KBR said Friday the global economic downturn so far has

had

little effect on its business but warned some projects on its books

could be in jeopardy if the headwinds persist into next year.

"With the economic outlook remaining uncertain, it is possible

that

customers may cancel or delay projects that are under way," said

William

Utt, chief executive of the Houston-based engineering and

construction

giant and government contractor.

He did not predict how much of the company's $15.3billion in

future

business commitments could be affected but downplayed the potential

of

any significant impact as "limited."

The remarks came during a conference call to discuss KBR's

third-quarter

financial results, which showed a 35percent improvement over the

same

period in 2007.

KBR, which was spun off from Halliburton Co. last year, posted

better

numbers and beat analyst expectations after a new acquisition

helped

boost sales and offset losses because of Hurricane Ike.

Net income rose to $85million, or 51 cents per share, from $63

million,

or 37 cents, in the July-September period of 2007. Income from

continuing operations totaled 44 cents per share, including

Hurricane

Ike-related costs of 4 to 5 cents a share.

Revenue climbed 39 percent to $3.02 billion from $2.18 billion,

on the

back of big gains in the company's government and infrastructure

unit

and services division.

Investors liked what they saw, boosting KBR shares 77 cents to

$14.84 in

New York Stock Exchange trading.

In commenting on third-quarter earnings in recent days, oil and

gas

executives have made clear that the industry is entering a more

challenging era, given the extreme volatility in the credit,

financial

and commodity markets.

They have cut capital spending budgets for exploration next

year,

revisited generous stock buyback programs and tried to reassure

investors that their balance sheets are strong enough to endure the

current credit crisis.

Utt, like the others, said the long-term fundamentals of the

industry

remain strong.

He suggested KBR could even benefit from the fall of oil prices

into a

more sustainable range, which has helped lower the costs of raw

materials and other project costs. That could encourage customers

to

place more orders.

"Just based on the change in oil price only, we still are at a

point

where our customers are making an affirmative investment decision

for

projects," Utt said, explaining that crude prices near $150 this

summer

likely spurred customers to delay investments until prices cooled.

Jeff Tillery, an industry analyst with Tudor Pickering Holt &amp;amp;

Co.

Securities in Houston, said if KBR sees projects canceled or

delayed, it

would be those in early engineering stages where final investment

decisions haven't been made.

"The cost structure has changed so much that a number of these

projects

the customer is just going to have to go back and re-evaluate," he

said.

But he doubts "big projects have much risk because there's

already so

much capital that's already been put into them."

KBR's biggest business is designing and building large-scale oil

and gas

projects, including refineries, offshore platforms and liquefied

natural

gas terminals.

It also takes major infrastructure projects in the U.S. and

abroad, from

repairing airfields in Iraq to building embassies in other

countries.

But it receives more attention for its exclusive

multibillion-dollar

contract with the Pentagon to provide non-military support to the

U.S.

Army in the Middle East.

Beginning next year, however, the work will be spread among

several

contractors, and KBR expects to receive roughly 40 percent of the

work

under the new contract, Utt said.

If the new U.S. president decides to pull out of Iraq sooner

than

expected, KBR could see a short-term increase in work to mobilize

people

and equipment before Iraq operations wind down, Utt said.

As part of a broader diversification effort since leaving

Halliburton in

April 2007, KBR has been trying to bulk up other divisions,

including

its domestic construction business.

In May, KBR announced a $550million deal to buy Birmingham,

Ala.-based

engineering and construction firm BE&amp;amp;K.

That deal closed in July and in the third quarter helped KBR

boost

revenues by 600percent at its services unit.

But KBR took a hit of 4 to 5 cents per share in the quarter

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Hurricane Ike knocked out windows and damaged the company's

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Three states -- Massachusetts, California and Connecticut -- have

legalized same-sex marriage. And now, three states, California

among them, have proposals on their ballots this month to ban gay

marriage.

But given that the federal government views same-sex married

couples as perfect strangers, ineligible for the many federal

rights given to opposite-sex married couples, the question for gay

couples is this: Is it worth it to tie the knot?

For many couples, the answer is a resounding yes: The word

"married" itself instantly conveys something that civil unions

and domestic partnerships do not.

Yet purely from a financial perspective, it's hard to come to

any sweeping conclusions. For couples living in states that offer

marriage or civil unions -- which provide many of the same rights as

marriage -- it definitely makes sense for them to be married if they

have children, according to financial planners and estate planning

lawyers. Those who make their relationship official may pay

significantly less in state estate taxes. They will also gain

important privileges, including hospital visitation rights and the

ability to make medical decisions for a partner in emergencies.

Still, the many rights that marriage confers vaporize the moment

couples step into a state that does not recognize their unions.

It is a tricky path to navigate, given the patchwork of state

laws and varying grades of benefits they provide. Besides the three

states that allow marriage -- Connecticut made it legal in October --

New Jersey, New Hampshire and Vermont allow civil unions, which

generally approximate marriage. Oregon provides something similar,

but calls it domestic partnership. The District of Columbia,

Hawaii, Maine, Washington and other jurisdictions provide certain

rights under domestic partnership laws. The constant state of flux,

as illustrated by this year's ballot, makes it all the more

complicated.

"It really depends on where you are standing," said David

Buckel, marriage project director and senior counsel at Lambda

Legal in New York. "More than 40 states have passed statutes to

confirm that same-sex couples are not allowed to marry."

There are also certain reasons not to marry. It could ruin your

chances of adopting a child from abroad, for example, because many

countries do not allow openly gay couples to adopt.

Many couples make the leap, even knowing their legal standing

will not be equal to that of opposite-sex couples. Jeff Friedman

and Andrew Zwerin, both 40 and residents of Rockville Centre, N.Y.,

decided to marry as soon as California legalized it in May. They

were wed in Palos Verdes Estates, Calif., on Oct. 12.

Their new status means they can qualify for lower car insurance

premiums because they are no longer considered "single males."

And they hope their marriage will give them more legal standing if

their son, Joshua, 5, lands in the emergency room because of his

asthma. The last time he was admitted, the pediatric nurse told the

two dads that she needed to speak with the child's mother.

But, Friedman said, they are well aware that their marriage

carries no weight when it comes to, say, filing their federal tax

return (though they can file a joint state tax return, which will

allow them to keep more of their earnings). And the marriage

certificate is flimsy when the couple leaves New York, which honors

same-sex marriages performed elsewhere. On family vacations, the

pair will continue to bring along a slightly torn manila folder,

stuffed with documentation -- birth certificates, health care

proxies, powers of attorney and all of their son's adoption records

-- that proves they are a family.

"Our hope is that also providing a marriage license might help

provide additional documentation for proof of how we are all

related," Friedman said. "I want to make sure my son is taken

care of if something were to happen to me."

The list below outlines the benefits same-sex married couples

(and those with civil unions) generally receive, as well as what

they still need to be concerned about. These issues are not as

complicated for opposite-sex couples, because they receive many

more rights when they marry, regardless of where they live, and

those rights are broadly recognized.

MEDICAL POWER OF ATTORNEY

Married or not, all committed same-sex couples should consider a

power of attorney for health care or medical matters, which

appoints a person to make medical decisions for you when you cannot

do so. It is also known as a health care proxy, among other things,

depending on where you live. The document should include an

authorization under the Health Insurance Portability and

Accountability Act to provide access to medical records. You may

also include a hospital visitation directive to specify who can

visit you in the hospital.

Another important document is a living will, which specifies

which medical procedures may or may not be done. "It is an

important document for anyone, but more so for same-sex couples

because we could have family members come in and say, 'No, I know

better and this person has absolutely no standing,"' said James

Tissot, a New York financial planner.

DURABLE POWER OF ATTORNEY

If one partner becomes incapacitated, a durable power of

attorney gives the other partner authority to handle financial and

legal affairs, like paying bills.

WILLS AND TRUSTS

Being married in a state that recognizes your union does not

guarantee that all your assets will go to your partner. (This goes

for heterosexual couples as well.) A will directs how your assets

will be distributed after you die and allows you to name a guardian

for your children. A revocable living trust, on the other hand, is

viewed as more difficult to contest than a will, and it avoids the

sometimes lengthy and expensive legal process to settle a deceased

person's estate. With a revocable living trust, you basically put

all your assets in the trust, and the trustee you name distributes

them according to your directions after you die.

"People just assume they don't need to have legal documents

drafted if they are in a civil union or a marriage, and that is an

entirely wrong assumption," said Debra Neiman, a financial planner

in Arlington, Mass.

RETIREMENT

Since same-sex married couples are not eligible for Social

Security survivor benefits, they may need to save more or make

special arrangements -- like purchasing life insurance -- to be sure

the survivor has enough financial resources if one partner should

die. For instance, if one partner is a stay-at-home parent, that

partner will not qualify for the wage-earning spouse's higher

Social Security benefits if the wage earner dies first, said Peter

Berkery, author of two books on financial planning for same-sex

couples.

PROPERTY OWNERSHIP

Same-sex couples, married or not, need to take extra care when

titling their property, especially their homes. Heterosexual

married couples can transfer real estate and personal property to

each other with no gift taxes and no estate taxes until the second

spouse dies. Same-sex married couples and those with equivalent

rights living in states that recognize them have this benefit only

on the state level. But property passing to a same-sex spouse is

still subject to federal estate taxes upon the first spouse's

death. In 2008, federal estate taxes apply for assets valued at

more than $2 million. Adding a same-sex spouse to the title of your

home may also have tax implications because it would be considered

a gift.

INSURANCE

Same-sex couples, married or not, should consider what types of

insurance they need to make up for benefits that go only to

straight married couples. Life insurance can be used to compensate

for certain retirement benefits or to cover federal estate taxes.

Disability insurance may also be a wise purchase. Normally,

married people qualify for some Social Security benefits if their

spouses become disabled, especially if their children are young.

But same-sex spouses do not qualify. Likewise, long-term-care

insurance should be considered, typically at around age 50, because

it is unclear how same-sex spouses will be treated by Medicaid, a

federal program administered by the state, Neiman said.

SECOND-PARENT ADOPTION

Your marital status does not matter here. If only one spouse is

the birth parent, it is best to conduct a second-parent adoption.

That will allow both parents to make decisions about the child and

will ensure custody in the event that one parent dies, as well as

parental rights should the couple split. Adoption will also give

the child access to health insurance and Social Security disability

or survivor benefits from either parent.

If you live in a state where you cannot get a second-parent

adoption, your next-best option is to create a co-parenting, shared

custody or guardianship agreement, according to Lambda Legal.

GIFTS

Same-sex spouses are subject to federal gift taxes for items

that add up to more than $12,000 annually. But partners, married or

not, can directly pay for medical or education expenses for one

another without consequences. Rick Kraft, a Boston estate-planning

lawyer who works with same-sex couples, recommends a joint account,

as long as it is used for regular household expenses and not

extravagant gifts. Technically, if one partner makes a big deposit

in a shared account and the other makes a big withdrawal, it is a

taxable gift. "It's a sticky area, and there is no definitive

guidance out there about how to apply this in the day-to-day

operation of a household," he said.

Given the tangle of terminology and rights, it is best to sit

down with a financial planner, and perhaps an estate planning

lawyer, to work through your individual situation. Unless the

federal government recognizes same-sex marriage, the complexities

will continue. "It's like seeing someone out in the water drowning

and saying, 'I will give them a lifesaver, but I won't let them on

the boat,"' said P. Louise Halloran, a vice president in wealth

management at Smith Barney in Connecticut, who has several same-sex

couples as clients.

David Pratt, a transfer student to American

University here, was ready to settle for almost anything after a

month-long housing search. So, when he visited a row house in the

Georgetown neighborhood, he overlooked the peeling paint, the

splintered floorboards, the shattered windows and the washing

machine that drained onto the floor.

"I didn't notice all those things," Pratt said. "I was just

happy to have found the place."

In August, when Pratt and his housemates moved in, the previous

tenants were gone, and the 140-year-old house's problems were

glaring. Disenchanted, Pratt, 22, began looking for help.

A quick Internet search found thisshouldbeillegal.com, a Web

site set up in August by city housing officials as part of a

campaign for students and others looking to rent legal and safe

housing.

The city set up accounts on free Web sites, including Facebook,

Twitter and WordPress, with links to housing codes, an inspection

checklist used by the city, and a searchable database of landlords'

business licenses. Renters can also use the sites anonymously to

report violations or to request inspections.

"Too often, students are the target of off-campus landlords

trying to make a quick buck at your expense," Linda Argo, the

director of the program, said in a videotaped introduction to the

Web site. "So we want to put the power in your hands."

More than 9,000 users have visited, and a third of them have

used the database, said Michael Rupert, the city official who works

with the student housing campaign.

Rupert, who lists his cell phone number and e-mail address on

the Web site, said he had taken more than 200 inspection requests

from students, at least 50 of which led to investigations.

Many students are unaware of their rights as renters. Relying on

first impressions of housing or descriptions from online listings,

they can be easy prey for unscrupulous landlords.

Argo said the city wanted a new tool to ease students' concerns

about retaliation and even eviction for reporting illegal rentals

or unsafe properties. Officials said the program could help deal

with problems like those that led to the 2004 death of Daniel

Rigby, a 21-year-old Georgetown University senior.

Rigby died of smoke inhalation, trapped inside his burning

basement apartment blocks from campus. Investigators said metal

bars welded over windows and a furnace blocking a rear exit

prevented him from escaping the fire, which they said was ignited

by a candle or cigarette.

Campus Firewatch, an online publication that tracks student fire

fatalities through news reports, said that 108 of 129

campus-related fire deaths since 2000 occurred in off-campus

housing.

After Rigby's death, fire officials said students turned them

away as they went door-to-door inspecting houses and installing

smoke detectors.

"The traditional methods of outreach were not reaching enough

students because there was too much hesitation about contacting

government," Argo said. "There were too many unknowns."

Across the country, colleges and universities have tried with

varying degrees of success to mediate landlord-tenant

relationships. Many provide rental listings, inform students of

their rights as renters and refer students to the proper

authorities to settle housing disputes. Few colleges provide legal

representation for students who have problems with off-campus

housing, although several give legal advice.

"A lot of people listen, but a lot of people don't," said

Esther Pratt, coordinator of the University of Illinois Student

Tenant Union, which spends more than $20,000 a year to advertise

its services on campus.

Since Rigby's death, Georgetown University officials have

organized an annual safety day featuring housing authorities and

the Fire Department. Julie Battaile, a university spokeswoman, said

the university welcomed the city's new approach.

"The biggest thing is that students didn't know there was such

a thing as a housing inspection that they could get," Battaile

said. "They want to know that kind of information."

When Pratt, the American University senior, and his roommates

got no response to their complaints from the property manager, a

private company called the Student Housing Association, Pratt

called Rupert.

Within two days, an inspector checked the house, and a week

later, the landlord was cited for 17 violations. The city also

opened investigations of the owner of the house, Lewis D. Brown,

who did not have a license to rent the property, and the property

management company.

Brown, the Student Housing Association and its parent company,

Metropolitan Housing, did not respond to repeated calls for

comment.

Pratt said that a month after he contacted the city, the

property manager had completed several repairs, including the

windows and washing machine, and was working on others.

"I'm looking forward to settling this," he said.

Some newspaper editors are wringing their hands over Garry

Trudeau's decision to pen several Doonesbury strips for next week

depicting Barack Obama as the winner of the election.

But for the politically pugnacious cartoonist, banking on an

Obama win a week in advance had zero downside.

"I never considered NOT writing about the election, but to

avoid lameness, I had to predicate it on an outcome," Trudeau

wrote in an e-mail to the St. Petersburg Times.

"If Obama wins, I'm in the flow and commenting on a genuine

phenomenon. If I'm wrong, there'll be such a global uproar that a

goofy call in a comic strip isn't going to be much noticed."

But Trudeau may be overly modest. Already, the Chicago Tribune

has decided to take the Nov. 5 strip off its regular comics pages,

which will be printed before the election results are known .

Some newspapers worry that if Sen. John McCain wins, they'll be

stuck with at least four strips that read like an ongoing "Dewey

Defeats Truman" headline touting a victory that didn't happen and

ticking off some readers.

"If Obama is elected president in (Doonesbury's) world," said

Tim Bannon, editor of the Chicago Tribune's daily features section,

"will he stay president for the next four years?"

Possibly, according to Trudeau, who said it would be a "great

idea" to keep Obama president in Doonesbury even if he loses.

At the St. Petersburg Times, features editor Mike Wilson said

the newspaper will run Trudeau's strips as he wrote them.

"If he's right, the people who like him still like him, and the

people who hate him still hate him," Wilson wrote in an e-mail.

"If he's wrong, everybody gets a 'Dewey Defeats Truman' keepsake,

and the people who hate him are happier than ever. It's a no-lose

situation."

Here are Trudeau's responses to questions from the Times:

What inspired you to write this strip, knowing you might be

wrong?

Fivethirtyeight.com, which is probably the most respected of the

poll analysts, has the likelihood of a McCain victory at 3.7

percent. That was risk assessment I could live with.

What do you think of editors who are deciding not to run the

strip?

I think more of them. It means they're reading their own comics.

What would it say about American voters if you are wrong?

Obama would graciously say that the voters have spoken. Someone

like Bill Maher would call them idiots. I'd split the difference

and say the idiots have spoken.

Eric Deggans can be reached at degganssptimes or (727)

893-8521.

Life has become a little easier for some customers of the

Reserve Fund, the money market fund company whose shareholders have

waited more than six weeks for their money. But it has become

harder for the fund company's regulators.

After freezing withdrawals from most of its money funds in the

wake of a panicky run on Sept. 15, the Reserve Fund mailed out

checks on Friday to shareholders of its giant Primary Fund,

returning half their original stake and promising substantial

future payments as more portfolio assets are sold.

Before the fund can send out the last of those future checks,

however, its regulators at the Securities and Exchange Commission

have to choose sides in a backstage battle between two groups of

Primary Fund investors -- one of which includes an investment arm of

the Chinese government.

That choice will determine how big those final checks will be

and how big a loss shareholders will ultimately incur, at least

until the courts work through the growing docket of lawsuits facing

the fund and its managers.

On one side of the SEC fight are the lawyers for shareholders

who submitted redemption orders after the fund "broke the buck"

on Sept. 16, reporting a per-share value below a dollar -- 97 cents,

to be exact. That team is urging that all shareholders who

submitted redemption orders anytime during or after the week of

Sept. 15 share equally in the liquidation proceeds.

The other legal team represents investors who applied to

withdraw their money on Monday, Sept. 15, when the fund was still

posting a price of a dollar a share, but who did not actually get

paid before redemptions were suspended.

Among those "Monday shareholders" is the Stable Investment

Corp., a subsidiary of the state-sponsored China Investment Corp.,

which has more than $5 billion frozen in the fund.

The corporation "has communicated with the SEC through our

legal counsel, highlighting the fund's promise of full repayment,"

it said in a recent statement. "We reiterated our points to the

SEC with regards to the full recovery of CIC's investment."

Lawyers for the opposing side say they are concerned about the

political pressure that China, one of the nation's major creditors

and trading partners, is putting on the commission -- although the

large institutional clients they represent are generally not shy

about "reiterating" their points to regulators either.

"Generally, we do not comment on whether or not we've been

contacted by outside parties," said John Heine, a spokesman for

the SEC, on Friday. Nor would he indicate when the commission would

make its decision, although lawyers on both sides said a decision

could come as early as next week.

Some Reserve Fund customers who have been unable to tap

much-needed cash for more than a month are getting some of their

money back, even if it is 50 cents on the dollar.

Peggy Lucero, a fund investor in Bethesda, Md., said she was too

angry about the handling of the crisis, both by the fund management

and by government regulators, to take much pleasure in the news.

A check for half her life savings "is not exactly causing me to

jump jubilantly around the cold room in my house," she said.

"When one's checking account is frozen for weeks on end, one is a

bit paranoid about turning the heat up."

But another investor, Michael Rosenbaum, an independent

television producer in Manhattan, said he took "some solace" from

the distribution, after weeks of uncertainty. "It certainly seems

like a great step forward," he said.

The checks mailed on Friday totaled $26 billion. An adviser to

the fund said Friday that it expected to make "substantial

additional distributions" when its remaining $25 billion in assets

were liquidated.

But 17 other Reserve money funds remain frozen, including its

large US Government fund, and the company has not indicated when

those shareholders might expect their money.

WEST PALM BEACH The favorite son returned to the troubled home

on Friday.

Albert Arnold Gore Jr. came back to Palm Beach County and the

bitter memory of butterfly ballots and hanging chads that helped

doom his presidential bid in 2000.

"Sooooo, where were we? It's been a long eight years," Gore

told a crowd at a convention center about a mile from the former

elections office where the confusing ballot was conceived.

His wife, Tipper, at his side and a Barack Obama banner

stretched across the stage, Gore engaged in a subtle game of

what-if: What if he had won and not George W. Bush?

"The economy started going downhill when the policies were

changed and it started on Jan. 20, 2001. I know, I was the first

one laid off," he said. "But seriously, right now we are in the

final days of this historic election. Don't let anyone take your

vote away from you or talk you into throwing it away.

"Take it from me, elections matter. Every vote matters."

The former vice president was making his first appearance for

Obama in Florida, with stops in West Palm Beach and Pompano Beach.

Before modest but enthusiastic crowds, he issued an urgent plea for

voters to head to the polls before Tuesday. The crowd paid homage

in return.

"You're our president," a man shouted at Broward College in

Pompano Beach. Gore smiled, but kept on making the case for the new

Democratic star.

Gore praised Republican Gov. Charlie Crist's "leadership and

statesmanship" for issuing an executive order adding four more

hours a day to early voting. He denounced Sen. John McCain as a

Bush clone, telling an afternoon audience in Broward County that

McCain has overwhelmingly supported the president's policies.

But as much as Gore dutifully played the role of surrogate, the

stain of 2000 permeated the day.

"We know it was the curse of the butterfly ballot that brought

the chaos to the world. It started here and it must end here,"

West Palm Beach Mayor Louis Frankel said before Gore took the

stage.

The ballot was confusing to many Palm Beach County voters

because it listed the names of presidential candidates on opposing

pages, apparently leading many in the heavily Democratic county to

mistakenly select right-wing, third-party candidate Pat Buchanan

instead of Gore.

It was one of a string of mishaps that transfixed the country

indeed, the world as a recount ensued, only to be stopped by the

U.S. Supreme Court.

In the end, Gore lost the Florida vote to Bush by 537 votes.

"I'm just keeping my fingers crossed it's going to be better

this time," said Blanche Vrooman, 83, who came to hear Gore speak

in West Palm Beach. "A lot of us who have voted already wonder if

the votes are going to count or not."

Gore, now 60, was an early favorite to run again this year but

rebuffed the calls. Since his spectacular defeat he has become one

of the leading voices about the threat of global warming, earning

him the Nobel Peace Prize in 2007.

"Certainly this will always be part of Palm Beach's and

Florida's history as well as his history," said Mitchell Berger, a

prominent Democratic fundraiser in Florida and friend of Gore. "He

has shown us all how to get up from a defeat and move on and

rebuild your life."

When the Sheikh Mansour bin Zayed al-Nahyan, a member

of the royal family of Abu Dhabi, swooped in last month to buy the

British soccer team Manchester City, the club's fans were

titillated by the bravado of the oil-rich emirate's front man.

Sulaiman al-Fahim, a property developer who managed the purchase

for the family, vowed to lure soccer's biggest stars and win a

European championship, and socialized with Pamela Anderson and Demi

Moore.

But when it came time to appoint a chairman to run the team's

business side, the flashy Fahim was replaced by one of the royal

family's most trusted advisers, Khaldoon al-Mubarak, the

32-year-old director of Abu Dhabi's high-profile development fund,

Mubadala.

With his designer stubble and perfectly tailored suit, Mubarak

cut a figure of suave aplomb as he watched his new team from the

stands. Later, he issued a soothing statement about developing the

younger players and the 10-year plan for the club, then he

discreetly returned to Abu Dhabi, which is part of the United Arab

Emirates.

The message from the sheiks: no need for bluster and starlets;

Abu Dhabi's money -- all 200 million pounds, or $330 million, of it

-- speaks for itself.

It spoke again on Friday, as Sheikh Mansour, who is also

chairman of the International Petroleum Investment Co., invested

almost 3.5 billion pounds ($5.77 billion) in Barclays, one of

Britain's largest banks -- for a stake that could reach 16 percent

of the bank.

Qatari investors will hold up to another 15.5 percent.

With markets in turmoil and some big sovereign wealth funds

losing billions on Western bets, one of the questions hanging over

the new world economic disorder has been whether sovereign wealth

and other state funds will continue to slosh around the world. The

new Barclay's investment offered a resounding yes.

"We are not going to be running away when the market is down,"

Mubarak said in a brief interview last month. "There are a lot of

interesting opportunities out there."

There are also calls for greater regulation of state-run funds,

fears of a global recession and oil's fall from $145.29 a barrel to

just $67.81 on Friday. But Abu Dhabi sits atop about 9 percent of

the world's oil reserves and still has the cash to spare.

Unlike its larger-than-life neighbor Dubai, it has been until

recently hyperdiscreet about how it deploys its windfall. But now

that it is emerging from the shadows, it is looking for attention --

but not the kind of flash-and-dash that Dubai is known for.

And Mubarak is the perfect avatar. He had a meteoric ascent from

a sales executive for Abu Dhabi's oil company to a powerful seat on

Abu Dhabi's governing executive council and oversight of Mubadala,

the emirate's aggressive development fund, which has recently made

several highly visible strategic investments.

These have included stakes in the private equity fund Carlyle,

the American computer chip maker Advanced Micro Devices and more

recently General Electric.

The emirate's sovereign fund, the Abu Dhabi Investment

Authority, is recognized as the world's largest. It has an

estimated $600 billion, compared with Mubadala's more than $10

billion, and operates behind a thick veil of secrecy. The

authority's mandate is to invest Abu Dhabi's oil surplus abroad as

a hands-off portfolio investor; Mubadala's charge is to invest in

joint ventures that promise both a commercial and a strategic

payback for the emirate.

"Mubarak has become Abu Dhabi's interface with the rest of the

world," said Christopher Davidson, a professor at Durham

University in Britain, who has written an economic history of Abu

Dhabi. "He has the ear of the crown prince and he can step in

whenever he is needed."

Mubarak appeared this summer on CNBC with GE's chief executive,

Jeffrey R. Immelt, to promote an $8 billion joint venture focused

on commercial finance in the Middle East and Africa, and he openly

signaled Mubadala's plan to become one of GE's 10 largest

shareholders.

By July, Mubadala is expected to have completed its planned

accumulation of GE stock, a financial commitment that could surpass

$3 billion.

To a large extent, Mubadala's increasingly public profile

tracked the rise in the price of oil to a peak of $145.29 a barrel

this summer. Falling oil surpluses will most likely create a rising

need for money to support local economies and markets. The federal

government of the United Arab Emirates has already disbursed more

than $30 billion to support local banks.

But Waleed al-Mokarrab, the chief operating officer for

Mubadala, points out that last year the average price of oil was

$80. "We do not expect a massive change for next year," he said,

suggesting the deals will keep coming.

So far, Mubadala has invested in sectors like aerospace, health

care, gas and aluminum production, water purification, computer

chips and, with GE, commercial finance.

"We are literally a development company," said Mokarrab. Like

Mubarak, he was educated in the United States and has a fondness

for American-style business school jargon.

To wit, they call the Abu Dhabi government their shareholder,

refer to investments as "game changers" and speak fluently of

internal rates of return.

"We take money from our shareholder and we create businesses on

the ground," Mokarrab added. "We are building a country

together."

Unlike the investment authority, Mubadala uses debt to help

finance some projects -- crucially, with the guarantee of Abu

Dhabi's cash reserves. The portfolio is financed on a ratio of 60

percent equity to 40 percent debt.

While Mubarak's smooth Western ways and his acumen have

impressed investors, his close relationship with the crown prince,

the younger half-brother of Abu Dhabi's ruler and his expected

successor, is behind Mubarak's increasing prominence. He heads an

elite advisory group called the executive affairs authority that

advises the crown prince, who is considered the leading voice for

cautiously modernizing the emirate, on a range of economic,

financial, social and communications issues. Compared with to its

two flanking neighbors, Saudi Arabia and Iran, Abu Dhabi has made

bold strides, yet its disposition remains secretive and its outlook

cautious, a reflection of the conservative spirit of its ruler,

Sheik Khalifa bin Zayed al-Nahyan.

All of which makes Mubarak all the more crucial. "If you have

his leadership skills and you can speak for the crown prince and

you have money, that is a very effective combination," said David

Rubenstein, a co-founder of the Carlyle Group.

Still, with oil prices continuing to fall and the Persian Gulf's

own economies showing strains, many analysts expect the busy

deal-making of the last year to slow -- somewhat.

Even with oil around $60 a barrel, Abu Dhabi clears a healthy

surplus and the emirate is likely to move cautiously but

purposefully toward a more active role in the international

financial community, with Mubarak and Mubadala front and center.

"He has a lot of bandwidth for his age," said Immelt, GE's

chief, who calls Mubarak a friend. "He is a great public face for

Abu Dhabi as well as being one of the great young business leaders

in the world."

Hexion Specialty Chemicals suffered a serious legal blow on

Friday when a New York state court judge refused to extend the

lending commitments from the company's banks for its proposed

merger with Huntsman.

The decision throws the fate of the $6.5 billion deal into

doubt, and could leave Hexion and its parent, the private equity

firm Apollo Management, on the hook for billions of dollars in

legal damages.

The financing commitments of the banks, Credit Suisse and

Deutsche Bank, are scheduled to expire on Saturday.

In her court ruling on Friday, Justice Eileen C. Bransten of the

state Supreme Court ruled that the banks were entitled to their

original contract.

Friday's decision is the latest blow to Hexion, which was found

by a Delaware court judge to have intentionally breached its

agreement with Huntsman.

In its Delaware lawsuit, the company argued that forcing the

deal's completion would leave the combined Hexion-Huntsman

insolvent. But the Delaware judge ordered Hexion to make its

"reasonable best efforts" to obtain the necessary financing to

close the transaction.

Hexion said it intended to pursue a lawsuit at a court hearing

Monday seeking to force Credit Suisse and Deutsche Bank to finance

the deal.

Huntsman is pressing forward on other fronts as well. The

chemical maker has sued Apollo and two of its top executives, Leon

Black and Joshua Harris, in Texas, arguing that the three

fraudulently lured it away from another proposed merger. Huntsman

recently sued Credit Suisse and Deutsche Bank in Texas as well.

"Hexion remains obligated to use its reasonable best efforts to

obtain the necessary financing and to consummate the transaction,"

Russ R. Stolle, a Huntsman spokesman, said. "Huntsman has been

harmed by both Hexion's and the banks' actions. We will vigorously

pursue our claims for damages in our suits pending in both Delaware

and Texas."

The state education commissioner, Richard P. Mills,

will be stepping down in June after 14 years of overseeing 700

school districts and 3 million students.

Mills, 63, said in an interview on Friday that he had decided it

was time for a change after leading the Education Department

through a critical period that has brought higher standards for

academic achievement and, for the first time, has held school

districts accountable for student performance on standardized

tests.

"I don't want to get to a point where I'm tired and out of

ideas and then say 'I'm leaving,"' he said. "I want to leave at

the top of my game and help the Board of Regents up until the

end."

Mills, who is paid $195,000 a year, was appointed in 1995 by the

Board of Regents, whose 16 members are selected by the state

Legislature for five-year terms. Mills was previously the education

commissioner of Vermont for seven years. Robert M. Bennett, the

chancellor of the Board of Regents, said that a national search

would be held this winter to find Mills' successor.

Under Mills' tenure, the state has raised high school graduation

rates while making college preparatory courses known as Regents

courses a requirement, and making the Regents diploma, which is

granted to students who pass Regents exams in core subjects, the

standard for all students. In addition, the number of credits

required for graduation rose to 22.5 from 20.5.

"His goal was that every district would have a 100 percent

graduation rate, and I think, by and large, you see improvements

across the board," said Henry L. Grishman, superintendent of the

Jericho district on Long Island and former president of the New

York State Council of School Superintendents. Jericho's graduation

rate has averaged between 98 percent and 100 percent in each of the

last three years, up from about 85 percent in the mid-1990s.

With the Regents' backing, Mills in 1999 began holding districts

accountable for student performance on state achievement tests, a

practice that later became mandatory under the 2001 federal law

called No Child Left Behind. The state also established a system of

state report cards to help parents and community members evaluate

their local schools.

In particular, Mills and state education officials made it a

priority to close the achievement gap for poor and minority

students by advocating for more financial resources for districts

with large numbers of poor and disadvantaged students, and by

eventually developing a new school aid formula that allocated more

money for high-needs districts, including New York City's.

"What we've learned is that the direction set by a state leader

matters a lot in terms of whether kids learn or don't," said Kati

Haycock, president of the Education Trust, an advocacy group based

in Washington. "If you judge this man by the improvement in

achievement, especially among minority and poor students, you would

have to say that he helped bring about some of the biggest gains in

the country."

But some educators and parents have said that Mills placed too

much emphasis on standardized testing -- with the result that many

schools focused on drilling students on basic skills in English and

math that were covered on tests at the expense of more creative

forms of instruction in poetry and writing as well as in enrichment

activities like art, music and even field trips.

Mills has also been criticized for his oversight of the

2,800-student Roosevelt school district on Long Island, which

struggled with financial problems and weak student performance for

years after it was taken over by the Education Department in 2002.

In January, the state Legislature approved an $8 million bailout

for the district to settle an accumulated debt that had threatened

to cripple its daily operations.

Mills said he wished that he had known about Roosevelt's recent

financial problems sooner, but moved quickly to address them once

he did. He pointed out that the state had built new buildings in

the district and sent in some of the state's top administrators to

oversee improvements.

He said that while standardized testing was necessary as a way

to gauge student achievement fairly and consistently, he had also

emphasized the need for art and music and other creative pursuits.

Mills got his start in education as a history teacher at the

Dalton School on the Upper East Side of Manhattan from 1967 to

1971, after earning bachelor's and master's degrees in history from

Middlebury College and Columbia University. He subsequently helped

establish and run the Elizabeth Seeger School, an alternative

public high school, on West 12th Street.

Mills said that he planned to continue working in the education

field and would be considering his options after stepping down as

commissioner.

"It will be hard to leave in June, but there's time to get a

lot of work done between now and then," he said. "This experience

has been exhilarating -- even the hardest day has had a clear

purpose. I've never tired of it."

Is Hollywood's next big adventure "Tintin in

Culver City"?

After months of deal-making turmoil, the elaborate, two-film

"Tintin" series planned by the directors Steven Spielberg and

Peter Jackson may find its financiers in a partnership being forged

by Sony Pictures Entertainment and Paramount Pictures.

Sony, the Culver City, Calif.-based parent of Columbia Pictures,

is in advanced negotiations toward a deal to co-finance the films

with Paramount, its Hollywood-based rival. The talks were described

by people who were briefed on them, and who spoke on condition of

anonymity to avoid conflict among the parties.

Kathleen Kennedy, a producer of Spielberg's project, did not

respond to a query. Peter Nelson, a lawyer for Jackson, declined to

comment, as did a Sony Pictures spokesman, Steve Elzer. A

spokeswoman for Paramount also declined to comment.

The negotiations began after Universal Pictures backed away last

month from an arrangement under which it would have shared the

project, based on the long-running Belgian comic strip about a

globetrotting young reporter, with Paramount.

Spielberg has been eager to begin shooting the first movie as

early as this year. Using motion-capture technology that combines

live actors with computer animation, he has already filmed parts of

the picture. But Universal, which had an option to become involved

because Spielberg started the project there 25 years ago, shocked

many in Hollywood by declaring it too risky, despite the

participation of Spielberg, who has kept his offices on Universal's

lot for decades.

The first film's budget of about $130 million is not

exceptionally large by contemporary standards. But Spielberg and

Jackson, as two of the industry's most prestigious directors, were

demanding nearly a third of the movie's gross receipts -- terms that

proved difficult at a time when studios were tightening belts.

Paramount later offered to make the movie on terms it found more

favorable, but the directors' representatives pressed for

alternatives. Sony offered to take the movie under a deal more to

the filmmakers' liking, but Paramount was reluctant to let go

entirely and began discussing a partnership, according to one of

the people briefed on the discussions.

Under the deal now being discussed, Paramount would distribute

the "Tintin" movies in North America and some English-speaking

territories, while Sony would distribute the pictures in various

foreign territories, including Europe and Latin America, according

to a person briefed on the talks. In recent years, studios have

routinely split some of their more expensive movies, usually by

leaving one studio with foreign distribution rights, and another

with domestic.

Thus, "The Curious Case of Benjamin Button," a coming film

directed by David Fincher and starring Brad Pitt, will be

distributed by Paramount in the United States and by Warner

Brothers abroad.

For Sony, a deal would be the first time Spielberg has worked

with the studio as a director since 1991, when he made "Hook" for

the company's TriStar Pictures unit. In 1977, Spielberg made

"Close Encounters of the Third Kind," one of his biggest hits,

for Columbia, long before the studio was acquired by Sony.

The first "Tintin" movie is expected to be ready for release

in 2010. Jackson's installment would come some time after, but does

not yet have a completed script.

For Paramount, a deal would be one more step in the readjustment

of its relations with Spielberg and his new DreamWorks company. The

studio had acquired DreamWorks in 2006, but Spielberg and his

associates left to form a new venture under the same name last

month.

Spielberg is expected to remain involved with a number of

Paramount projects in coming months. He has a producing role, for

instance, on "Transformers: Revenge of the Fallen," a sequel set

for release in June.

Meanwhile, his new company remains entangled with Paramount

through their mutual interest in dozens of development projects

that are owned by the big studio, but may be produced and

distributed through collaborative arrangements between them over

the coming years.

Heated political debates. Dramatic anti-testing videos. Disputes

over prime poster placement in the gym.

Campaign season is in full swing at suburban Sylvester Middle

School south of Seattle--and it's intense.

Each student in Ellyn Roe's social studies/language arts class was

assigned to campaign on campus for a candidate for president,

governor or state school superintendent.

The eighth-graders threw themselves into the project with fervor,

and ballots in the school's mock election already have started to

trickle in.

The Washington Assessment of Student Learning is a hot topic,

particularly in the race for state school superintendent, Roe said.

Students campaigning for incumbent Terry Bergeson have played up

her plans to shorten the test this spring, while members of

challenger Randy Dorn's crew have been running an in-house

television ad with the tagline "A vote for Randy Dorn is a vote

against the WASL."

"That one definitely hits close to home," Roe said. "There's

been a good, healthy debate."

They are among the thousands of Washington students who can't

legally vote, but are expressing their political views by

campaigning for candidates in school or participating in national

or state mock elections.

Nearly 14,000 Washington students already have voted in the Youth

Leadership Initiative's 2008 Mock Election, run by the nonprofit

Center for Politics at the University of Virginia.

There was last-minute campaigning as students at Seattle's Chief

Sealth High School filed into the library Thursday to cast online

ballots.

"O-bam-a!" a few chanted softly, while others urged, "Vote for

McCain or you're insane!"

"They're always surprised by the number of presidential

candidates," said Noah Zeichner, who teaches Spanish and social

studies, and got Sealth involved in the election. "They don't hear

much about third-party candidates in the media."

Sealth's results Friday: An overwhelming majority of students voted

for Barack Obama, re-elected Gov. Christine Gregoire and U.S. Rep.

Jim McDermott by large margins, and named the economy as the most

important election issue.

Even kindergarteners cast ballots in a mock election organized by

the Washington Secretary of State. That balloting ended Friday

afternoon with a majority of students statewide selecting Obama,

while challenger Dino Rossi appeared to edge out Gregoire for

governor.

That ballot included several state initiatives, although the ones

for elementary-schoolers were made up.

Not surprisingly, they shot down an initiative that called for

students to eat at least a serving of vegetables at lunch, or risk

losing recess time.

While parents often shape students' political views, many secondary

school teachers have used the election to encourage students to

form their own political identities.

At the Puget Sound Skills Center in Burien, social studies

specialist Michael McSweeney spent weeks discussing the election

with his students.

He has urged them to compare the presidential candidates' stances

on various issues and helped eligible students register to

vote--all without giving away his own political views.

It has had a profound effect on Mt. Rainier High School student

Michael Anderson, who said he grew up in a Democratic-leaning

family and had supported Obama.

But in McSweeney's class, he's studied both candidates and finds

himself drawn to John McCain because of his views on abortion and

gay marriage.

"I'm still kind of confused, in the middle," he said. "But I'm

realizing you really have to look at both sides."

At Pacific Middle School in Des Moines, teachers challenged

students to rethink their political views by reading articles

written by Obama or McCain, with the candidates' names removed. The

teens shared what they liked about each piece and what inspired

them--without knowing who wrote what.

Some students were surprised to find out they liked "the other

guy," said Jennifer Christenson, who teaches social studies and

leadership.

"A lot of them hear things at home and that's their primary source

of information," she said. "This helps them see the bigger

picture."

The school will hold a mock presidential election early next week,

followed by another election Thursday to choose student-body

officers.

Student candidates submitted brief biographies and photos, which

were compiled into a voters' pamphlet.

Top finishers in the school's primary last week were allowed to

hang one campaign poster in the cafeteria and will deliver a speech

to classmates Thursday morning.

The timing is perfect, Christenson said: "We can mirror what's

going on in the real world."

The cosmetic company Avon Products traces its roots to the horse

and buggy days of the late 19th century, when sales representatives

sold perfume door-to-door, often to women who lived far from big

department stores.

This American frontier model has translated well to countries

like Brazil and China, where large populations are dispersed across

a vast countryside. Today, more than two-thirds of Avon's sales are

outside the United States.

The direct-selling model -- where independent sales

representatives do not work directly for Avon -- makes it easier to

break into new markets, says Avon's chairwoman and chief executive,

Andrea Jung. About 5.5 million sales representatives now sell Avon

products, be it lip gloss in Shanghai, China, or face powder in Rio

de Janeiro, Brazil.

The company, reporting its third-quarter earnings Thursday, said

the only region where sales fell was North America, which it

defines as the United States, Canada and Puerto Rico. By contrast,

revenue rose 25 percent in both Latin America and China and 8

percent in Western Europe, the Middle East and Africa.

Jung, who was born the daughter of Chinese immigrants in Toronto

and moved to a suburb of Boston when she was 10, recently discussed

how she thinks the company's direct-selling model can improve the

lives of women in developing countries and where the next big

growth opportunities are for Avon.

Q: Since you became the chief of Avon in 1999, the company has

expanded into emerging markets. Why do you think your

direct-selling model works so well in developing countries?

JUNG: It is part of a movement around the world for women to

have more economic independence. From her very first order, a

representative does not have to pull the money out of her pocket.

We send her the products, and she pays us after she sells them. The

direct-selling model does not have to be centered around where

there is heavy retail infrastructure, either. For example, China is

going to be one of Avon's largest market opportunities. It has a

large geographic expanse, with hundreds of thousands of women in

small villages really striving to make an earnings opportunity for

themselves.

Q: And the majority of your independent sales representatives

are women?

JUNG: Well over 95 percent are women and the men are often in

Avon couples. I love those conversations, where the husbands tell

me that they quit their jobs because their wife's business was

doing so well, so they've joined forces to run the business as a

couple.

Q: Given the fact that your sales representatives are not

employed by Avon, how do you establish new markets?

JUNG: We hire recruiting managers, who are Avon employees. They

start canvassing for representatives in work places, in religious

gatherings, in school fundraisers. We also run recruiting

advertisements in a dozen markets today. And we train our

representatives how to manage their businesses online. For example,

in Turkey, where there is not much Internet penetration, we have

close to 100 percent of our sales representatives entering their

orders online. They go to Internet cafes or libraries.

Q: How do you deal with economic uncertainty in emerging

markets?

JUNG: With what's going on the last couple of weeks, it reminds

me of the very difficult time we had in Russia. I recall in the

late '90s, with the massive devaluation of the ruble, our Russian

business really became quite challenged. Some companies were

retrenching, but we looked across Russia and saw 11 time zones,

with women in every small town and village who wanted the

opportunity to be economically independent. So we were committed to

staying.

Q: Do you feel that your experience growing up as the daughter

of Chinese immigrants has influenced your career?

JUNG: It has given me a global vantage point, being the daughter

of immigrants from China, who had nothing when they came here. And

now I am leading a company. It speaks to something deep in me, the

concept that you don't have to start with anything. The

direct-sales opportunity allows people to change their lives.

Q: Many of your customers are familiar with the work of the Avon

Foundation, but they might not know that you have similar programs

in countries like Mexico and Malaysia. How global is your

philanthropy now?

JUNG: We've got programs in around 50 different countries.

Together, we have raised $580 million, mostly for breast cancer

research, diagnosis and treatment.

A couple of years ago, we added a second issue: violence against

women. We have made educational pamphlets about breast self-exams

and about domestic violence, which our representatives can give to

their customers. We have donated mammography units to underserved

hospitals in Spain and created mobile mammography units in China.

Recently, I had one of those amazing experiences where life and

work intersect. My maternal grandmother, who was from mainland

China, died of breast cancer in Singapore in the 1970s. It was

diagnosed at a late stage and she just passed away. It was

something that wasn't talked about back then. It was the "C"

word. About a year ago, my mother discovered that she had breast

cancer. She was diagnosed at an Avon breast cancer center, which

our people worked so hard to donate to Mass. General. It was

detected at a very early stage, with digital mammography, and one

year later she is cancer-free. When I look at the two generations

in my own family, it shows the progress that has been made on this

issue over the last 30 years.

TAMPA All agreed that the new chief at U.S. Central Command

needs no introduction.

Gen. David Petraeus, widely feted as the architect behind the

Iraq troop surge, took the helm at CentCom on Friday in an hourlong

ceremony under fluttering flags off Hillsborough Bay.

Petraeus comes to CentCom headquarters at MacDill Air Force Base

with enormous political capital and the kind of military reputation

seldom seen in the days since World War II.

As the outgoing CentCom commander, Lt. Gen. Martin Dempsey,

joked, "You probably need less introduction than anyone I know."

Petraeus comes to CentCom with the challenge of stemming the

rising violence in Afghanistan.

Petraeus, 55, shook Dempsey's hand the pair are from the same

West Point class of 1974 and offered a few quiet words as he took

official responsibility for CentCom's area of responsibility.

That responsibility is one of the largest in the U.S. military:

nearly two dozen countries, including oversight for the wars in

Iraq and Afghanistan and other hot spots such as Pakistan.

Petraeus, who has served three tours in Iraq including one as

commander of the 101st Airborne Division, is credited with policies

helping curb violence in Iraq.

And expectations that he will do the same in Afghanistan could

hardly be higher.

Defense Secretary Robert Gates praised Petraeus and Dempsey, who

had been the acting Centcom commander for seven months after Adm.

William Fallon was forced to resign.

Speaking of Petraeus, Gates said "history will regard him as

one of our nation's great battle captains. He is the preeminent

soldier, scholar, statesman of his generation. And he is precisely

the man we need at this command. ... Now he will take aim at our

adversaries in Afghanistan."

Petraeus, who had served as the overall ground commander in Iraq

since early 2007, is expected to quickly travel back to CentCom's

area of responsibility in the Middle East.

The general warned all: "The way ahead will be difficult."

Never thought I'd see the day when those two drama kings of the

hemispheres, David Beckham and Diego Maradona, would be

overshadowed by a second-string goalkeeper from Major League

Soccer.

But that is exactly what happened recently, as one soaring free

kick by Danny Cepero, making his league debut for the Red Bulls,

bounced into the opposing goal. Bend that, David and Diego.

Goals by goalkeepers happen to be one of my favorite

man-bites-dog events -- even more than home runs by pitchers or

touchdowns by lumbering 350-pound linemen.

I've always loved the sight of feral keepers like Rene Higuita

and Jose Luis Chilavert and Jorge Campos, Renaissance men from the

Americas. Now Cepero, out of the University of Pennsylvania, has

become an instant legend.

Cepero will be in goal Saturday at 4 p.m. when the Red Bulls

open the playoffs against Houston at Giants Stadium. He promises no

such fireworks like the 81-yard goal he unleashed on Oct. 18 -- a

freakish bounce on the home artificial turf, the first keeper's

goal in 13 years of the league's existence.

The goal managed to eclipse the latest buzz from the peripatetic

Beckham and the erratic Maradona.

Beckham arranged to take the winter semester in Italy, on loan

from the Los Angeles Galaxy to AC Milan, so that he can keep sharp

for possible duty with the English national team.

Maradona's odyssey is far more bizarre. Bounced out of world

soccer because of his drug habit, nearly dead from his appetites,

he is becoming the coach of Argentina -- the equivalent of the

United States putting Jose Canseco in charge of the U.S. team for

next year's World Baseball Classic.

However, Beckham's and Maradona's pursuits pale compared with

Cepero's awesome kick. Cepero got his chance because two teammates,

including the resident keeper, Jon Conway, were each suspended for

10 games because of a positive drug test -- from an over-the-counter

supplement they had considered safe, they said. Cepero, 23, had

played two reserve games for the Red Bulls.

"He's one of the more cerebral chaps on the team," Des

McAleenan, the team's goalkeeper coach, said. "He reads, he's very

likable, never too high, never too low."

In fact, Cepero is earning the last credits toward his degree at

Penn, driving down to Philadelphia each week for a course, "The

End of European Empire," which he said was about decolonization,

concentrating on Britain.

He also studies his arcane craft. McAleenan, who has trained

international keepers like Tony Meola and Tim Howard with this

franchise, has encouraged Cepero to produce long goal kicks to give

the offense a chance to work mischief at the far end. McAleenan

noted that Cepero was not among the strongest kickers he had

coached.

Some keepers insist on taking free kicks and penalty kicks.

Rogerio Ceni of Brazil has produced more than 80 goals in domestic

competition, according to FIFA.com, Chilavert of Paraguay has

produced more than 60, and Higuita of Colombia more than 40. (The

exact totals are obscured by various league matches over the

years.) Then there was the flamboyant Campos of Mexico, who not

only took the occasional kick but also would take the ball upfield

with his dancing feet or even play striker when the mood struck.

"My mother is from Mexico, and she is a big fan of Campos,"

Cepero said, adding that many Latino keepers have an admirable

flair for the dramatic. He did score a few goals as a teenager in

Baldwin, N.Y., playing the field, but he is hardly a free-kick

candidate.

Pressed into duty with two days' notice on Oct. 18, Cepero had a

2-1 lead in the 83rd minute. Given a direct kick, he lined up the

ball on the left side, about 25 yards upfield, motioning his

teammates to move forward, and he let fly. From three-quarters of

the field away, he saw the ball take a high bounce over the

Columbus keeper, also a backup, then he saw a flutter in the cords

of the net. Cepero's vision was so obscured that he did not see the

ball go in, but he received a context clue when teammates rushed

upfield and hugged him.

"I expected it to happen on this field," McAleenan said,

referring to the artificial turf. "That is carpet over concrete.

It just happened to be Danny."

Since that stunning moment, Cepero has received messages from

strangers from as far away as Croatia and Cyprus as well as from

old friends, but no endorsements and no re-creation of the kick,

straight down Broadway, for the Letterman show. At least not yet.

Reality hit home in the next game when the Red Bulls lost, 5-2,

at Chicago, McAleenan blaming their nonexistent defense. The Red

Bulls were lucky to squeak into the playoffs when DC United

stumbled in its final game.

This has been a star-crossed franchise since its first home game

as the MetroStars when a hapless defender (from Italy's top league)

bumbled in an own goal. Now Danny Cepero has overshadowed David

Beckham and Diego Maradona. Could this franchise's dismal karma

finally be changing?

TAMPA Jon Gruden made a certain observation about new return

man Clifton Smith on Sunday at Dallas.

The Buccaneers coach noticed Smith has a particularly good sense

of direction, knowing the best way to get up the field is going

north and south.

"I like that. A lot of guys go backward," Gruden said. "I'm

not saying Dexter (Jackson) did or does. I'm just saying that a lot

of guys retreat because there's no one there."

Jackson is the guy whose job Smith, an undrafted rookie, appears

to have taken. One of Jackson's flaws as the primary returner

during Weeks 1-7 was a tendency to cut back in an effort to gain

yards laterally.

Conversely, Smith charged forward each time he handled a punt or

kickoff against the Cowboys, making for an impressive pro debut

that was marred slightly by a lost fumble. Smith's first touch was

a 20-yard punt return, the Bucs' longest of the season.

There's a fearlessness about Smith that makes him appealing.

"It's a hard thing to come by to go out and find a player who

will sacrifice his body to run up and catch a ball, hit a hole and

be able to give the offense what it needs and keep the defense off

the field," Smith, 23, said.

You don't have to remind Gruden how rare a breed he is.

"When you go forward, there's everybody coming at you," he

said. "It's not a job that everybody is after. There aren't a lot

of guys that want to return kickoffs and punts in the National

Football League.

"You stand down there on the sidelines, and I stand behind

players. It's a bizarre scene. These guys are flying down there.

It's not for everybody."

Smith was a regular returner at Fresno State and had great

success. As a sophomore, he set an NCAA record with three punt

returns for 189 yards and two touchdowns against Weber State. And

he attended a school that is renowned for its emphasis on special

teams.

"We led the country in blocked kicks and other special teams

categories," he said. "(Playing special teams) taught me to be a

versatile player.

"I can run down on a kickoff and know what I'm doing. I can

come off the edge and be a punt rusher and block punts. It helped a

lot."

How did the experience translate to the NFL? Smith said he

believes he made an impression in Dallas, and it's hard to argue.

He was unspectacular on kickoffs, averaging 20.7 yards on three

returns. But on punts, he was a significant upgrade, averaging 16.4

yards to Jackson's 4.9.

But Smith worries what he will be remembered for more: his

decisive running or his fumble of the second-half kickoff that

Dallas recovered.

"I felt like I opened some eyes," he said. "But then again,

I'll have that question mark over my head like, 'Well, he might be

a fumbler,' which is a stigma I don't want on me at all. It's not

my game to put the ball on the ground."

The good news for him is he likely will get another shot Sunday

in Kansas City. After spending seven weeks on the practice squad,

Smith has learned to wait his turn.

"It's always tough to be patient," he said. "But that's the

name of the game. They always say it's a long season and something

is bound to happen. And before you know it, it'll be on you to go

out there and take advantage of your opportunities."

Sure enough, Smith's time is now.

Stephen F. Holder can be reached at sholdersptimes.com.

CINCINNATI USF's Matt Grothe said Monday that Nippert Stadium

was his favorite place the Bulls had visited, if only for the

old-school design of the Bearcats' homefield.

But the quarterback can't be as happy with his performances at

Nippert, where the Bulls have seen two lopsided losses and the two

lowest-rated performances of his USF career.

"They had us tonight. That's all I can say," Grothe said after

Thursday's 24-10 loss. "We couldn't do anything. They did a good

job of stopping us, and we did a good job of stopping ourselves."

Grothe, selected as a game captain for the first time in his

Bulls career, went 13-for-31 on Thursday with no touchdowns and

three interceptions. It marked the lowest completion percentage of

his 35 career games, and his passer rating of 20.8 is also his

lowest ever.

The junior's previous low rating was his last game at Nippert, a

23-8 loss in 2006 that saw him pass for 47 yards in 21 attempts.

Grothe has had only three games at USF in which he failed to pass

or rush for a touchdown; two of them have come at Nippert.

Thursday's statistics weren't all Grothe's fault, as his

receivers consistently failed to bring in catchable passes, with at

least five drops on a night in which Cincinnati's receivers had

several highlight-reel catches. Grothe's third interception came on

a pass that TE Cedric Hill juggled into the arms of CB DeAngelo

Smith.

Asked what has changed about USF from the team that opened 5-0

and was ranked No. 10 just a month ago, Grothe said he didn't have

an answer.

"I have no idea," he said. "That's a good question.

Something."

BIG CHANGE: Before Thursday, Cincinnati hadn't converted a third

down in its previous two games, going a combined 0-for-25, but the

Bearcats had no such troubles against the Bulls.

QB Tony Pike converted on third and 10 in the first quarter with

a 48-yard pass to WR Marty Gilyard. The Bearcats went 4-for-5 on

third downs in the first half in building a 17-7 lead.

THIS AND THAT: The 49-yard field goal by freshman Maikon Bonani

is a season long for him by 5 yards. It's the fourth longest in USF

history and the longest since Delbert Alvarado hit a Big East

record 56-yarder against Syracuse in 2006. DE George Selvie, who

saw some action as a roving "spy" linebacker, said the Bulls

tried the defensive strategy after seeing Oklahoma use it against

the Bearcats this season.

Greg Auman can be reached at (813) 226-3346 and at

aumansptimes.com. Check out his blog at blogs.tampabay.com/usf.

TAMPA The Bucs second-guessed their decision to play Warrick

Dunn in their previous game. They will have another decision to

make on the 33-year-old running back Sunday at Kansas City.

Dunn, who played sparingly Sunday against the Cowboys, has a

pinched nerve in his back and did not practice this week. It's

likely he will be held out against the Chiefs and replaced by

Michael Bennett. In the end, it will be a game-time decision.

"These guys that play seven, eight, nine, 10, 12 years, there's

a reason why they do that," coach Jon Gruden said. "The guys who

have had the kind of careers that Warrick has had, they all play

through so many different things.

"If he can go based on our eyes and our visual evaluation,

we'll certainly let him play. But for the time being, we've got to

do what's right, too. And that's wait until we see it happen."

More injuries: Starting LG Arron Sears has a back strain and

sustained a mild concussion in practice Wednesday even though it

was supposed to be noncontact and players weren't wearing helmets.

He also will be a game-time decision.

If Sears can't go, rookie Jeremy Zuttah will start.

"You try to reduce contact, and you have a collision," Gruden

said. "That just shows you a little about our team. You have a

tendency to go a little too hard all the time."

FB B.J. Askew, who did practice this week, is not expected to

play. WR Maurice Stovall also will be out. Both are recovering from

hamstring injuries.

fines: LB Cato June was fined $5,000 by the league for throwing

a punch at Dallas RT Marc Colombo, and Bucs RT Jeremy Trueblood was

fined $7,500 for throwing his helmet at the end of the game.

TRAP GAME: At 1-6, Herm Edwards' Chiefs appear to be circling

the drain. They have a second-year quarterback in Tyler Thigpen

from Coastal Carolina who is making his third NFL start.

But Edwards is rebuilding with high draft picks on defense, and

their lone victory came at home against a Broncos team that now

leads the AFC West at 4-3.

That's enough for Gruden to channel Lou Holtz, the former Notre

Dame coach famous for building up opponents.

"If you look at the film, they're a good defensive team,"

Gruden said. "They've yielded some big plays, and a lot of the big

plays they've given up have been at the end of games where they're

frantically trying to get the ball back. They played Denver

extremely well. They had the Jets (beat on Sunday before losing

late). They're a hard team to throw the ball against.

"I've been to Arrowhead (Stadium) enough times. It never

matters what their record is or what the stakes are. They play

their butts off in their stadium, and we've got to know that."

When Proposition K was added to Tuesday's

ballot, many people likely snickered at the possibility that San

Francisco might take its place alongside such prostitute-friendly

havens as Amsterdam and a few rural counties in nearby Nevada.

But this week, it became readily apparent that city officials

are not laughing anymore about the measure, which would effectively

decriminalize the world's oldest profession in San Francisco. At a

news conference on Wednesday, Mayor Gavin Newsom and other

opponents seemed genuinely worried that Proposition K might pass.

"This is not cute. This is not fanciful," Newsom said,

standing in front of the pink-on-pink facade of a closed massage

parlor in the Tenderloin district. "This is a big mistake."

Supporters of the measure say it is a long-overdue correction of

a criminal approach toward prostitutes, which neither rehabilitates

nor helps them, and often ignores their complaints of abuse.

"Basically, if you feel that you're a criminal, it can be used

against you," said Carol Leigh, who says she has worked as a

prostitute for 35 years and now works as an advocate for those who

trade sex for money. "It's a really serious situation, and ending

this criminalization is the only solution I see to protect these

other women working now."

The language in Proposition K is far-reaching. It would forbid

the city police from using any resources to investigate or

prosecute people who engage in prostitution. It would also bar

financing for a "first offender" program for prostitutes and

their clients or for mandatory "re-education programs."

One of the measure's broadest prohibitions would prevent the

city from applying for federal or state grants that use "racial

profiling" in anti-prostitution efforts, an apparent reference to

raids seeking illegal immigrants.

The fight over the ballot initiative has become an awkward test

of San Francisco's dual attitudes of live-and-let-live and

save-the-world. In the campaign's closing days, the rhetoric on

both sides has heated up. Supporters of the measure accuse the city

of profiting from prostitution through fines. They also imply that

laws against prostitution are inherently racist because minorities

are disproportionately arrested.

Proposition K, they say, will increase safety for women, save

taxpayer money and cut down on the number of murders of prostitutes

at the hands of serial killers.

But opponents dismiss the notion of legions of prostitutes

happily romping through the city's neighborhoods. "This isn't

'Pretty Woman,"' was how one put it.

Anti-Proposition K forces paint grim pictures of girls and women

from across the country held against their will in dark and

dangerous brothels here, forced into unsafe sexual behavior, and

often beaten, intimidated and raped.

"You're going to have young girls recruited and brought to San

Francisco, and they are going to be standing on these corners,"

said Norma Hotaling, the founder and director of Standing Against

Global Exploitation, an outreach project here. "And there's not

going to be any services for them to go to, and the police are not

going to have any means of investigating the cases."

The measure seems particularly abhorrent to San Francisco's

district attorney, Kamala D. Harris, who has made fighting human

trafficking a priority.

"I think it's completely ridiculous, just in case there's any

ambiguity about my position," Harris said. "It would put a

welcome mat out for pimps and prostitutes to come on into San

Francisco."

Central to Harris' objections is the theory that prostitution is

a victimless crime. Instead, she said, it exposes prostitutes to

drug, gun and sexual crimes, and "compromises the quality of life

in a community."

She also dismisses the argument that prostitutes would be more

likely to come forward if their business were not illegal.

"We're in the practice and habit of protecting victims, not

criminalizing victims," Harris said, adding that she often reminds

juries that the law protects people even if they are prostitutes or

drug users. "Our penal code was not created just to protect Snow

White," she said, noting that 65 percent of cases handled by her

department's sexual assault unit involved sex workers as victims.

Officials with the state attorney general's office would not

comment on the measure.

The city's Board of Supervisors, several of whom have expressed

support for the measure in the past, would have the power to amend

Proposition K if it passed. San Francisco, which has an exotic

dancers union and a well-established history of sexual freedom, is

not the first liberal outpost to mull legalizing prostitution. A

decriminalization bill was defeated by voters in Berkeley, Calif.,

in 2004.

Heidi Machen, a spokeswoman for the opposition, said her side

was hoping for a solid defeat. "We want this to fail by a

landslide," she said. "So it doesn't come back."

A local CBS poll released Thursday found that 35 percent of

likely voters supported the measure, while 39 percent were opposed.

But 26 percent were still undecided.

On Thursday night, about 50 supporters of the measure gathered

at a church to press their case. One of them, Patricia West, 22,

said she has been working for about a year as an "independent,

in-call escort."

West said that she enjoyed her work and believed that

Proposition K would allow prostitutes to organize into collectives

and negotiate for safer working conditions and better wages.

West concedes that what she does for a living "can be

dangerous." But she hoped Proposition K would make her occupation

safer and more legitimate. "Working in a coal mine can be really

dangerous, too," she said, "but it pays a lot of money so you're

compensated for your risk."

Lightning coach Barry Melrose knows exactly how the media game

is played.

Twelve years as an analyst for ESPN provides such insight.

So, when reporters took shots at his team for its stumbling

start, Melrose reminded it was early. When columnists speculated

his job already is in jeopardy (Sports Illustrated incorrectly

predicted he would be the first coach fired), he shrugged.

"That's their job," Melrose said. "I know all those guys.

When we win a couple, I'll be the greatest coach in the world, so I

don't worry about stuff like that. If you worry about stuff like

that, you shouldn't be in the business."

It is difficult to imagine a coach with a shorter honeymoon.

Chicago's Denis Savard was canned after four games, but that was

the final act of a scripted drama. Melrose is a new hire in a

situation that screams for patience: 15 new players learning a new

system while their coach, out of the game since he was fired by the

Kings in April 1995, tries to re-establish his credibility and that

of a team that last season was the league's worst.

But given the money owners Oren Koules and Len Barrie have put

into the roster, even Melrose said, "I don't think we have a year.

I'm under no illusion I have a five-year plan."

If there is a timetable, general manager Brian Lawton isn't

saying. "We're still in the earliest stages of evaluation," he

said of a process he stressed is focused on the entire team.

"We expect a lot from our players. We expect a lot from our

coaches, so thus, my comments would be we still have a lot of work

to do. We're not where we want to be or expect to be."

But heading into tonight's game with the Senators at the St.

Pete Times Forum, things are better. Tampa Bay (3-3-3) has won two

straight, and three of four, and Thursday dominated the

then-Northeast-leading Sabres 5-2 in Buffalo.

"The guys better know their roles now and understand what it's

going to take for us to be a good team, and a lot of that has to do

with him," left wing Mark Recchi said of Melrose. "Has everyone

done the right things? No. We haven't as players. But he cares.

He's passionate about it and wants us to do the right things."

Recchi said that Melrose had instant credibility with the

players "because he is a hockey person and we know he's a good

coach, so he had respect coming in."

Melrose, 52, said the only way for him to earn self-respect was

to get behind the bench.

"If I wouldn't have taken the job, I would have been a

hypocrite," Melrose said. "I'm sitting up there (at ESPN) and

criticizing other people and talking stuff, and if you have a

chance to get back in the fight and don't take it, I would have

been very disappointed in myself for not having the courage to do

that."

Asked if coaching is different from when he led the Wayne

Gretzky Kings to the 1993 Stanley Cup final, Melrose dragged out

what he admits is an old line that exaggerates to make a point.

The Kings, he said, had three players who were millionaires.

"Now, I have three who aren't."

Seriously, have new defensive strategies and antiobstruction

rules made it a different game?

"That's the easy answer," he said. "But the good teams still

win with character, they still win with competition, they still

outwork you. Goaltending is still the most important position of

any position in sports, and hockey is still a game of passion."

And I-told-you-so's.

Shortly after beating the Sabres, Melrose was asked if the

Lightning's two-game winning streak qualified him as a genius.

"No, just smart," he said. "For a genius, you have to win,

like, four in a row."

Damian Cristodero can be reached at cristoderosptimes.com.

Follow his blog at blogs.tampabay.com/lightning.

TONIGHT

Lightning vs. Senators

When/where: 7:30; St. Pete Times Forum, Tampa

Radio: 620-AM

Injuries: Tampa Bay F Ryan Craig (groin) and RW Radim Vrbata

(groin) are day to day. Ottawa None.

Key stats: Lightning centers Steven Stamkos and Vinny Lecavalier

each have two goals, two assists in their past two games. Ottawa's

Filip Kuba, right, a former Lightning, entered Friday tied for the

league lead among defensemen with 11 points, all assists. ... The

Senators, who have scored with the man advantage in nine of 10

games, had the league's No. 3 power play at 24.5 percent and was

No. 2 on the road at 29.4 percent.

Before the season began, Florida's depth chart at running back

consisted of a senior with an up-and-down career (Kestahn Moore), a

transfer who hadn't played in nearly 18 months (Emmanuel Moody), a

redshirt freshman coming off 2007 shoulder surgery (Chris Rainey)

and Jeff Demps, a true freshman with world-class speed .

It was Demps who intrigued coach Urban Meyer most. He thought

with time lots of time the young man from South Lake High in

Groveland could be a great player at Florida.

But running backs coach Kenny Carter saw things a little

differently. During his first full meeting with Demps, who arrived

on campus in July, the veteran assistant sensed quick impact

potential.

" And I'll tell you why," Carter said emphatically. "The

first time I got a chance to sit down with him and talk about our

pass-protection scheme and the things that we do he understood it

and could spit it back at me immediately. When he did that, I was a

happy man. Because I knew that if he could do that, he was ready.

That was right when we started being able to do football stuff. He

just took off and could do it all. So we were really excited about

that."

Along with excitement, Demps and Rainey have brought a

legitimate running game to the Gators, something Meyer didn't have

in his previous three years at Florida, outside of wide receiver

Percy Harvin. Gators running backs have accounted for 896 yards on

127 carries and 10 touchdowns. They totaled 761 yards on 136

carries last season.

Demps and Rainey emerged after the loss to Ole Miss, in which

senior Moore and transfer Moody were injured.

In the past three games, Demps and Rainey have carried 52 times

for 487 yards and four rushing touchdowns. Demps had consecutive

100-yard games (Arkansas, LSU), and his 11.9 yards-per-carry

average leads Division I-A (minimum 25 attempts). His average

touchdown run is 47 yards.

"I'm working as hard as I can, just trying to do whatever I can

to help my team," the soft-spoken Demps said. "I still have a lot

to learn."

In the Arkansas game Oct. 4, the Gators set a single-game record

for rushing yards under Meyer (278) and followed with the

second-best mark against then-No. 3 LSU.

At "5-foot-nothing" as Meyer jokingly refers to Demps (5 feet

8, 176 pounds) and Rainey (5-9, 185), the two pose a threat because

of their speed. Demps has run 100 meters in 10.01 seconds and just

missed qualifying for the final at the Olympic trials this year.

Rainey has run sub-4.4 for 40 yards and 10.23 in the 100. Demps is

more tough to defend in the speed-option because once he breaks

free, he has the potential to make huge gains.

"(The option) allows me to get into space, and when I get into

space, I can do a lot of things and get upfield," he said. "When

you get the pitch, you're looking at your blocker first, just

trying to make a read off the block. Once you get past the block,

you start looking downfield."

Meyer said when he sees Demps or Rainey break free out of the

backfield, "I become like a fan. It's a beautiful thing to

watch."

It's also a tremendous help to quarterback Tim Tebow, broadening

the offensive game plan.

"Having them in the game just opens things up," the junior

said. "Their speed allows them to get to the edge. We can put them

in open space to try to create one-on-one matchups. They are so

fast and athletic, we can stretch the field horizontally."

In the first seven games, Demps has averaged 12.1 yards every

time he touches the ball, Rainey 6.8. And according to Carter,

their potential is limitless.

"I told Jeff and Chris (this week) they have kind of a

Tiger-Woodish deal," Carter said. "Because they are so fast, they

are at another level than everybody else. So if they play at their

level, they can really do some great things. But if they don't play

at their level, then they are just average."

In a game in which teams are so evenly matched, having the duo

play at "their level" could be the difference between winning and

losing for the Gators in today's rivalry game against Georgia in

Jacksonville.

Today's state games

No.??5 UF vs. No. 8 Georgia

3:30, Jacksonville Municipal Stadium. TV/radio: Ch. 10; 970-AM.

Line: UF by 6?. Weather: 71, 30 percent chance of rain, wind

from northeast 12-15 mph.

No.??16 FSU at Ga. Tech

3:30, Bobby Dodd Stadium, Atlanta. TV/radio: Ch. 28; 1040-AM.

Line: Tech by 2?. Weather: 69, sunny, 10 percent chance of rain.

Miami at Virginia

Noon, Scott Stadium, Charlottesville, Va. TV/radio: Ch. 44;

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As the government makes taxpayer funds available to banks

weakened by the financial crisis, the criteria being used to choose

who gets money appears to be setting the stage for consolidation in

the industry by favoring those most likely to survive.

But while the measures, closely guarded by Treasury Department

officials, accommodate banks with top safety and soundness ratings,

they also allow the government to apply a looser definition to some

banks with lower ratings, according to two people briefed on the

process. Some of those banks may have lost money over the past

year, however, and should they fail the taxpayers' investment would

be wiped out.

Analysts said that giving capital to such weaker banks could run

against the spirit of Treasury Secretary Henry M. Paulson Jr.'s

suggestion that the program was for healthy institutions.

So far, at least 22 small and regional banks have been awarded

more than $38 billion in capital.

The Treasury is concerned that publicizing its selection

criteria would lead to speculation about which small and

medium-size banks may not be qualified to receive the aid, said the

people with knowledge of the process.

Some lawmakers are upset that the capitalization program, which

the government described as a way to jump-start lending, will end

up culling banks in their districts.

Regulators are applying a short list of criteria based on a

secret ratings system they use to gauge a financial institution's

health. These yardsticks, known as Camel ratings, classify the

nation's 8,500 banks into five categories, where a ranking of 1

applies to those in the best shape and a 5 to those in the worst.

Under the program, banks with a rating of 1 or 2 are essentially

guaranteed to qualify for the investments, according to the people

briefed on the process.

Those in the bottom categories are unlikely to receive capital

injections. As of June 30, that group included at least 117

financial institutions, mainly small banks and savings and loans,

on the Federal Insurance Deposit Corp. list of problem banks.

Approximately 2,500 to 3,500 banks, which likely have midtier Camel

ratings, are on the cusp of qualifying for the cash if they choose

to apply, analysts said.

Of those banks, those that have been profitable over the last

year are the most likely to receive capital. Banks that have lost

money over the last year, however, must pass additional tests.

Federal banking regulators are also applying additional

criteria, like assurances that banks are lending in low-income

communities, to determine eligibility.

They are also asking if a bank has enough capital and reserves

to withstand severe losses to its construction loan portfolio,

nonperforming loans and other troubled assets.

Banks that fail to meet two of the guidelines are unlikely to

receive the money, said a person with indirect knowledge of the

process. But banks that have only one strike against them can lobby

regulators for the cash.

Several advisers to financial institutions also said that they

were aware of banks that received capital with the understanding

the banks would try to find a merger partner. They said other banks

were urged to slash their dividend if they sought cash. The

advisers were not authorized by their clients to speak, and did not

name the banks.

Both actions suggest that the government may be loosely defining

what constitutes healthy institutions.

Banks are required to provide a specific business plan for the

next two or three years and explain how they plan to deploy the

capital. Regulators, however, say that they will not examine how

the financial institutions actually use the cash.

"There is no express statutory requirement that says you must

make this amount of loans," John C. Dugan, the comptroller of the

currency, one of the major banking regulators, said in a recent

interview. "But the economics work so that it is in their interest

to do so" and that their actions would "be open to the court of

public opinion."

Still, many lawmakers are concerned that some banks appear to be

holding on to the capital instead of immediately making loans to

spur economic growth. "Any use of these funds for any purpose

other than lending -- for bonuses, for severance pay, for dividends,

for acquisitions of other institutions, etc. -- is a violation of

the act," Rep. Barney Frank, D-Mass., chairman of the House

Financial Services Committee, said in a statement on Friday.

Justice Antonin Scalia has a reputation as an

intimidating jurist who poses withering questions during arguments

before the Supreme Court. But on Friday afternoon, when the soprano

Leontyne Price entered the West Conference Room at the court to

attend an honorary luncheon hosted by the National Endowment for

the Arts, Scalia, an avid opera fan, visibly melted.

"It's a great honor to meet you," he told Price, his face

crinkling with warmth and delight. When Price complimented him on

the elegance of the luncheon's setting -- a paneled salon, its walls

lined with portraits of past chief justices -- he replied, "Yes,

these are pretty nice rooms," adding, "And they're yours today."

There had been a similar greeting moments earlier when, before

the luncheon, Price entered the chamber of Justice Ruth Bader

Ginsburg, another passionate and highly informed opera buff. When

the justice opened the doors to her office, Price, who at 81 seemed

ever the prima donna, knelt on one knee before her. It was a

gesture Price mastered decades ago, when she would appear before

the curtain to thank audiences for their ovations.

"What a joy," Ginsburg said, beaming and taking Price's hand.

"My, this magnificent woman."

The occasion was the inauguration of a series of awards from the

endowment acknowledging lasting contributions to opera. Called the

NEA Opera Honors, they are the first new awards from the federal

government for individual achievement in the arts in 26 years.

Along with Price, the other honorees in this first year are the

conductor James Levine, the composer Carlisle Floyd (best known for

his operas "Susannah" and "Of Mice and Men," which have become

repertory works) and the English-born impresario Richard Gaddes,

who has had long and pivotal tenures directing the Opera Theater of

St. Louis and the Santa Fe Opera, where he recently stepped down as

general director.

The day represented "a meeting of art and justice," said Dana

Gioia, the chairman of the endowment, in welcoming the honorees,

their guests and other invitees to the luncheon.

The endowment has come under criticism in recent years by

legislators who seek to influence its policies and priorities. And

its budget, which last year was $148 million, has risen and fallen

with the times. In a brief interview, Gioia said he hoped that the

strong public reception to these awards would be seen "as an

expression of the regard in which the NEA is still held."

Perhaps the most fascinating aspects of the luncheon were the

revealing glimpses of the justices as smitten buffs. Gioia invited

the court's opera lovers -- Scalia, Ginsburg and Justice Anthony M.

Kennedy -- to serve as hosts for the luncheon; all three readily

accepted. As Ginsburg said, in welcoming the guests, "When Dana

Gioia asked us, I took a cue from Nancy Reagan and just said, 'May

we?"'

Great sopranos have long dominated the opera world, and Price

was the center of attention on this day. Touring Ginsburg's

temporary chambers (the justices' permanent offices are being

renovated), Price, accompanied by her younger brother, George

Price, a retired United States Army general, was visibly overcome.

"What would our parents say?" she asked her brother, thinking

of their origins in Laurel, Miss., where her mother was a midwife

and her father a handyman.

Ginsburg, 75, told Price that she and her husband, Prof. Martin

D. Ginsburg, who also attended the luncheon, were in the audience

when Price made her sensational Metropolitan Opera debut, on Jan.

27, 1961, as Leonora in Verdi's "Trovatore," the same night that

the renowned tenor Franco Corelli made his Met debut as Manrico:

"It was a 'Trovatore' like no other we have ever attended," she

said.

Ginsburg said she remembered very clearly that before one of the

acts, Price's parents, proudly sitting in a box at the Met, were

introduced, and a spotlight shone on them. "I'm not going to

cry," Price said, "though my mascara is starting to run."

Ginsburg showed Price a cabinet lined with photographs of

herself standing with opera singers she admires, including Luciano

Pavarotti, Renee Fleming and Denyce Graves. "Maybe before the day

is out I'll have a photo with you," she said.

The only honoree missing from the luncheon was Levine, who spent

Friday afternoon in rehearsals for the Met's new production of

Berlioz's "Damnation of Faust," which opens Friday. In addition,

illness forced him to miss the formal awards ceremony and concert

on Friday evening, with Placido Domingo and Israel Gursky

conducting vocalists and the orchestra of the Washington National

Opera at the Harman Center for the Arts.

As Ginsburg and Scalia chatted before lunch, they recalled a

disagreement about the Washington National Opera's much-debated

production of Puccini's "Boheme," which opened the season a year

ago. The director, Mariusz Trelinski, had boldly updated and

contemporized the opera, and Ginsburg did not like it, she said,

frowning.

"Ruth is a harsh opera critic," Scalia said. "I'm supposed to

be the stodgy one, but I loved it."

Scalia, 72, grew up in Queens, an only child of music-loving

parents. "My father gave me piano lessons until I was a junior in

high school," he said. "I used to be pretty good."

His love of opera started in his youth, when his father, a

professor at Brooklyn College, took him to the college theater to

see a production of Puccini's "Gianni Schicchi." In retrospect,

that opera could be seen as a fitting choice for a future jurist:

set in Renaissance Italy, it is a comedy about a falsified will.

"I loved 'Gianni Schicchi,' and I still love it," Scalia said,

breaking into a smile.

In her welcoming remarks at the luncheon, Ginsburg also singled

out the contributions of the other honorees. She said she had been

moved deeply by the Washington National Opera's productions of

Floyd's "Susannah" and "Of Mice and Men." And she has long been

a fan of Gaddes' work at the Santa Fe Opera.

"I've been going every summer," she said. "Once I discovered

the Santa Fe Opera, I stopped going to Salzburg and Glyndebourne."

During the meal, an unexpected pleasure quieted the luncheon

crowd of several dozen. The Sunrise Quartet, which had been playing

string quartet arrangements of opera arias, began "Un bel di

vedremo" from Puccini's "Madama Butterfly." Cio-Cio-San, the

opera's tragic heroine, was one of Price's great roles. From her

seat near the players, Price started singing the aria, softly at

first, then nearly in full voice. Even a hint of that gloriously

familiar voice stopped conversations. She sang right through to the

final high B flat.

Kennedy, who was seated next to her, appeared elated. As people

applauded, he lifted a corner of his eyeglasses to wipe away what

looked like a tear.

God and Satan duke it out for the soul of a troubled girl in

"The Haunting of Molly Hartley," an unexpectedly cynical addition

to the teen-scream genre that opened nationwide on Friday.

Life could not possibly be worse for the 17-year-old Molly

(Haley Bennett). For one thing, her mother (Marin Hinkle) is raving

in a psych ward after taking a pair of scissors to Molly's chest;

for another, the uniform required by her snobby new school is

extremely unflattering. No wonder she hears voices and sees

visions.

Luckily, lots of people want to save her, including the local

bad seed (Shannon Marie Woodward) -- identified by her strategically

ripped tights -- and a creepy evangelist (Shanna Collins) who'd like

to be Molly's BFF but whose fundamentalist frocks are early

disqualifiers.

Much more attractive are the rich-guy wardrobe and white-knight

attentions of Joseph (Chace Crawford), the kind of fortunate son

who thrives primarily by hosting plantation-style parties.

"The darkness is coming for you!" screams an apparition of

Molly's mom after one such event, leaving Molly to wonder why she

can't just be grounded like everyone else.

Tame and inoffensive (unless you're on the Lord's side), "The

Haunting of Molly Hartley" is no more than a big-screen lasso for

the "Gossip Girl" and "Supernatural" demographic. The press

notes rave about its "hot, young cast, all on the verge of

breaking out." I hear they have creams for that.

THE HAUNTING OF MOLLY HARTLEY

Directed by Mickey Liddell; written by John Travis and Rebecca

Sonnenshine; director of photography, Sharone Meir; edited by Zene

Baker; music by James T. Sale; production designer, John Larena;

produced by Jennifer Hilton and Liddell; released by Freestyle

Releasing. Running time: 1 hour 26 minutes. .

WITH: Haley Bennett (Molly Hartley), Chace Crawford (Joseph

Young), Jake Weber (Robert Hartley), Shannon Marie Woodward (Leah),

AnnaLynne McCord (Suzy), Shanna Collins (Alexis) and Marin Hinkle

(Jane Hartley).

"I ain't never gonna play that Vegas again," swears

the baby-faced boy with the sweeping sideburns. Who could blame him

for complaining? The year is 1956, and this budding rock 'n' roller

has just endured the humiliation of opening for the borscht-beltish

Shecky Greene.

The roar of laughter that greets this seemingly heartfelt avowal

in the musical "Million Dollar Quartet" can be explained simply

enough. The boy with the baby face is Elvis Presley, still in the

middle innings of his recording and film career, at least a decade

away from the peanut-butter-and-banana-sandwich bulges and the

rhinestone-encrusted white jumpsuits. Never say ain't never, Elvis.

This pouting youngster is not the only bright-eyed guitar

strummer with career problems in this lively little jukebox

musical, which boasts a set of gold-plated platters that puts most

of the rest of the karaoke competition in the shade.

"Million Dollar Quartet" is set in the studio of Sun Records

in Memphis during the very hours in which its celebrated stature

was cemented. On Dec. 4, 1956, Sam Phillips, the record producer

who founded Sun and has been called the father of rock 'n' roll,

hosted a jam session and impromptu recording with Elvis, Jerry Lee

Lewis, Johnny Cash and Carl Perkins. It was the only occasion on

which all shared a studio, and has entered music history as one of

those golden-hued, fantastical hours in which a whole pantheon of

gods frolicked together.

This slick, fictionalized re-creation of that hallowed night,

previously seen in Florida and Washington state (and rumored to be

Broadway-bound), is what you might call a no-brainer baby boomer

money-spinner. It packed audiences into the Goodman Theater's

smaller stage for several weeks this fall (I saw the last

performance at the Goodman on Sunday), and began performances on

Friday night for a run through Jan. 4 at the Apollo Theater here.

As the actors playing the rock luminaries gradually assemble

onstage, each bearing a modest resemblance to the fabled performer

he is portraying, a faint air of the animatronic threatens to

settle over the proceedings. You fear the show will be sort of a

Disneyland Rock 'n' Roll Icons Jamboree.

But the performers -- some actors who can play guitar, others

musicians trying the acting thing -- are genial, winning and

persuasive without lapsing into hackneyed or overripe

impersonation. The songs, a stack of early rock hip-shakers,

including "Blue Suede Shoes," "Great Balls of Fire" and "Whole

Lotta Shakin' Goin' On," are performed with a vibrant commitment

that keeps the sea of gray heads in the audience bobbing, bobbing,

bobbing throughout the show's fleet 90-minute running time.

The book, by the rock historian Colin Escott and the movie

writer-director Floyd Mutrux ("American Hot Wax"), has plenty of

forced transitions and mechanically inserted bits of trivia. At one

point a luscious blonde strides into the studio and, with little

preamble, grabs a microphone and starts crooning "Fever." Her

presence remains unexplained until the song is over. Turns out

she's Elvis' girl, although Elvis himself has not yet arrived. Go

figure.

The chief generator of suspense is the financial peril faced by

Phillips (the amiable Brian McCaskill), who steps in and out of the

show, annotating the proceedings with lore and background as it

goes along, in the process reminding us a little too frequently

that he discovered all these boys, "taught them to believe in

themselves and made them stars." About a year before this fateful

night Phillips had to sell Elvis' contract to RCA to keep his

record company alive. (He received just $40,000 for it -- ouch! --

but, as he informs us, wink-wink, he did invest some of the money

in a little outfit called Holiday Inn.)

Now the contract of his current chart-topper, Johnny Cash, is

about to expire. Phillips has a new one on hand, and plans to

spring it on Johnny when the whiskey's flowing and the boys are

trading guitar licks and reminiscing about the desperate days when

they were touring the South in the back of a flatbed truck.

The characterizations are economical but adequate. The

hotheaded, loudmouthed Jerry Lee Lewis (Levi Kreis) is new to the

label and wants to prove his mettle. Kreis just about pounds a hole

in the stage floor with his Converse high tops when he starts

flailing away on the keyboard. Jerry Lee's cockiness antagonizes

Carl Perkins (a charismatic Rob Lyons), who is also sore because

his records aren't selling and because Phillips had allowed Elvis

to sing Perkins' hit song "Blue Suede Shoes" on television.

Johnny, gracefully played by Lance Guest, is the courtly country

gentleman, pained at having to break bad news to the man who

jump-started his career. Eddie Clendening, who plays Elvis, is

obviously not a trained actor, but he gives a gentle, likable

performance. His honey-coated vibrato is perfectly suited to the

songs.

While the book and the songs are not particularly

well-integrated -- after a little banter and maybe a flashback to

the rough old days, somebody will just step up to the mike and

break into a familiar tune -- the directors, Mutrux and Eric

Schaeffer, don't ease up on the gas pedal long enough for you to

complain. And Mutrux and Escott have come up with a few sharp

zingers to warm things up between numbers. Johnny, unhappy about

Phillips' shambolic organization, grouses about his latest record

sales, "If they really want to stop the spread of Communism, they

ought to let Sun distribute it."

PRODUCTION NOTES

'MILLION DOLLAR QUARTET'

Book by Colin Escott and Floyd Mutrux, with songs by various

composers; directed by Mutrux and Eric Schaeffer; musical

arrangements and supervision, Chuck Mead; sets by Adam Koch;

costumes by Caryn Klein; lighting by Keith Parham; sound by Kai

Harada; production stage manager, Maggie O'Donnell; production

manager, Matt Marsden; general managers, Alan Wasser, Allan

Williams and Karen Leahy. Presented by Dee Gee Theatricals, John

Cossette Productions and Northern Lights Inc. At the Apollo

Theater, 2540 N. Lincoln Ave., Chicago; (773) 935-6100. Through

Jan. 4. Running time: 1 hour 30 minutes.

WITH: Brian McCaskill (Sam Phillips), Rob Lyons (Carl Perkins),

Lance Guest (Johnny Cash), Levi Kreis (Jerry Lee Lewis), Eddie

Clendening (Elvis Presley), Kelly Lamont (Dyanne), Chuck Zayas (Jay

Perkins) and Billy Shaffer (Fluke).

Fans here had waited 25 years for a championship

parade down Broad Street. The Phillies gave them one Friday, and so

many fans showed up that they nearly shut down the city.

When the Phillies defeated the Tampa Bay Rays on Wednesday night

to capture the World Series title, they delivered this city its

first major sports championship since 1983, when the 76ers won the

NBA finals. The Phillies' only other title came in 1980.

The parade started in Center City, passed City Hall and traveled

nearly four miles south to the Phillies' home field, Citizens Bank

Park. It started at noon and crawled at a speed of about 4 miles

per hour, arriving in South Philadelphia more than an hour later

than expected, about 3 p.m.

The police and city officials estimated that more than a million

fans packed the route, and the crowds overwhelmed the public

transit system. Septa, which runs the city's subway system and

regional rail lines, temporarily shut down the Broad Street Line,

which connects Center City to the sports complex area. The Patco

high-speed line, which runs to New Jersey, was also jammed. Some

fans chose to walk home instead of waiting for trains.

At times, Mayor Michael A. Nutter and Phillies manager Charlie

Manuel held up the World Series trophy while players waved to fans.

Left fielder Pat Burrell led the procession in a horse-drawn

carriage, which was followed by flatbed trucks filled with players

and other members of the organization. Center fielder Shane

Victorino tossed soft pretzels to the crowd, and shortstop Jimmy

Rollins turned his video camera on the fans.

The Phillies then greeted tens of thousands of fans who had

watched the parade on big screens at the city's baseball and

football stadiums. The team first stopped at Lincoln Financial

Field, where the Eagles play.

"This is the biggest parade I've ever been in," Manuel told

the fans. "It's like Christmas came two months early."

The Phillies then headed to Citizens Bank Park, where a red

"2008" banner was raised to celebrate their World Series title.

The clear sky and a 60-degree temperature was a contrast to the

cold, windy and rainy conditions that forced the suspension of Game

5 on Monday and prevented the game from being completed until

Wednesday. Fans packed sidewalks, climbed trees, hung out of

windows, watched from balconies and stood on roofs for a better

view.

