

## BRIEFS NATION

WASHINGTON

### Officials: U.S. still not ready for bird flu

The United States is making fast progress in preparations for a bird flu pandemic, including measures to close down schools and quarantine the sick, but vaccine supplies remain inadequate, health officials said Sunday.

"We've got a lot of work to do," said Julie Gerberding, director of the national Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. "We've got to get more and better antiviral drugs."

A strain of a bird flu that has killed more than 70 people in Asia since it first appeared two years ago has sparked concerns of a super-flu that could kill millions worldwide. Almost all the victims were in close contact with poultry.

While stressing that chances remain slight, health experts have said it could lead to a global pandemic if the bird flu mutates to start spreading easily among people. The United States, which has not seen any signs of the strain in birds or people, has only enough doses now for 4.3 million people.

Gerberding said some immediate measures to combat the flu in the United States and worldwide would include isolating the sick and their immediate contacts. That might entail closing schools, large meetings or otherwise separating the afflicted from the rest of the community.

WASHINGTON

### Spending for research and development drops

Defense and space projects account for most increases in the \$135 billion federal research and development budget next year, worrying scientists who fear that after years of growth the nation is beginning to skip on technology that fuels marketplace innovation.

The realignment by Congress of research money toward national defense and human space exploration means many universities, institutions and scientists will have to scramble for new sources of money or cut back current or planned projects.

The National Institutes of Health, the nation's premier biomedical research agency, saw its budget doubled between 1999 and 2003 but is getting \$28.6 billion next year, a slight 0.1 percent drop that marks its first budget cutback since 1970.

"There is a battle for the future in science and technology. That's what is going to govern the future of our country," explained Dr. Harold Varmus, a former NIH director and Nobel Prize winner.

The Bush administration counters that federal research and development spending remains near an all-time high and is close to 45 percent higher than when the president took office.

BRIEF

## WORLD

GAZA CITY, Gaza Strip

### Palestinian officers free hostage after shootout

Palestinian security officers stormed a building where an Italian hostage was being held Sunday, freeing the man in a shootout with his kidnappers.

It was a rare show of force in a wave of kidnappings, shootouts and mayhem in the Gaza Strip that has embarrassed Palestinian leader Mahmoud Abbas, threatening to undermine his Fatah Party in Jan. 25 legislative elections and boost the Islamic militant group Hamas.

The hostage, Alessandro Bernardini, was abducted early Sunday in the town of Khan Younis. An aide in the European Parliament, he was traveling with a delegation that included two European Union lawmakers when armed men stopped the vehicle, forced him out and sped away with him.

After a four-hour search, security agents burst into a Khan Younis building and freed Bernardini.

## THE WAR AGAINST TERRORISM

# Post-election violence, negotiations continue

## More than a dozen car bombs explode across Iraq; Sunnis open political bid

By PATRICK QUINN  
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

BAGHDAD, Iraq

Militants blew up 13 cars in three hours Sunday, injuring at least 20 people while 13 Iraqis were killed in other violence that fed the turmoil following last month's contested parliamentary elections.

Sunni Arabs made their opening bid in what could be protracted negotiations to form a new government. Leaders of the minority's main political group, the Iraqi Accordance Front, traveled to the northern city of Irbil for today's meeting with the president of the Kurdish region.

The Kurdish region in Iraq's north already has seen a flurry of post-election bargaining between Kurds and the governing Shiite Muslim religious party, the United Iraqi Alliance.

Preliminary results from the Dec. 15 election have given the Shiite group a strong lead in the voting for Iraq's 275-member parliament, but not enough for it to govern without other political blocs.

A year ago, it took nearly three months of negotiations between the Shiite religious alliance and a coalition of Kurdish parties to form an interim government after a Jan. 30 election that was boycotted by the Sunni Arabs at the core of the insurgency.

The first quarter of 2006 looks more crucial as Iraq tries to shape an administration that will govern for four years. U.S. officials are pushing the parties to form a broad-based coalition government, and failed negotiations could worsen the civil strife.

