

BRIEF
STATE

CENTER POINT

Search continues for
refuge's missing cougar

Searchers continued without success Monday in their efforts to find a 70-pound cougar that apparently scaled a 14-foot fence to escape a western Indiana wildlife preserve.

The 8- or 9-year-old tan wildcat escaped the Exotic Feline Rescue Center on Friday and eluded a tracker over the weekend, state Conservation Officer Max Winchell said.

The state Department of Natural Resources reported the cougar had not been found by nightfall Monday.

Joe Taft, director of the rescue center, said he believed the cougar may try to stay near the preserve to be near her male sibling, which remained in the cougars' cage. The preserve, which sprawls across more than 100 acres and holds nearly 200 exotic cats under a permit from the U.S. Department of Agriculture, is about 20 miles east of Terre Haute.

BRIEFS

NATION

MIAMI

Package at Miami port
found to be harmless

The Port of Miami was hit by its second terrorism scare in two days Monday when a package that was to be loaded onto a cruise ship tested positive for plastic explosives. Authorities later determined it was just a box of sprinkler parts.

The package was initially tested six times, and each time it came back positive for the military-grade explosive known as C4, the Coast Guard said.

The package was destroyed, and a Miami-Dade County police bomb squad determined the sprinkler parts contained a substance that closely resembles plastic explosives, said police spokesman Bobby Williams.

The package was included in provisions that were to be loaded aboard Royal Caribbean International's Majesty of the Seas.

The developments came a day after three Middle Eastern men in a cargo truck sparked a brief terrorism scare at the port. After a bomb squad search, authorities concluded that the men were carrying automotive parts and that the scare stemmed from miscommunication. A judge dropped all charges against the three men Monday.

WASHINGTON

New spy chief to inherit
a still-changing office

If confirmed as the nation's top spy, Mike McConnell will inherit a work in progress, a new agency that is supposed to streamline the nation's intelligence defenses but which has been beset by bureaucratic resistance in its first two years.



MCCONNELL

House Democrats may push him even further today as they seek to enact unfinished recommendations of the Sept. 11 Commission.

Yet the success of the first intelligence overhaul law, passed in late 2004 at the Sept. 11 Commission's behest, is still an open question. And the pioneer of the overhaul effort, National Intelligence Director John Negroponte, is leaving his post after just 20 months.

A career diplomat, Negroponte has received mixed reviews.

The President's Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board has launched a review of how the fledgling office is getting off the ground, said two intelligence officials who spoke on condition of anonymity because the review hasn't been made public.

The Sept. 11 commissioners and the lawmakers who hammered out the earlier intelligence changes will also be watching McConnell closely.



INDIANA GENERAL ASSEMBLY

DOWN TO BUSINESS

Legislators open with a prayer then begin working
on property taxes, toll roads and other issues

AP PHOTO

Members of the Indiana House bow their heads as a scripted prayer is read to begin the days session of the Indiana House at the Statehouse in Indianapolis on Monday. The attorney general approved the non-sectarian prayer that will be used to open the session.

By MIKE SMITH

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

INDIANAPOLIS

The Indiana House began the 2007 session on Monday with an official prayer, one designed to comply with a federal judge's ruling barring sectarian invocations as part of legislative business.

The brief prayer by new House Speaker Patrick Bauer was directed to "almighty God" but contained no specific references to Christianity.

U.S. District Judge David Hamilton ruled in November 2005 that official House prayers that mentioned Jesus Christ or used terms such as savior amounted to state endorsement of a religion. That case is now on appeal before the 7th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in Chicago.

Republican Rep. Brian Bosma, who

HOUSE PRAYER

Text of prayer given Monday by House Speaker Patrick Bauer to open the 2007 legislative session:

"Almighty God, we come before you today humbled by the magnitude of the responsibilities of this office. May you help us to realize that those who have been given the greatest responsibility need the greatest guidance.

"We pray you will show us what is good and what is required of us. We pray for your insight, your compassion and your strength. Amen."

was speaker at the time of the ruling, has argued on appeal that Hamilton's ruling violated the First Amendment guarantee of freedom of religion because it intrudes on the ability of visiting clergy and lawmakers to pray in accordance with their own conscience.

But last session, instead of continuing a 189-year tradition of beginning House pro-

ceedings with a prayer from the podium, several House members gathered before business began each day and prayed privately at the back of the chamber, often using Christ's name.

Democrats regained control of the House in the November election, and Bauer began the session with a prayer that he said was approved by state Attorney General Steve Carter. The South Bend Democrat had considered beginning chamber proceedings with a moment of silence as the Senate has done since Hamilton's ruling.

Bauer said beginning each day's business with a prayer from the podium was a tradition of nearly 200 years, which he wanted to continue.

"We do have an order, but there is a way temporarily to still pray from the front of the chamber following that order," Bauer said.