Rich and Michelle Boyle of Archbald, Pa., both 39, stayed

overnight in Center City so they could take their two sons,

10-year-old R.J. and 6-year-old Jeremy, to the parade. They secured

a spot along Market Street, near the start of route.

"We're die-hard Phillies fans, so we had to let them come and

see their first parade, hopefully not their last," Rich Boyle

said. "I didn't go to the last one. My dad said I had to wait

until I was old enough. I talked to him last night, and he said I

was old enough to go now."

R.J. was missing a Halloween parade, but he said, "I'd rather

be here." He dressed as a Phillies player, and his brother wore a

green jersey for his costume as an Eagles football player.

Carol Golden, 47, and David Golden, 43, of Cherry Hill, N.J.,

also let their sons skip school. "They'll get a lot more education

out of this than if they were in school," David Golden said.

The parade drew fans from beyond the region, too. Greg Packer,

44, of Huntington, N.Y., drove in for Game 5 of the World Series

and stayed for the celebration. He arrived on Broad Street near

City Hall at 5 a.m. to secure what he considered the best spot.

"In New York right now, we have no Mets, no Yankees, no

stadiums," he said. "I came here to represent and cheer our

neighbors."

Early in the Giants' workout on Friday,

much of the wire fence around their practice field was without the

usual blue plastic sheets. Anyone could peer through it. Spies from

the Dallas Cowboys could have discovered secret plays.

"To be honest with you, I didn't even notice it," coach Tom

Coughlin said of the see-through barrier. "They are supposed to be

covered all of the time anyway. So, if it was uncovered then,

somehow, some way, something happened there."

By the time practice ended, the sheets were back in place. But

it is doubtful that the Cowboys could have learned much of anything

before the National Football Conference East rivals meet Sunday at

Giants Stadium. These teams already know each other too well.

The Giants (6-1) played the Cowboys (5-3) three times last

season and 92 times since 1960, when the Cowboys joined the NFL.

Dallas won both regular-season games in 2007, but the Giants beat

the favored Cowboys in the playoffs, en route to the Super Bowl

title.

This game is one of the best this weekend. Entering the season,

the Cowboys were the trendy pick to win the championship. Some

Giants resented that; others laughed it off.

"Like I said in training camp, everybody crowned certain

people," Plaxico Burress said. "You still have to line up and go

play. I have seen a lot of crazy things happen in this league."

Dallas has been weakened by injuries. Among the wounded is

quarterback Tony Romo, out for a third consecutive game with a

broken finger, and tight end Jason Witten, questionable with a

broken rib.

Antonio Pierce, a middle linebacker, assessed these factors as

the Giants reached the midseason mark.

"They are still the Dallas Cowboys," Pierce said. "Everybody

hates everybody in this league. This rivalry has gotten even more

intense. They have been titled America's Team, and they are coming

to the Big Apple. So it should be fun."

Romo could be back for Dallas' next game. In his place Sunday,

the Cowboys will again use 40-year-old Brad Johnson, playing with

his fifth team in his 17th season. On defense, Dallas will be

without cornerback Terence Newman (sports hernia) and cornerback

Adam Jones, formerly Pacman, who is in alcohol rehabilitation.

Cornerback Anthony Henry (thigh injury) is probable.

The depleted secondary should be tested by Eli Manning and his

receivers. "We can try to throw the ball downfield, but it is

always a battle," Manning said. "We know each other very well."

Manning will be pursued by linebacker DeMarcus Ware, who leads

the Cowboys in sacks with nine. The Dallas offense is bolstered by

running back Marion Barber, who has 153 carries for 611 yards and

five touchdowns.

If Johnson can find them, his receivers include Terrell Owens

and Roy Williams, recently acquired from Detroit. But Owens has

only 13 catches for 167 yards and a touchdown in the last four

games.

His relative drought began before Romo was injured. "It is

frustrating," Owens said in a video clip on NFL.com. "You've got

to have faith. There were some one-on-one opportunities last game.

We just didn't connect."

The Giants have many tools, including a sack attack that leads

the league with 26 and a rushing attack that leads the league in

yards per game with 157.3. The team also leads the league in a

category most would not guess -- safeties, with two. In the last two

games, victories against San Francisco and Pittsburgh, the Giants

have scored on these rare plays.

Even the word itself is versatile in this sport. It applies to

two defensive positions ("free" and "strong"), and it also

applies to the general health of a team avoiding injuries. Coughlin

smiled when asked about the two-game streak of 2-point safeties.

"What do I think of them?" he said. "I hope they work for

us." Indeed, in pro football, you can never be too safe. That is

why coaches want their fences covered on their practice fields, to

play it safe.

Brace yourself, Floridians. With the Sunshine State positioned

to decide Tuesday's presidential election, the state will be loaded

with star-studded political events this weekend. From comedian

Chris Rock's free concert today in Tampa to Jimmy Buffett's free

concert Sunday in Tampa not to mention visits by both vice

presidential nominees and, oh yes, the presidential nominees

themselves here's what's in store.

Who/Where/When

Vice presidential nominee Sarah Palin

Today: Palin campaigns at Sims Park in New Port Richey at 9 this

morning. Doors open at 6 a.m. Later in the day she stumps at

Fantasy of Flight in Polk City and at West Port High School in

Ocala.

Former New York City Mayor Rudy Giuliani

Sunday: John McCain's former Republican primary rival will

campaign in South Tampa. He is scheduled to be at Square One

Burgers, 3701 Henderson Blvd., at 9:30 a.m.

Republican presidential nominee John McCain

Sunday and Monday: McCain, who was just in Miami on Wednesday,

is expected to return there Sunday. Then he plans a last-minute

push Monday along the I-4 corridor, including a rally outside

Raymond James Stadium in Tampa. Doors open at 6 a.m.; tickets are

available at www.johnmccain.com or at campaign offices.

Comedian Chris Rock

Today: Rock will host a free concert and rally in Tampa at the

Belmont Heights Little League Park on E. Martin Luther King Jr.

Boulevard at N. 22nd St. Gates open at 11:30 a.m. Parking is

available at Young Middle Magnet School, 1801 E. Martin Luther King

Blvd. Tampa police and event organizers expect thousands for the

45-minute standup routine. "After he finishes we're going to march

down to the College Hill Library to vote," said Bruce Miles, one

of the event's organizers.

Sen. Hillary Rodham Clinton

Today: Clinton holds an 11:30 a.m. rally at the Miami-Dade

Auditorium in Miami, then heads to Winter Park for an afternoon

stop at the Winter Park Community Center. Both events are free and

open to the public. Barack Obama's former rival for the Democratic

nomination is crisscrossing the country for him in the campaign's

final days.

Vice presidential nominee Joe Biden

Sunday: Biden returns to the state for stops in Tallahassee,

Gainesville and Volusia County. Details to be announced.

Singer Jimmy Buffett

Sunday: Buffett holds a free get-out-the-vote concert and rally

for Obama at the Ford Amphitheatre in Tampa. Gates open at 1:30

p.m. for the 3 p.m. show. Tickets are required, but it is free and

open to all Florida residents and students. Visit

FL.BarackObama.com or call toll-free 1-877-235-6226 for more

information.

Democratic presidential nominee Barack Obama Monday: He plans to

campaign in Jacksonville. Details to be announced.

Campaigning for John McCain Campaigning for Barack Obama

What looked implausible in June but practically guaranteed in

September happened Friday, when the Mets exercised their $12

million option on Carlos Delgado.

Given that the Mets were already committed to giving him a $4

million buyout if they had not picked up his option, paying Delgado

an extra $8 million could be a bargain if he can come close to

duplicating his second-half surge.

"Carlos is a key part of our plans for 2009, and we wanted to

let him know as quickly as allowed that we wanted him back,"

general manager Omar Minaya said in a statement.

"Yesterday -- the day following the conclusion of the World

Series -- was the first day that we could pick up the option per the

contract. It was our full intent to promptly close our deal with

Carlos, and that's what we did."

Delgado, 36, rebounded from a miserable first three months -- he

was batting .228 through the end of June -- to hit .271 with a

team-high 38 home runs and 115 runs batted in, his best statistical

season of his three with the team. After July 1, he batted .313

with 24 homers, 70 RBIs and a .617 slugging percentage. Only two

players in each of the last three categories had higher marks than

Delgado over that span.

Delgado's defense, never an asset, also seemed to improve as his

production increased.

With Delgado's value at its peak, and given that he plans to

play a few more seasons (he is 31 homers shy of 500), the Mets are

not necessarily wedded to having him on first base next season.

Although it is not a priority, the Mets may explore dealing him to

the American League, where he could serve as a designated hitter.

Such a deal could shore up the Mets' relief corps and starting

rotation. Although they still intend to pursue at least one starter

and a closer (and, perhaps, a second baseman) on the free-agent

market, the Mets seem more likely to fill most of their needs via

trades.

Nadine McNeil will reach the crest of the

Verrazano-Narrows Bridge on her handcycle soon after 7:30 Sunday

morning. Moments later, she will roll swiftly past her 18-year-old

son, Tyler, who is autistic. This will be her fourth marathon, and

Tyler's first. She has grown uneasy this week thinking of the

moment when she will leave him behind.

"I can't look back," she said. "For 18 years, I've always

known every moment where Tyler is. On Sunday, I won't."

Though joint parent-child appearances in the New York City

Marathon are not uncommon -- Rod Dixon, the race's 1983 champion, is

returning this year to run the race with his daughter -- the path

that brought Nadine, 42, and Tyler to the marathon is an unlikely

one. Nadine had a stroke when she was 8 and lost the use of her

right arm and her right leg. Tyler, her only child, is severely

speech-delayed. Even now. at 6 feet 4 inches, he communicates

verbally by using one or two words at a time.

Nadine has poured her life into her son. Tyler, in turn, is what

she calls "my right arm." He compensates for her disabilities by

tying her shoes. He does her buttons and zippers. If she tries to

put on her coat, he will immediately rush to her side and gently

lift her right arm into the sleeve.

Neither would have ever made it to this year's starting line

without the other.

Their path to the marathon began when Tyler was 7. Nadine

arrived with her son at Hunter College to see the director of

Project Happy, a program that provides athletic and recreational

activities to New York City youth with disabilities. Nadine was by

then a single mother living in the Bronx. She had already been

turned away from athletic programs at the Bronx Y, the 92nd Street

Y and the 53rd Street Y because of Tyler's tantrums and other

behavior.

"He came in with his mother," said Penny Shaw, the 71-year-old

director of Project Happy. "He had no language. He did nothing but

scream. We had never seen a child like that, and we certainly had

never taken one into the program. But the mother was so nice, I

said we would try."

Soon after Tyler enrolled, Shaw and her staff recognized that he

was a natural athlete. When he picked up a basketball, he would

throw it in the hoop with almost mathematical precision. Nadine had

also started taking Tyler to Achilles Kids, a running and rolling

program for children with disabilities. To get him to events, she

had to leave the Bronx for Manhattan at 5:30 a.m.

Tyler's behavior began to improve during his involvement in

Achilles Kids and Project Happy. He has since won dozens of medals

in the Special Olympics, particularly in swimming. "This child was

saved by sports," Shaw said.

Nadine had never considered that athletics could serve a similar

role in her own life. At Achilles Kids, she would guard the bags

and the coats while Tyler ran. One day in August 2006, Dick Traum,

an amputee who founded the Achilles adult program, mentioned to

Nadine that she should consider racing in a marathon.

"I laughed," Nadine said. "He said I could do it in a

handcycle. I was like, 'Dick, my right arm?"'

Three months later, in November 2006, Nadine found herself at

the starting line in Staten Island. She had attached her paralyzed

right arm to the handcycle's pedal mechanism with duct tape from

Home Depot. She powered the chair with her left arm and finished

the marathon in 4 hours 3 minutes.

As Nadine trained for more races, Tyler would jog by her

wheelchair. Nadine began to notice a difference in her supposedly

frozen arm: It had gained some power and even some range of motion.

Her doctor noticed, too.

"It has become much stronger in just the past year with all the

practice she's had," said Regina Coyne, Nadine's general

practitioner.

Last November, Tyler became confused when Nadine boarded the bus

to travel to the marathon starting line. He wanted to go with her.

His mother persuaded him to let her go by saying that he was not

allowed to run the race until he was 18.

After Tyler turned 18 in July, Nadine took him to his doctor,

who performed an EKG and said Tyler was physically capable.

Tyler's school for special-needs students in the Bronx, P.S.

176, held a pep rally for him Wednesday. He marched around the

seating bowl of the auditorium while holding an American flag, and

his fellow students -- some of them holding purple, green or orange

pompoms -- sang karaoke versions of "My Country 'Tis of Thee,"

"We Will Rock You" and "We Are the Champions."

One of Tyler's friends, Sean, 19, who is also autistic, took the

microphone and said solemnly: "Tyler, I have two words to say to

you: Good luck at the marathon, and I love you."

Tyler will run the race with one of his special-education

teachers, Vinny Bruno. His mother has decided not to try to slow

her chair and ride beside him. After 18 years, she wants to allow

him to become more independent -- a shift that is as difficult for

her as for him.

She thinks back to when he was 3 and the doctors suggested that

he would never even be toilet trained, let alone be an athlete. She

has had trouble sleeping this week, mostly because she knows him so

well.

"He's going to try his hardest to get to that finish line,

whether it hurts, whether it drives him nuts," she said. "He's

going to keep coming until he sees me."

There is such a thing as a free lunch -- or at least a free

recipe -- but the founders of Cookstr, a new Web site, do hope that

home cooks will eventually pay.

Although the Internet is already flooded with recipes, Will

Schwalbe, who stepped down as editor in chief of Hyperion Books in

January, is starting Cookstr to showcase the recipes of star chefs

like Jamie Oliver, Nigella Lawson and Mario Batali, as well as

those of less-well-known but highly regarded cookbook writers. The

idea, ultimately, is to sell copies of these authors' books.

On the site, www.cookstr.com, which goes live this month, each

recipe will appear on a page with a prominently placed picture of

the source cookbook's cover, as well as a link to one of four

online retailers selling the book.

Most people who want to cook at home eventually look up a recipe

online. According to comScore, an Internet marketing research

company, food sites attracted 45.6 million unique visitors in

September, up 10 percent from a year ago, more than double the rate

of total Internet growth in the United States.

At the same time, the Internet is shaking up the publishing

industry, as authors in all genres debate whether giving away

content generates or diminishes sales. In some respects, cookbooks

would seem particularly vulnerable, because recipes are

self-contained in a way that a chapter of a novel is not.

But Schwalbe -- along with more than a dozen publishers and 100

cookbook authors who have signed up to contribute recipes to the

site -- believes that a carefully chosen selection of recipes will

whet the appetites of prospective cookbook buyers.

During a recent interview in the downtown Manhattan offices of

Tipping Point, an Internet startup incubator that is helping to get

Cookstr going, Schwalbe, 46, pointed to the examples of Martha

Stewart and Rachael Ray, kitchen queens who post thousands of

recipes online and yet remain top-selling cookbook writers.

(Neither is contributing to Cookstr.)

"There are just so many people who go to the Web to look for

recipes," Schwalbe said. "And that is a great moment to remind

them that the best recipes in the world are in books, to introduce

them to authors they might not know about."

Cookbooks remain stalwart performers in publishing. Last year,

books in the food and entertaining category sold 13.9 million

copies, though that was down from 14.9 million a year earlier,

according to Nielsen BookScan, which tracks about 70 percent of

sales. So far this year, cookbook sales are slightly up, before

accounting for the crucial forthcoming holiday season.

Many authors have their own Web sites, and there are dozens of

other sites where home cooks can find recipes, including

allrecipes.com, epicurious.com and foodnetwork.com.

But these sites tend to feature recipes contributed by users or

those that have appeared in food magazines. The foodnetwork.com

site primarily offers recipes of the cooks who appear on its

television shows.

Cookstr, which will be supported by advertising revenues, will

aggregate recipes from published cookbooks. All of the authors will

have their own pages, with biographies, links to recipes and books,

and in the case of restaurant chefs, links to their locations on

Google maps.

Visitors to the site can search for recipes using a wide range

of parameters, from the more obvious -- ingredients, season,

occasion -- to more specialized criteria, like lactose-free,

kid-friendly or requires-only-one-pot-to-cook. The site will start

with 2,500 recipes, most likely to increase to 10,000 within a

year.

Schwalbe, who wrote "Send: The Essential Guide to Email for

Office and Home" with David Shipley, the deputy editorial page

editor at The New York Times, said he was financing the startup

costs of Cookstr -- which he said are less than $1 million -- with

savings, the proceeds from "Send" and the help of investments by

family and friends. He added that many vendors were providing

services on a deferred basis.

He has appointed Katie Workman, 40 -- the daughter of Peter

Workman, the founder of the Workman Publishing Co., a well-known

name in cookbooks -- to be editor in chief and chief marketing

officer, as well as a partner in the site.

Schwalbe, who left Hyperion after 11 years at the company, has

strong relationships with many cookbook authors, as he has edited

many of them, including Oliver and Lawson.

Oliver, a British chef whose books include "Cook With Jamie"

and "Jamie at Home," wrote in an e-mail message that he was also

attracted by Cookstr's business model, in which publishers and

authors share a portion of the ad revenues.

"My recipes are valuable, and Will's treating them as such,"

Oliver, who will also be a consultant to Cookstr, wrote. "Sites

are ringing up the office every day asking for free recipes. I

don't ring up the clothes shop and ask for free patterns and the

types of fabric so I can make my own clothes."

Publishers said they hoped that Cookstr could help draw

attention not only to new books, but also to older titles that had

fallen out of sight.

"The reality is that there are more than 400 new cookbooks

published every year," said Leslie Stoker, publisher of Stewart,

Tabori &amp;amp; Chang, which publishes cookbooks by Jacques Pepin, Arthur

Schwartz and Alain Ducasse. "So bookstores and online retailers

have to make room for the new things, and most of the older books

get pushed aside."

Schwalbe will be asking the cooks he knows best, like Lawson, a

British television personality whose books include "How to Eat"

and "Feast: Food to Celebrate Life," to identify authors he might

not know about.

"I feel television only gives certain people prominence,"

Lawson said in a telephone interview. "But there are plenty of

people who have brilliant recipes who don't have a television

show."

Mollie Katzen, author of "The Moosewood Cookbook," said she

was not worried about the site's pre-empting book sales. "There's

a whole lot more than the sum of its parts, a kind of presence and

ambience that a book has that isn't just a critical mass of

recipes," Katzen said. "A lot of the feedback that people have

given me on my books is that they like to curl up in a chair with

it."

Joan Nathan, the author of "Jewish Cooking in America" and

"The New American Cooking," said she suspected that the current

ubiquity of recipes online had diminished sales of her most recent

book. But she hoped Cookstr might still attract new buyers.

"Who knows?" Nathan said. "I guess I hope for something

wonderful. The worst-case scenario for me is that people use my

recipes."

Gen. Robert H. Barrow, the 27th commandant of the Marine Corps

who served heroically in World War II, the Korean War and the

Vietnam War, then went on to reform Marine recruiting and training,

died on Thursday in St. Francisville, La. He was 86.

The Marine Corps announced his death.

Barrow combined Southern courtliness, fierce devotion to Marine

tradition and courage reflected in dozens of awards. He was awarded

the Navy Cross in Korea and the Army Distinguished Service Cross in

Vietnam, both of which are second only to the Medal of Honor.

As the Marine manpower chief in 1976, Barrow was instrumental in

drafting reforms designed to end physical abuse and harassment of

recruit trainees by drill instructors. The New York Times, quoting

military officials, reported in 1979 that the training reforms,

which included closer supervision by officers, had worked well.

At the time, the general said the corps would not ease the tough

physical conditioning that was a hallmark of Marine boot camps. But

he demanded that there be no more "excess stress" on recruits,

including "nose-to-nose yelling" by drill sergeants.

Barrow also succeeded in raising the quality of recruits, in

part by seeking out high school graduates. In 1975, less than half

had high school diplomas; by 1982, 82 percent did.

Robert Hilliard Barrow was born Feb. 5, 1922, in Baton Rouge,

La., and grew up on his family's Rosale Plantation in West

Feliciana Parish, La. The family's circumstances were difficult,

however. They had no electricity, so Robert satisfied his early

passion for reading by using a kerosene lamp.

He went to Louisiana State University, because it offered free

tuition at the time and modest boarding costs. He worked as a

waiter and janitor and served in the university's Corps of Cadets,

as all physically fit students -- only men were admitted then -- were

required to do.

After Pearl Harbor, Barrow, inspired by the Marines' heroic but

ultimately unsuccessful defense of Wake Island in December 1941,

was attracted by a double-page Marine Corps recruiting ad in The

Baton Rouge Morning Advocate.

He joined the Marines in March 1942. He could have stayed to

graduate because of his membership in the university's corps but

instead asked for active duty in November 1942, Allan R. Millett

and Jack Shulimson wrote in "Commandants of the Marine Corps"

(2004).

Barrow was disappointed in his preparation during the six-week

boot camp in San Diego, undoubtedly setting the stage for his later

training reforms. The book quoted him as saying that the experience

"was not one that prepared someone to go off and be a fighting

member of a fighting organization."

Barrow stayed on as a drill instructor, then went on to officer

candidate school and was commissioned as a 2nd lieutenant in May

1943. He ended up being deployed to China, where he led a U.S. team

fighting with a Chinese guerrilla force behind Japanese lines. He

was awarded a Bronze Star with Combat "V."

During the Korean War, Barrow fulfilled diverse assignments,

including the Inchon-Seoul operation, a daring amphibious strike

led by Gen. Douglas MacArthur, and the Chosin Reservoir campaign,

in which U.S. troops fought valiantly to hold off invading Chinese

before being forced to withdraw. Lynn Montross the corps' chief

historian at the time, called him "the most outstanding company

commander of the war."

In 1952, Barrow was lent by the Marine Corps to a top-secret

mission on a string of islands north of Taiwan, the Marine Corps

said in its announcement of his death.

During Vietnam, Barrow commanded the 9th Marine Regiment, 3rd

Marine Division. In Operation Dewey Canyon in early 1969, his

troops killed 1,617 enemy soldiers and captured 1,461 weapons and

hundreds of tons of ammunition. Gen. Richard G. Stillwell, chief of

staff to Gen. William C. Westmoreland, the U.S. American commander

in Vietnam, called Barrow the war's "finest regimental

commander."

Barrow rose through the ranks, becoming assistant commandant in

1978 and commandant in 1979, succeeding Gen. Louis H. Wilson, who

had already started big reforms in the Marines, including

discharging more than 5,000 undesirables.

Besides recruitment and training, Barrow expanded the Marines'

role in the military's new rapid response strategy. He also

formulated ways the Marines could fight without storming beaches.

These included putting equipment on preloaded ships that would meet

Marines at a safe port.

In 1983, Barrow made news after a letter he wrote to the

secretary of defense, Caspar W. Weinberger, criticizing Israeli

soldiers in Lebanon, was released by the Pentagon. Barrow said

Israeli soldiers were firing guns at U.S. troops, among other

things. Israel denied the charges.

Barrow's wife of 53 years, Patty, died in 2005. He is survived

by his sons Charles C. Pulliam, of Greenville, S.C., and Robert H.

Barrow, a retired lieutenant colonel in the Marines, of Tampa; his

daughters Cathleen P. Harmon, of Killeen, Texas, Barbara B.

Kanegaye, of Houston, and Mary B. Hannigan, of Oakton, Va., 11

grandchildren and five great-grandchildren.

At his retirement in 1983, Barrow recalled asking graduates of

Parris Island boot camp what they had gotten out of their training.

He approvingly quoted one response: "Sir," a young Marine said,

"the private will always do what needs to be done."

Es'kia Mphahlele, a South African writer whose 1959 memoir,

"Down Second Avenue," vividly dramatized the injustices of

apartheid and became a landmark work of South African literature,

died Monday in Lebowakgomo, South Africa. He was 88.

His death was reported by Raks Seakhoa, a friend, The Associated

Press said.

Although Mphahlele (pronounced Mm-pah-FAY-lay) wrote essays,

short stories and novels, he was best known for "Down Second

Avenue," a searing account of his boyhood and early manhood. Its

depiction of traditional rural life, and of violence and oppression

in a black township in Pretoria, reflected the experience of

countless thousands of his fellow black South Africans.

"He was in many ways the father of modern black South African

writing," said Leon de Kock, the head of the school of literature

and language studies at the University of the Witwatersrand in

Johannesburg. "His death closes a certain bracket in our

literature, what we used to call protest literature, literature in

the resistance mode that included exile and return."

In an essay in The Star, a Johannesburg newspaper, the

journalist and editor Barney Mthombothi wrote, "If Nelson Mandela

is our political star, Mphahlele was his literary equivalent."

Ezekiel Mphahlele -- he later Africanized his first name -- was

born in Marabastad Township, Pretoria, but spent much of his

boyhood in Maupaneng, a large village outside Pietersburg (now

Polokwane). At 13, he and his brother and sister returned to

Pretoria, moving in with their maternal grandmother in a house on

Second Avenue in a teeming slum neighborhood.

Collecting and delivering the laundry that his grandmother

washed for white customers, Ezekiel learned his place in South

African society. At the same time, he excelled in school and

attended a progressive secondary school that left him, he later

said, "detribalized, Westernized, but still African." The

conflict, both social and artistic, between African and Western

identities would become an important theme in his work.

After training as a teacher, Mphahlele worked as a secretary at

a school for the blind and began contributing short stories to

Drum, New Age and other magazines. In 1945 he married Rebecca

Mochadibane. Four of their children survive him: Anthony, Motswiri,

Chabi Robert and Puso.

While teaching English and Afrikaans at a Johannesburg high

school, he earned a bachelor of arts and a master of arts in

English literature from the University of South Africa and

published his first book of stories, "Man Must Live" (1946). His

career as an educator came to a sudden halt, however, after he

publicly agitated against the discriminatory Bantu Education Act.

Barred from teaching in South Africa, he struggled to survive and

in 1957 emigrated.

"I was suddenly seized by a desire to leave South Africa for

more sky to soar," he wrote at the end of "Down Second Avenue."

He was, he complained, "shriveling in the acid of my bitterness."

A wandering life ensued, as he wrote and taught in Nigeria,

France, Kenya and Zambia. In the early 1970s he taught at the

University of Denver, where he had earned a doctorate in 1968, and

in 1974 accepted a full professorship in the English department of

the University of Pennsylvania.

While in exile he completed his memoir, as well as a second

volume of stories, "The Living and the Dead" (1961), which

explored the intricate, difficult relations between black and white

South Africans. Stylistically, the sharp, jabbing prose of his

memoir evolved into the more indirect, often wry voice of the

stories in "In Corner B" (1967).

In his first novel, "The Wanderers" (1971), Mphahlele offered

a sweeping view of African racial problems as seen through the eyes

of an exile very much like himself, unable to live in South Africa

but ill at ease in freer African states. While in exile, he also

published two well-regarded works of criticism, "The African

Image" (1962) and "Voices in the Whirlwind" (1972).

In 1977 Mphahlele surprised friends and family by giving up his

university post to return to South Africa. "I couldn't grasp the

cultural goals of the Americans," he told The New York Times. "I

found them so fragmented. I asked myself, 'What am I contributing

to American education?' I had no answer."

At Witwatersrand University, where he was the first black

professor, he taught African literature and created a department

devoted to the subject.

He also wrote two more novels, "Chirundu" (1980) and "Father

Come Home" (1984), as well as a second volume of memoirs, "Afrika

My Music" (1984).

In 2002 he founded the Es'kia Institute, an arts organization

devoted to preserving traditional African culture.

"An African cares very much where he dies and is buried," he

told the reference work Contemporary Authors after returning to

South Africa. "But I have not come to die. I want to reconnect

with my ancestors while I am still active."

Before she left for the Bangalore airport on Tuesday,

Susan Scott-Ker checked the mail one final time.

Nothing.

For nearly a month, she and her husband had been waiting for

their New York state absentee ballots to arrive in India, where she

has been working since the summer. A week ago, they realized that

even if the ballots arrived before the election -- a proposition

that was growing more dubious by the minute -- they had almost no

chance of getting them back in time to be counted.

They had already called the American Consulate, to no avail, and

had looked into hiring a round-trip courier service.

"We had a long talk about it," Scott-Ker said. "We could go

on holiday to a beach somewhere. Or we could come back here and

vote. It was a long talk. We decided it was important to stand up

and be counted.

"We bought the tickets that Friday, the 24th."

On Tuesday evening, she and her husband caught a flight from

Bangalore to New Delhi, about 1,100 miles. The next leg of the

journey, 7,500 miles, took them to Chicago. By 5:30 on Wednesday

morning, they had cleared immigration and customs at O'Hare

International Airport, and flew the last 700 miles to La Guardia.

Their journey of 9,300 miles had taken 22 hours.

It is possible for a traveler to go farther in one direction on

earth -- but not much. When all their expenses are counted, their

trip will have cost them about $5,000, Scott-Ker said.

Experts say Americans are showing more interest and passion

about this election than they have in nearly 50 years. But it is

still likely that one-third of the eligible voters will not take

part -- much less spend two full days traveling around the world to

do so.

For Scott-Ker, 45, a native of New Zealand, and her husband, who

was born in Morocco, the votes they intend to cast on Tuesday in

the Washington Heights section of Manhattan will be their first,

ever. They became American citizens on Nov. 30, 2007.

"We became citizens so we could vote," Scott-Ker said. "We'd

lived here 13 years on green cards, paid lots of tax money, but you

have no voice within the system."

A few months after they were sworn in as citizens, Scott-Ker was

transferred to Bangalore by her employer, Accenture, a management

consulting, technology and outsourcing company, as its marketing

director for India. She kept her eye on the election, filing the

voter registration forms in August and getting the confirmation in

early October. Then she discovered that an absentee ballot would

require a separate application to the city Board of Elections.

"In this highly technological age and city, do we need to be

mailing applications halfway around the world, just so you can get

a piece of mail sent back to the same place?" Scott-Ker wondered

aloud.

In a word, yes. So, she said, she followed the requirements "to

the letter. I even provided an addressed envelope for the ballot to

be sent back to us so it would be absolutely perfect, as it would

have to have been for the India postal service."

Still, no ballots came. The Board of Elections in Manhattan --

its funding cut this year in a dispute with the mayor -- has been

laggard in sending out absentee ballots, officials say. Scott-Ker

and her husband, a university instructor, knew nothing of that

squabble.

"We realized we're not going to get to vote, and we were all

geared up to do this," she said. "We thought, maybe a friend

could get the ballots for us in Manhattan and have them couriered

to India, and we could courier them back. There were so many ifs

and buts. I didn't want a bureaucratic process to get in the way of

casting a ballot."

Her determination is clear. Even so, was it really necessary to

go to all that trouble to cast votes in New York state, where most

polls give the Democratic ticket a lead of 30 percent or more?

"Then you're relying on other people to do your job," she

said. "Apathy doesn't work in a democracy."

Soon after she got home, she heard on the news that people in

some states said an incorrect vote was registered when they used a

touch screen in early voting. She fretted that they might lose

their votes in one final foul-up.

Not to worry, she was told, the voting machines in New York have

been around since at least the early 1960s, and are in no immediate

danger of being transformed into digital touch screens.

"I was looking online," she said, "and as far as I could see,

there's no information about the actual mechanics of voting."

She thought for a minute. She and her husband were determined to

vote for Barack Obama and Joe Biden. "Is there a test we can take

beforehand?" she asked. "We don't want to squander our vote."

ROCK THE VOTE VOTING, UPDATED

My column last Saturday discussed the troubles encountered by

New Yorkers who tried to register to vote using a form supplied by

Rock the Vote, which was printed with the address of the State

Board of Elections in Albany. That agency does not register voters;

under the State Constitution, only the county boards of elections

can register voters.

After the column appeared, Heather Smith, the executive director

of Rock the Vote, contacted me to say that the state address was on

a list provided by the federal Election Assistance Commission, and

that her group had twice received written confirmation from state

officials that they could receive the applications in Albany.

In a mass e-mail message sent on Friday afternoon, Smith said

she was optimistic "that everyone who filled out, downloaded,

signed and mailed a form by the Oct. 10 registration deadline will

be eligible to vote -- no matter where you sent it." She urged

people who registered but can't find their names on the online list

at https://voterlookup.elections.state.ny.us/ to contact

1-866-OUR-VOTE (1-866-687-8683).

These wind-swept West Texas plains offer an

improbable setting for one of the college football season's most

important games, as No. 6 Texas Tech hosts No. 1 Texas here on

Saturday.

And while this dusty city of 217,326 braces for the biggest game

in university history, there is a palpable fear here that Mike

Leach, the eccentric offensive guru who built Tech into an unlikely

national title contender, may not be around much longer. A local

radio station is giving out "Keep Mike Leach at Tech" shirts this

week, and many worry that this cult hero of a coach could bolt for

Clemson, Washington or one of the many other openings expected in

the off-season.

One reason for the concern is that Leach has just two years

remaining on his contract, the shortest length of any coach in the

Big 12. Leach has gone 73-37 in his nine years here, and with an

8-0 record this season, he has secured the program's ninth

consecutive bowl berth. Tech's stadium is on the verge of being

upgraded for the third time in his tenure, a testament to just how

popular he has become.

Coaches with that kind of track record typically have at least a

five-year contract cushion. For instance, the contract for Oklahoma

coach Bob Stoops expires in 2013, and Mack Brown's deal at Texas

ends in 2016. Leach's expires in 2010, which opposing coaches can

use against him in recruiting.

"I don't really second-guess it, certainly not during the

season," Leach said in a telephone interview this week. "I just

roll on and see where it takes you and do the best you can and go

from there."

He is earning $1.75 million this year, meaning he is not among

the five highest-paid coaches in the Big 12. While reports in the

local news media this summer blamed the athletic department's poor

financial situation for the lack of an extension, Gerald Myers,

Texas Tech's athletic director, said that was "not exactly

right."

In a telephone interview this week, Myers said he discussed a

new contract before this season with Leach's agent, Gary O'Hagan of

IMG. Myers said he did not talk to Leach directly about the

contract but that he could have reached a new deal before this

season. O'Hagan declined to comment.

"We just made a decision to wait until the season is over,"

Myers said. "I knew we had a chance to have a really great year

and good team. Knowing agents, they're just going to want to redo

everything again. We want Mike to be our coach, and we're going to

do everything we can to make him our coach for a long time. We'll

just take care of that when the season's over."

Asked if he was disappointed about his contract situation, Leach

said, "You always hope for the best you can get, but I try to

focus on the task at hand and just leave all that stuff to the

people that help me out that I hired to do it."

The situation has raised eyebrows around college football, where

Leach is respected for his quirky but effective style. His

pass-based system has helped turn quarterback Graham Harrell into a

Heisman Trophy contender. Harrell leads the NCAA Football Bowl

Subdivision in passing yards with 3,147. The system also helped

Michael Crabtree evolve into one of the nation's most productive

receivers. He is tied for first in the FBS with 14 touchdown

catches.

By whipping the ball around the field and making defenses dizzy

with his team's aerial antics, Leach has thrived in a place with a

small local recruiting base and little history of top-line football

success.

That is why other coaches are puzzled that Tech has not bent

over backward to keep Leach.

"It does surprise me," said Dennis Franchione, the former

Texas A&amp;amp;M coach. "If they're smart, they'll correct that as soon

as possible. Mike has done a magnificent job there. He's been to

bowls every year. He's competed very well at that level. It's hard

to win the Big 12 South. When you say you're trying to win the Big

12 South, you're trying to compete for the national championship.

That's what it takes in that division to do that."

With a victory over the top-ranked Longhorns on Saturday, Leach

would have Tech in position to compete for a spot in the Bowl

Championship Series title game.

Considering the advantages in financing, recruiting and

tradition at Big 12 South rivals like Texas, Oklahoma and Texas

A&amp;amp;M, it would be almost surreal if Tech found itself in position to

pass them and win the division.

"He's probably done more with less than anybody in that

conference over the past nine years," Arizona coach Mike Stoops,

who worked with Leach as an assistant at Oklahoma, said in a

telephone interview. "I think it's a credit to his system and his

way of doing things. He's very true to that system and to himself.

It's been very successful. By normal standards, you would think the

guy can stay as long as he wanted."

Along with Leach being an innovator on the field, few

personalities in college football are as engaging as he is. He is

one of the few major college coaches in any sport to have a law

degree, and his intellectual fascinations range from South Boston

gangsters to pirates. Of players who entered the Tech football

program out of high school or transferred between 1998 and 2001, 79

percent graduated within six years -- the highest percentage in the

Big 12, according to the latest NCAA report.

Although Leach has long been viewed as a bit of a maverick, he

is likely to find his name mentioned at places like Tennessee and

Auburn, where speculation has percolated about the future of their

coaches during seasons of struggle.

Still, Myers said he remained confident he would reach an

extension agreement.

"We're going to get that done," he said. "Absolutely."

He added: "There wasn't any question before of whether we

wanted Mike to be our coach. That wasn't the issue at all. I'm not

going to get into that now. We've hashed all this, talked about it.

Mike knows we want him to be our coach. So we're going to move on.

We'll get it done when the season's over."

Asked if he saw himself finishing his career at Tech, Leach

said: "I haven't thought that through exactly, but I'm excited

about it now. As far as anything down the road or around the

corner, I'll just have to deal with it then."

Leach's impact on Texas Tech has been discernibly greater than

that of Bob Knight, the former Indiana basketball coach who

struggled to sell tickets and generate interest during a seven-year

tenure on the Tech bench. Knight abruptly retired last winter,

handing the program to his son Pat during the middle of the season.

Leach's impact has been so great, Franchione said, that the

university itself "has grown in stature, and Tech football has

something to do with that growth."

That will all be on display when the teams meet this weekend in

a game featuring a Heisman showdown between Harrell and Texas

quarterback Colt McCoy.

Whether the game lingers as the high point of Leach's tenure

here, or is just a milepost in a long career, is likely to be

determined this off-season.

LOS ANGELES - For weeks, mortgage banker Ben Marsh has been

swamped with questions from clients worried about losing their

homes in this bad economy.

"What should I do? What should I do?" each client typically

asked Marsh, who has offered up several options, including renting

out a room to help cover the mortgage.

"Now I'm following my own advice. I figure an ounce of

prevention is better than a pound of cure."

Marsh is looking for a roomer to rent a bedroom with plasma TV

and stereo surround sound in his spacious three-story home in the

hillsides above Woodland Hills and Calabasas; the home includes a

baby grand piano and other musical instruments, a Jacuzzi and a

gym. All for $1,000 a month.

"Times are tough, and I'm not closing the 12 to 15 loans a

month I used to," said the single man in his 30s. "So I figured

that, before things get too bad, I'd take some steps to keep them

from getting bad."

As the financial crisis worsens, Marsh is like more and more

middle-class homeowners around the country who never thought of

taking in roomers but are now quietly doing so, hoping to use the

extra money to help pay mortgages or other debts.

"In this economy, we're now in uncharted waters, and I've never

seen anything like homeowners taking in boarders except in stories

about the Depression," said Bob Stern, president of the Center of

Governmental Studies in Los Angeles, which examines political and

economic issues in the Southland.

Although there are no statistics on how many homeowners are

renting out rooms for the first time, services that place roomers

say that in recent months they have received a rush of calls from

those who had rarely used their services -- middle-class

professionals living in upscale suburbs.

"We've seen an upsurge in homeowners renting out rooms in their

homes. It's a sign of the times," said Mark Verge, owner of

Westside Rentals, which also places roommates.

"I was recently in our Valley office, and a 62-year-old woman

walked in looking to share her home with a roommate, and (there

was) another homeowner who said, 'I've never done this before, but

I'm looking to rent out a room in my house to help me with my

mortgage."'

Verge said that with residential mortgage foreclosures still on

the rise in the U.S., more homeowners nationwide are considering

that same choice.

In recent weeks, "room for rent" signs have been spotted on

the lawns of some homes in Woodland Hills. Other homeowners have

resorted to the Internet site craigslist.org to list rooms in their

houses.

Marlene Mazzi of Winnetka said the threat of losing their

two-story, four-bedroom home is what drove her and husband Carlos

to list two of the bedrooms with baths for $750 a month each. They

have rented one bedroom and continue looking for a second roomer.

Mazzi, 48, who operates a home business selling natural and

organic products, has mounting medical bills. Her husband, a home

remodeler, has been out of work because of the downturn in the Los

Angeles home-building industry.

"We need the extra money to help with our house payments," she

said. "We have our life's savings invested in our home, and we

have to do whatever we can to keep it."

Renting out part of their home, however, is not without

sacrifices for Mazzi and her family, who live under the same roof,

including daughter Stephanie, 20, a student at Pierce College who

has her own bedroom; and grown nephew Paulo Taborga, a construction

worker who sleeps in a converted family room and also pays a share

of the rent.

"We are renting out each bedroom with a bath and we only have

three and a half bathrooms," Mazzi said. "So that means that our

family has to share one full bath."

Renting out rooms is also a humbling experience for many of

these homeowners, who don't want relatives, friends and neighbors

to know they have rented out rooms to strangers or that they have

financial problems.

Many of the homeowners advertising for renters on the Internet

confirmed they were taking that step because of the hard times, but

most were reluctant to be identified in this story.

"It was hard enough coming to grips with renting out a room in

our home," said a Northridge homeowner who would only identify

himself as Jeff.

"I don't think I'm ready to announce to the world that I need

help paying my mortgage."

Others said they were still dealing with the loss of privacy and

security involved in opening up their home to an outsider.

But ultimately there is one unifying, overwhelming incentive:

the hard times.

Garrett Swayne, a singer-songwriter and music teacher who has

owned his three-bedroom home in Canoga Park since 1988, said having

recently had a friend stay with him for a couple of months had made

his decision easier.

"I'm just now, for the first time - and in many ways driven by

economic reasons - realizing that maybe renting a bedroom to

someone else wouldn't be that bad," he said. "And having another

$700 in my pocket isn't going to hurt the bottom line."

Mary Wittenberg, the president of the New York Road

Runners Club, recalled Friday that it was not easy to accept a

title sponsor for the New York City Marathon in 2003.

On its own, the marathon's name had become a renowned brand. Now

it was joining the realm of stadiums, arenas and college bowl games

with corporate names.

But the club needed the money during a soft economy. "It was a

monumental shift that we weren't looking to make at the time,"

Wittenberg said at Tavern on the Green, two days before Sunday's

race. "We were looking at the time to replace JPMorgan Chase at

the very high level of principal sponsor, not to add a title

sponsor."

ING, the Dutch financial-services giant, agreed to spend an

estimated $2 million a year, which has probably increased since, to

place its letters in front of the marathon's name. "ING came to

us," she said, "which put us in a good position to say, Here are

the grounds we'll consider a title sponsor. We wanted a real

partner and someone who cares a lot about getting kids running, and

about the community."

The recent financial crisis weakened ING enough that the Dutch

government announced Sunday that it would provide $13.4 billion to

stabilize ING's operations, if not prevent a possible collapse.

Wittenberg said she was not surprised when she heard of the

financial rescue.

"We'd been in close contact with ING," she said. "We had a

very good sense throughout the crisis that ING was on solid

footing, as we understood it. ING is quite significant in the

Netherlands, so we thought the bailout would likely be coming."

ING is not cutting its commitment to the marathon, which goes

through 2010.

Tom Waldron, an executive vice president for ING Americas, said

in an interview at Tavern on the Green: "We're not letting up. I'd

be wondering about people who retreat at a time like this."

At a news conference a few minutes earlier, he said: "When ING

is involved in something, we're not a drive-by. We're here to

stay."

Waldron's vow to remain -- ING's rights fee is small compared

with its size -- will be worth watching as the effects of the global

recession damage the balance sheets of sports sponsors, who are

prominent in the financial and automotive sectors. How many will

retain their commitments, reduce or renegotiate them, or simply try

to get out?

Waldron said the New York City Marathon, along with others that

it sponsors in the United States and around the world, has helped

elevate ING's name into something beyond initials that consumers

don't recognize (or confuse with IMG, the sports marketer).

"In the United States, running was the great sweet spot

available to us when we entered the market in a big way," Waldron

said. "We see it as a real sweet spot for us. Our studies show

runners are more likely to seek financial advisers."

ING, like many sponsors, can't specifically say that the event

they pour money into generates new business or, in its case, new

accounts or clients for its banking and financial services. But,

Waldron said, ING measures consumer recalls of its name.

"We see an uptick in the recognition of our name after these

races," he said.

In the world of track and field, the marathon stands out as an

event that unites professionals and amateurs, and is untainted by

drug scandals.

"We're an attractive global brand," Wittenberg said.

According to federal documents, the club took in $10.8 million

in sponsorship and television revenues in the year ended March 31,

2007. Those were the second-largest sources of revenues for the

organization, after $13.1 million in race entries.

The marathon diligently uses the ING name in all public

utterances, press releases and signs. The staff knows ING's money

has helped increase overall prize money and the appearance fees

that entice about 40 total elite runners to New York. But the news

media isn't nearly as dutiful about using the ING name; a Nexis

database search showed that this year and last, the print media was

10 times more likely to leave out the ING name.

"I'm very good at calling it the ING New York City Marathon,

and they've paid for the name," said Wittenberg, who was wearing

an ING-orange suit. "I don't need to be reminded."

In the upper echelon of the Southeastern

Conference, the difference in talent is so slight that games can be

won inside the players' helmets as often as inside the hash marks.

That is the defining lesson that Georgia coach Mark Richt says

he learned last season. His Bulldogs used a single motivational

ploy to redefine their image and transform their program into a

contender for the national championship.

In a search for more emotion, Richt instructed his players

before their game last year against Florida in Jacksonville, Fla.,

to be sure to get a penalty for excess celebration after their

first touchdown. They ended up being called for two after about 70

players stormed the field and danced in the end zone.

Georgia went on to a 42-30 victory, suddenly altering a rivalry

in which Florida had won 15 of the previous 17 meetings.

On Saturday, fifth-ranked Florida (6-1, 4-1 SEC) plays No. 8

Georgia (7-1, 4-1) in one of the biggest games in the rivalry's

history, and Richt's ploy still dominates the conversation about

the game.

"What the celebration did is it brought a lot of attention to

our program," the Georgia athletic director, Damon Evans, said.

"It was over all the news and sports networks and radio and things

of that nature. It garnered a lot of attention."

Until the Bulldogs beat Florida last year, they had been

perpetually on the cusp of the nation's elite. The fact that they

almost never beat Florida was one reason they had not cracked

through to the rarefied air of college football for two decades.

But the intentional and indelible move by Richt for the Florida

game last year changed the images of Richt and Georgia. As a

columnist for the Atlanta Journal-Constitution, Mark Bradley, wrote

this week, Richt's maneuver "is the single smartest thing he has

done as a coach." Richt had lost five of his first six games

against Florida.

Richt and Florida coach Urban Meyer each declined to discuss the

celebration incident. But Richt did expound on the lesson of last

season, when Georgia finished 11-2 and ranked No. 2. In his words,

the 2007 Bulldogs reminded him that "emotion creates energy."

Richt is often stoic on the sideline, something he said was a

byproduct of his calling plays for years and wanting to keep a

level head. He gave up those duties toward the end of the 2006

season, and Richt said that since then, he had been concentrating

more on gauging his team's emotion.

"I think I've learned that it's about 50-50," he said of the

importance of energy and scheme. "You better do a good job

fundamentally and scheme-wise. But you need to try and find a way

to add energy."

Richt acknowledged that it was a bit unlike his usual demeanor

to be a rah-rah coach. (He interrupted his briefing with the news

media Tuesday to say "bless you" to a reporter who had sneezed.)

But his players point to certain instances, like the occasional

use of Georgia's black uniforms, of little changes Richt has made

to stir their emotions.

"I think it's part of Mark growing as a coach," Evans said of

Richt's exploration of the psychological part of the game. "I

think Mark has grown every single year as a coach and gotten better

and better. We all learn new things."

In a quiet moment Sunday night, Meyer would not comment directly

on Georgia's storming the field last year. But he said he had

instructed his team to keep quiet about the celebration because he

did not want it to become a focus of the game.

"I think anything that gets in the way of our preparation would

be a mistake," Meyer said. "We don't play the game until

Saturday. Focus isn't an issue. Get it out of your mind. Let's not

worry about song and dancing. Let's worry about blocking and

tackling the right people."

As much as the celebration helped spur Georgia to victory last

season, the real reason the Bulldogs won is that the Gators could

not tackle Knowshon Moreno, who ran for 188 yards and three

touchdowns on 33 carries. Those yards helped more than any

celebration.

"You could probably find enough people to tell you that the

celebration did have some big effect," said Pat O'Connor, a

professor of kinesiology at Georgia with a specialty in exercise

and sports psychology. "But there is no scientific evidence to

show that it helped. There's too many variables."

The end zone celebration may have motivated Georgia, but it also

infuriated the Gators. On Saturday, the Bulldogs may learn if that

ploy ends up backfiring this year or if they have really leaped

into the national elite.

LOS ANGELES - She was a pillar of strength for her church, a

powerhouse role model for community activism and the matriarch of

one of the San Fernando Valley's pioneering African-American

families.

Rosa L. Broadous, affectionately known as Mother Broadous, died

Tuesday at Valley Presbyterian Hospital in Van Nuys. She was 89.

Political all her life, Broadous made sure she participated in

next week's historic election.

"She was able to vote absentee. She voted for Obama," said her

daughter, the Rev. Pamela J. Broadous. "She admired his genius and

just how expertly he ran his campaign. She was really excited

during the primary. She said she was blessed not to miss her chance

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Broadous co-founded Pacoima's Calvary Baptist Church with her

husband, the late Rev. Hillery T. Broadous, in 1955. A mother of 11

children, nine of whom are still living, Broadous was more than

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directed choirs and youth groups, led children's ministries and

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giving to others," the Rev. Pamela J. Broadous said.

"She believed in the 'total' community. She taught that we are

all neighbors and people should interact with love. All of her

recent letters were signed 'Shalom, Mother Broadous. She had a

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Rosa Broadous came to the San Fernando Valley in 1946 with her

husband and the first five of their 11 children. She lived since

1954 in the same house in Pacoima.

Broadous volunteered with the Braille Institute, Girl Scouts and

Boy Scouts, the North Valley Center of the YWCA and the PTA in her

children's schools.

"We all called her Mother Broadous because of the type of woman

she was, very motherly. She was always there to support you in any

way you needed," said Jose De Sosa, friend since the mid-1960s,

fellow activist and a past president of the San Fernando Valley

Chapter of the NAACP. "The community will be at a loss because she

was there, financially and supportively, for so many. We're really

going to miss her."

Broadous graduated from Los Angeles Mission College in 1976 as a

liberal arts major and later attended California State University,

Northridge.

Born Rosa Lee Thompson on Dec. 8, 1918, in Gould, Ark., she

married the Rev. Hillery T. Broadous on April 18, 1937. He died

Sept. 9, 1982.

Broadous is survived by nine children: Marie Broadous Neloms,

Rosita Furaha Broadous, Hillery L. "Abdullah" Broadous, the Rev.

William T. Broadous, the Rev. Zedar E. Broadous, the Rev. Pamela J.

Broadous, the Rev. Arthur L. Broadous, the Rev. M. Cecilia Broadous

and Francine Broadous Oputa; 32 grandchildren; 40

great-grandchildren; and 12 great-great-grandchildren.

Two children preceded her in death as did five grandchildren.

Viewing will be from 1 p.m. to 8 p.m. Thursday at Rucker's

Mortuary, 12460 Van Nuys Blvd., Pacoima, and from 8:30 to 10 a.m.

Friday, Calvary Baptist Church, 12928 Vaughn St., San Fernando. The

memorial service will be at 7 p.m. Thursday and a funeral service

at 11a.m. Friday at Calvary Baptist Church. Burial will be at

Eternal Valley Memorial Park, 23287 Sierra Highway, Newhall.

LOS ANGELES - If Los Angeles Unified's $7 billion school bond

passes Tuesday, district students won't be the only ones who

benefit.

Contractors and construction firms are expected to see an uptick

in business during the slumping economy -- and many of them have

contributed financially to the Yes on Measure Q campaign.

Since early September, the Yes on Q effort received more than

140 contributions totaling more than $700,000. Nearly two-thirds of

them came from general contractors, construction, architecture and

engineering firms, most of whom do business with the district.

"It's not a surprise at all," said Bob Stern, president of the

Los Angeles-based Center for Governmental Studies. "Clearly they

will benefit financially."

Local developers said the donations don't buy influence with Los

Angeles Unified School District officials and see the contributions

as support for public education, the local economy and a token of

appreciation.

Most construction bids with the school district, undertaking the

largest school construction project in the nation, are awarded

based on lowest competitive bids.

"It would be easy to conclude that it helps garner favors, but

when you look at the mechanics of the bids, there is no

discretion," said Steve Pellegren, vice president for Bernards

Brothers Inc., one of the largest builders in Los Angeles.

LAUSD facilities chief Guy Mehula agreed.

"The Los Angeles Unified School District's contracting process

is transparent, fair and open to the public. Whether or not a

company financially contributed to a campaign to support any

district bond measure has absolutely no influence on the award of

contracts," Mehula said.

Between Sept. 9 and Sept.30, the Yes on Q campaign received

$264,300 in contributions. The largest donations were $25,000 each

from three separate groups: Tarzana-developer Sinanian Development

Inc.; the Los Angeles Orange Counties Building and Construction

Trades union and HMC Group, an Ontario-architecture firm.

Over the summer, Sinanian Development bid on two new elementary

schools in North Hills and Canoga Park as well as Sepulveda and

Sutter middle schools. Together, the contracts are worth slightly

more than $50 million. The contracts are the first between Sinanian

and the LAUSD.

Donations to Measure Q won't help generate business between

Sinanian and the district, said Jason Stalboerger, assistant to the

company's president.

"It's always a competitive bid. There's no way this directly

helped," he said.

Asked why the company donated to the campaign, Stalboerger said

LAUSD board President Monica Garc?a contacted the company's

president.

"I don't even know what Measure Q is, to tell you the truth,"

Stalboerger said.

Luis S nchez, chief of staff to Garc?a, confirmed that she had

made calls on behalf of the measure, noting that her efforts are

normal.

"She made a lot of calls on Measure Q," he said. "She spent a

lot of time fundraising for the measure."

Though district employees cannot stump for a ballot measure,

Garc?a and her board colleagues are allowed to do so, according to

Stern.

Board member Tamar Galatzan, who represents part of the San

Fernando Valley, was not asked to make calls on behalf of Measure

Q, said her chief of staff, Tom Waldman.

Marlene Canter spoke about Measure Q to a Valley Democratic

club, said spokesman Mark Taylor.

"Obviously she's supportive on the measure, but she hasn't been

making phone calls," he said.

On Sept. 10, Bernards Brother Inc., based in San Fernando,

donated $10,000 to the Measure Q campaign.

The general contractor has one active project with the LAUSD, a

new middle school on West 46th Street in South Los Angeles.

At $74.9 million to build the 53-classroom school, it was the

lowest of three bids for the project.

The total cost of the school, which should open in two years, is

approximately $136.6million.

Over the span of the LAUSD's construction project, Bernards

Brothers has been involved with 16 projects, according to the

district's strategic execution plan, which total approximately $895

million.

"Since we started working with LAUSD 20 years ago, we've

completed a little over 20 schools," said Pellegren.

The general contracting company was not solicited for donations,

Pellegren said, and the company does not believe the funds will

earn any influence.

Pellegren called the $10,000 donation a token of appreciation

and notes that the company has a personal and professional

commitment to public education and the local economy.

"We believe in L.A. Unified. My kids graduated from L.A.

Unified," he said. "The owners of Bernards graduated from LAUSD

and are Valley-born and -bred."

Mehula said along with a strict bidding process, there are

oversight measures to ensure a fair process.

"Currently there are more than 600 contractors pre-qualified to

work on LAUSD's New School Construction and Modernization

Program," Mehula said. "As an additional safeguard, the Office of

the Inspector General and the Citizens' Bond Oversight Committee

routinely review the contracting procedures for compliance through

audits and monthly reporting."

It's correct that donations don't buy influence, said Stern, but

donors are investing in something that they think they'll get a

shot at.

"The question is do they have more contracts coming up with the

district. These people don't waste money," Stern said. "These

tokens of appreciation are investments. These companies expect a

shot at some of that $7 billion."

Stephon Marbury sat docilely in jeans and a

black, blue and white plaid shirt, while all around him marched the

meticulous drum of preparation.

His teammates laced shoes, tugged jerseys over their chests and

warm-ups over their jerseys. Marbury, in his corner locker,

remained still, unaffected and undaunted.

In another of a seemingly steady progression of separating his

Knicks from the past regime, coach Mike D'Antoni listed Marbury

among his inactives before the Knicks' 116-87 loss to the

Philadelphia 76ers on Friday night at the Wachovia Center.

"There were a lot of things that we need to correct and get

better at," D'Antoni said. "I thought we were on our heels the

whole game and we didn't do anything real aggressive."

Marbury is healthy, void of illness and injury. He will not,

however, be a part of D'Antoni's rotation now, and probably ever.

That point was hammered in as Marbury watched the game from the

last seat on the Knicks' bench, an easy target to be assailed by

the taunts of fans.

On the opposite end of the bench, Eddy Curry sat next to the

assistant Dan D'Antoni. Curry also did not play for the second

consecutive game, although he was in uniform. Marbury and Curry

were once viewed as cornerstones of the organization. Now, they

bookended the team's bench.

It is a place they will probably find themselves for the

foreseeable future until a resolution can be found. For Marbury,

that may come through a buyout, a release, a trade or an expiring

contract that simply cannot expire soon enough.

Mike D'Antoni explained that minutes at the guard spots were

consumed by his preferred threesome of Jamal Crawford, Chris Duhon

and Nate Robinson. The remaining minutes would be divvied among

young players, those in the Knicks' future, those not named

Marbury, a lighting rod of controversy in past years.

"It's not that he's done anything," D'Antoni said before the

game, adding that he should have listed Marbury as inactive against

the Heat in the season opener on Wednesday, when Marbury dressed

but did not play. "It's just the team is going in a different

direction. He's been in the league for a long time. I'm not going

to put him out there for four minutes."

Friday was the next step in the evolution of Marbury's apparent

exile. It started subtly enough in July, with the signing of Duhon.

Then, in training camp, D'Antoni shuffled Marbury from starting

point guard to backup shooting guard, anointing Duhon the starter.

Next came sporadic minutes in the preseason, followed by

Wednesday's 48-minute benching.

D'Antoni insisted that the door for Marbury is ajar, but it may

be closing shortly. Asked what would have to happen for Marbury to

crack his rotation, D'Antoni said: "Injuries. Or somebody really

just playing bad. But we picked the direction of the club when we

signed Duhon, and with Jamal and Nate, those are the three guys who

are going to get the chunk of the minutes.

"The bigger decision, which was mine, was that he didn't have a

big role. At that point, it was now what are we going to do? We had

to figure out together. It was my decision on the direction the

team was going to take for the next two or three years."

That direction is now all but certain to exclude Marbury, who

despite bristling at some questions, continued to publicly put on a

good face.

Marbury left the bench to huddle in timeouts and slapped the

hands of teammates who departed the game. He reiterated his

statements that he wanted to remain in New York and help the team

win a championship, no matter how far off that might be.

"I'm not frustrated at all," Marbury said. "I have no control

over it. If it was raining outside, I can't get mad if it's

raining. I've got to go get an umbrella and then walk in the rain.

I have no control over the situation. The coach makes the decision

on who plays and who's not going to play, and, obviously, right now

he feels like I'm not one of the guys that's going to be playing."

Other questions elicited a simpler response.

Is it O.K. with you?

"Coach's decision," Marbury said.

Would you rather sit in clothes than a jersey?

"Coach's decision," Marbury said.

Did you want the chance to talk to D'Antoni about the decision?

"Coach's decision," Marbury said.

For all the predictable responses those questions returned, when

asked if he wanted to play somewhere else, Marbury took a moment to

size up the question, then offered another simple, yet different

answer.

"Next question," he said.

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Broadous graduated from Los Angeles Mission College in 1976 as a

liberal arts major and later attended California State University,

Northridge.

Born Rosa Lee Thompson on Dec. 8, 1918, in Gould, Ark., she

married the Rev. Hillery T. Broadous on April 18, 1937. He died

Sept. 9, 1982.

Broadous is survived by nine children: Marie Broadous Neloms,

Rosita Furaha Broadous, Hillery L. "Abdullah" Broadous, the Rev.

William T. Broadous, the Rev. Zedar E. Broadous, the Rev. Pamela J.

Broadous, the Rev. Arthur L. Broadous, the Rev. M. Cecilia Broadous

and Francine Broadous Oputa; 32 grandchildren; 40

great-grandchildren; and 12 great-great-grandchildren.

Two children preceded her in death as did five grandchildren.

Viewing will be from 1 p.m. to 8 p.m. Thursday at Rucker's

Mortuary, 12460 Van Nuys Blvd., Pacoima, and from 8:30 to 10 a.m.

Friday, Calvary Baptist Church, 12928 Vaughn St., San Fernando. The

memorial service will be at 7 p.m. Thursday and a funeral service

at 11a.m. Friday at Calvary Baptist Church. Burial will be at

Eternal Valley Memorial Park, 23287 Sierra Highway, Newhall.

The surrounding cornfields where the tornado

cut its deadly path last May have since grown tall, yielded their

crop and withered to a faded brown. But this 1,900-person town, its

south side cleaved by one of the biggest tornados on record, has

defied the dying days of fall and reversed the cycle. It sprouts

with life.

Some signs are as obvious as buzzing saws and pounding hammers.

Others are as subtle as the sod on the graves that many of the

football players from Aplington-Parkersburg High School helped dig

for some of the eight people killed by the tornado. The grass has

sown itself back to the earth, like healing scars.

The house of the football coach, Ed Thomas, at the corner of

Conn and Johnson, has been rebuilt, among the first of the 222

houses destroyed to become a home again.

The rubble that was the high school is gone, replaced by the

ascending brick walls of next year's classrooms.

The football field, which was speared by debris, is again lush

green, lined with stripes and mowed perfectly. The mangled signs of

205-mph chaos are gone, replaced by new bleachers, light towers,

goal posts and a short chain-link fence behind which restless men

and children watch the games. A new scoreboard stands in a corner.

A rumpled metal piece of the old one, proclaiming this to be

"Falcon Country," hangs as a twisted memorial where the players

take the field.

"You get beat up, battered, but you get back up off the

ground," Thomas said.

The Falcons, beyond reasonable expectations, are 10-0 and ranked

No. 1 in Iowa's Class 1A, for small schools but not the smallest.

There is no high school here, not anymore and not yet, but there is

a team. And those who never dreamed of such destruction now imagine

a recovery that includes a championship.

Aplington-Parkersburg opened the state playoffs with a 42-0

victory against St. Ansgar on Wednesday night at Ed Thomas Field.

As people gathered in the chilled twilight before the game, many

stopped at the orange construction fence to look at the school

being resurrected. They saw backhoes and dump trucks. They saw a

horizon filled with houses and businesses in various states of

construction. When asked about May 25, some of them cried.

Then they filled the new bleachers and cheered.

"We're just happy to help out the town," said Alex Hornbuckle,

a junior running back who scored five touchdowns on Wednesday and

is one of three 1,000-yard rushers on a team running an old-school

wing-T offense. "Whether it's building houses or playing football,

we're just happy to help," he said.

The tornado was an EF5 -- the top of the Enhanced Fujita scale,

the state's strongest in at least a generation -- and it demolished

City Hall, the gas station, the grocery store and the high school.

It uprooted families and 100-year-old trees. Neighbors found one

dead woman on her lawn. Her husband, with a neck brace, goes to the

football games, like just about everyone else.

Four assistant coaches lost their homes. So did about eight

players. One lost his grandparents, too.

Thomas and his wife, Jan, emerged from their basement that day

to find their possessions scattered over the fields to the east. He

walked to the high school, the first to arrive at the wreckage. He

vowed to rebuild the thing he knew best: the football program.

Thomas has been the coach at Aplington-Parkersburg -- AP to

everyone here -- for 34 years. The Falcons won state championships

in 1993 and 2001, and four former players are in the NFL: Packers

defensive end Aaron Kampman, Lions defensive end Jared DeVries,

Broncos center Casey Wiegmann and Jaguars center Brad Meester.

But the tornado forced the Falcons to rebuild, literally. The

first day, they pulled countless pieces of lumber -- pieces of homes

-- that the tornado had thrown into the field like darts. On the day

they played their first home game in September, the scoreboard went

up.

In between, a temporary locker room was carved from a building

constructed as a bus barn. Musco Lighting, based in Muscatine,

Iowa, donated and installed the lights -- about $150,000 worth,

Thomas said. Turf experts advised Thomas on rehabilitating and

reseeding the field. A man put in a concrete floor in part of his

barn to create the team's weight room. A new track, replacing the

one gouged with debris, is nearly complete.

On Wednesday, a school assembly was held at the middle school in

Aplington, where the 240 high school students have squeezed in. In

the hallway was a hand-painted sign: "We can't be knocked down,"

it read. "Falcon Pride is stronger than the EF5."

Thomas accepted a $16,332 check from Varsity Gold, a fundraising

company that solicited and matched donations from rival high

schools. All told, about $300,000 has been donated, not including

the lights. About $175,000 has come from the NFL's Youth Football

Fund, with a matching program for players. The rest has come mostly

in small increments.

"Sometimes I catch myself thinking, 'Did this really happen to

us?"' Thomas said.

But thoughts of the "60 seconds of horror," as the high school

principal, Dave Meyer, called it, are never far away. The school

held a tornado drill two weeks ago, as Iowa requires, though it was

euphemistically called a shelter drill. Some students needed

counseling, and some were excused from taking part.

Parents said that many children would not sleep upstairs in

their bedrooms, away from the relative safety of the basement.

"We still have kids on our football team, if there's bad

weather, especially wind, it gets to them," Thomas said. "They

want to be home."

During the game Wednesday, Dawn Wiegmann, the wife of an

assistant coach and mother of a starting safety, recalled the warm

afternoon that the family's house was destroyed. Her daughter and

son Coy were in the basement with two of Coy's teammates, including

Hornbuckle. Her husband, Jon, was not home.

As the children screamed at her to get downstairs, she was

frozen by the sight of the approaching black twister. Only when the

80-year-old tree in the yard was ripped from the ground did she

scurry to the basement, under the pool table, with the children.

She remembers the noise -- "It hurt," she said -- and how the

back half of the house lifted and fell back on its foundation,

three times, with a bang and a shudder.

The Wiegmanns have lived divided since. On Sunday, they hope to

move into their rebuilt home, sleeping under the same roof for the

first time since May.

And on Monday, they will be back at Ed Thomas Field, where

Aplington-Parkersburg plays St. Edmond (9-1) from Fort Dodge.

There are times during practice that Thomas senses that his

players are distracted. He will stop and have them look around, at

the part of town that was wiped away and is being rebuilt. That is

their motivation.

Before the game on Wednesday, Thomas paced inside the makeshift

locker room. The players, all 74 of them in uniform, were silent.

"I think you've understood since Day 1 that this wasn't some

ordinary season," Thomas said. He reminded the boys of the first

game, on the road, when the visiting bleachers were filled with

Aplington-Parkersburg fans an hour before kickoff.

"That's what you guys have meant to this community," he said.

"We've been playing for a lot of people. Tonight is no

different."

The Falcons soon ran underneath the battered sign salvaged from

the old scoreboard. The people in the bleachers stood and cheered.

Just behind them, in the twilight behind the construction fence, a

school was rising again.

LOS ANGELES - Call it a crosstown showdown, but with cotton

swabs instead of footballs and cheek cells instead of the Victory

Bell.

Students at USC and UCLA will compete next week to see which

campus can register the most people for the National Marrow Donor

Program, a registry that connects patients with illnesses to those

willing to donate life-saving bone marrow. Results will be posted

at bonemarrowchallenge.com.

But organizers hope the rivalry between the two universities

will prove to be more than just a numbers game. The real goal is to

find a match for Robert Corrales, a Santa Clarita sheriff's deputy

who was diagnosed with acute myeloid leukemia in April.

The only cure is a bone marrow transplant, but a match with his

ethnic background has proved elusive among the 11million people in

the registry. Even his brothers and sisters didn't match.

"He's unique because of his mixed ethnicity," said Dr. Ronald

Paquette, Corrales' physician and a researcher at UCLA's Jonsson

Comprehensive Cancer Center.

Corrales is Mexican, but his grandfather on his father's side

was Chinese. As it turns out, Corrales' skin tissue needs to match

his Chinese ancestry.

Those from multiracial backgrounds "present unique challenges

for finding an appropriate tissue type," Paquette said.

The U.S. Census has found that up to 11 percent of the

population in several Western states checks more than one race on

forms. In Hawaii, the most common combination is Asian and Hawaiian

or other Pacific Islander. In California, it is white and "other

race," and in Alaska and Oklahoma, it is white and American

Indian.

"This just goes to show that 'Multiracial America' is not a

simple product of urban melting pots but a wide-ranging and far

from uniform phenomenon," a statement on the Census Web site

reads.

But that trend doesn't trickle down to the donor marrow

registry.

"The challenge (for finding a match) is probably greatest in

this growing community of racially and ethnically diverse people,"

said Dennis Confer, chief medical officer for the National Marrow

Donor Program. "The tissue type is very complex. The chance that

two people from two different groups will create a new tissue type

in children is very high."

That's why there is a great need for donors from all

backgrounds, even among whites, because of the many different skin

types.

Corrales and his wife, Olga, were on a cruise in Mexico when he

started feeling ill. The ship's doctor deemed him too sick to

continue traveling.

Since then, Corrales, 56, the father of four sons, undergoes

chemotherapy treatments twice a day and is hospitalized at UCLA

Medical Center-Santa Monica for weeks because he has no immune

system.

"We have to stay positive," Olga Corrales said. "We have our

faith that helps us through everything, and I have to be the

advocate to try to save him."

But the desperate need for a bone marrow match touched family

friend Nancy Ullman, a USC alum who helped set up the crosstown

rivalry to register bone marrow.

"For the most part, we knew both campuses had culturally

diverse students," she said. "I'm a graduate of USC, and the

rivalry is embedded in students. We thought we could generate a

little bit of buzz, get a lot of kids to register and help them

understand that marrow has everything to do with race and nothing

to do with blood type."

What deters many from registering their donor type are

misconceptions, Ullman and others say. To register, all that is

needed is a swab of the inside of the cheek to gather cells.

During the marrow donation, doctors make several small incisions

through the skin over the back of the pelvic bones, according to

the National Donor Program Registry. They then insert a special

hollow needle through these incisions, and a syringe is attached to

the needle to draw out the marrow.

Corrales is worth all that, Ullman said.

"Bob is easygoing, spontaneous, witty and a great

storyteller," she said. "He has a way of making everyone around

him feel important. That's probably why he is fought over by the

UCLA Medical Center nurses.

"His co-workers love him because he brings them burritos in the

morning stuffed with bacon, eggs and homemade skillet potatoes."

Corrales, who grew up in the city of San Fernando and in

Pacoima, attended College of the Canyons in Valencia, where he

played baseball.

He was recruited to play at Pepperdine University, but drove a

hard bargain and refused to go unless his buddy, Steve Smith, went

with him.

The school eventually accepted Smith, who went on to become the

third-base coach for the 2008 World Series champion Philadelphia

Phillies. As for the crosstown showdown, Corrales said he is

focusing on the big picture and not on finding a match for himself.

"The chances of a donor coming out of this bone marrow drive

are not very good," he said from his hospital bed. "But just to

get the people out there to sign up, then hopefully someone can be

a match to save another life."

Kevin Blanchard's freshman year at George Washington University

was unlike anybody else's on campus.

Crowded classrooms routinely sent him into a panic. Cubicles

triggered tunnel vision. He felt alienated from the 18-year-olds

around him and their antics. His leg throbbed as he wandered the

campus, trying to remember where to go. His concentration whipsawed

and the words he read in textbooks slipped easily from his memory,

the result of a mild traumatic brain injury.

A charismatic Marine Corps veteran, Blanchard, 25, could trace

his difficulties to Iraq and the summer of 2005, when a Humvee he

was riding in detonated a bomb buried under the sand. The blast

claimed half his left leg and mangled his right leg. In short

order, he endured numerous surgeries, months in a wheelchair, a

titanium prosthesis and intermittent swirls of depression and

pessimism. Until, as he tells it, he woke up one morning and

decided to count his blessings.

College was the first step in his plan to reshape his life.

After four years in the Marines, one combat tour in Iraq and a

life-changing injury, how tough could it be?

"I thought, I'm so motivated, so intelligent -- I am taking on

the school," says Blanchard, who now leads efforts at George

Washington and nationally to bridge the gulf between combat and

campus. "It didn't happen that way at all. I was so lost."

Few students make their way to campus directly from an

outpatient bed at Walter Reed Army Medical Center, as Blanchard

did. But with the passage this summer of a new GI Bill that offers

a greatly improved package of education benefits, there will be

more. When the bill goes into effect, in August 2009, a boom in

post-9/11 veterans is expected at colleges and universities across

the nation. And unlike the aftermath of the Vietnam War, when few

colleges and universities welcomed military veterans, a growing

number are taking steps to ease the difficult transition.

Still in its early stages at many institutions, the effort is

led in large part by a generation of student veterans who came to

view their own struggles to adapt to academic life as dispiriting

and unnecessary.

"Some people are talking about it like it's a movement," says

Derek Blumke, a University of Michigan senior and cofounder and

president of Student Veterans of America, an advocacy group formed

earlier this year. "A lot of people are returning now and

realizing they want to go to college. They are coming back, getting

together and wanting to make this happen. People are mobilizing."

The legislation fueling the movement pays homage to the original

GI Bill of Rights, which is considered one of the most successful

and transformative government programs in history. It ultimately

sent 2.2 million veterans to college after World War II and helped

five million others acquire trade skills. Rather than come home to

sell apples, as many neglected veterans did after World War I,

these veterans helped broaden the middle class and democratize

universities, which were primarily bastions of the wealthy and well

connected.

Few would argue that the impact of the new GI Bill, formally the

Post-9/11 Veterans Educational Assistance Act, will rival that of

its prototype, mostly because there are far fewer eligible veterans

and the new law is less generous. The original bill paid for

public, private and vocational education. This one covers public

education for most veterans who served after 9/11 and eases the

burden of private tuition. The law also extends many benefits to

members of the National Guard and the Reserve, and offers stipends

for housing and textbooks. But it does not pay for non-degree

vocational training.

Still, the law is viewed both by veterans and colleges as an

opportunity to do right by today's combat-tested troops and mend a

relationship that has badly frayed since the antiwar movement of

the 1960s. The hope is that new veterans, buffeted by war and a

troubled economy, can seize on college as a roadmap to a productive

life beyond the military.

"This is the biggest step toward turning the page on what we

did after Vietnam," says Paul Rieckhoff, executive director of the

advocacy group Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America. "We saw

the GI Bill as a way of attempting to deal with veterans'

reacclimation issues in a more comprehensive way. They are in a

safe place there in school, moving forward with their life."

Rieckhoff's group spearheaded efforts to pass the bill, written

by Sen. Jim Webb, a Virginia Democrat and Marine Corps veteran. The

bill met strong resistance from John McCain, the senator from

Arizona who is now the Republican candidate for president, and from

President Bush, who argued that it would prompt service members to

choose college over re-enlistment after just three years. But

ultimately, it passed handily and was signed into law on June 30.

Of course, veterans have never stopped going to college with

government help, even as the country moved to a volunteer military.

The existing law, the Montgomery GI Bill, was passed in 1984 and

was named after the Mississippi congressman who worked to update

the benefits. But, over time, inflation outpaced the payments.

Veterans, who often enlist on the promise of a college education,

found that the program, in essence, paid for community college.

Many have been forced to find full-time jobs to pay their bills.

(In August, the benefit was increased by $221, to $1,321 a month.)

About 40 percent of the 450,000 veterans in the current program

attend community colleges, about the same percentage that attend

four-year institutions, according to the Department of Veterans

Affairs. Many do so by choice. Two-year colleges offer flexible

class schedules, enroll older students and can feel less

intimidating -- all important issues to veterans, who are usually

older and often married with families. Online programs are popular

for the same reasons.

Some veterans, though, say they wind up in community colleges or

fail to transfer to a four-year institution by necessity: the cost

is simply prohibitive. The new GI Bill will change that.

But money isn't the only hurdle. Veterans, for the most part, do

not have an easy time getting into four-year colleges and

universities, particularly selective private ones. Boredom or

frustration with high school -- often accompanied by mediocre

transcripts and SAT scores -- led many into the military in the

first place. But many institutions have failed to make allowances

for the soldiers' special circumstances or to promote themselves as

veteran-friendly. For veterans, adapting to civilian life, let

alone student life, is difficult. It is not uncommon for a new

veteran, particularly one with mental or physical injuries, to feel

overwhelmed by the choices and rhythms of college.

Ismael Valenzuela, 33, hopes one day to study at Columbia

University.

Reared in El Paso, Texas, he did a lackluster stint at a

community college, then in 1997 moved to New York to study

classical guitar at the New School. Despite his passion, he didn't

feel ready to get serious. "A big piece of the puzzle was still

missing," he says.

A patriot, he had long imagined himself in the military. So in

2000, Valenzuela enlisted in the Marine Corps. Twice he was

deployed to Iraq, the first time at the start of the war. The

second tour, with the country in the throes of an insurgency, was

much rougher. Days were filled with seek-and-destroy missions and

searching houses for weapons caches. A buddy died in combat.

Explosions and small arms fire were a constant hazard.

Last year he decided to leave the corps, a tough decision. He

traveled through Europe for a while and came home ready for

college. But he had missed the application deadline for Borough of

Manhattan Community College. He was told to reapply later in the

year.

Fearing that if he did not begin school right away he would

start a downward drift, Valenzuela asked to speak to the director

of admissions. At first the director, Eugenio Barrios, saw in him

just another case of procrastination and immaturity. But Valenzuela

brought up his seven-year career in the corps, and showed pictures

of a banged-up Humvee in Iraq. The vehicle had flipped in an

accident, a common danger, and Valenzuela had been knocked

unconscious for 10 minutes. He had shaken off the daze and gone

right back to work.

The two men shared a rapport, and Barrios agreed to become the

veteran's mentor.

Valenzuela did not do so well on the placement exam in reading,

writing and math required by the City University of New York. That

did not surprise him, because the day of the test he had trouble

focusing and remembering facts, perhaps a product of both

post-traumatic stress disorder and a mild traumatic brain injury.

Barrios was quick to tell him that to succeed he would need to

apply everything he learned in the corps to his schoolwork.

"Some need more help than others because their academic

beginnings were not as strong," Barrios says of veterans. "They

bring a certain level of maturity and a certain appreciation of our

system. Their desire is there. There is a word in Spanish for that:

las ganas. They have that very strong will to want to succeed."

Valenzuela's return from war has not been entirely smooth or

entirely unusual. In the months after he left the corps, he became

easily enraged, got into fights and drank two 12-packs of Heineken

a night, he says. He felt adrift and apathetic. That slowly began

to change after he started college, in January. With the help of

his psychiatrist at the Department of Veterans Affairs, his new

girlfriend and Barrios, he has wrestled down some of his mental

health problems. Talking about the war was the first step in a long

process.

"I have gotten a lot better," he says. "I have been pampered

right now by the V.A. and the school. They have been perfect, more

than perfect."

Academically, he has struggled. He studies three times as hard

as many other students, he says, but makes progress every day. He

is passing all his classes this term, though he failed math over

the summer. His goal is to study astronomy and engineering, then

return to the Marine Corps as a pilot.

"I can see why it would be hard to follow through," says

Valenzuela, an unyielding optimist now. "I don't know how many

times I just want to throw the books. But I am super-motivated.

That is one of the things keeping me sane."

Still, old habits die hard, even in the classroom.

"I always know where the exit is, how many windows there are

and," he says with a smile, "what's the weapon of choice."

Shortly after Valenzuela first showed up for class at the

community college's lower Manhattan complex, Aubrey Arcangel sought

him out. Arcangel is president of the student veterans club, and he

wanted to make sure Valenzuela was doing all right. It was a

protective gesture not so very different from the code the military

lives by.

New veterans step into college life from a highly structured

system and are bedeviled by the looseness they find. How to start a

day without a schedule, one that usually begins with physical

training? Arcangel, 26, who left the Army after four years and one

tour in Iraq, explains: "You have P.T. formation, then you have

P.T., then you have another formation and blah blah blah. There is

a procedure for everything, a field manual, a technical manual for

everything."

Then there are the other students, many of whom arrive right

from high school. By and large, fellow students have welcomed

veterans, although they do sometimes display a morbid -- some former

Marines say inappropriate -- curiosity about life on the ground in

Iraq. The discomfort many veterans mention has less to do with any

antiwar attitudes than with the students' maturity level and remove

from the war. With fewer than 2.7 million in the armed forces --

roughly 2 percent of Americans 18 to 49 -- young people know little

about the military, how it works and what it is like to fight in a

war.

For Arcangel, Iraq, where he provided security for a lieutenant

colonel, has been difficult to shake off. "If I were back there, I

think I would go insane," he says. "It seemed almost surreal."

That is one reason he became a student leader, working to hook

veterans up with one another in a social network. "There are some

veterans that are socially awkward and this helps," he says. At

Borough of Manhattan Community College, fewer than 1 percent of

enrolled students are veterans -- 160 of more than 19,000 students.

Channeling the warrior mentality into textbooks and tests can be

especially trying for combat veterans.

John Schupp, a chemistry professor at Cleveland State

University, which has about 340 former servicemen and women among

its 15,000 students, saw the difficulties firsthand and sold his

university on the idea of vets-only courses. Fall semester,

first-year vets can take four introductory courses -- English, math,

biology and "Introduction to College Life" -- and in the spring,

psychology, chemistry, sociology and one course in the mainstream

to ease them into the civilian world.

"I had to recruit students from the community to get enough in

the spring," he says. "They didn't just show up on campus. I

reached out to the military mom groups. I met with them on a weekly

basis." Last semester, the program's first, he recruited 14

freshmen. "Once I got the first 14, they were spokespersons."

This semester there are 25 new students in the program.

Schupp sees camaraderie in the classroom as crucial to getting

the veterans to show up, to stay and to thrive. "They tell me over

and over they wouldn't have come to college otherwise," he says.

"In the military world it's the team. The squadron must survive.

When you come to school it's all personal -- my books, my grade, my

stuff, my notes. They're isolated, because other students haven't

seen what they've seen."

The University of California, Berkeley, a hotbed of antiwar

protest during the Vietnam War, offers a class called "Veterans in

Higher Education," to help them learn how to prepare for tests and

maximize study time. The class is part of Troops to College, an

initiative begun in 2006 and championed by Gov. Arnold

Schwarzenegger to attract veterans to California state colleges and

universities and make them feel at home on campus.

And at the University of Michigan, with 90 students receiving GI

benefits, a veterans services office has been set up to help with

paperwork and particulars of the GI Bill, to walk new students

through course registration and to help them find housing. Such

offices can assist members of the service or veterans in gathering

lost transcripts before they apply, something not easily done from

Iraq, or see to it that veterans have access to counseling, in some

cases without having to wait in a roomful of other students.

Veterans suffering from combat stress don't always cope well with

crowded rooms.

Despite the steps to attract these students, Blumke of the

Student Veterans of America says many in the military view the best

universities as off limits, even for the academically qualified.

Blumke, 27, had a grade point average of 1.5 when he graduated

from high school in Alanson, Mich. The 3.9 GPA he earned in a

community college and, he believes, his standing in the military

got him into the University of Michigan last year. (Michigan State

University rejected him.) He is double-majoring in psychology and

political science.

His friends thought he was overshooting when he applied.

"Veterans for far too long have been pigeonholed" as only

community college material, says Blumke, a former noncommissioned

officer in the Air Force. "The Michigans, UCLAs and Dartmouths --

there is a social stigma attached to those schools. When I told my

friends I was going to U. of M., they couldn't believe it, because

of the liberal ideas that they don't like the military there. They

were stuck in the '60s and '70s."

Until recently, universities made little effort to recruit

veterans or to alter the misgivings that Blumke expressed.

Jim Selbe, the assistant vice president for lifelong learning

for the American Council on Education, which represents 1,600

colleges and universities, says that just two years ago "a

significant gap" existed "between rhetoric and practice."

"The gap is beginning to steadily diminish," he says. "There

is a deep sense of obligation to do what's necessary to provide an

opportunity for returning veterans."

Last year, the council started a program to provide

individualized college counseling to seriously injured veterans at

military hospitals. The program was the brainchild of James Wright,

the president of Dartmouth, who has led efforts to bring more

veterans to college.

"The all-volunteer military draws in a segment of the

population that has not customarily gone to college in the same

proportion as other parts of our society," says Wright, a former

Marine. He hopes the new GI Bill "will cause them to raise their

aspirations."

Dartmouth's admissions office takes military experience into

account, Wright says. He advises veterans to bring their service

record to the institution's attention, perhaps through the essay

requirement. Discipline, as well as job and leadership qualities,

brings something to the table that cannot be matched by young

students. Yet there has to be a sense that the veteran can cope

with the demands of the courses. "We don't look for the same thing

in terms of test scores, but we are not doing them any favors,"

Wright emphasizes. "We want to make sure they are prepared and

would succeed."

The number of recent veterans attending Dartmouth is tiny, all

matriculating in the last two years. Last year, two became

freshmen; this fall there are six in a first-year class of 1,077.

Blumke recognizes the uphill struggle and has refined his

organization's pitch, which he delivers repeatedly to colleges and

universities: "War is not glamorous, but it is reality. We bring

that experience to people who don't know about it."

That experience ultimately got James McMahon, who served four

years in the Marines, into the college of his choice. McMahon, 23,

had nearly given up on attending the University of Rhode Island,

his home state school. The admissions office looked at

five-year-old SAT scores and poor high school grades ("I didn't

have a vested interest in college") and was unimpressed. He was

rejected.

McMahon was in California training other Marines for deployment

to Iraq, so his father and girlfriend took up the battle, calling

the admissions office and sending letters that underscored his

successes.

"My father finally got in touch with the president of the

university and with his typical Irish charm said, 'Something might

be wrong with the computer system. I'm sure it's nobody's fault.

But did you just deny a combat veteran with all this experience and

a guaranteed $40,000 if he comes to your school?' " Two weeks

later, an acceptance letter arrived.

Admissions offices, McMahon says, "are just not wired to think

about it in those terms. I didn't take it as a personal insult. I

was more laughing at the university. My friends from high school,

they have bachelor degrees from there and these are the same kids I

was getting into trouble with four or five years ago."

An artilleryman, McMahon is being tested for a mild traumatic

brain injury. He recently cut back on his classes, saying that the

injury was making it hard to keep up. But he is majoring in

sociology with a focus on criminal justice and has a 3.24 average.

Like his fellow veterans, Blanchard is determined not to let his

injuries dictate his future. Following in his father's footsteps,

he joined the Marine Corps right out of high school, in 2001.

His specialty was combat engineering, because "I wanted to blow

stuff up," he says.

In 2005, he was deployed to Iraq near the Syrian border, where

he went on patrols and blew up gates and doors so buildings could

be searched. Six months later his Humvee hit the roadside bomb that

took half his leg.

After his roommate at Walter Reed was accepted by Georgetown

University, Blanchard decided to aim high himself and apply to

George Washington University, which has about 300 veterans who

receive benefits and 200 who do not, a university spokeswoman says.

The two veterans moved into an apartment in Virginia together,

and Blanchard started his first year.

But he didn't count on his brain playing tricks on him. Although

doctors had diagnosed mild traumatic brain injury, he shrugged it

off. Compared with losing half a leg and nearly losing his other

leg, a slightly shaken-up brain did not register as a concern.

"Whatever," Blanchard thought to himself.

Two days into classes, though, he noticed that he was retaining

little of what he read or heard in the classroom. "My mind was

blurred, cloudy all the time, and I was walking around in a daze,"

says Blanchard, who does not advertise his injuries because he

wants no special treatment. "I had a full load and I dropped all

my classes except two. And yet I'm studying all the time. It was so

frustrating."

Over time, his brain learned to compensate. "I just started to

remember better, adjusting how I think," says Blanchard, now a

junior studying international business. "It's still very hard.

With classes like regression analysis, I'll never be the same

again," he says, jokingly.

Although his good leg hurts all the time, he refrains from

taking pain medication whenever he can. Instead, he works out at

the gym and allows his endorphins to lessen his discomfort, reduce

his anxiety and help him concentrate.

He also started a student veterans group, which has put him in

touch with about 20 other veterans and has greatly diminished his

sense of isolation.

This semester, his grades are average and he is taking a full

load of courses, along with added responsibilities as vice

president of Student Veterans of America. He ran on a whim in the

spring and was voted in. He is setting up a database of services

for veterans and working on plans to take his fellow veterans to

Walter Reed to help -- and urge -- wounded service members to go to

college. He hopes to collaborate with the university's hospital on

treating student veterans for combat-related problems.

Looking back, he says, it was his injury and the discipline he

learned as a Marine that pushed him toward college, a first for his

family.

Now that he is here, courtesy of the government, he is not about

to squander the opportunity.

"I went through hell and my body shows it," Blanchard says.

"But I said this is going to be a blessing. I didn't know how, I

just knew it would."

For weeks, mortgage banker Ben Marsh has been

swamped with questions from clients worried about losing their

homes in this bad economy.

"What should I do? What should I do?" they have asked Marsh,

who has offered up several options, including renting out a room to

help cover the mortgage.

"Now I'm following my own advice. I figure an ounce of

prevention is better than a pound of cure."

Marsh is looking for a boarder to rent a bedroom that has a

plasma TV and stereo surround sound in his spacious three-story

home in the hillsides above Woodland Hills and Calabasas; the home

includes a baby grand piano and other musical instruments, a

Jacuzzi and a gym. All for $1,000 a month.

"Times are tough, and I'm not closing the 12 to 15 loans a

month I used to," said the single man in his 30s. "So I figured

that before things get too bad, I'd take some steps to keep them

from getting bad."

As the financial crisis worsens, Marsh is like more and more

middle-class homeowners around the country who never thought of

taking in boarders but are now quietly doing so, hoping to use the

extra money to help pay mortgages or other debts.