"This is perceived, inappropriately or inaccurately perhaps, by the enemy as a time of vulnerability, as the government transitions from its transitional government to a permanent government, to the constitutional-based, democratically elected four-year permanent government," said Brig. Gen. Donald Alston, spokesman for the U.S.-led coalition force.

The Sunni Arab visit to the Kurdish region was the first since the election,



Firefighters extinguish flames from a burning car, used in an attack in Baghdad, Iraq, on Sunday. Insurgents exploded numerous car bombs throughout the capital, but caused relatively few casualties, police said. Eleven people were wounded, and no one was killed.

## IN OTHER NEWS

### Indiana soldier killed in Iraq

FORT CAMPBELL, Ky. — Two Fort Campbell-based soldiers, including one from Indiana, were killed in Iraq on Friday in separate detonations by improvised explosive devices, the Army and the governor of Maine said.

Pvt. Jonathan R. Pfender, 22, of Evansville, was killed in Baiji, Iraq, during a patrol, the Army said Sunday. Pfender was assigned to the 1st Battalion,

whose results have been protested by Sunni and secular Shiite parties. Their trip came as Prime Minister Ibrahim al-Jaafari, a leading member of the governing United Iraqi Alliance, met on Sunday with Kurdish regional president Mazoud Barzani and discussed the outlines of a

187th Infantry Regiment, 3rd Combat Team, 101st Airborne Division.

In a separate incident, Sgt. 1st Class Shawn Christopher Dostie died in an attack near Baghdad, Maine Gov. John Baldacci said in a news release. Baldacci's office said Dostie was on active duty at Fort Campbell, but had no other information.

Pfender and Dostie are the third and fourth soldiers assigned to the 101st Airborne to die in the closing weeks of 2005.

future coalition government.

"We agreed on essential principles for exerting efforts to form a broad-based government. Meetings will be continued later, and we will continue to cooperate until we achieve what is beneficial for Iraq," Barzani said.

# Bush begins new year visiting wounded troops

The Associated Press

SAN ANTONIO

President Bush began the new year on Sunday at the bedsides of wounded servicemen and women, and awarded nine Purple Hearts to U.S. troops who served in Iraq and Afghanistan.

The president boarded the Marine One presidential helicopter before dawn on

his ranch in Crawford and flew more than an hour to Randolph Air Force Base. His motorcade drove to Brooke Army Medical Center, a 224-bed hospital at nearby Fort Sam Houston, to meet with about 50 injured members of various branches of the armed forces and their families.

"This hospital is full of healers and compassionate people that care deeply about our men and women in uniform," the president said after visiting wounded troops.

"I'm just overwhelmed by the great strength of character of not only those who have been wounded but of their loved ones as well."

The president, who was flying back to Washington after visiting the military hospital, has no public events scheduled for today, a federal holiday. He is to spend the rest of his first week of 2006 focused on Iraq and the economy.

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# U.S. rings in 2006 with big-city celebrations

## New Orleans pauses to honor hurricane victims

The Associated Press

LAS VEGAS

Fireworks rained over the Las Vegas Strip as hundreds of thousands of revelers rang in 2006 with quickie weddings, parties at posh nightclubs and what organizers hoped was the world's largest simultaneous toast, 14,000 Chardonnay-filled plastic glasses raised just before midnight.



Coolbone Brass Band plays for New Year's Eve in Jackson Square, New Orleans, on Saturday.

"Las Vegas knows how to throw a party," Mayor Oscar Goodman said at the annual blowout, billed as the

largest New Year's Eve party outside New York's Times Square.

Hours earlier in Manhattan, a 76-year-old Dick Clark returned to TV for the first time since suffering a stroke.

In New Orleans, after a festive jazz funeral procession in memory of Hurricane Katrina's victims, the city celebrated the end of a devastating year with concerts in the French Quarter and the lowering of a giant gumbo pot, a Cajun twist on New York's Waterford crystal ball.

As the countdown began, Mayor

Ray Nagin asked the thousands gathered to take a moment to remember all those people who did not make it to 2006.