Web extra: Visit the Communities page at thejournalnet.com for local legislators' Web sites and bills they're proposing.

Governor's full-day kindergarten plan faces hurdles

By DEANNA MARTIN

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

INDIANAPOLIS

Full-day kindergarten, one of Gov. Mitch Daniels' top priorities, might already be facing political hurdles with only one day of the legislative session in the books.

Though the concept is supported by members of both parties, some Democrats, who control the House, say increasing basic funding for schools is a higher priority than expanding full-day kindergarten. At least one leader of the Republican-controlled Senate

worries that state-funded full-day kindergarten will mean higher property taxes.

House Democrats argue the current budget, approved by a GOP-controlled legislature, provided a minimal increase for schools that relied almost entirely on local property taxes, resulting in more than half of Indiana's districts receiving less money than before.

"They laid off teachers, they

have laid off personnel, they cut programs," new House Speaker Patrick Bauer, D-South Bend, said Monday.

"So first we have to fund them. ... My priority would be first to get a solid, good budget that does not increase property taxes, and then if we can do full-day kindergarten, we will do it to the extent that we can."

Education advocates say full-day kindergarten gives teachers more time to help students, especially those struggling to catch up with their peers.

Daniels has said he will

lobby lawmakers on his proposal, which would phase in full-day kindergarten over three years, starting with the state's neediest children next year.

The plan would cost \$54 million in the 2007-08 school year, but that would grow to \$260 million a year by 2011-12.

Daniels says the state is in the black and can afford to pay for full-day kindergarten that would eventually be available to all Indiana students.

Daniels plans to propose an "aggressive" funding increase for schools, which could help appease House Democrats.



DANIELS

Group: Indiana has more male teachers than other states

The Associated Press

MERRILLVILLE

Indiana has a larger percentage of male educators than some other states, but recruiting men to teach can still be difficult.

Nationwide, men make up about 24.9 percent of public school teachers, according to the National Education Association. In Indiana, they account for about 30.5 percent of teachers, ranking among the top five states in the nation.

Frank Bush, executive director

of the Indiana School Boards Association, said Indiana's fascination with sports and the need for coaches may draw men to middle and high school classrooms. But the state's ranking does not mean Indiana is recruiting enough men to teach, he said.

"I think it's encouraging, but in no way does this number mean we've turned a corner and are doing a good job ... it should be 50 percent," Bush told the Post-Tribune for a Monday story.

Many districts, especially those

in urban areas, might specifically recruit male teachers to deal with a tougher school environment, said Jason Bearce, spokesman for the Indiana Department of Education.

"We're placing greater emphasis on making sure we have quality teachers, whether male or female," Bearce said.

Some men might not consider teaching as a career since other industries offer higher salaries, Bush said.

Joseph Bachan, who used to be in the military, left a corporate

job to become a teacher at Portage High School.

"I was in the business world. It was rewarding, but when I was in the military, I had a feeling I was doing something for the greater good," Bachan said. "I missed that."

Bachan said teaching business and personal law helps him make a difference with high school students.

"I feel better about what I'm doing. I find myself working just as hard, but there's a

Senator
vowing
battle
over warDemocratic leader
says goal is winding
down U.S. Iraq role

By DAVID ESPO

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

WASHINGTON

In a blunt challenge to President Bush, the leader of the Senate's new Democratic majority said Monday he will look at everything within his power to wind down the war in Iraq, short of cutting off funding for troops already deployed.



BUSH

"I think we've got to tell the president what he's doing as wrong. We've got to start bringing our folks home," said Sen. Harry Reid of Nevada in remarks that portend a struggle if, as expected, Bush announces plans later this week for an increase in troop strength of 20,000.

Meanwhile, Sen. Edward M. Kennedy said one option under consideration would be for Congress to vote on denying the use of funds for such an increase in the U.S. deployment. Several officials said the Massachusetts Democrat was hoping lawmakers could register their views before any increase in troops was implemented.

More broadly, Reid signaled that Bush's expected call for an additional \$100 billion for the war would receive close scrutiny from newly empowered Democrats.

"We have a platform we didn't have before, Leader Pelosi and I, and we're going to ... focus attention on this war in many different ways," said Reid. Speaker Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif., suggested over the weekend using Congress' power of the purse to restrain any troop buildup.

More than 3,000 U.S. troops have lost their lives in Iraq in a war nearing the end of its fourth year, and many Democrats attribute their success in last fall's elections to public opposition to the conflict.

The election results, combined with an assessment by the bipartisan Iraq Study Group that the situation in Iraq was grave and deteriorating, coincided with Bush's effort to begin work on a revised policy.

He is expected to make a nationwide televised address on the issue on Wednesday. Several officials have said one leading option for Bush is a so-called "surge" in troop strength, in which about 20,000 troops would be added to the force already in place, in hopes that sectarian violence can be quelled.



REID

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