"In this economy, we're now in uncharted waters, and I've never

seen anything like homeowners taking in boarders except in stories

about the Depression," said Bob Stern, president of the Center of

Governmental Studies in Los Angeles, which examines political and

economic issues in the Southland.

Although there are no statistics on how many homeowners are

renting out rooms for the first time, services that place boarders

say that in recent months they have received a rush of calls from

those who had rarely used their services -- middle-class

professionals living in upscale suburbs.

"We've seen an upsurge in homeowners renting out rooms in their

homes. It's a sign of the times," said Mark Verge, owner of

Westside Rentals, which also places roommates.

"I was recently in our Valley office, and a 62-year-old woman

walked in looking to share her home with a roommate, and (there

was) another homeowner who said, 'I've never done this before, but

I'm looking to rent out a room in my house to help me with my

mortgage."'

Verge said that with residential mortgage foreclosures still on

the rise in the U.S., more homeowners nationwide are considering

that same choice.

In recent weeks, "room for rent" signs have been spotted on

the lawns of some homes in Woodland Hills. Other homeowners have

resorted to the Internet site craigslist.org to list rooms in their

houses.

Marlene Mazzi of Winnetka said the threat of losing their

two-story, four-bedroom home is what drove her and husband Carlos

to list two of the bedrooms with baths for $750 a month each. They

have rented one bedroom and continue looking for a second boarder.

Mazzi, 48, who operates a home business selling natural and

organic products, has mounting medical bills. Her husband, a home

remodeler, has been out of work because of the downturn in the Los

Angeles home-building industry.

"We need the extra money to help with our house payments," she

said. "We have our life's savings invested in our home, and we

have to do whatever we can to keep it."

Renting out part of their home, however, is not without

sacrifices for Mazzi and her family, who live under the same roof,

including daughter Stephanie, 20, a student at Pierce College who

has her own bedroom; and grown nephew Paulo Taborga, a construction

worker who sleeps in a converted family room and also pays a share

of the rent.

"We are renting out each bedroom with a bath and we only have

three and a half bathrooms," Mazzi said. "So that means that our

family has to share one full bath."

Renting out rooms is also a humbling experience for many of

these homeowners, who don't want relatives, friends and neighbors

to know they have rented out rooms to strangers or that they have

financial problems.

Many of the homeowners advertising for boarders on the Internet

confirmed they were taking that step because of the hard times

today, but most were reluctant to be identified in this story.

"It was hard enough coming to grips with renting out a room in

our home," said a Northridge homeowner who would only identify

himself as Jeff.

"I don't think I'm ready to announce to the world that I need

help paying my mortgage."

Others said they were still dealing with the loss of privacy and

security involved in opening up their home to an outsider.

But ultimately there is one unifying, overwhelming incentive --

the hard times.

Garrett Swayne, a singer- songwriter and music teacher who has

owned his three-bedroom home in Canoga Park since 1988, said having

recently had a friend stay with him for a couple of months had made

his decision easier.

"I'm just now, for the first time -- and in many ways driven by

economic reasons -- realizing that maybe renting a bedroom to

someone else wouldn't be that bad," he said. "And having another

$700 in my pocket isn't going to hurt the bottom line."

tony.castrodailynews.com

The new GI Bill, officially the Post-9/11 Veterans Educational

Assistance Act of 2008, may be more generous than the old one, but

a lot of tuition and myriad incidental costs can end up uncovered.

Luckily, there's money out there. More than $300 million in

scholarships and grants for veterans and military members goes

unclaimed each year, according to Military.com, a Web site that

tracks benefits. How to take advantage? Step 1, says Terry Howell,

the site's managing editor, is to decide what education you want.

Step 2: prepare to do some homework.

FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE FOR THE DISABLED

Veterans given at least a 10 percent disability rating from the

Department of Veterans Affairs are eligible for a program with

greater benefits than the GI Bill. To qualify, veterans must

demonstrate that their injuries prevent them from doing jobs they

previously would have gotten. The program, rooted in World War I

and part of the Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment Service

(www.vba.va.gov/bln/vre/), entitles them to learn new skills or go

to college. It pays tuition, private or public, plus an allowance

of $500 to $800 a month. Veterans also receive help with tutoring,

employment and various other extras. There are 97,000 veterans

enrolled in the program; more than 20 percent of them fought in

Iraq or Afghanistan.

PAYING FOR PRIVATE COLLEGES

Under the new GI Bill, veterans can apply the cost of the most

expensive in-state public college to a costlier private university.

But that leaves thousands of dollars in unpaid tuition. The

Department of Veterans Affairs is hammering out details of the

Yellow Ribbon GI Education Enhancement Program. Under the program,

the government will match dollar for dollar whatever a college

provides, up to half the difference between cost and GI Bill

benefit. Institutions will have to sign up, and only veterans with

at least three years of service will be eligible.

(www.gibill.va.gov/s22/Yellow(USCORE)Ribbon.htm).

TUITION DISCOUNTS

Whether for patriotic or marketing reasons -- most likely, both --

many private institutions have come to the aid of servicemen and

women. Pace University in New York cuts tuition by half for

post-9/11 veterans enrolled in undergraduate and graduate programs,

including online. At Benedictine University in Lisle, Ill., Iraq

and Afghanistan veterans who pursue an associate degree in business

administration or a bachelor's in management pay no tuition. Online

programs in particular draw students from the military. Kaplan

University covers up to $7,000 toward its online bachelor's degree

or $3,600 toward an associate degree for up to 100 veterans a year.

Florida Tech University Online reduces tuition by 40 percent for

active-duty military and 10 percent for veterans. Grantham

University grants 54 full four-year scholarships each year to

physically or cognitively disabled National Guardsmen.

STATE HELP

Not all veterans must rely on the GI Bill to get to college.

State schools waiving tuition for vets include those in New York,

Connecticut, Wisconsin and Illinois. Ohio charges in-state tuition

to vets from elsewhere wishing to enroll in its public colleges and

universities. Most states offer tuition reductions to currently

serving members of the National Guard; 27 will waive it entirely.

TRADE SCHOOL SCHOLARSHIPS

Vocational training is covered by the new bill only when it

takes place at degree-granting colleges and universities. The

Imagine America Foundation Scholarship Program

(www.imagine-america.org), which supports career and technical

school education, grants a one-time $1,000 scholarship to veterans

entering any of 300 colleges participating in its Military Award

Program. Its Leadership Award grants up to $5,000 to active-duty

members of the military or veterans in any accredited career school

who meet certain G.P.A. and attendance standards.

SPECIAL PROGRAMS

ENTREPRENEURSHIP BOOT CAMP (www.whitman.syr.edu/ebv) A

consortium of business schools -- at Syracuse, Florida State, Texas

A&amp;amp;M and the University of California, Los Angeles -- provides

disabled Iraq and Afghanistan veterans practical training and

mentoring in developing new ventures and running small businesses.

Candidates are not required to have degrees but are evaluated

through letters of recommendation, work achievements in or out of

the military and desire to start a company. This year, 73 enrolled.

The program is free, including travel to one of the four business

schools, lodging and meals.

AMERICAN CORPORATE PARTNERS (www.acp-usa.org) This mentoring

program operates in Atlanta, Chicago, Cincinnati, Dallas, Houston,

New York, Philadelphia and Norwalk, Conn. Iraq and Afghanistan

veterans are paired with employees from one of six corporations --

Campbell's, General Electric, Home Depot, Morgan Stanley, Pepsico

or Verizon. These mentors -- 50 from each company -- meet with

proteges four hours a month for a year. The idea is to smooth their

entry to corporate America and help them leverage military skills

in a business context.

OUTWARD BOUND (www.outwardboundwilderness.org/veterans.html)

Outward Bound, which educates through experience, wants to build

practical skills, confidence, self-reliance and leadership in its

participants. It also tries to teach veterans to establish

supportive communities with one another and to ease readjustment to

civilian life. Wilderness expeditions for Iraq and Afghanistan

veterans are free, including travel to and from sites in

California, Colorado, Maine, Minnesota and Texas.

The new GI Bill kicks in on Aug. 1, 2009, and will offer

wide-ranging education benefits to veterans and active members of

the armed forces. It also provides benefits to those in the

National Guard and Reserve, who account for more than half the

veterans returning from wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and were

shortchanged under the old bill.

WHO'S ELIGIBLE?

Those who have served at least 90 days of continuous active duty

since Sept. 11, 2001, or at least 30 days and were discharged with

a service-connected disability.

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS?

TUITION: All benefits are prorated based on length of service.

People who have served three years or were disabled are entitled to

100 percent tuition at a public two- or four-year institution; that

includes vocational programs, but at degree-granting institutions

only. Those who have served less than six months receive the

minimum benefit -- 40 percent of tuition. At private institutions,

tuition and fees are covered up to the cost of the most expensive

in-state public university.

HOUSING: Veterans are entitled to a monthly stipend, depending

on a state's cost of living. Students taking online or

distance-learning courses are excluded.

EXPENSES: Active-duty and retired military receive up to $1,000

a year for books and supplies, $2,000 for one licensing or

certification test and $1,200 for tutoring.

WHAT ABOUT FAMILY?

If you've served six years and re-enlist for four more, benefits

can be transferred to a spouse, and after 10 years of service to a

child.

WHAT'S THE TIMETABLE?

Benefits cover four academic years and expire 15 years from date

of discharge.

AND THE OLD GI BILL?

Between the original GI Bill of Rights and the new one is the

Montgomery GI Bill, which covers those serving before 9/11. But any

vet who paid the $1,200 sign-up fee on enlisting can opt for its

benefits (the new bill has no fee). Veterans groups are encouraging

recruits to keep options open and pay the fee: benefits run up to

$1,321 a month, paid directly to the student (unlike the new bill,

which mandates payment to the college). That means the money can be

applied to any program, including a technical school. And in parts

of the country with low rent and tuition, the old bill may be a

better deal.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS: (gibill.va.gov/) The primary

source.

MILITARY.COM (http://education.military.com/education-home/)

Advice and links to scholarships, grants and educational programs.

Also: five steps to "Getting Your Degree" and benefits by state.

IRAQ AND AFGHANISTAN VETERANS OF AMERICA: (www.gibill2008.org/)

Try its benefits calculator.

SAN DIEGO STATE UNIVERSITY:

(www.sa.sdsu.edu/scholarship/other-scholarships.html) A

scholarships page, created by the school's financial aid director

(a former Marine), includes many aimed at the military.

The New York Times said in editorials for Saturday, Nov. 1:

OH, WASHINGTON? WHILE YOU'RE BAILING...

At a congressional hearing this week, the mayor of Trenton cut

through the weighty economic theories concerning this latest

downturn and borrowed a simple message from the Beatles. "Help!"

Mayor Douglas Palmer pleaded. Like mayors and governors across the

country, Palmer asked Congress to funnel money to city and state

governments where tax revenues are plummeting and requests for aid

are soaring.

The National Conference of State Legislatures has begun

appealing for congressional help with the "precarious" financial

status of many states. Unlike the federal government, most states

and cities require balanced budgets, and the conference has

estimated a $26 billion shortfall for 27 states so far this year.

If the economy continues its slide, that figure is surely to grow,

with some estimates rising to $100 billion by the next fiscal year.

California is facing a $3 billion shortfall this year. New

Jersey has $400 million less than needed for a $33 billion budget.

Gov. David Paterson of New York, whose Wall Street tax revenues are

evaporating, has estimated a record $47 billion budget deficit over

the next four years. And New York City's mayor, Michael Bloomberg,

who also sees his revenues shrinking precipitously, has called on

Washington for a "new New Deal."

If Congress and the White House can bail out bankers and

insurance companies and possibly the auto industry, they should be

able to help state and local governments, too. The aid could be

temporary, the way it has been during past recessions. And it

should come after cities and states have downsized to the

essentials.

In addition to extending unemployment benefits and food stamp

programs, which provide the biggest immediate boosts to states'

economies, one promising idea being pushed by governors is to put

more federal money into projects like roads, subways, bridges,

tunnels, schools and sewage plants. This help should go where work

already has started or can begin almost immediately. Transit

experts told Congress recently that they have at least $26 billion

worth of projects that would be ready to go in 90 days. All they

need is the money.

Gov. Jon Corzine of New Jersey reminded the House Committee on

Transportation and Infrastructure this week that federal support of

this kind would "put people to work." He estimated that each $1

billion for public works would create 35,000 jobs. At the same

time, Congress and the White House would be helping to stem the

rapid deterioration of the nation's infrastructure.

Many states also need added support for Medicaid. During the

last recession in 2001, Congress provided states an extra $10

billion in block grants and another $10 billion to help temporarily

with Medicaid. The program could use longer-range fixes, of course,

but emergency funding for at least two years would certainly help

protect the nation's most vulnerable.

Investing in highways and health care is a far more effective

way of stimulating the economy than repeating the mistake of

sending rebate checks to a broad array of individual taxpayers.

Most Americans used those federal bonuses to fill the gas tank, a

fleeting assist to family budgets, but a big boon for the oil

companies. With their record profits, the oil companies are the

last ones the government should be helping at this point. And

states won't use federal funds for executive bonuses or corporate

junkets, the way some financial firms have.

Giving money to state and local governments has its hazards, of

course. Congress must resist making this next stimulus into an ugly

porkfest, with money for everybody's favorite waterworks. And it

cannot become an excuse for governors and mayors to avoid making

hard decisions about how to cut their own budgets.

But it is time for Congress and the White House to recognize how

crucial it is to help local governments who provide services like

schools and health care and police protection that cannot fall

victim to this latest recession.

ANOTHER THUMB ON THE SCALES

The world is in economic turmoil -- much of it caused by American

financial excesses -- but the Bush administration isn't budging from

its anti-regulatory, unfettered-markets-know-best convictions.

The Justice Department's antitrust division has published a new

set of guidelines that narrow the interpretation of abuse that

would justify government intervention against monopolies. It is a

deregulatory gift aimed at getting pesky antitrust enforcers off of

the back of big business.

The new doctrine bends over backward to protect big firms from

accusations of anticompetitive behavior. It requires proof that the

harm done by a monopolist's actions -- say, bundling new

applications into a computer operating system to keep rival

software makers out -- be "disproportionately" greater than the

potential gains to consumers.

If a dominant firm made an exclusive deal with a distributor to

lock out a competitor, it would be illegal only if the competitor

were denied access to least 30 percent of the market. If a dominant

company used discounts as a tactic to smother competition, it could

get off the hook if it let its smaller competitor survive, even if

only barely. "Rivals' continued presence in the market casts

serious doubt on the existence of anticompetitive effects," the

report says.

The Department of Justice's antitrust division is supposed to be

the agency looking out for the interests of American consumers, not

big companies -- a role it has clearly forgotten over the last eight

years. Throughout the entire Bush administration, it has not

brought a single case against a dominant firm for anticompetitive

behavior. And it has argued enthusiastically on behalf of

monopolists before the Supreme Court.

Over the last decade and a half, the court also has bought into

the creed that unregulated markets self-correct, and it has become

extremely wary of government intervention against monopolistic

firms.

But even the Federal Trade Commission declined to support the

Justice Department's new guidelines. Chairman William Kovacic, a

Republican, said he doubted that big companies needed more

protection from regulators. The three other commissioners -- a

Democrat, a Republican and an independent -- said the report placed

"a thumb on the scales in favor of firms with monopoly or

near-monopoly power and against other equally significant

stakeholders."

Fortunately, the next administration can ignore this report. It

should. The lesson of the last eight years is that unfettered

markets don't always know best. Government regulation must play a

crucial part to ensure that fair competition prevails.

A FLAWED ASSESSMENT OF BPA

After reports of a possible conflict of interest, we worried

that a scientific advisory panel might pull its punches in

evaluating the Food and Drug Administration's judgments on the

safety of bisphenol-A, known as BPA. It didn't.

In a devastating new report, the panel charged that a draft

safety assessment prepared by the FDA ignored relevant studies,

used flawed methodology and created "a false sense of security"

about the safety of BPA, which is found in baby bottles, plastic

water bottles and the liners of cans, among other products.

The draft assessment had concluded that the small amounts of BPA

that leach into milk or food are not dangerous. The advisory panel

did not directly dispute this. But it left little doubt that the

weight of the evidence, in its view, suggests the need for a much

greater safety margin than the FDA draft deemed adequate.

The U.S. National Toxicology Program -- which considered many of

the studies the FDA had discounted -- has expressed some concern

about BPA's safety, and Canada has moved toward banning the sale of

baby bottles made with BPA. Some research suggests that BPA might

cause neurological damage, accelerate puberty, interfere with

chemotherapy and increase the risk for heart disease, diabetes and

cancer.

The FDA's Science Board, an advisory group, endorsed the panel's

critique on Friday. Now it is imperative that the FDA complete a

more rigorous assessment. It must also consider whether to restrict

some uses of BPA without waiting for further research.

SHEPARD THE ANCHOR

We do not often cheer on Fox News's coverage of politics. But we

did the other day when the anchor Shepard Smith reported on an

especially absurd turn in the "Joe the Plumber" saga.

John McCain's reference at the last presidential debate to

Samuel J. Wurzelbacher, the Ohio plumber who worriedly asked Barack

Obama about taxes, was a predictable campaign stunt. It ought to

have lasted for half a news cycle, especially after it became clear

that Wurzelbacher's taxes would go down under Obama's plan. But the

Republican nominee simply will not let the plumber go.

On Thursday, he shouted: "I'm going to Washington, and I'm

going to bring Joe the Plumber with me!" Earlier, in Virginia,

McCain's running mate, Sarah Palin, announced that one of her

favorite rally signs -- sometimes made by voters, but more often

supplied by the campaigns -- was "I am Jo Momma."

Wurzelbacher has held news conferences. He was interviewed on

the "CBS Evening News," where he compared Obama to Sammy Davis

Jr. According to Politico.com, he has an agent and is exploring "a

possible record deal with a major label, personal appearances and

corporate sponsorships."

At a campaign rally this week, Wurzelbacher was filmed agreeing

with another McCain supporter that electing Obama would be "death

to Israel."

For five, painful, live-on-Fox minutes the next day, Smith

repeatedly asked Wurzelbacher what evidence he had to back up that

charge. Wurzelbacher refused to answer. He said it was up to

Smith's viewers to figure out why he, Joe the Plumber, thought

Obama was a menace to Israel.

Looking incredulous, Smith gave up. He read a statement from the

McCain campaign praising the plumber's "penetrating and clear

analysis."

Then Smith said: "I just want to make this 100 percent

perfectly clear. Barack Obama has said repeatedly and demonstrated

repeatedly that Israel will always be a friend of the United States

no matter what happens once he becomes president of the United

States. His words."

"The rest of it," he said, "man, it just gets frightening

sometimes." Yes it does.

Listen to this

Pink

Album: Funhouse (LaFace/Zomba)

In stores: Now

Why we care: No surprise here that Pink's "breakup" album (she

divorced motocross star Carey Hart this year) is tough, raw and

head-snappingly bipolar. In an ephemeral pop wasteland, the lovable

malcontent born Alecia Moore doesn't suffer fools or lousy

husbands, and she gladly lets 'em know about it. I wonder if they

sing along, too?

Why we like it: Irresistible first single So What ("I guess I

just lost my husband / I don't know where he went") is a raucous,

thumbed-nose arena chant. But soon enough, Pink, whose growl is as

effective as her croon, breaks down beautifully, especially on

ballad I Don't Believe You ("So don't pretend to not love me at

all").

Reminds us of: Joan Jett with a Mystic Tan

Download these: So What, I Don't Believe You

Grade: B+

AC/DC

Album: Black Ice (Columbia)

In stores: Now (available only at Wal-Mart)

Why we care: Eight years have passed since AC/DC's last crack of

heavy-metal thunder, but this much remains true: The schoolboy

uniform still fits, and Angus Young can still lay down a reinforced

riff like no other. Sure, for every fist-pounder there are two more

that sound just like it. But trust me, this plus a six-pack will

make for a fun Friday night.

Why we like it: Producer Brendan O'Brien is obviously a fan, and

he properly isolates all those bloozy licks and defibrillating drum

pounds. The best song, Anything Goes, is sweet and sinister, a new

trick from old dogs.

Reminds us of: My unrequited sixth-grade crush once played Back

in Black during gymnastics. This should explain everything.

Download this: Anything Goes

Grade: C+

The Pretenders

Album: Break Up the Concrete (Shangri-La)

In stores: Now

Why we care: At Chrissie Hynde's VegiTerranean, a vegan

restaurant she opened in her Akron, Ohio, hometown, the menu and

dining room are based on high-falutin' food and fashion. Her

approach to rock 'n' roll, however, is the total opposite: messy,

swaggery, built in an oil-slick garage with bad lighting. No matter

what the 57-year-old does, though, the result is tasty.

Why we like it: From the jackknife bliss of Boots of Chinese

Plastic to strutty Don't Cut Your Hair, Hynde and super-drummer Jim

Keltner run rockabilly through the '60s up to now.

Reminds us of: If you go to VegiTerranean, order the hot Italian

banana peppers with soy mozzarella and herb risotto. Unbelievable.

Download this: Boots of Chinese Plastic

Grade: B-

SONG OF THE WEEK

Ashley Tisdale

Song: I Want It All

Album: High School Musical 3: Senior Year (Disney)

In stores: Now

Why we care: With the High School Musical franchise ready to

graduate its original cast of stars, it'll be interesting to see

who stays famous post-Disney and who hosts sad game shows on

Animal Planet. My bet? Ashley Tisdale, as HSM's Veruca Salty rich

kid Sharpay, outlasts 'em all. For proof, check out I Want It All,

High School Musical 3's bonkers salute to the universal hunger for

fame.

Why we like it: Throughout the series, Sharpay's material-girl

songs have always scored because they dilute the drippiness of the

lead couple's ballads. Tisdale has a pinched voice and wobbly legs,

but she's funny and quick and knows how to sell Bob Fosse-style

snap and 'tude. Fabulous, indeed.

Reminds us of: The great Madeline Kahn

Grade: A

Sean Daly is the pop music critic of the Times and can be

reached at sdalysptimes.com. His Pop Life blog is at

blogs.tampabay.com/popmusic.

He walked in beauty

Tony Hillerman liked to tell the story of what happened when he

wrote his first novel, The Blessing Way, in 1970. His first agent

advised him that if he wanted to publish it, he would have to get

rid of "all that Indian stuff."

I hope that agent found work in another field. Hillerman, who

died last week ((10/26)) at 83 at his home in Albuquerque, wrote 18

novels about all that Indian stuff that have sold millions of

copies around the world, made him a beloved figure among American

Indians and non-Indians alike, and brought countless readers to the

Southwest to experience the harshly beautiful land he wrote about

with such lyrical passion.

I've long been among his fans. I lived in the Southwest for 10

years, and when I'm missing it, a rereading of any of his 18

mysteries featuring Navajo Tribal Police officers Joe Leaphorn and

Jim Chee is enough to take me there for a while.

While I was a book editor in Tucson, Ariz., I was lucky enough

to meet Hillerman a few times, and he entirely lived up to his

reputation as a gentleman, supportive of other writers,

unpretentious about his own success and expert in all things

related to the Southwest's native people.

At a book signing, he caught sight of my husband's silver belt

buckle from across the bookstore. "Hopi?" he asked, guessing

correctly the origin of the design of trickster god Kokopelli among

cornstalks. "Nice piece," he said with a nod.

Hillerman's knowledge about the native people of the Southwest

was both scholarly and personal; he researched their cultures and

histories, but he also knew them as individuals. He wrote about

many of the tribes that live in the Four Corners area (where New

Mexico, Arizona, Colorado and Utah meet), but his focus was the

Navajo, or Dineh, people.

The Navajo Nation is the largest Indian tribe in the United

States, with almost 300,000 members. About 180,000 of them live in

the tribal homeland, which covers about 27,000 square miles in

Arizona, Utah and New Mexico.

Hillerman set the Leaphorn and Chee novels there, where among

the mesas and canyons you can see the ancient bones of the Earth

and where, in the McDonald's in the town of Window Rock, Ariz., you

can get free WiFi. His characters' lives reflect the constant

interplay between traditional Navajo ways the ideal of harmony, or

"walking in beauty" with everything around you and the intrusion

of the modern world.

Although he was not an Indian, Hillerman came by his knowledge

and understanding of the Indian people through long experience. He

was born in the Indian Territory, in Sacred Heart, Okla., founded

as a mission on the Potawatomi reservation, and attended Indian

schools.

Hillerman quit college to fight in World War II, returning with

a Purple Heart and severe injuries. After finishing college, he

worked for more than 30 years as a journalist and as a journalism

professor and department chairman at the University of New Mexico,

retiring in 1987.

He was in his 40s when he wrote his first novel, and,

fortunately for readers, he ignored that agent's advice. His first

four novels centered on Lt. Joe Leaphorn, a no-nonsense rationalist

with a master's degree in anthropology and a cynical view of what

he considers Navajo superstitions.

From the first, in The Blessing Way, Hillerman skillfully

interwove fascinating Navajo folklore with classic crime stories

and created lively, complex characters.

In his fifth novel, People of Darkness (1980), Hillerman

introduced a counterpoint to Leaphorn. Sgt. Jim Chee is younger,

much more traditional and something of a mystic he is undergoing

the long study required to become a hataalii, or singer-shaman.

Hillerman featured Leaphorn and Chee separately in some novels

and in others brought them together on cases. Readers love them so

much, and feel them to be so real, that they have been known to

show up at tribal police offices asking for them.

The author tried several times to end the series, but readers

wouldn't have it. His last published novel, The Shape Shifter in

2006, featured both Leaphorn and Chee in a mystery that links a

missing Navajo rug and the aftershocks of the Vietnam War.

Hillerman received many honors over the course of his career,

including being named a grandmaster by the Mystery Writers of

America in 1991. But he said that his favorite award was being

named a Special Friend of the Dineh by the Navajo Nation in 1987.

For him, bringing the culture and history of that people and the

reality of their contemporary lives to the wider world was a

life's mission.

Live in the Southwest for a while and you're likely to hear the

story about tourists driving up in a grocery store parking lot in

Window Rock or Chinle, Ariz., to a Navajo family clad in Wranglers

and Nikes and Old Navy T-shirts, and asking "Where are all the

Indians on this reservation?"

For Hillerman the Navajo were neither tourist attractions nor

anthropological subjects, but people. When Leaphorn struggles with

the heartbreaking loss of his beloved wife, first to early onset

Alzheimer's and then to death; when Chee tries to reconcile his

heartfelt religious beliefs with a world that has less and less

room for them those are human experiences, not "that Indian

stuff."

If you're already a Hillerman fan, pay his pages a return visit.

If you're not yet, start with The Blessing Way.

Colette Bancroft is the book editor of the Times and can be

reached at cbancroftsptimes.com.

Cuban clout weakening in South Florida

MIAMI Puerto Rican-born chef Julio Alicea, 63, used to be a

Republican, voting in solidarity with the cause of Cuban exiles.

Not this year.

"We are losing the American Dream. Who cares about Cuba?" he

said, after casting an early ballot Tuesday for Raul Martinez, the

Democratic challenger of Lincoln Diaz-Balart.

Alicea's rejection of Diaz-Balart, the eight-term incumbent in

the 21st District, is a signal that the Republican stranglehold on

three key congressional seats is in serious jeopardy. The races in

the 18th, 21st and 25th districts are closer than they have been in

two decades, and a Democratic win in any one of them would not only

change the complexion of South Florida politics but potentially

soften U.S. policy toward Cuba.

"We are witnessing a revolution in South Florida politics,"

said Fernand Amandi, vice president of Bendixen &amp;amp; Associates, a

leading Hispanic polling firm in Miami that works with Democratic

candidates.

Several factors are at work this year. The Democratic Party has

a strong presidential contender in Barack Obama. The local

candidates are much better known and better funded than previous

challengers. And the souring economy has eclipsed Fidel Castro,

long the defining issue of any South Florida election.

"Cuba is not the driving force in this election, it's the

economy," said Dario Moreno, a pollster with the Metropolitan

Center at Florida International University. "When people are

worried about getting foreclosed on, losing their jobs and their

health care, Cuba takes a back seat."

Both Lincoln Diaz-Balart and his younger brother, Mario, who has

represented the 25th District since 2002, won their districts by

comfortable double digit margins of 16-18 percent in 2006. Defeat

for either of them could send a signal to Washington that support

for the 46-year-old U.S. embargo against Cuba is wavering, analysts

say.

Martinez, 59, the former Hialeah mayor, has tightened his race

against Diaz-Balart, 54, so much that the Rothenberg Report, a

nonpartisan newsletter, calls it a "Pure Toss Up." The latest

polling gives Diaz-Balart a 1-point lead, according to

RealClearPolitics. The spread had been 11 points when the campaign

began in January.

Mario Diaz-Balart, 47, also has his hands full with another

high-profile Cuban-American challenger, Joe Garcia, 45, former

director of the influential Cuban-American National Foundation.

Diaz-Balart's lead is 3 points, also a toss-up, according to

RealClearPolitics.

A third Cuban-American incumbent, Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, 56, is

having an easier time defending her seat in the 18th District,

which includes Miami Beach, against a relatively unknown

businesswoman, Annette Taddeo, 41.

Martinez and Garcia have run well-funded campaigns with

advertising on local radio and television, a first for Democrats in

South Florida. The ads have countered attacks from

Republican-leaning Spanish-language radio in Miami that have

branded them as "traitors" to the Cuban exile cause. One TV ad

titled "Wheel of Corruption" portrays Martinez as mired in

repeated scandals, including a 1991 public corruption case for

which he was convicted in federal court. The verdict was later

overturned and subsequent retrials ended in hung juries.

Martinez hit back with a questionable ad that tried to tie

Diaz-Balart to a suitcase with $50,000 in illegal campaign

contributions from a crooked politician.

The Democrats have sent $1.1-million and a steady stream of

high-profile political names to South Florida, including Sen.

Hillary Rodham Clinton and House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, who has

visited eight times.

The Republican National Congressional Committee has responded

with $600,000 in advertising. "We feel good about where things

are," said Carlos Curbelo, who advises the Diaz-Balarts. He cited

a Spanish language TV poll two weeks ago that showed Lincoln

Diaz-Balart with a 14 percent lead, and his brother ahead by 7

points.

There is no doubt that a Cuba-less campaign hurts the

Diaz-Balarts, who have built their careers on tightening the screws

on Cuba's communist regime.

A recent University of Miami survey found that Cuban-American

voters remain very conservative on U.S. foreign policy toward Cuba

but are more liberal on social issues.

While polls show older Cuban exiles still strongly favor

Republicans, younger second generation Cuban-Americans "tend to be

more swayed by economic and bread-and-butter issues," said Amandi.

Polls show a majority of Cuban-Americans under 45 voting Democrat.

Pollsters say Cuba barely makes the top 10 issues of most concern

to Cuban-American voters.

The absence of Cuba from the campaign was no big surprise,

according to Curbelo. "The voters know where everybody stands on

Cuba. It's not something we need to spend our resources on," he

said.

Indeed, all the candidates support the main elements of the

embargo. But Martinez and Garcia oppose current restrictions on

travel to the island by Cuban-Americans with relatives still living

there, as well as limits on cash remittances families send.

David Adams can be reached at dadamssptimes.com.

REPUBLICAN SLIDE

Voter registration figures in all three Congressional districts

show an eroding Republican advantage.

Since 2006, in the 18th, the lead has shrunk from 23,202 to

1,730.

In the 21st, the GOP lead is now 10,543, down from 28,146 in

2006.

In the 25th, the Republican advantage has dwindled to 3,364 from

a high of 21,818.

Source: Elections supervisors

DIVIDED BY AGE

48 percentage of Cuban-American voters under 45 who support

Barack Obama

73 Percentage of Cuban-American voters 45 and over who support

John McCain

Source: Metropolitan Center at Florida International University

An astronomer explores apocalyptic ideas

REVIEW

Death From the Skies! These Are the Ways the World Will End

By Philip Plait

Viking, 326 pages, $25.95

I was on page 25 when I first thought, "Oh, I wish I didn't

know that."

I'd heard that a large asteroid is going to come very near Earth

in 2029 but that it isn't going to hit us. Astronomer Philip Plait

verifies that. But.

And this is a very big "but." It seems 99942 Apophis is going

to come so close (closer than some weather satellites) that Earth's

gravity might alter its orbit. And if it alters it in such a way

that it passes through a small region of space called a keyhole,

the orbit will change enough that on its next pass, in 2036, it

will hit us. We might not go the way of the dinosaurs. But then

again, we might.

Most of Plait's book is dedicated to telling us just how bad it

could be and how the solutions we've seen in the movies probably

wouldn't work. But then again, they might.

Plait's book is the latest in the genre of science made easy

and amusing for regular folk. He's not as elegant a writer as Bill

Bryson in a similar book, A Short History of Nearly Everything, and

his jokes aren't as funny. But he's good with analogies, and he's

smart to focus on the dramatic and the scary.

The first chapter, about impactors asteroids, comets is the

best. Others tell us about the immense size and danger of the sun,

what would happen if a supernova were to occur in our solar

neighborhood (bad news), gamma rays (really bad news), black holes

(the worst news: spaghettification!), the odds of being annihilated

by aliens, and so on.

I was fascinated to learn that when the sun dies, it will expand

so much that it will engulf our planet. That will be a pretty

rotten time to be human. Unless, of course, we can manage to move

our planet back a safe distance. Using the slingshot effect,

astronomers say, this could theoretically be done. Of course, we

could end up being ejected from the solar system, too. But.

We have a few billion years to figure it out.

Kate Brassfield can be reached at kbrassfieldsptimes.com.

Florida, a big dog again

The Sunshine Status

For the longest time, it looked as if Florida was an electoral

has-been, a state disrespected by the national parties for jumping

ahead of the pack with its primary. But we're back, and we matter

as much as ever.c.2008 St. Petersburg Times

Steve Bousquet reviews key events that brought us from exile to

electoral centerpiece, from political pariah to presidential

powerhouse. Not long ago we were shunned. Now we're in the middle

of the route to the White House, and our 27 electoral votes could

swing the election.

May 3, 2007: The Legislature votes to move up the date of

Florida's primary to Jan. 29, 2008. Analysis: Now largely

forgotten, this was No. 37 on Republican House Speaker Marco

Rubio's "100 Innovative Ideas for Florida's Future."

Aug. 25: Democratic National Committee votes to strip Florida of

all of its convention delegates for scheduling its primary one week

before party rules allow. Analysis: A power play by DNC chairman

Howard Dean that everyone knew couldn't last, and it didn't.

Sept. 1: All major Democratic presidential candidates boycott

Florida because of the state's decision to hold an earlier primary,

threatening the state's reputation as a kingmaker in presidential

politics. "Selfish," snaps state Democratic Party chairman Karen

Thurman. Analysis: Ignore Florida at your peril.

Nov. 8: The Republican National Committee votes to strip Florida

of half of its delegates for advancing the primary. But all

delegates would be restored at the August 2008 convention.

Analysis: The response was more muted, but the feelings were hurt

just the same.

Nov. 28: Eight Republican presidential contenders square off in

a CNN/YouTube debate at St. Petersburg's Mahaffey Theater.

Analysis: Mike who? Fred who? There was no talking snowman as in a

previous YouTube debate, but a questioner waved a Bible and asked

candidates if they believed "every word of this book." CNN said

the debate drew a large number of young viewers.

Jan. 26, 2008: Three days before Florida's critical primary,

Gov. Charlie Crist endorses John McCain for president. "I don't

think anybody would be better," Crist says at a Pinellas County

Republican dinner. Analysis: Crist's endorsement was worth a few

percentage points, enough to deliver Florida for McCain.

Jan. 29: McCain wins the primary in Florida, where Republican

voters also deliver a crushing blow to the presidential dreams of

Rudy Giuliani, while Democrats clearly favored Hillary Clinton over

Barack Obama. The GOP nomination is now McCain's, while cracks are

evident in Obama's Florida base. Analysis: Giuliani's post-9/11

message of domestic security didn't fit the times and he picked the

wrong state as his firewall. "From hero to zero," said MCNBC's

Keith Olbermann.

May 21: Obama ends his nine-month boycott of Florida with a

rally in Tampa. On a few days' notice he draws 16,000. Not a

sellout, but close. Analysis: Obamamania hits Tampa Bay, and not

for the last time. But after stiff-arming Florida for so long, the

Illinois senator still has a lot of catching up to do.

Aug. 24: The Democratic Party votes to restore all of Florida's

211 convention delegates; less than a week, later the Republicans

follow suit. Analysis: Take that, Howard Dean.

Aug. 29: McCain shocks the political world and picks Alaska Gov.

Sarah Palin as his running mate. That morning, McCain calls Crist,

a VP also-ran, to say he decided to "go in a different

direction." Analysis: As later news reports said, McCain's

advisers decided he needed a game-changer, but Palin brought a

bundle of good and bad to the ticket, and polls showed that she

scared away women and independents that are crucial to McCain's

hopes.

Sept. 16: Campaigning in Jacksonville, McCain declares: "I

believe, still, the fundamentals of our economy are strong." The

sound bite will reverberate for weeks on cable channels. Analysis:

In the middle of the biggest Wall Street collapse since the Great

Depression, McCain's words became instant fodder for an Obama

attack ad.

Sept. 21: A Sarah Palin rally draws a crowd estimated as high as

60,000 in The Villages, the boomers' mega-retirement community

north of Orlando. Analysis: It was Palin at her best, firing up the

Republican base while enhancing the reputation of The Villages as

the No. 1 Florida destination for GOP candidates (exit 329 off

I-75).

Sept. 29: In the GOP-leaning Sarasota-Bradenton market, Obama

raises $750,000 to McCain's $209,000. "We have far more

momentum," a local Democrat says. Analysis: The Democrats had far

more money, too the reverse of what usually happens in Florida

races.

Sept. 30: State Republican chairman Jim Greer calls a meeting of

party and McCain staffers that leads to reports of dissension

between the camps. A day later, a rolling average of polls shows

Obama ahead in Florida for the first time. Analysis: If McCain

loses Florida, pundits may point to this as a turning point. If

McCain wins Florida, Greer may want to hunt for an olive branch.

Oct. 19: The state reports that Democrats had a 2-to-1 advantage

in registering voters in Florida in 2008 and signed up 657,775 more

Democrats than Republicans. Analysis: Democrats have a big

advantage in new voter registration in a state with a history of

voting for Republican presidential candidates.

Today (Nov. 2): It's Joe Biden's turn to return to Leon, Alachua

and Volusia counties, capping a week that saw visits by McCain,

Palin, Obama, Bill and Hillary Clinton, Al Gore, Joe Lieberman and

others. Analysis: They all get it: Florida, Florida, Florida.

An exhibit looks at how average people prepared for the

afterlife

REVIEW

To Live Forever: Egyptian Treasures from the Brooklyn Museum

The exhibition is at the John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art,

5401 Bay Shore Road, Sarasota, through Jan. 11. Hours are 10 a.m.

to 5:30 p.m. daily. Admission, which includes the Circus Museum and

Ca d'Zan, is $19 adults, $16 seniors, $6 children 6 to 17. (941)

359-5700 ; ringling.org.

SARASOTA For ancient Egyptians, death was the easy part.

Gaining eternity was, regardless of rank, a journey that makes

Dante's Inferno look like a walk in the park. And though they could

not buy their way into the afterlife, those with means definitely

had a strong advantage. That is the context of "To Live Forever:

Egyptian Treasures from the Brooklyn Museum" at the John and Mable

Ringling Museum of Art.

More than 100 objects spanning 4,000 years illustrate the

evolution of a complex system of beliefs and rituals regarding the

departure from this life and entry into the next. The twist is that

the exhibition generally looks at the perspective of people of more

modest means. We're used to seeing the whiz-bang regalia of

pharaohs. But what about the Egyptian equivalent of Joe the

Plumber, who cared just as much about immortality as King Tut?

We see how those lower on the food chain emulated as best they

could the surface feeders and understand that it wasn't just for

show. How one was buried and with what accoutrements were,

literally, life and death issues. Amassing the money needed to pay

for a proper sendoff could take years.

Preservation of the body was paramount, as was specific

identification by name. Different levels of mummification were

available, and whether you got the full treatment, in which most of

the organs were removed and everything encased in resin, or a

simple wash-and-wrap job, depended on your budget. The heart,

considered to control thought and emotion, was left in the body.

The brain, not believed to have value, was destroyed. In this show,

a man named Demetrios was someone of means; his remains are stored

in gold-washed linen and his portrait, painted in encaustic, is

fitted on his head. Not so lucky was the stonecutter who could

afford only a wooden tag inscribed with his name. Presumably his

body was not embalmed as elaborately as Demetrios' so his body was

lost to time.

The goal was to arrive in the netherworld beneath the earth,

undertake a perilous journey by boat, avoid the onslaughts of

demons and find an advantageous spot to settle down permanently.

The body was needed to act as a sort of template for the soul's

resettlement, which took on a life of its own.

The soul was able to function corporeally after death, eating

and drinking. And traveling. A fear was that it would take off and

not return to the body. So there were ritual chants and amulets

that discouraged such truancy. Those with the means had tablets

inscribed with incantations and descriptions from The Book of the

Dead for every stage of the journey, a cheat sheet in case they

were unprepared. Examples of these objects are in the show along

with a papyrus fragment from the book.

A coffin was essential to this journey, acting as a protective

case and safe haven for the soul in the netherworld. Its importance

was based on the myth of Osiris , the first king of Egypt, who was

murdered by his brother Seth (sometimes spelled Set) by sealing him

in a coffin (made to fit his body perfectly) and throwing it in the

Nile. Osiris' wife Isis found the coffin and managed to revive him

long enough to conceive a son, Horus , who eventually defeated

Seth. Osiris continued to the netherworld and ruled as its king.

The evolution of the myth, embroidered with more elaborations

through the centuries, was the prototype for all Egyptian funerals.

The wood coffin, for example, was constructed to resemble a human

shape and painted with references to Osiris, who passed judgment on

all who entered the afterlife.

A curious custom that seems to have become common was the

recycling of funeral objects. Even pharaohs were not above the

practice; scholars believe King Tut's coffin was originally made

for an earlier, wealthier king. There are several examples of this

repurposing and the intriguing, unresolved question of how

Egyptians reconciled their reverence for custom with the

practicalities of economy.

Unlike other large shows of Egyptian antiquities I have seen,

this one is not intended to inspire awe. It gives us a sense of how

real people coped with the exigencies of life and aspirations in

death. Because so much time is covered, we also see how many

practices changed. And though it dwells on the nonrich a lot, most

of the objects belonged to those with some means. The poorest

people probably could not afford even a simple coffin.

The Brooklyn Museum, which organized the show from its own

enormous, world-famous collection, sent few objects made of

precious metals and gems. But I really like the show. It has a

clear mission and makes sense of the carved stones and old statues

that tend to make our eyes glaze over in many antiquities shows.

The wall labels are especially well done and the catalog, for sale

in the museum store, has a wonderful essay about the cost of a

funeral. The Ringling is offering family-friendly tours every

Saturday and has a free activity guide and interactive area for

younger visitors.

Lennie Bennett is the art critic of the Times and can be reached

at lenniesptimes.com.

The feed

Elect to take note

With days remaining until the presidential election, you may

feel as if you're drowning in political media. Believe me, I feel

your pain.

Still, I hope you find the strength to peruse the Five Biggest

Election Media Lessons/Trends I've seen during the 22 months we've

spent watching Barack Obama and John McCain run for president:

1. The new medium politicians must own is online. Forget the

Nixon/Kennedy comparisons on the candidates' TV images: The medium

where Obama really outflanked McCain is the Internet. Online, Obama

raised many millions of dollars, spread videos touting his

candidacy, debuted a "fact-checking" Web site to combat negative

rumors and used e-mail lists to mobilize volunteers and potential

voters. "While McCain was using his resources to own the news

cycle, Obama was registering voters," said media analyst Andrew

Tyndall.

2. Instant fact-checking emerges. Back in 2004, when the Swift

Boat Veterans for Truth raised questions about Democrat John

Kerry's war record, news outlets took weeks to vet the incendiary

charges. This time around, Web sites such as FactCheck.org and the

St. Petersburg Times' PolitiFact.com vetted claims made during the

debates within hours. Both the candidates and media know: These

days, attack, response and vetting must be immediate.

3. Political satire achieved what journalism couldn't. Despite

constant cable TV coverage, it took The Daily Show's Jon Stewart

and Saturday Night Live's Tina Fey to puncture some of the

campaigns' biggest absurdities, from the media's love for Obama to

Sarah Palin's populist pandering. No wonder CNN and Fox News now

have shows blending comedy and news; this is where the cultural

action is.

4. Liberals developed a media echo chamber to mirror

conservatives. Just as talk radio host Rush Limbaugh, the

Washington Times newspaper and Fox News Channel create an echo

chamber of right-leaning messages, liberals developed a smaller but

similar media structure including MSNBC, blogs such as the

Huffington Post and Daily Kos, and the Air America radio network.

5. Political success equals positive coverage. A Project for

Excellence in Journalism study discovered McCain got more negative

coverage because his campaign wasn't as successful. Stories on

McCain grew harsher as Obama's poll numbers improved and McCain's

actions during September's financial crisis drew criticism. "The

old 'nothing succeeds like success' adage was completely reinforced

by our study," said PEJ associate director Mark Jurkowitz.

m m m

Ti-Vo

The Simpsons, 8 tonight, Fox: Trust schlubby Homer Simpson to

come up with a sidesplitting Halloween episode two days after the

holiday ends. Still, the show's annual "Treehouse of Horror"

episode shines, powered by gory, animated takes on Mad Men, a

Simpson-ized version of Peanuts' Great Pumpkin story and an

Election Day bit on a malfunctioning touch-screen voting machine.

For Floridians, it may feel just like home.

Ti-Vo

Law &amp;amp; Order, 10 p.m. Wednesday, NBC: Stuck with a

disintegrating Wednesday night lineup, NBC made its best decision

so far bringing back its mothership crime drama early,

re-energized by new blood. Jeremy Sisto and Anthony Anderson make a

wry pair as the show's new detectives, and British actor Linus

Roache is masterful as the show's sharp, competitive American

assistant district attorney. Best of all, the mothership avoids the

schmaltzy unreality of its spinoffs, returning with an episode

about a murderous street brawl and the havoc unleashed when Sam

Waterston's district attorney ruthlessly bends the law to prosecute

the fighters.

m m m

the list

Besides the cable news channels, online political Web sites may

have benefitted most from this 22-month election cycle. According

to the online usage tracking site comScore.com, top political Web

sites HuffingtonPost.com, Politico.com and DrudgeReport.com saw in

the past year audience increases of 472 percent, 344 percent and 70

percent, respectively.

Top political Web sites in September, according to comScore.

HuffingtonPost.com, 4.5-million users.

Politico.com, 2.3-million.

DrudgeReport.com, 2-million.

RealClearPolitics.com, 1.1-million.

Freerepublic.com, 987,000.

Capitol Advantage, 959,000.

DailyKos.com, 953,000.

Townhall.com, 884,000.

Newsbusters.org, 732,000.

WorldNetDaily.com, 636,000.

m m m

the site

Two years ago, St. Petersburg entrepreneur Frank Maggio dreamed

of creating the first nationwide TV-based trivia game network,

allowing viewers to play from home and earn prizes. But technology

problems, the crashing economy and a fruitless fight with the

Nielsen ratings company forced him to find a new dream: an online

network of ad-supported trivia sites. Check out his games based on

presidential questions at www.McCainGameShow.com and

www.ObamaGameShow.com.

Eric Deggans is the TV/Media critic of the Times and can be

reached at edegganssptimes.com. Read his blog at

blogs.tampabay.com/media.

Cooler air from the Pacific will pour into the West Coast and

interior West states Sunday in the wake of a cold front. Scattered

showers will occur near the leading edge of cooler air as it

crosses the northern Rockies. Moisture lingering behind the front

will promote numerous showers from Northern California to

Washington and Oregon. Meanwhile, snow will blanket the higher

elevations of the Sierra-Nevada and Cascade Mountains. Sunshine and

dry weather will prevail over the Southwest, although areas of

clouds will cling to the Southern California beaches.

Gusty breezes and a few fleeting showers will sweep over Florida

and the Southeast Coast. Otherwise much of the South will be sunny

and quite mild. Colder air will spread over the Northeast in the

wake of a front. In contrast, active breezes from the southwest and

sunshine will promote unseasonably warm weather across the Plains

states.

FOCUS: CHANGING TIMES

While turning back the clock cannot change the weather, Sunday's

shift to standard time can noticeably alter weather perceptions.

Many weather trends begin at sunrise. The flood of solar energy

sets the air into motion, causing wind to increase. The temperature

often rises quickly after sunrise, while fog dissipates as the rays

of the sun penetrate the morning mist. Of course, strong weather

systems can overwhelm these daily cycles. But, on average, as many

people begin the day, the weather this week will be windier, warmer

and brighter than last week as a result of the change in time.

Lew Oliver's McCain-Palin T-shirt advertised his

intentions, and the woman in the SUV gave him an opening. "I'm

undecided," said Nicole Ellington, 31, a paralegal with two young

children. "You have two minutes. Go."

Oliver knew that her family leaned Republican because she was on

his get-out-the-vote list, and he rapidly delivered a pitch honed

over 22 years of volunteering for local campaigns. "Wow, you're

good," she said. And as she drove away, Oliver smiled with

satisfaction.

But did he really win her over? Ellington had pointed to the

"Palin" on his T-shirt and said, "I'm worried about this one."

"I don't know," Oliver said after giving it some thought.

"She may have been being polite."

Oliver, 47, a real estate lawyer who walks and talks in bursts,

is the kind of party regular who is not usually one to doubt. He

has been the Orange County Republican Party chairman since 1999,

and with his encyclopedic knowledge of the neighborhoods and

demographics of Orlando, he built the grass-roots effort that

pushed George W. Bush to victory here and statewide in 2000 and

2004.

But this year, Oliver said, the challenge is tougher. Part of it

is the "collapse of the economy of the Western world," he said.

Part is the competition, a campaign by Sen. Barack Obama that has

poured more money and people into the state than Sen. John McCain

has. Even the most seasoned Republicans now acknowledge that they

face an uphill fight.

"This is as difficult an environment for Republicans as there's

been since Watergate," said George LeMieux, the former campaign

manager for Gov. Charlie Crist, a Republican.

Oliver agrees. And like many Republicans trying in the final

days to push their party to victory, he says he has found

inspiration in McCain, the perseverant prisoner of war who came

from behind to seize the Republican nomination. The current call to

arms is simple: "If anyone can pull it off, it's John McCain."

The same could be said for Oliver. Even his counterparts in the

local Democratic Party describe him as one of the best organizers

in Florida, a tireless terrier of campaigns who has missed only

four of the county party's meetings in 22 years.

Oliver claims to dislike politics, seeing it as a way to fulfill

the civic duty that led his father and two brothers to the

military. But he is single and admits that the Republican Party

consumes much of his free time.

On Thursday, his day began at 9 a.m., calling his Orlando

neighbors from a phone bank list he carries everywhere so he can

reach voters during down times. By 10 a.m., he was inside a local

TV news studio, where he debated the race with the local Democratic

Party chairman.

On camera, Oliver emphasized that "no one is giving up." He

said that the polls were close in Florida and that slight movement

could bring victory.

During a commercial break, though, he quoted Bill Clinton

("It's the economy, stupid") and said, "If I had a videotape of

Barack Obama shooting someone, he'd still be up in the polls."

What really frustrated him, he said, was that voters did not

seem to be recognizing what he admired about John McCain: his

pragmatism, his toughness, his proven willingness to buck his party

and reach across the aisle on tough issues like immigration.

But lately, Oliver's task has become complicated as he finds

himself competing with a burning fear voiced by some McCain

supporters. It can be seen in the anti-Obama book at the McCain

office in Altamonte Springs; or in Maitland, where someone posted a

letter on the wall that said: "This is the scariest election we as

Christians have ever faced, and from the looks of the polls, the

Christians aren't voting Christian values."

Just a few feet away, a larger poster near an American flag

stated: "Obama -- too dangerous for our America."

Oliver, when told about the messages, said they did not reflect

the party's official position and would be taken down. At the

Orlando headquarters, where he usually spends his time, no such

language was visible.

But in an unscientific show of hands among 30 volunteers, more

people said they were motivated by a fear of Obama than by a love

of McCain or Gov. Sarah Palin. Such passions are double-edged: Some

party officials worry that the negative tone alienates independent

voters; on the other hand, it has pushed volunteers to great

lengths.

About half of the volunteers at the headquarters had come from

outside Florida, representing at least eight states, including

Alaska, Georgia and Texas. Many said they were volunteering for the

first time, spending as much as $2,000 of their own money to try to

keep the Democrats from winning.

Krista Parrett, 37, said she came from Syracuse to volunteer

because she feared that an Obama victory would make the United

States like Uzbekistan, a former Soviet state ruled with an iron

fist, where she once lived. Marlene Heineman, 58, a flight

attendant who had come to the office during a long layover, said

she worried about who might be behind Obama's rapid rise to

prominence.

"He has a lot of shady connections," Heineman said. "He

hasn't been forthcoming."

Other interviews brought similar sentiments, though one

volunteer, Michael Walzak, 46, a member of the county's Republican

Executive Committee, said he was "disappointed that so many people

are that fearful."

Oliver, for his part, has stayed focused on what he knows: how

to win. At 3:30 p.m., he returned from his law office, speeding

into the campaign headquarters in Nike running sneakers and jeans,

with not just a McCain-Palin shirt but also a hat.

The operation had just shifted from asking voters if they had

received and sent in their absentee ballots to the get-out-the-vote

effort.

This two-pronged emphasis, on absentee ballots and getting

voters to the polls, has been the party's focus in Florida for

decades. Oliver said that it works in part because Republicans tend

to be less transient than Democrats, making them easier to reach,

and because they have historically been more loyal to their party.

As an example, he said that 81 percent of registered Republicans

in Orange County voted in 2004, compared with about 75 percent of

Democrats.

To try to continue that tradition, Oliver grabbed a list of 181

addresses in Baldwin Park, an area of working professionals.

The first house he visited took him to James Sims, 50, who said

he was happy to see fellow McCain supporters in the neighborhood.

The second voter he encountered also promised to vote Republican.

"No matter how sick you are?" Oliver said. "Even if you have to

drag yourself there on a wagon?"

"Yes," the woman said.

It was a well-honed pitch. In his 22 years, he said he had

learned a few things about voter contact. First, knock and ring the

doorbell. Second, step a few feet back to avoid looking

threatening. And third, use humor. Introductions like "Hi" -- big

smile -- "we're not selling anything" are usually effective.

Or at least they get the conversation going. What happens next,

this year at least, seems more unpredictable. Just after Oliver

said he had not yet found a house with Republicans who said they

would vote for Barack Obama, he encountered two of them in a row.

Beth Moriarty said that her 62-year-old husband, for the first

time in his life, was going to vote for a Democrat.

Patricia Millar, 50, a registered independent, also said that

she and her husband, Jeffery Bergenthal, a Republican, were not

voting for McCain. A blue Obama sign fluttered in her lawn. She

seemed unsure of how to break the news.

"We think he's a great guy," she said of McCain. "We're just

a little disappointed with the ticket this year."

No one disputes that Iceland's economic troubles are

largely the country's own fault. But there may be more to the

story, at least in the view of Iceland's government, its citizens

and even some outsiders.

As grave as their situation already was, they say, Britain --

their old friend, NATO ally and trading partner -- made it

immeasurably worse.

The troubles between the countries began three weeks ago when

Britain took the extraordinary step of using its 2001

anti-terrorism laws to freeze the British assets of a failing

Icelandic bank. That appeared to brand Iceland a terrorist state.

"I must admit that I was absolutely appalled," the Icelandic

foreign minister, Ingibjorg Solrun Gisladottir, said in an

interview, describing her horror at opening the British treasury

department's home page at the time and finding Iceland on a list of

terrorist entities with al-Qaida, Sudan and North Korea, among

others.

In a volatile economic climate, in which appearance matters

almost as much as reality, being associated with terrorism is not a

good thing.

"The immediate effect was to trigger an almost complete freeze

on any banking transactions between Iceland and abroad," said Jon

Danielsson, an economist at the London School of Economics. "When

you're labeled a terrorist, nobody does business with you."

The Icelandic prime minister, Geir H. Haarde, accused Britain of

"bullying a small neighbor," and said the action was "very out

of proportion." In a recent speech in Beijing, Howard Davies, a

former deputy governor of the Bank of England and now the director

of the London School of Economics, said that Britain had used a

"beggar thy neighbor" approach to Iceland.

And an online petition signed so far by more than 20 percent of

Iceland's population said the British prime minister, Gordon Brown,

had sacrificed Iceland "for his own short-term political gain,"

thereby turning "a grave situation into a national disaster."

Iceland's financial problems had been brewing for some time.

This past spring, the country's banks, bloated with foreign

deposits and debts, began to falter. This fall, as the financial

crisis deepened, the government took over two of the country's

three largest banks.

The British government, alarmed about the tens of thousands of

accounts held by its citizens, companies, local governments and

charities, froze the British assets of one of the failed banks,

Landsbanki. It also seized the assets of Kaupthing Singer &amp;amp;

Friedlander, the British subsidiary of another Icelandic bank,

Kaupthing.

"The Icelandic government, believe it or not, told me yesterday

that they have no intention of honoring their obligations here,"

Alistair Darling, the chancellor of the Exchequer, declared the day

Britain seized the assets.

The Icelandic government disputed that, saying it was merely

asking for time to make good on its obligations.

Whatever the case, reaction was immediate and severe,

particularly when Brown said the following day -- inaccurately --

that "we are freezing the assets of Icelandic companies in the

U.K. where we can."

Iceland's ambassador to Britain, Sverrir H. Gunnlaugsson, said

in an interview that this statement was particularly damaging.

"There was a perception in the U.K. press and among suppliers that

everything Icelandic had been frozen," he said. "The word was put

out belatedly that this was not the case."

Icelanders say that it is now nearly impossible to get foreign

currency into or out of the country. Many banks have refused even

to transfer money to Iceland. Importers are having difficulty

paying their foreign bills, and exporters are having trouble

getting paid by their foreign customers.

Many people in Iceland are also furious about what happened to

Kaupthing Singer &amp;amp; Friedlander. The British government's seizure of

its assets precipitated the immediate collapse of its parent bank,

Kaupthing, which the Icelandic government had been propping up and

had hoped would survive.

"Kaupthing was the last, best hope of the Icelandic banking

system, and it was killed there and then," Andres Magnusson, an

editorial writer for Icelandic Financial News, said in an

interview. "This really was the last straw. A lot of Icelanders

are asking, 'Excuse me: who's the terrorist here?"'

The bank's collapse had repercussions beyond Iceland and

Britain. More than 8,000 depositors, individuals and businesses,

hold Kaupthing Singer &amp;amp; Friedlander accounts worth about $1.34

billion on the Isle of Man, money they now cannot get their hands

on -- and may never.

Iceland is in line to receive a $2 billion loan from the

International Monetary Fund and is talking to other Scandinavian

countries. It is not entirely friendless: It was recently offered a

loan of about $52 million from the tiny Faroe Islands, for which it

is very grateful, Gunnlaugsson said.

The Icelandic government has pledged to make good on domestic

bank accounts. But it is still fighting with Britain over how much

it is obliged to pay -- and how much it can afford to pay -- to

compensate customers with accounts in Icesave, Landsbanki's British

branch.

Under European regulations, Iceland is obliged to pay 20,000

euros (about $25,000) to each individual account holder in Icesave.

But the total, Gisladottir, the foreign minister, said, would

amount to about 600 billion Icelandic kronur -- only about $5

billion at today's collapsed exchange rate but fully 60 percent of

Iceland's gross domestic product.

"The compensation that we would give would be twice as much per

head as the reparations Germany faced in the Treaty of Versailles

after the First World War," she said. "That is something we

cannot afford."

The British government has guaranteed that individual British

account holders will be compensated fully, which is why it is

seeking to wrest as much money as possible from Iceland. But no

such guarantees have been made to the British companies, local

governments, charities and universities -- including Oxford and

Cambridge -- that had Icesave accounts. That figure alone is well

over $1 billion dollars.

Iceland's key interest rate now stands at 18 percent. The

currency, the krona, has declined 44 percent in the last year.

Danielsson, the economist, visited the country recently and found

the situation grave.

"Salaries are frozen, food prices are shooting up, and they are

laying off people left, right and center," he said. "Companies

are going bankrupt all over the place. It's unimaginable how bad it

is."

Gisladottir said Britain's decision had sent Iceland back some

30 or 40 years, to a time when it was an isolated, poor country,

dependent mostly on its fishing trade.

"This is a major crisis," she said. "We haven't been in this

situation for, probably, ever. We cannot solve it alone. We need

solidarity from partners, from friendly countries, and we thought

the U.K. was one of them."

Sens. Barack Obama and John McCain have stood (or

sat) for 36 debates, endured thousands of interviews, and spent

hundreds of millions of dollars on advertisements and the better

part of two years trying to convince voters that they are worthy of

the presidency, or at least a vote.

But with only days left until Election Day, a small cluster of

holdouts -- 4 percent, according to a New York Times/CBS News poll --

is still wrestling with the "Who are you voting for?" question.

Which raises a follow-up: What is up with these people?

"I do not like being an 'undecided,"' said a sheepish Doug

Finke, a 66-year-old executive at an international relocation

service in Louisville, Ky. "Last time at this point, I definitely

was decided. Not this time. I find it unnerving."

Doug Finke, a Republican, voted twice for George W. Bush. He

describes himself as an economic conservative and said he had been

"very impressed" with Sen. John McCain. It sure sounds as if

Finke is leaning toward McCain, the Arizona Republican, right?

Not so fast.

"I'm socially more liberal," Doug Finke said. "I think Obama

is bright and has been very steady in this campaign." He added

that it would be "very exciting for the United States to elect a

black president." Besides, he does not think McCain's running

mate, Gov. Sarah Palin of Alaska, would be ready to step into the

top job if something happened to McCain (who, Finke pointed out,

"is pretty old").

Where does this leave Doug Finke? "I plan on doing a lot of

reading this weekend," he said.

If the country is divided between red and blue, Doug Finke

resides in a gray state, along with a proud -- or embarrassed --

corps of undecideds. They are a shrinking cohort of confused,

procrastinating, indifferent or just plain indecisive consumers of

democracy. Doug Finke lives in a red state, Kentucky, with his

wife, Shelley, who is also a gray state citizen. She works out of

their home, where she helps manage her husband's second career as a

jazz trombonist.

"I tend to be a procrastinator," said Shelley Finke, 44, who

said she operated best with deadlines.

She voted for Bush twice and describes herself as "a

conservative person at heart." At the beginning of the campaign,

she was suspicious of Obama "because of the whole Hollywood

thing," but she has since warmed to him.

"My opinion of Obama has definitely risen during this

campaign," Shelley Finke said. "And my opinion of McCain has

fallen."

So it sure sounds as if Shelley Finke is moving toward Obama,

the Illinois Democrat, right?

Not so fast.

"I'd say I'm leaning towards McCain," she said. "For as awful

as things are with this Republican administration, there's

something about the whole conservative thing that appeals to me."

Put her down as "leaning McCain" then.

"But maybe I'll vote for Obama," she said. "How many days are

left?"

Two, as of Sunday. While many people in this campaign-saturated

country are relieved that the election will soon be over, some of

the undecideds figure, What's the rush?

"I might flip a coin," said Vasilios Gerovasiliou, 64, of

Concordville, Pa. His two grown sons -- like him, veterinarians --

are split along party lines. His wife, Helen, said she was

"disgusted with both sides."

Gerovasiliou, who emigrated from Greece 35 years ago, said there

were things he liked about both McCain and Obama. But he also

believes that "neither of the candidates always speaks the truth"

and that "none of them will be able to do all of the things they

are promising."

Gerovasiliou supported Sen. Hillary Rodham Clinton, loved Bill

Clinton and pretty much vowed to support anyone not named Barack

Obama after he defeated Clinton in the Democratic primaries.

But the Clintons' endorsement of Obama went a long way. "Time

healed things," Gerovasiliou said. Plus, he likes Obama's running

mate, Sen. Joseph R. Biden Jr. of neighboring Delaware, who is

"friends with a lot of the Greeks around here" and patronizes the

local Greek diners. He likes McCain, too, however. He admires his

service, patriotism, and grit, and also likes that Palin comes from

a small town, just as he did from one in Greece.

Would he really flip a coin? No, he would not. "I will just

have to make a decision," Gerovasiliou said. By the end of a

15-minute phone interview, he sounded a little closer to making

one. "I think I am leaning a little bit to someone now," he said.

And that would be?

"Biden."

Talking does not necessarily bring undecideds closer to

deciding. "The more I chat, the more confused I get," said Laura

Wolpo, a Brooklyn native who lives in Palm Beach Gardens, Fla. She

was fresh from a golf outing that was filled with political

conversation and left her head spinning. "People get so wacky

about this stuff," she said.

Wolpo, 76, has usually picked a candidate by the end of the

conventions. That was the Democrats Al Gore in 2000 and John Kerry

in 2004.

Obama? "I have great misgivings," she said.

"We are of the Jewish faith," she said, "and I don't really

know his stance on the Middle East and Israel." She also worries

about his "share the wealth ideas" and says Michelle Obama comes

on a little too strong. ("And someone should teach her how to

dress, too.")

McCain? "I like the man," she said. "I have a great deal of

respect for him."

But she has problems with him, too, some big ones. First, she is

a strong believer in abortion rights (which McCain is not.) "The

government does not belong in our bedroom," she said. And then

there is Palin.

"Oh, my God," Wolpo said. "Some of what she says is very

stupid."

Wolpo vows to vote Tuesday. She raises the possibility of a

"toss of the coin," but then rejects the notion.

When pressed, Wolpo said there was probably a 60 percent chance

she would support McCain. She does not buy the Obama campaign

argument that McCain is just like Bush. "McCain knows in his heart

that Bush is a loser," she said.

Either way, Wolpo said her decision did not keep her awake at

night. "I have enough to worry about," she said, explaining that

her youngest son, who is in his 40s, suffered a stroke last spring.

He has good days and bad days, she said, and that puts everything

else in perspective.

"This other thing is just an election," she said.

On a rainy Friday evening in early August,

six Taliban fighters attacked a police post in a village in Buner,

a quiet farming valley just outside Pakistan's lawless tribal

region.

The militants tied up eight policemen and lay them on the floor,

and according to local accounts, the youngest member of the gang, a

14-year-old, shot the captives on orders from his boss. The

fighters stole uniforms and weapons and fled into the mountains.

Almost instantly, the people of Buner, armed with rifles,

daggers and pistols, formed a posse, and after five days they

cornered and killed their quarry. A video made on a cell phone

showed the six militants lying in the dirt, blood oozing from their

wounds.

The stand at Buner has entered the lore of Pakistan's war

against the militants as a dramatic example of ordinary citizens'

determination to draw a line against the militants.

But it says as much about the shortcomings of Pakistan's

increasingly overwhelmed police forces and the pell-mell nature of

the efforts to stop the militants, who week by week seem to seep

deeper into Pakistan from their tribal strongholds.

Since the events in Buner, the inspector general of the police

in the North-West Frontier province, Malik Naveed Khan, has

encouraged citizens in other towns and villages in his realm to

form posses of their own.

The hope is that determination itself will deter Taliban

encroachment, building on the August victory with one phalanx after

another of committed citizens.

But the strategy is also a sign of his desperation.

"We are laying down our lives," Khan said in an interview in

October. "By the hundreds the police are being targeted and

killed."

He has had to lower recruitment standards to fill out the ranks,

he said, "because this is war." Even so, he has supplemented his

force with what he said were some 15,000 "special police" --

citizens whom he cannot pay, but whom he is willing to arm. "Any

community which helps us, we give them weapons," Khan said.

The army was of no use here.

"There is no other way," Khan said. "Pure military action

would create a lot of devastation, to the extent that people would

turn against the government."

Indeed, after the Taliban were cornered, a new peace committee

composed of elders and politicians passed a resolution declaring

Buner a zone free of both the army and the Taliban.

The local police chief in the Buner district, Zubair Shah, a

rising star of the Pakistani police force, acknowledged the

challenges of confronting a Taliban threat that is more deeply

ensconced in communities all over Pakistan than had been thought.

He is trying to tamp down the Taliban with a police force that

is grossly underpaid and frequently overmatched by better armed

militants. Currently, the police officers in Buner earn about

one-quarter the monthly salary that the Taliban are offering, Shah

said.

Moreover, given that the police have become a primary target of

the militants, it is hardly surprising that morale has plummeted.

"The people are more motivated than the police," he said.

In the tribal areas to the west of the Buner district, the

Pakistani army is now encouraging tribal militias, known as

lashkars, as a backup force against the Taliban. Such militias have

a long tradition in tribal society.

But even there, they have met with little success in the current

conflict.

By contrast, posses like the one in Buner have not been tried

before in the settled parts of Pakistan outside the tribal areas,

Khan said. They have in any case become a necessary tool to help

preserve the peace.

The citizens of Buner, interviewed in late October after the

police arranged an escort to the area, where security is still

sketchy, said they had taken matters into their own hands to keep

not only the militants at bay, but the army as well.

In areas where the army has had to confront the militants,

fighting has ensued on the scale of a civil war, displacing tens of

thousands of people. If citizens' militias sound like civil war

already, that is precisely what the people of Buner say they are

hoping to avoid.

Such wrenching violence has been the fate already of the

neighboring Swat Valley, and of nearby Bajaur, an area of the

tribal region, where the army and militants have been locked in

heavy fighting. Civilian casualties are high. The task of pushing

back the Taliban is taking far longer than the army had

anticipated.

In Swat, the army has been unable to stop the burning of more

than 100 girls schools or the murders of politicians and their

families. About one-third of the police force has deserted in Swat,

and some of the deserters have joined the Taliban, even as

trainers, according to senior police officials.

In Bajaur, more than 200,000 people have fled, becoming refugees

in appalling conditions in makeshift camps.

The villagers in Buner say they would prefer to handle the

Taliban on their own, rather than have the heavy hand of the army

come and do it for them.

They did it with gusto, later lining up the bodies of their

Taliban victims at a hospital like trophies so citizens could take

a closer look.

"We don't want happening here, what is happening around us,"

said Mohammed Zada, a retired bank manager, and a driving force

behind the peace council. "The people are very unified, so the

Taliban failed. We are dead set against the army, too."

While the resolve of local residents is heartening, Shah, an

expert in counterterrorism, understands better than most Pakistanis

what kind of threat he is up against.

He has taught police investigative work with the United Nations

in Bosnia and was selected by the U.S. Consulate in Peshawar for a

month-long leadership program in the United States. He recently

spent a year in Australia studying transnational terrorism.

As in many areas of Pakistan -- from Karachi to Islamabad, and

from rural districts in the north to the cultural capital, Lahore --

the Taliban have sympathizers and workers in Buner who lie low in

sleeper cells that can be easily activated, Shah said.

Soon after the citizen posse killed the six Taliban, he said,

undercover work led police officers to a house where they found a

suicide vest packed with 20 pounds of explosives and 15 pounds of

ball bearings.

That discovery led to a potentially more lethal find: a full kit

of ingredients for major explosions.

In a house near his police headquarters, investigators found

more than 500 pounds of explosives, a cache of 30 detonators, 10

remote-control devices, dozens of battery cells, a police uniform

and a motorcycle, Shah said.

Worryingly, he said, the explosives had been methodically

delivered into Buner over time in small parcels by motorbike.

One of the men arrested in the case had been friendly with the

police, a shopkeeper who prayed at the same mosque as the police.

Many of the villagers in Buner had relatives working abroad -- in

Malaysia, in Dubai and as taxi drivers in Arlington, Va. -- who sent

remittances home. The relative wealth and a long-standing social

cohesion had helped to fortify the community and keep the Taliban

at bay.

Under these circumstances, the police chief said, people power

was his best bet. "If the militants enter Buner," he said, "all

you need to do is go to the mosque loudspeakers and shout, and

people will be mobilized."

Facing labor shortages back in 1990 but

ever wary of allowing in foreigners, Japan made an exception for

Japanese-Brazilians. With their Japanese roots, names and faces,

these children and grandchildren of Japanese immigrants to Brazil

would fit more easily in a society fiercely closed to outsiders, or

so the reasoning went.

In the two decades since then, despite periodic economic

downturns like the current one, the number of Japanese-Brazilian

workers in Japan has kept growing. They are clustered in industrial

regions dotted with factories supplying familiar companies like

Honda, Sanyo and Toyota, whose headquarters gave this city in

central Japan its name.

But perhaps nowhere in this country do Japanese and

Japanese-Brazilians rub shoulders with such intensity as in a

public housing complex here called Homi Estate. Built in the 1970s

for young Japanese families, Homi has a population of 8,891 that is

now nearly evenly split between Japanese, at 52 percent, and

foreigners, at 48 percent.

"To be honest," Toshinori Fujiwara, 69, a Japanese community

leader, said, "I never imagined in my wildest dreams that this

would ever become a multiethnic neighborhood."

A generation from now, more Japanese are likely to be making

similar comments as Japan's population ages and its work force

shrinks. Recently labor shortages have spread from factories to

farms, fishing boats, hospitals and other areas, prompting Japan to

open its doors to temporary workers from China and elsewhere in

Asia.

As the demographic squeeze grows tighter, Japan may have to open

itself further to immigration, experts say, if it is to have the

workers it needs to remain a major industrial power. A homogeneous

and insular nation, however, Japan is notoriously unwelcoming to

immigrants; Koreans who came here during World War II are still

treated as second-class citizens.

To make itself an attractive destination for immigrants, the

experts say, Japan will have to undergo a difficult cultural

transformation for which the Japanese-Brazilians pose an elementary

test case. If even they cannot gain acceptance, what chance will

there be forimmigrant groups that may be ethnically, racially,

religiously and nationally different from native Japanese?

Immigration is an unpopular and politically delicate topic. But

the country's 317,000 Japanese-Brazilians -- whose children are

growing up in Japan and, in many cases, coming of age here --

effectively make up Japan's largest immigrant population. Of the

total, nearly 94,400 have acquired permanent residence, while the

others can stay in Japan indefinitely. Children born in Japan of

foreign parents do not automatically get citizenship.

A city within a city, Homi Estate -- 40 apartment buildings,

detached houses, schools and shops -- looks like any other Japanese

housing complex from afar. But, on closer inspection, street signs

are in Japanese and Portuguese. In the community's shopping

complex, restaurants serve Brazilian dishes; a convenience store

displays Brazilian magazines. A Japanese supermarket was replaced

by a Japanese-Brazilian one last year, reflecting Homi's shifting

demographics.

Other differences are more subtle. Some elevators are covered

with scratches, a kind of vandalism rarely seen in Japan. And

parking lots contain cars retrofitted into low-riders and painted

purple, while Japanese tend to stick to white or gray.

In the beginning, the Japanese did not understand why the

Japanese-Brazilians played loud music, failed to sort their trash

perfectly and did not seem bothered about arriving late to

appointments. For the Japanese-Brazilians, their grandparents' or

parents' often rose-tinted image of Japan seemed dated at best, and

they felt unwelcome.

"I've been lucky, because the Japanese have been kind to me,"

said Rita Okokama, 40, a Japanese-Brazilian who has been here 18

years and owns Padaria, a small sandwich shop. "But others have

faced prejudice. For example, Japanese shop owners will follow

around Japanese-Brazilian customers because they think they'll

shoplift."

A decade ago, Japanese-Brazilians even clashed with Japanese

right-wing groups singling out foreigners. But the situation began

improving five years ago as the Japanese and the

Japanese-Brazilians learned to live with one another and organized

joint events, like barbecues, said Kunikazu Ihara, 65, a local ward

leader. Another reason for the improvement may be that Japanese

unwilling to live next to Japanese-Brazilians simply moved.

"If they were surrounded by foreigners, especially those in

rental apartments, some Japanese just got out," Ihara said.

By contrast, the Japanese who stayed appeared committed to

getting along.

"Japanese tend to be insular and build shells around

themselves," said Kimio Yamamoto, 71, a retired Japanese engineer

who has become a familiar face at Homi's Japanese-Brazilian-run

fitness club. "And foreigners can feel that right away."

As he worked on his pectorals, Yamamoto said the

Japanese-Brazilians had immediately made him feel at home at the

club. "It's fun," he said.

Still, most adults keep a polite distance from one another.

"Children become amigos," said Fujiwara, the Japanese

community leader, who is taking Portuguese lessons and sprinkles

his Japanese with Portuguese words. "But adults, they don't become

amigos."

At West Homi Elementary, where Japanese-Brazilian children

account for 53 percent of the 196 students, supplementary Japanese

language classes are offered, as well as help in other subjects.

Partly as a result, Japanese-Brazilian children do not drop out, a

common problem in other public schools, where foreign children are

often bullied.

Because of the growing number of Japanese-Brazilian students,

some Japanese parents were wary of letting their own children stay

at the school. School officials tried to persuade the Japanese to

keep their children here by emphasizing the positive side effects

of the Japanese-Brazilian presence.

"This is no longer the era of a homogeneous people, but rather

of a multiethnic society," said Mitsuyuki Shibuya, a school

official.

The new era may be symbolized by a 9-year-old Japanese-Brazilian

student named Nicholas Wada, who has taken home prizes for poetry

and other subjects, which his parents proudly display. His parents,

Joao, 44, and Silvana, 40, came to Japan 18 years ago and also

reared a daughter, Veridiana, 22, here.

This year they built a two-story detached house as a sign of

their commitment to Japan.

"My son has no image at all of Brazil, so we built this house

for him," Wada said in the couple's living room. "Nicholas says

he doesn't want to go to Brazil."

"He thinks in Japanese," Wada, a truck driver, added.

Like most Japanese-Brazilians -- indeed, like almost all

immigrants throughout the world -- the Wadas arrived here intending

to stay only two or three years. "Even if you ask us now, we'll

say we're going back in two to three years," Wada said.

Uncertain about how long they will stay in Japan, many

Japanese-Brazilians send their children to private

Portuguese-language schools or keep them out of school altogether.

Going to school is not compulsory for foreigners.

Of the nearly 33,500 Japanese-Brazilian children in Japan

between 5 and 14 years old, the ages of compulsory education, about

10,000 are in Japanese schools receiving remedial Japanese lessons,

according to government figures. Most of the rest are likely in

Portuguese-language schools or not attending school.

Children who do not attend Japanese schools tend to become

isolated from Japanese society, said Kiyoe Ito, the chairwoman of

Torcida, a private organization that teaches Japanese to

Japanese-Brazilian children in Homi. Even if they intend to move to

Brazil, their understanding of that country is also limited.

One boy studying Japanese at Torcida one recent morning was

Bruno Da Costa, 15, whose Japanese maternal grandparents had

immigrated to Brazil. With his parents, Bruno had moved to Japan at

the age of 1, but he was unable to express himself in Japanese. He

said he understood most of his favorite cartoon on television,

"Naruto," but movies were beyond his comprehension.

"I feel Brazilian because I went to a Portuguese school,"

Bruno said. "If I'd gone to a Japanese school, maybe I'd feel

differently. But Japan is also my country; I grew up here. Brazil,

I think, is a dangerous country. I mean, I'd feel afraid to carry

around an iPod or wear a designer T-shirt over there. Japan's

safe."

Around 5 p.m. on weekdays buses from nearby factories drop off

day-shift workers at Homi and pick up the night-shift crew. Most of

the Japanese-Brazilians earn around $12 an hour and work at

suppliers to Toyota.

The company Tokai Rika, a seatbelt maker started by hiring eight

Japanese-Brazilian workers in 1995 and now has 280, or almost a

quarter of its factory work force here. In the past year, the

company made changes -- including offering the foreign workers

longer contracts and hiring a Japanese-Brazilian chef in its

cafeteria -- to retain Japanese-Brazilians who might be lured away

by better-paying competitors.

"To be honest, they work more faithfully than Japanese

workers," Hiroaki Ito, a general manager, said, repeating a common

complaint among businesses that young Japanese lacked the work

ethic of older Japanese and tended to quit easily.

Kouji Buma, the manager of the factory, said simply, "If we

consider the future, we just won't be able to operate this factory

without Japanese-Brazilians."

Tokai Rika officials did not venture an opinion on the country's

immigration policies. But some of Homi's residents did.

Hiroko Arakawa, 52, a Japanese homemaker who was buying meat at

the Japanese-Brazilian supermarket, said her son, now in junior

high school, had had Japanese-Brazilian friends since elementary

school. And she had enjoyed getting to know the friends' parents.

Japan should open itself up to immigrants and give them full

access to society, she said.

"They become sick and need health insurance just like

Japanese," she said. "If we do right by them, they won't want to

leave."

Growing up in St. Louis in the 1950s and '60s, Deddrick Battle

came to believe that the political process was not for people like

him -- a struggling black man whose vote, he was convinced, surely

would not count for much of anything. The thought became ingrained

as an adult, almost like common sense. And that partly explains

why, at age 55, he just registered to vote for the first time a

month ago.

The other part of the reason is Sen. Barack Obama.

"This is huge," Battle, a janitor, said after his overnight

shift cleaning a movie theater. "This is bigger than life itself.

When I was coming up, I always thought they put in who they wanted

to put in. I didn't think my vote mattered. But I don't think that

anymore."

Across the country, black men and women like Battle, who have

long been disaffected, apolitical, discouraged or just plain bored

with politics, say they have snapped to attention this year,

according to dozens of interviews conducted in the last several

days in six states.

They are people like 25-year-old Percy Matthews, of Chicago's

South Side, who did vote once, but whose experience was so

forgettable that he cannot recall with certainty for whom he cast a

ballot, or even what year it was. Now an enthusiastic Democrat, he

says the old days are gone.

And Shandell Wilcox, 29, who registered to vote in Jacksonville,

Fla., when she was 18, then proceeded to ignore every election

before the current one. She voted for the first time Wednesday.

Over and again, first-time and relatively new voters like

Matthews and Wilcox, far past the legal voting age, said they were

inspired by the singularity of the 2008 election and the power of

Obama's magnetism. Many also said they were loath to miss out on

their part in writing what could be a new chapter of American

history -- the chance to vote for a black president.

Battle, for one, remembers growing up in the Pruitt-Igoe housing

project in St. Louis and how intimidated the adults were about

voting, and that left an impression on him. The older women he knew

were afraid to walk to the polls, he said, for fear of being

attacked.

"I didn't think it was for black people, period," he said of

politics before the Civil Rights era. "We didn't have any rights,

really. We were just coming into voting and everything."

Fast-forwarding to the present, he continued: "I never thought

that I'd see this day. I never thought I'd see the day where an

African-American was standing at the podium, getting ready to be

president."

The swelling ranks of the newly enthusiastic are also the result

of extensive nationwide voter registration drives and new

early-voting procedures in many states, which have made the process

easier and more accessible.

David Bositis, senior political analyst at the Joint Center for

Political and Economic Studies in Washington, said the states with

the largest increases in early voting have been those where the

black population is proportionally the highest. In Georgia, for

instance, blacks represented a quarter of all voters in the 2004

presidential election. So far this year in early voting alone, they

make up 35 percent of all voters.

"I am fully expecting record black turnout," Bositis said.

"It's not just a question of Obama as the first black nominee;

it's also that blacks have suffered substantially under the Bush

years and blacks have been the single most anti-Iraq-war group in

the population."

He added, "Obama is like the icing on the cake, but it's not

just a question of Obama."

One early voter in Georgia was Armento Meredith, 43, who waited

in line for two hours at the Fulton County Government Building in

downtown Atlanta to vote for the first time Thursday. "It's time

for a change," Meredith, a telephone operator, said. "I want to

see something different."

The result is likely to be a level of black participation in the

electoral process that is higher than ever before. If sustained,

some of those interviewed said, it might also translate into a

reinvigorated spirit of democracy in some communities where it has

been long dormant.

"In the black community, I see a great many people coming out

who were apathetic since '84," said Bob Law, 63, an activist in

New York City and former radio host who worked on the Rev. Jesse

Jackson's campaign for the presidency in 1984, the first time a

black candidate was a serious national contender. But in the years

since, he said, blacks' enthusiasm had waned.

"People didn't vote before because they really didn't think

their vote was going to make a difference," Law said. "Whenever

black voters felt like there was a reason to vote, like it might

mean something, they've turned out."

That is exactly how Battle, the janitor in St. Louis, feels. In

the past, "I felt like Democrat or Republican, it didn't matter

who won," he said. "But my guy Obama? I think it's going to be a

change if he wins. He's speaking my language."

For some black men and women, the sense of pride is

overwhelming, as is the feeling that they are participating in what

could become a touchstone moment, something that children and

grandchildren will want to hear about.

"I'd feel bad forever if I didn't get out this time," said

Wilcox of Jacksonville, a cafeteria worker. "I'd feel like I

didn't do my part to put him in the office. How would I explain

that to my little girl? 'Oh, I had something better to do'? And

sure, it's partially because he's African-American. But he also

says there will be change and I believe him."

Timothy Hairston, 47, a bartender in Brooklyn, N.Y., who has

never voted before, shared that point of view. "I wanted to be a

part of a historical moment, to say that I was involved in history

in the making, that I was an active participant as opposed to

someone on the sidelines rooting for change but not involved in the

process of making change."

He added of Obama: "I think it's a testament to his campaign

that he can inspire. At the end of the day, no matter what party

you vote for, I think every once in a while there are inspirational

moments that call for people to wake up from their deep sleep and

become alive and get involved. And I think Barack at the very least

is an inspirational figure."

For some, coming back to political life was a slow process that

unfolded over months. Others said they were struck by something in

Obama's life or what he stands for, and conversion was immediate.

Wilcox saw some of her own biography reflected in Obama's. They

were both born to single mothers and raised mostly by their

grandparents in modest settings. Wilcox said she felt validated,

motivated and inspired all at once when she first heard Obama's

life story during the primary season. "I began to think that we

had a lot of life features in common," she said. "It gave me

hope."

Bianca Williams, 20, a hair stylist in Brooklyn, said the

campaign had changed her life. After seeing Obama in the first

debate, she decided to go back to community college part-time.

"After seeing his success, I started thinking maybe I could help

my community like he did," she said. "If he could do it, then I

could do it. It woke me up, career-wise. It just gave me the

willpower to go on."

That is also true for Matthews, who works in a Chicago coffee

shop. Not too long ago, he said, he lied to his mother about having

voted in an election just so that she would stop nagging him to get

out and vote. What a difference this year has made: He said he

watched the party conventions and three of the four presidential

and vice presidential debates. He has followed coverage of the

candidates in the local papers. He voted in the primary, and he

cannot wait to vote Tuesday.

"As I'm talking now, I'm getting goose bumps," he said.

For 18-year-old Darnell Harris of Cleveland, a private in the

Marines, the legal voting age could not come fast enough. "I'm

excited that the first time I get to vote, it's for Barack," he

said. And echoing many others, he said that race is only part of

the reason. "Obama cares about everybody, whether they're white,

black, Chinese, whatever. He's not just for one little group."

For some new voters, family and peer pressure certainly played a

role.

"Most of my life, I didn't want to get involved with anything

political," said Damien Henderson, a 26-year-old merchant seaman.

"But everywhere I go lately people are talking about Barack Obama.

I could be standing in line at a grocery and somebody's going to

ask me what I think about Barack Obama."

Henderson said he started paying attention and fell for Obama's

charisma. He voted for the first time Monday, for Obama.

How did it feel to cast that first vote?

"It actually felt really good," he said.

"People come up to me in the grocery store and say, 'How did we

get suckered into this?' All I can tell them is, 'We thought we

were making the smart choice."'

-- Marc Hujik, an investment adviser and school board member in

Kenosha, Wis.

On a snowy day two years ago, the school board in Whitefish Bay,

Wis., gathered to discuss a looming problem: how to plug a gaping

hole in the teachers' retirement plan.

It turned to David W. Noack, a trusted local investment banker,

who proposed they borrow from overseas and use the money for a

complex investment that offered big profits.

"Every three months you're going to get a payment," he

promised, according to a tape of the meeting. But would it be

risky? "There would need to be 15 Enrons" for the district to

lose money, he said.

The board and four other nearby school districts ultimately

invested $200 million in Noack's deal, most of it borrowed from an

Irish bank. Without realizing it, the schools were imitating hedge

funds.

Across the country, New York subway officials were also being

wooed by bankers. Officials were told that just as homebuyers had

embraced adjustable-rate loans, New York could save money by

borrowing at lower interest rates that changed every day.

For some of the deals, the officials were encouraged to rely on

the same Irish bank as the Wisconsin schools.

During the go-go investing years, school districts, transit

agencies and other government entities were quick to jump into the

global economy, hoping for fast gains to cover growing pension

costs and budgets without raising taxes. Deals were arranged by

armies of persuasive financiers who received big paydays.

But now, hundreds of cities and government agencies are facing

economic turmoil. Far from being isolated examples, the Wisconsin

schools and New York's subway system are among the many players in

a financial fiasco that has ricocheted globally.

The bank at the center of their saga, named Depfa, is now in

trouble. The Wisconsin schools are on the brink of losing their

money, confronting educators with possible budget cuts. Interest

rates for New York's subways are skyrocketing and contributing to

budget woes that have transportation officials considering higher

fares and delaying long-planned track repairs.

And the bank's problems have threatened the stability of its

parent company in Munich, forcing German officials to intervene

with a multibillion-dollar bailout to stop a chain reaction that

could freeze Germany's economic system.

"I am really worried," said Becky Velvikis, a first-grade

teacher at Grewenow Elementary in Kenosha, Wis., one of the

districts that invested in Noack's deal. "If millions of dollars

are gone, what happens to my retirement? Or the construction paper

and pencils and supplies we need to teach?"

The trail through Wisconsin, New York and Europe illustrates how

this financial crisis has moved around the world so fast, why it is

so hard to tame, and why cities, schools and many other

institutions will probably struggle for years.

"The local papers and radio shows call us idiots, and now when

I go home, my kids ask me, 'Dad, did you do something wrong?"'

said Shawn Yde, the director of business services in the Whitefish

Bay district. "This is something I'll regret until the day I

die."

SELLING RISK

Whitefish Bay's school district did not intend to become a hedge

fund. It and four nearby districts were just trying to finance

retirement obligations that were growing as health care costs rose.

Noack, the local representative of Stifel, Nicolaus &amp;amp; Co., a St.