Further north, Boston honored the hurricane-ravaged New Orleans with Marti Gras-themed festivities. The "Spirit of New Orleans" parade featured carnival masks, and jazz bands joined in.

In Las Vegas, gusts of 30 mph and scattered showers threatened to cancel the \$500,000 firework display, but the skies cleared, allowing the show to light up the Strip for 8 minutes after midnight.

# Supreme Court to take on business

## Roberts, Alito would offer companies two allies on high bench

By DONNA CASSATA  
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

WASHINGTON

Business couldn't do any better than Chief Justice John Roberts and Samuel Alito on the Supreme Court.

One represented corporate interests as a private attorney; the other often sided with employers in lawsuits filed by workers. The prospect of the two on the Supreme Court signals to manufacturers and businesses that they will have allies in high places, say academics and business experts.

Beyond their decisions in individual cases, the Roberts court also has the potential to craft a consistent philosophy on business issues, something that several academics argue has been lacking in recent years since the departure of Lewis Powell in 1987. A former corporate lawyer, Powell built a reputation as business' friend during his 15 years on the Supreme Court.

The court's highly selective docket for the current term will give Roberts and Alito, assuming the latter is confirmed, ample opportunity to shape the court. Among the critical issues for companies are the Supreme Court's decisions in antitrust cases, government regulation of land development and the commerce clause.

Certain to catch any court watcher's attention is how the new justices decide on whether to limit punitive damages in lawsuits against corporations.

"In contrast to the more liberal members, I see them more in favor of business," said Nathaniel Persily, a professor at the University of Pennsylvania Law School.

Roberts spent more than a decade with the private law firm of Hogan & Hartson, arguing on behalf of Toyota and health maintenance organizations. He wrote friend-of-the-court briefs for the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, participated in its moot court and earned its endorsement.

Alito compiled a record of backing businesses in employee claims of sex and racial discrimination during 15 years on the Philadelphia-based 3rd Circuit U.S. Court of Appeals. Corporate cases were prevalent in the appellate court, whose jurisdiction includes Delaware. More than half a million business entities call Delaware their legal home.

## AT A GLANCE

Chief Justice John Roberts and Samuel Alito could participate in several cases with far-reaching implications for business. Among the cases on the docket are:

### Domino's Pizza Inc. v. McDonald

John McDonald sued Domino's Pizza, contending that the company ended contracts with JWM Investments because he is black. McDonald is the president and sole shareholder of JWM Investments.

### Texaco Inc. v. Dagher, Shell Oil v. Dagher

Thousands of gas station owners sued Texaco and Shell Oil, arguing that the companies established a joint venture to set the price of its products. The gas station owners claimed that the action was a violation of the Sherman Antitrust Act.

### DaimlerChrysler Corp. v. Cuno

The state of Ohio gave tax credits and exemptions to DaimlerChrysler and the company decided to build a vehicle-assembly plant. Plaintiffs in the case contend that the credits and exemptions violate the commerce clause, with one state benefiting at the expense of others.

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### LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

P.O. Box 699  
Franklin, IN 46131  
letters@thejournalnet.com

### MANAGEMENT TEAM

**Publisher**  
Jeffrey W. Owen 736-2744  
jowen@thejournalnet.com

**Editor**  
Scarlett Syse 736-2749  
syse@thejournalnet.com

**Assistant managing editor**  
Michele Holtkamp-Frye 736-2774  
mholtkamp@thejournalnet.com

**Assistant managing editor**  
Jennifer L. Gaskin 736-2721  
jgaskin@thejournalnet.com

**Advertising director**  
Chuck Wells 736-2750  
cwells@thejournalnet.com

**Circulation director**  
Mike Warren 736-2711  
mwarren@thejournalnet.com

### Delivery manager

Bruce Powell 736-2702  
bpowell@thejournalnet.com

### Administrative manager

Linda Wirey 736-2751  
wirey@thejournalnet.com

### Information technology manager

Kathy McDermott 736-2782  
kmcdermott@thejournalnet.com

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