

BRIEFS
STATE

COLUMBUS

Bartholomew County jail inmate hangs himself

A Bartholomew County Jail inmate whom authorities planned to question as a witness in a quadruple murder hanged himself with a bedsheet as his cellmate slept nearby, officials said.

Jailers found Michael Dean Ward, 37, of Country Squire Lakes, Thursday afternoon when they went into his cell to take him to the doctor, Sheriff Kenny Whipker said.

Coroner Larry Fisher ruled the death a suicide.

Ward was arrested on a warrant for failure to appear in court on three counts of intimidation.

Whipker said prosecutors also wanted to question Ward as a witness in the retrial of Robert Bassett, who is accused of killing four Seymour residents.

A jury convicted Bassett of the four murders in 2001, but the Indiana Supreme Court overturned the verdict and ordered a new trial, which is scheduled for April in Dearborn County.

INDIANAPOLIS

Drought aid approved for 24 Indiana counties

Farmers in 24 Indiana counties where last summer's drought took a bite out of crop yields have been declared eligible for federal loans, state officials said Friday.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture's disaster designations for the counties means farmers can apply for low-interest emergency loans through the federal Farm Service Agency to help their farms stay afloat as another growing season nears.

Severe drought conditions covered much of the state last summer, although beneficial rains from the remnants of Hurricane Katrina arrived in August.

The 24 affected counties are chiefly in northwestern, southeastern and north-central Indiana. Johnson and Marion counties are not included.

Southeastern Indiana experienced corn yields about 9 percent below normal, and parts of western, north-central and southwestern Indiana also saw yields dry up.

The federal low-interest loans will help farmers in a precarious financial situation in the wake of the drought keep their farms running for another year, he said.

Still, Hurt noted that the money is not a grant and must be paid back.

BRIEF
NATION

WASHINGTON

New face comes aboard Federal Reserve

Kevin Warsh was sworn in Friday as the newest governor at the Federal Reserve, where he'll have a role in setting interest rates and shaping policies that affect the nation's financial and economic landscape.

Tapped by President Bush for the Fed post, Warsh, 35, is the newest member to the Federal Reserve. He previously had served as an economic assistant to Bush at the White House.

Warsh along with Randall Kroszner had been nominated by Bush and confirmed by the Senate to fill two open seats on the seven-member board.

Kroszner, an economics professor at the University of Chicago's school of business, is expected to be sworn in to the Fed post next week, a Federal Reserve spokesperson said.

No verdict in BlackBerry hearing

Judge delays ruling, says decision will be made as soon as possible

By STEPHANIE STOUGHTON
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

RICHMOND, Va

A judge ended a hearing on a request for an injunction against the maker of the handheld BlackBerry device without issuing a decision Friday.

Shares of BlackBerry-maker Research In Motion Ltd. rose \$4.86, or about 7 percent, to \$74.39 on the Nasdaq Stock Market after the hearing was adjourned.

During the hearing, NTP Inc., a small patent holding firm that suc-

cessfully sued Research In Motion, asked U.S. District Judge James R. Spencer to impose an injunction on the service but permit a 30-day grace period so all sides could work out the details of how to exempt government and emergency workers, among other issues.

The Arlington, Va.-based company also recommended that the judge immediately halt sales of new BlackBerry devices and award it \$126 million in damages for starters.

"This is a self-inflicted situation," said NTP attorney James H.

Wallace Jr., who compared RIM to a squatter who continued to live rent-free. "It's just time to pay up."

Henry C. Bunsow, an attorney for Waterloo, Ontario-based RIM, argued against the injunction, saying it would not be in the public's best interests.

The process of exempting government and emergency employees from the BlackBerry ban would prove difficult and problematic, he said.

"It will take a lot of time," Bunsow said. "It will take a lot of effort."

Bunsow also pointed to a number of users which would not be exempted, including hospitals, government contractors, energy companies and financial institutions.

BlackBerry use has become so prevalent that the device has become part of the country's infrastructure, he said.

Spencer said he would rule as soon as possible but provided no timetable. He also said that, if he ordered an injunction, he would make sure that the government's needs were met.

RIM's attorneys also noted that

the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office is poised to reject all patents at the heart of the case.

Although Spencer previously had said he was unwilling to delay his proceedings while awaiting final word from the agency, the speedier moves from the patent office have some attorneys wondering whether Spencer will be swayed.

"I really feel it's too close to call," said Stephen Maebius, a Washington patent attorney not involved in the case. "I can really see it going both ways."

Buyer proposes to increase VA budget

Funds could help update G.I. bill, cover some medical fees

By ASHLEY M. HEHER
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

INDIANAPOLIS

An Indiana congressman said Friday that he would like to add nearly \$2 billion in benefits to President Bush's proposed \$77.7 billion veterans budget.



BUYER

Republican U.S. Rep. Steve Buyer said the House Veterans Affairs Committee, which he heads, hopes to add \$600 million to modernize the Montgomery GI bill and nearly \$780 million to wipe out an administration proposal that creates enrollment fees and copays for medical treatment for some veterans.

"We will make sure that individuals have every opportunity to live full and healthy lives," Buyer said during a news conference at the Indiana War Memorial.

Bush earlier this month submitted his \$2.77 trillion overall budget plan for Fiscal 2007, which begins Oct. 1.

The proposal includes a 10 percent increase in VA appropriations over this year's spending.

The White House plan increases funding for the military and homeland security. But it would trim one-sixth of the budget that covers the rest of discretionary spending.

Buyer said his committee developed its recommendations after hearing from 19 groups representing veterans and military services.

Other committee proposals include adding 200 employees to process claims and \$427 million to pay for medical and prosthetic research, \$28 million more than Bush's budget.

The lawmakers also said the VA's budget should cut \$23.5 million meant to pay for out-of-pocket costs veterans incur when seeking emergency room care.

Buyer also said the VA should spend \$1.1 billion, rather than Bush's suggested \$1.3 billion, on information technology.

David Bowman, commander of Indiana's Military Order of the Purple Heart, said he hopes the increased money will help current veterans and those returning from combat in Iraq and Afghanistan.

"The VA being what it is, nothing changes overnight," he said. "Obviously more money will help a little bit, but they've got to be better at managing the money."

The committee's other proposal, modernizing the Montgomery GI Bill, would allow national guardsmen and reservists to use the military's education benefit after they leave the military.

The plan would also allow veterans to use the program's education benefits to cover certain job training costs.

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