Louis investment bank, had been advising Wisconsin school boards

for two decades, helping them borrow for new gymnasiums and

classrooms. His father had taught at an area high school for 47

years. All six of his children attended Milwaukee schools.

Noack told the Whitefish Bay board that investing in the global

economy carried few risks, according to the tape.

"What's the best investment? It's called a collateralized debt

obligation," or a CDO, Noack said. He described it as a collection

of bonds from 105 of the most reputable companies that would pay

the school board a small return every quarter.

"We're being very conservative," Noack told the board,

composed of lawyers, salesmen and a homemaker who lived in the

affluent Milwaukee suburb.

Soon, Whitefish Bay and the four other districts borrowed $165

million from Depfa and contributed $35 million of their own money

to purchase three CDOs sold by the Royal Bank of Canada, which had

a relationship with Noack's company.

But Noack's explanation of a CDO was very wrong. Noack, who

through his lawyer declined to comment, had attended only a

two-hour training session on CDOs, he told a friend.

The schools' $200 million was actually used as collateral for a

complicated form of insurance guaranteeing about $20 billion of

corporate bonds. That investment -- known as a synthetic CDO --

committed the boards to paying off other bondholders if

corporations failed to honor their debts.

If just 6 percent of the bonds insured went bad, the Wisconsin

educators could lose all their money. If none of the bonds

defaulted, the schools would receive about $1.8 million a year

after paying off their own debt. By comparison, the CDOs offered

only a modestly better return than a $35 million investment in

ultra-safe Treasury bonds, which would have paid about $1.5 million

a year, with virtually no risk.

The boards, as part of their deal, received thick packets of

documents.

"I've never read the prospectus," said Marc Hujik, a local

financial adviser and a member of the Kenosha school board who

spent 13 years on Wall Street. "We had all our questions answered

satisfactorily by Dave Noack, so I wasn't worried."

Wisconsin schools were not the only ones to jump into such

complicated financial products. More than $1.2 trillion of CDOs

have been sold to buyers of all kinds since 2005 -- including many

cities and government agencies -- an increase of 270 percent from

the four previous years combined, according to Thomson Reuters.

"Selling these products to municipalities was pretty

widespread," said Janet Tavakoli, a finance industry consultant in

Chicago. "They tend to be less sophisticated. So bankers sell them

products stuffed with junk."

From the Wisconsin deal, the Royal Bank of Canada received

promises of payments totaling about $11.2 million, according to

documents. Stifel Nicolaus made about $1.2 million. Noack's total

salary was about $300,000 a year, according to someone with

knowledge of his finances. And Depfa received interest on its

loans.

In separate statements, the Royal Bank of Canada and Stifel

Nicolaus said board members signed documents indicating they

understood the investments' risks. Both companies said they were

not financial advisers to the boards but merely sold them products

or services. Stifel Nicolaus said its relationship with the boards

ended in 2007. Noack now works for a rival firm.

"Everyone knew New York guys were making tons of money on these

kinds of deals," said Hujik, of the school board. "It wasn't

implausible that we could make money, too."

A BANK GOES GLOBAL

By the time Depfa financed the Wisconsin schools' investment, it

had already become an emblem of the new global economy. It was

founded 86 years ago as a sleepy German lender, and for most of its

history had focused on its home market.

But in 2002 a new chief executive, Gerhard Bruckermann, moved

Depfa to the freewheeling financial center of Dublin, Ireland, to

take advantage of low corporate taxes. He soon pushed the company

into Sao Paulo, Brazil; Mumbai, India; Warsaw, Poland; Hong Kong,

Dallas, New York, Tokyo and elsewhere. Depfa became one of Europe's

most profitable banks and was famous for lavish events and large

paychecks. In 2006, top executives took home the equivalent of $33

million at current exchange rates.

Bruckermann was a gregarious leader who joked that he hoped to

make all employees into millionaires. He divided his time between a

London home and a vast farm in Spain, where he grew exotic

medicinal plants. And his success fueled an arrogance, former

colleagues say.

Bruckermann once told a trade publication that Depfa, unlike

German banks, understood how to benefit from the global economy.

"With our efforts, we are like the one-eyed man who becomes king

in the land of the blind," he was quoted as saying.

Bruckermann, who left the bank earlier this year, did not

respond to requests for an interview.

But as Depfa grew, other European banks began competing with the

firm. So executives stretched into riskier deals -- the sort that

would eventually send shockwaves across Europe and the United

States.

Some of Bruckermann's employees grew concerned about deals like

one struck in 2005 with the Metropolitan Transportation Authority

of New York, the agency overseeing the city and suburban subways,

buses and trains.

For years, municipal agencies like the Metropolitan

Transportation Authority of New York, the agency overseeing the

city and suburban subways, buses and trains, had raised money by

issuing plain-vanilla bonds with fixed interest rates. But then

bankers began telling officials that there was a way to get cheaper

financing.

Bankers said that cities, like homebuyers, could save money with

adjustable-rate loans, where the payments started low and changed

over time. What they did not emphasize was that such payments could

eventually skyrocket. Such borrowing -- known as variable-rate bonds

-- also carried big fees for Wall Street.

The pitches were very successful. Municipalities issued twice as

many variable-rate bonds last year as they did a decade earlier.

But variable-rate bonds had a hitch: many investors would

purchase them only if a bank like Depfa was hired as a buyer of

last resort, ready to acquire bonds from investors who could find

no other buyers. Depfa collected fees for serving that role, but

expected it would rarely have to honor such pledges.

Depfa's salespeople traveled the world encouraging officials to

sign up for variable-rate loans. And bureaucrats and politicians,

including some in New York, jumped in.

By 2006 Depfa was the largest buyer of last resort in the world,

standing behind $2.9 billion of bonds issued that year alone. It

backed a $200 million bond issued by the MTA.

But as Depfa grew, it became more reliant on enormous short-term

loans to finance its operations. Those loans cost less, and thus

helped the bank achieve higher profits, but only when times were

good. Indeed, some employees were worried about that debt.

In 2007, even as the global economy was softening, one of

Germany's biggest lenders, Hypo Real Estate, purchased Depfa for

$7.8 billion. The CEO's cut was more than $150 million. He then

left the company to grow oranges on his Spanish estate.

THE INVESTMENTS FALTER

Last March the delicate web tying Milwaukee, Dublin and

Manhattan became an anchor dragging everyone down.

Yde, the director of business services for the Whitefish Bay

district, began receiving troubling messages indicating the

district's investments were declining. Worried, he started coming

into his office at dawn, before the hallways of Whitefish Bay High

School filled with students.

As the sun rose, Yde searched for explanations by the light of

his computer screen. He Googled "CDOs." He called bankers in

London and New York. Each person referred him to someone else.

Then notices arrived saying that the bonds insured by Whitefish

Bay's CDOs were defaulting. It became increasingly likely that the

district's money would be seized to pay off other bondholders.

Most, if not all, of the $200 million would probably be lost.

As other districts received similar notices, panic grew. For

some boards, interest payments on borrowed money were now larger

than revenue from the investments. Officials began quietly warning

that they might have to dip into school funds.

"This is going to have a tremendous financial impact," said

Robert F. Kitchen, a member of the West Allis-West Milwaukee school

board. Officials say some districts may have to cut courses like

art and drama, curtail gym and classroom maintenance, or forgo

replacing teachers who retire.

Problems were emerging elsewhere, as well.

Depfa's executives were realizing that bonds all over the world

were declining in value, exposing the company to the possibility

they would have to make good on their pledges as a buyer of last

resort. And Depfa was still borrowing billions each month to cover

its short-term loans. By autumn, the short-term debt of the bank

and its parent company, Hypo, totaled $81 billion.

Then, in mid-September, the American investment bank Lehman

Brothers went bankrupt. Short-term lending markets froze up.

Ratings agencies, including Standard &amp;amp; Poor's, downgraded Depfa,

citing the company's difficulties borrowing at affordable rates.

That set off a crisis in Germany, where officials worried that

Depfa's sudden need for cash would drag down its parent company and

set off a chain reaction at other banks. The German government and

private banks extended $64 billion in credit to Hypo to stop it

from imploding.

"We will not allow the distress of one financial institution to

endanger the entire system," Angela Merkel, the German chancellor,

said at the time.

That crisis spread almost immediately to the MTA.

(BEGIN OPTIONAL TRIM.)

The transportation authority, guided by Gary Dellaverson, a

rumpled, cigarillo-smoking chief financial officer, had $3.75

billion of variable-rate debt outstanding.

About $200 million of that debt was backed by Depfa. When the

bank was downgraded, investors dumped those transportation bonds,

because of worries they would get stuck with them if Depfa's

problems worsened. Depfa was forced to buy $150 million of them,

and bonds worth billions of dollars issued by other municipalities.

Then came the twist: Depfa's contracts said that if it bought

back bonds, the municipalities had to pay a higher-than-average

interest rate. The New York transportation authority's repayment

obligation could eventually balloon by about $12 million a year on

the Depfa loans alone.

On its own, that cost could be absorbed by the agency. But, as

the economy declined, the MTA had lost hundreds of millions because

tax receipts -- which finance part of its budget -- were falling. And

its ability to renew its variable-rate bonds at low interest rates

was hurt by the trouble at Depfa and other banks. The

transportation authority now faces a $900 million shortfall,

according to officials.

It is "fairly breathtaking," Dellaverson told the MTA's

finance committee. "This is not a tolerable long-term position for

us to be in."

In a recent interview, Dellaverson defended New York's use of

variable bonds.

"Variable-rate debt has helped MTA save millions of dollars,

and we've been conservative in issuing it," he said. "But there

are risks, which we work hard to mitigate. Usually it works. But

what's happening today is a total lack of marketplace

rationality."

In a statement, the transportation authority said that it was

exploring options to reduce the cost of the Depfa-backed bonds,

that its variable-rate bonds had delivered savings even during the

current turmoil and that the agency had remained within its budget

on debt payments this year.

The transportation authority has already announced it will raise

subway and train fares next year because of various fiscal

problems, and may be forced to shrink the work force and reduce

some bus routes. Some analysts say tolls will probably rise again

in 2010.

The Depfa fallout doesn't end there. Rating agencies have

downgraded the bonds of more than 75 municipal agencies backed by

Depfa, including in California, Connecticut, Illinois and South

Dakota. Officials in Florida, Massachusetts and Montana have cut

budgets because of CDOs or similar risky bets.

And Hypo, the German company that bought Depfa, last week asked

the German government for financial help for the third time. Depfa

has frozen much of its business, according to Wall Street bankers,

and though it continues to honor its commitments, some wonder for

how long.

The Wisconsin school districts have filed suit against the Royal

Bank of Canada and Stifel Nicolaus alleging misrepresentations.

Board members hope they will prevail and schools and retirement

plans will emerge unscathed. The companies dispute the lawsuit's

claims. Noack is not named as a defendant and is cooperating with

the school boards.

In Velvikis' classroom at Grewenow Elementary in Kenosha,

students have recently completed a lesson in which each

first-grader contributed a vegetable to a common vat of "stone

soup." The project -- based on a children's book -- teaches the

benefits of working together. The schools have learned that when

everyone works together, they can also all starve.

"Our funding is already so limited," Velvikis said. "We rely

on parent donations for some supplies. You hear about all these

millions of dollars that have been lost, and you think, that's got

to come out of somewhere."

By midsummer, Susan Skolfield, a freckled

former actress, had grown a little frustrated with the presidential

campaign of Sen. Barack Obama. Despite her pleas, it had no plans

to open an office here in her hometown, a traditionally Republican

suburb west of Orlando.

So Skolfield opened one herself. She dug into her own pocket for

the initial $1,350 in rent, hooked up telephones and computers,

hauled in furniture and printed up fliers for an early September

opening party that drew nearly a thousand people.

Eight weeks later, Skolfield, 51, who has strawberry-blond hair

and a habit of shutting her eyes when she makes a solemn point,

spends most of her days hovering at the doorway of her bustling,

still-unofficial Obama operation, serving as cheerleader and

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technologically sophisticated get-out-the-vote machine in Florida,

with nearly 500 paid staff members and mountains of finely sifted

voter data. The work of Skolfield and her hundreds of troops would

not be possible without this infrastructure. Many met on the

campaign's social-networking site, and they coordinate with a paid

Obama field organizer, who provides literature and tells them where

to drop it.

But what is most striking is just how much Skolfield and her

office of volunteers are doing, even beyond the crucial

campaign-dictated tasks of door knocking and cold calling.

Brent Constantinides, 24, and Jennise Belizaire, 26, built their

own Obama booth, which they set up every day at a dog run near the

office. (Over a few weeks, they registered 400 new voters there).

Milly Dawson, 53, distributes leaflets to her neighbors, and

includes a personal note in every packet, along with an invitation

to an election-night potluck party. Marie Ciaravino, a 66-year-old

water aerobics instructor, spends her afternoons at bus stops,

handing out little cards on which she has scrawled a number to call

for a ride to the polls.

On Wednesday, several Obama-Biden signs the height and length of

small cars mysteriously appeared, stacked outside the office. They

were professionally printed, but campaign officials did not send

them, so who had?

"I think Santa Claus brought them," Skolfield said.

Back in June, she attended a three-day session run by the

campaign -- "me and 199 college students," she says -- during which

she was trained, the instructor told her, in the same community

organizing techniques Obama once used on the streets of Chicago.

The first key to success, she was taught, was to polish her own

story. She developed a quick spiel: A former flight attendant and

actress, she was raised Republican, opposed the Iraq war from the

start and became enamored of Obama after his 2004 Democratic

convention speech.

Skolfield grew up in Winter Park, which sprouted up a century

ago as a destination for vacationing Northerners. Like many other

girls from white, wealthy families, she was cared for by black

servants. Now some domestic workers, along with their children,

make up a chunk of her volunteers. But the roles almost seem

reversed: Skolfield waits on the older black women, offering them

bottled water, driving them to the polls or finding others who

will.

A member of the local historical society, Skolfield has been

putting together video slideshows about some of their stories: how

Rose Bynum, 83, was not allowed on the white children's playground

as a child, how she was refused service at the counter of an

Orlando drugstore.

Now Bynum's neighborhood, once called Colored Town, features an

Obama sign in nearly every yard. When a gaggle of middle-schoolers

crossed the street one day this week, they spotted her lawn sign

and whooped in approval. "GoBama, that's how we roll!" one cried.

Though strays have floated in from as far away as Massachusetts,

the Winter Park volunteers are mostly homegrown, which suits the

Obama campaign's preference for local versus imported volunteers,

for turning its activists first and foremost toward their own

friends, relatives and fellow church members. Across Florida and

the nation, the campaign is running programs with names like

Neighbor to Neighbor and Adopt Five, which means see to it that

five sporadic voters get to the polls.

Though most polls show a close Florida race, and there are still

plenty of McCain-Palin signs around town, the Winter Park

volunteers bask in their seeming success. According to Skolfield's

contacts at the campaign, her office regularly leads the state in

the daily tallies of doors knocked on, phone calls made and data

entered. On the final day of voter registration last month, the

office registered 1,400 people.

Though the canvassers hear stray racial epithets, they also hear

cheers, even in Latino neighborhoods with uncertain levels of Obama

enthusiasm. And every day, a few more longtime Republicans tell the

canvassers they will be voting for Obama.

Things are so upbeat, in fact, that their two-room office can

feel like an idealized refuge from the real world: It is an

integrated setting in a still-segregated-feeling town, and while

the Orlando economy staggers, resources and donations at 200 N.

Denning Drive flow freely. Even the snacks have a labor-of-love

feel. Most campaign offices run on store-bought junk food, but the

Winter Park volunteers grazed on homemade banana-walnut bread and

fudge, dropped off by supporters who wanted to help.

For many of the 40 or so core supporters, the place has become

something of a personal haven. At night, Skolfield, who is not

married, returns home to her mother, an 84-year-old Alzheimer's

patient, and recounts the latest happenings at the office as her

mother looks back uncomprehendingly. Recently, her mother had been

making "B" sounds, Skolfield said. She knew it couldn't quite be,

but she was hopeful that she was somehow trying to say "Barack."

Constantinides and Belizaire, the couple who keep an Obama vigil

at the dog run, are out of work, out of money and unsure of how

they will provide for Belizaire's 5-year old daughter, Ayana. "All

we know for sure right now is this office and this little booth,"

said Constantinides, an electrician, his eyes welling. Lately some

of the motherly types in the office have been hiring him for little

jobs around their homes. But after the election, the couple is

thinking of heading north to look for work.

Dawson, the volunteer who writes little notes with her leaflets,

lives in a prosperous subdivision, lush with lakes and tropical

foliage, but she seems just as lost as to what she will do after

Tuesday. Like the others, she has been living full-time in

Obamaland for months now.

"We are so worried about what we're going to do after the

election," she said, heading off in the sunshine to deposit more

packets on her neighbors' doorsteps.

By midsummer, Susan Skolfield, a freckled

former actress, had grown a little frustrated with the presidential

campaign of Sen. Barack Obama. Despite her pleas, it had no plans

to open an office here in her hometown, a traditionally Republican

suburb west of Orlando.

So Skolfield opened one herself. She dug into her own pocket for

the initial $1,350 in rent, hooked up telephones and computers,

hauled in furniture and printed up fliers for an early September

opening party that drew nearly a thousand people.

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Chicago is bracing for a gigantic crowd this week in

Grant Park, the city's iconic front yard, where Sen. Barack Obama

has chosen to spend election night.

As many as 70,000 people are expected to attend an event for

local supporters. All available tickets were swept up days ago, and

thousands of people have applied to be on a waiting list. Thousands

more -- maybe as many as a million people, Mayor Richard M. Daley

has proudly suggested -- are expected to pile into the downtown

parkland and sidewalks and streets surrounding Obama's official

celebration.

"This could be a moment of history right here, and it's high

time for it," said Patricia Cadagin, who stood last week peering

through a new fence around the south end of Grant Park, one of

blocks and blocks of fences erected as part of the elaborate

security efforts. Cadagin, 82, who said she had voted early for

Obama, will probably not be here on Tuesday night. "It's going to

be a big crowd and at night, and I'm a small woman," she said.

"Will I be here in spirit? You bet you."

Chicago, it seems, is of two minds about this party. Many

supporters in Obama's hometown speak with pride of the potential of

seeing the first black person claim victory in a presidential

campaign here on the edge of Lake Michigan, in view of their

beloved skyline. Still, in hushed tones, some say they are worried

about his safety in the public park and about how a huge crowd in

this city, which has seen violence after events like basketball

championships, might respond, win, lose or draw.

Even city leaders have sent mixed messages. On Thursday, Daley,

a fierce Obama supporter, seemed to suggest the more the merrier.

"You think I'm not going to invite people down?" he told

reporters, according to The Chicago Tribune. "This is a

celebration."

A day later, city leaders cautioned Chicagoans to behave

properly, warned them that people might be turned away if Grant

Park became too crowded and stood at a city-run news conference

beside ministers who suggested that those without tickets use

"common sense" and stay in their own neighborhoods.

"We can't have foolishness," said the police superintendent,

Jody P. Weis. "We can't have mischief."

Grant Park, known as Lake Park until it was renamed for Ulysses

S. Grant in 1901, lies not far from the route of Abraham Lincoln's

funeral procession, was the home of at least four political

conventions in the late 1800s, was visited by Queen Elizabeth II in

1959, was the site of a clash between the police and anti-war

protesters during the Democratic convention in 1968, and was the

place where Pope John Paul II celebrated Mass with thousands in

1979. The park is home to the annual Taste of Chicago, as well as

games of 16-inch softball played by generations of Chicagoans.

"You couldn't have a place more infused with Chicago and more

infused with everything that Chicago has experienced," said the

city's cultural historian, Tim Samuelson, who noted that parts of

the park were probably built on debris left behind from the Great

Chicago Fire of 1871.

As Obama supporters searched for tickets on Craigslist and in

other places (though it is unclear whether the free tickets are

transferable and campaign officials say identification will be

checked), federal and local law enforcement officials revealed

little about their security plans but made it clear that they were

extensive.

The city has kept on a special security chief it had hired in

case the White Sox or the Cubs made it to the World Series. No

sworn Chicago police officers will have Tuesday night off.

Firefighters were told to take their gear home so they could

respond quickly if called. Some of the city's largest thoroughfares

and some boat harbors will close. And parking will be banned

through large areas of downtown.

Last week, officials could be seen touring rooftops in downtown

high-rises as helicopters flew over Hutchinson Field, the section

of Grant Park where the Obama event will be held. Some downtown

offices have been asked to send employees home early Tuesday.

Fence companies, meanwhile, appeared to be certain winners, as

fences and barricades rose all around.

Local and federal law enforcement officials said repeatedly that

they were confident they could keep the event safe, even outside,

even with uncertain crowd numbers. "We're concerned about every

venue," said Ed Donovan, a spokesman for the Secret Service. "We

do this for a living."

The Obama campaign declined to discuss the cost of the event,

but city officials have suggested that the campaign might spend $2

million on extra city services for the evening. In discouraging

those without tickets from going downtown, city officials and

ministers described somewhat stark conditions at the official

party: no chairs, no alcohol (though hot chocolate is expected), no

bags allowed, and uncertain weather given the month and the town.

"It's taken us a long time to get to where we are," said the

Rev. Albert Tyson, one of several ministers who called for calm.

"We are on the precipice of the most historic event that this

United States has ever seen. We certainly want to counsel folks all

over the city not to do anything to mar this event."

Susan O'Halloran, 58, who has volunteered for the Obama

campaign, is among those who will have a ticket on Tuesday night.

She was also in Grant Park 40 years ago, as a high school senior

who had joined others to oppose the Vietnam War during the

Democratic convention. She said she had been eating, relaxing and

talking during the protest when police officers grew tense, pulling

billy clubs from their belts. One chased her, apparently because

she had a Super 8 movie camera, she said, and she fled; other

demonstrators were later beaten, an event O'Halloran considers a

scar on the city.

"I will be back on that field," O'Halloran said. "And I don't

care how cold it is or how long I have to wait. It feels too

historic."

She said the possibility that Obama would be elected was "all

part of the same thing" she was fighting for in the 1960s. "My

reason for being there as a young woman was because there was

something I wanted to see this country become. That'll be the same

reason I'm down there Tuesday night," she said, her voice

breaking. "The full circle is pretty luscious."

Brightly colored lines of washing hang

by the gray stone walls. A vendor offers sunglasses, shampoo and

cigarettes from a plastic sheet under a tree. A man with a Polaroid

camera sells souvenir photos to the Cambodian soldiers camped on

the temple grounds.

At the main gate, where an hourlong firefight with Thai troops

broke out less than three weeks ago, the commander of a Cambodian

border police unit is playing cards with his men.

It is a sleepy interlude here at the Preah Vihear temple, on the

Thai-Cambodian border, where this summer a dispute over sovereignty

became the most volatile international confrontation in Indochina

in 20 years.

Cambodian troops occupy the swooping cliff-top temple, which is

in Cambodia but is most easily reached from the high ground on the

Thai side. The Thais, who claim parts of the territory around the

temple, are mostly out of sight in the hills or in camps nearby in

Thailand.

But the Cambodian government seems to be digging in for a long

siege. A new budget expected to be approved in the coming week

would double the country's military budget to $500 million -- or 25

percent of all government spending.

"We cannot sit and watch Thai troops encroach on our border,"

Cheam Yeap, deputy head of the finance commission of the National

Assembly, was quoted by Reuters as having said. "Our army needs to

be more organized, better trained, with newer bases and well-fed

troops."

The encampment here has the village feel of Cambodian

deployments throughout conflicts in recent decades.

A small market has opened under red and blue tarpaulins; a

barber has put out his chair by a temple wall; a satellite dish

brings in both Thai and Cambodian soap operas for the officers to

watch.

Soldiers calling their families wander the cliff's edge

searching for a cell phone signal, which switches between Thai and

Cambodian carriers as they walk.

At the bottom of the great stone causeway, giant loops of silver

razor wire close off the main entrance, which is guarded by armed

men wearing sandals; the 900-year-old temple, with its sagging

walls and tumbling columns, is empty of tourists.

The commander of the forces here, Gen. Chea Dara -- a man who

looks to be in his 50s and wore a white tank top along with his

gold wristwatch, and held a dripping red dragon fruit -- claimed a

great victory in the little skirmish that took place Oct. 15.

"They left with their hands in the air!" he said of a group of

10 Thai soldiers whom the Cambodians captured and returned. He

raised his arms and shook them, adding: "They were trembling! They

thought we would kill them."

Other tales are told on the Thai side, and the origins and

outcome of the clash remain unclear. Soldiers here say that three

Cambodian soldiers died, two by gunfire and one from a heart

attack. The Thais admit to one death and several wounded.

Tiny marks of shrapnel fleck the great stone staircase that

rises from the Thai side to the temple, along with two stone

dragons that flank the steps. But nothing seems to have been gained

or lost in the fighting.

The dispute flared in July, when UNESCO, the cultural agency of

the United Nations, declared the temple a World Heritage site,

based on a Cambodian government proposal. Domestic politics in

Thailand fueled a nationalist response, and troops, artillery and

tanks were moved into position.

The confrontation echoes with the history of the rise and

retreat of empires over the centuries, and old fears and hatreds

still burn between Cambodia and its more powerful neighbors,

Vietnam and Thailand.

The dispute also draws together the tangled strands of more

recent conflicts, with roots in the Vietnam War and the brutal

decades of massacres and civil war involving the Khmer Rouge of

Cambodia.

One Chinese-made 85-millimeter artillery piece at the lip of the

precipice was brought to Cambodia by invading Vietnamese soldiers

in 1980, and it may have been used against American troops a few

years before that. Since then, both Khmer Rouge and government

soldiers have fired it as control of Preah Vihear changed hands.

After the Cambodian civil war ended a decade ago, the Khmer

Rouge were integrated into the government army, and the combined

force is facing off now against Thailand.

The Thais, armed and equipped mostly with American weaponry,

have the advantage in firepower as well as air cover from fighter

jets. Their 300,000-strong military is three times the size of the

Cambodian armed forces.

But the Cambodians, with their more tormented history, are more

hardened soldiers. Some of them have fought on one side or another

-- or on more than one -- since they were boys in the 1960s.

"They wanted to test us, to see if Cambodian troops are easy to

intimidate," said Col. Meas Yoeun, 48, a ranking commander in

Preah Vihear province.

"They curse us and mock us and look down on us," he said of

the Thai soldiers. "They say we have old weapons and ask us if

they really fire."

According to the Cambodian soldiers camped here, the Oct. 15

battle began with taunts as Thai troops across a small stream

shouted at them, "Come on, let's fight!"

Touch Socheat, 39, a captain in the border police, said he had

come to know some of the Thai soldiers by name over the weeks as

they called back and forth, and he felt betrayed when they started

shooting.

"One guy got hit right over here as he was taking a bath," he

said, pointing to an open pump. "I'm not going to trust them

anymore."

Srum Mao, 45, a deputy post commander for the border police,

said the two sides were keeping a close eye on each other now,

waiting for some new surprise.

"We watch what they do," he said. "When they carry

ammunition, we carry ammunition. When they dig a bunker, we dig a

bunker. When they put down their weapons, we put down our weapons.

We are watching each other."

When the killer smog rolled into town here in

October 1948, 12-year-old Joann Crow thought it was an adventure.

"Dad couldn't drive us to school because it was so hard to

see," said Crow, now 72. "He had to walk us to school that

Wednesday with a flashlight, which we thought was fun."

But the next day, Thursday, Oct. 28, her grandmother, Susan

Gnora, 62, started coughing and experiencing chest pains. It was

the same for a lot of older residents of this Monongahela River

valley mill town 24 miles southeast of Pittsburgh.

"She died the next day. That's when we all got worried," said

Crow, a retired child care worker. "They tried to blame it on

asthma. But we knew that wasn't true. She was always so strong. It

was that smog from the mills."

By the time a rain on Oct. 31 cleared the air, 20 people in

Donora had died, and nearly half the town became ill in one of the

worst air pollution disasters in the nation's history.

After decades of largely remaining silent about the horrors of

that week, Donora residents began to open up about it in recent

years, placing a historical marker in town on the 50th anniversary.

Over the last two weeks, they marked the 60th anniversary with

memorials for the families of those who died, discussions with

experts about the lessons learned, and the opening of the Donora

Smog Museum, with the slogan "Clean Air Started Here."

"It was the first time that people really understood that a lot

of air pollution in a short period of time could kill people,"

said Dr. Devra Davis, director of the Center for Environmental

Oncology at the University of Pittsburgh and author of "When Smoke

Ran Like Water," about air pollution. She is also a Donora native

who was 2 at the time of the smog.

The Donora smog gained national attention and helped lead to

some of the first local and state pollution control laws, and,

eventually, the 1970 federal Clean Air Act.

"We want people to realize Donora was a big part of the

environmental movement," said Don Pavelko, a Donora councilman who

came up with the idea for the museum. "The smog in Donora over the

years had been looked upon as a black eye. The older folks just

didn't want to talk about it, because they thought it was bad

publicity."

The museum, in a former Chinese restaurant, brings together

photographs, old newspapers, maps and copies of studies of the

smog. Brian Charlton, a high school history teacher, has been

appointed archivist and is pursuing oral histories of that week.

Paul C. Brown, 81, who worked in the steel mills then,

remembered going to work at the mill that Saturday.

"We all thought it would lift eventually, because we were used

to the fog in the valley," he said. "Then I started to hear about

people getting sick."

Smog was not unusual in Donora, a town of 14,000 then that was

home to the American Steel &amp;amp; Wire Co. and the Donora Zinc Works

plants -- both run by the U.S. Steel Co. -- that sat along the river

and employed 5,000 people.

But this was different. The thick, yellowish, acrid smog was the

result of an unusual weather inversion -- a pocket of warm, stagnant

air -- that sat over the valley for five days.

Underneath what was essentially a lid on the valley were

sulfuric acid, nitrogen dioxide and other poisonous gases,

including fluorine, that would normally rise into the atmosphere.

Most researchers blame the zinc plant, which had long been a source

of complaints and was responsible for the denuding of almost all

vegetation within a half-mile of the plant.

The actual toll from the smog has never been accurately

calculated. Davis said Donora's mortality rate remained high for

years afterwards.

"There are still lessons to be learned," Davis said. "There

are situations like Donora going on in India and Asia right now."

The plants both closed by 1966, and Donora is now a struggling

town of 5,653.

After the deadly smog, U.S. Steel said it was "an act of God"

and never admitted any responsibility, even after it settled

lawsuits filed against it for $250,000.

By the time legal fees were taken out and the money was spread

among the hundreds of victims -- both those who died and those who

got ill -- "My aunt said she had enough left to buy a TV," Crow

said.

"I just hope the memory of it helps somebody else," she said.

"I hope we never hear of something like this happening again."

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was "an act of God," and never admitted any responsibility, even

after it settled lawsuits filed against it for $250,000.

It was a lousy day to be Sen. John McCain, Keith

Olbermann informed his viewers on MSNBC on Thursday.

Sen. Barack Obama's surge in the polls was so strong he was

competitive in McCain's home state, Arizona. The everyman hero of

McCain's campaign, "Joe the Plumber," failed to make an expected

appearance at a morning rally in Defiance, Ohio, and the senator's

efforts to highlight Obama's association with a professor tied to

the PLO were amounting to nothing.

Wait a minute ... not so fast. Click.

Things were looking up for McCain, the Fox News Channel hosts

Sean Hannity and Greta Van Susteren told their viewers at roughly

the same time Thursday. He got a boost at an afternoon rally in

Sandusky, Ohio, from none other than Joe the Plumber, who announced

his intention to vote for "a real American, John McCain"; he was

gaining new ground in ever-tightening polls, despite the

overwhelming bias against him in the mainstream news media; and

Obama's association with a professor sympathetic to the PLO was now

at "the center of the election."

On any given night, there are two distinctly, even extremely,

different views of the presidential campaign offered on two of the

three big cable news networks, Fox News Channel and MSNBC, a dual

reality that is reflected on the Internet as well.

On one, polls that are "tightening" are emphasized over those

that are not, and the rest of the news media is portrayed as

papering over questions about Obama's past associations with people

who have purportedly anti-American tendencies, which he has not

answered. ("I feel like we are talking to the Germans after Hitler

comes to power, saying, 'Oh, well, I didn't know,"' Ann Coulter,

the conservative commentator, told Hannity on Thursday.)

On the other, polls that show tightening are largely ignored,

and the race is cast as one between an angry and erratic McCain,

whose desperate, misleading campaign has as low as a 4 percent

chance of beating a cool, confident and deserving Democratic

nominee. ("He's been a good father, a good citizen; he's paid

attention to his country," Chris Matthews, the MSNBC host, said

Wednesday night in addressing those who might be leaning against

Obama based on race. "Give the guy a break and think about voting

for him.")

And, perhaps unsurprisingly, each campaign is often at war

against its television antagonist, just as the networks are at war

with each other.

It is a political division of news that harks back to the way

American journalism was through the first half of the 20th century,

when newspapers had more open political affiliations. But it has

never been so apparent in such a clear-cut way on television, a

result of market forces and partisan sensibilities that are further

chipping away at the post-Watergate pre-eminence of a more

dispassionate approach.

The more objective approach came as the corporate owners of the

networks pushed for higher profits and the newspaper industry

consolidated and sought broader audiences. "To sell as many copies

as you could to as many people as you could, you became what we

considered objective," said Richard Wald, a professor of media and

society at Columbia University School of Journalism and a former,

senior vice president at ABC News.

Fox News Channel was founded 12 years ago with an argument that

the mainstream news media were biased toward liberals and that

nonliberals were starved for a "Fair and Balanced" television

antidote by day and openly conservative-leaning opinion by night.

But it was only in the last couple of years that MSNBC, long

struggling for an identity and lagging, established itself as a

liberal alternative to Fox News Channel in prime time, finding

improved ratings in the mistrust of the mainstream media that had

grown among those on the left during the Bush years and the Iraq

war.

The presidential campaign, and the partisan and ideological

intensity surrounding it, has been the perfect subject for both

sides, providing endless fodder to play to the persuasions of their

audience and mock the views expressed on the rival network.

The result is a return to a "great tradition of American

journalism," Wald said. "Basically you chose your news outlet if

it made you happy, if it reinforced all your views."

Indeed, voters who primarily get their news from Web sites like

The Huffington Post by day and MSNBC by night, and those who

primarily get theirs from The Drudge Report by day and Fox News

Channel by night would have entirely different views of the

candidates and the news driving the campaign year. (At second place

in the ratings, behind Fox News Channel, CNN is maintaining a far

more traditional approach to news this year.)

When Politico.com reported Oct. 21 that the Republican National

Committee had spent $150,000 on clothing for Gov. Sarah Palin of

Alaska, Olbermann interrupted his 8 p.m. program on MSNBC to

promote the story and discuss it, as did Rachel Maddow, whose

program follows.

Fox News Channel reported it first the next morning, on "Fox &amp;amp;

Friends" in a segment in which the report was described as sexist

and unfair, and Bill O'Reilly and Van Susteren, later criticized

the news media on their programs for giving it as much attention as

they had.

"It was ridiculous," O'Reilly said, singling out The New York

Times in particular for covering the purchase.

That was a role reversal from May 2007, when news broke that

former Sen. John Edwards had paid $400 for a haircut out of his

Democratic presidential campaign account.

Olbermann named Hannity the "Worst Person in the World," a

running feature on his program, for making fun of Edwards' haircut

and showing video of him styling his hair before an interview.

O'Reilly had said of Edwards at the time: "He runs around

telling Americans the system is rigged, while paying $400 for a

haircut. This guy is a one-man sitcom."

Tom Rosenstiel, director of the Project for Excellence in

Journalism at the Pew Research Center, said, "To some extent, they

are reverse images of each other."

The group has studied the tone and content of the election-year

coverage and found that McCain has been the subject of more

negative reports in general than has Obama on issues that include

assessments of their performances in polls, the debates and running

their campaigns.

But within that universe, the study found, the number of

positive reports on McCain at Fox News was above the average of the

news media at large, and the number of negative reports about Obama

was higher, too. (The study found that the mix of positive and

negative was roughly equal for them on Fox.)

And the study found that MSNBC featured more negative reports

about McCain than the rest of the news media and more positive

reports about Obama. CNN was more generally in line with the

average.

Rosenstiel said Fox News Channel and MSNBC showed ideological

differences, "obviously more so at night." And executives at

those networks said that opinion was kept to their prime-time

lineups and away from their news reporting.

Officials at the Obama and McCain campaigns said in interviews

last week that they believed they were treated fairly by the

reporters assigned to them at the two networks, including Major

Garrett and Carl Cameron at Fox News Channel and Kelly O'Donnell

and Lee Cowan at NBC News. (NBC pools some political newsgathering

efforts with The New York Times.) And advisers to both campaigns

show up for interviews on both networks.

Obama's campaign aides said they were pleased when Shepard

Smith, the Fox News Channel anchor, this week dressed down Joe the

Plumber, aka Samuel J. Wurzelbacher, for agreeing with a voter who

called a vote for Obama "a vote for the death of Israel."

Reporting that Obama supported Israel, Smith added with

exasperation, "It just gets frightening sometimes."

And Maddow is chilly toward Obama's position that he would

attack sites inside Pakistan without permission from Pakistan's

government if there were an opportunity to go after terrorists.

But officials at both campaigns also said there had been plenty

of instances when they have perceived bias in regular news

coverage. On Fox News Channel, for instance, Greg Palkot, referring

to Obama, asked a guest, "Do economists say that in fact his

policies could drive a recession into a depression?" (The guest,

Donald Lambro of The Washington Times, responded, "Well, I haven't

read that, no.")

Raising a report about Obama campaign suspicions that McCain got

an unfair peek at questions to be asked of him at a joint forum at

the Saddleback Church, McCain's campaign wrote to NBC News in

August, "We are concerned that your news division is following

MSNBC's lead in abandoning nonpartisan coverage of the presidential

race."

And sometimes the approaches have been noticeable simply through

what the networks cover. After NPR reported late last week that a

McCain supporter, former Secretary of State Lawrence Eagleburger,

questioned whether Palin was "prepared to take the reins of the

presidency," MSNBC mentioned it roughly 20 times over the course

of the day; CNN mentioned it four times; and Fox News Channel did

one segment, in which it interviewed Eagleburger, who apologized

and said Palin was "a quick study."

Fox News Channel executives would not comment for this article.

Phil Griffin, president of MSNBC, agreed that at night his network

gives a decidedly opinionated viewpoint.

"All of our material is based on fact -- our guys work really

hard on it, and the point-of-view shows make their conclusions,"

Griffin said. "In this modern era, you've got a variety of places

that look at the day's events. Some you respect more than others,

others you recognize as having a point of view, some you see as

factual in a different way, and it all blends together into how you

make your decision for what's going on.

"The burden," he said, "is a little more on the individual."

Sen. John McCain has opted for the tried and true for his

election night party: the Arizona Biltmore Resort and Spa, a

semisecluded, exquisitely manicured spot that is to Phoenix what

the Waldorf-Astoria is to New York.

The Biltmore, whose architecture was inspired by Frank Lloyd

Wright and is noted for its gilded lobby ceiling and geometric

concrete blocks, splays out in one of the city's most expensive

neighborhoods.

It has played host to political functions since it opened in

1929 during the Hoover administration, and every president since

then has stayed there. Irving Berlin wrote "White Christmas" by

one of its eight pools, according to hotel lore.

Like many couples before and after them, John and Cindy McCain

had their wedding reception there.

McCain held his Super Tuesday victory party there in February,

swelling a ballroom to the brim.

But the campaign said Tuesday will be different. While the

typical large ballroom crowd is planned, McCain will head outdoors

for his principal address, before an anticipated 2,000 supporters

on a lawn framed by Camelback Mountain.

"It's a special setting," said Brian Rogers, a spokesman for

the campaign. "We will show off Arizona a bit."

Having him outdoors also helped with the logistics of

accommodating a large pack of reporters, he said. About 3,000

people in total are expected, he said.

He declined to draw comparisons to Obama's election night plans

-- a gathering in Grant Park in Chicago that is expected to draw a

million or more people.

"I don't know if he is planning another Berlin moment, but

we're having what will be a great victory night celebration with a

lot of supporters," said Rogers, alluding to the multitude that

saw Obama speak in Berlin in July, an event that the McCain

campaign criticized as the height of hubris.

Mayor Phil Gordon of Phoenix said the city planned to have extra

security for the McCain party, but he said that most residents

probably will not notice or will pay little heed, having grown

accustomed to McCain's motorcades and the past presidential visits.

"Given the budget crisis that every city is facing, we are

grateful we will have all the thousands of visitors, media and

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After weeks of testimony about a suitcase stuffed with

illegal campaign contributions bound for Buenos Aires, a federal

jury here remains undecided about the role of a Venezuelan

businessman.

The businessman, Franklin Duran, is charged with conspiracy and

with operating in the United States as an unauthorized agent of a

foreign government.

Prosecutors say Duran, who owns a house in the Miami area, came

to the United States at the behest of the Venezuelan government to

coerce a friend to conceal the source and destination of an

$800,000 cash contribution to the 2007 campaign of an Argentine

presidential candidate, Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner, who went on

to win the election.

Jurors have deliberated for seven days but remain deadlocked.

Earlier this week they sent a note to Judge Joan A. Lenard saying

they were at an impasse.

Lenard instructed them to continue deliberating.

Both Kirchner and her Venezuelan counterpart, President Hugo

Chavez, have denied any role in the matter, which has made

headlines in Latin America.

The jury's impasse has prompted some Venezuelans to speculate in

news blogs and Internet chat rooms that the Chavez administration

is somehow manipulating the jury to prevent a guilty verdict.

"If he is found guilty, those that are anti-Chavez will be

happy," said Laura Weffer, an investigative reporter for the

leading Venezuelan newspaper El Nacional, who has covered the Duran

trial from its inception in September. "But if there is a

mistrial, they will say he bought the jurors."

Among those testifying at the trial was Maria Lujan Telpuk, the

former Argentine police officer who discovered the money-laden

suitcase in the airport in Buenos Aires and later capitalized on

her fame by posing naked for the Latin American edition of Playboy

magazine.

During the trial, prosecutors also played secretly recorded

phone conversations between Duran and others.

Among the conservations recorded by the FBI were those between

Duran and his friend Guido Alejandro Antonini Wilson, who was

carrying the suitcase, filled with $800,000 in $50 bills, when he

was stopped Aug. 4, 2007.

Stripped of the money, Wilson returned to South Florida, where

he has a home, and approached the FBI to become a witness for the

agency. Wilson was paid $30,000 by the bureau for his services,

according to testimony at the trial.

Duran's lawyers contend that he became involved in the case to

help Wilson, and not at the behest of Chavez or Venezuelan

intelligence.

"Everything Franklin Duran did, he did for himself, and for his

best friend in the world, Alejandro Antonini," Ed Shohat, Duran's

lawyer, said in his closing remarks last week.

"Just because the Venezuelan government wants the same thing,"

he added, "doesn't mean Franklin Duran is working as an agent of

the Venezuelan government."

Shohat had said U.S. prosecutors pursued the case to try to

embarrass Chavez and his government.

Three other men have pleaded guilty to their roles in trying to

cover up the affair. Two of the men testified on behalf of the

prosecution.

Deliberations could continue until late next week, a defense

lawyer said, as the jurors will convene for an abbreviated session

on Monday and be pardoned from court altogether Tuesday because two

jurors have a conflict that day.

Many of the mug shots of drug traffickers that

appear in the Mexican press show surly looking roughnecks glaring

menacingly at the camera. An anti-corruption investigation unveiled

last week in the Mexican capital, however, made it clear that not

everybody enmeshed in the narcotics trade looked the part.

There was a gray-haired, grandfatherly type who was pushing 70,

as well as an avuncular figure with a neatly styled goatee and

wire-rimmed spectacles perched upon his nose. Some of the five men

who found themselves on the front pages of newspapers on their way

to jail, wore suits, which made them look more like bureaucrats

than bad guys.

Among the greatest challenges in Mexico's drug war is the fact

that the traffickers fit no type. Their ranks include men and

women, the young and the old. And they can work anywhere: in remote

drug labs, as part of roving assassination squads, even within the

upper reaches of the government.

It has long been known that drug gangs have infiltrated local

police forces. Now it is becoming ever more clear that the problem

does not stop there. The alarming reality is that many public

servants in Mexico are serving both the taxpayers and the

traffickers.

The men in suits, it turns out, were both bureaucrats and bad

guys, corrupt officials high up in an elite unit of the federal

attorney general's office who were feeding secret information to

the feared Beltran Leyva cartel in exchange for suitcases full of

cash.

Their arrest, and the firing of 35 other suspect law-enforcement

officials, represents the most extensive corruption case that this

country, which knows corruption all too well, has ever seen. And it

raises a question that is on the lips of many Mexicans: How does

one know who is dirty and who is clean?

"I'm convinced that to stop the crime, we first have to get it

out of our own house," President Felipe Calderon, who has made

fighting trafficking a crucial part of his presidency, said in a

speech Tuesday, after the arrests were announced.

That house is clearly dirty. There is ample evidence that

Mexicans of all walks of life are willing to join the drug gangs in

exchange for cash, including the farmers who abandon traditional

crops and turn to growing marijuana and the accountants who hide

the narco-traffickers' profits.

There was sporadic evidence in the past that such corruption

extended into high-level government offices. An army general who

commanded Mexico's anti-drug unit was arrested and convicted in

1997 after the discovery that he was working for a drug lord on the

side. In 2005, a spy working for a drug cartel was discovered

working in the president's office and accused of feeding

traffickers information on the movements of Vicente Fox, then the

president.

But the abundance of law enforcement officials now believed to

be on the take has made Calderon's drug war all the more difficult

to execute. Traffickers often know beforehand when raids are going

to occur. Sometimes dealers plant their people on the teams that

carry out the raids to act as saboteurs.

The traffickers' networks are not foolproof. Calderon's

government did manage to capture Alfredo Beltran Leyva, a cartel

leader, in January even though the group was receiving inside

information. What appears to have happened, officials say, is that

the army carried out the raid without involving the attorney

general's office, inadvertently keeping the corrupt officials out

of the loop.

The cartel's leaders, who operate out of Sinaloa state and have

been implicated in the killing of a top police commander in Mexico

City, were described in local press accounts as being furious that

their government moles had not informed them of the raid.

Still, the reach of the drug networks is so extensive that even

winning a court conviction against a kingpin is not always enough

to claim victory.

Many prison wardens and guards have shown themselves to be

corrupt, allowing prominent detainees not only to operate their

crime networks from their cells, but also to use their illicit drug

proceeds to be as comfortable as possible behind bars, paying for

everything from pizza to prostitutes. The cartel leaders sometimes

even use their money to escape. The most notorious case was in

2001, when Joaquin Guzman Loera, the country's most wanted drug

lord, managed to slip out of a maximum security prison in a laundry

cart.

The porous nature of Mexican penitentiaries has prompted

Calderon to increase the number of transfers of drug lords to the

U.S. prison system. The United States has already filed the

paperwork to extradite one of the officials accused last week of

corruption. The official, Miguel Colorado Gonzalez, 68, was a top

manager in the government organized-crime office known by the

Spanish acronym SIEDO.

Calderon is not the first president to try to root out

corruption. President Ernesto Zedillo reorganized the nation's

federal police at least twice; each time traffickers quickly

infiltrated the force and bought off leading officials. His

successor, Fox, tried and failed to clean up law enforcement as

well.

Calderon's efforts have been sustained enough that the

traffickers have begun a vicious counterattack; so far this year,

nearly 4,000 people -- including police officers, soldiers,

criminals and civilians -- have been killed in an extraordinary wave

of violence linked to organized crime.

The latest corruption scandal has prompted Calderon's attorney

general to order a restructuring and purging of his office, and

specifically of SIEDO, which was formed from another agency that

was shut down after being infiltrated by drug spies.

The government has ordered more lie-detector tests for officials

in delicate posts, beefed-up background checks and better salaries

for underpaid police officers. But the amount of cash that the

traffickers throw around -- which Jorge Chabat, a security analyst,

calls "enough money to buy part of the state" -- makes government

salaries seem laughable. Clearly, the government cannot compete

peso for peso.

In some cases, finding out who has strayed from the straight and

narrow should be a simple matter of following the money. Colorado

Gonzalez is reported to have bought four luxury vehicles in one

year. Expensive jewelry was found in his home. His bank account was

bulging.

In Tuesday's speech, a clearly frustrated Calderon said the

fight to clean up Mexico depended on citizens putting their country

first and respecting the law above all else. He suggested that the

small bribes so often demanded by the officer on the beat, and

accepted by the public as normal, for infractions real and

imagined, were not disconnected from the government official

receiving millions of dollars in drug profits.

"We need a stronger society, a society that lives the principle

of legality with conviction, that encourages, promotes, spreads and

educates its children with values," Calderon said. In other words,

there has to be a line people will not cross, even for a suitcase

full of cash.

And so: Just how far have we come?

As a rough gauge last week, I watched a movie I hadn't seen

since it came out when I was a teenager in 1967. Back then, "Guess

Who's Coming to Dinner" was Hollywood's idea of a stirring call

for racial justice. The premise: A young white woman falls madly in

love with a black man while visiting the University of Hawaii and

brings him home to San Francisco to get her parents' blessing. Dad,

a crusading newspaper publisher, and Mom, a modern art dealer, are

wealthy white liberals -- Katharine Hepburn and Spencer Tracy, no

less -- so surely there can be no problem. Complications ensue

before everyone does the right thing.

Though the film was a box-office smash and received 10 Oscar

nominations, even four decades ago it was widely ridiculed as dated

by liberal critics. The hero, played by the first black Hollywood

superstar, Sidney Poitier, was seen as too perfect and too

"white" -- an impossibly handsome doctor with Johns Hopkins and

Yale on his resume and a Nobel-worthy career fighting tropical

diseases in Africa for the World Health Organization. What couple

would not want him as a son-in-law? "He's so calm and sure of

everything," says his fiancee. "He doesn't have any tensions in

him." She is confident that every single one of their biracial

children will grow up to "be president of the United States, and

they'll all have colorful administrations."

What a strange movie to confront in 2008. As the world knows,

Barack Obama's own white mother and African father met at the

University of Hawaii. In "Dreams From My Father," he even

imagines the awkward dinner where his mother introduced her

liberal-ish parents to her intended in 1959. But what's most

startling about this archaic film is the sole element in it that

proves inadvertently contemporary. Faced with a black man in the

mold of the Poitier character -- one who appears "so calm" and

without "tensions" -- white liberals can make utter fools of

themselves. When Joe Biden spoke of Obama being "clean" and

"articulate," he might have been recycling Spencer Tracy's lines

of 41 years ago.

Biden's gaffe, though particularly naked, prefigured a larger

pattern in the extraordinary election campaign that has brought an

African-American to the brink of the presidency. Our political and

news media establishments -- fixated for months on tracking down

every unreconstructed bigot in blue-collar America -- have their own

conspicuous racial myopia, with its own set of stereotypes and

cliches. They consistently underestimated Obama's candidacy because

they often saw him as a stand-in for the two-dimensional character

Poitier had to shoulder in "Guess Who's Coming to Dinner." It's

why so many got this election wrong so often.

There were countless ruminations, in print and on television,

asking the same two rhetorical questions: "Is He Black Enough?"

and "Is He Tough Enough?" The implied answer to both was usually,

"No." The brown-skinned child of biracial parents wasn't really

"black" and wouldn't appeal to black voters who were

overwhelmingly loyal to the wife of America's first "black"

president. And as a former constitutional law professor, Obama was

undoubtedly too lofty an intellectual to be a political street

fighter, too much of a wuss to land a punch in a debate, too

ethereal to connect to "real" Americans. He was Adlai Stevenson,

Michael Dukakis or Bill Bradley in dark face -- no populist pugilist

like John Edwards.

The list of mistaken prognostications that grew from these

flawed premises is long. As primary season began, we were

repeatedly told that Hillary Clinton's campaign was the most

battle-tested and disciplined, with an invincible organization and

an unbeatable donors' network. Poor Obama had to settle for the

ineffectual passion of the starry-eyed, Internet-fixated college

kids who failed to elect Howard Dean in 2004. When Clinton lost in

Iowa, no matter; Obama could never breach the "firewalls" that

would wrap up her nomination by Super Tuesday. Neither the Clinton

campaign nor the many who bought its spin noticed the

take-no-prisoners political insurgency that Obama had built

throughout the caucus states and that serves him to this day.

Once Obama wrested the nomination from Clinton by surpassing her

in organization, cash and black votes, he was still often seen as

too wimpy to take on the Republicans. This prognosis was codified

by Karl Rove, whose punditry for The Wall Street Journal and

Newsweek has been second only to Jon Stewart and Stephen Colbert as

a reliable source of laughs this year. Rove called Obama "lazy,"

and over the summer he predicted that his fundraising had peaked in

February and that he'd have a "serious problem" winning over

Hispanics. Well, Obama was lazy like a fox, and is leading John

McCain among Hispanics by 2 to 1. Obama has also pulled ahead among

white women despite the widespread predictions that he'd never

bring furious Hillary supporters into the fold.

But certainly the single most revelatory moment of the campaign

-- about the political establishment, not Obama -- arrived in June

when he reversed his position on taking public financing. This was

a huge flip-flop (if no bigger than McCain's on the Bush tax cuts).

But the reaction was priceless. Suddenly the political world

discovered that far from being some exotic hothouse flower, Obama

was a pol from Chicago. Up until then, it rarely occurred to anyone

that he had to be a ruthless competitor, not merely a sweet-talking

orator, to reach the top of a political machine even rougher than

the Clinton machine he had brought down. Whether that makes him

more black or more white remains unresolved.

Early in the campaign, the black commentator Tavis Smiley took a

lot of heat when he questioned all the rhetoric, much of it from

white liberals, about Obama being "post-racial." Smiley pointed

out that there is "no such thing in America as race

transcendence." He is right, of course. America can no sooner

disown its racial legacy, starting with the original sin of

slavery, than it can disown its flag; it's built into our DNA.

Obama acknowledged as much in his landmark speech on race in

Philadelphia in March.

Yet much has changed for the better since the era of "Guess

Who's Coming to Dinner," thanks to the epic battles of the

civil-rights movement that have made the Obama phenomenon possible.

As Mark Harris reminds us in his recent book about late-1960s

Hollywood, "Pictures at a Revolution," it was not until the year

of the movie's release that the Warren Court handed down the Loving

decision overturning laws that forbade interracial marriage in 16

states; in the film's final cut there's still an outdated line

referring to the possibility that the young couple's nuptials could

be illegal (as Obama's parents' marriage would have been in, say,

Virginia). In that same year of 1967, LBJ's secretary of state,

Dean Rusk, offered his resignation when his daughter, a Stanford

student, announced her engagement to a black Georgetown grad

working at NASA. (Johnson didn't accept it.)

Obama's message and genealogy alike embody what has changed in

the decades since. When he speaks of red and blue America being

seamlessly woven into the United States of America, it is always

shorthand for the reconciliation of black and white and brown and

yellow America as well. Demographically, that's where America is

heading in the new century, and that will be its destiny no matter

who wins the election this year.

Still, the country isn't there yet, and should Obama be elected,

America will not be cleansed of its racial history or conflicts. It

will still have a virtually all-white party as one of its two most

powerful political organizations. There will still be white

liberals who look at Obama and can't quite figure out what to make

of his complex mixture of idealism and hard-knuckled political

cunning, of his twin identities of international sojourner and

conventional middle-class overachiever.

After some 20 months, we're all still getting used to Obama and

still, for that matter, trying to read his sometimes ambiguous

takes on both economic and foreign affairs. What we have learned

definitively about him so far -- and what may most account for his

victory, should he achieve it -- is that he had both the brains and

the muscle to outsmart, outmaneuver and outlast some of the

smartest people in the country, starting with the Clintons. We know

that he ran a brilliant campaign that remained sane and kept to its

initial plan even when his Republican opponent and his own allies

were panicking all around him. We know that plan was based on the

premise that Americans actually are sick of the divisive wedge

issues that have defined the past couple of decades, of which race

is the most divisive of all.

Obama doesn't transcend race. He isn't post-race. He is the

latest chapter in the ever-unfurling American racial saga. It is an

astonishing chapter. For most Americans, it seems as if Obama first

came to dinner only yesterday. Should he win the White House on

Tuesday, many will cheer and more than a few will cry as history

moves inexorably forward.

But we are a people as practical as we are dreamy. We'll soon

remember that the country is in a deep ditch, and that we turned to

the black guy not only because we hoped he would lift us up but

because he looked like the strongest leader to dig us out.

The MediaNews Group plans to move the following stories from The

Denver Post for clients of the New York Times News Service for

editions of Sunday, Nov. 2, and thereafter. For questions, contact

Brian Schoeni at 303-954-1668; wireservicedenverpost.com.

All stories will carry the DEN designator.

NATIONAL ("a" category)

COLO-POLL (Denver) -- Demcorat Barack Obama has a five percentage

point lead in Colorado over Republican John McCain, according to

the latest Denver Post poll. That lead is larger than one a month

ago, when the candidates were in a dead heat, but also projects the

state as much closer than most other polls. By Karen E. Crummy. 700

words.

With POLL-BATTLEGROUND-STATES (Denver) -- A report on polling

results from several battleground states in the final weekend:

Ohio, Missouri, Florida, Nevada, Virginia, North Carolina. By Karen

E. Crummy. Developing.

With OBAMA-CAMPAIGN-ART (Colorado Springs, Colo.) -- Coverage of

Democratic presidential candidate Barack Obama at a campaign rally

in Colorado Springs. By Joey Bunch. Photos. Developing.

OZONE-WEST-ART (Denver) -- Ozone pollution -- once seen as

primarily an urban problem -- is spreading across the West. Elevated

levels of the corrosive gas have been recored in Wyoming, New

Mexico and Colorado. Four counties in Arizona are also likely to

exceed a tighter federal health standard set last March. While much

of the pollution is coming from growing cities, oil and gas

development and power plants turn out a big chunk of the gas. By

Mark Jaffe. Graphic. 900 words. Moved Friday.

OBIT-THOMPSON (Denver) -- Dr. Horace Thompson, a pioneer in the

use of ultrasound in obstetrics and gynecology, died Oct. 9. He was

87. An unexpected result of the research Thompson and his

colleagues did at the University of Colorado Medical Center made it

possible for a woman to know in advance the sex of her child. By

Virginia Culver. 500 words. Moved Friday.

BUSINESS ("f" category)

JBS-MEAT-PACKER-ART (Denver) -- A look at JBS, the Brazilian

meatpacking company that bought out Swift in Greeley, Colo. After a

series of acquisitions, it is now one of the largest meatpackers in

the nation. The Department of Justice and Attorneys General in 13

states recently sued to stop JBS from buying another beef company.

By Steve Raabe. Graphic. 800 words. Moved Friday.

SPORTS ("s" category)

FBN-BRONCOS-POLITICS-ART (Denver) -- A look at politics in the

locker room and the friendly locker room arguments arising as the

presidential election approaches. By Mike Klis. Photo. 900 words.

With FBN-BRONCOS-ELLIS (Denver) -- Comment from Denver Broncos

executive Joe Ellis, who is a first cousin of President Bush. By

Mike Klis. 400 words.

KISZLA-COL (undated) -- Denver Post columnist Mark Kiszla files

from the Denver Nuggets' home opener against the Los Angeles

Lakers. 700 words. Moving late.

PAIGE-COL (undated) - Denver Post columnist Woody Paige files on

the Denver Broncos and former coach Dan Reeves being nominated for

the NFL Hall of Fame. 900 words.

FBN-CAPSULES (undated) - Capsule summaries and comments on the

weekend's NFL matchups. By Jim Armstrong. 2,000 words. Moved

Friday.

ENTERTAINMENT ("e" category)

OSTROW-COL-TV (undated) -- The battered broadcast networks

bounced back to relevance this presidential election year,

delivering images, buzz phrases and parodies that ricocheted on the

air and then endlessly around the Web. Ratings soared. Even the

driest of the TV debates outdrew the rest of prime time. Television

had a heavier hand than usual in conducting the nation's political

business. Regular column by Denver Post TV critic Joanne Ostrow.

1,200 words. Moved Friday.

AUTHOR-JENKINS-ART (undated) -- Artist Steve Jenkins' stunning

cut and torn-paper illustrations make him the darling of

librarians, teachers and booksellers. He has won dozens of major

awards and citations in his 17-year career as an author and

illustrator. By Claire Martin. Photos. 850 words. Moved Friday.

KIDS-BOOKS (undated) -- Capsule reviews of recently released

children's books. By Claire Martin. 400 words. Moved Friday.

The Denver Post

Lew Oliver's McCain-Palin T-shirt advertised his

intentions, and the woman in the SUV gave him an opening. "I'm

undecided," said Nicole Ellington, 31, a paralegal with two young

children. "You have two minutes. Go."

Oliver knew that her family leaned Republican because she was on

his get-out-the-vote list, and he rapidly delivered a pitch honed

over 22 years of volunteering for local campaigns. "Wow, you're

good," she said. And as she drove away, Oliver smiled with

satisfaction.

But did he really win her over? Ellington had pointed to the

"Palin" on his T-shirt and said, "I'm worried about this one."

"I don't know," Oliver said after giving it some thought.

"She may have been being polite."

Oliver, 47, a real estate lawyer who walks and talks in bursts,

is the kind of party regular who is not usually one to doubt. He

has been the Orange County Republican Party chairman since 1999,

and with his encyclopedic knowledge of the neighborhoods and

demographics of Orlando, he built the grass-roots effort that

pushed George W. Bush to victory here and statewide in 2000 and

2004.

But this year, Oliver said, the challenge is tougher. Part of it

is the "collapse of the economy of the Western world," he said.

Part is the competition, a campaign by Sen. Barack Obama that has

poured more money and people into the state than Sen. John McCain

has. Even the most seasoned Republicans now acknowledge that they

face an uphill fight.

"This is as difficult an environment for Republicans as there's

been since Watergate," said George LeMieux, the former campaign

manager for Gov. Charlie Crist, a Republican.

Oliver agrees. And like many Republicans trying in the final

days to push their party to victory, he says he has found

inspiration in McCain, the perseverant prisoner of war who came

from behind to seize the Republican nomination. The current call to

arms is simple: "If anyone can pull it off, it's John McCain."

As serious as Iceland's economic situation already was,

Britain -- their old friend, NATO ally and trading partner -- made it

immeasurably worse, in the view of Iceland's government, its

citizens and even some outsiders.

The troubles between the countries began three weeks ago when

Britain took the extraordinary step of using its 2001

anti-terrorism laws to freeze the British assets of a failing

Icelandic bank. That appeared to brand Iceland a terrorist state.

"I must admit that I was absolutely appalled," the Icelandic

foreign minister, Ingibjorg Solrun Gisladottir, said in an

interview, describing her horror at opening the British treasury

department's home page at the time and finding Iceland on a list of

terrorist entities with al-Qaida, Sudan and North Korea, among

others.

"The immediate effect was to trigger an almost complete freeze

on any banking transactions between Iceland and abroad," said Jon

Danielsson, an economist at the London School of Economics. "When

you're labeled a terrorist, nobody does business with you."

The Icelandic prime minister, Geir H. Haarde, accused Britain of

"bullying a small neighbor," and said the action was "very out

of proportion."

And an online petition signed so far by more than 20 percent of

Iceland's population said the British prime minister, Gordon Brown,

had sacrificed Iceland "for his own short-term political gain,"

thereby turning "a grave situation into a national disaster."

Iceland's financial problems had been brewing for some time.

This past spring, the country's banks, bloated with foreign

deposits and debts, began to falter. This fall, as the financial

crisis deepened, the government took over two of the country's

three largest banks.

The British government, alarmed about the tens of thousands of

accounts held by its citizens, companies, local governments and

charities, froze the British assets of one of the failed banks,

Landsbanki. It also seized the assets of Kaupthing Singer &amp;amp;

Friedlander, the British subsidiary of another Icelandic bank,

Kaupthing.

"The Icelandic government, believe it or not, told me yesterday

that they have no intention of honoring their obligations here,"

Alistair Darling, the chancellor of the Exchequer, declared the day

Britain seized the assets.

The Icelandic government disputed that, saying it was merely

asking for time to make good on its obligations.

Whatever the case, reaction was immediate and severe,

particularly when Brown said the following day -- inaccurately --

that "we are freezing the assets of Icelandic companies in the

U.K. where we can."

Iceland's ambassador to Britain, Sverrir H. Gunnlaugsson, said

in an interview that this statement was particularly damaging.

On a rainy Friday evening in early August,

six Taliban fighters attacked a police post in a village in Buner,

a quiet farming valley just outside Pakistan's lawless tribal

region.

The militants tied up eight policemen and lay them on the floor,

and according to local accounts, the youngest member of the gang, a

14-year-old, shot the captives on orders from his boss. The

fighters stole uniforms and weapons and fled into the mountains.

Almost instantly, the people of Buner, armed with rifles,

daggers and pistols, formed a posse, and after five days they

cornered and killed their quarry. A video made on a cell phone

showed the six militants lying in the dirt, blood oozing from their

wounds.

The stand at Buner has entered the lore of Pakistan's war

against the militants as a dramatic example of ordinary citizens'

determination to draw a line against the militants.

But it says as much about the shortcomings of Pakistan's

increasingly overwhelmed police forces and the pell-mell nature of

the efforts to stop the militants, who week by week seem to seep

deeper into Pakistan from their tribal strongholds.

Since the events in Buner, the inspector general of the police

in the North-West Frontier province, Malik Naveed Khan, has

encouraged citizens in other towns and villages in his realm to

form posses of their own.

The hope is that determination itself will deter Taliban

encroachment, building on the August victory with one phalanx after

another of committed citizens.

But the strategy is also a sign of his desperation.

He has had to lower recruitment standards to fill out the ranks,

he said. And he has supplemented his force with what he said were

some 15,000 "special police" -- citizens whom he cannot pay, but

whom he is willing to arm. "Any community which helps us, we give

them weapons," Khan said.

"There is no other way," Khan said. "Pure military action

would create a lot of devastation, to the extent that people would

turn against the government."

Sen. John McCain and Sen. Barack Obama began their final push

for the White House on Saturday, returning to the themes that had

marked their candidacies, with Obama calling for a break from the

Bush era and McCain challenging Obama's credentials to lead the

country during difficult times.

The campaign's final days brought a reminder of Obama's

financial might through his ambitious effort to redraw the

political map. He is spending his time campaigning in states that

went Republicans four years ago -- Colorado, Missouri and Nevada on

Saturday -- as he seeks a broad victory on Tuesday.

McCain pushed back with a burst of television advertising. His

aides mapped out ambitious campaign travel that sent McCain and his

running mate, Gov. Sarah Palin, to defend states that Republicans

won in 2004 and two -- New Hampshire and Pennsylvania -- that

Democrats won last time.

McCain and his advisers said they saw evidence he was gaining on

Obama as McCain hammered home his attempt to paint Obama as someone

who would raise taxes on the middle class.

"We have never been as convinced as others by some of the

discouraging numbers," said Nicolle Wallace, a senior adviser to

McCain. "We are not saying we are moving ahead of him. But we are

certainly encouraged by the tightening of the polls."

Still, McCain is on difficult ground. A spate of national and

battleground-state polls showed Obama with a sizable lead. Much of

the last-minute spending by McCain was in states that just two

months ago Republicans believed to be safely in their column. They

include Indiana, North Carolina and Virginia.

McCain, at a modest outdoor rally in Newport News, Va., on

Saturday, left no doubt how important he viewed the battle in the

state.

"Let me state the obvious again: We need to win Virginia on the

4th of November," McCain said, adding: "My friends, I need your

help in the next three days. Volunteer! Knock on doors!"

McCain's and Palin's weekend stops have been mainly in states

that President Bush won four years ago: Colorado, Florida, Indiana,

Iowa, Missouri, Nevada, New Mexico and Ohio.

"If the race were closer, the states he'd be going to would be

blue states," said Matthew Dowd, who was Bush's chief strategist

in 2004. "He's campaigning as if he knows he's significantly

behind."

Tad Devine, who was senior adviser to Sen. John Kerry, Bush's

opponent in 2004, said Obama was in a substantially stronger

position than Kerry was at this point in his race.

"The difference is night and day," Devine said. "If you look

at where this is today compared with where we were four years ago,

a whole cluster of states that weren't even remotely in play --

Virginia, Colorado, North Dakota, Indiana -- are truly

competitive."

Obama's campaign manager, David Plouffe, said he was confident

of victory in every state the Democrats won in 2004, allowing Obama

to put all his closing effort into keeping McCain on the defensive.

"All the Kerry states right now are in good shape for us," he

said.

The latest New York Times electoral map puts five states in the

toss-up category, based on polls, interviews with local analysts

and campaign officials: Florida, Indiana, Missouri, North Carolina

and Ohio. Bush won all those states in 2004. According to the Times

count, another five states that went with Bush in 2004 -- Colorado,

Iowa, Nevada, New Mexico and Virginia -- were leaning toward Obama

going into the weekend.

McCain's aides had, at the start of the month, listed as

takeover targets four states that Kerry won in 2004: Minnesota, New

Hampshire, Pennsylvania and Wisconsin. All four were leaning

Democratic going into the last weekend, according to the Times

tally. Based on where he is campaigning and spending his money,

McCain has all but given up on Minnesota and Wisconsin.

VIRGINIA: IN ONE COUNTY, GUSTS OF CHANGE

LEESBURG, Va. -- At this time of year, the leaves in Virginia are

still turning in warmer parts of the state, a symbol perhaps of the

state's regional shifts from red to shades of purple.

Nowhere is Virginia's changing electorate more apparent than

here in Loudon County, where the influx of young families in

exurban sprawling developments has contributed to swinging a

solidly Republican state in presidential elections into a

battleground. While cows still graze on farms nearby, the county's

schools are exploding as a result of a population surge of almost

50 percent in the last decade.

And that changing demographic is one reason Sen. Barack Obama

holds a narrow lead in polls here as both campaigns battle for the

state. Obama, the Democratic presidential nominee, and Gov. Sarah

Palin, the Republican vice-presidential nominee, held rallies here

in recent weeks; reminders of the race's intensity are dueling yard

signs, side by side from street to street, and in one storefront

after another.

A Democratic presidential candidate has not won Virginia since

Lyndon B. Johnson in 1964. But the population trends and bluish

political winds, especially in the northern region, have

transformed Virginia into what Mayor L. Douglas Wilder of Richmond,

who was the nation's first black governor, calls the New Dominion.

To Tammy Enright, a general accounting manager from Ashburn who

voted for Sen. John McCain, the Republican candidate, last week,

Loudon's residents seem fairly divided. With a brother in the

military who served two tours in Iraq, Enright, 37, said the

Republican's positions on the war made a "big difference to her."

And although she worried about Palin's lack of experience, "my

support of McCain outweighs that," she said.

But Wilder, a Democrat, sees a reversed pattern, with stalwart

Republicans sizing up Obama and realizing "he's talking pocketbook

issues. They are the things that really make a difference in these

rural areas."

In Loudon County, Glen Caroline, head of the local Republican

Party, dismissed the idea that the Democrats were the only ones

brimming with enthusiasm. Like others involved in the Republicans'

72-hour get-out-the-vote efforts across the country, he plans an

all-out push through Tuesday. "Republicans are very excited about

this ticket," he said, "and are very willing to vote for this

ticket."

And McCain and Obama are making final stops here in the last

days of the campaign.

-- KATE PHILLIPS

PENNSYLVANIA: BATTLE ROYAL FOR A BIG STATE

PHILADELPHIA -- The McCain campaign may be down in some polls by

double-digit margins in Pennsylvania, which has not voted

Republican in a presidential race since 1988. Yet the campaign

knows it must take the state if it wants to win the White House,

and it is taking a page from Sen. Hillary Rodham Clinton's playbook

to try to do so.

To that end, Sen. John McCain has poured $20 million in

advertisement purchases here, more than any other state by a long

shot. (Still, he is swamped by Obama, who has spent $34 million

here.) The candidate has come to the state more than 16 times since

early June, and his running mate, Gov. Sarah Palin, continues to

stump here in the campaign's waning days. Even "Joe the Plumber"

campaigned for McCain at a popular South Philadelphia cheese steak

haunt last week.

But to go to Sen. Barack Obama's headquarters in Center City is

to see what McCain is up against. The office is jammed with more

than 50 volunteers on computers and on the phones, preparing for an

orchestrated get-out-the vote drive. Even a television crew from

Indonesia was there to film it, adding to a palpable sense of

excitement. By contrast, at a nearby McCain-Palin office, there was

not a single volunteer, a reflection how McCain is concentrating on

drawing votes in more rural areas of Pennsylvania.

Still, the state has long posed a challenge to Obama, and the

time and money spent by the McCain campaign has put Obama on the

defensive. Clinton won by a comfortable margin here in the

Democratic primary, and took more than 70 percent of the votes in

some of the conservative western counties. All this has given the

McCain campaign hope that it might have a chance in this reliably

Democratic state, as other Republican strongholds slip away.

The key to a McCain victory is threefold: to highlight his

maverick image among moderate swing voters in the Philadelphia

suburbs; to hold onto Republican strongholds in the south-central

part of the state, which are mostly white and conservative

Protestant, and to win big in the western coal region, where

Clinton gained support from pro-gun, working-class voters.

But McCain is up against determined Obama volunteers like Linda

Dee from Buffalo. "Mobilization is the key to our effort," Dee

said. "Everything is from the ground up."

-- LESLIE WAYNE

OHIO: CITY AND RURAL, TOOTH AND NAIL

CHILLICOTHE, Ohio -- Two grandfathers, each with two

grandchildren grabbing their hands, walk down the sidewalk in this

city in the rolling Appalachian hills.

They incarnate the presidential election in this city and this

state: Dan Young, 56, a pulp mill manager, is voting for Sen. John

McCain "because that man's got the wisdom."

Richard Hawkins, a 60-year-old nurse, favors Sen. Barack Obama

"because the last eight years have just bully whipped us

economically, and McCain doesn't know what it's like to be in debt

and hurting."

Polls show Obama with a narrow lead, but even partisans put

little stock in those. Hard experience has shown that Ohio tends to

offer intense matches and bleary eyes while awaiting election-night

returns.

Heavily Republican counties line the western and central parts

of the state, and Democrats dominate in Columbus, Dayton and

Cleveland. But the electoral war is fought out in more divided

precincts like Chillicothe, a predominantly white city of 21,000

that mirrored the statewide results in the last two elections by

going narrowly for President Bush.

Enthusiasm runs high. Here and across the state, officials

expect one-third of the voters to vote early.

"The enthusiasm is amazing, off the charts," said Diane

Carnes, the Ross County Republican chairwoman and a real estate

agent in Chillicothe. "I've got Democrats walking in and asking to

volunteer for McCain."

Gov. Ted Strickland, who hails from hilly southeastern Ohio, has

worked his home precincts hard for Obama. The governor helped Sen.

Hillary Rodham Clinton win there in the Democratic primary.

"Any Democrat who neglects the rural voters won't win; it's

that simple," said Mayor Michael B. Coleman of Columbus. "And

Obama has put a lot of effort -- a lot -- into winning there."

Gov. Sarah Palin of Alaska has, polls show, turned off centrist

independents. But she has excited her party's powerful evangelical

base.

"If McCain wins here, he'll owe her a debt," said Mark Caleb

Smith, director of the Center for Political Studies at Cedarville

University. "She is much more populist and anti-elite than

Republicans are used to, and she articulates a lot of their

cultural angst."

Evangelical leaders were slow to warm to McCain, but they have

rallied. On a radio station on Friday, evangelical pastors prayed

for God to help voters "avoid wickedness" and help deliver

"electoral miracles on Election Day."

-- MICHAEL POWELL

NORTH CAROLINA: FIRST REAL RACE IN A GENERATION

ROCKY MOUNT, N.C. -- At a rally here with Michelle Obama the

other day, little slips of paper were tucked into the windshields

of cars in the parking lot. They announced a free breakfast, paid

for by local Democrats, on behalf of Sen. Barack Obama on Saturday,

the last day of early voting.

The fliers were a small reminder of something big -- the Obama

organization in this state.

North Carolina has not seen a real presidential race for a

generation. But in one of the biggest surprises of this long

campaign season, Obama has pulled even in the polls with Sen. John

McCain.

Obama has more than twice as many offices, more than twice as

many paid staff members and thousands more unpaid volunteers. He

has outspent McCain more than 8-to-1 on television advertising,

although McCain has increased his spending in recent weeks.

Both campaigns have stepped up their face time here, with Gov.

Sarah Palin, McCain's running mate, appearing Saturday and Obama

expected to be back Monday.

A record number of people have voted early; twice as many were

Democrats as Republicans.

"My people didn't always have the right to vote," said Joseph

Scott, 40, who works in banking, as he stood in line in Greensboro

for more than an hour to vote for Obama.

Blacks like Scott make up about 21 percent of registered voters,

and the degree to which they turn out for Obama will be a critical

piece of the puzzle.

But McCain's selection of Palin has inspired cultural

conservatives. Her rallies are energetic; she had the country stars

Gretchen Wilson in Asheville belting out "I'm a Redneck Woman"

and Hank Williams Jr. in Elon singing his own "McCain-Palin

Tradition."

Through rallies, commercials and automated calls, the McCain

campaign casts Obama as a radical.

"He's a socialist," Bob Hartsock, 78, who works in real estate

in Concord, said after a McCain rally there.

Working to Obama's advantage is an influx of new voters --

potentially more moderate -- and the mounting economic crisis.

Ruby Hill-Benjamin, 53, a registered nurse, was one of hundreds

of people in an overflow room here shrieking for Michelle Obama.

She said she had voted for President Bush because she liked his

faith initiative. But McCain is "running on the past," she said,

and she is inspired by the Obamas: "They are speaking for all

Americans."

-- KATHARINE Q.SEELYE

NEW HAMPSHIRE: MCCAIN SEEKS 'LIFE SUPPORT'

NASHUA, N.H. -- New Hampshire propelled Sen. John McCain toward

his party's nomination this year, and his campaign hoped that his

nonconformist brand of Republicanism would be an easy sell for the

general election. In recent weeks, however, Sen. Barack Obama, the

Democratic presidential nominee, has taken a commanding lead in

polls here.

Still, New Hampshire voters are a capricious bunch, as Sen.

Hillary Rodham Clinton's surprise victory over Obama in the

Democratic primary proved. Obama had a double-digit lead in some

polls going into the primary, in January, and his startling defeat

is reason for some to believe that McCain still has a shot.

To that end, McCain is returning to the state this weekend.

"New Hampshire has given him life support twice," said Jennifer

Donahue, political director of the New Hampshire Institute of

Politics at St. Anselm College.

Despite New Hampshire's longtime affection for McCain, the state

has been trending Democratic for years.

Research by the University of New Hampshire Survey Center

suggests that a third of the state's electorate is new since 2000,

when George W. Bush defeated Al Gore here. The research found that

more than half of these new voters are Democrats.

So why should McCain bother returning to the state?

"His theme of Obama meaning higher taxes really resonates

here," Donahue said. "No matter what the polls say the week

before the election, New Hampshire voters make their final decision

in the last three days. McCain knows it, and that's why he's coming

back."

Democrats, too, think the race is closer than it seems. One of

Obama's highest-profile surrogates, former President Bill Clinton,

is to campaign here Sunday. And in a separate visit last week,

Hillary Clinton warned Democrats not to get complacent.

Ray Buckley, head of the state's Democratic Party, said it was

undertaking the largest get-out-the-vote effort in state history,

with more than 3,000 volunteers canvassing neighborhoods and

working phones.

Buckley said the effort would focus on blue-collar cities won by

Clinton in January, including Nashua, Manchester and Rochester.

The Republicans were also homing in on areas that embraced

Clinton, with "a better-organized, better-oiled machine than even

Bush '04 had," said Fergus Cullen, chairman of the state's

Republican Party. An important target, he said, is the

"blue-collar, working-class male who's registered as a Democrat

but not in touch with that party culturally."

-- ABBY GOODNOUGH

MONTANA: SEEING A LOT OF OBAMA

HELENA, Mont. -- This state, with its small cities and wide-open

spaces, is not used to seeing presidential candidates. But this

year, many Montanans have been pleasantly surprised.

Sen. Barack Obama has run an aggressive campaign here, spending

about $160,000 a week on advertising and visiting the state five

times during the campaign, including spending the Fourth of July in

Butte. That kind of attention is unheard of.

"He has a real shot," Pat Williams, a former longtime

Democratic congressman from Montana, said of Obama. "Part of it is

his incessant traveling in Montana and the lack of a single

footprint by McCain."

But there is one unpredictable factor that may help decide the

race: Ron Paul, the libertarian Texas congressman running on the

Constitutional Party line here. Paul's supporters here asked if

they could put his name on the ballot. He agreed, then changed his

mind; but his request to be taken off the ballot came too late.

Now polls show him drawing 4 percent, and he is particularly

popular among conservative voters in this independent-minded state,

just the kind of voters Sen. John McCain, the Republican

presidential nominee, needs.

With polls suggesting a close race, the Republicans are mounting

a last-minute push. The Republican National Committee was planning

to spend $300,000 to $400,000 in these final days of the race, most

of it on television advertising.

Some Republicans think Montana will be an uphill battle for

Obama, the Democratic nominee, particularly because of the issue of

gun control.

"I find it hard to believe, given his radical view on guns,

that he's doing as well as he is," said Joe Balyeat, a Republican

state senator and gun-rights supporter. "I think McCain will win.

Hunting and shooting sports are a way of life here." While Obama

has said he would not take guns away from people, Balyeat thinks

otherwise.

The last time a Democrat won a presidential election in Montana

was Bill Clinton in 1992, and that victory was chalked up to Ross

Perot's presence in the race, and his siphoning of a substantial

number of votes from the elder President George Bush. But the

current President Bush carried the state by 20 percent in 2000 and

2004.

Obama has worked hard to win the state, and his work has gone

beyond just visiting. He has opened 19 campaign offices here, while

McCain has none.

Those offices are a base for Obama's drive to turn out

sympathetic voters.

-- JIM ROBBINS

MISSOURI: PICKING WINNERS IS A SPECIALTY

WARRENTON, Mo. -- One of the first places Sen. Barack Obama

visited after clinching the Democratic nomination was Cape

Girardeau, Mo., the birthplace of Rush Limbaugh. On Saturday, Obama

ended his campaigning in this battleground state with a rally in

Springfield, the hometown of former Attorney General John Ashcroft.

Missouri has voted for the winner in every presidential election

save one over the last century, and Obama seems to be fighting for

every ballot in every county, including those areas normally

hostile to a liberal Democrat.

Sen. John McCain has also campaigned heavily here, as has his

running mate, Gov. Sarah Palin, and polls show the race in Missouri

tighter than anywhere in the nation.

The tradition here is for Democrats to run up majorities in St.

Louis and Kansas City and Republicans to dominate in the dozens of

rural counties in between, leaving both parties to fight over the

suburbs around the two big cities. That is a pattern that, thanks

to pocketbook issues, would seem to benefit Obama.

"Obama is the leader who can change the economy to what we

need," said Mike Delia, 27, a machine operator in Warren County,

outside St. Louis, where Obama drew 100,000 people to an Oct. 18

rally. "McCain talks 'Country First,' but he has put the interests

of Iraq ahead of the United States."

But Obama faces a challenge in that three of every eight

Missourians describe themselves as evangelical Christians, compared

with about a quarter of people nationwide. McCain won the

Republican primary here narrowly, receiving less than a third of

the vote and narrowly defeating former Gov. Mike Huckabee of

neighboring Arkansas.

So a basic question, especially in the southern part of the

state, is whether the religious right will put aside its

reservations about McCain and vote for him or stay home. Huckabee

and Mitt Romney have been campaigning vigorously for their former

rival. But it could prove decisive if even a few evangelicals

defect to Obama, who has also been wooing them.

That is why McCain is counting on social conservatives like Bea

Farrell, 79, a retiree originally from Arkansas.

"We don't want Obama because he's not qualified and is going

about everything the wrong way," she said at a mall in neighboring

St. Charles County. "He doesn't stand for American values. McCain

is going to keep us safe."

-- LARRYROHTER

GEORGIA: BLACK TURNOUT MAY HOLD KEY

ATLANTA -- On Friday, Sen. Barack Obama's campaign began

broadcasting two commercials here, in a sign of its renewed hopes

that Georgia could be truly competitive in this election.

It was a swift turnaround. The campaign initially had Georgia on

its wish list, but just two months ago, it went off the air here

and moved out some of its paid staff members. Sen. John McCain's

campaign, meanwhile, treated Georgia as an automatic win.

But then came the reports from early polling stations: people

were waiting more than four hours in some places to cast their

ballots, and 35 percent of them were black. By the time early

voting closed on Friday, more than 1.7 million of Georgia's 5.6

million registered voters had cast their ballots, and many of them

were in left-leaning urban counties in and around Atlanta, where

support for Obama is at a fever pitch.

"I feel like this is the year out of every other year in

history that Georgia could go for a Democrat," said Triniece

Britt, a client relations manager at a mortgage company and an

Obama supporter, who was waiting in a four-hour line to vote on

Friday "People are hungry for something different. People want

change so bad that they'll wait as long it takes."

What remains to be seen is the demographics of the turnout on

Election Day. Analysts are not certain if it will be overwhelmingly

white, or if it will more closely mirror the demographics of the

electorate, which is 29 percent black, keeping black turnout high.

"If it's anything close to 30 percent in the end, that would

give Obama a big chance," said Alan Abramowitz, a political

science professor at Emory University.

The long lines at early polling stations have also raised

concerns that the voting system is not equipped to handle an

expected surge on Election Day.

Matt Towery, a Republican political consultant and pollster,

said he would not be surprised if the margin of victory in Georgia

came down to 10,000 or 20,000 votes -- well within battleground

range. Just six years ago, he noted, the state was controlled by

Democrats, but lately the party's base has not turned out.

"Because Barack Obama is running, he has brought that

Democratic voting base back out," Towery said. "If Georgia votes

at full strength, then it's a highly competitive state."

He added, "You cannot be the fastest-growing state in the

nation for African-American population and be drifting to become a

massively Republican red state."

-- SHAILA DEWAN and ROBBIE BROWN

FLORIDA: WRONG HOUSE, BUT RIGHT STATE?

ORLANDO, Fla. -- On Thursday, two Republican canvassers appeared

at Beth Moriarty's door in Orlando looking for her husband's vote.

Her response was blunt.

"Y'all are totally at the wrong house," Moriarty said. "My

husband, he's 62, he has never voted for a Democrat in his entire

life. Until Tuesday."

Perhaps no state in recent presidential politics is more

resonant than Florida, which Democrats would love to recapture

after two consecutive defeats that included the bitter recount of

2000. And Florida is a state that Sen. John McCain must win to

capture the presidency. But after coasting through the summer,

McCain, the Republican nominee, now finds himself falling behind in

many recent polls.

Sen. Barack Obama, the Democratic presidential nominee, has a

litany of structural advantages to help him retake Florida for the

Democrats. With only days to go, the Obama campaign has more of

just about everything: offices (100 to McCain's 80); advertising

money (outspending the McCain campaign 4-to1 in some weeks); and

voter registrations (a 660,000 Democratic edge over Republicans, up

from 280,000 in 2006).

None of this is destiny, of course, in such an unpredictable

state. Every poll since Sept. 12 (50 of them) shows a gap of single

digits between the candidates, which could be closed by any number

of last-second surprises.

McCain, who spent time stationed here in the Navy, has recently

revived what had been a flagging effort. On Oct. 23, he

crisscrossed Florida from Daytona Beach to Sarasota, hammering

energetically on an economic theme, telling audiences that

"Obama's tax increases would put even more people out of work."

With unemployment in Florida at its highest rate in 14 years,

the message will no doubt be heard. The state and national

Republican Party has also amplified the argument with television

advertisements and one particularly blunt mailer that said,

"Barack Obama's solution is to take more of your money!"

But, according to analysts and voters, the shift toward economic

issues amounts to McCain playing on the Democrats' turf, putting

Florida once again in the crosshairs of both campaigns.

"We need to bring our best game these last couple days before

the election," said George LeMieux, the former campaign manager

for Gov. Charlie Crist, a Republican. He expressed hope that the

Republican field operation would prevail.

"There are a lot of Republicans who have been through a lot of

battles before," he said. "They know the game."

-- DAMIEN CAVE

COLORADO: EARLY VOTING CHANGES TACTICS

DENVER -- The reality in Colorado is that a big piece of the

election is already over.

The state's heavy emphasis on mail-in and early voting means

that close to 1.5 million votes, or about 46 percent of the

registered total, are already in the can, cast and waiting to be

counted.

That means two things. First, that a surge, or a misstep, at the

last minute can only help or hurt so much, since voter decisions

were in many cases made on conclusions reached in mid-to-late

October. Second, it mandates, in a still-tight race, a pinpoint,

surgical search for the votes still remaining.

Mary Ann Larsen and Diane Tapia-Gonzales, who knocked on doors

in the Denver suburb of Arvada on Thursday night as volunteers for

Sen. Barack Obama, the Democratic candidate, epitomized the new

narrow-cast focus. On their computer-generated lists, every name

came with a one-to-five scale based on prior contact -- one being

committed to Obama, five being four-square for the Republican

candidate, John McCain. The women knew who had already voted --

updates come in daily from local county clerks -- and who had a

mail-in ballot in hand not yet submitted.

McCain's campaign is similarly obsessed with the details.

"Everyone knows which votes are turned in and where the votes

are that are left," said Tom Kise, the campaign's communications

director for its south central region.

But so far, that knowledge has probably not been entirely

comforting to McCain supporters. Of the mail-in ballots received as

of Friday, more registered Democrats had cast their ballots than

Republicans or unaffiliated voters, either by mail or by early

voting in regular polling places. Registered Republicans outnumber

Democrats in Colorado by about 10,000, out of 3.2 million total,

with unaffiliated voters the largest group by far.

McCain's television advertising presence in the state also

dropped beginning two weeks ago -- a decision that Kise said was

purely tactical. At the CBS affiliate in Denver, KCNC, for example,

Obama has been outspending McCain by almost 3-to-1 since a decision

in mid-October to spread McCain advertisements out over the

remaining time until the election.

