework for eventual Mideast peace, Rice said.