With some polls showing Obama up by large margins, he is still

not taking any chances. He plans a rally on Saturday in Pueblo, a

heavily Hispanic, mostly blue-collar Democratic stronghold. Pueblo

County is where the votes are, with lower numbers of early or

mail-in voters than many other counties.

-- KIRK JOHNSON

WRESTLING THE BEAR

OCT. 26-NOV. 1

MONDAY: CAR TROUBLE

The News: White House officials sought ways to provide emergency

financial assistance to the deeply troubled auto industry that

could help spur a proposed merger between Chrysler and General

Motors.

Behind the News: Two options being discussed include making the

carmakers' financing arms eligible to take part in the Treasury's

$700 billion bailout program, originally intended mainly for banks

and other financial institutions, or using a $25 billion loan

program recently created by Congress to help them modernize plants.

The failure of any of Detroit's big three would have far-reaching

implications and could start a national pension-financing crisis.

TUESDAY: A RALLY

The News: A worldwide rally sent stock markets soaring on Wall

Street and around the world, with the major American indexes

posting gains of about 11 percent.

Behind the News: Market analysts were hard-pressed to identify a

single catalyst for the surge. They tended to point instead to a

general feeling that the sharp sell-offs of recent weeks, partly

owing to sales forced by the financial crisis, had been overdone,

and that stocks had been beaten down to attractive prices. It was a

day when bad news just wouldn't stick: Investors seemed to shrug

off a report that a widely followed measure of consumer confidence

had sagged to a 40-year low.

WEDNESDAY: A RATE CUT

The News: The Federal Reserve cut each of its two benchmark

short-term interest rates, the federal funds target rate and the

discount rate, by half a percentage point.

Behind the News: The Fed said its policy-setting committee,

which approved the move unanimously, acted to address multiplying

danger signs of a downshifting economy, and that there was little

risk of inflation. The cut brought the federal funds target rate

down to 1 percent, matching the lows of 2003 and 2004 when the

central bank was trying to contain the damage from the bursting of

the dot-com bubble. Stocks rallied briefly after the cut but

slumped at the day's end.

THURSDAY: BAD NEWS

The News: New figures from the Commerce Department showed that

the economy contracted in the third quarter at a 0.3 percent annual

rate.

Behind the News: Consumers, who buoyed the economy through

previous dips and slowdowns by continuing to spend, have snapped

their wallets shut this time: Personal consumption spending fell at

a 3.1 percent annual pace, the first decline in 17 years, the

report said. Business investment also retreated in the quarter, and

the only economic bright spot (of sorts) in the report was growth

in government spending, especially on the military. Still, the

figures weren't as gloomy as expected, and the stock market posted

gains for the day.

FRIDAY: A MOVE IN JAPAN

The News: The Bank of Japan cut its benchmark interest rate for

the first time in seven years to try to rekindle growth in Asia's

largest economy.

Behind the News: Japan joined moves by the Federal Reserve and

other central banks to lower their rates. The overnight lending

rate between banks was cut by 0.2 percentage points to 0.3 percent

to reduce borrowing costs and ease a growing credit crunch in

Japan. With interest rates already so low, economists said the

action was unlikely to stimulate borrowing. But they said it had

symbolic value as a sign of Japan's willingness to coordinate with

other governments against the global financial downturn.

LAUGH LINES

Jay Leno

-- Alaska's senator, Ted Stevens, has been found guilty on all

seven felony counts of accepting over $250,000 worth of gifts and

services from a contractor. But he says he will not step down and

he will win re-election. Don't you love how these guys have no

shame? In fact, have you heard his new slogan, "Vote for Stevens,

a man of convictions"?

David Letterman

-- Earlier tonight, Barack Obama had a half-hour television

special, which cost a lot of money. In fact, they say it was the

most money spent by a Democrat for a half an hour since Eliot

Spitzer.

Conan O'Brien

-- Yesterday, in Washington, the Secret Service arrested a man

who climbed over the White House fence. True story, yeah. Yeah, the

Secret Service told the man, "Get back here, Mr. President. You

have two more months."

Sen. John McCain and Sen. Barack Obama began their final push

for the White House on Saturday, returning to the themes that had

marked their candidacies, with Obama calling for a break from the

Bush era and McCain challenging Obama's credentials to lead the

country during difficult times.

The campaign's final days brought a reminder of Obama's

financial might through his ambitious effort to redraw the

political map. He is spending his time campaigning in states that

went Republicans four years ago -- Colorado, Missouri and Nevada on

Saturday -- as he seeks a broad victory on Tuesday.

McCain pushed back with a burst of television advertising. His

aides mapped out ambitious campaign travel that sent McCain and his

running mate, Gov. Sarah Palin, to defend states that Republicans

won in 2004 and two -- New Hampshire and Pennsylvania -- that

Democrats won last time.

Still, McCain is on difficult ground. A spate of national and

battleground-state polls showed Obama with a sizable lead. Much of

the last-minute spending by McCain was in states that just two

months ago Republicans believed to be safely in their column. They

include Indiana, North Carolina and Virginia.

McCain, at a modest outdoor rally in Newport News, Va., on

Saturday, left no doubt how important he viewed the battle in the

state.

"Let me state the obvious again: We need to win Virginia on the

4th of November," McCain said, adding: "My friends, I need your

help in the next three days. Volunteer! Knock on doors!"

McCain's and Palin's weekend stops have been mainly in states

that President Bush won four years ago: Colorado, Florida, Indiana,

Iowa, Missouri, Nevada, New Mexico and Ohio.

Obama's campaign manager, David Plouffe, said he was confident

of victory in every state the Democrats won in 2004, allowing Obama

to put all his closing effort into keeping McCain on the defensive.

"All the Kerry states right now are in good shape for us," he

said.

The latest New York Times electoral map puts five states in the

tossup category, based on polls, interviews with local analysts and

campaign officials: Florida, Indiana, Missouri, North Carolina and

Ohio. Bush won all those states in 2004. According to the Times

count, another five states that went with Bush in 2004 -- Colorado,

Iowa, Nevada, New Mexico and Virginia -- were leaning toward Obama

going into the weekend.

On a snowy day two years ago, the school board in Whitefish Bay,

Wis., gathered to discuss a looming problem: how to plug a gaping

hole in the teachers' retirement plan.

It turned to David W. Noack, a trusted local investment banker,

who proposed they borrow from overseas and use the money for a

complex investment that offered big profits.

"Every three months, you're going to get a payment," he

promised, according to a tape of the meeting. But would it be

risky? "There would need to be 15 Enrons" for the district to

lose money, he said.

The board and four other nearby school districts ultimately

invested $200 million in Noack's deal, most of it borrowed from an

Irish bank. Without realizing it, the schools were imitating hedge

funds.

Across the country, New York subway officials were also being

wooed by bankers. Officials were told that just as homebuyers had

embraced adjustable-rate loans, New York could save money by

borrowing at lower interest rates that changed every day.

For some of the deals, the officials were encouraged to rely on

the same Irish bank as the Wisconsin schools.

School districts, transit agencies and other government entities

were quick to jump into the global economy, hoping for fast gains

to cover growing pension costs and budgets without raising taxes.

Deals were arranged by armies of persuasive financiers who received

big paydays.

But now, hundreds of cities and government agencies are facing

economic turmoil. Far from being isolated examples, the Wisconsin

schools and New York's subway system are among the many players in

a financial fiasco that has ricocheted globally.

The bank at the center of their saga, named DEPFA, is now in

trouble. The Wisconsin schools are on the brink of losing their

money, confronting educators with possible budget cuts. Interest

rates for New York's subways are skyrocketing and contributing to

budget woes that have transportation officials considering higher

fares and delaying long-planned track repairs.

And the bank's problems have threatened the stability of its

parent company in Munich, forcing German officials to intervene

with a multibillion-dollar bailout to stop a chain reaction that

could freeze Germany's economic system.

"I am really worried," said Becky Velvikis, a first-grade

teacher at Grewenow Elementary in Kenosha, Wis., one of the

districts that invested in Noack's deal. "If millions of dollars

are gone, what happens to my retirement? Or the construction paper

and pencils and supplies we need to teach?"

NEW YORK TIMES CORRECTIONS FOR SUNDAY NOV. 11, 2008

(These corrections will appear in The New York Times on Sunday.

Date refers to the original article's transmission by the New York

Times News Service and will need to be adjusted.)

RI-JOBLESS-ART (moved Oct. 25)

A New York Times News Service article about surging unemployment

in Rhode Island misspelled the surname of a spokeswoman for Gov.

Donald L. Carcieri who said that historically the state is one of

the first to feel hard times and one of the last to come out of

them. She is Amy Kempe, not Kemp.

OBIT-DORFSMAN (moved Oct. 25)

A New York Times News Service article about Lou Dorfsman, chief

of design at the Columbia Broadcasting Co., referred incorrectly to

the design of the artwork for the CBS headquarters' cafeteria wall,

"Gastrotypographicalassemblage." Although Dorfsman developed the

overall design, the typography was by Herb Lubalin and Tom Carnase

under Dorfsman's direction; Dorfsman did not design the typography.

RACE-HOLLYWOOD-REVIEW (moved Oct. 18)

A New York Times News Service article about Hollywood's caution

in making films that focus on African-American themes misspelled

the name of a character in a series of films by the writer,

director and actor Tyler Perry. The character is Madea, not Medea.

TV-PUNDITS-SCHOOL (moved Oct. 24)

A New York Times News Service article about learning to be a

political pundit on television referred incorrectly to the Fox

program "Hannity &amp;amp; Colmes." Its hosts present opposing

conservative and liberal views on issues; it is not a conservative

show.

LOST-RECORDINGS (moved Oct. 22)

A New York Times News Service article about the discovery of wax

cylinder recordings dating from 1890 to 1927 misstated the year

that commercial recording began. It was roughly 1889; it was not

1899, the year that classical commercial recordings began.

BELFAST-MUSIC (moved Oct. 14)

A New York Times News Service article about the Belfast music

scene misstated the role of Henry McCullough in a folk band called

Sweeney's Men. He joined the band in 1968, two years after it was

founded; he did not start the band. The article also misstated the

name of a drink served at the John Hewitt, a Belfast pub; it was

Harp Lager, not an ale.

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With oil prices less than half what they were this

summer, Iraqi and U.S. officials are searching for new sources of

money to jump-start Iraq's economy.

At a meeting on Saturday, representatives from the two countries

and a handful of foreign business people discussed ways to

stimulate investment in business ventures in Iraq.

Almost 95 percent of Iraq's revenues come from oil exports. The

Iraqi government has said that it will have to reduce its 2009

budget to $67 billion from an earlier forecast of $80 billion

because of slipping crude prices.

Bayan Jabr, Iraq's finance minister, said spending would have to

be reduced by more than 16 percent, leading to a drop in the money

available for rebuilding infrastructure. Jabr said that the country

figured that it needed almost $400 billion to rebuild and upgrade

its infrastructure.

"We must seriously activate foreign investment in Iraq," he

said.

Iraqi officials emphasized that the recent decline in violence

should make investing in the country safer, and Rafie al-Issawi,

deputy prime minister, suggested that investors could benefit by

taking a chance on "the young experiment of Iraq."

The U.S. delegation included State Department officials; Robert

M. Kimmitt, the deputy secretary of the Treasury; and the deputy

secretary of commerce, John J. Sullivan. The U.S. officials

expressed their support for private enterprise, and Kimmitt said he

looked forward to the day when the relationship between the

countries was more about business than about security concerns.

But he also used the meeting as an opportunity to again warn

that delays in signing a security pact with the United States could

keep away investors.

The pact, which would regulate the presence of U.S. soldiers, is

being held up because of a series of amendments demanded by the

Iraqis and disagreements inside the Iraqi government. The U.N.

Security Council mandate for the U.S. presence expires Dec. 31.

"We hope the negotiations on the security agreement can be

concluded as quickly as possible," Kimmitt said. "This again will

send an important signal not just in the political and security

field, but also in the economic and financial fields and especially

to foreign investors."

He said the agreement was one of several "significant

challenges" that remained in luring foreign investors, including

complex laws and bureaucratic practices.

On Wednesday, Brig. Gen. David G. Perkins, spokesman for

U.S.-led forces in Iraq, warned that the "partnership" between

Iraq and America as well as the flow of foreign investment into

Iraq would be adversely affected by the lack of an agreement on

U.S. forces.

He likened the role of the United States to a "pillar"

necessary for the functioning of the Iraqi state.

U.S. negotiators also presented almost 10 days ago a series of

slides to the Iraqi government outlining in great detail what

America currently provides to Iraq in security, economic and

technical assistance and how this would have to come to an end in

the absence of an agreement, according to American and Iraqi

officials.

On Thursday, Prime Minister Nouri Kamal al-Maliki responded,

"If they or others think that Iraq's decision could be begotten

through blackmail, then I think that's an illusion."

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Brightly colored lines of washing hang

by the gray stone walls. A vendor offers sunglasses, shampoo and

cigarettes from a plastic sheet under a tree. A man with a Polaroid

camera sells souvenir photos to the Cambodian soldiers camped on

the temple grounds.

At the main gate, where an hourlong firefight with Thai troops

broke out less than three weeks ago, the commander of a Cambodian

border police unit is playing cards with his men.

It is a sleepy interlude here at the Preah Vihear temple, on the

Thai-Cambodian border, where this summer a dispute over sovereignty

became the most volatile international confrontation in Indochina

in 20 years.

Cambodian troops occupy the swooping cliff-top temple, which is

in Cambodia but is most easily reached from the high ground on the

Thai side. The Thais, who claim parts of the territory around the

temple, are mostly out of sight in the hills or in camps nearby in

Thailand.

But the Cambodian government seems to be digging in for a long

siege. A new budget expected to be approved in the coming week

would double the country's military budget to $500 million -- or 25

percent of all government spending.

The encampment here has the village feel of Cambodian

deployments throughout conflicts in recent decades.

At the bottom of the great stone causeway, giant loops of silver

razor wire close off the main entrance, which is guarded by armed

men wearing sandals; the 900-year-old temple, with its sagging

walls and tumbling columns, is empty of tourists.

Tiny marks of shrapnel fleck the great stone staircase that

rises from the Thai side to the temple, along with two stone

dragons that flank the steps. But nothing seems to have been gained

or lost in the fighting.

The dispute flared in July, when UNESCO, the cultural agency of

the United Nations, declared the temple a World Heritage site,

based on a Cambodian government proposal. Domestic politics in

Thailand fueled a nationalist response, and troops, artillery and

tanks were moved into position.

The confrontation echoes with the history of the rise and

retreat of empires over the centuries, and old fears and hatreds

still burn between Cambodia and its more powerful neighbors,

Vietnam and Thailand.

In the final moments of the most gripping campaign in modern

history, John McCain is still trying to costume Barack Obama as a

dangerous enigma.

But, in an odd and remarkable reversal, it is McCain who is the

enigma, even though he entered the race with one of the best brands

in American politics.

And it is Obama, who sashayed onto the trail two years ago as an

aloof and exotic mystery man with a slim record and a strange name,

now coming across as the steadier brand.

The McCain campaign specializes in erratica, while the Obama

campaign continues to avoid any dramatica.

McCain pals around with Joe the Plumber and leaves Tito the

Builder to Sarah Palin, exactly the kind of inane campaign

silliness that the McCain formerly known as Maverick would have

mocked mercilessly.

He's getting a little traction on taxes, as he latches on to

every possible scary image about Obama -- except the suggestion that

the Democrat's gray Hart Schaffner Marx suits are red.

Before he was bubbled by Bushies, McCain was one of the most

known and knowable quantities in American politics. For most of his

long public career, he prided himself on his openness with the

press -- he even allowed some reporters to watch the results of

January's New Hampshire primary in his hotel suite in Nashua. He

relished spending all day being challenged by voters and reporters.

Last summer, tapped out and unable to afford a paid staff of

political professionals, he talked freely, telling reporters he

would have a White House that would be the polar opposite of the

secretive and dismissive Bush-Cheney operation. He imagined weekly

press conferences and talked of subjecting himself to a version of

British question time in Congress. While acknowledging he was a

tech tyro, he promised to try "a Google," as he called searching

the Web, to put government spending online so citizens could

bird-dog it.

He even went so far as to spin a dream of a West Wing in which

he would cut back on his Secret Service so he wouldn't feel so

constrained.

In the end, "The Bullet," or "Sarge," as McCain calls his

replacement campaign manager, Steve Schmidt, was the one who did

the shackling, turning the vibrant and respected McCain into a

shell of his former self.

Schmidt abruptly cut off the oxygen supply to McCain's brain. No

more of the oldest established, permanent floating craps game of

press confabs. No more audiences that weren't vetted for

friendliness. No more of McCain's trademark insouciant mocking the

process even as he participated in it.

Whether it was the five years he spent in a hole in Hanoi or

just his gregarious makeup, McCain seemed to feed off of the

company of people who interested him, be it reporters, voters or

the pols in his posse, like Joe Lieberman and Lindsey Graham.

Unlike Obama, He Who Walks Alone, McCain always rejected the

solitary in favor of the social. But ever since Sgt. Schmidt put

Capt. McCain into a sterile brig on the trail, the candidate has

become a question mark.

Why would he repeat that oblivious line about the fundamentals

of the economy being strong, saying it once in August and again in

September?

Why would he threaten to not show up for a debate (after

denouncing Obama for not rising to the challenge of joint town

halls) so that he could go to Washington and play the shining

knight if he had no plan and no prospect for success?

Why did he allow his campaign to become a host body for a Bush

virus looking for someplace to infect? After working so hard to

erase the image of what Senate aides called "the Bush hug,"

McCain inexplicably hugged Bushies, surrounding himself with

mercenaries trained in the same Rovian tactics that tore up his

family -- and tore apart his campaign -- in 2000.

Why did a politician who once knew how to play the game so well,

who was once so beloved by people of very different political

stripes, allow his campaign to get whiny, angry, vengeful and

bitter?

Why Palin?

(Her latest instant classics came Friday, when she entered a

rally in York, Pa., to the tune of "Thriller" and when a

conservative radio station broadcast an interview in which she

accused reporters of threatening her First Amendment rights by

attacking her for negative campaigning that she feels justifiably

calls out Obama "on his associations.")

Why did he allow his staff to put Palin on a couture catwalk in

a tin-cup economy and then, when the price tags were exposed, trash

her as a "diva" and "whack job," thus becoming the rare

Republican campaign devoured by Democratic-style vicious

infighting?

The ultimate riddle is this: Why doesn't McCain question why he

has become a question mark?

After weeks of testimony about a suitcase stuffed with

illegal campaign contributions bound for Buenos Aires, a federal

jury here remains undecided about the role of a Venezuelan

businessman.

The businessman, Franklin Duran, is charged with conspiracy and

with operating in the United States as an unauthorized agent of a

foreign government.

Prosecutors say Duran, who owns a house in the Miami area, came

to the United States at the behest of the Venezuelan government to

coerce a friend to conceal the source and destination of an

$800,000 cash contribution to the 2007 campaign of an Argentine

presidential candidate, Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner, who went on

to win the election.

Jurors have deliberated for seven days but remain deadlocked.

Earlier this week they sent a note to Judge Joan A. Lenard saying

they were at an impasse.

Lenard instructed them to continue deliberating.

Both Kirchner and her Venezuelan counterpart, President Hugo

Chavez, have denied any role in the matter, which has made

headlines in Latin America.

The jury's impasse has prompted some Venezuelans to speculate in

news blogs and Internet chat rooms that the Chavez administration

is somehow manipulating the jury to prevent a guilty verdict.

"If he is found guilty, those that are anti-Chavez will be

happy," said Laura Weffer, an investigative reporter for the

leading Venezuelan newspaper El Nacional, who has covered the Duran

trial from its inception in September. "But if there is a

mistrial, they will say he bought the jurors."

Deliberations could continue until late next week, a defense

lawyer said, as the jurors will convene for an abbreviated session

on Monday and be pardoned from court altogether Tuesday because two

jurors have a conflict that day.

Here's what strikes me this election eve: I can't remember a

presidential campaign that was so disconnected from the actual

challenges of governing that will confront the winner the morning

after. When this election campaign began two years ago, the big

issue was how and for how long we continue nation-building in Iraq.

As the campaign comes to a close, the big issue is how and at what

sacrifice we do nation-building in America.

Unfortunately, you'd barely know that from the presidential

debates. Watching them in the context of the meltdown of the

financial system was like watching a game show where the two

contestants were kept offstage in a soundproof booth and brought

out to address the audience without knowing the context.

Since the last debate, John McCain and Barack Obama have

unveiled broad ideas about how to restore the nation's financial

health. But they continue to suggest that this will be largely

pain-free. McCain says giving everyone a tax cut will save the day;

Obama tells us only the rich will have to pay to help us out of

this hole. Neither is true.

We are all going to have to pay, because this meltdown comes

in the context of what has been "perhaps the greatest wealth

transfer since the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia in 1917," says

Michael Mandelbaum, author of "Democracy's Good Name." "It is

not a wealth transfer from rich to poor that the Bush

administration will be remembered for. It is a wealth transfer from

the future to the present."

Never has one generation spent so much of its children's wealth

in such a short period of time with so little to show for it as in

the Bush years. Under George W. Bush, America has foisted onto

future generations a huge financial burden to finance our current

tax cuts, wars and now bailouts. Just paying off those debts will

require significant sacrifices. But when you add the destruction of

wealth that has taken place in the last two months in the markets,

and the need for more bailouts, you understand why this is not

going to be a painless recovery.

The Bush team leaves us with another debt -- one to Mother

Nature. We have added tons more CO2 into the atmosphere these last

eight years, without any mitigation effort. As a result, slowing

down climate change in the next eight years is going to require

even bigger changes and investments in how we use energy.

Given that New York Times columnists are not allowed to

"formally" endorse candidates and given that the context of this

election has changed so much from the policy positions the

candidates started with, all I can suggest is that you vote for the

candidate with these character traits:

First, we need a president who can speak English and deconstruct

and navigate complex issues so Americans can make informed choices.

We have paid an enormous price for having a president who could not

explain and reassure us during this financial meltdown. We wasted a

huge amount of time pretending that we could punish Wall Street

without punishing Main Street -- when, in fact, they are intricately

intertwined.

A major money market fund -- Reserve Primary -- failed in

September because the extra interest it offered customers derived,

in part, from the $785 million in high-yielding Lehman Brothers

commercial paper and notes it was holding. Depositors who told

their congressmen to just let that greedy Lehman Brothers fail were

shocked to discover this meant that their own money market would be

frozen. No, we don't need a president defending greed on Wall

Street, but we do need one who can explain that we are all in the

same boat, that a leak at one end can sink everyone and that while

we must regulate, we don't want to kill risk-taking and the rewards

that go with that -- which are essential to growing our economy.

Second, we need a president who can energize, inspire and hold

the country together during what will be a very stressful recovery.

We have to climb out of this financial crisis at a time when the

baby boomers are about to retire and going to need their Social

Security and eventually Medicare. We are all going to be paying the

government more and getting less until we grow out of this hole.

Third, we need a president who can rally the world to our side.

We cannot get out of this crisis unless China starts consuming more

and unless Europe keeps lowering interest rates. Everyone is

interconnected, and everyone is still looking to America to lead.

So, bottom line: Please do not vote for the candidate you most

want to have a beer with (unless it's to get stone-cold drunk so

you don't have to think about this mess we're in). Vote for the

person you'd most like at your side when you ask your bank manager

for an extension on your mortgage.

Vote for the candidate you think has the smarts, temperament and

inspirational capacity to unify the country and steer our ship

through what could be the rockiest shoals our generation has ever

known. Your kids will thank you.

The Supreme Court specializes in law, not

lexicography. But it will soon have to consider the meaning of that

most versatile of four-letter words.

The Oxford English Dictionary's three core entries on the word --

noun, verb and interjection -- are about six times as long as this

article. That doesn't count about 30 derivations and compounds, all

colorful and many recent. The nimble word, the dictionary tells us,

can help express that a person is incompetent; that another is not

be meddled with; that a situation has been botched; that one does

not have the slightest clue; and, in a recent addition, that

someone has enough money to be able to quit an unpleasant job.

You know the word I mean.

A central question in the case of Federal Communications

Commission v. Fox Television Stations, to be argued Tuesday, is

whether every permutation of the word evokes sex and thus runs

afoul of indecency regulations, which prohibit the broadcasting of

material that "depicts or describes sexual or excretory activities

or organs."

"Given its core meaning," the commission told the court, "any

use of the word has a sexual connotation even if the word is not

used literally."

Thus, when the pop star Bono emphasized his glee at receiving a

Golden Globe award in 2003 by saying his victory was "really,

really" -- insert a form of the word here -- "brilliant," the

commission contended there was a sexual element. So too when Cher,

on another awards show, used the word to propose something that

ought to be done to her critics.

And there was sex in the air, the commission said, when Nicole

Richie, at a third awards show, veered from these scripted

comments: "Have you ever tried to get cow manure out of a Prada

purse? It's not so freaking simple." Richie did not say

"manure," and she did not say "freaking."

Bono, Cher and Richie all made sexual references, and all were

indecent, the commission says. "It hardly seems debatable," the

commission wrote in 2006, "that the word's power to 'intensify'

and offend derives from its implicit sexual meaning" as "one of

the most vulgar, graphic and explicit words for sexual activity in

the English language."

The federal appeals court in New York disagreed. "As the

general public well knows," Judge Rosemary S. Pooler wrote for the

majority last year, four-letter words "are often used in everyday

conversation without any 'sexual or excretory' meaning."

Bono's exclamation, Pooler added, is "a prime example of a

nonliteral use" that has "no sexual connotation." In support of

that proposition, she cited remarks from President Bush (about the

need to get Hezbollah to stop doing, uh, stuff) and Vice President

Dick Cheney (urging Sen. Patrick Leahy to start doing something not

biologically possible).

A dissenting judge, Pierre N. Leval, agreed that many people who

use the most adaptable curse word do not intend to refer to sex.

(He gave examples: "a student who gets a disappointing grade on a

test, a cook who burns the roast, or a driver who returns to his

parked car to find a parking ticket on the windshield.") But,

whatever the speaker's intentions, Leval added, "a substantial

part of the community, and of the television audience, will

understand the word as freighted with an offensive sexual

connotation."

The commission, on the other hand, has not been entirely

consistent. Swearing in "Saving Private Ryan," the Steven

Spielberg war movie? Not indecent. Swearing by blues masters and

others in a music documentary produced by Martin Scorsese?

Indecent.

Swearing on the "The Early Show" on CBS? Not indecent, because

the bad word was part of "a bona fide news interview" protected

by the First Amendment. The foul-mouthed subject of said bona fide

news interview? A contestant on "Survivor: Vanuatu."

Thirty years ago, the Supreme Court allowed the commission to

censor George Carlin's famous "seven dirty words" monologue. It

justified the decision by saying that broadcasting was "uniquely

pervasive" and "uniquely accessible to children."

Peter Chernin, the president of News Corp., which owns Fox, said

much had changed since the decision in the Carlin case, FCC v.

Pacifica Foundation. That decision, he said, is an artifact of a

world without the Internet or cable television programming, neither

of which is subject to government indecency regulation.

"The government is turning a blind eye to 99 percent of the

content that's being delivered," Chernin said. Viewers who

subscribe to cable switch between regulatory regimes by changing

channels, he said, leaving broadcasters at "an inexplicable

competitive disadvantage."

Even in the Pacifica case, the court moved cautiously. It

emphasized Carlin's "repetitive, deliberate use" of swear words

and left open the question of whether "an occasional expletive"

would be considered indecent.

In other settings, the court has protected vulgarity. In 1971,

for instance, the court ruled that it was not obscene to say about

the Vietnam draft what Cher said about her critics. "Such

expression must be, in some significant way, erotic" before it

crosses the line into obscenity, Justice John Marshall Harlan wrote

for the majority in Cohen v. California. "It cannot plausibly be

maintained that this vulgar allusion to the Selective Service

System would conjure up such psychic stimulation."

Judicial opinions about salty language, like sermons about sin,

are the work of amateurs. Jesse Sheidlower, the editor at large of

the Oxford English Dictionary, is a professional.

"I spent much of last year revising the OED's entry on it,"

Sheidlower said of the word in an interview the other day.

Sheidlower is also preparing a third edition of his book on the

subject, "The F-Word." (That euphemism, according to the

dictionary, first appeared in 1973, in this newspaper.)

The power of the word to shock is in decline, Sheidlower said,

largely because its core meaning has been blurred. The word, he

said, "has been around since the late 15th century, and almost all

of the nonsexual uses are quite recent, say, late Victorian or

later."

The word has seldom been, in any event, the most offensive one

around. Words suggesting questionable parentage -- "bastard,"

"whoreson" -- were long thought more offensive. Blasphemous words

have also gotten people into more trouble. These days, a racial

slur can end a career.

Sheidlower said he had followed the court case and did not find

it difficult.

"The outrage that the FCC pretends to feel is false," he said.

"I'm highly opposed to censorship in any form," he added.

"This is censorship. Having said that, I don't encourage this word

to be very commonly broadcast at all times whenever anyone feels

like it."

On Friday, the Supreme Court turned down a request from C-Span

for prompt access to an audiotape of Tuesday's argument. The court,

which occasionally grants such access, gave no reasons. But Fox's

lead lawyer has said that he will not be relying on euphemisms.

Chicago is bracing for a gigantic crowd this week in

Grant Park, the city's iconic front yard, where Sen. Barack Obama

has chosen to spend election night.

As many as 70,000 people are expected to attend an event for

local supporters. All available tickets were swept up days ago, and

thousands of people have applied to be on a waiting list. Thousands

more -- maybe as many as a million people, Mayor Richard M. Daley

has proudly suggested -- are expected to pile into the downtown

parkland and sidewalks and streets surrounding Obama's official

celebration.

"This could be a moment of history right here, and it's high

time for it," said Patricia Cadagin, who stood last week peering

through a new fence around the south end of Grant Park, one of

blocks and blocks of fences erected as part of the elaborate

security efforts. Cadagin, 82, who said she had voted early for

Obama, will probably not be here on Tuesday night. "It's going to

be a big crowd and at night, and I'm a small woman," she said.

"Will I be here in spirit? You bet you."

Chicago, it seems, is of two minds about this party. Many

supporters in Obama's hometown speak with pride of the potential of

seeing the first black person claim victory in a presidential

campaign here on the edge of Lake Michigan, in view of their

beloved skyline. Still, in hushed tones, some say they are worried

about his safety in the public park and about how a huge crowd in

this city, which has seen violence after events like basketball

championships, might respond, win, lose or draw.

Even city leaders have sent mixed messages. On Thursday, Daley,

a fierce Obama supporter, seemed to suggest the more the merrier.

"You think I'm not going to invite people down?" he told

reporters, according to The Chicago Tribune. "This is a

celebration."

A day later, city leaders cautioned Chicagoans to behave

properly, warned them that people might be turned away if Grant

Park became too crowded and stood at a city-run news conference

beside ministers who suggested that those without tickets use

"common sense" and stay in their own neighborhoods.

"We can't have foolishness," said the police superintendent,

Jody P. Weis. "We can't have mischief."

Facing labor shortages back in 1990 but

ever wary of allowing in foreigners, Japan made an exception for

Japanese-Brazilians. With their Japanese roots, names and faces,

these children and grandchildren of Japanese immigrants to Brazil

would fit more easily in a society fiercely closed to outsiders, or

so the reasoning went.

In the two decades since then, despite periodic economic

downturns like the current one, the number of Japanese-Brazilian

workers in Japan has kept growing. They are clustered in industrial

regions dotted with factories supplying familiar companies like

Honda, Sanyo and Toyota, whose headquarters gave this city in

central Japan its name.

But perhaps nowhere in this country do Japanese and

Japanese-Brazilians rub shoulders with such intensity as in a

public housing complex here called Homi Estate. Built in the 1970s

for young Japanese families, Homi has a population of 8,891 that is

now nearly evenly split between Japanese, at 52 percent, and

foreigners, at 48 percent.

"To be honest," Toshinori Fujiwara, 69, a Japanese community

leader, said, "I never imagined in my wildest dreams that this

would ever become a multiethnic neighborhood."

A generation from now, more Japanese are likely to be making

similar comments as Japan's population ages and its work force

shrinks. Recently labor shortages have spread from factories to

farms, fishing boats, hospitals and other areas, prompting Japan to

open its doors to temporary workers from China and elsewhere in

Asia.

As the demographic squeeze grows tighter, Japan may have to open

itself further to immigration, experts say, if it is to have the

workers it needs to remain a major industrial power. A homogeneous

and insular nation, however, Japan is notoriously unwelcoming to

immigrants; Koreans who came here during World War II are still

treated as second-class citizens.

To make itself an attractive destination for immigrants, the

experts say, Japan will have to undergo a difficult cultural

transformation for which the Japanese-Brazilians pose an elementary

test case. If even they cannot gain acceptance, what chance will

there be forimmigrant groups that may be ethnically, racially,

religiously and nationally different from native Japanese?

Immigration is an unpopular and politically delicate topic. But

the country's 317,000 Japanese-Brazilians -- whose children are

growing up in Japan and, in many cases, coming of age here --

effectively make up Japan's largest immigrant population.

Some audiences for the upcoming film "Milk," about the slain

San Francisco supervisor and gay politician Harvey Milk, will

certainly be inspired by his fight against Proposition 6, a 1978

California ballot measure that would have expelled gay teachers

from the state's public schools. Others less entranced with Milk's

politics will, no doubt, be less impressed.

But, in California, both types of moviegoers will probably feel

a sense of eerie familiarity. The state is embroiled in a fight

over another numbered ballot measure aimed at gays that will be put

to voters on Tuesday: Proposition 8, which would bar same-sex

marriage.

In many ways, the battle sparked by this latest proposal echoes

the one that inspired Milk's most famous crusade.

"It's surreal," said Cleve Jones, a veteran civil rights

activist who is portrayed by a curly headed Emilie Hirsch in the

film. "It's like there's a 30-year cycle."

Call it life imitating "Milk," or vice versa, but the

parallels between the campaign chronicled in the movie and the

real-life battle over Proposition 8 are striking. Social

conservatives pitted against gay activists? Check. A Republican

governor (and former movie star) siding with gay Californians?

Check. Close polls, a nationally watched campaign, the potential

for heartbreak?

Check, check, check.

One of the most obvious similarities is the role that children

have played in both campaigns as political symbols.

In 1978, supporters of Proposition 6 suggested that gay people

might aim to "convert" and molest children. Recent advertisements

for Proposition 8 have asserted that gay marriage will be taught in

schools to young children.

"I'm all for tolerance, everyone's for tolerance, but how do

you explain to a kindergartener what a bisexual is?" said Sonja

Eddings-Brown, a spokeswoman for Protect Marriage, the leading

group behind Proposition 8.

Opponents of the ballot measure deny the school claim. But it

isn't accidental.

"Schools are still there as part of the story because whatever

their politics, families are conservative when it comes to their

kids," said David L. Kirp, a professor of law and public policy at

the University of California at Berkeley. "No family regards their

kids as a social experiment."

Proposition 6 was hatched in California just days after the

singer and anti-gay activist Anita Bryant successfully led an

effort to overturn an antidiscrimination law in Miami in 1977. (At

the film's premiere in San Francisco last Tuesday, the crowd hissed

when Bryant appeared on screen.)

The 2008 battle has also been influenced by forces beyond

California's borders, with both sides receiving major financial

support from groups based outside of the state.

Many analysts say the critical factor in defeating Proposition 6

was Ronald Reagan, then the former governor, who said it would be

costly to implement and infringed "on the basic rights of

privacy."

This time around, Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger, another Hollywood

Republican, has come out against Proposition 8. And as in 1978, the

election on Tuesday is likely to be a nail-biter; a Field Poll

released last Friday showed 49 percent against Proposition 8 and 44

percent for the measure.

Of course, not everyone buys into the parallels between the two

campaigns.

"This is not about the rights of gay people in California,

which are and should be protected," said Frank Schubert, the

campaign manager for Protect Marriage. "This is about marriage."

For all the similarities, there are some major differences

between then and now, particularly the changed political landscape

for gay Americans. The 2008 vote in California comes after a

decision by the state Supreme Court in May to permit same-sex

marriages made California the second state, after Massachusetts, to

do so. (Connecticut has since become the third.)

Such notions were fanciful in Milk's time, said Art Agnos, a

former mayor of San Francisco and sometime political sparring

partner with Milk.

"Had someone said in 1978 that you would have the right to

marry your lover, you'd say they were from Mars," he said.

Jones recalled that the prospect that Proposition 6 -- which

threatened people's jobs -- could pass was far more frightening. "I

and all of my contemporaries felt a real sense of physical fear,"

he said, of the 1978 vote. "I don't feel that this time."

For all that, there's no question passions are still running

fairly high. At the film's premiere on Tuesday, scores of

anti-Proposition 8 protesters chanted outside the theater even as

actors on the screen inside shouted pro-gay rights slogans from

another era.

Perhaps the biggest difference today is the lack of charismatic

front men like Milk, who was assassinated by a fellow supervisor,

Dan White, shortly after the defeat of Proposition 6. Milk, one of

the country's first openly gay elected officials, became the face

of the anti-Proposition 6 campaign by challenging its major

sponsor, a Republican state senator from Southern California, to a

series of debates.

Such figures are harder to find in this generation of gay

leaders, said Scott Schmidt, who is 33, gay, opposed to Proposition

8 -- and a Republican.

"There are no Harvey Milks in this campaign." he said.

Sens. Barack Obama and John McCain have stood (or

sat) for 36 debates, endured thousands of interviews, and spent

hundreds of millions of dollars on advertisements and the better

part of two years trying to convince voters that they are worthy of

the presidency, or at least a vote.

But with only days left until Election Day, a small cluster of

holdouts -- 4 percent, according to a New York Times/CBS News poll --

is still wrestling with the "Who are you voting for?" question.

Which raises a follow-up: What is up with these people?

"I do not like being an 'undecided,"' said a sheepish Doug

Finke, a 66-year-old executive at an international relocation

service in Louisville, Ky.

Finke, a Republican, voted twice for George W. Bush. He

describes himself as an economic conservative and said he had been

"very impressed" with Sen. John McCain. It sure sounds as if

Finke is leaning toward McCain, the Arizona Republican, right?

Not so fast.

"I'm socially more liberal," Finke said. "I think Obama is

bright and has been very steady in this campaign." He added that

it would be "very exciting for the United States to elect a black

president." Besides, he does not think McCain's running mate, Gov.

Sarah Palin of Alaska, would be ready to step into the top job if

something happened to McCain.

Where does this leave Finke? "I plan on doing a lot of reading

this weekend," he said.

While many people in this campaign-saturated country are

relieved that the election will soon be over, some of the

undecideds figure, What's the rush?

"I might flip a coin," said Vasilios Gerovasiliou, 64, of

Concordville, Pa. His two grown sons are split along party lines.

His wife, Helen, said she was "disgusted with both sides."

Talking does not necessarily bring undecideds closer to

deciding. "The more I chat, the more confused I get," said Laura

Wolpo, a Brooklyn, N.Y., native who lives in Palm Beach Gardens,

Fla.

Wolpo vows to vote Tuesday. Either way, she said her decision

did not keep her awake at night. "I have enough to worry about,"

she said, explaining that her youngest son suffered a stroke last

spring. He has good days and bad days, she said, and that puts

everything else in perspective.

"This other thing is just an election," she said.

An unscientific poll of 109 professional historians this year

found that 61 percent rated President Bush as the worst president

in American history.

A couple of others judged him second-worst, after James

Buchanan, whose incompetence set the stage for the Civil War. More

than 98 percent of the historians in the poll, conducted through

the History News Network, viewed Bush's presidency as a failure.

Bush's presidency imploded not because of any personal

corruption or venality, but largely because he wrenched the United

States out of the international community. His cowboy diplomacy

"defriended" the United States. He turned a superpower into a

rogue country. Instead of isolating North Korea and Iran, he

isolated us -- and undermined his own ability to achieve his aims.

So here's the top priority for President Barack Obama or

President John McCain: We must rejoin the world.

There are three general ways in which we can signal a new

beginning and "refriend" our allies:

-- We should not only close the Guantanamo prison but also turn

it into an international center for research on tropical diseases

that afflict poor countries. It could thus become an example of

multilateral humanitarianism.

The new president should also start a Truth Commission to

investigate torture and other abuses during the "war on terror."

This should not be a bipartisan panel but a nonpartisan one,

dominated by retired generals and intelligence figures like Brent

Scowcroft or Colin Powell.

Such a panel would be respected as fair and authoritative in a

way that one composed of bickering Democrats and Republicans would

not, and it would underscore that we are eager to return to the

norms of the civilized world.

-- The new president also should signal that we will no longer

confront problems just by blowing them up. The military toolbox is

essential, but it shouldn't be the first option for 21st-century

challenges. You can't bomb climate change.

We also have to pay far more attention to public diplomacy and

outreach. Our Afghanistan and Pakistan policy is a mess in part

because Osama bin Laden's approval rating in Pakistan (34 percent)

is almost double America's (19 percent). You know we need a new

approach when we lose a public relations competition to a fugitive

mass murderer.

A new approach means a vigorous effort for peace in the Middle

East. We also need to commit to negotiating with odious countries.

President Clinton's engagement policy toward North Korea was a

constant headache, for Kim Jong Il was brutally repressive and

tried to start a secret uranium program. But North Korea didn't

produce nuclear materials for a single weapon during Clinton's

years in office; under Bush, it has produced enough for a half

dozen.

So here's the score: Clinton diplomacy, 0 weapons; Bush

fulmination, 6 weapons.

-- We must cooperate with other countries on humanitarian

efforts, including family planning. One of the Bush follies that

has bewildered and antagonized our allies has been the vacuous

refusal to support family planning through the U.N. Population

Fund.

The upshot of the failure to support contraception has been

millions of unwanted pregnancies and abortions. It's difficult to

think of any person alive today whose policies have led to more

unnecessary abortions worldwide than Bush.

For all my criticisms, though, I would rank Bush more gently

than those historians: I would peg him as second worst, after

Buchanan. That's because Bush has begun effective foreign-aid

programs against AIDS and malaria that are saving millions of

lives. His AIDS programs have transformed areas of southern Africa,

but he so antagonized the world that America never gets adequate

credit for this huge achievement.

Look, a friendlier, more multilateral policy will not solve the

world's problems. Iran isn't going to give up its nuclear program

because it likes us, and brawn is necessary to back up brains.

But without global political capital, we don't have the leverage

to organize more muscular persuasion. Without diplomatic heavy

lifting, we can't credibly threaten military heavy smashing.

In the aftermath of World War II, the United States led the

international effort to construct global institutions to promote

peace and prosperity. These included the United Nations, the World

Bank and the International Monetary Fund, and they served our

interests. Now, in the aftermath of the Cold War, we need to

rethink and refurbish this architecture for the next half century

or more.

The United States needs to be a part of the International

Criminal Court and should lead the push for a new climate change

treaty, for example. The new president should be an architect of

this emerging order, rather than AWOL as the Bush administration

has been.

For eight years, the United States has been in self-imposed

exile, and that is one reason Bush's presidency has failed on so

many levels. After Tuesday, let's rejoin the world.

Growing up in St. Louis in the 1950s and '60s, Deddrick Battle

came to believe that the political process was not for people like

him -- a struggling black man whose vote, he was convinced, surely

would not count for much of anything. The thought became ingrained

as an adult, almost like common sense. And that partly explains

why, at age 55, he just registered to vote for the first time a

month ago.

The other part of the reason is Sen. Barack Obama.

"This is huge," Battle, a janitor, said after his overnight

shift cleaning a movie theater. "This is bigger than life itself.

When I was coming up, I always thought they put in who they wanted

to put in. I didn't think my vote mattered. But I don't think that

anymore."

Across the country, black men and women like Battle, who have

long been disaffected, apolitical, discouraged or just plain bored

with politics, say they have snapped to attention this year,

according to dozens of interviews conducted in the last several

days in six states.

Over and again, first-time and relatively new voters, far past

the legal voting age, said they were inspired by the singularity of

the 2008 election and the power of Obama's magnetism. Many also

said they were loath to miss out on their part in writing what

could be a new chapter of American history -- the chance to vote for

a black president.

The swelling ranks of the newly enthusiastic are also the result

of extensive nationwide voter registration drives and new

early-voting procedures in many states, which have made the process

easier and more accessible.

For some black men and women, the sense of pride is

overwhelming, as is the feeling that they are participating in what

could become a touchstone moment, something that children and

grandchildren will want to hear about.

"I'd feel bad forever if I didn't get out this time," said

Shandell Wilcox, 29, of Jacksonville, Fla., a cafeteria worker.

"I'd feel like I didn't do my part to put him in the office. How

would I explain that to my little girl? 'Oh, I had something better

to do'? And sure, it's partially because he's African-American. But

he also says there will be change and I believe him."

On MSNBC, Sen. Barack Obama's surge in the polls was so strong

he was competitive in McCain's home state, Arizona. The everyman

hero of McCain's campaign, "Joe the Plumber," failed to make an

expected appearance at a morning rally in Defiance, Ohio, and the

senator's efforts to highlight Obama's association with a professor

tied to the PLO were amounting to nothing.

Wait a minute ... not so fast. Click.

Things were looking up for McCain, the Fox News Channel hosts

Sean Hannity and Greta Van Susteren told their viewers at roughly

the same time Thursday. He got a boost at an afternoon rally in

Sandusky, Ohio, from none other than Joe the Plumber, who announced

his intention to vote for "a real American, John McCain"; he was

gaining new ground in ever-tightening polls, despite the

overwhelming bias against him in the mainstream news media; and

Obama's association with a professor sympathetic to the PLO was now

at "the center of the election."

On any given night, there are two distinctly, even extremely,

different views of the presidential campaign offered on two of the

three big cable news networks, Fox News Channel and MSNBC, a dual

reality that is reflected on the Internet as well.

On one, polls that are "tightening" are emphasized over those

that are not, and the rest of the news media is portrayed as

papering over questions about Obama's past associations with people

who have purportedly anti-American tendencies, which he has not

answered. ("I feel like we are talking to the Germans after Hitler

comes to power, saying, 'Oh, well, I didn't know,"' Ann Coulter,

the conservative commentator, told Hannity on Thursday.)

On the other, polls that show tightening are largely ignored,

and the race is cast as one between an angry and erratic McCain,

whose desperate, misleading campaign has as low as a 4 percent

chance of beating a cool, confident and deserving Democratic

nominee. ("He's been a good father, a good citizen; he's paid

attention to his country," Chris Matthews, the MSNBC host, said

Wednesday night in addressing those who might be leaning against

Obama based on race. "Give the guy a break and think about voting

for him.")

And, perhaps unsurprisingly, each campaign is often at war

against its television antagonist, just as the networks are at war

with each other.

Many of the mug shots of drug traffickers that

appear in the Mexican press show surly-looking roughnecks glaring

menacingly at the camera. An anti-corruption investigation unveiled

last week in the Mexican capital, however, made it clear that not

everybody enmeshed in the narcotics trade looked the part.

There was a gray-haired, grandfatherly type who was pushing 70,

as well as an avuncular figure with a neatly styled goatee and

wire-rimmed spectacles perched upon his nose. Some of the five men

who found themselves on their way to jail on the front pages of

newspapers wore suits, which made them look more like bureaucrats

than bad guys.

Among the greatest challenges in Mexico's drug war is the fact

that the traffickers fit no type. Their ranks include men and

women, the young and the old. And they can work anywhere: in remote

drug labs, as part of roving assassination squads, even within the

upper reaches of the government.

It has long been known that drug gangs have infiltrated local

police forces. Now it is becoming ever more clear that the problem

does not stop there. The alarming reality is that many public

servants in Mexico are serving both the taxpayers and the

traffickers.

The men in suits, it turns out, were both bureaucrats and bad

guys, corrupt officials high up in an elite unit of the federal

attorney general's office who were feeding secret information to

the feared Beltran Leyva cartel in exchange for suitcases full of

cash.

Their arrest, and the firing of 35 other suspect law-enforcement

officials, represents the most extensive corruption case that this

country, which knows corruption all too well, has ever seen. And it

raises a question that is on the lips of many Mexicans: How does

one know who is dirty and who is clean?

"I'm convinced that to stop the crime, we first have to get it

out of our own house," President Felipe Calderon, who has made

fighting trafficking a crucial part of his presidency, said in a

speech Tuesday, after the arrests were announced.

That house is clearly dirty. There is ample evidence that

Mexicans of all walks of life are willing to join the drug gangs in

exchange for cash, including the farmers who abandon traditional

crops and turn to growing marijuana and the accountants who hide

the narco-traffickers' profits.

OBAMA UNAWARE OF STATUS OF AUNT, CAMPAIGN SAYS Reporting was contributed by Abby Goodnough, Eric Lipton, Michael Luo and Jeff Zeleny.

WASHINGTON -- Responding to a report that a Kenyan relative of

Sen. Barack Obama was living in the United States illegally, his

campaign on Saturday said that he had no knowledge of her

immigration status and that "any and all appropriate laws" should

be followed.

The woman, Zeituni Onyango, referred to as "Auntie Zeituni" in

a passage in Obama's memoir, applied for political asylum in the

United States in 2004, but a federal immigration judge rejected her

request and instructed her to leave the country, said a government

official with knowledge of the case who asked not to be identified

because of its sensitive nature. Onyango's legal status was first

reported by The Associated Press on Friday.

Onyango is the half-sister of Obama's father and is part of an

extensive network of paternal relatives with whom Obama has had

limited contact, his aides said. Obama, who was largely raised by

his maternal grandparents in a modest apartment in Honolulu, first

met Onyango when he traveled to Africa as an adult.

On Saturday, David Axelrod, the chief strategist for Obama, the

Democratic presidential nominee, characterized the senator and

Onyango as having "not a real close relationship." Axelrod said

it had been "years, not months," since the two had spoken.

Onyango attended the ceremony when Obama was sworn in to the

U.S. Senate in 2004, but campaign officials said he had provided no

assistance in getting her a tourist visa and did not know the

details of her stay. At the time of the ceremony, Onyango and

another relative said in interviews that they had flown to the

United States from Kenya to witness the moment. Obama last heard

from her about two years ago when she called to say she was in

Boston, but he did not see her there, the campaign said.

The reports about Onyango came on the last weekend of the

hard-fought presidential campaign. Tucker Bounds, a spokesman for

Sen. John McCain, the Republican nominee, said his campaign had no

comment.

Federal Election Commission records list a Zeituni Onyango on

Orton Marotta Way in South Boston as making a series of

contributions, totaling $265, to the Obama campaign, with the most

recent contribution, $5, made on Sept. 19.

Obama's campaign said the money was being refunded. It is

illegal for foreign citizens and immigrants without green cards to

make political donations. Aides said that the donations came

through the normal channels, and that no one at the campaign knew

that Onyango was related to Obama or of her immigration status.

The Times of London first reported on Thursday that Onyango

lived in "modest circumstances" in public housing in Boston. On

Friday, The AP reported that she was in the country illegally and

that her case had led to an unusual nationwide directive from the

Immigrations and Customs Enforcement requiring that any

deportations before Tuesday's election be approved at least at the

level of regional directors.

Kelly A. Nantel, press secretary for the agency, said she could

not comment on whether a special hold had been put on any

deportations related to the election because it was

"law-enforcement sensitive."

Onyango lives in a disabled-access apartment in South Boston,

and worked as a volunteer resident health advocate for the Boston

Housing Authority from December 2007 and August of this year, the

Times of London reported.

On Saturday, a police officer was stationed outside the low

brick public housing complex where Onyango lives. The officer said

she was not at home and told reporters not to enter the building.

Several neighbors interviewed said they did not know Onyango and

were surprised by the sudden attention to their modest complex on a

narrow street in a mostly working-class neighborhood.

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"It's over," wrote Charles M. Blow on the Op-Ed page of The

New York Times 15 days ago. "I've studied the polls and the

electoral map for months, and I no longer believe that John McCain

can win." Blow allowed as how a serious mistake by Barack Obama,

the re-emergence of the Rev. Jeremiah Wright or a national security

emergency could change the outlook, but he said he was so sure of

his prediction that, if wrong, "I'll take my crow with a six pack

of Liquid-Plumr."

Now that is confidence. But could it be misplaced? My Washington

Redskins, 4-1 three weeks ago, were so heavily favored to beat the

St. Louis Rams, a team winless and in disarray, that it seemed

almost pointless to play the game. The Rams won.

If McCain somehow pulls off a similar upset, Blow will have

plenty of company on the chow line for crow. (Let's forget the

Liquid-Plumr.)

A recent Newsweek cover story explored "How a President Obama

Might Govern a Center-Right Nation." New York magazine's cover

last week carried the headline, "January 20th 2009: What an Obama

presidency would look like." NBC's political director, Chuck Todd,

dismissed McCain's chances this way last week: "It does seem like

it's an uphill climb that's just too steep." Within the Republican

Party and the conservative movement, the recriminations have

already begun.

For reporters and editors at The Times responsible for news

about the election -- as opposed to opinions, like Blow's -- this is

a tricky time. They have to walk a careful line, reporting what

appears to be current reality without predicting an outcome that

nobody can be certain of, no matter what polls indicate. A lot is

at stake: the newspaper's credibility and voters' right to decide

the winner without being discouraged by coverage suggesting that

the result is inevitable.

The Times and other news media got burned once before this year,

in the New Hampshire primary. The coverage, reflecting respected

polls and what reporters thought they saw on the ground, strongly

suggested that Obama, fresh from victory in the Iowa caucuses, was

going to defeat Hillary Clinton. The Times published a front-page

article on the day of the voting that reported on a possible

shake-up in the Clinton campaign staff and quoted an unnamed

supporter as saying, "We're all resolved to the probability that

she's not going to win New Hampshire, and the mood has turned very

despondent -- fatalistic, probably." Two days later, the newspaper

was asking how pollsters and news organizations failed to see the

Clinton victory coming.

Now, Times editors and reporters say they are well aware of the

danger of getting too far in front of events. Still, I think the

coverage over time has created a strong expectation of an Obama

victory and a Democratic sweep in Congress. If it does not happen,

The Times and many other news organizations will have a lot of

explaining to do.

The expectation has been built bit by bit in The Times: an

online video about the fight for Pennsylvania that briefly

mentioned that McCain was relying on Christian voters and then

dwelled at length on Obama's thorough organizing to get out his

supporters, a front-page article about the risks and rewards for

Democrats if they wind up controlling both the White House and

Congress, an online article about whether Sarah Palin turned out to

be a drag on the Republican ticket. That one said McCain might

still win but, "anticipating that he will fall short, the

pre-postmortems have already begun."

Jill Abramson, the managing editor for news, said, "It is

difficult, even when you do the most diligent editing, not to leave

the appearance" of calling the winner. She said editors talk daily

about avoiding stories with "a predictive tone or premise."

Richard Stevenson, the editor in charge of campaign coverage,

said: "There is a great degree of angst now among Republicans

about their prospects for president and down the ballot. There is a

great degree of optimism among Democrats. That all leads you to a

conclusion right now, as a snapshot in time, that Obama is in a

better position than McCain is in. That's the reality, and we're

not going to put our finger on the scale to pretend otherwise."

Adam Nagourney, the chief political correspondent, said, "I

don't think it's over, and I think coverage that suggests it is is

irresponsible." Still, he said, "you've got to reflect what's

going on." What's going on is that Obama is ahead in every

national poll; he is drawing huge crowds and raising record amounts

of money; he is leading or tied in critical states that McCain must

win to have any chance; and McCain is saddled with an apparent

recession, an unpopular war and an unpopular president from his

party. None of which means he cannot win.

Nagourney wrote a front-page article on Oct. 24, under the

headline, "In McCain's Uphill Battle, Winning Is an Option," that

explored the ways the Republican candidate could prevail. The

article said McCain would have to hold Republican states where

Obama has him on the run and either convert a Democratic state like

Pennsylvania or pick up a combination of swing states. "Not easy,

but not impossible either," it said.

The latest Times/CBS News poll on Friday, giving Obama an

11-point lead among likely voters nationally, indicated that McCain

had a long way to go. But presidential elections are not decided by

the national popular vote; they are won state by state, and polls

in critical states have varied widely. At least 10 surveys of

Pennsylvania voters were released last week, showing Obama's lead

anywhere from 14 to 4 points.

Larry Harris of Mason-Dixon Polling and Research, which found

the smallest Obama margin, said, "The cake has not been baked."

Mason-Dixon has found similarly close margins in Florida, Virginia

and other crucial states. Though polls clearly inform the coverage,

The Times has treated them with great and appropriate caution in a

year when an African-American is atop one ticket for the first time

and the outcome could depend on groups -- the young, minorities --

that traditionally do not turn out in proportion to their numbers.

"I have no idea who's going to win," said Janet Elder, the

editor in charge of polling. What the Times/CBS poll can tell you

"is what was on the minds of voters and nonvoters on the days we

called them."

There are only two days left until the next president is

elected. I think The Times would be wise, in the words of my former

colleague Tom Fiedler, dean of the College of Communication at

Boston University, to "forgo the temptation of the horse race"

and focus on issues and what the candidates are saying. That is

just what the paper did Thursday, with articles on their positions

on student loans and summarizing their final stump speeches.

Best not to join Blow on his limb. As Abramson, a former

Washington bureau chief, told me, "What I know from politics is,

anything can happen."

For the last two decades, the easiest way to invoke

dovishness in Israel has been to utter the words "Yossi Beilin."

The politician who navigated mutual recognition between Israel and

the Palestine Liberation Organization in the early 1990s and has

never stopped believing, Beilin has a unique place in the Israeli

political galaxy, admired and reviled for his relentlessness.

So it is of some consequence that last week, as new elections

were announced and the chances of a year-end Palestinian-Israeli

agreement seemed slim to nonexistent, Beilin revealed that he was

leaving parliament 20 years after he was first elected, and

stepping away from political life 31 years after Shimon Peres named

him the Labor Party's spokesman.

Israel's political landscape has changed drastically since the

1970s. Peres, now the country's ceremonial president, and Beilin, a

member of the declining left-wing Meretz Party, have both abandoned

Labor, whose own fortunes have been sinking steadily.

Still, Beilin's decision to leave public life and set up a

private company offers a lens through which to view Israeli

politics. The arc of his career describes the fortunes of

peacemaking. He said last week that he was leaving in triumph,

since his support for an end to occupation of Palestinian

territories and the creation of a Palestinian state, once radical

positions, are today mainstream. There is no denying that shift in

public opinion and official policy. But it is impossible not to see

the move also as a defeat -- of Beilin's understated style in an

overheated environment, and of his goals, with no Palestinian state

on the horizon.

Most successful Israeli politicians resemble Ariel Sharon --

open-shirted men with strong military backgrounds, thick fingers

and quick tempers. But the soft-voiced Beilin, with his Cross gold

pens and carefully knotted ties, was a different species, one that

left Israelis bemused. At his political height, that mattered

little since he was less a leader of the people than a leader of

the leaders, a behind-the-scenes actor who persuaded Prime Minister

Yitzhak Rabin in 1993 that Yasser Arafat wanted peace. That feat

was all the more remarkable because, as Beilin noted in a two-hour

conversation in his office last week, he and Rabin never liked each

other.

It is a tribute to Beilin -- to his powerful intellect and keen

interpersonal skills -- that despite his demure style and lack of

good-old-boy credentials, his political fortunes rose remarkably in

the 1990s as the Oslo peace process that he set in motion took over

Israeli politics. In the Labor primaries at one point, he won the

No. 2 spot. Twice he was appointed a minister. For a while, if you

wanted to know what was next on Israel's geopolitical agenda, you

consulted Beilin.

But when peacemaking reached a dead end and the second intifada

broke out in late 2000, sending Israel into a fury of suicide

bombings and fierce military counterattacks that killed thousands,

Beilin lost his sheen. He was accused of being a snake-oil

salesman, responsible for luring Israelis into the false belief

that they had a peace partner. The exotic fellow with the Ph.D. and

attache case was anathema.

Beilin said he felt betrayed by the Palestinians but that Israel

had mishandled things as well. He argued that nothing essential

about the situation had changed, that a deal remained possible. He

found a new home in Meretz and continued his work. But he never

recovered his place in public life, even after negotiations with

the Palestinians again took center stage. Three years ago, the new

Kadima Party of Sharon and Ehud Olmert came to power, and its

outlook today seems hard to distinguish from his -- although no one

feels a need to give him credit.

When Olmert gave a departing newspaper interview in September,

he sounded exactly like Beilin of the last 20 years. "I could not

have said it better than he did," Beilin mused last week. "I told

him that sometimes I read his speeches and am not sure that I

didn't write them."

But even Beilin recognizes that while his successors may sound

like him, they are not taking his advice on details and tactics. He

recoils, for example, at arguments against yielding any part of

East Jerusalem to the Palestinians. "Israel is going to pay a

crazy price because it is not ready to give up some Palestinian

neighborhoods in Jerusalem that no Jew has ever visited," he said.

"Yet giving up on that means giving up 250,000 Palestinians who

don't want to live under Israeli sovereignty."

He sees two clocks ticking. One is demographic, with the

Jewish-Palestinian ratio in Israel and the Palestinian areas

nearing 50-50. The other is geopolitical, what he calls the growing

threats and hatred toward Israel in the region. "Our behavior,"

he said, "is costing us a huge price because we are giving the

fanatics the best pretext." Beilin, now 60, is starting an Israeli

version of Kissinger Associates and says he plans to stay involved

as a private citizen in peace efforts, even as he promotes

businesses across the Israeli-Arab divide.

Among those who favor peace, it is widely feared that the most

Israel will ever offer the Palestinians is less than the

Palestinians will ever accept. Still, Beilin argues that there is

simply no other choice than a deal.

He notes, with approval, that security cooperation in the West

Bank between Israel and the Palestinians is growing, with Jordanian

and American help. He argues for a peace accord as soon as

possible, followed by a cease-fire with Hamas in Gaza, despite what

he considers its vicious ideology.

He says he fervently hopes for a victory by Barack Obama -- but

also that the economic and other crises don't overwhelm the new

administration. "God forbid if this conflict is marginalized," he

said. "If we are marginalized, it will be to kill each other."

Beilin's colleagues on the left, meanwhile, publicly mourn his

departure and worry about its symbolism, but also recognize that it

reflects reality. "He saw the promised land," wrote Gideon Levy,

a leftist columnist in Haaretz, "but he did not reach it."

PAPA'S GIFT TO THE FIRE-IN-THE-BELLY CROWD (The Week in Review) (NOTE TO INTERNATIONAL CLIENTS: For international clients' use by special arrangement only. Asian and European points: contact Philippe Hertzberg in Paris for details and prices, phone: 47-42-17-11; FAX: 47-42-80-44; e-mail: phertzberg@nytimes.com. Latin American points: contact Isabel Amorim Sicherle in Sao Paulo, phone/fax: 55-11-3023-3331; e-mail: sicheia@nytimes.com.) David Margolick is a contributing editor at Conde Nast Portfolio. Robert Jordan is a left-wing radical, or was modeled after

several of them. He palled around with terrorists, or at least

people whom many Americans, of his era and beyond, so thought. His

specialty is blowing things up for a cause. He is at minimum a

socialist, someone so eager to spread wealth around that he'd lose

his life to do it.

Robert Jordan is also honorable, steadfast, selfless,

determined, stoic, generous, tolerant, courageous, conscientious,

forgiving, altruistic, tender, wise, loyal, independent, taciturn,

disciplined, dutiful, patient, exacting, empathetic, idealistic,

introspective, charismatic and handsome. No wonder the beautiful

Maria falls for him the first time she sees him, and the earth

moves beneath the two the first time they make love.

Robert Jordan is the hero of Ernest Hemingway's "For Whom the

Bell Tolls," an American fighting Franco's Fascists in the Spanish

Civil War. And despite his radical roots, he's a literary sensation

during this election season. Sen. Barack Obama told Rolling Stone

that Hemingway's novel, published in 1940, is one of the three

books that most inspired him. As for Sen. John McCain, few men,

real or fictional, have influenced him as much as Jordan.

McCain begins his 2002 book, "Worth the Fighting For" (a

phrase lifted from Jordan's dying soliloquy), with an extraordinary

paean to the character, whom he first encountered at age 12. Having

found two four-leaf clovers, young John pulled "For Whom the Bell

Tolls" off his father's bookcase so he could press them. He and

Robert have been together ever since, even in Hanoi. "I knew that

if he were in the next cell to mine, he would be stoic, he would be

strong, he would be tough, he wouldn't give up," McCain said in a

radio interview in 2002. "And Robert would expect me to do the

same thing."

America never embraced the more than 3,000 of its sons and

daughters -- many of them Communists and more than half of whom were

killed -- who fought in Spain between 1936 and 1938. Rather, they

were persecuted, subpoenaed and passed over for jobs when they came

home. As late as 1984, Ronald Reagan said that most Americans still

believed they had fought on the wrong side. The few veterans of

that fight still alive remain unapologetically to the left; McCain

won't find many votes among them. "He's the very antithesis of

what we stood for," said Mark Billings, a mechanic during the

Spanish Civil War who now lives in El Cerrito, Calif. (He says he

is only guardedly optimistic about Obama.)

How is it, then, that the radicals' literary stand-in appeals to

two mainstream presidential candidates who agree on little else?

Well, take an author who was politically skeptical, commercially

savvy and damned good. Throw in a movie starring Gary Cooper and

Ingrid Bergman. Add ignorance or amnesia, garnish with the passage

of time, and you get a role model that comfortably serves two.

"Both candidates regard themselves as paladins of democracy,

and would be reluctant to acknowledge that their 'hero' might have

been a Communist," said Paul Preston of the London School of

Economics, an authority on the Spanish Civil War. James Benet of

Forestville, Calif., who drove ambulances in Spain, agreed: "If

Robert Jordan were alive he'd be way to the left of those guys, and

he'd be a lot harder for them to admire."

Hemingway never revealed on whom he based Jordan, who taught

Spanish at the University of Montana before heading to Spain. Cecil

Eby of the University of Michigan proposed Robert Merriman, who,

like Jordan, was a Westerner and a teacher (he had studied

economics in Moscow). But Merriman, who was killed in 1938, was

never a guerrilla behind enemy lines, as Jordan was. Three others

whom veterans speculate could have been models -- Michael Jimenez,

William Aalto, and Irving Goff -- were, in fact, guerrillas; Goff, a

New Yorker who died in 1989, actually blew up bridges, but unlike

Merriman, he never met Hemingway. (He once joked that he never met

Ingrid Bergman, either; if he had, he said, "I might still be

there.") Large swaths of Jordan, including his "red, black,

blinding" temper and his father's suicide, clearly come from

Hemingway himself.

Among the Americans in what later became known as the Abraham

Lincoln Brigade, few claimed to be Jordan's prototype. Most hated

the book, in which Hemingway trashed the people leading the fight

for the embattled Spanish Republic, particularly the Soviets. In

The Daily Worker, Mike Gold dismissed Hemingway as a rich,

alcoholic voyeur, "a sportsman and a tourist." The book

represented "a picture so drastically mutilated and distorted as

to slander the cause for which we fought," the Veterans of the

Abraham Lincoln Brigade declared in an open letter to Hemingway.

And they hated Robert Jordan, mostly for what Peter Carroll,

author of "The Odyssey of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade," called

his "extreme individualism." Jordan was no ideologue. "Nobody

owned his mind, nor his faculties for seeing and hearing,"

Hemingway wrote. When Jordan dreams of Marx, it is Groucho, not

Karl; he fantasizes about taking Maria to see "A Night at the

Opera" in Madrid once the fighting stops.

Allen Josephs, a Hemingway scholar at the University of West

Florida, says Hemingway created Jordan as a Communist, but changed

his affiliation to "anti-Fascist" after his publisher, Charles

Scribner, objected. The switch fit Hemingway's own politics and,

not coincidentally, made Jordan more commercially acceptable. (So

too, surely, did making him a stately Westerner rather than a New

York Jew, as so many of the Americans Hemingway encountered in

Spain were.)

Jordan's willingness to give his life to a cause greater than

himself would appeal to anyone from McCain's military background,

said William Braasch Watson, a Hemingway scholar and retired

professor of history at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

And that appeal, Watson added, would only have grown in Hanoi,

where Jordan's long interior monologues -- questioning himself, his

character, his future -- would have anticipated McCain's

experiences.

Watson said he could see Jordan's appeal to Obama, too. "Like

Jordan, Obama's a person with a mission and a larger vision," he

said. "He, too, seems remarkably self-contained -- somewhat aloof,

even -- and he's driven to accomplish his goal."

If McCain does not win on Election Day, he may have even more

reason to identify with Robert Jordan. Part of what Jordan has

taught him, McCain has said, is to "accept your fate, accept your

fate." But no matter who prevails come Tuesday, one winner is

already clear: the much-out-of-fashion Hemingway himself. In the

political-literary world, he's this year's Comeback Kid.

Place an opponent in his path, and Stephon Marbury will skip

past him. Place an entire defense in front of him, and Marbury will

find a seam to the basket. From his earliest days as a basketball

prodigy in Coney Island, Marbury has been able to dribble, pass or

shoot his way out of any problem on the court.

Yet Marbury finds his career at a crossroads, and he is missing

the most vital tool in a troubled athlete's arsenal: an agent.

Marbury has not employed one in eight years, and it is probably

hurting his ability to break free of the Knicks and start fresh.

That is, at least, the view of a number of agents surveyed last

week. And it is shared by many NBA team executives, who are used to

resolving player conflicts by working through their paid advocates.

"You need someone who is looking out for your interests but is

also assessing your situation on multiple levels, from your

perspective," said Lon Babby, a Washington-based NBA agent, whose

clients include Tim Duncan, Grant Hill and Ray Allen. "Sometimes

you lose the forest for the trees if you don't have someone who can

step back and analyze things with some distance and perspective."

Babby is not privy to Marbury's situation and was speaking

generally about the business. But he is well versed in the sort of

player-team standoff that now threatens Marbury's career.

The Knicks no longer want Marbury around. Coach Mike D'Antoni

placed him on the inactive list on Friday night, and Marbury has

most likely played his last game in a Knicks uniform. Yet he

remains on the roster because of a practically untradeable contract

and his refusal to negotiate a buyout. Marbury is set to earn $21.9

million this season, the last year of his deal.

Such stalemates are not uncommon in the NBA. The typical

solution has the parties agree to a slightly reduced payout, on the

premise that the player will recoup the loss when he signs with

another team. Often, the player's agent has suitors lined up, and

concrete offers in hand.

But Marbury has not had a certified player agent since June

2000, when he parted ways with David Falk. (Falk said he resigned;

Marbury said he fired him.) Marbury has a rocky history with

agents. He fired his first agent, Eric Fleisher, in 1998.

Marbury represented himself when he signed his last contract, a

four-year, $76 million extension with the Phoenix Suns. That deal

was consummated in October 2003, three months before the Suns

traded him to the Knicks.

Because the Suns offered Marbury the maximum allowed under NBA

rules, the talks were fairly simple.

"There wasn't no need for me to use an agent," Marbury said

last week. "There wasn't no need for me to give somebody 4 percent

or 3 percent of my money when I can go do the same thing that they

would go do."

Asked if he needed an agent now, to help him find a new team,

Marbury said: "I don't want to go nowhere. I want to stay right

here."

He declined to say whether anyone else was advising him and

would not answer other questions on the matter.

It is rare for players to represent themselves. Only eight

current NBA players are without an agent, according to a database

compiled by DraftExpress.com. The group includes Gilbert Arenas,

who negotiated his contract with the Washington Wizards last

summer.

Money matters aside, Marbury needs representation for some

practical reasons, said several agents, speaking anonymously

because Marbury is not their client. The most basic reason is this:

Teams that want to sign Marbury have no one to call to gauge his

interest.

A good agent would know which teams need a veteran point guard

and what they are willing to pay. With the Knicks' permission, the

agent could solicit tentative offers before negotiating a buyout --

or even attempt to broker a trade.

Perhaps most critically, an agent could convince Marbury that

accepting less money now is in his best interest because he can

recoup the loss next summer as a free agent. In general, players

are poor judges of their value, sometimes overestimating and

sometimes underestimating it. Two agents invoked the adage that a

man who represents himself has a fool for a client.

"He's trying to answer all the questions for himself, and he

has no sounding board," a West Coast-based agent said.

If Marbury stands firm, refuses a buyout and sits on the bench

all season, his market value can only decline, the agents said.

Marbury turns 32 in February. He has not played a full season since

2004-05. And he has a history of clashing with coaches and

teammates.

"You tell him there's no future in New York for you," an East

Coast-based agent said. "You have two choices: You can buy out of

the contract and go somewhere else and get a fresh start, or you

can be stubborn and sit at home and tell people how great you were

in the '90s."

The absence of a paid advocate certainly hurt Marbury in past

skirmishes with Knicks management. Last year, Marbury abandoned the

team during a trip after Isiah Thomas, then the coach, threatened

to bench him. Marbury was docked one game's pay. He filed a

grievance with the help of the players union, claiming that Thomas

gave him permission to leave.

An agent might have advised Marbury to stay put while trying to

resolve the dispute. A more aggressive agent might have immediately

demanded a trade or a buyout.

Agents also advise players on personal finance, business

investments, charity work and medical issues. Most have strong

relationships with general managers and know how to sell them a

difficult player. Agents also help make their clients' cases to the

news media.

More than anything, an agent serves as a slightly detached

adviser, who can keep a player focused on the bigger picture. But

the advice is valuable only if the player listens.

"Sometimes," the East Coast agent said, "you have to tell the

client, 'Wake up and smell the coffee."'

On Tuesday the nation's fretful, hopeful voters will finally

have their say, and none of the rigorously calibrated polls or

demographically incisive analysts out there can tell us with any

certainty what will happen.

Will one candidate win by millions, or lose by thousands? If

there is a clear victor, will he be the first black American ever

elected to the presidency, or the oldest American ever to win a

first term?

We don't need to know the answers to be certain of this much: no

matter the outcome, it will be the climax of one of the most

extraordinary presidential elections in this nation's 232-year

history, and "the first" and "the oldest" capture only some of

what has made it so remarkable.

Whether judged by the milestones reached, the paradigms

challenged, the passions stirred or simply the numbers -- the 85

percent of Americans who believe the country is on the wrong track,

or the record-demolishing $640 million fundraising mark that Barack

Obama passed by mid-October -- the election of 2008 actually

warrants the sorts of adjectives and phrases that are often just

journalistic tics: epochal, pivotal, historic, once-in-a-lifetime.

It's been so rich with precedent and incident -- and so very,

very long -- that we have, if anything, undervalued and even lost

sight of its significance at times. In these final hours there's

some sense in pausing, pulling back and taking the broad measure of

a contest that's sure to affect not only this country's civic life

but also its emotional and psychological landscape for some time to

come.

Much of its impact boils down, yes, to race and gender, Obama

and Hillary Rodham Clinton and Sarah Palin, who could become the

nation's first female vice president.

In this fiercely waged election, long-standing barriers were

challenged and toppled, at times to the seeming surprise of the

person doing the toppling.

Think back. When Obama took the stage in Iowa after his victory

in the state's caucuses last January, he was not yet the favorite

for the Democratic nomination, and he was a long way from becoming

the general-election frontrunner.

In videotape from that night, you can see and sense an

astonishment and exhilaration -- in him, around him -- that seem

almost quaint just 10 months later.

"They said this day would never come," he tells a euphoric

Iowa crowd, and not just his eyes but the whole of him twinkles,

gleams. "They said our sights were set too high."

While he's talking specifically about himself and his campaign

troops, it's impossible not to hear in his words a statement about

all minorities in America, for whom the week-by-week,

month-by-month advance of his candidacy would hold an especially

powerful message.

The writer Ta-Nehisi Coates observed that as Obama's quest for

the presidency caught fire, "I knew, for the first time in my

life, that it would be a good year to be black."

"Consider this fact: the most famous black man in America isn't

dribbling a ball or clutching a microphone," Coates continued, in

a recent essay for Time magazine. "He has no prison record. He has

not built a career on four-letter words."

"Words like hope, change and progress might seem like naive

campaign sloganeering in a dark age," Coates further wrote. "But

think of the way those words ring for a people whose forebears

marched into billy clubs and dogs, whose ancestors fled north by

starlight, feeling the moss on the backs of trees."

Over the course of a campaign that was part therapy session,

part consciousness-raising seminar, a few of the principal players

took on meanings much, much larger than themselves. Obama and

Clinton became vessels for the aspirations and frustrations of

entire classes of aggrieved Americans. Their journeys encouraged

the airing of hurts and the discussion of difficult issues.

In Philadelphia in March, Obama delivered a set-piece speech

that sought to do nothing less than explain centuries of racial

enmity and move Americans past it. In New Hampshire in January,

Clinton welled with tears that became catalysts for a charged

examination of the treatment of women in American life.

Was sexism more potent than racism? This was the sort of

impossible question raised on television shows and in newspapers,

at restaurant counters and kitchen tables, revolving around Clinton

in winter and spring, Palin in summer and fall.

For many of Clinton's supporters she was Everywoman, called on

to prove her toughness without wholly abandoning her softness,

asked in the end to yield once more to an ambitious, impatient man.

Come Tuesday, will these supporters be haunted anew by what might

have been? And will they be haunted more by an Obama victory or an

Obama defeat?

How will some younger voters react if McCain prevails? Or some

older ones if Obama does? In recent weeks, the ire and ugly

catcalls of some supporters of the McCain-Palin ticket have

suggested a division in this election that goes well beyond tax

policy or Iraq strategy.

There's more generational, cultural and stylistic difference

between McCain and Obama, ages 72 and 47, than between rivals in

most presidential contests over the last half-century.

Bill Clinton and the first President Bush were three years

closer in age, and while Clinton's victory marked the ascension of

baby boomers, Obama's election would be emblematic of something

more profound: that the multicultural, postracial society so often

discussed in the news media but so seldom affirmed in public life

was now, literally, the face of our nation. Clinton was Fleetwood

Mac. Obama is India.Arie.

Candidates in many past presidential contests lacked life

stories as compelling as those of Obama, the son of a man from

Kenya and a woman from Kansas, and McCain, who endured years of

imprisonment and torture in Vietnam.

But these two weren't the only vivid characters in a campaign

that, purely as narrative, proved sensational.

Who would have believed, at its start, that Mike Huckabee was

going to outlast Rudy Giuliani? That John Edwards' pledges of

support for his seriously ill wife were going to give way to a

public apology for infidelity?

That Obama would choose a running mate who once described him,

in terms of plausible aspirants to the White House, as "the first

mainstream African-American who is articulate and bright and

clean?"

That McCain would choose a running mate who could field-dress a

moose and would take the stage at the Republican convention with a

pregnant, unwed teenage daughter in tow?

Perhaps that's one reason voters paid such close attention. In

any case, the 2008 election contradicted any and all claims that

Americans were alienated from politics.

Although cable news was supposed to be moribund, programs

devoted to politics got some of their best ratings in years.

"Saturday Night Live" sailed temporarily into prime time on the

winds of political parody. An average of about 34.5 million viewers

a night tuned into the Republican convention, versus 22.6 million

in 2004. For the Democratic convention, viewership rose to an

average of 30.2 million from 20.4 million four years ago.

"We're seeing record levels of interest in the campaign," said

Michael P. McDonald, a senior fellow at the Brookings Institution

and an associate professor at George Mason University who studies

voting patterns. McDonald cited evidence like new voter

registration and responses in polls that asked how interested in

the election voters were.

And he extrapolated from that to predict turnout of 64 percent,

which would be the highest since 1908, when, he said, 65.7 percent

of those Americans eligible to vote did. He said that just under 64

percent voted in the Kennedy-Nixon election of 1960, adding that

2008 turnout could top that.

One of the most striking measures of voters' engagement has been

Obama's fundraising, built in large measure on small donations made

over the Internet. The final total may well exceed $700 million. In

the 2004 election, the presidential candidates combined raised $684

million before their conventions, after which President Bush and

Sen. John F. Kerry took public financing.

Only McCain did that this time, and as a condition has had to

limit his spending between the convention and Election Day to $84

million. Obama broke an early promise to take public financing and

thus evaded such limits. He spent $21 million on television

advertising alone during one week in October.

If Obama wins by a wide margin on Tuesday, that victory will

reflect more than strides in race relations, thirst for change and

the strength of his appeal. It will also reflect the power of

money, and it could usher in the end of general-election candidates

participating in the public financing system.

An Obama victory could redraw the political map, patches of red

becoming blue or at least purple, swaths of the South no longer

conceded to Republicans from the start.

So many other assumptions have been upended already. A black man

with an exotic-sounding name wasn't supposed to flourish in an

overwhelmingly white state like Iowa, but Obama beat Edwards and

Clinton there by 8 percentage points.

Someone who failed to win Democratic primaries in New Hampshire,

Ohio, Pennsylvania, California, New York and New Jersey wouldn't

seem to be on a successful path to the Democratic nomination, but

Obama was.

He hasn't fit neatly into the usual paradigms, and that could

manifest itself in some way in Tuesday's voting -- if this election,

like the 1980 race between President Jimmy Carter and Ronald

Reagan, will reveal some new political dynamics and yield some new

political alignments.

Are we still the center-right country we've heard so much about

over the last decade? Obama's success even to this point calls that

into question, just as McCain's triumph in the Republican primaries

raises doubts about the putative sway of religious conservatives

within -- and beyond -- his party. The 2008 election suggests an

evolving body politic, not a palsied one.

Then again it's hard to tell, because what may ultimately be

most extraordinary about this election is its context. The country

is facing what is widely regarded as the greatest financial crisis

since the Depression, and that's not just election-season

hyperbole. America is fighting wars in both Iraq and Afghanistan.

And its claim to global leadership is being undercut by Russia,

which defied the will of the West in invading Georgia last summer,

and China, which staged an Olympics that was the envy of the world.

The 2008 presidential election stands out from so many before

it, and will have repercussions for so many after it, because it's

a decision about who can guide us through the worst of times. We're

in trouble if we get it wrong. And maybe even if we get it right.

After nearly a decade of running marathons -- 19 races that add

up to 497.8 pounding miles -- Catherine Ndereba insists there is one

thing she cannot live without.

Not her coach. Not her agent. Not even the occasional Philly

cheese steak, her reward for training 90 to 100 miles a week.

It is her massage therapist.

"When I was younger, I never used to have a lot of fatigue in

my muscles -- never," Ndereba, 36, said recently in Norristown,

Pa., her training base in the United States. "But now, if I don't

have a massage at least twice a week, I feel like I can't move.

"I don't feel old; I still feel like I'm in my 20s. But, yes,

sometimes, there are a few signs that my body doesn't agree."

Ndereba, a four-time winner of the Boston Marathon and two-time

Olympic silver medalist for Kenya, is among the 41 elite women in

the field for Sunday's New York City Marathon. And many of them

have probably noticed uncharacteristically sore muscles or creaky

joints.

Their average age is about 33, one of the oldest groups of elite

women, if not the oldest, in the history of the race, organizers

said. Two-thirds are 30 or older, including the favorites Paula

Radcliffe, 34, and Gete Wami, 33. Nearly half are 35 and older.

"It's unusual to see so many really good women of that age, but

this is probably a fluke that they are all so good at once," Mary

Wittenberg, the race director, said. "I do expect to see a

changing of the guard because we are probably looking at the end of

a superstar generation."

"Gete, Paula, Catherine are in a class by themselves, but time

is ticking," she added. "They are probably getting close to the

point of diminishing returns."

Those runners are not pioneers in racing marathons -- and often

winning -- into their 30s. At that age, many distance runners are in

their prime, some experts say, because their bodies are accustomed

to the mileage required to train for the 26.2-mile races.

Many also started running marathons only after they had built a

foundation in shorter races, to prevent burnout and injuries. A

widespread belief is that elite runners have a limited number of

marathons in them, so they also tend to use their time in

competition wisely.

Grete Waitz was 35 in 1988 when she won her ninth New York City

Marathon. The year before, the British runner Priscilla Welch was a

seemingly ancient 42 when she crossed the finish line first.

This year in Beijing, Constantina Tomescu of Romania won the

Olympic marathon at 38. In September, Irina Mikitenko, 36, won the

Berlin Marathon. She began running marathons last year, she said,

because she was mentally tough enough to do so after having two

children.

To some, the current wave of older women succeeding in marathons

makes sense. More women are running the distance these days, they

say, so more they are training at a higher level.

More women are also sticking with the marathon because of the

economic incentive, said Ryan Lamppa, a researcher for Running USA,

a nonprofit organization that tracks trends in distance running.

Top runners like Radcliffe and her peers consistently receive

six-figures appearance fees from big-city marathons, agents and

race directors said. So a hefty payday is guaranteed just for

showing up and finishing. Five of the women in Sunday's field have

made at least $1 million in prize money in their careers, according

to the Association of Road Racing Statisticians. The top 10 women

Sunday will also receive prize money.

First place is worth $130,000 of the $301,000 purse, second

place $65,000, third $40,000, fourth $25,000, fifth $15,000 and so

on down to $1,000 for 10th place. In addition, bonuses ranging from

$5,000 to $70,000 are paid for reaching certain time standards.

Twenty years ago, though, the total women's purse in the New

York City Marathon was $134,500, organizers said, and a decade ago,

it was $165,000.

"If the sport was back in its amateur days, you definitely

wouldn't see as many 30-plus marathoners than you do now," Lamppa

said. "I don't think they're staying in the sport purely for the

love of it. It's a nice gig if you can do it long enough. But, you

know, it's a painful gig, too."

To make a decent living at marathon running in your 30s and 40s,

Lamppa added, athletes must remain fast enough to finish in the top

10. That could be a challenge for an aging athlete.

Hirofumi Tanaka, an exercise researcher at the University of

Texas, said endurance athletes had the edge over sprinters as time

marched on. He said sprinters peaked at 22 to 24, and marathoners

peaked at 28 to 31. Some marathoners reach peak performance around

35, he added. The trick is finding the way to extend that time

frame.

High-level marathoners should be able to do so, said Vonda

Wright, a professor of orthopedics at the University of Pittsburgh.

In a study published in March that looked at male and female

American masters record-holders in distances from 100 to 10,000

meters for the past 50 years, Wright said she found less than a 1

percent decline per year in performance as they aged from 30 to 50.

The slow-twitch muscles needed in endurance sports do not

decline significantly until athletes reach their late 30s or early

40s, she said. But fast-twitch muscles that sprinters rely on begin

deteriorating in their late 20s and early 30s.

"If you are a runner in your 30s or 40s, it's really a sweet

spot to be in," Wright said. "You've trained longer, so your

heart works more efficiently and your lungs exchange oxygen more

efficiently. You know your race, you know your body.

"Biology might not have taken over yet, so you don't see that

muscle physiology decline that would prevent them from being

amazing."

That decline, however, could happen any day -- and there is no

telling when the athlete will notice it.

Waitz, one of the best female marathoners, said from the time

she was 35 until she retired at 38, she could sense her body

changing.

"The end sneaked up on me," she said.

After 10 years and 20 marathons, Waitz said, it took longer to

recover from races. She became injured more easily. But she said

the change in the mental aspect of the marathon, not the physical

part, prompted her retirement.

Waitz said she did not feel as hungry to win as she once had,

partly because she sensed that her body was not as strong.

"I always say that there are two ages of a person: a running

age and your biological age," she said. "So after all those

marathons, I was old as a runner but still young as a person. I

still felt fast, but I was not. It was time for me to go."

Ndereba, a marathoner since 1999, said she had no idea when she

would retire.

"Now why would I quit if I can still finish in the top five?"

Ndereba said. "Why would I quit when there are people out there,

so many people, who would want to run like Catherine, but they

can't? I will run until I feel I can't do it anymore."

With her massage therapist, she said, she still feels much

faster and stronger than she did at 26, when she made her marathon

debut in Boston.

Ndereba said she was in so much pain after finishing sixth in

that race that she needed to be carted off in a wheelchair.

"So now, I don't need a wheelchair when I finish," she said

with a smile. "It shows that I'm only getting better, right?"

Now that Philadelphia has phulfilled its phantasies, it's time

for sports sympathizers to turn their bleeding hearts to other

cities: Cleveland and Atlanta, to name two.

During the World Series, the story line was as much about

Philadelphia as it was about the Phillies, who had not won it since

1980. The world was continually reminded that Philly's teams in

Major League Baseball, the NFL, the NBA and the NHL had not won a

championship since the 76ers, with Julius Erving and Moses Malone,

took the NBA title in 1983.

Poor Philly, no championships over that quarter-century, but

nobody in Cleveland and Atlanta was feeling sorry for all those

Philly phans.

The Indians haven't won the World Series since 1948, when Bob

Feller and Bob Lemon were in their rotation. The Browns have never

been to the Super Bowl. The Cavaliers haven't won the NBA title,

and in their only two NHL seasons three decades ago, the Barons

finished last in their division.

For all of the Braves' 15 division titles in Atlanta, they won

only one World Series, in 1995 (against the Indians). The Falcons

haven't won the Super Bowl, the Hawks haven't captured the NBA

championship and the Thrashers haven't lifted the Stanley Cup.

Before the Super Bowl era, the Browns won the 1964 NFL

championship and three titles in the 1950s, when Paul Brown was

their coach and Otto Graham their quarterback; they also swept all

four All-America Football Conference titles. The Indians won

another World Series, in 1920.

In Atlanta, the Falcons at least reached the Super Bowl once but

lost. The Braves got to the World Series four other times, but lost

to Minnesota once, Toronto once and the Yankees twice.

Only five cities/regions have had title teams in each of the

four major sports: New York, Boston/New England, Chicago, Detroit

and, surprise, Philadelphia.

In addition to the success of the Phillies and the 76ers, the

Eagles, with center-linebacker Chuck Bednarik often playing both

ways, ruled the NFL in 1960 and also in 1948 and 1949. The Flyers,

alias the Broad Street Bullies, hoisted the Stanley Cup in 1974 and

1975. In the long ago, Connie Mack's baseball Athletics won five

World Series.

Some cities haven't celebrated much. San Francisco, for example.

The 49ers won five Super Bowls (four with Joe Montana at

quarterback, one with Steve Young), but the Giants never won the

World Series. Across the bay in Oakland, the Athletics won four

World Series, the Raiders two Super Bowls, and the Golden State

Warriors took the 1975 NBA title.

Of the cities that have celebrated all four championships, New

York has had the most success, especially in baseball: 26 World

Series titles for the Yankees, two for the Mets, five for the

Giants before they departed for San Francisco and one for the

borough of Brooklyn before Walter O'Malley absconded to Los Angeles

with the Dodgers.

Add four trays of Super Bowl rings (three Giants, one Jets),

four earlier NFL titles for the Giants, two NBA titles for the

Knicks, and the Rangers' four Stanley Cups, notably in 1994 after a

54-year drought. If you include the metropolitan area franchises,

the Islanders won consecutive Cups from 1980 to 1983, and the

Devils won three.

Long before the Red Sox' two recent World Series victories, the

Patriots' three Super Bowls under coach Bill Belichick and the

Celtics' triumph in June, Boston bragged about its record 15 NBA

championships featuring Bill Russell, Bob Cousy and Larry Bird; as

well as the Bruins' five Stanley Cups, the latest in 1970 and 1972

when Bobby Orr dazzled.

Chicago keeps seeking sympathy for the Cubs, who haven't won the

World Series since 1908, and the Blackhawks, who haven't won the

Stanley Cup since 1961. But Michael Jordan and the Bulls dunked six

NBA titles in eight seasons during the '90s, the White Sox won the

Series in 2005, and Chicago's pro football teams won 10 NFL titles

before the 1985 Bears dominated the Super Bowl.

The Red Wings' four recent Stanley Cups have emphasized that

Detroit is Hockeytown. The Lions have never been to the Super Bowl,

but they won three NFL titles in the '50s and another in 1935. The

Tigers won four World Series and the Pistons took three NBA titles,

two with the Bad Boys in and 1989 and 1990.

In Los Angeles, the Lakers, under Pat Riley and Phil Jackson,

won nine NBA titles, the Dodgers five World Series, and the Rams,

although no longer there, were the 1951 NFL champions, but its only

Super Bowl winners, the 1983 Raiders, were on lend-lease from

Oakland. The hockey Kings, even with Wayne Gretzky, lost in their

only Stanley Cup finals.

So if you cried a river for Philadelphia, either the Delaware or

the Schuylkill, you now may want to empty the Cuyahoga in Cleveland

or the Chattahoochee in Atlanta.

Leave it to Jon Stewart to cut to the chase.

Interviewing Sen. Barack Obama last week as the campaign rolled

toward its conclusion, the host of "The Daily Show" observed that

being president today looks considerably less appealing than when

Obama launched his candidacy two years ago.

"Is there a sense that you don't want this?" Stewart asked.

"That you may look at the country and think, 'You know, when I

thought I was going to get this, it was a relatively new car. Now

look at it!"'

Obama laughed and gave an earnest answer about having an impact,

but did not really address the larger question. Just why would

anyone want this job, anyway? What is it about the psyche of

would-be presidents that makes them wake up in the morning and

think it would be gratifying to take on the troubles of the world,

to assume responsibility for the lives of 300 million Americans at

a time when their lives are so precarious?

And particularly now, in this moment of maximum crisis. Millions

are in danger of losing their homes. Hundreds of thousands have

lost their jobs. The national debt is skyrocketing. The Taliban is

rampaging through Afghanistan. Pakistan is a nuclear-armed

shambles. The country is still at war in Iraq and trying to avoid

it with Iran and North Korea. Russia has invaded a neighbor. And

much of the world hates us.

"This is an unprecedented mess," said Ted Sorensen, the former

counselor to President John F. Kennedy. By many measures, no

incoming president will have inherited quite such a sack of trouble

in decades. Yet neither Obama nor Sen. John McCain has expressed

second thoughts.

"You have to not only have a sense of confidence but a pretty

big ego -- you have to almost be a fanatic," Sorensen said. "You

have to look at yourself and everybody else running for the office

and think not only are you as good as they are, but you and your

ideas are better."

And that you can fix what nobody else can fix. The ambition and

drive that propel politicians to high office at a time of

tribulations may convince them that the country's deep problems are

simply successes waiting to happen.

"Part of self-confidence is believing you have special gifts

and how selfish of you not to use them to full capacity," said

Alvin S. Felzenberg, a University of Pennsylvania scholar and

author of "The Leaders We Deserved (and a Few We Didn't)." "It's

not a job for ordinary mortals. It may have been fairer in the

Middle Ages to have them walk over hot coals than what we put them

through now."

Of course, this is not yet the hot-coals part of the program.

For two more days, Obama and McCain can still enjoy the affirmation

of the crowds. To see either on the campaign trail last week

surrounded by fans proclaiming everlasting love was to taste the

elixir of adulation that attracts politicians to the presidency

even now.

"That's a pretty heavy trip," said Jerrold M. Post, a

professor of political psychology at George Washington University.

"The nature of the relationship between leaders and the people

around them is very important. It's a very heady experience, and

something happens when you become president."

Yet even in the best of times, the presidency can be an enormous

burden. Every American soldier killed abroad, every house

foreclosed on at home, every monster storm from the Gulf of Mexico

to the Indian Ocean ultimately becomes his responsibility.

Increasingly, that burden has come to define the job as much as

the glamour. Parents get that. A CNN/Opinion Research Corp. poll in

2006 found that only 41 percent of mothers and fathers would want

their child to grow up to be president, compared with 58 percent

who would not. And that was before things got as crazy as they are

now.

Think about those before-and-after pictures of presidents

leaving office. Let's look back at how the vast majority in the

modern era have left the White House. President Kennedy was

assassinated. Lyndon B. Johnson and Richard M. Nixon were driven

from power. Gerald R. Ford, Jimmy Carter and George H.W. Bush were

repudiated by the voters. Bill Clinton departed after his most

intimate personal failings were excavated for public examination.

George W. Bush is leaving as the most unpopular commander in chief

in the history of polling.

Perhaps the only president lately who left office reasonably

intact was Ronald Reagan, who recovered from the Iran-contra

scandal and found himself revered as time passed.

"The thing about Reagan is, he was not stuck on himself," said

David M. Abshire, a special counselor to Reagan and now the

president of the Center for the Study of the Presidency. "He was

not an ideologue. And his sense of humor was always on himself. In

dealing with him, I was never dealing with a big ego."

Those who think the office does not wear down presidents do not

see them with their guard down. Critics consider President Bush

immune to the devastation of the war he launched, but he has met

privately with hundreds of relatives of slain soldiers, many of

whom later described him weeping and genuinely anguished by their

pain.

For all that, Bush still has that gene that makes presidents

want to be president even in dark moments. He told aides and

businesspeople this fall that if the financial crisis was going to

happen, he was glad it happened on his watch so he could put the

country on a path to improvement by the time his successor takes

office.

In some ways, Obama has expressed similar sentiments. His

advisers said they warn him every day that he may be winning a pile

of manure if he beats McCain on Tuesday. But they also hope that

things are so bad, they can only get better.

Obama's answer to Stewart suggested that he sees an opportunity

for an ambitious program, that when people are struggling for

answers they are less resistant to change.

"I actually think this is the time to want to be president,"

he said. "You know, if you went into public service thinking that

you could have an impact, now is the time where you can have an

impact."

Ultimately, Felzenberg said, the motivation may come down to

posterity. Every president sees himself on Mount Rushmore. "Maybe

you have enough gumption to think you can defy the gods and come

out intact," he said. "I guess you have an opportunity for

immortality. People like me still talk about Lincoln and Jefferson

as if they were still living now, and in a way they are. Every time

we talk about them, we bring them back to life."

In a sign that high-end collectibles may withstand the economic

downturn, a near-record price for a rare postage stamp was set last

week at an auction in New York City.

A pink 3-cent stamp issued in 1868 and depicting George

Washington was bought on Wednesday by an anonymous bidder for

$1,035,000, including commission. Stamps of this design are common

and usually worth only a few dollars; but what made this one worth

a million dollars is a distinct, waffle-like grill pressed into the

back of the stamp as part of a short-lived government experiment to

prevent fraudulent re-use. The Post Office tried out various sizes

of grills, and only four 3-cent stamps with this type, called a

B-grill by collectors, are known to exist.

The four were rediscovered in 1969, on a single envelope from a

letter mailed to Germany. The stamp is one of the keys to

assembling a complete collection of American stamps.

This particular example last sold at auction in 1993 for

$85,000; another of the four sold in 1998 for $155,000. Wednesday's

buyer, who bid by telephone, was described by the auctioneer only

as a "longtime, serious collector" who is most likely trying to

complete a collection.

Last week, 15 of the 88 University of North Texas football

players failed a test for recreational or so-called street drugs.

The unusual part of this story is that the second-year coach Todd

Dodge chose to have his entire active roster tested, even though

the Sun Belt Conference and NCAA do not require this kind of

testing.

Other coaches around the country have done some targeted

testing, but a wholesale maneuver like this is rarely done and

almost never surfaces as it has at the university in Denton.

North Texas, 0-8 entering Saturday's game at Western Kentucky,

is off to its worst start ever, and Dodge said he saw the

inconsistent performances, lack of focus and mood swings of his

players as indications that his team might have a problem.

"Twenty-three years of coaching had given me pretty good

intuition about consistency and inconsistency," Dodge said in a

telephone interview. "I suspected that there may be some uses of

marijuana on our team; I felt that we may have one or two that have

really got a problem and they're crying out for help, and we may

have another dozen or so that are just starting to dibble-dabble in

the stuff."

Dodge said he also felt that the specter of testing could give

his players "a reason to say no at the next party they go to."

The 15 who tested positive will continue to play and do not face

any suspensions. They will be randomly tested throughout the

academic year and are required to attend substance-abuse

counseling. Testing all 88 players cost the university roughly

$2,800.

Brett Vito, a reporter for The Denton Record-Chronicle, broke

the story, which is based on university records obtained through

the Freedom of Information Act. According to the article, the

testing was done between Sept. 24 and Oct. 15.

Most Division I and II athletic programs do some testing for

recreational drugs. But such testing is usually done on a small

sampling of the program's athletes.

Dodge said it was only fair that he tested the entire team. "I

didn't want them saying I was picking on this certain group or that

certain group or you're only testing guys you didn't recruit," he

said.

The team captain, Casey Fitzgerald, a senior wide receiver, said

his coach called the right play. "I feel it was a big step for

Dodge," he said by phone Thursday. "He has that responsibility;

it's good to know he was looking out for people and making sure, if

there was a problem, it would be addressed." Fitzgerald led the

nation in receptions per game with 10.4 entering Saturday's games.

"There was a team meeting, we addressed the problem and the

publicity that we received," he said. "We just reassured each

other that we're all in it together. We're going to put this behind

us and try to make everything good."

There have been cynical reactions to the decision to test his

players: Would Dodge have done this if the team were 8-0? Was he

trying to imply that drug use -- not coaching -- was the reason the

team was underperforming?

"My charge while I'm here as the head football coach is to help

this football program and this football team reach its potential,"

Dodge said. "We're not close to doing that right now. And if we've

got a bunch of 'em that are smoking dope, there's no way we can get

there."

Dodge did the right thing, and so did the university in

supporting him. Even if there is a double standard in that most

students can use street drugs without fear of being tested by their

university.

"It is very different for athletes," said the university

president, Gretchen M. Bataille. "Athletes have scholarships and

they sign consent forms. They're basically recipients of $100,000

worth of scholarships over a four-year period. With that comes

certain responsibilities.

"The consent form says they can say that they don't want to be

tested, but then they're off the team."

The high rate of use among North Texas football players makes it

clear that a broader drug-testing net needs to be cast.

The NCAA has a year-round random testing program for all

Divisions I and II athletes for steroids, masking agents and

amphetamines, according to Mary E. Wilfert, the associate director

of educational services. The NCAA tests for all drugs -- performance

enhancing and recreational -- only during NCAA championships.

Drug testers for the NCAA just happened to be on campus --

randomly testing 20 football players for performance-enhancing

drugs -- right when Dodge's team was being tested for mood-altering

drugs like marijuana, cocaine and methamphetamine.

The NCAA does not mandate that its member institutions or

conferences test for drugs that are not considered

performance-enhancing. This is a mistake.

As Dodge told his players: "It's not good for us, it's illegal,

it leads to worse things, it leads to incarceration and sometimes

it leads to death. How could that be good for our team?"

The difference between the high-profile sports teams on campus

and almost any other extracurricular activity is the public nature

of success and failure, wins and losses -- and how much money and

acclaim they bring to the university.

The frustration of losing may have contributed to the role of

drug use at North Texas.

"Sometimes, that triggers that," Waters said of the

correlation between losing and recreational drug use.

"And you've got to be prepared, whether it's your academic

counseling center or whether it's your trainers or whether it's

your assistant coaches, you've really got to spend some additional

time helping these kids deal with the frustration. Winning is a

wonderful thing, losing is a terrible thing."

Fitzgerald said the frustration of losing should have nothing to

do with choices that are made away from football. "It all just

boils down to who you are," Fitzgerald said. "You can do anything

you want every day. It's about being smart and making the right

decisions."

North Texas is having a miserable season on the field, but

Dodge's bold move to hold his players accountable may turn out in

the long run to be his program's best game plan.

There's nothing like game day, and after the

adventure of Oxford basketball tryouts I couldn't wait to play in a

real game. That sense of anticipation was only heightened by the

trip to Nottingham for our season opener.

Let me say this: the trip made me miss the good ol' days when I

went to games by bus. All 11 of us piled into two European cars.

The pregame meal was on the road and consisted of a variety of

homemade sandwiches. Dan Altschuler was just finishing his

Nutella-and-peanut-butter special when Duncan England, one of the

local students on the team, said, "Look, it's Sherwood Forest."

The Americans in the car went crazy. In the back of my mind, I was

thinking, If we're passing Sherwood Forest on the way to the game,

what's waiting for us at the gym?

There was no way the game could live up to the hype. There was

no royalty in the crowd -- or even any crowd at all. And no men in

tights tried to redistribute points from the team that was winning

to the team that was losing, although the girl working the

scoreboard tried once or twice.

After the jump ball, the game was surprisingly familiar -- made

even more so by the presence of our point guard, Jeff Miller. Jeff

played junior varsity for Princeton. He's everything I came to

expect from a Princeton basketball player over four years in the

Ivy League.

Jeff is a Rhodes scholar who has the need to stop practice every

time anyone makes a backdoor cut to explain the proper angle. Toss

in a couple of Princeton oddities, like his insistence to shoot

layups from the right side with his left hand and vice versa, and

you have the prototypical Princeton guard.

I never miss the chance to give Jeff a hard time about his

background, so when Jeff closed out the game with a wrong-foot,

wrong-hand, wild drive that drew a foul, I didn't greet him with

"cheers." Instead, he heard, "That's so Princeton." His free

throws put the finishing touches on our 94-53 win.

The game might have been "so Princeton," but the postgame was

all Oxford. Our first tradition is to do a cheer, for the other

team. Against Nottingham, it was a simple "1-2-3 Nottingham!" But

coach Brian Porth was so happy to get his first win that I almost

persuaded him to let us chant, "Two, four, six, eight, who do we

appreciate? Nottingham! Nottingham. Go Nottingham!"

The postgame cheers were nothing compared with the postgame

celebration. The festivities took place at St. Vincent's. Vinnie's

is pure Oxford. It has a dress code and pictures of old students

all over the walls. Bill Bradley's picture is front and center by

the bar, and everyone brags that he is a better athlete than Bill

Clinton, who played only on the "twos" basketball during his

Rhodes stint.

St. Vincent's is old school. At lunchtime, it is an all-male

eating club, and the process of becoming a member is shrouded in

mystery. You have to be invited to join, but asking how you receive

an invitation is a disqualifier.

On Wednesday nights, Vinnie's becomes the postmatch gathering

place; all Oxford sports play on Wednesdays. Teams gather there for

the drinks. The bar serves the appropriate winter ales and mixed

drinks, but has specials called pinkies and perkies. A pinky is

grapefruit juice, orange juice and five shots of gin. A perky is

grapefruit juice, lemonade and five shots of vodka.

I can attest firsthand that perkies have the power to turn a

couple of postgame drinks into an ill-advised Wednesday night at

the Euro club scene. The only problem? The morning after the

Nottingham game, I had a meeting with my master's supervisor at

8:30. But under the influence of a few perkies and buoyed by the

good cheer of my teammates, that didn't seem like such an

impediment. My education about English basketball continued until

close to 4 in the morning.

I may be only one game in, but I have learned this much about

Oxford basketball: it's the postgame traditions that count.

Backdoor cuts and layups off the wrong feet may be "so

Princeton," but too many perkies and two hours of sleep before

meeting with my academic adviser, "That's so Oxford."

Denver -- Democrat Barack Obama has solidified his base and

picked up a majority of unaffiliated voters in Colorado, giving him

a five percentage point lead over Republican John McCain, according

to a new Denver Post poll.

With only 72 hours remaining in the presidential campaign, the

results -- in addition to other statewide polls showing McCain

trailing Obama -- indicates that the Arizona senator faces

substantial challenges in winning Colorado.

Overall, Obama leads McCain 49 percent to 44 percent. Colorado

unaffiliated voters, the critical voting bloc making up more than

one-third of the electorate, are backing Obama 57 percent to 32

percent. Four percent of those polled, however, are still

undecided.

In a Denver Post poll one month ago, the two candidates were

tied, with 8 percent of voters undecided. Since then, Obama has

increased his lead over McCain among men, women, independents and

voters over 35 years old.

Brad Coker, pollster for Mason-Dixon Polling &amp;amp; Research who

conducted the poll for The Post, said the number of undecideds in

Colorado is smaller than in other battleground states. While those

voters could have an impact, especially if they all throw their

weight behind McCain, Obama has momentum.

"Obama looks like he's in good shape. Even if all the

undecided's break to McCain, Obama could likely still hang on,"

Coker said.

McCain spokesman Tom Kise said in the final few days of a

campaign polls are "all over the board."

"The only poll that is going to matter is the one on Election

Day," he said. "In these last 96 hours ... we are fully confident

that we will turn our people out and Colorado will be a red state

on Election Day."

In the past 44 years, the state has voted for a Democratic

presidential candidate only once: Bill Clinton in 1992. So even

with a lead, the Obama campaign is not taking the state for

granted. The Illinois senator attended a campaign rally in Pueblo

on Saturday.

Obama campaign manager David Plouffe said he thinks independent

voters in Colorado will continue to "break decisively" for Obama.

In Colorado and nationally, Plouffe disputed the notion that

undecided voters will trend en masse to McCain.

"We reject that 90 percent of the undecideds will go for

McCain," Plouffe said in a conference call Friday. "Some states

will split evenly, some will break a little more to him, some more

to us."

Colorado voters, as those in the rest of the nation,

overwhelmingly cited the economy as the most important national

issue facing the country, and Obama narrowly edges out McCain on

the question of who is best able to handle economic issues.

He also is ahead of McCain on environmental and public-land

issues, developing energy resources and improving health care.

McCain leads on immigration, national security, cutting taxes and

managing the war in Iraq.

Independent voters have also sided strongly with the campaign of

Democratic Senate candidate Mark Udall, giving him a small but

stable lead in the race for Colorado's open Senate seat, the poll

found.

The poll indicates that both candidates are getting overwhelming

support from their own party voters, with Udall enjoying a 19-point

lead among independents.

Overall, Udall leads Republican Bob Schaffer by 47 percent to 43

percent, a small drop from the five-point lead he enjoyed in a

Denver Post poll a month ago and one that shows a significantly

smaller lead for Udall than other recent polls.

Fourteen percent remain undecided in the Senate contest.

The poll of 625 likely voters was conducted on Tuesday and

Wednesday. An additional 200 unaffiliated voters were also

interviewed and are reflected in the poll, which has a margin of

error of plus or minus 4 percentage points.

Many homeowners who have taken out home equity lines of credit

have learned in recent months that these loans are not as useful as

they initially seemed.

Lenders are struggling to minimize risk, and because they are

especially at risk to lose money on residential real estate loans,

they are cutting back on homeowners' credit lines or freezing them

altogether.

Many people who took out home equity credit lines of $100,000 on

their home and used only, say, $20,000 have received letters

informing them they can no longer borrow additional money, just as

their stock portfolios are dwindling. The banks' reasoning,

typically, is that area property values are dropping, so the equity

does not actually exist.

To challenge the bank's valuation of a home, a homeowner has

little recourse but to spend his or her own money to order an

appraisal -- a potentially costly and futile approach.

But a new countermeasure is emerging: take out the money before

the bank puts it out of reach. In this strategy, borrowers draw the

maximum amount even if they don't need it, then place the cash in a

liquid, and safe, investment vehicle.

"I categorize this as liquidity protection," said Oded

Ben-Ami, a senior loan officer with the Sterling National Mortgage

Company, based in Great Neck, N.Y.

Ben-Ami said he had suggested to mortgage clients that they

consider drawing down the maximum amount possible from their home

equity credit lines.

Which leads to a question: Where to put the money?

Home equity credit lines usually carry interest rates equal to

or slightly lower than the prime lending rate, which banks charge

their best customers. Last week, that rate fell to 4 percent as the

government looked to stimulate the economy.

Those who withdraw their home equity should consider putting the

cash into a certificate of deposit, a savings account or a

money-market account, Ben-Ami said.

These financial instruments are typically insured by the Federal

Deposit Insurance Corporation. Borrowers can withdraw the money on

short notice and pay no penalties in the case of savings or money

market accounts, or marginal penalties for early withdrawals from

CDs. (Unlike money market accounts, money market funds are not

protected if the depository fails.)

Short-term liquidity is a key advantage, as borrowers may well

be using their credit lines for college tuition bills or as

emergency funds if they lose a job or face a major home repair.

Interest rates paid by CDs were at least 3 percent last month,

Ben-Ami said. "So on an equity line of $100,000, the annual cost

of this strategy is approximately $1,000" -- the difference between

a cost of 4 percent and income of 3 percent, he said.

"The question then is, is it worth it to you to pay $1,000 a

year to ensure $100,000 worth of liquidity against the worst of

circumstances? For many people, the answer is yes."

There are some risks for borrowers who follow this approach.

First, if the value of a home drops significantly and the borrowers

have spent the cash from their equity line, they can end up owing

more money than their property is worth. (In industry parlance, the

borrower is then "under water" or "upside down.")

The prospect of easy money is also a temptation that some

borrowers will find difficult to resist. But for those with enough

self-restraint not to spend more than they need, withdrawing the

full credit line may be easier than having a credit line rescinded

and then finding another bank.

C.C. Sabathia is probably going to be a rich pitcher with a West

Coast team or an even wealthier pitcher with the Yankees. First

baseman Mark Teixeira could be added to the mix in the American

League East, where the Orioles, the Yankees and the Red Sox covet

him, or he could remain with the Angels. Outfielder Manny Ramirez

may keep hanging out in Mannywood by staying with the Dodgers.

Four days ago, one season ended when Brad Lidge fell to his

knees after guiding the Phillies to their first World Series

championship since 1980. Another season, farcically called the

off-season, will begin Monday with the general managers meetings in

Dana Point, Calif.

Although free agents cannot sign with new teams until Nov. 14,

there has been endless ruminating about where Sabathia, Teixeira

and Ramirez will end up. Trade discussions will also intensify

because pitcher Jake Peavy of the San Diego Padres and outfielder

Matt Holliday of the Colorado Rockies are among those who could be

dealt.

Although Sabathia, Teixeira and Ramirez will receive the most

attention from the news media because of their status, other free

agents can have an impact. These players may not be as dominant as

Sabathia, as polished as Teixeira or as fearsome as Ramirez, but

they range from talented to useful to fading.

Here are a dozen intriguing free agents not named C.C., Manny or

Texas.

ORLANDO HUDSON, 2B

He is a three-time Gold Glove winner and a strong influence in

the clubhouse. Hudson has been injury-prone, but that should not

scare teams. If the Mets ate most of the $18 million left on Luis

Castillo's contract and traded him, they could sign Hudson. Still,

General Manager Omar Minaya said, "Right now, I think Castillo is

going to be our second baseman."

DEREK LOWE, P

The durable Lowe is an appealing option for teams that do not

sign Sabathia. Lowe has averaged 15 victories and 208 innings in

the last seven seasons and has a 3.33 earned run average in the

postseason. If the huge offer the Yankees will undoubtedly make

does not sway Sabathia, they should take a long look at Lowe.

MILTON BRADLEY, DH/OF

The good news is he hit .321 with 22 homers and 77 runs batted

in this year. The bad news is he hit 68 points higher at Rangers

Ballpark in Arlington than on the road, he has averaged just 90

games a season for the last four years and he is always a threat to

implode.

A.J. BURNETT, P

He is expected to opt out of his deal with the Blue Jays and

pursue another loaded contract. When Burnett is healthy, scouts

rave about his repertory. He was healthy enough this year to win 18

games, strike out 231 and toss 221 1/3 innings, all career highs. A

team will give Burnett big money and pray that he holds up.

JUAN CRUZ, P

How much could the Mets have used Cruz, a thin-as-a-foul-pole

right-hander, when they were playing dial-a-reliever in September?

Cruz has a 94-mile-per-hour fastball and struck out 71 in 51 2/3

innings. He is not a closer but would be a stellar addition to help

revamp any bullpen.

JASON GIAMBI, DH/1B

He had seven adventurous years with the Yankees. Now it could be

time to return to Oakland, a soft landing spot for Giambi. He

should be able to crank out at least one more season of 30 homers

and a .375 on-base percentage.

RAUL IBANEZ, OF

He has knocked in 338 runs over the last three seasons while

being hidden in Seattle. A low-maintenance, high-production player,

Ibanez could improve a lot of lineups and gain some acclaim, too.

The Rays, the Cubs and the Mets could use a power-hitting

outfielder.

JASON VARITEK, C

Before 2008, he probably figured he might match Jorge Posada's

$54-million contract. Not anymore. While Scott Boras, Varitek's

agent, offers him to the Tigers and others, Varitek should probably

be content with a two-year contract at a reduced salary from the

Red Sox.

PEDRO MARTINEZ, P

He will pitch somewhere, most likely not with the Mets. Martinez

would be smart to stay in the National League, where his 87-mph

fastball will not be so wimpy. Minaya said the Mets would talk to

Martinez, which sounded like a polite goodbye to a pitcher with a

5.61 ERA.

BOBBY ABREU, OF

He has driven in 100 runs or more for six straight years, is a

patient hitter and has decent speed. The Yankees like him, but he

will be 35 in March and his statistics are slowly declining, so

they will not offer him a three-year deal. But some team will.

JOE BEIMEL, P

A left-handed relief specialist, he has allowed one homer in his

last 128 innings. Barry Bonds could never solve Beimel. Why should

anyone else? Beimel will not command a pricey deal, which makes him

even more attractive.

BEN SHEETS, P

He missed the postseason with an elbow injury and has averaged

about 150 innings for the last four years. That is not the

prescription for a reliable No. 1 starter. Buyer, beware.

At this important time, every buyer should beware. The

off-season is about to begin. The serious spending will soon

follow.

Jimmie Johnson has been so dominant lately that he could wrap up

his third straight title in two more races, or as early as next

Sunday. Unfortunately for Curtis Gray, there are three races left

in the NASCAR Sprint Cup season.

Gray is the president of Homestead-Miami Speedway, which will

host the season finale on Nov. 16. No other track has benefited

from the Chase for the Sprint Cup more than Homestead, where the

champion has been determined the past four years.

But Johnson has stormed to a 183-point lead over Carl Edwards

heading into Sunday's race in Fort Worth. If Johnson leads by at

least 161 points after the Nov. 9 race in Phoenix, he will win the

title, no matter how he does at Homestead.

Gray said Friday that he thought that Homestead would sell out

the race, although he added that he had the same trouble selling

tickets that track officials elsewhere had encountered because of

the economic downturn. The attendance at Atlanta last Sunday

dropped to 80,000 from 100,000, though that could also be a sign of

diminishing fan interest."It's not the best scenario for us," he

said. "Obviously, we'd like to have a close and exciting Chase

like we've had for the last few years."

There are still two races to go before the finale -- 646 laps, or

813 miles -- so there is time for Johnson to run into mechanical

trouble or a fender-bender.

"Why not?" Gray said, laughing, before quickly adding, "I'm

just kidding."

Kurt Busch beat Johnson by just eight points for the first Chase

title in 2004. Four drivers had a chance to win the title going

into Homestead in 2005; five drivers were in contention heading

into the final race in 2006.

Last year, Johnson went into Homestead with a four-race winning

streak but a surmountable 86-point lead over Jeff Gordon. When

Gordon finished fourth, Johnson's seventh-place finish was good

enough for him to clinch the title by 77 points.

"It's been real good for us, but what we're building is an

event much like the Super Bowl, where it doesn't matter what

drivers are in the championship race when they get here," Gray

said of the Chase. "At this point in the history of the Super

Bowl, it doesn't matter who's in the game."

To maintain fan interest, NASCAR has been promoting other

competitions that are still in play, like the Nationwide Series,

the rung below the Sprint Cup, and the manufacturer's championship,

which is currently led by Chevrolet.

But Johnson has been so fast in the Chase with five top-five

finishes in seven races that it appears as if he will cruise to his

third straight title. Only one driver has won three straight titles

in NASCAR's highest division: Cale Yarborough in 1976-78.

Johnson's bid to match Yarborough could be helped by the

locations of his next two races: Texas Motor Speedway and Phoenix

International Raceway. Johnson has finished first and second in his

last two races at Texas, and has won his last two races at Phoenix.

Johnson's most impressive performance was last Sunday at

Atlanta, when he took four fresh tires and zoomed to 2nd place from

11th in the last eight laps of the race. Edwards won the race.

"Jimmie's the last guy I want to see in my mirror with a few

laps to go," Edwards said during a conference call last week.

Given Johnson's dominance, other drivers have been asked if the

points system should be tweaked -- again -- to ensure that all 36

races of the season are meaningful, something the Chase was

supposed to have addressed.

"I think you could throw at them whatever you want, and they're

still going to figure out how to win it," Matt Kenseth said,

referring to Johnson and his crew chief, Chad Knaus. "There's

nothing wrong with that."

This year's race at Homestead could merely be a coronation for

Johnson, but Gray said that might not be such a bad thing because

Johnson was poised to accomplish something that no driver had done

in 30 years.

"But first, he's got to get through two more races," Gray

said. "He's got a long way to go."

It happened again last Sunday.

An apparent mistake by officials -- this time it was a muffed

punt by the Atlanta Falcons that did not look muffed after all --

probably changed the course of a game. From there, what has become

a familiar postgame ritual unspooled: The play broadcast repeatedly

in slow motion all over the country, arch commentary about the

officials' competence, the inevitable note from the Falcons sent to

NFL headquarters asking for an explanation.

Mike Pereira, the league's director of officiating, always has a

full in-box from irate coaches, owners and fans. But one

spectacularly blown call by Ed Hochuli, the NFL's highest-profile

official, has opened the floodgates to an unusual level of scrutiny

and scorn from coaches and players in the first half of the season.

And with each excruciatingly detailed replay or game-turning

decision (there have been at least three obvious ones so far), the

angry chorus has grown louder, creating a problem for the NFL The

statistics show that officiating is no worse this year than before,

but the perception that there are more bad calls resonates.

According to the NFL's grading, for every 100 plays, 97.64 of

them were officiated correctly before Sunday's games. Because games

historically average a little more than 150 plays, officials are

averaging about four mistakes a game, about the same as in 2007,

when the accuracy rate was 97.78. And Pereira said that in a recent

game (he would not say which one), a crew graded perfectly -- 100

percent correct on every call and noncall.

"I've never seen a game that didn't have incomplete passes or

fumbles or interceptions," Pereira said. "Once officiating gets

in the public eye, then it's going to be there for a while. No

matter if it's better than in the past or worse. Officiating is a

mental exercise that involves judgment that is difficult. It is

imperfect."

The former Baltimore coach Brian Billick, who is now an analyst

for Fox, said criticism had ratcheted up in part because a blown

call leading to a loss could result in a coach's firing. Marcellus

Wiley, a former player who now works for ESPN, said he suspected

that players had become more outspoken as they had received more

guaranteed money. But Billick compared the officiating

controversies to fretting over injuries when a star quarterback is

hurt: are there really more, or does it just feel that way?

"One time, there was a hue and cry -- 'This is the worst year

for officiating' -- and we went back and looked and we determined it

had been written five different years," said Rich McKay, the

Falcons' president and a member of the NFL's competition committee,

which oversees rule changes. "Since we brought instant replay

back, it's not necessarily a good thing for officiating. You begin

to scrutinize plays at milliseconds. It creates an unreasonable and

unreal standard that you can't meet."

Still, Hochuli's call in the second week of the season -- he

ruled that Denver's Jay Cutler had thrown an incomplete pass and

whistled the play dead, negating what was clearly a fumble, not an

incompletion -- almost certainly cost San Diego a victory. And it

gave birth to nonstop officiating surveillance.

When Hochuli's crew waved off a Carolina interception return for

a touchdown with a roughing-the-passer penalty on Julius Peppers,

there was instant analysis of the call's accuracy. (Peppers was

fined $10,000 for a helmet-to-helmet hit on that play.) Then, Miami

linebacker Joey Porter, angered by what he perceived as bad calls

by Hochuli's crew, said, "I'm like, Man, it's crazy that the same

referee staff from all of this other stuff that's been happening

was out there."

Porter, like other players and coaches who have sounded off, was

fined, an indication of the NFL's distaste for questioning the

integrity of the officials -- and for keeping such questions in the

public eye.

"Public criticism of officials is prohibited because it serves

the club and the league no good," said Ray Anderson, the league's

executive vice president for football operations.

"We do it privately, so we can make sure we're responding to an

allegation that is presented in a calm moment, not in the heat of

battle where you have just lost a game."

But as the scrutiny rippled far beyond Hochuli, KC Joyner, who

breaks down game tape for his annual Scientific Football guides and

his Web site, The Football Scientist, said he wondered if the harsh

glare of the spotlight could be affecting officials.

In a game between Minnesota and Detroit, a Lions defender was

called for pass interference although replays indicated that the

receiver was, at most, barely touched and that a flag should not

have been thrown. The 42-yard penalty put the Vikings in field-goal

position, and they won the game.

When officials took at least five minutes to sort out an unusual

call in the Arizona-Dallas game a few weeks ago -- it put Dallas in

position to kick a tying field goal -- Joyner became convinced that

officials were hesitant to make mistakes, a possibility

acknowledged by the retired official Jim Tunney.

"It can make them gun-shy, and it's very important to work with

the crew in terms of confidence when they walk on the field,"

Tunney said. "It's easy for officials to get intimidated. And in

today's environment, they have to keep building confidence. I've

been afraid in situations, concerned about if I'm doing the right

thing."

One primary argument against replay, McKay said, was that

officials might start second-guessing themselves before making

calls because mistakes would be immediately exposed. But now,

Pereira said, replay forces officials to improve. Historically, 33

percent to 38 percent of calls have been overturned by replay, he

said. In the first third of this season, he said, only 19 percent

were overturned. Pereira said officials had improved on calling

sideline catches, which might account for the shift.

But there is little thirst for more calls to be reviewable. The

competition committee will probably review the pass/fumble rule

that tripped up Hochuli, although Pereira and Anderson have

reservations about changing it because quarterbacks could be

endangered as players pursue what may or may not be a fumble.

But there is almost no chance that pass interference will be

reviewable soon. Now, there are 1.1 stoppages for replay a game. If

the replay rules were broadened, the average could rise to four

stoppages, Pereira said.

"I think we're all happy the system hasn't been too

intrusive," he said.

Perhaps so, even if it is not perfect. In the meantime,

Pereira's mailbox fills up while his officials try to tune out the

din.

"We have criticism from the days of officiating Pop Warner when

parents yell at you from sidelines," Pereira said. "I don't like

it, but it's not the thing I focus on."

Denver -- Democrat Barack Obama has solidified his base and

picked up a majority of unaffiliated voters in Colorado, giving him

a five percentage point lead over Republican John McCain, according

to a new Denver Post poll.

With only 72 hours remaining in the presidential campaign, the

results -- in addition to other statewide polls showing McCain

trailing Obama -- indicates that the Arizona senator faces

substantial challenges in winning Colorado.

Overall, Obama leads McCain 49 percent to 44 percent. Colorado

unaffiliated voters, the critical voting bloc making up more than

one-third of the electorate, are backing Obama 57 percent to 32

percent. Four percent of those polled, however, are still

undecided.

In a Denver Post poll one month ago, the two candidates were

tied, with 8 percent of voters undecided. Since then, Obama has

increased his lead over McCain among men, women, independents and

voters over 35 years old.

Brad Coker, pollster for Mason-Dixon Polling &amp;amp; Research who

conducted the poll for The Post, said the number of undecideds in

Colorado is smaller than in other battleground states. While those

voters could have an impact, especially if they all throw their

weight behind McCain, Obama has momentum.

"Obama looks like he's in good shape. Even if all the

undecided's break to McCain, Obama could likely still hang on,"

Coker said.

McCain spokesman Tom Kise said in the final few days of a

campaign polls are "all over the board."

"The only poll that is going to matter is the one on Election

Day," he said. "In these last 96 hours ... we are fully confident

that we will turn our people out and Colorado will be a red state

on Election Day."

In the past 44 years, the state has voted for a Democratic

presidential candidate only once: Bill Clinton in 1992. So even

with a lead, the Obama campaign is not taking the state for

granted. The Illinois senator attended a campaign rally in Pueblo

on Saturday.

Obama campaign manager David Plouffe said he thinks independent

voters in Colorado will continue to "break decisively" for Obama.

In Colorado and nationally, Plouffe disputed the notion that

undecided voters will trend en masse to McCain.

"We reject that 90 percent of the undecideds will go for

McCain," Plouffe said in a conference call Friday. "Some states

will split evenly, some will break a little more to him, some more

to us."

Colorado voters, as those in the rest of the nation,

overwhelmingly cited the economy as the most important national

issue facing the country, and Obama narrowly edges out McCain on

the question of who is best able to handle economic issues.

He also is ahead of McCain on environmental and public-land

issues, developing energy resources and improving health care.

McCain leads on immigration, national security, cutting taxes and

managing the war in Iraq.

Independent voters have also sided strongly with the campaign of

Democratic Senate candidate Mark Udall, giving him a small but

stable lead in the race for Colorado's open Senate seat, the poll

found.

The poll indicates that both candidates are getting overwhelming

support from their own party voters, with Udall enjoying a 19-point

lead among independents.

Overall, Udall leads Republican Bob Schaffer by 47 percent to 43

percent, a small drop from the five-point lead he enjoyed in a

Denver Post poll a month ago and one that shows a significantly

smaller lead for Udall than other recent polls.

Fourteen percent remain undecided in the Senate contest.

The poll of 625 likely voters was conducted on Tuesday and

Wednesday. An additional 200 unaffiliated voters were also

interviewed and are reflected in the poll, which has a margin of

error of plus or minus 4 percentage points.

The poll data in COLO-POLL-DEN are embargoed for Web and print

publication until 4 a.m. MST on Sunday, Nov. 2. Thank you.

The Denver Post

The NFL's crackdown on player safety has produced lots of

penalties, big fines and a bit of confusion.

According to the NFL, it levied 139 fines for playing rules

violations in the weeks preceding the games of Oct. 26. That, it

said, was up marginally from last year. Many of those fines were

for plays that did not draw a flag during the game, although

according to FootballOutsiders.com, which tracks penalties, calls

for unnecessary roughness through Week 7 were at 75, way higher

than last year's 43.

Do the after-the-fact fines and suspensions undermine the

officials if a penalty was not called? The NFL said that those

sanctions did not.

"You can't humanly catch all the things that might happen,

particularly if it's away from the play," Ray Anderson, the NFL's

executive vice president for football operations, said. "It's no

rap on the officials that they might not catch a helmet-to-helmet

hit at full speed on the other side of the field."

The NFL also uses tape of hits that draw fines as a tool to

teach officials what kind of hits it wants penalized. Still, when

players appeal fines or suspensions, their first argument is

obvious: how can it draw a fine if a flag was not thrown?

That was one of the issues Anderson addressed when he met with

members of the Pittsburgh Steelers two weeks ago, after several

Steelers players publicly questioned the emphasis on player safety.

Safety Troy Polamalu said the fines for hits -- several Steelers,

including Hines Ward, have been fined for hits that did not draw

flags -- was turning the NFL into a "pansy" league.

"We understand it's a tough, aggressive game, and players have

always played tough," Anderson said he told the Steelers. "To the

extent that the play involves illegal techniques or hits that put

our players at unnecessary risk, this commissioner and football

operations department want you to know we're not going to have

it."

POLL-BATTLEGROUND-STATES-DEN (undated) will not move in

tonight's Denver Post file.

The Denver Post, Nov. 1, 2008

The brother of the Afghan finance minister

has been kidnapped in the northwestern Pakistani city of Peshawar,

the second kidnapping of a prominent Afghan in Pakistan in the past

two months, a spokesman for the Finance Ministry in Kabul said

Saturday.

The man, Zia ul-Haq Ahadi, a businessman and the brother of

Finance Minister Anwar-ul-Haq Ahadi, was abducted near his home in

the residential district of Hayatabad on Friday morning, Aziz

Shams, the spokesman, said.

The Afghan consul general, Abdul Khaliq Farahi, was kidnapped in

the same area in September and was reported freed a week later.

Kidnappings have increased recently in Peshawar as militants

have grown more powerful and as criminal gangs have taken advantage

of the deterioration of law and order.

In his first year as a starting running back, Michael Turner of

the Atlanta Falcons has been all over the place, rushing for as

many as 10 yards a carry (Week 1 against Detroit's 31st-ranked

rushing defense) and as few as 2.2 yards a carry (Week 6 against

Chicago's sixth-ranked rushing defense.)

But with big games against the Lions, Kansas City and Green Bay,

he has shown that he has the ability to dominate against poor

defenses.

Playing in Oakland this week, Turner will be running against a

Raiders defense that is 26th against the run and has allowed the

second-most rushing touchdowns. Last week against Baltimore,

Oakland allowed 192 yards on the ground with four backs gaining 20

or more yards.

Even accounting for his inconsistency, Turner is on pace for

1,497 rushing yards and 14 touchdowns. It is unlikely that the

Raiders will slow that pace down.

EDGE TO JAGUARS' DEFENSE

In a game between a team that cannot stop the pass rush and a

team that cannot rush the passer, it is hard to determine who has

the advantage.

But the Cincinnati Bengals are forced to start quarterback Ryan

Fitzpatrick, who has six fumbles and five interceptions in five

starts and has been sacked 17 times. Even the Jacksonville Jaguars

should be able to take advantage.

It has been a rough season for the Jaguars' defense, which is

ranked 23rd in the NFL in total defense and 30th in sacks with nine

after finishing ninth in the league last season. No player on the

team has more than one and a half sacks.

Fitzpatrick has an impressive group of receivers to throw to,

but he has yet to show the ability to get the ball to them.

AN OFFENSIVE BATTLE IN DENVER

It could turn into quite a shootout in Denver when Jay Cutler

and the Broncos host Chad Pennington and the Miami Dolphins.

Cutler has been great at home this season, with 1,033 passing

yards and nine touchdowns in four games. Pennington has been hot,

with 280 or more yards in three consecutive games.

Considering that each team has struggled against the pass this

season (Miami is ranked 25th, Denver 28th), this game is shaping up

to be an offensive battle.

Responding to a report that a Kenyan relative of

Sen. Barack Obama was living in the United States illegally, his

campaign on Saturday said that he had no knowledge of her

immigration status and that "any and all appropriate laws" should

be followed.

The woman, Zeituni Onyango, referred to as "Auntie Zeituni" in

a passage in Obama's memoir, applied for political asylum in the

United States in 2004, but a federal immigration judge rejected her

request and instructed her to leave the country, said a government

official with knowledge of the case who asked not to be identified

because of its sensitive nature. Onyango's legal status was first

reported by The Associated Press on Friday.

The disclosure came as the presidential campaign hurtled toward

Election Day on Tuesday, and it left the Obama campaign answering

questions about what he knew of her situation.

Some Democrats suggested that the timing of the disclosure could

have been politically motivated, and some immigration lawyers said

that for government officials to disclose information about an

asylum applicant was unethical or perhaps illegal.

"People are suspicious about stories that surface in the last

72 hours of a national campaign, and I think they're going to put

it in that context," David Axelrod, Obama's chief strategist, told

reporters on Saturday.

Sen. John McCain's campaign declined to comment, and neither

McCain nor his running mate, Gov. Sarah Palin, raised the issue on

the campaign trail.

Kelly Nantel, a spokeswoman for the U.S. Immigration and Customs

Enforcement Agency, said that the matter had been referred to the

agency's inspector general and office of professional

responsibility. Nantel said that she could not comment on the

matter. A White House spokesman, Scott Stanzel, said the White

House had no involvement in the matter. Onyango is the half-sister

of Obama's father and is part of an extensive network of paternal

relatives with whom Obama has had limited contact, his aides said.

Obama, who was largely raised by his maternal grandparents in

Honolulu, first met Onyango when he traveled to Africa as an adult.

Axelrod said that Obama and Onyango did not have "a real close

relationship."

Onyango attended the ceremony when Obama was sworn in to the

U.S. Senate in 2004, but campaign officials said the senator had

provided no assistance in getting her a tourist visa and did not

know the details of her stay. At the time of the ceremony, Onyango

and another relative said in interviews that they had flown to the

United States from Kenya to witness the moment.

Obama last heard from her about two years ago when she called to

say she was in Boston, but he did not see her there, the campaign

said.

Federal Election Commission records list a Zeituni Onyango in

South Boston as making a series of contributions, totaling $265, to

the Obama campaign, with the most recent contribution, $5, made on

Sept. 19.

Obama's campaign said the money was being refunded. It is

illegal for foreign citizens and immigrants without green cards to

make political donations. Aides said that the donations came

through the normal channels, and that no one at the campaign knew

that Onyango was related to Obama or of her immigration status.

The Times of London first reported on Thursday that Onyango

lived in public housing in Boston. On Friday, The Associated Press

reported that she was in the country illegally and that her case

had led to an unusual nationwide directive from the Immigrations

and Customs Enforcement requiring that any deportations before

Tuesday's election be approved at least at the level of regional

directors.

Onyango lives in a disabled-access apartment, and worked as a

volunteer resident health advocate for the Boston Housing Authority

before stopping recently for physical therapy following back

surgery, said William McGonagle, deputy director of the authority.

On Saturday, a police officer was stationed outside the low

brick public housing complex where Onyango lives. The officer said

she was not at home and told reporters not to enter the building.

The New York Times said in editorials for Sunday, Nov. 2:

ISLAND OF LOST HOMES

As the financial crisis crisscrosses the globe, mutating as it

goes, it is important to remember the brownfield of bad American

home loans that are its ground zero. The view is ugly, the effects

dire and the need for solutions just as urgent whether you look in

the stucco foreclosure tracts of Phoenix and Southern California,

the condo-boom cities like Miami -- or a birthplace of the suburban

American dream, Long Island.

Long Island's two counties, Suffolk and Nassau, are first and

fourth in the number of loans at risk of foreclosure in New York

state. Long Island was not supposed to be hit this hard, because of

its affluence, highly desirable housing stock and relative lack of

room to sprawl. But for lots of reasons distinctly its own, it was

highly susceptible to the toxic fallout of the subprime bubble.

Long Island has two housing crises, an acute new one laid over a

chronic old one. The old one is a severe shortage of housing for

regular people, in a market pathologically skewed by racial

segregation and not-in-my-backyard resistance to responsible

development.

Housing in the land of Levittown, the national symbol of

affordable starter homes, has for years been out of reach to young

couples and the working class. Thousands of Long Islanders of

modest means, from young professionals to immigrant day laborers,

are crowding into illegally subdivided single-family houses.

Demographers have documented an exodus of people who grew sick of

living in their parents' basements, while retirees rattled around

in empty nests, cash-poor but property-rich -- at least until the

mortgage meltdown.

For all that, there are few legal rental units, and efforts to

build higher-density "smart growth" developments have been

vigorously, often rabidly, opposed by communities wedded to the

single-family house behind the white picket fence. McMansions have

been eating up the island's dwindling open space and farmland,

while its downtowns and infrastructure wither from age and neglect.

To top it off, the island remains one of the most segregated

suburbs in the country, designed from the days of its earliest

tract homes to be a haven of white aspiration. For years,

African-American homeowners were shunted to tightly bounded

neighborhoods that became self-perpetuating pockets of poverty with

severely underperforming school districts.

It is little wonder that within Long Island's dysfunctional

housing market, where more than half of residents spend more than

30 percent of their income on housing, the lure of easy credit was

irresistible. Mortgage lenders cajoled the elderly to plunder their

equity, people in heavily minority areas like Hempstead Village,

Amityville and Brentwood lined up for the subprime express,

investors snapped up homes for illegal rentals, and trader-uppers

in richer ZIP codes dived in over their heads.

Advocates who had struggled to get poor people into housing

realized a few years ago that things were moving too fast. Peter

Elkowitz, chief executive of the Long Island Housing Partnership,

said people at the group's home-ownership workshops would sometimes

bristle at being told what they could not afford and take their

business to storefront brokers who offered no-income-verification

loans and the false promise that home values would keep rising

forever.

Now it is all crashing down. The ranch homes have plywood

picture windows, and front lawns sprout billboards for foreclosure

auctions. The disaster is particularly acute in black and Latino

communities, where subprime loans were advertised heavily. The

Empire Justice Center found that the three Suffolk communities with

the highest foreclosure risk -- Amityville, Brentwood and Central

Islip -- are home to a full 30 percent of the county's

African-American homeowners. Nassau's three hardest-hit areas --

Hempstead, Freeport and Elmont -- are home to 42 percent of its

black homeowners.

The county executives of Nassau and Suffolk, Thomas Suozzi and

Steve Levy, have ramped up services like debt counseling to keep

the next wave of troubled homeowners from defaulting when their

adjustable-rate mortgages reset next year. But the counties are

struggling to keep their own budgets right-side-up in a wretched

economy. New York State's deficit is mountainous, and Levy and

Suozzi expect to get hammered on aid from Albany, even as their own

sales taxes and property-transfer taxes dwindle.

Crime is not up yet, but homelessness and hunger are. So is

blight: Town and village officials have their hands full keeping

lawns mowed for a glut of abandoned houses. The bottom-feeders are

out: "We Buy Houses," read the light-post fliers in poor

neighborhoods, offering fast cash for troubled homes. Brokers who

shamelessly peddled subprime loans to unqualified buyers are now

offering, for thousands of dollars in fees, to fix people's credit,

convert their loans and negotiate with lenders -- the same thing

nonprofit groups do at no charge.

This disaster was caused by a torrent of bad loans, but there

has been only a trickle of the money and leadership needed from

Washington, where the focus has been on bailing out banks before

homeowners. At a training workshop at the Long Island Housing

Partnership in Hauppauge last week, representatives of Citibank met

with nonprofit groups to explore ways to repair mortgages so that

families can keep their homes for the life of the loans, and not

simply postpone inevitable foreclosures.

The emphasis was on realism and honesty in a world that

jettisoned both. Participants agreed that a solution as big as the

problem had not yet been devised. Lenders, homeowners and advocates

are stuck with straightening out a colossal mess, one bad loan at a

time.

GONE MISSING

Ever since Sept. 11, 2001, the world has shuddered at the

possibility of loose nuclear weapons or radioactive material

falling into the hands of terrorists. Shuddered and done too little

to stop it.

Mohamed ElBaradei, the head of the International Atomic Energy

Agency, warned last week that there has been a "disturbingly

high" number of reports of missing or illegally trafficked nuclear

material. According to agency figures, there were 243 incidents

between June 2007 and June of this year. Fortunately, the amounts

reported missing have been small. Some experts say that if all the

material were lumped together it would not be enough for one

nuclear weapon. That is no consolation in a world where so many

countries are eager to build their own nuclear reactors and

possibly nuclear weapons.

That means that in coming years there will be even more states

with nuclear materials, more scientists with nuclear knowledge and

more opportunities for terrorists to get their hands on the

material for a bomb.

It is the atomic agency's job to keep tabs on civilian nuclear

programs, to ensure that states do not misplace fuel or divert it

to clandestine weapons programs. One way to guard against such a

perilous future is to ensure that the agency is fully staffed with

the best people available and has the money and support it needs.

Member states must be willing to increase their budget

contributions so the agency can refurbish its testing laboratory,

invest in new technology and hire additional nuclear experts. The

agency must also be ready to take on new tasks, like administering

a nuclear fuel bank to be the supplier of last resort for countries

that choose not to get into the risky reactor fuel business.

(Producing nuclear fuel is the hardest part of building a nuclear

weapon.)

ElBaradei completes his term at the end of 2009. His successor

must be knowledgeable, politically skilled -- but less likely to

give Iran the benefit of the doubt at crucial moments -- and ready

to help lead a global campaign to secure dangerous nuclear

materials and constrain the world's nuclear appetites.

President Bush spent far too much energy trying to oust

ElBaradei and far too little on arms reduction and restraining the

spread of nuclear technology and know-how. Barack Obama and John

McCain both say they understand the many threats out there. We hope

they also see the urgency.

Between phone calls and sips of coffee, Maggie McComas enjoyed

the crisp, sunny Sunday on Beatrice Sibblies' front stoop on West

121st Street. The battleground states of Pennsylvania and New

Hampshire seemed far away as she sat back in her folding chair with

sheets of voters' names and numbers.

McComas, 63, of the Upper West Side, picked up one of two cell

phones from the chair in front of her. One was hers, the other

borrowed from a friend, and with the minutes from both, she was

ready to make "hours" of calls for Barack Obama. And soon, she

said, she would be knocking on doors in Pennsylvania. "I haven't

done that since I sold Girl Scout cookies," she said.

Inside the house, a dozen callers spread out on the stairs, on

the sofa and chairs, at the dining room table and in the kitchen.

It was the third weekend cell phone bank held by Sibblies, 39, a

real estate developer and ardent supporter of Obama.

"A lot of people here have never done this before, and they're

a little nervous," she said.

But it was not just the fear of making cold calls that was

making her guests unsure. Many spoke of being anxious as Election

Day drew closer, feeling that as New Yorkers, their votes "would

not count." Most had come out on a beautiful Sunday to try to do

something to swing the vote in the states that "matter."

From the Sputnik Bar in Clinton Hill, Brooklyn, to the Bowery

Hotel in the East Village, to Sibblies' pink-brick town house in

Harlem, supporters of Sen. Obama gathered across the city. They

made in-kind donations of their cell phone minutes to reach out to

voters in the more mottled states that are likely to decide this

presidential election.

Supporters of Sen. John McCain held a similar drive at the

campaign's regional headquarters in Woodbridge, N.J., a 40-minute

drive from Midtown.

About a dozen New Yorkers, most of them from Staten Island, made

the trip last weekend, according to Stephanie Fila, the volunteer

coordinator. On Monday night, supporters of McCain filled the phone

room in Woodbridge, pounding out Pennsylvania and New Jersey area

codes on 18 black office phones. They sat close together at folding

tables. Photographs of the senator, snapshots of volunteers and a

large banner -- "Small Business Leaders for McCain" -- decorated

the walls.

"On Tuesday nights, it's Veterans Calling Veterans, and I come

to that, too," said Jim Bellina, 55, of Skillman, N.J., who served

in the Navy. He said he was confident despite polls showing his

candidate trailing. "Let me put it this way: This is the fourth

quarter in a football game, and we're having a tough time. But if

you know Senator McCain, you know he ain't got no quit."

If history, voting registration and polls are any indication,

New York City will vote Democratic in Tuesday's presidential

election, as it has every time since 1924, when Calvin Coolidge, a

Republican, pulled out a victory in a three-way race that saw

Democratic voters siphoned off by the Progressive Party.

As of March 1, there were 2.8 million registered Democrats in

the city, compared with a little more than half a million

Republicans, according to the most recent numbers from the Board of

Elections. The goal for strategists of both parties is to marshal

strong supporters here to change minds and get out the vote in

swing states.

"We're seeking to harness the enthusiasm in New York to help

out in other states," said Blake Zeff, the director of

communications for the Obama campaign in New York. More than 3,000

volunteers made roughly 180,000 calls last weekend, according to

statistics provided by the campaign.

For this final weekend, the Obama campaign said it would be

ramping up its "Last Call for Change" effort, creating a handful

of supersize phone banks to accommodate hundreds of callers, in

addition to more than 20 smaller sites.

In Woodbridge, where more than 200,000 calls have been made for

McCain, they will be hammering away until Election Day, according

to the campaign. New York supporters of McCain, however, will not

find any official phone banks in the city, though they might happen

upon the candidate himself on his way from Rockefeller Center to

New Hampshire on Sunday morning after his scheduled appearance on

"Saturday Night Live."

The campaign is likewise encouraging supporters to head to the

battleground state of Pennsylvania to knock on doors.

With the end nearing, the emotions of voters on both sides

seemed to be gathering strength. Some described having troubled

sleep and even more troubling dreams.

"I had a dream the other night that Obama won, and I woke up so

happy," said Melissa Gluck, 30, of Forest Hills, Queens, who came

with a friend to Sibblies' house to make calls. "But then, I felt

a sense of panic."

At a much larger phone event for Obama, at the Bowery Hotel,

Ralph Stern, 83, also said he had lost sleep over the impending

election.

"I get a little shaky," he said, making calls with his wife,

Arlene, at a wicker table in the lobby. "I get panicky."

Jamie Lynn, 27, a waitress and college student who lives in

Woodbridge, was making calls on behalf of McCain. She said that for

three nights she had been "having trouble sleeping, nightmares"

about what would happen if Obama were elected. In her dream, there

were riots, she said. She had been making calls every weekday for

two weeks and would continue until the election.

No one seemed nervous about making dozens of cold calls to

strangers in faraway towns. "What's the worst that could happen?"

said Edward Bishop, 63, of Monroe Township, N.J. "They hang up on

you."

"Or," he added, "I guess they could say they're voting for

Obama."

After eight years of economic policies custom-made for the hedge

fund set, it is great to hear the economic interests of the middle

class mentioned so often in the presidential campaign. As the

candidates enthuse about all they intend to do for this important

segment of American society, it would be helpful if they also

specify what they mean by "middle."

It is puzzling when Barack Obama suggests a tax cut for a middle

class that earns all the way up to $200,000 a year. When John

McCain drew the border between the middle class and the rich at $5

million a year, it brought to mind Marie Antoinette's musings about

dessert.

There is such a thing as a straightforward middle. The nation's

median household income last year was $50,233. Half of all

households earned more and half earned less. Some economists would

define the middle class as those who earn between 75 percent and

125 percent of that -- say households making between $37,500 and

$63,000.

Development economists sometimes define the middle class as

those making more than the bottom fifth of the population but less

than the top fifth. In this country, that would include households

making between $20,291 and $100,000. Of course, there are places --

New York comes to mind -- where $150,000 a year does not buy many of

the trappings of wealth.

The heavy use of the term seems to be more than an appeal to

people's wallets. "Middle class" has become less a position on

the income scale than a state of being. According to a poll by the

Pew Research Center, a little more than half of Americans consider

themselves middle class, including a third of those who make more

than $150,000 per year. For many people, to be "middle class" is

to work hard, to struggle to succeed, often against unfair forces.

Forget the money.

Praising and promising to reward the middle class is a way for

the candidates to stroke the self-esteem of all those who identify

themselves as good, hard-working Americans. And this makes it a

very useful term.

McCain hopes heavy use of the term inoculates him against the

charge that he is carrying water for the same moneyed set that

George W. Bush does. Obama is hoping it can protect him from

charges that he is too eager to redistribute the wealth of the

rich, and those who hope to be.

The coded language also has real costs. One is that it displaces

necessary words like poverty. These days, the candidates rarely

talk about the poor, except when they are talking about the risk

that people might drop out of the middle class. Given what is going

on in the economy, that fear might well reach up to $200,000 a

year.

While waiting for her parents outside the pro shop, Song-Hee Kim

took her sand wedge and bounced a ball off the toe, then the heel.

After a dozen bounces, Kim froze the ball on the face of the club

and spun it as if she were a chef sauteing it. By the time the ball

stopped spinning, she held a small crowd in her sway.

This was how Kim began one of her best weeks as a professional,

by entertaining LPGA fans last month at the Samsung World

Championship in Half Moon Bay, Calif. The week ended with Kim, a

20-year-old South Korean, in second place, one stroke behind Paula

Creamer, and panic-stricken about speaking to American reporters.

Kim felt enormous pressure to conduct her news conference in

English because of LPGA Commissioner Carolyn Bivens' short-lived

proposal that foreign-born players with two years' experience on

the Tour be proficient in English or face suspension beginning in

2009.

Entertaining answers are not a trick Kim can pull out of her

bag. Growing up in South Korea, she spent countless hours

addressing a golf ball but rarely an audience, public speaking

being a skill that is not encouraged. Although Kim speaks English

well enough to have been her mother's interpreter during the

tournament, she opted to play it safe. She spoke in Korean while an

LPGA official translated.

And another chance to shine a light on a tour personality was

lost in the translation.

Although language has become a primary talking point on the

tour, the cultural gap may be wider than any English-speaking

policy can bridge. Bivens has since strained relations more by

indicating that her plan was also meant to help the South Korean

players shake their omnipresent fathers. By singling out the South

Koreans, Bivens has reduced them to one-dimensional stock

characters, which is like reading no break in a putt on a contoured

green.

Walking the fairways of the LPGA Tour for two weeks, one finds

that the South Korean players are an eclectic and varied lot who

love their parents, Facebook and pumpkin pie. They are crazy about

purses, texting and practicing, and manage to balance a lot of

complex relationships, including their often confused feelings

about golf.

AN EVOLVING IMAGE

The LPGA Tour is the longest-running and most successful

professional women's sports organization. Its image has undergone

more makeovers in its 58 years of existence than Betty Crocker:

from dilettante to tomboy to pin-up to postfeminist and, much more

recently, to multinational.

This year, 120 players -- half the tour's membership -- are from

outside the United States. Of those, 45 are from South Korea. They

have won seven tournaments this year and have eight players among

the top 20 money earners. The pipeline shows no signs of drying up

as more than three dozen South Koreans competed this year on the

Futures Tour, the LPGA's development circuit.

The influx of international talent comes as the tour has

recently lost four title sponsors and has yet to complete a

television deal beyond the one with ESPN and the Golf Channel that

expires next year.

When she met with South Korean players in August, Bivens said

she had received complaints from corporate sponsors in the

lucrative pro-ams because some LPGA players could not schmooze in

English. After the details of her language-proficiency policy were

leaked, the public outcry was louder than any gallery roar.

Within two weeks, the LPGA announced it was rescinding the

threat of suspension but maintaining its expectation -- fostered

through its program of language tutors and software programs -- that

playing members would become proficient in English.

Bivens's motivation extends beyond the fiscal health of the

tour. In a recent interview, she said her goal was to help

assimilate the South Korean players into a culture starkly

different from their own and to emancipate them from what she

characterized as overbearing fathers. Forcing the players to learn

English and threatening their livelihoods was the best way she saw

to accomplish that.

"The language is part of the control the parents have over

their young daughters," Bivens said. "If they don't even know

survival English, they're totally dependent on the dad."

Seon Hwa Lee, the LPGA rookie of the year in 2006 and a two-time

winner this year, is considered one of the quieter South Koreans,

but she was outspoken about Bivens' emancipation proclamation. "I

don't think that's her job," Lee said.

(BEGIN OPTIONAL TRIM.)

FATHER, FATHER

Christina Kim, a 24-year-old who dresses to blind and has a neon

nature, has a split personality, cavorting like the American girl

immortalized in song by Cyndi Lauper while maintaining a Korean

daughter's comportment.

Born and raised in California to parents who emigrated from

South Korea, she once described herself as being not just the life

of the party, but the party itself. During the pro-am at a

tournament in Danville, Calif., she was the perfect hostess,

drawing out her golf partners by asking them personal questions. By

the end of the round, they were exchanging fist pumps and contact

information.

Later, Christina motioned for a reporter to take the golf cart

seat her father, Man Kim, had just vacated.

At the mention of Bivens' name, Man Kim, who was standing in his

daughter's shadow, leaned into the cart and spoke to her in Korean.

He interrupted her repeatedly as they discussed whether she ought

to continue.

"Dad," she said finally, "either you listen or whatever, but

don't do my interview for me."

When asked later about her father, she wrote in an e-mail

message: "Regardless of what people think, my father and I have

always had a great relationship. We would come to raised voices,

but which family has never done that before? I always have and

always will defend my father's role in my career, both as a caddie,

coach and father. He sacrificed so much to get me to this point in

my life."

In Korean culture, parents will do whatever is necessary to help

their children's prospects. They have a name for it, child farming,

and cultivating successful sons and daughters confers great

prestige on the parents. For golfers, that means fathers leave

their jobs to travel the circuit and serve their daughters in many

unofficial roles: coach, caddie, chauffeur, counselor, critic and

cook.

At night during the Danville tournament, the halls of an

Extended Stay America Hotel smelled of garlic and kimchi as parents

of the South Korean players made dinner. Filial obedience and

financial independence are not mutually exclusive to the South

Koreans, who see nothing contradictory about taking home the

bulgogi (barbecue beef) and letting their mothers or fathers fry it

up in a pan.

Some of the fathers turn up the heat, pushing their daughters to

practice and berating them when they do not play well. Three

caddies who work for them said there were a handful of South Korean

players on the Tour who have been ostracized by their compatriots

because of their overzealous fathers.

Christina Kim said: "I can understand and appreciate what

Carolyn is trying to do in regards to emancipating Korean players

from their fathers. However, it is my firm belief that just like in

any other culture, one has to go and reclaim their independence,

learn who they are as humans in this world, of their own volition.

If someone is not ready to leave the comforts of the nest, or they

haven't got the strength to do it, I feel that it is their own

choice."

'WHY ME?'

When does a daughter stop being daddy's little girl? The

question is a vexing one for Jeong Jang. The 2005 Women's British

Open champion, Jang is easy to find on the course; just follow her

laugh.

Jang is accompanied on the tour by her father, Seung Jang. He

retired as a police officer and left his wife behind to run the

family restaurant when his daughter joined the LPGA Tour in 2000.

Now 28, Jang has two older sisters back in South Korea.

Jang gave her father a night off from cooking last month.

Accompanied by three other South Korean golfers, she held bilingual

court over dinner at a Korean barbecue restaurant in Oakland,

Calif. In English, she recalled how she once talked her way out of

a speeding ticket in Florida by telling the officer who stopped

her, "I have to pee real bad." Wading into politics, Jang said

she liked Gov. Sarah Palin of Alaska, the Republican candidate for

vice president.

"Does she have pregnant teenage daughter?" she said to a

reporter. Yes, she was told. Jang grinned and said, "Just like

Jamie Spears!"

The next night, Jang, who has earned more than $900,000 in 24

starts this year, was in the hotel doing her father's laundry.

"He has more clothes than I do," she said.

Jang was counting down the days until she returned home to play

in this week's tournament in South Korea. She had been away since

March. Sometimes, she said, when her scores are high and her

spirits are low, she will call her mother.

"I ask my mom, 'Why me?"' Jang said. "'Why you guys pick me

to play golf?"'

She spoke of the pressures that come with being her family's

Chosen One.

"I really appreciate what my dad is doing," she said. "But

think about it. How you'd feel if your dad retires because of you,

and your mom is lonely because of you. I don't want everything to

be about me."

Her father, who explained through an interpreter that he travels

with Jang because his presence "keeps her from being lazy," spoke

of the long absences from his wife and two daughters and said he

experienced "separation anxiety."

"The person I feel most sorry for is my wife," he said. "I'd

like to apologize to her for being away." He rose abruptly and

went outside to smoke.

(END OPTIONAL TRIM.)

SEPARATION ANXIETY

Hee-Won Han, a 30-year-old player from Seoul, longs to see her

1-year-old son, Dale, who is being cared for by her in-laws in

South Korea and her husband, Hyuk Son, a retired baseball pitcher,

as she completes her eighth year on the tour. Han glues photographs

of Dale onto the covers of her yardage books.

"I miss him," she said, adding, "In Korea, every time it's a

big deal when I want to take him on a plane. They say he is too

young to be traveling."

She is the first South Korean to have a child and return to the

LPGA Tour.

"Everyone's not getting married," Han said. "All the players

are the same. They practice, practice, practice. They just want to

play golf harder."

As children, South Koreans are funneled into sports or

schoolwork. The two do not mix in a culture that places a premium

on excellence, not well-roundedness.

Seon Hwa Lee turned pro at 14 and won her first event on the

South Korean LPGA tour the next year. Song-Hee Kim was 17 when she

won on the Futures Tour in 2006. When Lee and Song-Hee Kim gained

their full LPGA privileges, they were cocooned teenagers not quite

ready to be social butterflies.

At last year's pro-am in Danville, Chuck Rydell, an employee of

the tournament sponsor Longs Drugs, was paired with a young South

Korean who spoke little English. He said he spent an enjoyable

round teaching her American curse words.

This year, his pro partner was Sun Young Yoo, a 21-year-old who

is known among the South Koreans as the course clown. She made

Rydell laugh when the windshield in her cart flew off. Without

missing a beat, Yoo said, "Maybe we are going to lose tires

next."

The pro-ams are like a roving cocktail party, with plus-fours

instead of petit fours, and entry fees of $3,500 to $12,000 a

person. Coolers around the course are stocked with soda and beer;

golf is the ice-breaker for conversation. This kind of socializing

is new to the South Koreans, who may even consider it improper. In

their culture, it is unusual for young people to mingle with older

strangers.

Juli Inkster, who has had a front-row seat for golf's

globalization during her 26-year LPGA career, said: "You put an

18- or 19-year-old girl that's maybe not comfortable with her

English with four CEOs, men or women, she is not going to feel

comfortable going up there and making small talk. That's not the

way they are brought up."

With a little ingenuity, this gap can be bridged. For the last

two years, the tour stop in Portland, Ore., has held a separate

pro-am for Korean-speaking players. They are paired with

Korean-speaking amateurs for 18 holes, and a meal catered by a

local Korean establishment is served afterward. Everybody wins. The

players gain practice interacting with strangers, and the

tournament is tapping into a new fan base. This year, the Portland

tournament sent out nine foursomes with South Korean pros, up from

five in 2007.

Among the players who took part in this year's South Korean

pro-am was Song-Hee Kim. One of 10 players on the tour this year

with the surname Kim, Song-Hee is easy to pick out. She walks the

course with a thoroughbred's gait and favors short, cropped hair

and long pants. Until she signed a clothing contract with Fila, her

father was her stylist. He bought her shirts in pro shops, choosing

what he might wear himself.

Song-Hee's Kim's personality is blossoming with her golf game.

One day she left the practice green with a messenger bag slung over

her right shoulder. The Swedish veteran Helen Alfredsson touched

the flap and purred, "Nice bag, Song-Hee."

Beaming, Kim said her coach had helped her choose the Louis

Vuitton, the first purse she had ever owned. Her English was

perfect.

Florida's annual game against Georgia here

is known as the World's Largest Outdoor Cocktail Party, a testament

to the pervasive tailgating scene.

But as cocktail parties go, Saturday's on-field edition of the

heated rivalry had the style of a kegger in the woods rather than a

Midtown martini soir?e.

No. 5 Florida pasted No. 8 Georgia, 49-10, the second-worst

beating the Bulldogs have taken in a series that began in 1915.

If revenge is best served cold, Florida's victory could be

considered an ice bath. Georgia enraged Florida's players and

coaches last season by sending 70 players out to celebrate its

first touchdown. Georgia won, and that celebration resonated as

much as any moment in college football last season.

Cold can also describe Saturday's postgame handshake between

Florida coach Urban Meyer and Georgia coach Mark Richt, a brush-by

with no eye contact, straight out of the Bill Belichick playbook.

While Florida did not respond with a specific ploy, the Gators

delivered a historic victory. The lopsided tenor of the victory

made a soothsayer out of Meyer, who wrote in his autobiography this

summer, "We'll handle it, and it's going to be a big deal."

Florida (7-1, 5-1 Southeastern Conference) called two timeouts

in the final minute to relish the victory, rubbing in the worst

loss of Richt's tenure at Georgia. Florida has won 16 of its past

19 meetings with Georgia.

Tim Tebow ran for three touchdowns and threw for two others, as

Florida took hold of the eastern division of the SEC and reasserted

itself into the Bowl Championship Series title race. But most of

Florida's success on a muggy afternoon came from Georgia's

self-inflicted wounds.

In a fog of penalties, Matthew Stafford interceptions, Knowshon

Moreno blunders and one baffling coaching decision by Richt,

Georgia's season of great expectations melted into one of extreme

disappointment.

Georgia (7-2, 4-2) began the season as the country's No. 1 team,

but this season will probably be defined by their staggering

ineptitude Saturday.

The debate around college football next week will be whether

Florida can sneak into one of the top two spots in the BCS

standings, but the debate in Athens will be about which of

Georgia's star offensive players played worse.

Stafford, considered the country's best quarterback prospect by

many NFL scouts, turned the game with a critical interception in

the third quarter that Joe Haden returned 88 yards to the 1.

Stafford badly underthrew the freshman receiver A.J. Green on the

play. Stafford then fueled the blowout with two more interceptions

that turned into Gators scores.

Stafford finished 18 for 33 with 267 yards and no touchdowns.

Stafford may be a better professional prospect, but Tebow

outclassed him. Tebow finished 10 of 13 passing for 154 yards and 2

touchdowns. Florida scored seven touchdowns, had no turnovers and

has averaged 54.3 points in victories over Louisiana State,

Kentucky and Georgia its past three games.

Moreno had a beautifully thrown ball by Stafford hit him off the

face mask late in the second quarter with Georgia trailing, 14-3.

Georgia had to settle for a field-goal attempt, which Blair Walsh

plunked off the left upright from 27 yards out.

Georgia went into halftime behind by 14-3, and Haden's

interception turned the game. But Moreno did not help when he

failed to catch a pitch from Stafford that Florida defensive

lineman Terron Sanders picked up. He pirouetted, then ran for 30

yards.

Tebow scored from 8 yards out two plays later, Florida led by

35-3, and the Georgia fans poured to the exits.

The first Florida touchdown came after an illegal-contact

penalty by Georgia's Jarius Wynn negated a Tebow interception. The

penalty accounted for 14 yards, and Florida scored two plays later

on a 13-yard option run by Percy Harvin.

After Georgia answered that score with a field goal, Richt

inexplicably decided to try an onside kick. The Florida walk-on

holder Butch Rowley recovered, and the Gators took over in Georgia

territory. Tebow immediately found tight end Aaron Hernandez for an

18-yard pass, starting a drive that he ended with a 1-yard

touchdown run on fourth down.

With the ball on the Florida 6, Georgia imploded. Stafford

missed tight end Tripp Chandler, who was running alone in the end

zone, on first down. Moreno was stuffed on an uninspired run on

second down, and the ball plunked his face mask on third down. He

flailed to the officials for a pass-interference call, which summed

up Georgia's ineptitude on the day.

Georgia's success against Florida ended with a distinctive thud.

And this cocktail party ended like so many others, with the

Bulldogs looking up at Florida in the SEC standings. The yearlong

hangover begins Sunday morning.

A federal judge has appointed a temporary receiver for a kosher

meatpacking company in Iowa after a bank said that the company had

defaulted on a $35 million loan and that it had written $1.4

million in bad checks.

The loan foreclosure against the company, Agriprocessors Inc.,

was the latest in a cascade of troubles that have come after nearly

400 illegal immigrant workers were arrested in a raid in May at its

plant in Postville, Iowa. On Thursday, Sholom Rubashkin, the former

chief executive, was arrested in Iowa on federal charges of

conspiring to harbor illegal immigrants.

In a lawsuit filed Thursday in federal court in Cedar Rapids,

First Bank Business Capital of St. Louis claimed that

Agriprocessors had failed to maintain enough cash in designated

bank accounts to stay current on the revolving loan it took out in

1999. The lawsuit was first reported Friday on the Web site of The

Forward, a Jewish newspaper.

The suit also claims that Agriprocessors violated the loan terms

by diverting nearly $1.4 million from First Bank accounts to

another bank to issue payroll checks on Oct. 24. First Bank learned

that those checks were returned for insufficient funds, the lawsuit

says.

The suit says Agriprocessors had begun to fall behind on the

revolving loan during the quarter that ended March 31, suggesting

that its financial woes predated the raid, which decimated its

workforce.

The bank asked the judge to appoint a receiver immediately,

saying that a bank representative had been expelled from the

Postville plant after a meeting on Thursday. The judge, Linda R.

Reade of U.S. District Court, appointed the temporary receiver late

Friday and set a hearing for Wednesday.

The bank reported that Agriprocessors owed $188,000 to an

electrical company and warned that electricity to the plant could

be shut off, causing "millions of dollars of fresh and frozen

products" to spoil. The suit says millions of chickens "are in

danger of starving to death if not fed."

Aaron Rubashkin, the company's owner and the father of Sholom,

put up $2.2 million in collateral, in addition to some of the

property at the huge Postville plant, and Sholom Rubashkin put up

$1 million, the suit says.

Last week, Iowa authorities levied $10 million in fines against

Agriprocessors for wage violations, and Aaron and Sholom Rubashkin

are facing criminal charges for child labor violations.

Lawyers for the company could not be reached for comment.

Albert Boime, a noted scholar of art history who took the

history every bit as seriously as the art, if not more so, died

Oct. 18 in Los Angeles. He was 75 and a longtime Los Angeles

resident.

The cause was myelofibrosis, a bone marrow disorder, his wife,

Myra, said. At his death, he was a professor of art history at the

University of California, Los Angeles, where he had taught for

three decades.

In nearly 20 books and scores of articles, Boime explored the

social and political contexts in which art is produced. His work

did not neglect issues of style and form, the traditional province

of art criticism. But it focused on art as a cultural product -- for

good or ill -- of the society in which it is made. He also sought to

rehabilitate one of the most famous madmen of Western art.

Training Marxist and psychoanalytic lenses on his subjects,

Boime examined artworks as physical manifestations of the

economics, class divisions, power structure and racial attitudes of

their times. He was best known for his studies of 19th-century

European art, but his work ranged over many genres, among them

popular imagery in Europe and America and emblematic national

monuments like the Statue of Liberty and Mount Rushmore.

Boime was known in particular for his four-volume "Social

History of Modern Art." Published by the University of Chicago

Press, the series spans nearly 3,000 pages and comprises "Art in

an Age of Revolution, 1750-1800" (1987); "Art in an Age of

Bonapartism, 1800-1815" (1990); "Art in an Age of

Counterrevolution, 1815-1848" (2004); and "Art in an Age of Civil

Struggle, 1848-1871" (2007).

While some critics found Boime's work polemical, others praised

the sweep of his scholarship. Writing in The New York Times in

1974, Hilton Kramer singled out Boime's first book, "The Academy

and French Painting in the Nineteenth Century," as "the

indispensable text for this inquiry." Published by Phaidon in

1971, the book examines the unintended contribution of the French

Academy, long considered a conservative force in the training of

19th-century painters, to artistic innovation.

Albert Isaac Boime was born in St. Louis on March 17, 1933.

After Army service, he earned a bachelor's degree in art history

from UCLA in 1961, followed by master's and doctoral degrees in the

field from Columbia in 1963 and 1968. From 1968 to 1972 he taught

at what was then the State University of New York at Stony Brook

(it is now Stony Brook University); from 1972 to 1978 he taught at

SUNY Binghamton. He joined the UCLA faculty in 1979.

Besides his wife, the former Myra Block, Boime is survived by a

brother, Irving, of St. Louis; two sons, Eric, of Minneapolis, and

Robert, of Portland, Ore.; and five grandchildren.

Boime was often drawn to outsiders, as both the subjects and the

makers of art. In one book, "The Art of Exclusion" (Smithsonian

Institution, 1990), he examined the depiction of black people in

19th-century art. In another, "Thomas Couture and the Eclectic

Vision" (Yale University, 1980), he explored the life and work of

Couture, a significant but neglected French painter of the 19th

century.

But in one study, which attracted wide attention in the news

media, Boime offered a new interpretation of a well-known painting

by a well-known artist. With a planetarium put at his disposal, he

reconstructed the sky over Saint-Remy, France, as van Gogh would

have seen it in from the window of the asylum to which he was

confined in 1889 and 1890.

Addressing the American Astronomical Society in 1985, Boime

argued that van Gogh's masterwork, "The Starry Night," was not

the hallucinatory vision of a madman, as observers had long

supposed. Instead, he said, the painting's outlandish whorls

accurately if somewhat fancifully depicted the arrangement of the

heavenly bodies in the predawn hours of June 19, 1889, the day van

Gogh finished the painting.

When coal powered the tugboats of Cornell Steamboat Co., people

who lived along the Hudson River would recognize them by the yellow

and black of their smokestacks and the blare of their whistles. In

the decades after the Civil War, Cornell pulled the barges that

brought the bluestone, cement and bricks to build New York City,

and the grain and ice to sustain it. Baled hay came down the river

for the thousands of horses on city streets, and their manure went

north for fertilizer.

Clarence W. Spangenberger -- who died Oct. 21 in Rhinebeck, N.Y.,

at the age of 102 -- was the last president of what for many years,

with its more than 60 vessels, was the largest tugboat company in

the United States, and maybe the biggest in the world.

His death was announced by Stuart Murray, author of "Thomas

Cornell and the Cornell Steamboat Company" (2001).

By the time Spangenberger took over the legendary company in

1954, Cornell was struggling; trucks, railroads and oceangoing

vessels were fast cutting into its business. Spangenberger, known

as Bill, did everything he could to stave off a collapse, including

laying off hundreds of employees, many of whom he had known since

childhood -- always telling them in person. He even had to let his

father, the company barber, go.

After its largest customer, New York Trap Rock Corp., a producer

of crushed stone, bought Cornell in 1958, Spangenberger remained in

charge of towing operations, which continued to be called Cornell

Steamboat. But his economies and the introduction of powerful new

kinds of tugboats were not enough to prevent Cornell from going out

of business in 1963.

The company traced it roots to the 1830s, when Thomas Cornell

acquired a sloop to carry passengers and ship goods from Rondout,

N.Y., a port town on the Hudson that is now part of Kingston, to

New York City, 100 miles to the south.

But he glimpsed that steamboats were the wave of the future and

set about building a fleet of towing paddle-wheelers that by 1900

was the largest of its kind in the United States. One steamer was

the famous Norwich, which was designed by Robert Fulton and

operated until 1910.

Cornell's business empire included hotels, railroads and an

amusement park. When he died in 1890, Samuel D. Coykendall took

over and converted the Cornell fleet to propeller-driven tugboats.

His six sons assumed control after his death in 1913.

Spangenberger was born in Kingston on Dec. 9, 1905. He was the

only child of parents who supported themselves by catering to the

shipyard workers and boatmen in Rondout, his mother by selling

bread from her parents' bakery, and his father by working as a

barber to the Coykendall family and to company executives.

Spangenberger graduated from New York University with a degree

in business, then worked for Standard Oil Co. as a sales

representative. He joined Cornell in 1933 in accounts receivable,

then moved to supervising the engineers, firemen and oilers of the

tugs before climbing the ladder to become president in 1954.

By that time, much of Cornell's business had disappeared. The

Hudson had been deepened around 1930 to allow oceangoing ships to

reach Albany, ending the need to tow grain barges. Railroads and

trucks could carry most cargo faster and more efficiently than

boats, and refrigeration had obviated the need for natural ice. And

Cornell had not gone after the lucrative business of towing

petroleum products.

Well before he became president of Cornell Steamboat,

Spangenberger had nudged the company's reluctant owners to convert

steam vessels to oil power. His efforts to modernize the fleet

resulted in boats like the Rockland County, which could push 21

barges that were tied three abreast and covered an acre. Before

then, when barges were towed end to end, they would have extended a

half mile, Murray said.

Trap Rock, whose corporate predecessors dated to before the

Civil War, hoped to use Cornell's name, Spangenberger's expertise

and $4 million in new barges to expand its tug and barge business.

But when sufficient business failed to materialize, Trap Rock sold

its barges and boats and got out of the business in 1963.

Spangenberger, who left no immediate survivors, liked to hike in

the Catskills and dance to the music of Guy Lombardo in elegant

Manhattan hotels with his wife of more than 70 years, the former

Kathleen M. Sharp, who died last year. He played tennis into his

early 90s.

He worked to keep alive the memory of the steamboat company. He

helped to get the company biography published and to organize an

exhibit about Cornell Steamboat at the Hudson River Maritime Museum

in 2001.

In 1958, Spangenberger, with clear delight, showed a reporter

for The New York Times some yellowed articles about the company,

including one from the 1880s that reported that it had cost a

shipper a dime a ton to move cargo from New York City to Yonkers,

and twice that if the destination was Poughkeepsie.

Super Bowl champions get celebrity

treatment. For Amani Toomer of the Giants, this meant an invitation

to the television talk show "The View."

Such moments can also be humbling. Whoopi Goldberg mistakenly

praised Toomer for the spectacular Super Bowl catch that was made

by David Tyree. But Toomer let the gaffe pass so as not to

embarrass her. "I let her off the hook," he said.

In a way, the moment suited the understated professional persona

of Toomer, the senior Giant, who will enter Sunday's game against

the Dallas Cowboys at Giants Stadium with several franchise

pass-catching records, including most receptions (642) and most

yards (9,194).

Despite his longevity and accomplishments, Toomer -- in his 13th

season -- has never made the Pro Bowl. It was not until this season

that he was elected by his teammates as one of five captains.

"I haven't been a captain since high school because I'm kind of

quiet, and I don't really say too much," Toomer said. "I thought

it was pretty special. They recognized the hard work I've done."

Toomer, playing a position occasionally filled by outspoken

egotists, sometimes comes across as reticent. But he was one of the

few Giants to publicly discuss the recent problems involving

Plaxico Burress.

Toomer said last week that Burress -- suspended for a game

earlier this season and benched for a quarter last Sunday -- had

become a distraction. "It's not good for the team," Toomer said,

"and it's not good for him."

They play similar roles and share playing time, so the situation

could be sensitive. Toomer said he did not confront Burress. But he

felt obligated to answer questions; it is what a captain does.

As is usually the case among athletes, credibility in the locker

room is earned primarily by performance on the field. Toomer

accrued more last Sunday in Pittsburgh with the Giants trailing by

5 points in the fourth quarter on a fourth-and-6 play.

With a move around a cornerback, he got open deep. With a

last-moment dive, he caught Eli Manning's pass for a 30-yard gain

while eluding a safety's helmet-first tackle. The reception kept

alive a drive that helped lead to a 21-14 victory.

Kevin Gilbride, the offensive coordinator, said the catch was

"huge."

"Somebody had to step up and make a big play," he said.

Gilbride also praised Toomer for "the courage he displays."

Two days later, on his day off, Toomer was in a limousine in

Hillsdale, N.J., picking up Chase Strynkowski, a sixth grader at

George White Middle School. It was part of the NFL's Take a Player

to School promotion to encourage physical fitness.

Toomer ate breakfast with Strynkowski's family, teased Chase

lightly about his New England Patriots souvenirs and rode with him

to school in the limo. When they entered the principal's office,

Toomer removed his hat.

"Can't wear hats in school," Toomer said. "My dad was

actually the principal at my school. I was the principal's son.

Think about that."

That was in Northern California, where the four Toomer siblings

were raised in a suburban neighborhood with a view of the Golden

Gate Bridge. His parents had named him Amani Askari because the

words mean Peace Warrior in Swahili.

Amani first attended private schools but his father, Donald

Toomer, was in charge of an inner-city junior high in San

Francisco. According to Donald, he decided to enroll Amani in his

school when his son said to him at a young age, "Dad, I don't like

black dudes."

"I said, 'What?"' Donald Toomer recalled. "I said, 'Well,

what do you think I am?"'

The elder Toomer, speaking in a telephone interview, said he

grew up as one of 13 children in what he called a ghetto in Akron,

Ohio. He said his mother was a domestic worker.

The elder Toomer said his son required cultural orientation

about his race. "I needed him to go to a public school, an

inner-city school, to see how other people -- people of color -- had

to act and react," he said. "I wanted him to understand everyone

isn't as fortunate."

Donald Toomer also said he taught his son to be more aware of

others. "Respect yourself and go out of your way to be aware of

others, especially the little kids," he said.

Amani excelled at his father's junior high, moved on to a

private high school, was recruited by Michigan and was drafted by

the Giants.

His father, who played for Woody Hayes at Ohio State, used to

officiate Pac-10 games and still operates a scoreboard clock for

Oakland Raiders games. So he had connections.

As a teenager, Amani Toomer studied under Jerry Rice, the star

of the San Francisco 49ers. But he had difficult adjustments to

both college and professional football.

In his freshman year at Michigan, he called his father and said

he wanted to transfer. "He said, 'Dad, they don't like me,"'

Donald recalled. "'They chased me out of the varsity room."'

In his rookie year with the Giants, Toomer called his

high-school coach on the telephone and said, "Coach, they think

I'm a space cadet." His second Giants coach, Jim Fassel, scolded

him for poor training habits.

Toomer got more serious, mastered kung fu, studied yoga and

evolved into something more than a kick returner. Now, he mentors

players like Mario Manningham, a rookie receiver from Michigan who

has the locker next to Toomer's.

"He has been showing me the ropes," Manningham said. "He

leads by example." Down the row, the second-year receiver Steve

Smith said: "He tells you to stay patient. Your time's going to

come."

Smith smiled and tapped a shelf on his locker. "We respect

him," Smith said. "He's been here longer than some of the wood in

this room." Toomer is 34 years old. Manningham is 22; Smith, 23.

On Tuesday, Toomer stood with 11-year old Chase Strynkowski in

front of his gym class in Northern Jersey, leading stretches and

exercises and telling the children to work out for at least one

hour each day.

"Be active," Toomer said. "Don't just sit around and play the

Xbox. Live a healthy life."

Having just finished the soft part of their

schedule, the Jets play at Buffalo on Sunday in their most

important game since they lost in the first round of the playoffs

in 2006.

Of course, getting the Jets to acknowledge the additional

importance of any game is almost impossible, a violation of coach

Eric Mangini's every-game-counts-the-same philosophy. Yet last

week, several players for the Jets (4-3) used the word "big" to

describe their American Football Conference East game against the

Bills (5-2).

Even Mangini allowed this much: "We've definitely talked about

the fact that if you want to move forward, you have to win these

division games."

When the Jets made deals worth more than $100 million in the

off-season on free agents, and traded for quarterback Brett Favre

and nose tackle Kris Jenkins, they did so with the intention of

winning games like this one.

Seven games into their grand roster experiment, the Jets still

have no idea what type of team they are. Sometimes, their running

game is effective. Other times, it goes nowhere.

Sometimes, their passing game is unstoppable, as it was against

the Arizona Cardinals when Favre threw six touchdown passes. Other

times, it is erratic as it was in the Jets' past three games, when

Favre threw for a combined seven interceptions and three touchdown

passes. In those games, the Jets had a 2-1 record with a minus-8

turnover ratio while playing against the Cincinnati Bengals, the

Oakland Raiders and the Kansas City Chiefs. They have a combined

4-17 record.

The defense has also been inconsistent. In a microcosm of their

season, the Jets shut out the Cardinals in the first half but gave

up 35 points in the second.

Despite their uneven play and their loss to the Raiders, the

Jets are in the thick of the East race, trailing the division

leaders Buffalo and New England by a game.

After watching the Bills on tape, Favre said their record was

not a fluke. He added that a win over the Bills would give the Jets

a feeling of "O.K., we could be pretty good."

"It will do a lot for our psyche and character, but I don't

know if it will put us over the hump," Favre said. "We have to

get over that hump, and if we can do that, you know, it will be

interesting."

Entering this season, Bills coach Dick Jauron said he felt each

team in the East had improved. With Patriots quarterback Tom Brady

out for the season, that improvement means the division is wide

open -- only two games separate the Bills and last-place Miami. The

Bills lost to the Dolphins last week. Jauron acknowledged that each

week, coaches say they prepare the same way, but he added that a

division game with the playoff implications of this one was

"emotionally, a little bit different."

"There is a little more bounce," Jauron said. "I don't know

how else to define it. It's not in terms of hours of preparation,

or effort on the field at practice. There is just a difference in

feeling when you're inside that division."

Division aside, the Jets enter this game tied for the second

wild-card slot in the AFC. They face a Bills team that has won the

last three games in this series, despite entering each contest with

a losing record. They will face quarterback Trent Edwards, who made

the first start of his career last season against the Jets and has

been on a roll lately. And they will face the Bills' rowdy home

crowd at a stadium where Buffalo is unbeaten in three games.

"I don't know yet," Edwards said when asked if the Bills had

arrived. "We have probably won some games that we should have

lost, but we lost some games that we should have won. Once Week 17

comes around, we'll have a better feel for whether or not we're an

elite team."

Edwards lauded the AFC East as one of the toughest divisions in

the NFL, although its teams have benefited this season from a full

slate of games against the AFC and NFC West, which are generally

regarded as two of the worst divisions in the league.

The Bills have emerged as a contender largely because of an

offense that has been together for a while.

"I have a better comfort level with this offense and with these

guys in the huddle," Edwards said. "They're not new faces. It's

the same guys from last year. It's the same offense as last year,

and it's the same coaches as last year."

The Jets took the opposite approach, adding Favre, left guard

Alan Faneca, right tackle Damien Woody and fullback Tony

Richardson. The results have been mixed, particularly in the past

three games.

The next part of their schedule seems difficult: St. Louis, at

New England, at Tennessee, and Denver.

"Regardless of what's being said externally, if you buy into

that, if you look at that, if you think about that, you lose track

of what's important," Mangini said. "It happens all the time.

Teams that are favored to win, don't. Teams that aren't favored to

win, do."

The Jets hope that trend continues Sunday.

The bright lights of the big city are getting a

little bit duller -- with just a hint of green.

Motion sensors ensure that unoccupied offices, storerooms and

canteens go dark after workers and cleaning crews leave at night.

Dimmers soften overhead lights that once could burn only bright or

not at all. Timers guarantee that buildings fade to black while the

city sleeps.

Gone are the days when cheap electricity, primitive lighting

technology and landlords' desire to showcase their skyscrapers kept

floor after floor of the city's highest towers glowing into the

night. Rising energy costs, conservationism, stricter building

codes and sophisticated lighting systems have conspired to slowly,

often imperceptibly, transform Manhattan's venerable nightscape

into one with a gentler glow.

Instead of tower after tower shining at all hours -- the World

Trade Center stayed aglow long after its occupants went home -- the

skyline is becoming a patchwork of sparsely sparkling buildings

decorated with ornamentally lighted tops.

"The tall tower with the illuminated floors on all night long

is probably a thing of the past," said Randy Sabedra, the owner of

RS Lighting Design, who is helping to create a new map of the

city's most prominently lighted buildings. "You're not relying on

the glowing floors to have the building presence. It is relying on

the crown of light."

Since electricity set it ablaze more than a century ago, the

skyline has dimmed a number of times. During World War II and the

energy crisis of the 1970s, New Yorkers considered it patriotic to

turn out lights. But such frugality disappeared once times were

flush again.

The building boom of the last decade, the ever-expanding

electronic billboards of Times Square and unshielded traffic lights

have solidified New York's status as one of the country's most

light-polluted cities, according to the International Dark-Sky

Association, which has pushed for city and state legislation to

turn the lights down.

New York scores a 9 on the 9-point Bortle Dark-Sky Scale, the

association's favored measure, along with other major cities like

Houston and Las Vegas; a typical suburban sky ranks a 5, while

Tucson, which has stringent outdoor lighting codes, is also a 5.

"The light bulb has not really gone on in their head yet,"

Susan Harder, who runs the association's New York section, said of

city officials. "We'll always have an iconic skyline, but we don't

need this big glow over the city."

To that end, the State Assembly passed legislation in June

requiring that new outdoor lighting have shields that reduce glare

and waste; the bill's sponsor, Assemblywoman Linda B. Rosenthal, a

Manhattan Democrat, said it would most likely be taken up by the

state Senate if the Democrats manage to win a majority on Tuesday

(Republicans currently hold a one-seat advantage).

City Councilman Alan J. Gerson has introduced a variety of

similar measures -- to require full streetlight shields and motion

detectors in all commercial and government buildings, and to

mandate more efficiently lighted billboards. The first of the

proposals could be taken up as early as this month.

"The sky won't be totally dark," Rosenthal said. "But it's

2008, so we have to take into account energy concerns."

In many ways, the business community is ahead of the

politicians. Several of the city's newest skyscrapers incorporate

cutting-edge technologies that appeal to environmentalists -- and

those eager to keep energy costs down.

"This time, the difference is that we're more conscious of what

we're doing and the lighting industry is more advanced," said Meg

Smith, a manager in New York for Lightolier, a manufacturer that

specializes in lighting fixtures and controls.

As demand for electricity in New York rises and global

competition drives energy prices higher, the cost of the technology

that makes better use of daylight and reduces electricity use at

night -- motion sensors, software-driven timers and the like -- is

falling. In some cases, it takes just two years to recoup the

investment in this equipment, down from five years not long ago,

according to Mark Roush, director of New York marketing for Acuity

Brands Lighting, the nation's largest maker of lighting fixtures.

That includes the growing number of rebates from state agencies

and utilities, which are trying to reduce consumption to relieve

stress on the electric grid and put off building expensive power

plants and substations.

At the new 91,000-square-foot downtown offices of Incisive

Media, which owns about 30 publications, including The American

Lawyer magazine, the two floors are divided into four zones for

overhead lighting so not all of the space has to be lighted or dark

at a given time. Individual offices are equipped with motion

sensors; on a recent evening, lights automatically shut off as

workers left for the day. The cleaning crew was gone by 8 p.m., but

because a handful of editors worked later, a timer turned off the

remaining lights at 11 -- and would turn them back on at 6 a.m.

"We have to balance the administrative time versus the energy

savings," said Allison Hoffman, an Incisive Media executive who

oversaw the construction of the space, at 120 Broadway. "We'll be

constantly adjusting."

To qualify for tax credits and rebates from the State Energy

Research and Development Authority, Incisive's architects, TPG,

designed a system that emits less than 0.78 watt a square foot (1.1

watts a square foot are allowed under the building code for

refurbished offices). They used fluorescent bulbs that are

five-eighths of an inch in diameter, about 40 percent smaller than

the previous generation of bulbs, and use 28 watts of electricity,

compared with 42 to 48 watts for the old lights.

At the National Audubon Society's offices on Houston and Varick

Streets, lights-out is set for 7 p.m. Ten minutes before, a warning

flash alerts employees needing to work late that they should go to

a light switch to reset the timers.

Clay Nessler, vice president of global energy and sustainability

at Johnson Controls, helped develop a more complex system for the

Citigroup tower in Long Island City, Queens, that helps keep

cleaning crews on schedule. "It's going to increase productivity

and lead to more efficiency," he said.

At the Renzo Piano-designed new headquarters of The New York

Times, on Eighth Avenue, the rows of single 28-watt fluorescent

bulbs that line the ceilings are connected to a computer network

that lets maintenance workers quickly scan which ones need

replacing or repair, rather than trolling the floors.

Like Incisive Media, The Associated Press divided its Manhattan

headquarters, which covers two acres of floor space, into zones,

allowing groups of workers to tailor the lights to their liking and

preventing large banks from burning when just a handful of people

are around. The system, Lightolier's iGEN, helped cut energy use by

28 percent in the first year, Smith said.

Because of the expense, advanced lighting systems are being

installed primarily in new buildings or offices being retrofitted

for new tenants. So changes to the city's nightscape will come

gradually over many years.

But more and more, building owners are writing leases that

require tenants to pay for their own electricity, leading many

tenants to install more efficient lights. A lot of the new

energy-efficient fixtures were designed to fit into the ceiling

spaces that now hold older fixtures, making the upgrades easier and

cheaper.

"Lights will diminish," said Guy Geier, senior partner at

FXFowle, an architecture and interior design firm in Manhattan,

"because over 10 or 20 years, those leases are going to roll over

and the incentive is going to be there to start installing newer

lights."

This is not the first time innovations in technology and

construction have been visible in the nightscape. In the early 20th

century, many buildings lacked air-conditioners, so they were

designed to have most workers sitting near windows; that meant the

yellowish light from the incandescent bulbs hanging above their

desks flooded through open windows into the street.

As central air-conditioning and fluorescent lights spread after

World War II, architects could build skyscrapers enclosed in glass,

which gave off a cooler light; at the same time, more interior

space was now viable, though lights there were less visible from

the outside. But as tall towers multiplied, the volume of light in

Manhattan increased: Many buildings had only a few light switches

on each floor, so if even one person was in the office, large

swaths were aglow.

James Sanders, who used to work for the Port Authority of New

York and New Jersey, recalled arriving at work one Sunday in 1985,

finding only two switches on the entire 84th floor of one of the

World Trade Center towers, and discovering that a janitor had to be

called to flip one.

"They had to switch a half-acre of lights on just for me," he

said. To his bosses, who were the landlords, leaving lights on all

evening "was in part a symbol of power," he said. These days,

such landlords can light perimeter offices while keeping the center

of a building dark. Others are installing more efficient LED lights

outside buildings in place of older floodlights. Still others are

focusing on the tops of their towers, joining the Empire State

Building, whose color-coded homages are a New York icon.

Con Edison itself has adopted several of these techniques at its

26-story headquarters near Union Square, installing 344 LED

fixtures on the clock tower in September. The fixtures, which are

meant to last 15 years, use 63 percent less energy than

conventional lights, and can be programmed to produce millions of

colors without the need for filters (like those used at the Empire

State) or other equipment.

Such ornamental statements will most likely become more

prominent as the interiors of buildings continue to dim over time.

"New York City's skyline will always be a magical thing," said

Sabedra, the lighting designer at work on the nightscape map.

"It's something wonderful and beautiful about the city when it

transforms at night, its building glow, its glowing canyons. It's a

wonderful sight."

Until recently, few people would have thought Felipe Massa, a

small, modest Brazilian, would be challenging for the Formula One

title at the Brazilian Grand Prix on Sunday in the last race of the

season.

Massa trails the series leader, Lewis Hamilton of McLaren

Mercedes, by 7 points and will need as much luck as his Ferrari

teammate Kimi Raikkonen had last year when he won the race and the

championship by a point. But Massa, a winner of five races this

season, said that did not worry him.

"I have zero pressure, because I have nothing to lose," he

said. "The only thing I am thinking about is winning. After that,

the matter is not in my hands."

But Massa did take a step toward making his task easier on

Saturday. He delighted tens of thousands of fans packing his home

country's 2.6-mile Interlagos track by winning the pole for the

race with a time of 1 minute 12.368 seconds in his Ferrari.

Now he needs to win and have Hamilton finish sixth or lower.

Ferrari, for its part, seems to have always believed in him. He

signed with Ferrari in 2002, four years before he drove for the

team. It is the only such contract Ferrari has given a young

driver.

Another who believed in him early on was Peter Sauber, the

founder of the Sauber team, who was the first to hire Massa and

Raikkonen. In Raikkonen, Sauber saw formidable mental strength; in

Massa, he was impressed by his natural abilities.

It has taken the 27-year-old Massa years to build his mental

strength and racing craft. But he is one of the most complete

drivers in the series, and he has almost lived down his first-year

reputation as an erratic, unstable driver. He was 20 when he began

with Sauber in 2002, and he had repeated errors and accidents.

"My first year, I was really a kind of a wild guy," Massa

said. "But I had a very difficult car to drive and I was very

young. I think I was maybe too young to have started straight

away."

His rise to the top happened quickly. Massa had just won the

Italian and European Formula Renault titles and was about to join

the Formula 3000 Euro series in Italy when he met with Jean Todt,

the Ferrari director.

"The only thing he said is that he had heard about me, and he

said I need to win the F3000 championship first," Massa said.

He won it and Todt signed him to a contract from 2002 through

2008. That deal was later extended through 2010. But Massa did not

race for Ferrari until 2006; he still had much to learn.

After his troubled first year with Sauber, Massa took 2003 off

to test drive for Ferrari, hoping to improve his technical skills,

confidence and team relations.

"If you know how to set up the car, if you know how to work

with the team, you know what you need to have a comfortable car to

drive," he said. "That was a big learning experience when I was a

Ferrari test driver."

Returning to Sauber in 2004, Massa was indeed a better driver,

scoring 12 points that year and 11 points in 2005.

In 2006, he joined Michael Schumacher at Ferrari and quickly

proved to be as fast as him. Massa got his first victory, at the

Turkish Grand Prix. He also learned from Schumacher.

"The way he works as a leader, I think that's very important

for you to grow inside the team, to work with the team and to say

exactly what you want, to push hard in every area," Massa said.

Last year, his first without Schumacher, was crucial. Ferrari

had invested heavily in Raikkonen, who was expected to lead the

team.

But Massa challenged for the title up to the fourth-to-last

race, the Italian Grand Prix at Monza, in a battle between him,

Raikkonen and Hamilton.

After Massa dropped out of the Monza race with a broken

suspension, Ferrari decided he should support Raikkonen, even

though Massa had a mathematical chance to win the title.

"I was 3 points behind Kimi," he said. "But the difference

was compared to the first. So if they put me still in the position

to be able to win the championship, we were not going to be

champions, because Kimi won by only 1 point. It was the right

decision."

Even so, Massa said it was difficult to accept, and it became

even more difficult in the last race, Massa's home race. As with

Massa and Hamilton this weekend, Hamilton and Raikkonen were

separated by 7 points. Massa had been the fastest all weekend in

S?o Paulo, but he was forced to give up the lead to help Raikkonen

win the title.

He did so ungrudgingly, and Raikkonen made it clear that it was

thanks to Massa that he won the title.

"We were not really racing against each other, so a big thanks

to the team, a big thanks to Felipe," Raikkonen said after the

race.

In 2008, many expected Raikkonen to be even stronger. He won the

second race of the season and Massa failed to score points in

either the first or the second race. But Massa won the third race,

the Bahrain Grand Prix, finished second in Spain, won in Turkey and

finished third in Monaco. He has been consistent ever since,

winning a total of five races.

But he also gained 7 points because of penalties against

Hamilton and another driver. One of those penalties resulted in

Massa's inheriting the victory in Belgium after the race was over

and he had crossed the finish line in second.

His quiet confidence is often misinterpreted by his critics as

weakness. But he said that the low expectations made his good

results all the sweeter.

"People always put me completely out of the game, and that's

even nicer because nobody expects you to do a good job and then you

do a better job than everybody thinks and it's nicer," Massa said.

By the time polls open Tuesday morning, officials predict that

as many as 35 percent of Florida voters already will have cast

ballots via early voting or absentee ballot.

Good thing.

That's nearly 4-million people who can stay away while the rest

of the state's Nov. 4 electorate an estimated 5.6-million people

votes the old-fashioned way: at the precinct polling place.

Early and absentee voters have relieved pressure on polling

places in advance of what many say will be a monumental turnout.

But a Times analysis indicates that it won't be enough to reduce

long lines on Election Day if projections hold true.

The numbers of new registered voters are so large (more than

1-million this year) and the expected total turnout for the

election is so high (85 percent of 11.2-million registered voters)

that traffic in Florida polling places still will be heavier than

it was in 2004.

In addition, most Florida voters will be using optical scan

ballots for the first time, and election officials expect it to

take them longer to vote on the new system than it did on the old

touch screen machines.

All signs point to longer lines than in 2004, when many people

waited an hour or more to vote.

"Imagine if early voting wasn't there," said Sean Greene, a

manager for electionline.org, an election information project of

the Pew Center on the States.

The average Florida polling place saw 718 voters on Election Day

2004. That's 60 voters an hour. If turnout projections hold true

for Tuesday, the average precinct could see 810 voters, or 67

voters an hour.

In Pinellas, an average of 72 voters an hour could go through

each precinct, an increase of six over 2004. Hillsborough's

per-precinct traffic stands to increase to 77 voters an hour, up

four voters over 2004.

In Miami-Dade County, where there are fewer precincts per voter,

the traffic could increase by 20 voters an hour.

"There's an energy and an excitement and an interest that I

have not seen in my 31 years doing this," said Pinellas Supervisor

of Elections Deborah Clark. "Voters are generally excited about a

presidential election but this is off the charts."

Experts credit big issues and the prospect of electing the first

African-American president or the first female vice president.

How you react to the coming onslaught depends on your outlook.

Some voting advocates, wary of scaring people away from the polls,

say long waits are not optimal but that's the price of democracy.

Others say excessive wait times are good reason to worry about

voters being disenfranchised.

Election officials tend to take a brighter view. Their attitude

toward high turnout: Bring it on. "You've got to remember we live

for this stuff," said Pasco County Supervisor of Elections Brian

Corley. "The more the merrier. If it means headaches on Election

Day, that's a headache I want."

Judith Browne-Dianis, co-director of the Advancement Project, a

voter advocacy group, is less optimistic.

"We are not prepared for that level of engagement in our

democracy," she said. "These waits in line are serious because

some voters do not have the opportunity to wait."

She criticized elections officials in other states who have made

light of the long lines by comparing them to waiting to buy coffee

at Starbucks or queuing up for a roller-coaster ride.

"Voting is a right," Browne-Dianis said. "The fact that

they're excusing their failure to prepare for this election is

inexcusable."

Ever since Florida's famously flawed recount in 2000, elections

have been under a microscope. The National Association of Counties

warns of a "tsunami of voters."

Electionline.org says: "Another perfect storm may be brewing,

only this one has the potential to combine a record turnout with an

insufficient number of poll workers and a voting system still in

flux."

On Monday, a group of 10 advocacy groups will hold a conference

call with journalists to announce an array of resources available

on Tuesday, including an "election protection blog" and a

real-time map of election trouble spots .

Electionline.org recently released a report titled: "What if We

Held an Election and Everyone Came?" It offers a preview of

election issues in every state and the District of Columbia.

"The question is no longer exclusively 'Will the system work?'

Rather it is, 'Can the system handle the load?'?" the report

states.

Adds Greene, the electionline.org manager: "Not only do you

have more volume, but you have it with all these changes at the

polling place."

Florida, for example, will be debuting its second large-scale

voting system in the last two presidential elections.

Well aware of the possibility of crowds, election supervisors

are working to make the flow of voters go as quickly as possible on

Tuesday.

Corley, the Pasco supervisor, said he is one of 16 counties

using a device that reads the black strip on the back of a driver's

license, speeding the check-in process to just seconds.

He says his staff is more than ready for Tuesday .

In a recent meeting with supervisors, Florida Secretary of State

Kurt Browning said there was no law requiring people to vote in a

privacy booth. If the booths are full, he said, why not set out

some tables?

With so many people watching the process now, it's more likely

that problems that once went unnoticed will be caught before the

election, said Greene. "There's always the chance that it'll be

fine."

Times staff writer Craig Pittman contributed to this report.

In case you missed it, Barack Obama wins the White House if he

wins Florida. Two days to go. Where's Florida tilting?

First stipulate that Democrats would be fools to underestimate

the GOP turnout machine in this state, as some seem to be doing.

Florida Republicans take a bow, former state chairman Tom Slade

practically invented the intensely targeted voter mobilization

program eventually fine tuned and enhanced by Karl Rove.

Every cycle, their technology and microtargeting only improve.

We also hear plenty of anecdotal evidence that the combination of

excitement over Sarah Palin and fear of Obama has the GOP base at

least as energized as it's ever been.

At this point in 2004, the rolling average of polls compiled by

RealClearPolitics.com showed President Bush leading Florida by 0.6

percent. Bush wound up winning by 5 percentage points, despite an

unprecedented voter mobilization effort by independently operating

Democratic groups. As of Saturday, the average of recent polls

showed Obama leading by 4.1 percent.

Let's also stipulate that Florida has never in modern history

seen a campaign like Obama's not only dominating the airwaves for

months, but also methodically organizing every crevice of the state

with a vast army of volunteers and paid staffers.

"It's organized like a highly sophisticated corporation. The

level of detail to which things are conducted and the discipline to

ensure that detail is followed is phenomenal," said former Florida

Sen. Bob Graham.

Early voting is also changing the equation. Bush won Florida by

381,000 votes in 2004, and the GOP's long-standing program of

promoting mail-in absentee ballot voting ensured that when Election

Day arrived, about 150,000 more Republicans had already cast their

votes than Democrats. Republicans continue to beat Democrats

significantly on absentee ballots, but factor in ballots cast at

early voting sites, and 285,000 more Democrats than Republicans had

voted as of Saturday morning.

A key question is how many of those early voters would have

voted anyway. The Obama campaign estimates that 28 percent of the

early votes came from Floridians who rarely or never had voted. A

recent St. Petersburg Times poll found that McCain had a 10-point

advantage among people who said they intended to vote on Election

Day.

McCain is in position to win Florida. But he has some serious

hurdles to overcome.

Quote of the week

"There is no doubt in my mind that if Charlie Crist had been

picked as the vice presidential nominee, we would not be discussing

the closeness of the Sunshine State in this election." Florida

GOP chairman Jim Greer.

Get connected with TV show

Check out a special one-hour Political Connections today on Bay

News 9 at 11 a.m. and 8 p.m. Guests include: Sen. John McCain,

Republican Party of Florida chairman Greer, Obama campaign adviser

Frank Sanchez and Secretary of State Kurt Browning.

TV stations rake in the advertising

Sick of presidential campaign ads? The local TV stations aren't.

From Oct. 21-28, McCain and the Republican National Committee spent

$2.93-million on TV ads in Florida, and Obama spent $4.61-million,

according to an analysis by the Wisconsin Advertising Project.

The nation's busiest market for presidential campaign ads? Tampa

Bay, followed by Las Vegas, Orlando, Denver and Miami.

Campaign trail doesn't reach to China

On a conference call to extol McCain's economic plans, Sen. Mel

Martinez, R-Fla., and a fellow former housing secretary, Jack Kemp,

found themselves on the spot over this hot-button campaign issue:

Why won't Palin go to China?

An unidentified reporter kept insisting McCain's running mate

was missing a golden opportunity by turning down an invitation to

speak at a Beijing university on Monday, the day before the

election.

"She could get elected!" he shouted.

Martinez told the speaker he wasn't a journalist. "I am, too!

For 50 years!"

Martinez feigned bafflement. "I don't know why she's not going

to China."

"Think how many votes there are in China," Kemp said.

Winner of the week

Florida House Democratic Leader Dan Gelber, D-Miami, is the

week's hands-down winner for persuading Republican Gov. Charlie

Crist to extend early voting hours in Florida. Gelber, a lawyer,

convinced the governor that he had the legal authority to do so,

and Crist issued the executive order.

Winner of the week II

Feeling generous, we won't stamp anyone as a loser this week and

instead name Charlie Crist our other winner. Even if McCain loses

Florida with an assist from Crist's early voting extension, Crist

will come out fine. After all, he needs many of those Florida Obama

supporters in his corner for re-election in 2010, and generating

some bipartisan good sure helps.

Times Columnist

Two more days to the election, and high time, too. Really, what

do we know now we didn't know months ago? We should make a new deal

with New Hampshire and Iowa: They can still hold their primary

elections first, but they have to wait until June.

Most polls say that Barack Obama is going to win. Even Karl

Rove's Web site is counting 300-plus electoral votes on the blue

side. John McCain has to win all the undecided states and pull off

a big comeback in places like Ohio, Pennsylvania and Virginia.

Out of sheer cussedness, part of me would like to see it not

based on platform or ideology at all, but just the perverse joy of

proving, once again, that We're Not So Smart. Watching the entire

punditocracy shifting gears to explain the thing would be high

entertainment.

But this is probably not going to happen. You can tell by the

last-minute wave of desperate, shrill stuff screaming that Obama is

a socialist, a Marxist, a Muslim, a non-citizen, or that busloads

of black people are invading the suburbs. In Hernando County last

week, a flier went out to 70,000 homes featuring twin photographs

of Obama and Osama bin Laden.

This is the year that It Did Not Work. There are several

reasons:

First, rightly or wrongly, the horror of 9/11 and the subsequent

fear of imminent danger have receded. They have been replaced by

weariness over the prolonged occupation of Iraq, and the stubborn

unilateralism that led up to it.

Second, our free-spending, free-lending, free-borrowing ways

have come home to roost, and the nation is in a nasty mood.

Third, the Democrats managed to nominate the most inspiring

candidate since JFK, and the best counter-puncher and organizer

since Bill Clinton, who understood that he was not going to win

merely by giving a nice speech. The real story of Obama's campaign

has been its technical expertise against Hillary Rodham Clinton,

then the GOP .

Fourth, the story line of McCain war hero, decent and respected

man, steady veteran of the Senate was shoved aside for a retread

of attack politics and the choice of Sarah Palin, which delighted

only the people already most likely to vote for him. Palin's appeal

to the "pro-American" parts of the nation was, at least, one

campaign cycle too late.

Fifth, the National League won the World Series. I don't know

why, but that means a Democratic win most of the time. (I would

have thought it the other way around, since the designated hitter

obviously is a left-wing idea.)

If Obama wins, he will win in the middle among that slice of

Americans not wedded to party label or predigested slogans. Some of

these same voters were willing to try Bush in 2000, and unwilling

to switch to the guy from Massachusetts in 2004.

He is likely, too, to have an even more Democratic Congress, but

this is not a blessing. It might prove to be his biggest challenge,

in fact. There's nothing worse than winning a big election to go

right to a party's head.

Oh, well! Here's an Electoral College prediction: Obama 291,

McCain 247. I'm giving McCain all the undecided states, including

Florida, and throwing in Ohio just for fun 'cause those guys count

votes even wackier than we do. If you want to keep Ohio blue, then

it's 311-227.

Now, I've gotta go work on my brilliant explanation in case I'm

wrong?

The frenzied, final push to turn out Florida's voters had stars

political and otherwise blitzing the state Saturday.

"Get everybody in your family, anybody that can vote,"

comedian Chris Rock exhorted more than 1,000 people at a pro-Barack

Obama rally in the College Park area of Tampa. "Get your retarded

uncle. Get him to vote. Anybody you know with an arm, bring him

down."

Forty miles north in New Port Richey, at least 5,500 people

turned out to see Republican vice presidential nominee Sarah Palin

kick off a three-stop tour of Central Florida. And in Miami and

Winter Park, Sen. Hillary Rodham Clinton stumped for Obama.

"Remember, Florida, we're a nation at war. We need somebody who

talks about wars that America is fighting, and isn't afraid to use

the word victory. We need John McCain," Palin told the

enthusiastic crowd at Sims Park.

Early voting ended Saturday in many Florida counties (except

Pinellas, where voting continues today from noon to 4 p.m.), so the

campaigns are shifting their emphasis to get every possible vote

Tuesday. Polls show a tight race for Florida's 27 electoral votes,

and both sides are slicing and dicing the electorate to mobilize

their supporters.

That's why Palin was in Pasco, Polk City and Ocala on Saturday.

Stressing familiar Republican themes of limited government,

national defense and, especially, taxes, she was working to help

win these Republican-leaning areas with similarly big margins as

President Bush did in 2004.

It's why Rock appeared in a heavily African-American

neighborhood at a Little League field a couple of blocks from an

early voting site. And it's why Clinton, particularly popular with

Hispanics, was in Miami and Central Florida.

"It's like we've been in a long, long race and we can see the

finish line," she told a fired-up crowd outside Old San Juan

Restaurant in Little Havana. "We can't let anybody stop us or trip

us up or divert or distract us. We have to get across that finish

line. Everything is at stake that we care about."

Volunteers handed out stickers that read "Hispanics for

Change" and arranged for buses to take people to early voting

sites and to canvass neighborhoods.

"How many of you have already voted?" Clinton said. A sea of

hands shot up amid a roaring cheer. "Well, here's what I want you

to do: I want you to make the case for Sen. Obama, and it's not

hard to make.?

"It took a Democratic president to clean up after the first

President Bush. It's going to take a Democratic president to clean

up after this President Bush."

The flood of activity continues today as former New York City

Mayor Rudy Giuliani campaigns for McCain at 9:30 a.m. at Square One

Burgers in South Tampa; Joe and Jill Biden hit Tallahassee,

Gainesville and Daytona Beach; and Obama supporter Jimmy Buffett

holds a free get-out-the-vote concert at the Ford Amphitheatre in

Tampa at 3 p.m.

McCain, fresh off a Saturday Night Live appearance, is scheduled

to hold a rally in Miami after midnight tonight , and then hold a

rally outside Raymond James Stadium in Tampa later Monday morning.

Obama will campaign in Jacksonville on Monday.

Dave Rodgers, 58, a Republican from Holiday at Palin's rally,

discounted the polls showing McCain behind Obama. He said the

undecided voters will go for McCain because of questions over the

economy and national security, and McCain's experience. Those

factors played into his decision to back McCain after the third

debate, even though he had planned to sit out the election.

"Remember back to the 2004 election, we were behind, too,"

Rodgers said.

A Mason-Dixon poll released Saturday shows a neck-and-neck race

in Florida with Obama leading McCain, 49 percent to 47 percent and

5 percent undecided. That means Florida could come down to

whichever side has the stronger voter turnout effort.

"I'm very, very worried. I have never seen people so much as

now," said Laura Vianello, 59, a Republican activist who was

waving signs for McCain outside the Cuban restaurant Versailles on

Saturday. "Obama is much more organized, and I hate to say that

because I'm a Republican."

Many voters who turned out to see Chris Rock sported "Obama is

my president" T-shirts, and many of them said they already had

voted. Rock joked during his seven-minute routine about the

numerous houses owned by the McCains and said the Republican

nominee can't relate to their lives and struggles. "When you go to

somebody for help, you want somebody who can relate to what you

have to say. Like if I have problems (picking up women), I wouldn't

call Brad Pitt because he wouldn't know what I was talking about,"

Rock quipped.

He is hardly the only celebrity working to turn out votes in

Florida. Comedian George Lopez will be campaigning for Obama in

Miami and Tampa on Monday, and the McCain campaign on Saturday

released a new TV ad featuring Jeb Bush.

"The people of Florida face an important choice," the former

governor says. "Do we elect a president who'll raise your taxes,

or fight for working families? A president who'll spread your

income, or let you keep what's yours?

Jessica Vander Velde contributed to this report. Adam C. Smith

reported from Tampa, David DeCamp from New Port Richey and Alex

Leary from Miami. Adam C. Smith can be reached at

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Matt Garza being a former teammate of yours, you must have

watched the World Series with great interest.

I watched, but it was a bad series overall. It wasn't that

interesting. It was a series full of errors and not a lot of

offense by the Rays anyway. Chase Utley and Ryan Howard did pretty

well for themselves, but all in all, it wasn't a great series.

Do you keep in touch with Matt?

I've talked to him a couple of times since I've been down here.

He and I have been real busy. We haven't had a chance to really get

together and hang out.

So, your high school team must have been pretty good, I suppose.

Well, we actually went to different high schools, rival high

schools. But we played on the same summer (travel) team together.

We played in our World Series in Nevada, and we'd travel all over,

like down to San Diego.

If you went to rival high schools, then you've faced his

pitching, right?

I did when I was a freshman and he was a junior. I played

varsity all four years. He definitely used to throw the ball hard,

but he couldn't find the strike zone to save his life back then. I

guess it was his senior year and once he got to college, he really

started to develop.

What did you think of the way Matt pitched this season and how

he's developed?

He's been real successful. I was real proud to see how far he's

come. To see him out there during the playoffs, it was amazing. We

played together back in high school; now we're in the same town

watching our dreams come true.

So, how serious were you about baseball?

I was actually pretty good. I played centerfield. I was going to

be drafted coming out of high school. I got offered good money to

stop playing football. The Dodgers wanted to draft me out of high

school. They offered me a lot of money to quit football, but I

didn't want to. So, I just left baseball alone. I tried to do it in

college, but it was bad timing, and it didn't work out.

Which sport was your first love?

My first love was always football because I like contact sports.

I just have a lot of fun. Baseball isn't really a boring game, but

it's a slow-developing game. You have to really have a real

appreciation for the game to get into it.

So, how much baseball do you follow today?

I still follow baseball, but not like I used to. I was a Seattle

fan back when they had Ken Griffey, (Jay) Buhner and Edgar

(Martinez). That was my team back then. When I started to grow up,

I started to follow Boston a lot more.

You're a long way from home for the first time. Has it been a

big adjustment?

I was born and raised in Fresno, I went to Fresno State all

that. You don't have a friendly face for miles. My family comes as

much as they can, but it hasn't been that much. But the whole

family is coming to see me for the Minnesota game (Nov. 16), so I'm

looking forward to that.

Our first weekly question: What's playing most on your iPod

nowadays?

It all depends on what kind of mood I'm in. If I'm getting ready

for a game, I'll probably have on (rappers) Young Jeezy or Lil'

Wayne. If I'm just driving down the road on a relaxed day, I'll put

on some R&amp;amp;B. But you know what? For some reason I've been on

this old-school kick lately. Stuff like Teddy Pendergrass, Lenny

Williams, stuff like that.

And what Web site do you visit most?

Oh, man, it's a Web site that I always said I wasn't going to

get into. Since I've been here and away from everybody, I broke

down and got a Facebook page. I was never a Facebook or MySpace

person. I always believed that those should have the slogan

"Breaking up a relationship near you." Everybody gets in trouble

on there. I didn't want that.

It's like one big gossip room, isn't it?

Yes. If someone wants to be nosy, they can go look on this other

girl's page to see if you're leaving messages on her page, or

whatever.

And when you have the rare free moment away from here, how have

you spent your time?

The rookies go bowling a lot, at least every Monday. If I'm not

bowling, then I'm probably at home.

What is it with you running backs and bowling?

I know. Cadillac (Williams) and Earnest (Graham) are probably

the best bowlers on the team. Right now, I'm doing okay. I had a

game the other night around 210. Me and (quarterback) Josh Johnson

have a big battle going on. He actually outdid me and got a 216.

Actually, after we're done with this, I'm going to get some

practice in.

FAST FACTS

Clifton Smith

Position: Running back

Height, weight: 5-8,

190 pounds

Age: 23

College: Fresno State; finished with 630 career rushing yards

and five touchdowns; had 47 punt returns for 782 yards and five

touchdowns; set NCAA record in 2005 with three punt returns for 189

yards and two touchdowns against Weber State.

Pro: Spent the first seven weeks this season on the Bucs

practice squad; promoted to active roster last week; returned five

punts for 82 yards, including team seasonlong 20-yarder.

Rookie running back Clifton Smith played high school baseball in

Fresno, Calif., with Rays pitcher Matt Garza, but even Smith had a

hard time getting through the World Series. If you really want to

keep his attention, challenge him at bowling.

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Malcolm A. Smith, the minority leader of the

state Senate, is promising something drastic, by Albany standards,

if Democrats win control of the chamber on Tuesday. He wants to

share power with rank-and-file lawmakers.

Whether he will follow through remains to be seen. But in an

interview, Smith, a Queens Democrat, who would be the state's first

black majority party leader if his party gains control of the

Senate, listed a litany of the sweeping promises politicians make

when they stand outside the levers of power.

He said he would reinvent the Senate's committees, which often

have little discernable authority, and make them work more like

committees do in Congress. He said he would move to cut the Senate

majority's central staff by at least 15 percent, or roughly 100

workers. He said he would narrow the wide gap between the resources

allocated to majority and minority party members for office

budgets. And he would move quickly to introduce legislation to

publicly finance elections, despite the state's fiscal crisis.

Senate Republicans express confidence they will hold their

one-seat majority in the chamber, and tend to roll their eyes at

Smith for what they see as empty political grandstanding before an

election. Smith has made headlines before for claims that did not

materialize, including his boasts last year that he was close to

enticing some Senate Republicans to shift to his side of the aisle.

Even good-government groups are wary of bold promises, having

been disappointed by the administrations of Gov. Eliot Spitzer and

his onetime running mate, Gov. David A. Paterson, whose promises of

reform have not translated into much tangible alteration to the way

business is done in Albany.

The changes that Smith describes, if they actually came to pass,

could recast the often-inscrutable way business has long been

conducted by both political parties. Legislative power resides with

the Senate majority leader and the speaker of the Democratic-led

Assembly, who form the so-called three men in a room who run the

state alongside the governor. Deals among the trio are typically

worked out behind closed doors, often with little public debate or

influence from the remaining 210 lawmakers.

"It's time for New York State government to move into the 21st

century," Smith said. "It would be more transparent, more

participatory, from legislators to advocates to Joe Citizen."

He added that his leadership was "not going to be about

exacting revenge" for years of slights at the hands of Senate

Republicans, who have controlled the chamber for more than four

decades.

Under Smith's plan to change the Senate's rules, committees

would have more autonomy to bring bills to the floor, and members

of a standing conference committee would seek to negotiate

legislation with the Assembly.

The ranking minority member of a committee could also put a bill

on a committee's agenda. And Smith says he would also abolish a

practice put in place by Republicans years ago that allows

essentially secret voting on hostile amendments or motions to send

stalled bills out of committees.

He would require committee members to attend meetings and would

discontinue the practice of holding committee meetings off the

Senate floor while the Senate was in session. He would also end

limits on the ability of senators in the minority to use what are

known as "discharge motions" to force bills to the floor.

"If he delivered, it would be the equivalent of a political

earthquake," said Blair Horner, the legislative director of the

New York Public Interest Research Group.

"But as we know from the 2006 election, when Spitzer and

Paterson ran to change Albany and then they didn't do anything,

talk is easy; delivering is hard."

As it stands, minority parties in Albany are relegated to poor

stepchildren status.

Take the issue of office budgets. The Senate Republicans spent

$445,904, on average, on their office budgets over the six months

ending in March, according to a recent report by the Empire Center

for New York State Policy, a branch of the Manhattan Institute for

Policy Research. By comparison, the Senate Democrats spent $274,316

on their staff budgets, the report showed.

Senate Republicans have accused Smith of being more concerned

with process than with issues that matter to voters, but their main

and most potent electoral pitch has focused more on geography than

policy. A Democratic-led chamber would doom upstate, they say,

because it would leave all of the levers of government in the hands

of New York City residents for the first time in decades.

"Every single leader would be from New York City," Dean G.

Skelos, the Senate majority leader, said in an interview in Albany

last month.

Voters outside the city, he said, "are concerned about regional

balance and fairness, so that's resonating throughout the state."

Skelos, who did not comment for this story, is not from upstate,

but from Long Island, though upstate members play a predominating

role in his caucus.

"The reality is that what most people care about is what the

Legislature will do for them," said John McArdle, a spokesman for

Skelos, citing issues like a mandatory ceiling on school property

taxes, which Smith has also supported.

"These are process issues that the vast majority of New Yorkers

are not focused on," McArdle said.

They have sent microfilm clerks and security

guards from their desks in the Capitol to the hustings of eastern

Long Island and the Buffalo suburbs. They have brought in a dozen

outside consultants, including a firm that produced the Swift Boat

campaign against John Kerry, to cut advertisements and raise money.

They have spent millions of dollars to fight for seats that were

once safely Republican.

No effort is being spared by New York Republicans in the final

days of this election season, which will determine whether they

continue to control the state Senate, their only outpost of power

in an increasingly Democratic state. Even veterans like Sen. Caesar

Trunzo -- 82 years old and running against the son of a candidate he

beat a quarter-century ago -- are making eight appearances a day to

shake hands and ask for votes.

"We just keep going along, doing what we have to do, and then

hope for the best," Trunzo said recently as he rushed off to a

campaign rally in Patchogue, on Long Island. "It's so important

that we control the New York State Senate."

Republicans have held a majority in the Senate for all but one

of the last 70 years, outlasting governors and presidents,

Watergate and Jack Abramoff, seemingly immune to the ebb and flow

of national politics. The Senate majority has helped Republicans

garner millions of dollars for their campaigns and 10 times that in

state aid for their mostly suburban or rural districts. It has been

the party's storehouse of institutional knowledge, the career

springboard for generations of politicians and operatives, and the

lifeblood of some of Albany's most powerful lobbyists.

But now the Republican majority is down to a single seat,

provoking the most intense, expensive and sweeping campaign in many

years. Eight Republican seats are being seriously contested, double

the number in most recent election years.

"It's different, because they're fighting for their survival,"

said Michael D. Dawidziak, a Republican consultant. "They haven't

fought for survival in any of their lifetimes."

The potential loss of the Senate majority is usually mentioned

only glancingly on the campaign trail, in veiled references to the

need for "balanced government." But it is the urgent undercurrent

to conversations in campaign offices, in the hallways of the

Capitol and among local Republican activists.

"Our troops, the committeemen, the volunteers -- they are very

aware of the Albany piece, where they usually are not," said James

P. Domagalski, the Republican chairman of Erie County. "They

understand what would happen if we lose the Senate."

The long tenures of many Republican senators fighting for

re-election -- some came into office in 1972 during Richard Nixon's

landslide re-election -- is a testament to the Senate Republicans'

endurance and agility. But facing the worst economic crisis since

the Great Depression, a party name damaged by an unpopular

administration in Washington, and the chance that Sen. Barack

Obama's presidential bid will bring a surge of Democratic voters to

the polls, the challenge has never seemed so great.

"This is a national tide," said Alfonse M. D'Amato, a lobbyist

and a former U.S. senator, who has been a major fundraiser and

booster for state Senate Republicans. "Sometimes the tide comes

in."

D'Amato said he was convinced that Senate Republicans would hold

on this year despite the obstacles they faced. And publicly and

privately, Republican senators and aides scoff at the suggestion

that this will be the year the majority cracks.

"I'm confident we're going to be victorious, and I'm not

thinking about 'what if,"' said Sen. Charles J. Fuschillo Jr., of

Long Island. "Because we're not going to have deal with the 'what

if."'

On the campaign trail, Republicans have used their fundraising

advantage to expand the playing field, devoting hundreds of

thousands of dollars to races in which Democrats have shown

unexpected weakness, to offset possible Republican losses. On

Friday, they sent Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg, a key ally, to

campaign with Sen. Serphin R. Maltese of Queens, who is the

Democrats' top target.

In recent weeks, Republicans have aggressively have stoked fears

that communities upstate and on Long Island would suffer from a

Democratic takeover of the Senate, which would leave the governor's

office and both legislative leadership posts in the hands of

Democrats from the five boroughs. They are blunt about what is at

stake.

"The biggest fear is that if we lose the majority, all funding

goes to New York City," said Fuschillo.

After a devastating loss in February in an upstate special

election, Republicans revamped their campaign committee, bringing

on new senior staff members, several with experience on

presidential campaigns. Since that race -- where much of the

television advertising was handled by a firm linked to a former

party chairman -- the committee has broadly expanded its roster of

campaign and advertising consultants, bringing in highly regarded

talent from the Beltway.

"We learned from the special that the TV in particular has to

be top-notch. It can't be the same old same old. You can't use the

same old political tactics," said Sen. Thomas W. Libous, an

upstate Republican and a leader of the party's campaign effort.

Facing an unprecedented number of races, Senate Republicans have

devised a buddy system -- as it is known internally -- to send

senators from safe districts to campaign for and advise incumbents

in tight races. Party officials say they have also gotten safe

incumbents to contribute more campaign money than in the past to

their more vulnerable colleagues.

"They now say, 'Instead of trying to drive up my margins in my

district, I should spend that time trying to help one of the weaker

guys win his race,"' D'Amato said.

Republicans are also preparing to unveil the kind of technology

more familiar from presidential campaigns with

hundred-million-dollar budgets. In several key races on Tuesday --

party officials would not say which -- workers will use BlackBerrys

to check off Republican voters as they arrive at polling places and

send the lists to a central database, making the party's turnout

operation far more efficient.

In some races, the GOP has resorted to methods that are

lower-tech but no less intensive. In Westchester County, where

Republicans are hoping for an upset victory, the Republican

candidate, Liz Feld, has been sending handwritten notes to voters

to ask for their support.

The loss of the majority, Republicans say, would not only put

their districts at a disadvantage in Albany. It could also cripple

the party itself. The majority, after all, comes with roughly $85

million in earmark spending and hundreds of extra staff jobs in

Albany and in district offices. In most areas of the state,

Republican senators sit atop a well-established political food

chain, providing patronage jobs, smoothing political disputes and

running local party organizations.

Vincent F. Liguori, who is active with the Republican committee

in Islip, on Long Island, said that having Trunzo as his senator

was "like having my father looking out for me."

"It's like they say: To the victor belong the spoils," he

added. "There's going to be a lot of people looking for work if he

loses."

TAMPA Halfway through the regular season, there are really only

two observations to be made about the Bucs: great defense,

disappointing offense.

That hardly rates as news anymore. Since Jon Gruden arrived from

Oakland in 2002 with a sterling reputation as an offensive

play-caller, the Bucs have ranked only once in the top 10 in total

offense (2003). This season, in terms of yardage, the Bucs are 13th

overall, averaging 341.2 yards per game. But they are 21st in the

league in scoring at 21.2 points per game.

In fact, the Bucs have scored just 13 touchdowns this season and

are on pace to have one of their worst seasons, second only to when

they had 20 touchdowns in the 4-12 season with rookie quarterback

Bruce Gradkowski.

It's somewhat perplexing, especially considering that the

offensive line, with free agent center Jeff Faine, is probably

better and deeper than at any time in the franchise's history. And

quarterback Jeff Garcia, 38, while hobbled by injuries early, has

done a decent job protecting the football.

And yet, with a win today against 1-6 Kansas City, the Bucs

could enter the bye week 6-3 and a half game back of Carolina in

the NFC South. Remarkable.

"I've just been very impressed with our team," Gruden said.

"I don't want to speak out about any individuals, although I think

we've had some guys that have really exploded onto the scene, Pro

Bowl caliber players. I really think the center is a great player.

I think we're getting better on the line.

"I think Earnest Graham, what he's done, speaks volumes about

the kind of man he is and the football player he is. Defensively

speaking, our secondary, those guys are for real. And our

linebacking corps, those guys are outstanding players. Tanard

Jackson I hope some of these guys get the recognition they

deserve. Barrett Ruud, I hope he gets the recognition."

So what do the Bucs have to do to challenge for the Lombardi

Trophy in Super Bowl XLIII at Raymond James Stadium?

Get healthy: Fullback B.J. Askew will miss his sixth game due to

a hamstring tear today. His backup, Byron Storer, is on injured

reserve with a torn right ACL. Jameel Cook, who hadn't played in

Tampa Bay since '05, isn't up to speed on the offense.

That meant Graham had to move to fullback. And it resulted in

more carries for Warrick Dunn, which led to a pinched nerve in his

back that will likely keep him out today.

"Warrick and I were in there for a while, and we were kind of

feeding off each other," Graham said. "Then everything that

happened, injuries (to Storer) and B.J., you got out of that

pattern. We've just got to get back in that rhythm. We need to get

this game and get some guys healthy."

The Bucs have been without Joey Galloway most of the season.

It'll be interesting to see what he and Antonio Bryant can do the

second half.

Play better on the road: The Bucs have lost eight of their past

12 road games and are 1-3 this season. Worse yet, Tampa Bay's

offense has scored just two touchdowns on the road.

When you consider that the Bucs have lost at home in the

wild-card round of the playoffs twice in the past three years, the

prospect of doing anything in the postseason on the road is

daunting.

"But we've got to win some big games," Gruden said. "We've

got to play better on the road. But I like this team. They're

together, they play hard. We have some young players playing, too.

We're building our team just like everybody else is. There's been

some real positive signs. Obviously, there are some areas we'd like

to clean up and get better at. Health has a lot to do with that,

too. You've got to get your team healthy, and the best players have

to play for you to play your best."

Beat Carolina: It's a safe bet the season will come down to the

Monday Night Football game at Carolina on Dec. 8. If the Bucs win,

they will own a sweep of the Panthers and the first tiebreaker.

The Panthers have tough road games to navigate the second half

at Green Bay, at the New York Giants and at New Orleans.

So, who's next? Now that the Phillies have given Philadelphia

its first major sports championship since 1983, what city is next

in line to moan and groan about its title drought? Most major

cities with at least two pro sports teams have won at least one

championship in recent history. Boston has been loaded with

championships. New York never seems to go more than a year or two.

Heck, even we here in Tampa Bay have seen two championships in the

past six years. But what about those poor saps in Cleveland?

Here's a look at cities that have parade-route plans gathering dust

in some office.

Cleveland

In 2004, ESPN named Cleveland America's "most tortured sports

city," and things haven't improved since then. The championship

drought is 44 years and counting. The Browns are one of pro

football's most storied franchises, but they have never appeared in

a Super Bowl and haven't won an NFL championship since 1964. The

Indians haven't won a World Series since Bob Feller was 29. That

was 1948.

Next best chance: LeBron James has gotten the Cavaliers to the

NBA Finals once. Eventually, he will win an NBA title. The question

is, will it be in Cleveland or somewhere else?

San Diego

Football's Chargers came into existence in 1960. Baseball's

Padres joined the majors in 1969. The city had two NBA teams,

1967-71 and 1978-84. Yet in all that time, the city has never won a

major championship other than the Chargers winning an old American

Football League title in 1963. (Does that even count?) The Chargers

reached one Super Bowl, XXIX, and were destroyed 49-26 by the

49ers. The Padres have made the World Series twice but are 1-8 in

World Series games, losing in five to Detroit in 1984 and getting

swept by the Yankees in 1998.

Next best chance: The Padres are awful, so it's going to have to

be the Chargers. With LaDainian Tomlinson, the Chargers were

supposed to be a contender this season, but it hasn't worked out

that way so far.

Buffalo

The Sabres have never won a Stanley Cup, while the Bills are

most famous for having lost four consecutive Super Bowls in the

early 1990s. The Bills won AFL titles in 1964 and 1965.

Next best chance: The Bills are off to a 5-2 start this season

and the Sabres are off to a hot start as well. Still, it's hard to

imagine either winning a title this season.

Seattle

This, actually, might be the most depressing place to be a

sports fan . Some thought the Mariners would be a contender this

season and, instead, they lost 101 games. The Seahawks were

supposed to win their fifth straight NFC West crown and, instead,

they are near the bottom at 2-5. Plus, Seattle's NBA team is now

playing in Oklahoma City. The Mariners, who came into baseball in

1977, have never made the World Series. The Seahawks have never won

the Super Bowl. The city's lone major title came when the

SuperSonics topped the NBA in 1979.

Next best chance: Yeesh, the way the Mariners and Seahawks are

going, Seattle's best chance might be getting an NBA expansion team

and building it into a winner.

Atlanta

Yes, we know the Braves won the World Series in 1995, but that

was their only championship despite making the postseason 16 times

since 1969 and 14 times since 1991. In fact, that is Atlanta's only

major championship. The Falcons have never won the Super Bowl. The

Hawks have never won an NBA title in Atlanta, and the Flames

(1972-80) and Thrashers (1999-present) have never won the Stanley

Cup.

Next best chance: Hard to say. The Braves have a good

organization, the Hawks are getting better, the Falcons are heading

in the right direction. But none seems close. If we had to guess,

we'd say the Braves.

Kansas City

Certainly not an epic drought like the one Cleveland is living

through or the one Philadelphia just ended. Still, the Chiefs last

won a Super Bowl in 1970. The Royals have won one World Series, and

that was in 1985. So the count is 23 years, just two fewer than the

Philadelphia streak

Next best chance: Can we say there's no chance? Eventually

maybe, perhaps if the stars align just right and the tides shift

and pigs begin flying the city will see another title, but the way

the Chiefs and Royals are, we just can't see it happening anytime

soon.

New Orleans

Aside from a few years with a couple of NBA teams, New Orleans

has had only one professional team, and that's not really enough to

qualify on this list. That's why we aren't talking about cities

such as Orlando, Salt Lake City, Sacramento and Jacksonville. But

the Saints' fans need to be recognized and sympathized with. The

Saints are one of six current NFL teams that hasn't reached the

Super Bowl. Of those teams, only Detroit and Cleveland have been

around longer. The Saints, founded in 1967, have won only two

postseason games.

Next best chance: Actually, New Orleans' relatively new NBA team

might be this city's best shot at a title. The Hornets, who moved

to New Orleans in 2002, had the NBA's fourth-best record last

season.

Cincinnati

Those in their 40s remember watching the Big Red Machine with

Pete Rose, Johnny Bench and Joe Morgan win titles in 1975 and 1976,

but if you're younger, you have only one championship to remember,

and that was 18 years ago when the Reds won the 1990 World Series

under Lou Piniella. The Bengals have never won a Super Bowl. And,

based on today, it looks as if they never will.

Next best chance: We have to say the Reds because the Bengals

are so awful. But it's not like the Reds are close.

Washington

Thank goodness for the Redskins. At least they have won three

Super Bowls, but the last was the 1991 NFL season. So we're talking

a streak of 17 years. The Wizards won the NBA title when they were

the Bullets in 1978, and that was the capital's first championship

in 36 years. The Washington Capitals have had good teams but have

frustrated fans by choking in the playoffs and never going all the

way. Washington again has baseball but only if you consider the

Nationals a real major-league team. (That's a joke.) When you think

about it, Washington has had a rough go of it over the years.

Next best chance: The Redskins are 6-2 this season. They aren't

a favorite to win the Super Bowl, but it wouldn't be dropped-jaw

shocking, either.

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a favorite to win the Super Bowl, but it wouldn't be dropped-jaw

shocking, either. By TOM JONES,

c.2008 St. Petersburg Times

So, who's next? Now that the Phillies have given Philadelphia

its first major sports championship since 1983, what city is next

in line to moan and groan about its title drought? Most major

cities with at least two pro sports teams have won at least one

championship in recent history. Boston has been loaded with

championships. New York never seems to go more than a year or two.

Heck, even we here in Tampa Bay have seen two championships in the

past six years. But what about those poor saps in Cleveland?

Here's a look at cities that have parade-route plans gathering dust

in some office.

Pueblo, Colo. -- With just three days until Election Day,

Democratic presidential candidate Barack Obama teased rival John

McCain for earning the endorsement of Vice President Dick Cheney.

In front of a crowd estimated by police at 15,000 in downtown

Pueblo, Colo., Obama continued his tactic of tying McCain to the

Bush administration.

"President Bush is sitting out the last few days before the

election. But earlier today, Dick Cheney came out of his

undisclosed location and hit the campaign trail. He said that he

is, and I quote, 'delighted to support John McCain,' " Obama said.

"I'd like to congratulate Sen. McCain on this endorsement

because he really earned it. That endorsement didn't come easy.

Sen. McCain had to vote 90 percent of the time with George Bush and

Dick Cheney to get it."

The entire Obama family traveled to Colorado for the rally --

Obama's fourth trip to the state since he accepted the Democratic

nomination in August at Invesco Field at Mile High in Denver.

The Illinois senator referenced his two daughters in attendance,

saying they had a tough time choosing Halloween costumes.

"John McCain doesn't have that problem," he said. "He goes

out and trick-or-treats as George Bush."

The joke hit the sweet spot for Danny Jacobs, who leaned back

his head and howled his approval.

"We got them right where we want them," he said, mocking

McCain's recent appraisal of his chances.

Obama asked supporters whether they thought Cheney and McCain

"have been talking about how to shake things up," he said.

"Colorado, we know better. After all, it was just a few days

ago that Sen. McCain said that he and President Bush share a

'common philosophy.'

"... So George Bush may be in an undisclosed location, but Dick

Cheney's out there on the campaign trail because he'd be delighted

to pass the baton to John McCain. He knows that with John McCain

you get a two-fer: George Bush's economic policy and Dick Cheney's

foreign policy -- but that's a risk we cannot afford to take."

Before the Obamas took the stage, retired Army Gen. Wesley Clark

urged the crowd to get out and vote.

"We're down to the final hours," said Clark, who was once

stationed at nearby Fort Carson. "The thing about elections is

it's never over until every vote is recounted, I mean counted."

Seeking undecided voters, Obama and McCain have been flitting in

and out of battleground states. McCain's running mate, Alaska Gov.

Sarah Palin, is scheduled to be in Colorado Springs on Monday, and

Michelle Obama will be in Littleton the same day.

Pueblo is Colorado's ninth-largest city and

neighbors heavily Republican El Paso County. Democrats make up

nearly 47 percent of all registered voters in Pueblo County; 23.5

percent are Republicans, and 29 percent are unaffiliated, according

to the county elections office.

Before the event, Stephanie Mueller, a spokeswoman for the Obama

campaign, said staging the rally at a bandstand on Main Street was

no accident.

"Barack Obama wants to say again that he wants tax cuts and

relief for Main Street, not just Wall Street," Mueller said.

The McCain campaign called a news conference after the rally for

downtown businesses that were dismayed by being forced to close for

the Obama event.

Sheila Conlee, owner of Amore Antique, called herself "Sheila

the Shopowner" and hung a sign, "I have lost my wages today

because of you, Obama," according to the McCain campaign.

Not all downtown businesspeople were grumpy about closing.

Irby's Jewelers just behind the bandstand had a giant handmade

sign that stated "Obama for the Future!"

When the political dynasty that is the Bush family effectively

ends with Tuesday's election, life as Joe Ellis knew it will become

life as he's known it.

The majority of people familiar with the unassuming Ellis may

know him as the Denver Broncos' chief operating officer. Few know

him as the cousin of our 43rd president, George W. Bush, and nephew

of former President George Herbert Walker Bush.

"I'm proud of my family and their accomplishments and all

that," Ellis said. "But I try to keep all that private. I don't

share political beliefs or provide insight about family members or

anything like that."

Ellis' mother is George H.W. Bush's sister.

It was a White House run that began in 1980 when Uncle George

began his eight-year term as vice president to Ronald Reagan. The

uncle got his own chance to lead our country in 1988.

And then in 2000, cousin George began what became an eight-year

term in the Oval Office.

There were times when the Bushes were immensely popular in the

polls. There were other times when their popularity took a hit. Up

or down, Ellis was steady as they go.

"I have known Joe for almost 25 years and I have never known

him to flaunt his connection or try to gain benefit in any way,"

said Jim Saccomano, the Broncos' longtime chief of public

relations. "And I would venture to say more than 90 percent of the

people employed here are not aware of it."

Proving his political naivet?, Ellis once helped organize a

campaign rally for cousin George at Dove Valley. He soon regretted

the decision, as some Democratic season-ticket holders took

offense.

"Joe is not political." Broncos owner Pat Bowlen said. "He's

been a football guy all his life. He's a Bush, but it's sort of

like a family thing to him. He keeps it there."

This year more than any other, there has been bickering inside

the Denver Broncos' locker room.

The intelligence from one cross-section of the room has

frequently questioned those positioned at the opposite end. There

have been times when teammates have gone so far as to -- gasp! --

point fingers at one another.

Offensive players giving the what-for to defensive players?

Nope. This is about guys supporting John McCain arguing with

teammates who back Barack Obama.

"It adds another aspect to the locker room," Broncos offensive

tackle Ryan Harris said. "You talk about it, joke about it as

friends. It's fun."

Maybe the Broncos' rosters of yesteryear were filled with

dumb-jock stereotypes who passed the time talking about girls, cars

and stereo systems.

The Broncos of 2008 are about taxes, the economy, school systems

and even foreign policy.

"There are some smart guys in here," tight end Nate Jackson

said, "guys that pay attention to issues outside of football -- and

it's made for good conversation in the locker room. It's made for

some heated debate."

There is a Broncos game Sunday against the Miami Dolphins at

Invesco Field at Mile High.

A presidential election takes place Tuesday.

The first contest deals directly with the livelihoods of the

players. They all get paid to perform on Sundays.

The second contest figures to have an impact on the quality of

life awaiting them after they get paid. To those who believe it's a

stretch to suggest the two are intrinsically connected, where again

did the Democratic presidential candidate deliver his national

convention speech?

"Go, Obama," Broncos running back Selvin Young said.

Although McCain's proposed economic plan offers greater tax

benefits to a 53-man roster whose average salary approaches $1.8

million, Obama is well-represented inside the Broncos' locker room.

His most overt supporter may be receiver Brandon Marshall, who has

been wearing Obama T-shirts to his weekly news conferences.

His latest included an Obama portrait with the inscription: "Do

You Smell What Barack Is Cookin'?"

The outgoing Marshall, though, is more listener than participant

when the presidential race turns serious inside the players'

sanctuary.

"Usually the liberals in here are outweighed by the

conservatives, at least for the politically aware," Jackson said.

The conservative-leaning Broncos, it seems, are more likely to

recite the tax advantages for those drawing a $600,000-plus salary.

"Money is not the only issue in here," Jackson said.

"However, what you do find is those who are McCain supporters,

overwhelmingly their No. 1 reason is because of money."

Too bad Tom Nalen wasn't around to hear that. The veteran center

was said by several teammates to be McCain's top Dove Valley

supporter until his transfer to the injured reserve list in

September left him rehabbing at odd hours.

At least Nalen was replaced by another McCain man.

"Moreso because of abortion, gay marriage, things like that,"

proud Republican and center Casey Wiegmann said. "Taxes, that

helps, but you're going to pay your taxes no matter what. I mean,

I've been playing for 13 years in this league. Taxes are a part of

it."

There can be no debate: The Broncos are a bipartisan locker

room. A fair number of players are pulling for Obama. Many others

will be voting for McCain.

Kicker Matt Prater would be an independent if he was anything.

"I don't vote," he said. "My mom wants Obama and my dad wants

McCain, so I don't get into it too much. Besides, I've got my own

theory on voting -- I think it's rigged."

If Prater sounds bitter about the political process, he has good

reason -- he's from Florida.

Speaking of Al Gore, global warming isn't much of an issue

inside the Broncos' locker room, although one would think it might

come up during the sweltering days of training camp.

"The environment is not an issue," Jackson said. "Health

care, no one cares about the health-care issue. We all have great

health care in here. Foreign policy is an issue. But it's more of

like a machismo issue. It's not about diplomacy. It's about, 'We

are America. We are stronger, we have to keep on the attack.' "

Many players were reluctant to share their preference. Receiver

Darrell Jackson and running back Michael Pittman, though, quietly

declared their support for Obama.

"I had never heard of Obama before he joined the presidential

race," Pittman said. "I'm dead serious. Never heard of him. But

once I started hearing him talk and the way people gather around

him and (he) carried himself, he rubbed off on me."

Ordinarily, football locker rooms are like summer parties -- it's

not cool to talk politics or religion. They are subjects with

differing opinions, which leads to offended feelings.

This year, though, the Broncos haven't been afraid to go there.

"I think this is a bigger deal," Harris said. "Either way,

there's history being made. I think it's a reflection of the race

itself."

Of course, there are more serious matters. Like the Dolphins.

The Denver Broncos need (and knead) the whole loaf of bread

today.

John Elway and Dan Marino are not playing quarterback.

Neither is Bob Griese, nor Brian Griese.

This is not for the AFC championship or, for that matter, the

AFL championship.

It's not Mike Shanahan against Jimmy Johnson or Dan Reeves

against Don Shula. It's not Shanahan against Nick Saban, or Lou

Saban against Shula. It is Shanahan against Bill Parcells, sort of.

The Miami Dolphins and the Broncos will not have perfect

seasons. In fact, it must be presumed neither the Dolphins nor the

Broncos will win their third Super Bowls. The Dolphins once won

back-to-back titles, and the Broncos duplicated the feat 25 seasons

later.

There is no Csonka, Kiick or Warfield. There's no Floyd Little.

There's no Bobby Anderson playing against his brother Dick

Anderson.

There'll be no 14-13 final score.

And there'll certainly be no 10-10 tie.

It's more likely there will be, as in 1999, 59 points scored by

the teams.

Chances are, for Miami, as Jimmy Buffett (who has lived in

Florida and Colorado) might sing: "Fins to the left, fins to the

right, Dolphins running all around."

Chances are, for Denver, as Shanahan (who has lived in Florida

and Colorado) might sing: "Passes to Marshall, passes to Royal,

passes flying all around."

The Dolphins bring back the single-wing formation. The Broncos

bring out their All-Torain Vehicle. The Dolphins come with a

mediocre defense. The Broncos go with the worst defense in America.

Those Dolphins could be called sons of the beaches this season.

These Broncos, after their Mess in Mass, have been called many

similar things.

Chad Pennington has never referred to himself as the second

coming of Dan Marino. Jay Cutler has referred to himself, well, you

know how he has referred to himself.

To wit: Broncos vs. Dolphins is as fascinating as a Bourne or a

Bond movie, as fun as spring break in Fort Lauderdale and the first

day of skiing in Steamboat Springs.

And there won't be a snowstorm in Denver on Halloween weekend.

Nothing but blue skies and 74 degrees of Colorado bliss.

In the Sept. 19, 1971, opener at old Mile High Stadium (not to

be confused with the London-Owned Corporation Sellout Field at

Mile High), in a 10-10 game between Miami and Denver, the Broncos

got the ball on a fumbled punt (recovered by one of the Anderson

brothers) late in the fourth quarter -- and coach Lou Saban elected

to run out the clock and accept the tie.

Some younger football fantasy players among us might ask: "Why

didn't the Broncos go for two when they scored their touchdown?

Shanahan would," or "Why take the risk? The Broncos knew they

could win in overtime."

Two problems: After the AFL merged with the NFL, there was no

two-point conversion, and the NFL overtime period had not been

invented.

In his postgame spiel justifying his decision, Saban muttered

that immortal sentence: "Half a loaf is better than none."

Half-a-Loaf Lou grabbed a baton and acted like he was leading a

parade when he was run out of town nine games into that season. The

next year the Dolphins went undefeated. The Broncos hired John

Ralston. Significant times for both franchises.

Many, many years later, Saban, now 87, told me: "What people in

Denver didn't understand was when I was a kid in Chicago, during

the Depression, a half a loaf of bread was very important."

In the first round of the 1983 NFL draft, Elway was chosen No.

1, but Marino lasted until the 27th pick. Elway, who also was

chosen in the first round by the Oakland Invaders of the USFL, was

traded by Baltimore to Denver, but the Dolphins decided to hang on

to Marino. And the rest of the story is written on the wall at

Canton, Ohio.

Elway and Marino faced each other three times, once in 1985

(Miami won 30-26) and twice in '98. In the next-to-last

regular-season game of 1998, the Dolphins gave the Broncos only

their second defeat, and in the divisional playoff game the Broncos

flogged the Dolphins, 38-3.

In the Monday night opener of the following season, with Brian

Griese making his quarterback debut for the Broncos and father Bob

Griese (the quarterback in the '71 tie) looking on, the Dolphins

scored 38 points and won by 17. Brian Griese became as popular as

Saban.

Three years ago, Denver and Miami opened at what is named now,

appropriately and simply, Dolphin Stadium, and the Dolphins won

34-10.

It was the debut of Dolphins coach Nick Saban.

He soon got his own baton.

Nick Saban is the cousin of Lou Saban.

The Broncos and the Dolphins play the Whole-Loaf Bowl this

afternoon.

Woody Paige is a sports columnist for The Denver Post.

Washington -- Democratic presidential nominee Barack Obama often

tells voters that the 2008 election is "a defining moment in

history." Candidates usually think their particular race is

historic, but in this case, it actually is.

Voters themselves feel they are standing at a watershed moment,

whether Democrat, Republican or the dwindling conflicted few still

undecided two days before the end of a two-year campaign. Half say

they are scared of what might happen should the wrong man win.

The candidates themselves embody the moment: The 47-year-old

Obama, on the brink of making history as the first African American

president, urges voters to take the leap into the future. The

72-year-old Republican nominee, John McCain, warns that his rival

is dangerously inexperienced and urges voters to stick with his

record in times of peril.

Perilous times they are. The next president faces two wars, a

once-in-a-century financial crisis, a warming planet, a deficit

that could approach $1 trillion, unprecedented U.S. reliance on

foreign oil, a teetering health care system and a battered U.S.

image abroad.

Whoever prevails, three giant forces are shifting in this

election: race, an enduring American preoccupation; generation, as

Baby Boomers who came of age in the 1960s cede ground to the

Millennials born after 1980; and ideology, with three decades of

Republican dominance showing evident signs of exhaustion.

In purely political terms, 2008 is a rarity. Not since

Republican Dwight Eisenhower faced Democrat Adlai Stevenson in 1952

has neither candidate been part of an incumbent ticket. McCain's

running mate, Alaska Gov. Sarah Palin, is the first female

Republican vice presidential nominee, and with Obama, ends a

219-year tradition of two white males heading the major parties.

Obama would be not only the first black U.S. president, but "so

far as I know, this would be the first time a white-majority

country has ever elected a non white head of state," said Boston

University historian Bruce Schulman. It would be the equivalent, he

said, of a Jamaican-descended prime minister of Britain, an

Algerian-descended president of France, or a Turkish German

chancellor. "That's pretty astonishing in world historical

terms."

Politics is always evolving, but there are moments in history

when bigger changes occur: the 1932 election of President Franklin

D. Roosevelt that ushered in the New Deal and a long Democratic

reign; the political upheavals of the 1960s that began with

Democratic President John F. Kennedy, saw the civil rights

revolution, the Great Society and the Vietnam War under Democrat

Lyndon B. Johnson before ending with the resignation of Republican

President Richard Nixon; and the GOP's rebirth with the 1980

election of President Ronald Reagan.

Each reflected generational change. Stanford University

political scientist Morris Fiorina, who is writing a book on the

politics of generational shifts, likes to use the Rev. Jesse

Jackson's gaffe during this year's campaign to illustrate.

Thinking his microphone was off during a break in a Fox News

show last July, Jackson whispered to a co-panelist that Obama

"talks down to black people" adding in crude terms that he would

like personally to mutilate the Democratic nominee. Talk afterward

was "about the aging lion versus the young cub, and Jackson being

pushed aside," Fiorina said. "That's really going on

everywhere."

Aging conservative evangelical leaders are fading as younger

Christian conservatives question their orthodoxies. The Democratic

primaries saw a split between older feminists backing Sen. Hillary

Rodham Clinton and younger women backing Obama.

Clinton, her husband, President Bill Clinton, and his successor,

President Bush, all were products of the Vietnam era and the

cultural conflicts of the 1960s. If Obama were to win and serve two

terms, said Schulman, "It's hard to imagine that we would have a

president again who was of that '60s generation."

The Millennial generation rivals the Baby Boom in size and, now,

influence. More than a third of the voting age population was born

after Watergate. Today's college freshmen, born after Reagan's

presidency, have no memory of it. "We carry these things with us

all our lives," Fiorina said, "and then the younger generations

coming up don't have the same experiences and attitudes."

Take the strong link between age and views on gay rights or

abortion. Young people take both for granted. "For every 100

people over age 70 who die and are replaced by 100 people between

18 and 24, you get more liberal social attitudes," Fiorina said.

Older generations grew up with big government programs of the

New Deal and Great Society, and when those grew creaky, were open

to something new, Fiorina said. "The current generation has grown

up with a much more laissez-faire approach to government, and now

there's a mess, so they say, OK, let's try something else."

Yet for partisans, it is the threat or hope of ideological

change that matters most. The mood among conservatives has grown

darker each day. Not only McCain but much of the conservative

intellectual elite warn of an impending turn to European-style

socialism at home and appeasement abroad, especially if Democrats

seize a monopoly in Washington.

Historians call the fears exaggerated, a reflection of the

country's 30-year rightward shift. On many issues, Obama is to the

right of Nixon, the Republican who proposed a guaranteed income for

all Americans, supported affirmative action, imposed wage and price

controls, and established much of today's environmental regulation.

"A conservative in 1968 was far more liberal than a liberal is

in 2008," said Schulman.

Crushing budget deficits will hamstring ambitious policy

changes. Despite the likelihood of powerful Democratic majorities

in Congress -- they could resemble the 1964 Democratic landslide

under Johnson -- the deficit will constrain any Obama-style Great

Society or McCain tax cuts.

Pressing economic demands will land on the next president's

desk. "He didn't have any discretion over them, they're just

there," said George Edwards, a presidential scholar at Texas A&amp;amp;M

University. "That's going to be a constraint on him. The world has

a way of doing that to presidents."

If McCain wins, a Democratic Congress would force him leftward

as it did Nixon, reinforcing McCain's own ambivalence toward his

party. Some predict he would be a caretaker president.

"McCain could not govern on economic or other issues from the

right," said Christopher Malone, a political scientist at Pace

University. "He's going to look at 58, 59 Democratic senators. He

has no option but to govern from the center and even left of

center."

McCain could emulate Eisenhower, who lost control of Congress in

his first term, and only modulated Democratic policies.

An Obama victory offers two potential paths: a major political

realignment, following Roosevelt in 1932 and Reagan in 1980. This

would require that he rack up successes in his first two years, a

honeymoon when presidential power is at its peak.

If he does, and realignment is under way, he could avoid the

catastrophic losses that Clinton suffered after his 1993 health

care plan crashed under a Democratic Congress, replaced in 1994 by

a Republican one.

Another model is 1964, with a big Democratic win followed by a

collapse four years later, or 1976, when Democrat Jimmy Carter ran

a flawless campaign but proved a weak leader unable to control his

party or rally the public.

"You could have a scenario where Obama is under a lot of

pressure from his left and yet can't do big economic things because

of the difficult situation we're in, where he can't disengage from

Iraq and Afghanistan as quickly as the base would like," Fiorina

said. Obama could then come under attack from his left, face

congressional losses in 2010 and by 2012 a challenge from his own

party, perhaps Hillary Clinton.

Whatever happens, many sense that the page is turning.

"This is one of those very rare, once-in-a-generation

transforming elections in America that marks the end of one

political era and the beginning of another," said Allan Lichtman,

a political historian at American University. "That will certainly

be true if Obama is elected, because he's going to come in with

overwhelming control of the government. It's even true if McCain

gets elected, because he's not going to be able to turn back the

clock to the old conservative era."

LOS ANGELES - Their votes won't count this year, but the 750

kids going to Welby Way Elementary School in West Hills are still

going to the polls Tuesday.

They've already heard from John McCain and Barack Obama (played

by fifth-grade magnet students), and now it's time for them to step

into the school's makeshift ballot boxes and make up their minds

along with the rest of the country.

Because it's never too early to teach kids just how important

the vote is.

"We made ballots for the upper classes just like the ones their

parents will use, and for the lower grades we put the candidate's

picture by his name," said Adria Metson, the school's magnate

coordinator.

"Everyone gets an 'I voted' sticker to show their parents that

they voted, too."

The younger ones might not understand exactly what that sticker

means, but the way Metson sees it, elementary school is the perfect

place to start teaching kids about the election process.

She's been getting out the vote at Welby Way since the 2000

election, when she took her fifth-grade class to both candidates'

local campaign offices and had them meet Al Gore when he flew into

Bob Hope Airport on Air Force One.

"The sooner we get them involved, the sooner they'll understand

that people have a direct impact on how government operates," she

said Friday.

Many teens across this country are already having a say in this

election, even though they're not old enough to vote.

A new Web site -- my2centsforchange.org -- was launched on Super

Tuesday to give teens 13-17 a chance to get their 2 cents in on the

issues.

"We may not be old enough to vote, but we still care and have

our opinions," said 15-year-old Melisa Fumbarg, a student at El

Camino Real High School, told the candidates.

"Teens are knowledgeable and want to be heard."

The candidates of both major parties have heard from more than

2,000 non-voting-age teens, like Melisa, on issues they feel most

passionate about -- from education and health care to homelessness

and global warming.

"Teens are more interested than ever in the outcome of this

election and should be given a chance to be heard," said Avery

Budman, who launched the site in February.

"We're issued-based, not candidate-based, and we're reaching

these teens on the Internet, where they're spending all their time

these days."

Gabbi Baker, 16, told both presidential candidates that although

she couldn't vote for one of them this year, whoever wins "will

have a large impact on me regardless."

"Most importantly, this election determines who will be on the

ballot when I'm able to vote in 2012," she said.

Zach Cherny, 17, says it's important for teens to feel as though

their say matters.

"And we have a lot to say," he added.

Between forward-thinking schools like Welby Way giving their

students a mock vote and Web sites giving teens a say on the

issues, I think the 2012, 2016 and 2020 presidential elections

should have a pretty good turnout.

Because Metson's right. The sooner you get them involved, the

sooner they'll understand just how important the vote is.

San Francisco -- Proposition 8 is a California ballot measure,

but ripples from the high-priced, high-profile effort to ban

same-sex marriage are extending way beyond its borders.

Checks of $500,000 or more are arriving from places like

Cleveland; Brooklyn, N.Y.; Linden, Utah; and Bryn Mawr, Pa.

A Kansas City minister brings thousands of evangelical

Christians to San Diego's Qualcomm Stadium for a

religious/political rally.

The New York Times writes an editorial endorsing a "no" vote

on Prop. 8, even though Sacramento is 2,800 miles from the paper's

Manhattan headquarters.

"Both sides agree that what happens here will have a major

impact on the same-sex marriage debate across the nation," said

David Cruz, a constitutional law expert at the University of

Southern California School of Law. "It's not only California's

size, but the influence it has on other states and other courts."

With many polls suggesting that the race is a tossup as election

day closes in, both sides are using the final weekend to make one

last push for victory.

The biggest event Saturday was in San Diego, where Missouri

minister Lou Engle and other pastors brought out thousands for a

12-hour prayer meeting to push for traditional marriage. While the

gathering was religious rather than overtly political, the election

was never far from anyone's mind.

Tuesday's vote represents a challenge to the religious view of

marriage, James Dobson of the Focus on the Family ministry told the

crowd.

"This is not about hate, this is about love," he said.

At the Christian Community Church in San Jose, about 50 Prop. 8

supporters renewed their wedding vows to highlight the importance

of the measure they back.

"I think there's a surge of support for Prop. 8 this weekend,"

said Michael Dowling, who runs the House of Prayer ministry in San

Francisco. He was in San Jose because "There's more favor for our

world view here than there is in the city."

The Prop. 8 opposition had its own religious meetings across the

state Saturday, with San Francisco Mayor Gavin Newsom joining an

interfaith gathering at Glide Memorial United Methodist Church.

Later in the day, Newsom and Assemblyman Mark Leno braved a

driving rainstorm to walk through the Castro district and remind

people to vote against Prop. 8.

The pair didn't run into many supporters of the same-sex

marriage ban in the heart of the city's gay community, "but if 90

percent of San Francisco votes against Prop. 8, those are votes we

don't have to get somewhere else," Leno said as he and Newsom

greeted people in the Edge bar.

On Tuesday, two other states will vote on California-like

constitutional amendments to ban same-sex marriage: Arizona, with

Prop. 102, and Florida, with Amendment 2.

But neither of those campaigns has attracted nearly as many

contributions as Prop. 8. About $11 million was raised for the

initiatives in Florida and Arizona, compared with $67 million for

the battle in California.

Prop. 8 was guaranteed its place in the national spotlight in

May when the state Supreme Court ruled that same-sex marriage is a

constitutional right, overturning a ban of such marriages approved

by 61 percent of voters in 2000.

That court decision meant supporters of same-sex marriage could

fight from a moral high ground using the argument that Prop. 8

would legitimize discrimination against one group of Californians.

"It's no secret that in recent years we have suffered a string

of defeats on relationship issues," said Rea Carey, executive

director of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force Action Fund in

Washington. "But a victory in California would signify that

Americans are increasingly uncomfortable at taking away anyone's

rights."

After the court ruling, California quickly became the prime

destination for same-sex couples from other parts of the country to

come and legally wed. And as they returned home, wedding licenses

in hand, the pressure began to grow on states in which they live to

deal with them as newlyweds. But then came Prop. 8.

"The ballot measure is a political matter, but it's also

intensely personal to the many people from across the country who

went there to get married," said Carey, who herself was married in

a Northern California ceremony.

Those wedding photos of gays and lesbians from California had a

very different impact on the supporters of traditional marriage,

who were riding a nationwide winning streak. Twenty-eight state

elections in recent years resulted in 27 bans on same-sex marriage,

with their only loss a 2006 measure to ban same-sex marriage -- and

many domestic partnership benefits -- in Arizona.

"California is a cultural leader, and a win (by same-sex

marriage supporters) will embolden other state efforts to legalize

gay marriage," said Carrie Gordon Earll, senior director of public

policy for the Colorado-based Focus on the Family, which has given

more than $500,000 to the Yes on Prop. 8 campaign.

For many Christian groups and other supporters of traditional

marriage, Prop. 8 is a desperately needed firewall that will keep

same-sex marriage from spreading to the rest of the country.

Tuesday's election is spoken of in apocalyptic terms by many

backers of the marriage ban.

If Prop. 8 is beaten, "I'm afraid the culture war is over and

Christians have lost," Donald Wildmon, founder of the Tupelo,

Miss.-based American Family Association, said in a speech in July.

"California is a big dam, holding back the flood and if you take

down the dam in California, it's going to flood 49 other states."

Wildmon's group has donated $500,000 to the Yes on Prop. 8

campaign.

On the other side, lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender

groups have joined with progressives and mainstream Democratic

organizations and donors to oppose Prop. 8.

"Both sides have jumped in with both feet and made California

the battleground for same-sex marriage," said Steve Smith,

political consultant to the No on Prop. 8 campaign. "This is

California, and right now equality in marriage is the law of the

land. If voters reject Prop. 8, the final decision has been made

and there's no appeal."

When the polls close on Tuesday, voters on both sides of the

issue in many other states will turn their eyes nervously toward

California, anxiously waiting to see what happens next in a social

melee that has stretched across the years.

Newsom has taken his lumps for the euphoric, over-the-top speech

he gave after the state Supreme Court opened the way for same-sex

marriage in May, but he knew even then just how important that

ruling would be for the rest of the country.

"As goes California, so goes the nation," he said.

TAMPA Billed as "Always Anonymous, Always Juicy,"

JuicyCampus.com says its sole purpose is to provide a forum for

college students to gossip.

Just find your school and post. No filters. No mercy.

Consider these popular "Juicy" topics: Who is gay? Who snorts

coke? Who has a sexually transmitted disease?

The site has shaken campuses nationwide.

There was the Duke undergrad who felt she couldn't go to school

for three weeks after someone said she had attempted suicide.

The Colgate University student arrested after threatening in a

Juicy post to go on a classroom shooting rampage.

And the Vanderbilt rape victim who logged on and read, "She got

what she deserved."

Almost a year after the site's launch, officials at local

universities thought they had nothing to worry about.

Until now.

Which girls in USF sororities are most likely to put out?

It's heeeere.

Both the University of South Florida and the University of Tampa

made the list of new additions to JuicyCampus in September, the

same month the Web site grew from 60 schools to 500.

It took a while to catch on locally, but in recent days, student

Angela Martin has watched USF posts grow exponentially.

"It went from 10 posts to, like, 1,000," Martin said. "I can

just see it's going to be bad."

Someone wrote an offensive post about President Judy Genshaft.

Fraternity brothers are being accused of hazing, date rape and drug

use. Sorority sisters, of promiscuity, pregnancy and eating

disorders. They're scared about who will read it, especially

parents and future employers.

JuicyCampus has taken off a little more slowly at UT, with just

a few pages of posts instead of USF's dozen-plus.

But the venom is just as strong.

One poster wrote, You can't spell "Slut" without "UT." In

response to an attack, a UT student wrote, im 1100 miles from home,

and this is the last s--- i needed, i didnt even know this site

existed.

He encouraged his attacker to "step up" so they could fight.

He isn't the first to issue a threat.

A USF student writes, in defense of a friend, ill hunt ur a--

down i promise 2 god!!!!

As Martin watches this site go viral in every sense of the word

she says, "I can't even believe this is actually legal."

Experts say JuicyCampus.com is protected by federal law;

specifically, Title 47, U.S.C. Section 230, which makes Web sites

immune to prosecution for the actions of their users.

Marc Randazza, an adjunct law professor at Barry University in

Miami Shores puts it this way: If you're a blogger and post

defamatory material on your blog, you can be held liable, but the

site that provided the template can't.

And if someone posts a defamatory comment on your blog, the

comment-maker, not you, can face penalties.

Many of the comments made on JuicyCampus.com could be prosecuted

as defamatory in court if the identity of the poster was revealed.

But JuicyCampus.com reveals its users only if subpoenaed. The

site cooperated with police to identify a student who threatened a

campus shooting rampage.

Almost all posts are left on the site, no matter how much its

subject protests. JuicyCampus.com will consider but not guarantee

removing posts that disclose contact information.

The site's frequently asked questions include: Why don't you

remove more posts?!?

Well, that's called censorship, and we're just not that into it.

But China is, so if you're interested in moving, we've provided a

link below with some helpful information.

At the center of it all the avalanche of news stories, the

swirl of spilled secrets is Matt Ivester, just three years out of

college.

After his graduation from Duke and subsequent job at a New York

consulting firm, Ivester, 25, moved to Silicon Valley and focused

on his first love entrepreneurship.

He wanted to start a college Web site, one that captured the

essence of his best memories from Duke: the drunken stories, wild

parties, quirky professors. JuicyCampus.com would be a place to

share "crazy high jinks."

Ivester now calls some of the posts he reads "distasteful" and

"awful," but refuses to remove most, and says he feels no guilt

for the hurt they cause.

"I don't see anything wrong or even controversial with the idea

that we provide a forum where students can talk about the things

that interest them most," he said.

Ivester won't say how much money the site has made from the

advertising it sells, but says it's still in the red. He's already

planning future upgrades.

He'll have help from his staff of 20, which includes a legal

team. And a public relations firm, based in Beverly Hills.

As president of the USF Panhellenic Council, the governing body

of sororities, Angela Martin has no idea how to deal with

JuicyCampus.com.

"Do I bring it up and then cause almost everybody who doesn't

know about it to go on there?" she asks.

Campuses across the nation have faced that same question: What

to do?

At the University of Florida, which was added to JuicyCampus.com

in February, student body president Kevin Reilly did some research.

He learned that the attorney general of New Jersey had launched an

investigation of the site.

Reilly wrote to Florida's attorney general, Bill McCollum. He

spoke of suicide and stalking and sexual predators, and asked

McCollum to start his own investigation. McCollum has not done so,

but a spokeswoman said he is keeping tabs on the New Jersey case.

At UT, the dean of students, Bob Ruday, heard about JuicyCampus

months ago, but had no idea it had gotten to his school. Last week,

he started calling officials at other Florida schools to see what

ideas they had.

Peter Arrabal, editor in chief of UT's the Minaret, says he

laughed when he read trash talk about his newspaper. He calls it

"free speech" and "entertainment," and doesn't believe most of

what he reads.

"I think when people start taking it too seriously, things are

going to go south with it," he said.

At USF, where things have gone more south, student body

president Greg Morgan plans to bring it up at his next Cabinet

meeting.

And Robert Brann, president of USF's Sigma Phi Epsilon chapter,

e-mailed his brothers, telling them to stay away from the site.

Brann, who has been attacked there, said he wishes there were a way

to block it.

There is, but most colleges don't want to resort to blocking it

from their school network. They worry that doing so could set a

precedent for further restrictions on free speech. Two small

Christian universities, Samford in Alabama and Millsaps in

Mississippi, are among those that have.

Students from both have still found ways to post.

Alexandra Zayas can be reached at azayassptimes.com or (813)

226-3354.

WASHINGTON Would you want this job?

At home, the near collapse of the housing market, a crippled

financial sector gasping for credit, and rising unemployment.

Abroad, an intractable war in Iraq, a rising Taliban in

Afghanistan, a prowling Russian bear, and a big, restive China

plus Iran and North Korea.

No president since Franklin D. Roosevelt, who took office during

the heart of the Great Depression, will have taken office at a time

of such difficulty as John McCain or Barack Obama.

And before Roosevelt, presidential scholars say, you have to

look back to Abraham Lincoln, who was elected on the eve of the

Civil War in 1860, to find a new president who faced problems of

such depth and complexity.

"We have a humongous debt and deficit. There is very little

trust anymore in government," said Stephen Wayne of Georgetown

University, an expert on the presidency. "And even if the

president, in McCain's case, tries to be bipartisan, or Obama tries

to be postpartisan, they're still going to be dealing with a very

partisan, divided Congress.

"That means there will be pressures from the party on the

president, and there will be pressures to pursue the party's

position rather than compromise." he said. "It's a mess. I can't

think of a worse situation for a new president to begin."

Obama or McCain will face a veritable Rubik's Cube. He will have

to negotiate the expiring agreement for keeping U.S. troops in

Iraq, at a time when Americans and Iraqis alike are tiring of their

presence. His commanders in Afghanistan say they need 20,000 more

troops. He'll be under immense pressure to shore up the U.S.

housing market, with more than 1-million Americans having lost

their homes to foreclosure over the past two years, yet money is

tight: For the fiscal year ending in September, the U.S. budget

deficit hit a record $438-billion.

Fortunately, the winner can learn from the past. There's no

clear blueprint for success, of course, but over the years, certain

strategies have worked. And certain ones have not.

Beginnings matter

Ronald Reagan got off to a great start. So did John F. Kennedy

and George W. Bush. Jimmy Carter and Bill Clinton did not. The

difference? Planning and personnel.

Let's take Reagan and Clinton.

Within two days of his election, Reagan held a news conference

to announce the men who would lead his transition and the White

House James Baker and Edwin Meese.

Then, as now, the economy was the chief concern, with

double-digit inflation and high unemployment, and Reagan's first 87

appointments were related to economic policy, said Martha Joynt

Kumar, director of the nonpartisan White House Transition Project,

which works with the current administration and the president-elect

to ease the takeover.

Reagan quickly began schmoozing congressional leaders friendly

Republicans in the Senate, hostile Democrats in the House to lay

the groundwork for his legislative agenda of cutting taxes,

revamping the military and cutting other government spending.

The budget he submitted shortly after his inauguration reflected

those priorities, and set the tone for his presidency.

Clinton, by contrast, didn't name some of his key people until

just days before his inauguration in January.

His first major domestic initiative, health care reform, failed

in part because the administration and its point-person, first lady

Hillary Rodham Clinton, were essentially unprepared. They hadn't

recruited enough congressional support or developed a strategy for

getting it passed. Instead of an accomplishment, it served as a

lesson.

"Once you come into the White House, there's no time to be

looking backwards and thinking about what the job is," Kumar said.

"But if people are named right after an election, they have

time to read, they have time to talk to people. And they have time

to think. Once the inauguration happens, it's very hard to carve

out that time. Because they are always standing there with a

firehose."

Get smart

Aside from inheriting national disasters, Roosevelt and Lincoln

had one thing in common: They knew what they didn't know.

Lincoln was a congressman from rural Illinois. Roosevelt was

highly experienced, having been secretary of the Navy and governor

of New York, but he wasn't an expert on the economy. Unlike some

other presidents, he valued outside and contrary opinions and

recruited a team of respected academics known as the Brain Trust to

help him plan the New Deal.

Lincoln took the unusual step of appointing several Republican

rivals to his Cabinet, including harsh critics like William Seward,

his secretary of state, and, in 1862, Edward Stanton, his secretary

of war.

Both later became close friends and supporters of Lincoln's. But

when they were picked, Lincoln knew they would challenge his

assumptions and ideas, as well as each other's. Members of

Roosevelt's Brain Trust often disagreed with each other as well.

"He took these people who were smart and somewhat rivals and

brought them inside the tent and took what he could from them,"

said Michael Shaller, a history professor at the University of

Arizona who has written about Reagan, FDR and others. "Roosevelt

and Lincoln relished having these strong personalities around

them."

Do something

As he campaigned across America during the Depression, Roosevelt

told voters, "The country needs (and) the country demands bold,

persistent experimentation. It is common sense to take a method and

try it. If it fails, admit it frankly, and try another. But above

all, try something."

And he did. When he took office, in March 1933, unemployment was

around 25 percent, 4,000 banks had collapsed in the past two months

with no federal insurance to protect deposits and the financial

system was literally collapsing.

The first thing he did was issue a proclamation briefly closing

all banks, to give him and the Congress time to pass an emergency

banking bill.

"The country had already been through three years of economic

depression. It's been a long, hard road, and he's stepping into a

situation where people are looking for answers," said Herman

Eberhardt, the museum curator at the Franklin D. Roosevelt

Presidential Library and Museum in New York.

Then Roosevelt, abetted by a Democratic Congress, got to work on

passing his 100 Days agenda 16 major bills in all, including

regulatory reforms, creation of the Civilian Conservation Corps.,

and initiatives to help railroads, farmers and homeowners.

It is doubtful McCain or Obama would try, or need, to push so

many sweeping measures next year, but the lesson is a valuable one

for a president confronted by crisis.

"Some of what Roosevelt proposed worked. Some of what Roosevelt

proposed didn't work. Some of the policies he advocated were

contradictory," Eberhardt said. "But what mattered to most people

at the time was he was coming in and taking decisive action.

"That in itself was inspiring to people, and raised hope he

was taking an active, aggressive stance that he was going to

address this problem."

Pick your shots

More recent presidents who scored quickly have done so by

limiting their goals. Think Lyndon B. Johnson's dogged approach to

passing civil rights legislation after taking over for President

Kennedy in late 1963, or Reagan's focus on just three things:

cutting taxes, cutting domestic spending and rebuilding the

military. He accomplished the first two in his first year, despite

Democratic control of the House.

"Reagan did one thing that I really think presidents should

do," said James T. Patterson, professor emeritus of history at

Brown University and an author. "You decide, 'I'm going to do one

or two things, here's what I really stand for and what I want to

get done and what the people elected me to do.' And that's what he

did."

Clinton quickly learned that the middle class tax cuts he had

championed during the campaign weren't financially feasible, thanks

to the deficits he inherited, and he struggled with where to start.

Members of his inner circle disagreed over what they should do

first address social problems such as health care, or lasso the

deficit.

Absent a driving narrative, lesser and less flattering issues

filled the void his policy on gays in the military, a botched

attorney general appointment, a scandal over firing the White House

travel office.

"He just wasn't ready," Patterson said.

Despite having only 37 days between Al Gore's concession and his

inauguration, George W. Bush's transition went smoothly in part

because his priorities for office had formed the backbone of his

campaign: cut taxes, pay religious groups to provide social

services, reform Social Security, and set federal standards for

education.

He achieved three out of four before the Sept. 11, 2001,

terrorist attacks forever altered his place in history.

"He was not left in a position with a vacuum that other people

could fill with discussions about the murky election," Kumar said.

"He could talk about what he wanted to talk about. The public was

ready for it, too, because they had heard him discuss it."

Perception is reality

History teaches that even if things don't go that well for Obama

or McCain over the next couple of years, he may not suffer for it.

It's easy to forget this, but despite all he did, FDR never solved

the Great Depression. By the end of his first year in office, in

1934, unemployment remained at nearly 22 percent. By his first

re-election campaign in 1936, it was still at a staggering 17

percent.

Yet Roosevelt remained wildly popular, carrying all but two

states and 60 percent of the popular vote, the biggest landslide in

80 years.

"There were a lot of poor people who had a picture of Jesus

Christ on their wall, and a picture of Roosevelt nailed up on their

wall, often cut out from the newspaper," Patterson said.

"Either of these guys gets elected, they're coming into power

at a time where you've got really serious problems that are hung

over from the past, that you've inherited. If you make a

considerable dent in them that is to say, if what you do seems to

work out you will have something like the approbation and

enthusiasm among voters that Roosevelt had."

Wes Allison can be reached at allisonsptimes.com or (202)

463-0577.

Direction of high court hangs on election by WES ALLISON, WASHINGTON As Election Day nears, Sens. John McCain and Barack Obama are sparring over the economy, taxes, health care and each other. But the next president of the United States may make his most lasting imprint on the U.S. Supreme Court. With four of the nine justices in their 70s and one in his 80s, the next president likely will have the privilege of appointing at least one new justice to the court, experts say, if not two or three. Because the most likely retirees lean left, McCain has the best chance of either candidate to significantly remake the court in his own view, by replacing liberals with conservatives. relatively young, and apparently in good health. The fourth,

Antonin Scalia, 72, is unlikely to retire any time soon, either.

Though he has angered many conservatives through the years by

taking contrary stances on the environment, campaign finance and

medical research, McCain has pledged to choose judges in the mold

of President Bush's appointees, Chief Justice John Roberts and

Justice Samuel Alito Jr., who are favorites within the conservative

movement.

"Whatever is going to happen with the economy is going to be

affected by a lot more people and a lot more forces than the

president," said Wendy Long, a former clerk to conservative

Justice Clarence Thomas and chief counsel for the Judicial

Confirmation Network, which advocates for the appointment of

conservative judges.

"It's going to be affected by the markets, it's going to be

affected by Congress and by what private banks do, and

individuals. But what happens to the court is going to be up to one

man."

She added: "Whoever it is, Obama or McCain, is going to

basically shape the court for most of this century and shape the

interpretation of the Constitution."

Liberal activists agree. The court now is roughly split four to

four, with Justice Anthony Kennedy, 72, a Ronald Reagan appointee,

often casting the deciding vote. Replacing liberal Justices John

Paul Stevens, 88, or Ruth Bader Ginsberg, 75, with a conservative,

as McCain pledges to do, would push the court to the right.

Which is why, as the Judicial Confirmation Network runs ads in

swing states urging support for McCain, the liberal People for the

American Way is running ads in swing states for Obama.

Kathryn Kolbert, president of the group, says a whole host of

policies hangs in the balance, including abortion, environmental

regulations and the right of citizens to sue corporations.

"I think this election will have the most significant effect on

the Supreme Court than any we've seen in 40 years, because the

court is so divided, and it's on the brink of being taken over by

conservative forces," Kolbert said.

Philosophically, the argument is how the Supreme Court should

interpret the Constitution. McCain, Bush and other conservative

leaders say they favor so-called strict constructionists, jurists

who view the Constitution not as a living, changing document, but

one that grants rights only specifically given by the Constitution.

Practically speaking, the biggest affront to this approach was

the 1973 ruling Roe vs. Wade, which allowed legal abortion in all

50 states.

At issue was the high court's finding that the Constitution

guarantees a right to privacy and, by extension, a woman's right

to seek an abortion. (Which is why McCain's running mate, Alaska

Gov. Sarah Palin, raised eyebrows when she told CBS News anchor

Katie Couric that she supports overturning Roe vs. Wade, yet also

believes the Constitution guarantees the right to privacy.)

But this view has many other implications, including the

government's ability to regulate business, the legal basis for

affirmative action in hiring, and the prosecution of class-action

suits.

McCain gave his most explicit nod to this philosophy in a speech

in May at Wake Forest University in North Carolina, which is often

quoted by conservative activists. "My nominees will understand

that there are clear limits to the scope of judicial power, and

clear limits to the scope of federal power," he said.

Those on the other side prefer a more open-ended approach to

regulation, the courts, and civil and personal liberties. Obama has

said he would appoint judges with empathy for others, and whose

experiences have shaped their judicial philosophy. Give him the

keys to the Supreme Court, conservatives warn, and say hello to

national requirements for gay marriage, an end to restrictions on

certain types of abortions, and an American business community

ravaged by liability lawsuits.

Carl Tobias of the University of Richmond Law School in

Virginia, an expert in federal judicial appointments, said in

reality an Obama presidency most likely would ensure the status

quo.

"All this talk about how Obama would make this a very liberal

court or something is absurd," Tobias said. "If he is elected,

the opportunities are just not going to be there, because I think

he's going to be replacing people with relatively like-minded

people."

In their own words from the Oct. 15 debate

"I believe strongly that we should have nominees to the United

States Supreme Court based on their qualifications rather than any

litmus test. I voted for Justice Breyer and Justice Ginsburg. Not

because I agreed with their ideology, but because I thought they

were qualified, and that elections have consequences when

presidents are nominated. I do not believe that someone who has

supported Roe vs. Wade ... would be part of those qualifications."

John McCain

"Well, I think it's true that we shouldn't apply a strict

litmus test, and the most important thing in any judge is their

capacity to provide fairness and justice to the American people.

And it is true that this is going to be, I think, one of the most

consequential decisions of the next president. It is very likely

that one of us will be making at least one and probably more than

one appointments, and Roe vs. Wade probably hangs in the balance."

Barack Obama

The current lineup of justices

The left The middle The right

John Paul Stevens,

88, appointed by President Gerald Ford, 1975

Ruth Bader Ginsberg,

75, appointed by President Bill Clinton, 1993

Steven Breyer,

70, appointed by President Bill Clinton, 1994

David Souter,

69, appointed by President George Bush, 1990

Anthony Kennedy,

72, appointed by President Ronald Reagan, 1988

Antonin Scalia,

72, appointed by President Ronald Reagan, 1986

Clarence Thomas,

60, appointed by the first President Bush, 1991

Samuel Alito Jr.,

58, appointed by President Bush, 2006

John Roberts,

53, chief justice, appointed by President Bush, 2005

Cox News Service

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But since the 2004 Olympics this capital city, bathed in

millennia of history, has been rejuvenated for the new millennium.

Not only is there an efficient airport, a sparkling new Metro

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at the restaurants I visited recently was impeccable, more on par

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Yet under all the polish, much of Athens that hasn't changed a

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Take the Central Market, where squeamish tourists were visibly

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But I was fascinated. Having haunted food markets in many

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The market is an example of what makes parts of this cradle of

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If for no other reason, a trip to Athens is warranted just to

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Greece would like nothing better than to be able to display the

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But pressure on the British Museum intensified in September when

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There's no question the New Acropolis Museum, 30 years in the

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The most jaw-dropping part of the museum will be its top floor,

where visitors will be able to view the frieze, and then look out

the window to see the Parthenon itself.

In addition to the new museum, the city's main attraction

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Generally the best time to visit, though, is just after the

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tzatziki, meatballs, lamb chops, pork kebabs, feta cheese, and

spanakopitas, or spinach pies.

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Psiri, the old leather district of narrow streets that's now often

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tiny shops that look like they've been closed for years give way to

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The hotel I stayed in, Ochre &amp;amp; Brown, a lovely 11-room boutique

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Let's just hope it never forgets the gritty part of its

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bar/restaurant with great views of the Acropolis.

WHAT TO SEE:

The New Acropolis Museum, opening in March, located just a short

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metro station. For more information: www.newacropolismuseum.gr.

Take a walking tour, in English, around various parts of Athens,

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Visit the National Archeological Museum, the largest

archeological museum in Greece. For more information:

www.culture.gr.

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Cox News Service

WASHINGTON - Sixty - it's a nice round even number, as the

Yankee baseball slugger Roger Maris was repeatedly told in his

assault on Babe Ruth's legendary home run record in 1961. But since

1975, the number "60" has also had a kind of hall of fame status

in American politics - as a number signifying nearly unbridled

power in the U.S. Senate.

And Tuesday night, when the votes are being counted in the

presidential and congressional election, the most frequently

mentioned number during the counting is likely to be "60" as the

vote-counters try to determine whether the Democrats will win

enough seats in the Senate to reach "60" - the majority needed to

stop Republicans from filibustering, and thereby killing,

Democratic legislative proposals.

"It'll be the most over-mentioned over-analyzed number of the

night," longtime Democratic strategist James Carville said at a

recent breakfast with political reporters.

That's because the Senate can make or break a presidency, and,

as Democratic nominee Barack Obama has observed, "big changes

don't happen without big Senate majorities."

Nearly every major political prognosticator sees big Democratic

gains in Congress on Tuesday, especially if Obama holds his

commanding lead in the polls over Republican rival John McCain and

the political "earthquake" strikes, as Democratic pollster Stan

Greenberg recently predicted.

The Cook Political Report predicts a net gain of seven to nine

seats in the Senate for the Democrats. Likewise, the rival

Rothenberg Political Report. Congressional Quarterly magazine is a

little more conservative, projecting a net Democratic gain of five

seats. But the online "Crystal Ball" projections of the

University of Virginia's Larry Sabato calculates between five and

seven more Democratic seats in the Senate in 2009.

It's a "Democratic wave" election," says Sabato, the director

of Virginia's Center for Politics.

Similarly, Charlie Cook reports in his Cook Political Report

that "this election isn't over, but it is looking very bad for

Republicans - and seems to be getting worse." Rarely has a

political party suffered back-to-back losses in congressional

elections, but the Republicans, having lost their majorities on

Capitol Hill in 2006, is likely to have its second consecutive

"train-wreck elections," Cook writes.

Earthquake, wave, train wreck - whatever you want to call it,

this year's congressional election started out badly for

Republicans with President Bush's sinking popularity, the Obama

phenomenon and the economic crisis that sent McCain's campaign

spiraling downward in the public opinion polls.

The GOP had 23 of their 49 Senate seats to defend, whereas

Democrats had only a dozen of their 51 seats to hold, only one of

which was considered vulnerable - Mary Landrieu of Louisiana. Then

five Republican senators decided to retire or seek other political

office this year - including five-term Virginian John Warner and

six-term New Mexican Pete Domenici - whereas the Democrats had no

retirements.

Then last week, the longest serving Republican in the Senate,

Ted Stevens of Alaska, was convicted on seven felony counts

involving political corruption, and overnight the Democratic

chances were greatly improved in a reliably Republican state.

The Democrats' best chances for picking up Senate seats begin

with three states Bush won in 2004: Virginia, where former Gov.

Mark Warner has a 30-point lead in the polls; New Mexico, where

Rep. Tom Udall is ahead by 17 points; and Colorado, where Udall's

cousin Mark, also a congressman, has an 11-point edge.

Nonpartisan experts also see Democratic opportunities against

Republican incumbents in New Hampshire, North Carolina, Oregon and

Minnesota, where, notably, former Saturday Night Live comedian Al

Franken has pulled even with GOP freshman Norm Coleman.

And surprisingly, in the final week of the campaign, Senate

Republican Leader Mitch McConnell, who was first elected in the

1984 Reagan Republican landslide, is in a tough re-election fight

in Kentucky against Democrat Bruce Lunsford, underscoring the tough

political climate for Republicans this year.

One of the most potent political arguments for Republicans this

late in the election, with McCain trailing Obama, is to warn

against one-party rule. And in fact, a new Gallup poll found that

Americans are not eager for one-party rule: 48 percent said they

would prefer a Republican Congress if Obama is elected, 47 percent

chose a Democratic Congress.

Not surprisingly, the GOP has seized on the one-party argument

in the final days of the campaign. "Liberals are bent on handing

Barack Obama a filibuster-proof Senate majority to rubber-stamp his

radical agenda," Sen. Orrin Hatch, R-Utah, vice chair of the

National Republican Senatorial Committee, said in a recent plea to

donors.

But New York Sen. Chuck Schumer, chair of the Democratic

Senatorial Campaign Committee, disputed the GOP's commitment to

divided government. "They're not for checks and balances. They're

for blocking change and backing Bush," he said during a Capitol

Hill briefing for reporters Wednesday.

Schumer said that even under favorable conditions in this

election, it will be "hard to get to 60" seats in the Senate. And

whether the Democrats achieve "60" may not be settled until Dec.

2, the date of a run-off in Georgia if neither Republican incumbent

Saxby Chambliss nor Democratic challenger Jim Martin receives more

than half of the vote in yet another surprisingly tight race.

Still, Democrats may not even need a full "60" seats. If they

have, say, only 57, they could turn to the handful of moderate

Republicans - Arlen Specter of Pennsylvania, Olympia Snowe of

Maine, Richard Lugar of Indiana and perhaps a few election night

converts - to help them shut down debate on Democratic proposals

and move to an up-or-down vote.

Scott Shepard's e-mail address is sshepardcoxnews.com.

Here is a list of top battleground Senate races and the way

experts view them:

ALASKA - Republican incumbent Sen. Ted Stevens v. Democratic

Anchorage Mayor Mark Begich (Lean Democrat)

COLORADO - Democratic Rep. Mark Udall v. former Republican Rep.

Bob Schaffer (Lean Democrat)

GEORGIA - Republican incumbent Sen. Saxby Chambliss v.

Democratic state Rep. Jim Martin (Toss Up)

KENTUCKY - Republican incumbent Sen. Mitch McConnell v.

Democratic businessman Bruce Lunsford (Lean Republican)

LOUISIANA - Republican State Treasurer John Kennedy v.

Democratic incumbent Sen. Mary Landrieu (Lean Democrat)

MINNESOTA - Republican incumbent Sen. Norm Coleman v. Democratic

television personality Al Franken (Toss Up)

OREGON - Republican incumbent Sen. Gordon Smith v. Democratic

State House Speaker Jeff Merkley (Toss Up)

NEW HAMPSHIRE- Republican incumbent Sen. John Sununu v. former

Democratic Gov. Jeanne Shaheen (Toss Up)

NEW MEXICO - Republican Rep. Steve Pearce v. Democratic Rep. Tom

Udall (Lean Democat)

NORTH CAROLINA - Republican incumbent Sen. Elizabeth Dole v.

Democratic State Sen. Kay Hagan (Toss Up)

VIRGINIA - Former Republican Gov. James Gilmore v. former

Democratic Gov. Mark Warner (Likely Democrat)

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Shelley Emling's e-mail address is semlingcoxnews.com

Week 8 of the NFL season is in the books, the midway point.

Thanks to bye weeks, some teams have played eight games, others

seven. And then you have the Bengals and the Lions, who have yet to

show up at all.

This being an election week and all, it's time to haul out the

pseudo-midseason list of MVP candidates. Usually, it's a coin flip

between Peyton Manning and Tom Brady. Not this year. Brady's season

was 86'd almost before it started and Manning is on pace for a

career low in touchdown passes.

That leaves Clinton Portis, he of the 944 rushing yards, and

Jason Campbell, who has yet to throw an interception. Drew Brees?

One look at the NFC South standings and those glittering stats lose

their luster. Then there's Kurt Warner, the George McGovern of MVP

candidates.

Our midseason MVP? None of the above. Make ours Tennessee DT

Albert Haynesworth. Only twice -- Alan Page in 1971 and Lawrence

Taylor in '86 -- has a defensive player won the award. Haynesworth's

Titans have allowed 87 points in seven games, 12.4 per.

N.Y. Jets at Buffalo

1 p.m., Bills by 5 1/2

Last meeting: Bills won 13-3 at the Meadowlands on Oct. 28,

2007.

Maybe he'll quit making rookie mistakes in his 40s: Brett Favre

on pace for 25 INTs. ... Brett the Jet 0-fer-3 career at Buffalo.

... Bills a tale of two teams: 2-2 in roadies, 3-0 at home, where

they average 27 points per game. ... Kid coach Eric Mangini 1-3

career vs. Bills. ... Can anybody here hang on to the dang ball?

Jets minus-6 in turnovers, Bills minus-3.

Prediction: Bills 31, Jets 20

Miami at Denver

4:05 p.m., Broncos by 3 1/2

Last meeting: Dolphins won 34-10 at Miami on Sept. 11, 2005

So you're thinking Phish are a phluke. Think again, nacho

breath. They're second in the league in turnovers (plus-7) and lead

the NFL at 6.48 yards per on first down. ... Jay Cutler: eight TD

passes in Broncos' first five games, five in last four. ... Joey

Porter has tied his career high, reached twice with Steelers, with

10.5 sacks. ... Broncos 15-4 after bye weeks. ... Brandon Marshall

on pace for second straight 100-catch season. ... Broncos desperate

for a W, coming off back-to-back losses and facing back-to-back

roadies, including Thursday nighter at Cleveland.

Prediction: Dolphins 27, Broncos 26

Detroit at Chicago

1 p.m., Bears by 12 1/2

Last meeting: Bears won 34-7 at Detroit on Oct. 5.

Lions may win heated battle with Bungles for initial win. ...

They've gone, count 'em, three straight weeks without losing by

double digits. Parade on Tuesday. ... Kyle Orton threw for 334

yards, 2 TDs in first meeting. ... Have folks underrated Orton?

Dude is 11-2 in homies. ... Lions had their annual Halloween party

last week. Rumor is everyone came dressed as football players.

Prediction: Bears 30, Lions 20

Jacksonville at Cincinnati

1 p.m., Jaguars by 7 1/2

Last meeting: Jaguars won 23-20 at Jacksonville on Oct. 9, 2005.

Jax has won nine outta 10 vs. Cincy. ... Jags a tough read. They

struggle at home, but have won two straight on the road. ... So

much for talk of first-round bust. Matt Jones en route to 87

catches. Without a suspension in the equation, that is. ... New

team, same results: Cedric Benson, 3.3 yards per for Bengals. ...

T.J. Houshmandzadeh runs a 4.45 40, signs autographs in 4.46.

Prediction: Jaguars 27, Bengals 3

Baltimore at Cleveland

1 p.m., Browns by 1 1/2

Last meeting: Ravens won 28-10 at Baltimore on Sept. 21.

First meeting closer than you think. Ravens converted two INTs

into TDs in third quarter to blow it open. ... Browns gained, count

'em, 6 yards in second half at Baltimore. ... Willis McGahee has

100-plus yards in three of past four vs. Brownies. ... Cleveland

coming off impressive wins over Giants and Jaguars in past three

weeks. ... Ravens minus-4 in turnovers, Browns plus-6.

Prediction: Browns 23, Ravens 16

Tampa Bay at Kansas City

1 p.m., Buccaneers by 9

Last meeting: Bucs won 34-31 at Tampa on Nov. 7, 2004.

Do not attempt this at home: Tyler Thigpen completing 50 percent

of his tosses. ... Who knew? Chiefs plus-4 in turnovers. ... Larry

Johnson says he's sorry for his off-field issues. But most of all,

he's sorry to be stuck with the dog-keister Chiefs. And he has a

lot of company. See Gonzalez, Tony. ... Johnson vs. Broncos: 198

yards rushing. L.J. vs. everyone else: 55 yards per game, 3.4 per.

... Tampa fifth in the business in D, tied for NFC lead with 15

takeaways.

Prediction: Buccaneers 27, Chiefs 23

Houston at Minnesota

1 p.m., Vikings by 4 1/2

Last meeting: Vikings won 34-28 (OT) at Houston on Oct. 10,

2004.

Special teams could be a factor here. Vikes have allowed

league-worst five special-teams TDs. ... Texans -- cue the Willie

Nelson soundtrack -- on the road again after four straight at home,

a fallout from the hurricane. ... Houston in search of fourth

straight win, which would be a franchise first in a single season.

... Minnie's eighth-ranked D the best the Texans have faced.

Prediction: Vikings 34, Texans 23

Arizona at St. Louis

1 p.m., Cardinals by 3

Last meeting: Cardinals won 48-19 at Arizona on Dec. 30, 2007.

What's this? A pulse in St. Looie? Rams playing hard for Jim

Haslett after mailing it in under Scott Linehan. ... Cards have won

last three in series. ... Rams plus-7 in turnovers in three games

under Haslett. ... Hope you're enjoying the view, Matt Leinart.

Ex-Ram Kurt Warner on pace for 32 TD passes. ... Don't look now,

but rookie Tim Hightower is pushing Edge James for Cards' startin'

TB gig.

Prediction: Rams 37, Cardinals 33

Green Bay at Tennessee

1 p.m., Titans by 4 1/2

Last meeting: Titans won 48-27 at Green Bay on Oct. 11, 2004.

Not a great spot for Titans. They're coming off mega-win on

Monday Night Football, with this one sandwiched between two

roadies. ... Packers, who've been more banged up than the Dow,

hoping to be healthy after bye week. ... Tenn leads loop with

plus-8 turnover ranking. ... Pack the picture of mediocrity: 16th

in offense, 17th in D. ... Did you know? Kerry Collins tops in NFL

in third-down passer rating (120-plus) and nine third-down TD

passes.

Prediction: Packers 24, Titans 23

Dallas at N.Y. Giants

4:15 p.m., Giants by 9

Last meeting: Cowboys won 31-20 at the Meadowlands on Oct. 11,

2007.

As if you didn't know, that's last meeting, as in the regular

season. G-Men ruled in playoff game at Dallas. ... Point spread has

jumped from 7 1/2 to 9. You don't suppose it's because Brad Johnson

is starting, do you? ... Johnson 3-0 career vs. Giants in the

swamps o' Joisey -- in his pre-Geritol days. ... Brad, meet Justin.

G-Men DE Justin Tuck, that is. Dude has eight sacks in past eight

games, including SB XLII.

Prediction: Giants 31, Cowboys 16

Atlanta at Oakland

4:15 p.m., Falcons by 3

Last meeting: Falcons won 35-10 at Atlanta on Dec. 12, 2004.

Pride and poise? Not these Raiders. Not vs. the NFC. Silver 'n'

Bleak have lost five straight vs. the other conference. ... CB

DeAngelo Hall, the proud owner of millions of Al Davis' dollars,

going up vs. ex-mates. ... Falcons sure have missed him. They've

already matched last year's win total. ... Talk about consistent.

Raiders 26th in offense, 26th in D.

Prediction: Raiders 20, Falcons 17

Philadelphia at Seattle

4:15 p.m., Eagles by 6 1/2

Last meeting: Seahawks won 28-24 at Philadelphia on Dec. 2,

2007.

Strange stuff in last year's meeting, when an LB, Lofa Tatupu,

intercepted three passes. ... Eagles were sans Donovan Mac in that

one. ... Philly leads NFC with plus-7 turnover ranking. ... Don't

let that so-so record fool you. Eagles a stout bunch, witness No. 8

ranking in Oh, No. 7 in D. ... Not that Seahawks have injury issues

at WR, but rookie TE John Carlson leads club with 20 catches.

Prediction: Eagles 34, Seahawks 24

New England at Indianapolis

8:15 p.m., Colts by 6

Last meeting: Patriots won 24-20 at Indianapolis on Nov. 4,

2007.

John Madden, who'll call this one, says the Colts have fallen

and gone BOOM! ... Peyton Manning on pace for career-low 23 TD

passes. Marvin Harrison? Dude has three catches, 23 yards in last

two games. ... No typo: Indy No. 21 in offense. Pats, meanwhile,

No. 19. ... Fearless prediction: Wes Welker will catch a bunch a

passes. Including postseason, he has caught six-plus in 11

straight.

Prediction: Colts 30, Patriots 23

Pittsburgh at Washington

8:30 p.m. Monday, Redskins by 2

Last meeting: Steelers won 16-7 at Pittsburgh on Nov. 28, 2004.

Has Steelers punter chased down that errant snap yet? ... Willie

Parker expected to play in this one. He had back-to-back

100-yarders before coming up lame. ... Clinton Portis 56 yards away

from the magic 1,000 mark. Say what? What's so magic about 1,000

yards in a 16-game season? ... Jason Campbell is the lone Week 1

starting QB who hasn't thrown a pick. We'll see if he can say that

after facing Steelers' top-ranked D.

Prediction: Redskins 19, Steelers 16

Steve Jenkins' stunning cut and torn-paper illustrations make

him the darling of librarians, teachers and booksellers and have

won him a Caldecott Honor award, a Boston Globe/Horn Book award and

dozens of other major citations in his 17-year career.

Nearly every book starts with a nagging question.

What if we did a book about the way animals talk to each other,

he wondered once. The answer was "Slap, Squeak and Scatter: How

Animals Communicate."

Can a picture book show exactly how big certain prehistoric

creatures were? Answer: "Prehistoric Actual Size!"

Dsungaripterus, a flying reptile, requires a four-page foldout to

display its menacing, toothy beak.

One of Jenkins' questions -- what's a powerful way to teach

children about specialization and adaptation? -- begets another,

"What Do You Do With a Tail Like This?"

Besides showing how the animals use that part of their bodies,

the text visually hints at the movement. "If you're a lizard, you

break off your" is separated from "tail to get away" in

imitation of the lizard's defense strategy. That won a 2004

Caldecott honor award.

"Whatever he does, we buy it," said Sue Lubens, owner of The

Bookies, which specializes in children's and educational books.

"We have teachers who come in and ask, 'What's the new Steve

Jenkins book? Has anything come from him lately?' "

Jenkins' books combine arresting images with equally riveting

text. Dinocephalosaurus, he notes in "Prehistoric Actual Size,"

"wasn't a dinosaur. It was a fish-eating reptile that sucked up

its prey by quickly stretching out its long neck." Try to erase

that mental picture before turning out the lights tonight.

The amount of time that Jenkins devotes to research eclipses the

physical work on his books. An information junkie, he is delighted

to learn, for example, that female earwigs are unusually maternal,

brooding their eggs and grooming the hatched larvae.

He and his wife and frequent collaborator, Robin Page, work

almost daily in the tidy, whimsical studio in their north Boulder,

Colo., home.

Flat, broad drawers stash his color-sorted collage papers. An

architectural vertical bookshelf holds research materials. The high

walls are adorned with period kitsch, including a B-movie poster

and some paint-by-numbers paintings.

Their projects fall into what Jenkins calls "the niche between

board books and books that are more encyclopedic" -- text-heavy

nonfiction that may not captivate their target audience of children

between 5 and 9 years old.

"Often, a first, second or third grade kid understands concepts

but they may not be intrigued by a lot of facts," Jenkins

explained.

"So instead, you give them a book about problem-solving that's

really a book about evolution."

Before turning to picture books, Jenkins spent 20 years as a

commercial graphic designer in New York City. Jenkins loved that,

but found illustrating children's books as a way to marry his

lifelong fascination with science -- his boyhood goal was to become

a scientist -- with art.

Though Jenkins sometimes illustrates books written by other

authors, he increasingly writes as well as illustrating. His secret

for avoiding ennui: "Never work on anything that doesn't fascinate

me personally."

Among his current projects is "Down, Down, Down: A Journey to

the Bottom of the Sea," a book due in stores next spring that

visually illustrates the ocean's depth.

"I was interested in doing a book about the ocean, and I wanted

to start at the surface and go straight down," he said.

"If you explore that thought, it's like a diver descending. The

ocean is 3 miles deep, on average. You have the surface, the

twilight zone, and then the bulk of the ocean is that dark zone. We

don't know much about it," he says. "More people have visited the

surface of the moon than the deepest part of the ocean."

As he researched the most lightless parts of the deep blue sea,

Jenkins learned about "bait balls," which are schools of fish

that swim so tightly bunched that their bodies touch as they swim.

He learned about the primary means of deep-ocean communication:

bioluminescence.

And because he was fascinated by the Mariana Trench when he was

a boy, he chose the deep Pacific Ocean formation as the bottom of

his visual dive.

"I wanted to do a spread on the hydro-thermal vents, where

super-heated water comes in," he said.

"You know, until the 1970s, scientists assumed that life

depends on the sun. But then they found life around the vents, and

that opened new possibilities for anaerobic life on Earth -- and

other planets. I think about science in a cross-curriculum way."

That's a deliberate response to the social and educational

emphasis on standardized tests, and a strategy for persuading young

readers to stick with nonfiction as they move on to sophisticated

books.

"There's a thing that happens in fourth or fifth grade where

kids move away from picture books to chapter books, and from

nonfiction to fiction," Jenkins said.

"Science education has some real challenges now, and it's not

just politics and intelligent design."

Capsule reviews of recent children's book releases.

"Off To War: Voices of Soldiers' Children," by Deborah Ellis,

$15.95.

The author's earlier books -- including the novel

"Breadwinner," set in Afghanistan -- looked at children in foreign

war-torn countries. This features interviews with the children

whose parents are serving in the U.S. and Canadian militaries.

The voices are direct responses to what seems to be a standard

set of questions -- how do you feel when your mother or father is in

combat? How does life change when they're gone? When they're back?

Do you want to be a soldier?

The candid answers offer insights into a group that's usually

overlooked in the mainstream media's coverage of the military.

(Ages 9 to 12)

"Nation," by Terry Pratchett, $16.99.

This intelligent, philosophical novel examines society reborn

from the ragtag survivors of a catastrophe. This task falls to two

improbable leaders, both children -- Mau, the only living native of

an island wiped out by a tsunami, and the shipwrecked

Ermintrude/Daphne -- who lead a handful of adults.

How they contrive to bridge linguistic, cultural and physical

barriers is enterprising and often amusing. Mau manages to milk a

wild pig to feed a newborn. Both children struggle past social

mores -- "Does not happen!" mutters Mau when he violates a taboo --

to cobble together an enviable milieu. (Ages 12 and up)

"Twenty-odd Ducks: Why, Every Punctuation Mark Counts," by

Lynn Truss, illustrated by Bonnie Timmons, $16.99.

In about a half-dozen examples, this droll book shows how a

punctuation mark can mean the difference between a blue-whale

expert, who's the go-to guy on blue whales, and a blue whale

expert, who is either sad or whose skin is tinged blue.

The examples, as in the collaborators' previous book, "Eat

Shoots &amp;amp; Leaves," are witty and pointed. "Jack's parents; who

could be happier?" shows two fond parents snuggling a child with a

perfect report card. "Jack's parents, who could be happier,"

however, shows an uneasy couple in a chaotic room where their

little snowflake is running amok.

Sometimes, punctuation means the difference between a compliment

and an insult:

"Dear Teacher: We want a teacher who knows what punctuation is

all about. You are clever. People who are not like you admit to

being horrible at grammar." The meaning is entirely different

here: "Dear Teacher: We want a teacher who knows what punctuation

is. All about you are clever people, who are not like you. Admit to

being horrible at grammar!" (All ages)

"Twelve Terrible Things," by Marty Kelley, $16.99.

The Lemony Snicket-esque introduction advises the reader not to

turn the page, which is how many of us anticipate feeling the day

after Tuesday's election. No candidates hide inside these pages,

but there are one or two Terrible Things that could be even worse.

Kelley's looming dentist says, "Say AHHH," instead of the

truly chilling "You might feel some discomfort."

But the birthday clown? Pure evil. So are the elderly lady's

manicured fingernails lunging toward the reader ("Oh my goodness,

just look at those CHEEKS." (Ages 4 to 8)

"The Animals Came Two by Two: The Story of Noah's Ark," by

Christopher Wormell, $19.95.

English wood engraver Wormell's minimalist illustrations are

invariably striking and handsome.

His latest book, a simple recounting of the story about the man

whose large wooden boat rescued "two of every creature" from the

ultimate version of ethnic cleansing, is ravishing. Pick a page,

any page, and it's suitable for framing and hanging on the wall.

(Ages 4 to 8)

"Ten Little Fingers And Ten Little Toes," by Mem Fox and Helen

Oxenbury, $16.

This enchanting picture book is a gentle reminder of what nearly

all of us share when politics and religion are shelved. Born under

various circumstances, some healthy and some not, these delightful

babies and toddlers present a picture of unity and love that's

worth emulating. (Ages 4 to 8, and new grandparents)

The battered broadcast networks bounced back to relevance this

presidential election year, delivering images, buzz phrases and

parodies that ricocheted on the air and then endlessly around the

Web. Ratings soared. Even the driest of the TV debates outdrew the

rest of prime time.

From the low-bar name-calling of "The View" to the sober Colin

Powell endorsement delivered on "Meet the Press," with Katie

Couric's comeback interview, Tina Fey's defining impersonation,

David Letterman's faux hurt feelings and a closing infomercial that

may have redefined the political ad in the mix, television had a

heavier hand than usual in conducting the nation's political

business.

Twenty-one months of campaign coverage felt like the world's

longest reality TV show. Really, though, it was a collision of

high- and low-brow political, entertainment and gossip outlets

exploiting the campaigns to their own ends -- for humor, for web

hits, for ratings or partisan outrage -- and tightening the nonstop

news cycle.

But it worked. It made TV must-see again and, it's fair to say,

more than ever, TV impacted the outcome of the election.

Again and again, the campaigns mattered less than the media

images of them. Those of us on the couch assessed "character" and

"temperament" via style more than through speeches and official

statements. The sight of Barack Obama dancing on Ellen DeGeneres'

show meant more to more people than his domestic policy talking

points. The visual of John McCain shuffling around a televised

"town hall" registered on a deeper level than his stump speeches.

Fey's spot-on Sarah Palin impersonation and Couric's devastating

interview were turning points in voters' minds. Politics and

entertainment merged in what Seth Meyers called a "snake eating

its tail moment," when Hillary Rodham Clinton gave "SNL" a

shout-out during a debate.

There was a lot of garbage, but after years of being scolded for

failing to ask the tough questions, television proved its worth as

a truth-seeking medium in the 2008 election cycle.

TV is a great lie detector. The camera's unblinking eye is

better at observing than probing, but it does eventually force

truth to the surface. Palin was terrific on TV, until she wasn't.

Prolonged exposure allowed the American public to move beyond

Palin's star-making turn reading a teleprompter. Couric brought an

unrehearsed side of the candidate into focus even as the candidate

railed against "the filter of the media."

Similarly, negative ads were powerful, until they weren't.

Repetition and truth squads allowed viewers the time to weigh and

reject distortions and untruths.

Television made the candidates excruciatingly familiar as they

camped out in our living rooms through endless debates.

Cranky or elitist? Too old or too inexperienced? Beyond canned

zingers and market-tested answers, prolonged exposure revealed

personal tics, body language and style points, judged by the

citizenry in record numbers.

Obama's small-screen charisma boosted by eloquence was

inarguably telegenic. His young children likewise were made-for-TV

cute. Some 33 million viewers caught Wednesday's slickly produced

infomercial, designed to make Obama seem at once presidential and

regular. His campaign proved most adept at reimagining the

political uses of television, updating the Ross Perot chart talk of

1992 with a hopeful 30-minute docu-bio-rally.

McCain's grimaces and eye rolling, apparent in close-ups during

debates, and his initial reluctance to look at or engage his

opponent onstage, did not play well on TV. Often his battle-worn

screen image seemed at odds with the battle-tested words he

expressed.

The importance of mainstream media imagery could be seen in

online efforts to compare and contrast the public displays of

affection of the physically close Obamas and the more restrained

McCains.

In addition to glib talk and fist bumps, a remarkable level of

informed debate was broadcast in 2008. Amazingly, 50 million of us

gathered to hear back-and-forth on wonkish details of tax policies

and health plans. More amazingly, 70 million of us spent an evening

sizing up the vice presidential contenders. During a particularly

weak season of network entertainment ("Knight Rider," anyone?),

We the People chose Jim Lehrer, Gwen Ifill, Tom Brokaw and Bob

Schieffer instead.

The surprising hit ratings for the debates gave way to

television's pundit love-in, overpopulated roundtable discussions.

(Jon Stewart noted that the inexhaustible supply of opinionated

pundits are qualified because they have "a face and a functioning

mouth.") When Donna Brazile, David Gergen, James Carville, Jeffrey

Toobin, Paul Begala, Alex Castellanos, Gloria Borger and William

Bennett engaged, the crosstalk was useless for anything but parody.

New techno-info-graphics, like CNN's bars monitoring audience

reaction (judging the sweaty palms of male and female observers)

and analyst scorecards (monitoring who was pro and con on the

candidates), further cluttered the screen. How long before the

networks wire the candidates for live EKG scans during debates?

The unforeseen resurgence of "Saturday Night Live" was a boon

not only to NBC but also to the world of YouTube, Hulu and the

rest. As the economy tanked, how many work hours, in how many

offices across America, were lost to streaming the latest Tina Fey

sketch or Fred Armisen parody of John King's touch-screen map?

Of course earlier campaigns ventured into popular media. When

Bill Clinton played saxophone on Arsenio Hall's show, the political

media landscape shifted. When McCain announced his candidacy on

Letterman's late-night soapbox, he upped the ante.

This election was different thanks to the evolution of the Web.

The Internet doesn't allow TV moments to fade, extending the life

of every gaffe -- as Joe Biden learned the hard way.

The truth-telling that is political satire enjoyed a

renaissance. The best TV jokes got an afterlife online, popping up

in reruns faster than you could say "Huffington Post."

The long media march created new stars -- Rachel Maddow debuted

to stellar ratings for MSNBC and Elisabeth Hasselbeck of "The

View" made her bow as political warm-up act for Palin. Keith

Olbermann edged out Bill O'Reilly in key ratings; both of them

stole the spotlight from Rush Limbaugh. Our fascination with

"Obama Girl" gave way to PalinasPresident.com (complete with

lipsticked pit bull).

And so it was ironic that, as robo-calls were replayed on TV,

the contest's climactic turning point was an old-school media

moment: Colin Powell dissing McCain and endorsing Obama on "Meet

the Press."

The only notable absence was Oprah Winfrey. The talk-show host

endorsed Obama early on, but consciously avoided the spotlight

during the campaign rather than eclipse the candidate.

That sparked speculation that, if true, would tie pop culture to

politics as closely as Ronald Reagan did: The London Times reported

that Winfrey's name has been floated as Obama's ambassador to Great

Britain.

Hispanic Americans could be a decisive factor in Tuesday's

presidential election in the three battleground states of New

Mexico, Nevada and Colorado.

Both Sen. Barack Obama, D-Ill., and Sen. John McCain, R-Ariz.,

have aggressively campaigned in these states, which President Bush

carried in 2004 and which are home to large Hispanic populations.

Polls show Obama leading McCain in these states, where polls

also show that Hispanic voters prefer the Democrat from Illinois by

large margins.

Assuming that Obama wins all 252 of the electoral votes won by

Sen. John Kerry, D-Mass., in his unsuccessful 2004 bid for the

presidency, the 19 electoral votes in New Mexico, Nevada and

Colorado would provide Obama with 271 electoral votes, one more

than he needs to win the White House.

That means that if Obama wins those states, he could still

clinch the presidency -- even without prevailing in other

battleground states like Ohio and Florida.

A key question is whether Hispanic voters will defy historical

trends and actually turn out to vote Tuesday. Voter participation

in Hispanic communities has historically been lower than the

national turnout, much to the consternation of Hispanic political

activists, who note that the group is the nation's fastest growing

racial or ethnic demographic.

For example, Hispanics represented 14.3 percent of the nation's

population in 2004, but only cast 6 percent of the votes in that

year's presidential election.

Analysts of Hispanic voting patterns predict this year will be

different and that there will be a huge turnout on Tuesday. One

analyst, Antonio Gonzalez, president of the Velasquez Institute, a

research organization aimed at increasing Latino and other minority

groups' political participation, predicts that Hispanic voter

turnout will be "record breaking." He notes that Hispanic voter

registration and voting have increased each cycle since 1980 and

that efforts to register Hispanic voters this year have so far

resulted in large registration surges.

Brent Wilkes, national executive director of the League of

United Latin American Citizens, the nation's largest Latino

political organization, agreed. Voter registration levels and

polling data indicate that turnout by Hispanics will be "huge,"

he said.

"All indications are that record numbers of Latinos are

registering to vote," said Wilkes. "Their overall interest level

is higher than it was in perhaps the last three or four election

cycles."

The National Association of Latino Elected and Appointed

Officials Educational Fund, a leading Latino leadership

organization, predicted that Latino voter turnout on Tuesday will

hit 9.2 million, up from 7.6 million in 2004.

A poll conducted by NALEO in October showed that nearly 90

percent of registered Hispanic voters in Colorado, Florida, New

Mexico and Nevada said they were "almost certain" they would vote

on Nov. 4.

McCain and Obama have aggressively campaigned for the Hispanic

vote, particularly through Spanish-language appeals on the issue of

immigration. The Obama campaign, for its part, has poured $20

million into Hispanic outreach nationally.

Polls conducted in August and September by Latino Decisions, a

public opinion firm led by Matt Barreto of the University of

Washington and Gary Segura of Stanford University, in conjunction

with NALEO, showed Obama leading McCain among Hispanic voters in

each of these three states by margins of between 44 and 53 points.

Those strong leads, coupled with the size of the Hispanic

populations in these states, could spell influence on Election Day.

In 2006 Latinos constituted 30.4 percent of registered voters in

New Mexico, 10 percent of registered voters in Colorado and 10.2

percent of registered voters in Nevada, according to a report led

by the Immigration Policy Center, part of the American Immigration

Law Foundation.

State-wide polls in October gave Obama an average edge of about

seven points in New Mexico. The Illinois senator's lead in Colorado

and Nevada similarly averaged at seven points at the end of

October, according to Real Clear Politics, a website that tracks

polling data from a variety of sources.

An October study by the William C. Velasquez Institute reported

that without the support of Latino voters those leads would

disappear -- putting Obama behind McCain by four points in New

Mexico and in a statistical tie in Colorado and Nevada.

Ellie Klerlein, field and civic engagement strategist for the

National Council of La Raza, said that, though immigration is

generally not listed as a top issue for Hispanic voters -- as with

most voters, economic concerns fill that slot for Hispanics -- it

does drive these individuals' perception of candidates.

"Polls have shown that it's something that Latinos use as sort

of a way to get a feel for how candidates think about their

community," Klerlein said.

Immigration issues in this year's contest have often been just

below the surface --except in the Spanish-language news media, where

both the Obama and McCain campaigns have slugged at each other over

immigration, according to Frank Sharry, executive director at

America's Voice, an organization which presses for immigration

reform.

One issue is the degree to which McCain will be faulted for

Republican immigration policies and rhetoric that is unpopular in

the Hispanic community.

In Sharry's view, McCain had to "run away" from the Latino

community during his primary campaign in order to attract his

party's conservative base.

The result, Wilkes said, is that McCain has lost support from

Latino voters who once admired his 2006 efforts with Sen. Ted

Kennedy, D-Mass., at immigration reform

"His support couldn't really overcome the negative perceptions

of the party," Wilkes explained.

Avoiding that negative association may be particularly important

in McCain's efforts to win over new young Latino voters and newly

naturalized citizens.

These voters, who are new to the political process, don't yet

have entrenched voting patterns, said Erica Bernal Martinez, senior

director of civic engagement at NALEO.

McCain and Obama will therefore have to address issues like the

economy, the war in Iraq, health care and education in order to

gain votes from those individuals, Martinez said.

"The Latino community has matured politically. They're really

looking for policy decisions," Martinez said. "This isn't about

'Can someone speak to me in Spanish and is that going to be enough

to win me over?"'

--(E-mail: allison@hearstdc.com)

The one certainty of Tuesday's national election is

that a sitting senator will be elected president, marking the first

time someone has gone directly from the Senate to the White House

in almost 50 years.

Of the nation's 43 presidents, the only two who were elected

while in the Senate were Democrat John F. Kennedy in 1960 and

Republican Warren Harding 40 years before that.

Either Sen. John McCain or Sen. Barack Obama will be only the

third president to come directly from the Senate in 225 years.

Having "U.S. Senate" at the top of the winner's resume will be

a mixed blessing once he enters the White House, according to

political scientists and presidential historians.

"The senator who enters the White House thinks that he knows

Washington," said Stephen Hess, a presidential expert at the

Brookings Institution, a D.C.-based think tank. "The problem is

that what he knows about Washington is Capitol Hill."

A major liability for any former senator is that he can be

viewed as a Washington insider -- a creature of the Congress in

which he served -- and unable to meet the needs of states and

everyday people once in the White House. And the skills that

generally make good senators -- such as the ability to negotiate and

compromise -- don't translate to the White House, where a president

is often called on to be decisive.

On the campaign trail and once in the White House, senators

"have been hindered by the fact that they talk in 'Senate-speak,'

" said Barry Burden, a political science professor at the

University of Wisconsin, who has studied how would-be presidents in

the Senate. "Outside the institution, that sort of talk just

doesn't resonate with voters."

The winner in Tuesday's election can immediately capitalize on

his legislative skills by taking a lead role later in November when

Congress reconvenes to craft another economic stimulus package. In

the unique position as a sitting senator poised to become president

on Jan. 20, either McCain or Obama could help write -- and even

introduce -- the financial relief package congressional leaders hope

to debate later this month.

"We're going to see (action) immediately, like key appointments

-- for the secretary of the treasury -- (and) appointing an economic

stimulus team," predicts Larry Berman, a professor of political

science at the University of California, Davis.

The senator-turned-president can draw on his firsthand knowledge

of the personalities in Congress and the sometimes arcane

procedural rules and traditions that can help propel a legislative

agenda on Capitol Hill or stop it in its tracks. Both Obama and

McCain would be able to capitalize on their personal connections

with former colleagues in Congress to push their own priorities

from the other end of Pennsylvania Avenue.

The president-elect will "still have all the contacts (and)

understand what committees are important and can work the system

from the outside, which is really impressive and rare," Burden

said.

For instance President Lyndon B. Johnson's 12 years in the

Senate -- including six years running the chamber as its majority

leader -- gave him an advantage in pushing civil rights legislation

and the "great society" agenda during his time in the White

House. Although Johnson had more than a decade of experience in the

Senate, his launching pad to the presidency was as vice president

when Kennedy was assassinated.

"He got an amazing amount of legislation passed because of what

he knew about the Senate," Hess said.

By contrast, former President Bill Clinton's first big

initiative -- to overhaul the nation's health care system -- failed

partly because the former Arkansas governor tried to craft it

without involving Congress. A former senator would immediately know

such a move would alienate lawmakers expecting to play a key role

in the debate.

The legislative experience Obama and McCain would bring to the

presidency would be a departure from the experience of governors

who have frequently occupied the White House.

Their "knowledge of the legislative process" is a "major

advantage," Berman said. "Governors . . . have executive

experience, but it's a different kind of experience."

History shows that senators have a tough time getting elected to

the White House, even for those few who were nominated.

Since Kennedy's time, at least 56 sitting senators have run for

the presidency, according to Burden's research. Only a handful won

their party's nomination, most recently John Kerry, D-Mass., in

2004, and former Sen. Robert Dole, R-Kan., in 1996.

This means that the loser in Tuesday's presidential contest will

have plenty of company in the Senate, which is filled with wannabe

executives.

Another reason that the path from the Senate to the White House

is rocky is that would-be presidents have amassed extensive voting

records in the chamber that can be easily picked apart on the

campaign trail. Opponents can make political hay out of Senate

votes on contentious issues.

Governors and other presidential aspirants don't have the same

easy-to-attack records.

Because of Obama's limited time in the Senate -- he won his seat

in 2004 -- he has had an advantage over McCain, a 26-year Senate

veteran, and his main challenger in the Democratic primaries, Sen.

Hillary Clinton, D-N.Y. Both McCain and Clinton cast votes

authorizing the use of military force in Iraq in 2002 -- before

Obama arrived in the Senate.

Senators also can struggle to explain the nuance of their Senate

voting record -- especially votes that contradict each other. A

senator who may be able to square a vote for a proposal with a

later vote against a similar initiative may find that impossible to

explain on the campaign trail. There, the vote change can be used

as evidence of flip-flopping.

Case in point: Four years ago, Kerry was attacked for explaining

a vote in favor of war funding by saying he voted for it before

voting against it.

Senators also are often portrayed on the campaign trail as

Washington insiders who are too immersed in Beltway politics to

connect with voters across the nation.

Both candidates -- especially McCain -- would have to broaden

their expertise after years of being immersed in a few select areas

serving on individual committees in the Senate.

A senator-turned-president may know a lot "about the particular

areas that he specialized in (while) in the Senate," Hess said.

"Senators become very specialized, which means there are a lot of

areas in which he steps into the executive office of the president

in which he knows nothing."

Ross Baker, a political science professor at Rutgers University,

says that senators are "fairly narrowly tracked" -- and that

leaves them ill-prepared for the juggling act required of

presidents.

"As president, you have 13 responsibilities coming at you in

terms of various policy areas," Baker said. "A senator can always

say, 'I will check with my staff and get back to you.' A president

can't do that."

(Jennifer A. Dlouhy can be reached at 202-263-6400 or at the

e-mail address jdlouhy(a)hearstdc.com)

Adriana Rodriguez and Silverio "Silver"

Salazar don't have much in common -- clearly evident in their

divergent choices for the country's next president.

But they're both keenly aware of one vital trait they share:

They're Hispanic voters in Colorado, representing the swing voting

bloc in a battleground state that is being intensely courted by

both campaigns.

Like millions of voters across the country, Rodriguez and

Salazar are deeply concerned about the economic crisis. But what's

driving their political activism -- what motivates them to work the

phones and knock on doors -- is another issue that has faded from

the national spotlight but still riles Coloradoans: immigration.

"My son shouldn't risk living without a father just because the

system's wrong," said Rodriguez, a stay-at-home mom whose husband

illegally migrated from Mexico. She was volunteering last week at

the Barack Obama campaign office here.

Salazar, who's in charge of Hispanic outreach in southern

Colorado for John McCain, agreed. "Immigration is still a crucial

issue for us," he said. "Some of us have been here for five or

six generations, but we still have close ties with Mexico."

A recent accident in which an unauthorized immigrant crashed

into an Aurora, Colo., ice cream shop, killing three, including a

3-year-old, has helped keep the issue of illegal immigration in the

forefront here. But it's the lingering legislative impasse in

Washington over immigration reform that is inspiring nonpolitical

types in Colorado to join the election fray.

Hispanics are estimated to make up nearly 10 percent of the

state electorate.

"The Hispanic differential could be the decisive factor," said

Floyd Ciruli, a veteran independent pollster in Denver.

Campaign officials, state and local leaders, researchers and

immigrants all agreed that in Colorado the issue of immigration

conjures deep, personal emotions that are infusing a vibrant

political discourse.

Activists pushing for a more restrictive immigration system link

the issue to economic troubles and national security concerns.

State Sen. Dave Schultheis, has been a leading proponent of new

state laws on illegal immigration, arguing that Colorado leaders

cannot sit by idly until their counterparts in Washington get their

act together and overhaul the current policy.

The latest Census statistics show Colorado is home to nearly

500,000 immigrants -- about half of them in the country illegally,

according to the Federation for American Immigration Reform, the

country's largest anti-illegal-immigration organization.

People are mad, said Schultheis, who represents Colorado

Springs, the state's second-largest city and a Republican

stronghold. "They're furious over illegals stealing jobs,

hampering the education system and increasing crime rates."

The immigration-restrictionist argument in Colorado is also

often linked to population growth that is threatening quality of

life and the environment.

That's a constant argument Richard Lamm, former Democratic

governor of the state, has been making for decades. Illegal

immigration is driving the population explosion, said Lamm, adding

that the most effective solution is to systematically punish

employers who profit from illegal workers.

"Cheap labor is economic cocaine for the business community,"

said Lamm, a three-term governor and current college professor who

spearheaded Defend Colorado Now, an anti-illegal-immigration lobby

effort.

Many Hispanic voters, particularly immigrants who have become

naturalized citizens, have not made up their mind on a candidate

because they're not sure who will be a better leader on immigration

reform, according toAmber Tafoya, with the Colorado Immigrant

Rights Coalition.

Many of them have relatives or friends who are in the country

illegally, and they're among the hardest hit by the economic

downturn --particularly its impact on construction.

While the two candidates have remained mostly mum on the issue

of immigration on the campaign trail, both Democratic and GOP

operatives in Colorado said it plays a vital role in the contest

there.

Salazar, who hails from a family steeped in Colorado politics,

including two current members of Congress, said he defected from

the Democrats because he didn't trust Obama, specifically his

promise to tackle immigration.

Wearing a T-shirt emblazoned with "Another Democrat for

McCain" at the senator's headquarters in Pueblo, Salazar said his

candidate's record on immigration and border issues speaks for

itself.

Obama has put his fundraising largesse to use in Colorado,

opening 51 offices -- compared with 13 for McCain.

Renting a private home, an affordable alternative to staying in

a hotel, is becoming an increasingly popular option for many

travelers, particularly for those on a family vacation. But it also

has potential pitfalls and drawbacks -- not only for the renter, but

sometimes for the owner as well.

At least that's the conclusion one might draw from the reaction

to the Practical Traveler column on Oct. 5 about this subject, with

more than 80 readers weighing in at nytimes.com.

Renters and owners alike shared their vacation rental

experiences -- some terrific, some horrific. And some, like

Christine from St. James, N.Y., the owner of a vacation rental in

Puerto Rico, took offense to the story's description of one

person's bad experience with a different property in Puerto Rico

that a renter said was dirty and poorly maintained.

"I was dismayed to read this article that portrayed private

vacation rentals in such a bad light," Christine wrote. "I have

heard similar stories from friends who rented from management

companies. You can have a bad experience at any vacation rental, or

at a hotel for that matter."

(To see the full version of this excerpt and other comments from

readers, go to the Practical Traveler at nytimes.com/travel.)

But there were more than just complaints or rebuttals. Readers

also shared tips and advice on how best to select a vacation

rental.

Lesson No. 1: While professionally managed rentals promise a

certain level of quality control, they don't always deliver on that

promise. Take this post by "rjc" from Madison, Wis.:

"In September 2007, we rented an apartment in Nice, France,

from a Scottish owner. Upon arrival at the rental agency, before

the designated time, we had to wait because the rental agent wasn't

on site and when she came, she had to run an errand. When we were

finally taken to the apartment it hadn't been cleaned, there was

rotting food, and mold, in the refrigerator, and no hot water for

over 18 hours. 'These things happen,' we were told by the rental

agent. The apartment was cleaned within the next three hours, but

it was a rocky start to the week. Correspondence to the owner after

returning home was ignored. The rental agent was responsible, but

took no responsibility and offered no recompense."

That's not to say that rental management companies don't have

fans.

"I have rented homes in several states for vacations with

family," wrote a reader named Sue from Schererville, Ind. "We

would suggest only renting from a professional management company.

We have been very disappointed with rentals from private

individuals. Just remember your idea of a clean house may not

coincide with their idea of a clean house."

Likewise, rental management companies had something to say about

the services they provide, mostly, it seems, a dose of reality.

"Every owner believes his property offers something special --

which is the attitude you want an owner to have -- but the fact is,

they sometimes don't really notice the barking dog, the street

noise, or the out-of-the-way location," wrote Nikki Hootman, who

writes a newsletter for Rentvillas.com, an agency specializing in

rentals in Europe. "The role of the agency is to evaluate the

property impartially and disclose the strengths and weaknesses

openly with the client."

Vacation rental homeowners wrote in passionate defense of the

rental-by-owner market, pointing out that many of them take great

pride in their homes and hold their rentals to high standards.

"With the wide use of the Internet and the potential for fraud

and abuse, people can pretend to be anybody and sell anything,"

wrote Joelle Miller, a vacation rental owner from Pine, Colo.

"Vacation rentals are unfortunately not excluded from possible

Internet scams. However, there are thousands of honest, hardworking

homeowners who rent their own second home as a vacation rental and

most of them are very professional."

And sometimes, homeowners pointed out, it's not the property

that is the problem -- it's the renter.

"Not mentioned in the article: the fact that it's all a two-way

street," wrote Zachary K. "Sometimes renters ignore rules of the

house (regarding smoking, late-night noise, etc), break things

without paying or even mentioning them, etc. These folks are in the

minority, I think, but it just goes to show you: Trust is required

on both sides."

Regardless of whom you rent from, communication is the key.

"Communicate with the agency or owner often -- let them know

your priorities, ask questions and get references and pictures,"

offered a reader named Kathy from California, who said she has

rented in various parts of Europe, and "you will learn quickly who

is responsive and on top of things. Many people who rent really

love their properties and locations and are happy to give you the

scoop."

(BEGIN OPTIONAL TRIM.)

Making a priority list of what you're looking for in a rental

can also be useful, she noted: "Are you looking top notch

accommodations? A good location? An inexpensive place? A

kid-friendly place?"

Travelers can also learn a lot from a vacation rental ad, if

they know what to look for. A lack of interior photos can be a clue

that something's not quite right, a reader with the screen name

nyc10012 pointed out, adding:

"Make a point of asking a question in your first query to the

owner -- did you get a quick and reasonable reply to your question?

If not, trust your instinct and keep looking."

How long the posting has been listed may also offer some clues

as to the quality of the rental. "I look for places that have

reviews by people who have stayed there, and places that have been

listed for a long time on a particular Web site," wrote a reader

with the screen name "dobes" from New York. "I figure they would

have been taken off the list if renters had had bad experiences. So

far, I've had only good luck -- and positively great luck -- in Jerez

de la Frontera, Spain, and Dublin, Ireland."

It's also a good idea to find out if the owners use the home for

their own vacations or if the property is solely held for rental

income.

"I like to rent from owners who use the property for their own

vacations on the theory that owners want the place to be nice and

will not tolerate dirt," wrote Carol H. from Oklahoma, who said

she had rented in Europe and recommended the National Trust

(www.nationaltrustcottages.co.uk) or Landmark Trust

(www.landmarktrust.org.uk), two preservation charities that own and

operate historic rental properties in the United Kingdom and

Europe.

(END OPTIONAL TRIM.)

Several readers recommended Web sites where travelers can find

reviews of vacation rentals, like www.vacationrentalscommunity.com

and www.slowtrav.com. Bob Kelly, who owns a rental property in

Pacific Beach, Wash., pointed out that reviews, like those on

www.cyberrentals.com, often include the renter's e-mail address so

travelers looking for feedback on a specific property can contact

past renters for more insight.

Finally, consider the possibility that a vacation rental may

just not be your thing. Kathy from California wrote:

"Don't sweat little stuff -- a barking dog or broken appliances

are a huge issue, but sub-par cooking utensils or ugly bedspreads

shouldn't be a deal breaker. If that stuff bothers you, it's best

to go to the local hotel."

Q: I am looking for some ideas for a day trip from Frankfurt,

Germany, when I am there for a couple of days. I hear there is not

that much to do in Frankfurt, so any kind of suggestions about good

places to eat and places to see would be great.

-- J.B. Hopkins, Homewood, Ala.

A: I'm not sure why Frankfurt is getting a bad rap in Alabama,

but the city, Germany's financial capital, has a lot to offer any

visitor. "Its museums are the best in Germany, after Berlin's,"

wrote Mark Landler last year in "36 Hours in Frankfurt" (Aug. 19,

2007), "and its opera and ballet are top notch." You'll find

plenty to fill your two days, including attractions like the

Staedel-Museum (Schaumainkai 63; 49-69-605-098-0;

www.staedelmuseum.de) and the botanical garden, Palmengarten

(Siesmayerstrasse 61; 49-69-212-333-91;

www.palmengarten-frankfurt.de).

Landler's dining recommendations in the piece include Silk,

where you eat while reclining on a leather daybed

(Carl-Benz-Strasse 21; 49-69-900-200; www.cocoonclub.net). Silk

also made the list of Germany's culinary hot spots reviewed by

William Grimes in T: Travel magazine's "Teutonic Plates" (Nov.

18, 2007).

Christian Anderson, a reader in Davis, Calif., who lived in

Frankfurt for eight months, listed in an e-mail message a number of

the city's cultural delights, including the city museum

Historisches Museum (Saalgasse 19; 49-69-212-35-599;

www.historisches-museum.frankfurt.de) and the cinema-themed

Deutsches Filmmuseum (Schaumainkai 41; 49-69-96-12-200;

www.deutschesfilmmuseum.de). Other reader recommendations can be

found in the Where to Stay, Where to Eat and What to Do sections of

the Frankfurt destination guide at nytimes.com/travel.

As for side trips outside the city, Anderson recommended a hike

into the nearby Taunus mountain region, specifically a visit to the

Meisterturm in Hofheim (www.meisterturm.de), a small Eiffel

Tower-like structure with a beer garden. Heidelberg, only about 55

miles from Frankfurt, is a beautiful university town, untouched by

World War II shelling, with enough to see and places to eat for an

enjoyable day trip. Again, check the Times Web site for

recommendations.

Division Street runs from east to west. It begins (or ends, if

you prefer) in Chicago's wealthy Near North Side, where high-rise

condo buildings offer views across Lake Michigan, and continues

through the bar- and club-infested area around State and Rush

streets. It is the main thoroughfare of hip Wicker Park; then it

traverses Humboldt Park, before heading -- like so many residents

who once lived on or near it, including a few generations of my own

family -- into the suburbs.

Solomon Belo moved from Lachine, Quebec, to the Humboldt Park

neighborhood when he was 9. About a decade later, shortly after

publishing a short story called "The Hell It Can't" about a

savage, unexplained beating, he changed his first name to Saul and

his last to Bellow. If the rest isn't quite history, by now it's

certainly biography.

Late in his life, Bellow reflected on spending summer nights in

Humboldt Park, "on the back porch, your neighbors on their back

porches all down the line, the graceless cottonwoods reaching

toward you and you listened to the accordions and player pianos and

harmonicas below, across the way, down the street, playing mazurkas

... One of the children was sent to the corner to bring home a

pitcherful of soda pop (the druggist called it a phosphate). Over

every drugstore in Chicago there swung a large mortar and pestle

outlined in electric bulbs and every summer the sandflies with

green light transparent wings covered the windows."

Though you get the classic Bellovian sense of motion at the end

of the passage, with the children running, sandflies beating their

wings against the drugstore window, the tone is calm, quiet, almost

pastoral. It lacks Augie March's antic good humor, Herzog's

generative sense of woundedness, Charlie Citrine's obsessing over

his friend Humboldt eating a pretzel while already covered with

"the dust of the grave." But it retains (to my eye and ear, at

least) an essential Chicagoness -- or at least it evokes the Chicago

I knew through my grandparents: a city of immigrants and

first-generation Americans living close together, with an ear

cocked toward the old country (accordions, mazurkas) while running

toward the new (phosphates, electric bulbs).

These days in much of Humboldt Park, you are more likely to hear

a tight horn section than accordions, the declining syncopated

arpeggios of a piano used in a Latin band than a player piano,

salsa, hip-hop or reggaeton than mazurkas. Heading down Division

Street, from Western Avenue to the park itself, you pass beneath a

row of abstract steel representations of the Puerto Rican flag

flying over the street. Most of the signs are in Spanish; the

gentrification that has transformed the neighboring areas of Wicker

Park, Bucktown and Logan Square is barely a ripple here. And yet,

the essential feel that Bellow evokes -- a cozy, cheek-by-jowl

urbanity -- remains palpable. The modest but solid apartment

buildings -- three flats and six flats -- lining the side streets all

across Chicago's Northwest Side are snug and solid, the sorts of

places that some people use as a first American toehold and others

never leave. Bellow referred to the animal smells, the rawness of

Chicago that struck him when his family first moved from Lachine;

if the animal smells are gone -- the huge Union Stockyards, just

southwest of Humboldt Park, closed in the early 1970s, after

decades of decline -- Chicago's rough vitality remains stronger here

than almost anywhere else in the city.

The second house into which Abraham Belo moved his family is a

brick three flat on Cortez Street. The house is on the ragged edge

of Ukrainian Village; walking along these streets you'll hear

Ukrainian, Russian and Spanish with equal frequency. Some hipsters,

but not many, have started to make inroads this far west. At the

end of Bellow's old block, on the corner of Cortez and Western, is

a bar called the Empty Bottle where the new and old communities

have made a tentative accommodation: It has an old-time,

corner-tavern feeling (which in this area still tends to mean

Polish), it serves a largely Latino community and in the evenings

it features an eclectic array of experimental jazz and rock bands,

along with some of the best DJs in the city. It achieves this mix

matter-of-factly, unsentimentally.

My grandmother and her two sisters, like Bellow, attended Tuley

High School in Humboldt Park; he and my great-aunt Dorothy were

almost exact contemporaries, and there appears in "More Die of

Heartbreak" a character with their surname, Vilatzer (Bellow

spelled it "Vilitzer"). The apocryphal family legend says that he

was fond of Dorothy when they were in high school, but her father,

Elie, who owned a furniture store, shooed the dreamer away.

Bellow's Vilitzer was the apotheosis of a corrupt big-city pol --

a caricature, in a sense, of Elie's cautious immigrant materialism.

Harold (The Big Heat) Vilitzer was a physically imposing city

councilman who squeezed a man's head in a vise, maneuvered his

sister out of proceeds from a real estate sale and shunned his

nephew before climbing into the back of a limousine.

Perhaps as an act of rebellion -- Bellow was pretty close to

sainthood in my secular Jewish home -- I came to him late, not

reading a word of him until I was almost 30. I was then in the

middle of a three-year spell in London, restless and homesick, and

I picked up "The Adventures of Augie March" less from a burning

desire to read Bellow than because the mere title reminded me of

home.

Of course, it took all of three sentences to hook me; the voice

coming out of those pages was so strong, so familiar, and seemed to

be speaking directly to me. I suppose all aesthetic loves carry

with them a sense of ownership, but since then I've worked my way

through much of the rest of the canon, and there remains something

categorically different -- both welcoming, almost haimishe, and a

little eerie -- in my encounters with Bellow than with other authors

I revere.

My early memories are full of characters I would come to

recognize (or at least call) Bellovian: Jewish wiseguys,

street-smart autodidacts like my grandfather, an orphan raised in

military school who became first a professional saxophonist and

then a lawyer, who taught me how to play poker when I was 6. My

grandfather also read voraciously, everything he could get his

hands on; when he came across an unfamiliar word he wrote it on the

book's inside flap, then looked it up and used it as soon as he

could. My grandmother could curse in Yiddish and quote Browning

from memory with equal felicity. Art and commerce coexisted, rather

than competing, in these people and in their milieu. Augie, Einhorn

and Maurice spoke in their accents: adenoidal Midwestern with an

unerasable Yiddish twang.

All of them were forged -- were made Americans -- in the crucible

of Chicago's Northwest Side. Their stories have been re-enacted

hundreds, thousands of times over; a more fertile writer's ground

is difficult to imagine. Naturally, Bellow wasn't the only writer

patrolling this patch of earth. Nelson Algren's stories were mostly

set on the Northwest Side. Algren memorably described a fondness

for Chicago as being "like loving a woman with a broken nose, you

may well find lovelier lovelies. But never a lovely so real."

Studs Terkel has lived in the area since he was 8 (that's 88 years

and counting, for those keeping score); his oral history "Division

Street," published in 1967, tells the neighborhood's stories from

ground level.

Division Street has always been the Northwest Side's main

thoroughfare. It once held more bars per capita than any other

street in the world. Today you have to hunt around a bit more -- the

center of drinking-gravity has moved a bit east, toward Wicker Park

and Bucktown -- but there are still plenty of dark, quiet spots for

an afternoon beer and no conversation. You still see bars with Old

Style signs out front advertising "Zimne pivo" (Polish for "cold

beer"), even if the drinkers are speaking Spanish.

Division Street also houses Chicago's last remaining Russian

bathhouse, which inspired the greatest paragraph of Chicago

anthropology in Bellow's most Chicago-centric book, "Humboldt's

Gift":

"The patrons of the Russian Bath are cast in an antique form.

They have swelling buttocks and fatty breasts as yellow as

buttermilk. They stand on thick pillar legs affected with a sort of

creeping verdigris or blue-cheese mottling of the ankles. After

steaming, these old fellows eat enormous snacks of bread and salt

herring or large ovals of salami and dripping skirt-steak and they

drink schnapps. They could knock down walls with their hard stout

old-fashioned bellies. Things are very elementary here. You feel

that these people are almost conscious of obsolescence, of a line

of evolution abandoned by nature and culture. So down in the

super-heated subcellars all these Slavonic cavemen and wood demons

with hanging laps of fat and legs of stone and lichen boil

themselves and splash ice water on their heads by the bucket.

Upstairs, on the television screen in the locker room, little dudes

and grinning broads make smart talk or leap up and down. They are

unheeded ... There may be no village in the Carpathians where such

practices still prevail."

If my grandfather didn't eat red meat every day of his 87 years,

he came pretty close. Their house always smelled like roast beef

and garlic; from time spent on the floor as a child I can confirm

it worked itself into the very fibers of the shag carpet.

And me? As much as I love a good shvitz, it has an antique,

almost kitsch feel to it. In that paragraph I fear that I am at

best the little dude making smart talk and going unheeded. I don't

feel terrible about it: that's Americanization; that's what

Humboldt Park is for: to turn a family from antique forms to

twittering little dudes in three short generations.

IF YOU GO: IN AUGIE MARCH COUNTRY

GETTING THERE

Almost every major American airline flies between Chicago and

New York, usually for around $300.

WHERE TO STAY

Ray's Bucktown B&amp;amp;B (2144 N. Leavitt St.; 773-384-3245;

www.raysbucktownbandb.com) is in Bucktown, one neighborhood east of

Humboldt Park, and has 10 rooms for $119 to $179 a night (two-night

minimum).

For those who prefer to stay downtown, the Trump International

Hotel and Tower (401 N. Wabash Ave.; 312-924-7610;

www.trumpchicagohotel.com) just opened in January; rooms start at

$475.

WHERE TO EAT

Fonda Del Mar (3749 W. Fullerton Av.; 773-489-3748;

www.fondaonfullerton.com) offers upscale Mexican food on the

Humboldt Park-Logan Square border. The restaurant specializes in

seafood; try the marlin ceviche for a hearty appetizer. (Dinner for

two, with wine and tip, comes to about $100.)

Lula Cafe (2537 N. Kedzie Blvd.; 773-489-9554;

www.lulacafe.com), in the heart of Logan Square, features a

changing eclectic menu (which can include an excellent 24-hour lamb

shoulder), and they do a brisk brunch business. (Dinner for two

about $100.)

Takashi Yagihashi, a James Beard Award-winning chef, has just

opened Takashi (1952 N. Damen Ave.; 773-772-6170;

www.takashichicago.com) in Wicker Park, where he combines Japanese

ingredients with French technique to produce a changing array of

dishes. On a recent visit, the clay-pot chicken with yuzu was

especially good. (Dinner for two, $140.)

Here's how Michael Fox, the operations manager of the Hale

Center Theater in Salt Lake City, plans for his trip to New York:

He waits for The New Yorker's food issue to come out, rips out

pages and makes a list of where to go and what to order the next

time he's in town.

Fox's latest recommendation: the flat pasta with braised rabbit

at Kefi, a small Greek restaurant on the Upper West Side that will

soon move to a bigger space. "It feels like one of the local

places," he said, standing outside the Metropolitan Museum of Art

about two weeks ago. "It's not in a place a tourist would just be

walking by. I like feeling like an insider."

It's an excellent tip. Kefi is a gem known to Upper West Siders

and food-obsessed New Yorkers, but way off the tourist track. It

turns out you can make quite a weekend plan by simply asking a

dozen visitors from everywhere from Bulgaria to Vancouver to share

the highlight of their own trips, then cobbling those together. It

might even yield better results than (alas) reading a travel

columnist who'd like to think he knows what visitors will like but

has perhaps become a bit blase by living in the city.

The recommendation by Fox's wife, Barbara, was a bit dicier than

the restaurant pick. Her favorite activity was buying knock-off

purses in backrooms of Canal Street stores. (Weekend in New York

does not endorse such activity but did not want to restrict her

freedom of speech, so will note that she got a $3,400 Louis Vuitton

purse (or something like one) for $80.

A young couple from Zaragoza, Spain, said that what made their

trip was the decision to stay in the St. Marks Hotel in the East

Village, as opposed to a more traditional Midtown location. "The

St. Marks is not a grand hotel," said Jesus Longares, a

32-year-old engineer. "But it is in a fascinating area. There are

many contrasts. You can see a store specializing in comics, and

then a boutique for Goths."

Sometimes, popular destinations yield unexpected highlights.

Mircea Bucecu and Gwen Groom, who were visiting from Vancouver,

recommended ground zero, but not for the typical reasons. They were

chilled and touched not so much by the site itself, but by the

near-silence of their fellow visitors. "I couldn't believe that,"

said Bucecu, 62. "Usually it's a noisy town. If someone was

talking, they were whispering."

Groom, 54, cited another characteristic New York is not known

for. "There was a sense of humbleness there," she said.

Most travelers had to ponder their decision a bit, but not Vasco

Krapchev. Krapchev, a seasoned traveler and molecular virologist

who was born in Bulgaria and lives in Poland, recently spent four

days visiting a childhood friend in New York. His call: drinking at

Ideya, a cozy bar and restaurant serving modern Latin cuisine in

SoHo. He recommended the bar scene between 10 p.m. and midnight on

Friday or Saturday nights. "Great mojitos and caipirinhas," he

said. "Top 10 of where I've been for sure. Maybe top five."

(Note: a vigorous test of his recommendation proved he was on the

mark.)

He was not impressed with the food, although he may have drunk

too much to taste it, as evidenced by his difficulty in recalling

how long he stayed. In the end, he resorted to an alternative form

of measurement:

"We spent four caipirinhas there," he said. "So probably

three hours."

Thais Mucher, a Brazilian woman traveling with her sister

Juliana -- both in their 20s -- was amazed that in New York, she

could eat tapas under such elegant lighting at Pipa. "During the

day, it's a store that sells crystal chandeliers," she said --

that's ABC Carpet &amp;amp; Home. "At night, they put in tables. It's

really awesome." The dozens of chandeliers hanging from the

ceiling -- along with the mirrors on the wall -- are for sale. The

Sisters Mucher weren't tempted; they stuck with the sangria.

Her sister fell into another category of traveler: those who

recommended things New Yorkers and frequent visitors take for

granted. In her case, it was the concept of brunch. "In Sao Paulo,

it's just lunch," she said. "Here, brunch is really delicious."

She recommended the beef sandwich with caramelized onions and

Gruyere at Bistro Citron on the Upper West Side.

In the same category was Peggy Minnich from Ventura County,

California, who was with her husband, Richard. Her simple

recommendation: the subway as tourist attraction. "Coming from

L.A.," she said, "we don't have public transportation. It's an

experience in and of itself. It connects you to the city in a way

that nothing else does."

Richard Minnich was slightly less complimentary, calling the

subway filthy.

"Use the word 'earthy,' perhaps," Peggy Minnich said.

The recommendation of Trish and Chris Skillman, who were in town

for the weekend from Clinton, N.J., with their 14-year-old,

Heather, and her friend Lauren Folsom, was not to plan at all. "I

would come in with absolutely nothing particular in mind and just

pick and choose as the mood strikes," said Chris Skillman. Almost

nothing in mind, that is: Every time they visit, Heather insists

that they go to John's Pizzeria near Times Square. Her

recommendation: the sausage and fennel Petes-a-Rolls and a glance

at the stained glass skylight that looks like a pizza.

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In the opening scenes of the 1964 biopic

"Your Cheatin' Heart," Hank Williams hawks patent medicine,

swills whiskey and throws a few punches. Moments later, at a church

social, Hank -- played by George Hamilton -- makes a pass at his

future wife and busts a guitar over the head of a heckler. Overripe

with swagger and excess, Hamilton's performance comes off as a

clumsy composite of James Dean, Jerry Lee Lewis and John Wayne.

Though cartoonish, the movie underscores the enduring challenge

in deciphering this country music pioneer. More than five decades

after his death, in 1953, of an overdose of morphine on his way to

play a show, Hank Williams lives on in myth that is so fraught with

melodrama -- the liquor and pills, heartache and gloom -- and so

calcified by decades of redaction and hype that it's almost

impossible to tell the singer of "Lost Highway" from his songs.

But two recent projects help recast him in a revealing new

light, without whitewashing the intemperance and scandal. The

first, an exhibition at the Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum

here, features family artifacts that have never been displayed in

public before. The second, a CD box-set called "The Unreleased

Recordings," is the first installment of unearthed radio

transcriptions to be issued by Time Life. Far from presenting this

archetypical singer-songwriter as ghostly or morose, the exhibition

and box-set leave the impression of a devout man who, despite

debilitating health and personal problems, loved his family and

liked nothing so much as a good prank.

"You talk about pulling practical jokes -- him and the band,

that's all they did," said Hank Williams Jr., 59, in an interview

at his customized RV here this summer. (He also owns several

residences.) "We're talking about a bunch of 20-year-old guys,"

he continued, referring to his father's band, the Drifting Cowboys.

"He would sign autographs and they would come up behind him with a

stink bomb."

The exhibition, "Family Tradition: The Williams Family

Legacy," depicts the lives of three generations, from Hank and his

wife, Audrey, to Hank Jr.'s five children, and features items like

the 1944 Martin D-28 guitar on which Williams wrote many of his

hits. The Scotch-taped scrapbooks that Hank's mother kept during

his rise to fame are presented alongside touch-screen recreations

of their contents. There are candid family photos from the late

1940s, home movies of a trip to Disneyland and a snapshot, taken

decades later, of a young Hank Williams III taking a bath with his

half-sisters Holly and Hilary. (All three now sing professionally.)

The singer Jett Williams, Hank Sr.'s daughter from his brief affair

with Bobbie Jett, is also a subject of the exhibition.

Originally preserved on 16-inch acetate discs, the 143

transcriptions included in "The Unreleased Recordings" -- the

first 54 of which were released last week -- nearly double Hank

Williams' recorded output. The music was rescued from a Dumpster in

the late 1980s by an employee of WSM-AM, the Nashville radio

station on which the songs were originally broadcast, on an early

morning program sponsored by Mother's Best Flour Company, in 1951.

The decision about what should be done with the transcriptions was

delayed by protracted litigation over the Williams estate.

The recordings greatly expand what we know of Williams' persona

and repertory. We hear him not only exulting in the pleasures of

making music, but also clowning with his band and crooning old

hymns like "Softly and Tenderly" and Victorian parlor ballads

like "The Blind Child's Prayer."

"What the Mother's Best Flour shows reveal is that Hank was a

fully fleshed-out man, with a silly sense of humor, deep religious

faith and a sentimental side that comes off as borderline cheesy

today," said Brenda Colladay, curator of the Grand Ole Opry Museum

in Nashville. "This isn't the tortured, tragic genius who died in

the back seat of a Cadillac. This is the Hank who can't quite

believe he is playing on WSM radio, has a closet full of custom

suits, a string of hit records and a beautiful blond wife sitting

next to him as he steers that Cadillac toward his dream house."

In one touching between-song segment, Williams promises young

Bocephus -- his nickname for Hank Jr. -- that he'll be home for

breakfast to "sop biscuits" with him. Williams had just reached

new heights in popularity, including appearances on national

television programs like "The Perry Como Show" and being billed

above Bob Hope and Milton Berle on the touring Hadacol Caravan.

Nevertheless, the eagerness in his voice at the prospect of being

home with his family is palpable.

Hank Jr. was only 3 1/2 when his father died, and he remembers

little of their time together. Nearly eight years his senior, Hank

Jr.'s half-sister Lycrecia Williams Hoover has more firsthand

memories of what Williams was like.

"Of the two of us, I always considered myself the luckiest one

because I got to do things with Daddy," said Hoover, 67, a

dignified woman with intense blue eyes. A stay-at-home mom much of

her life, Hoover, who today works part time in a beauty shop, spoke

from the patio of her home in rural Bon Aqua, Tenn., about 40 miles

from Nashville.

"Daddy was a fun person," she said. "He would take me bowling

a lot. He would go horseback riding and fishing with me. I just

feel like Hank Jr. missed out on so much."

Audrey Williams' daughter from an earlier marriage, Hoover

wasn't enthusiastic about the prospect of another retrospective

about her stepfather when representatives of the museum in

Nashville contacted her about the project. She doesn't shy away

from talking about her parents' "fussing and fighting," or about

Hank's darker side or drinking. She was, however, wary of yet

another tabloid treatment of the Williams legacy.

"They said, 'We promise you this is not going to be like the

others,"' she said.

Particularly welcome, Hoover said, is the museum's depiction,

through telegrams and other documents, of her mother's career as a

businesswoman. Audrey married Hank in 1944, at a gas station near

Andalusia, Ala. After playing a critical role in helping her

husband start his career, Audrey, a performer who has often been

portrayed as conniving and shrill, went on to become a successful

song publisher and movie producer. In 1964 she was a founder of

Aud-Lee Attractions, Nashville's oldest privately owned talent

agency (now called Buddy Lee Attractions).

"Had it not been for Mother, I just don't think Daddy would

have gotten to Nashville, unless somebody else could of got a hold

of him and pushed," Hoover said. "Daddy, he liked to entertain.

He was a genius, but Mother was the mastermind behind getting him

where he needed to be."

Carolyn Tate, the curator, with Michael McCall, of the Family

Tradition exhibition, stresses the importance of putting Audrey's

accomplishments in historical context. "She was a single mom in

the mid-'50s," Tate said. "She was left to run a business and

raise children and to deal with a lot of legal issues."

Despite her business acumen, Audrey died bankrupt, in 1975,

after years of struggling with addiction to alcohol and other

drugs. "After Daddy passed away, Mother blamed herself," Hoover

said. "She loved him and felt like she should have been able to

keep him from drinking. Later, little by little, she began to

drink, until she became an alcoholic too." Audrey and Hank

Williams divorced in July 1952, less than six months before Hank's

death.

The exhibition also plots lesser-known points in the trajectory

of Hank Jr.'s career. Initially cast as his father's imitator, Hank

Jr. transformed himself into a raucous country-rocker, fusing his

father's blues-steeped honky-tonk with disparate influences to

create a new Southern hybrid.

"To see me, at 13 and 14 years old with the wavy jellyroll hair

and the white Stratocaster, it all comes together," said Hank Jr.,

who was born Randall Hank Williams, recalling his days leading a

combo called Rockin' Randall and the Rockets. "I'd go out on the

road and be Hank Williams Sr. and come back home and be Rockin'

Randall. That's how I would do it -- two worlds. And guess what?

Rockin' Randall consumed the other guy. My cloning days were

over."

Hank Jr.'s son, Hank Williams III (born Shelton Hank Williams),

35, has felt the burden of his birthright too. In his case, this

has meant pressure to differentiate himself not just from his

father but also from his grandfather, to whom he bears an uncanny

physical and vocal resemblance.

"I'm almost following in the same footsteps as my dad, but

instead of Skynyrd, I've been into Pantera and David Allan Coe and

bands like that," he said of his assortment of country, punk and

heavy metal. "The energy's just different."

The most emblematic items in the exhibition from Hank III's

career are his duct-taped cowboy boots. Hank III, whose album

"Damn Right, Rebel Proud" (Curb Records) was released on Oct. 21,

estimates that before loaning them to the museum, he had worn them

for as many as 4,000 consecutive performances.

Cropping up again and again in the exhibition is the struggle of

Williams family members to define themselves as inheritors of Hank

Sr.'s legacy while also striving to preserve some semblance of

normality. Most telling is a photo from the late '50s in which

Hoover and her brother and mother are playing in the snow in front

of their ranch-style home in Nashville.

"People don't understand that part -- a kid with his sister and

his mother," Hank Jr. said, referring to the scene in the photo.

"It's real normal, yeah, until this big bus comes by with all

these tourists, and as this little bitty kid I think, 'Why are they

stopping there?' And then it hits you. That's why they're stopping

there."

It took two years of high-level negotiations to arrange

a meeting with Daniel Craig. In an era when MI6 -- the agency that

employs his best-known character, James Bond -- blithely advertises

for agents on the Internet, Craig may well be the world's most

elusive pretend spy.

The long wait allowed plenty of time for disturbing rumors to

marinate. For instance: He is surly and defensive, a

reporter-averse utterer of combative monosyllables. Or this, from

two women working on his publicity: He has more sexual magnetism

than anyone we have ever met.

Perhaps nothing short of Craig's materializing in his snug

powder-blue bathing trunks from "Casino Royale" and offering to

shake the martinis himself could have realistically lived up to all

that anticipation.

But there he was in jeans, his arm in a sling from recent

shoulder surgery. He was wearing a thick cardigan that, truth be

told, walked a sensitive line between doofusy and stylish. He was,

of course, unfairly attractive anyway, in his craggy, lived-in,

blue-eyed way, but not so much as to render anyone speechless or

unable to operate a notebook.

He was polite to a fault. He stood up when his publicist's

assistant brought in a cup of tea. He apologized several times for

being five minutes late. He acted as if he were not sitting in a

soulless conference room, which he was, and as if he had all day to

chat about Bond and other interesting topics, which he didn't. (He

had an hour.)

Unlike many movie stars who come to believe the myth of their

superiority, Craig, 40, tends to mock his own celebrity. Now that

he is too famous to go to the movies without being recognized, he

said, he might be forced to install a screening room at home. Not.

"I could stick it next to the indoor swimming pool," he said

sarcastically.

Passing beneath two celebratory posters of himself as James Bond

in his publicist's office here, he grimaced and muttered, "That's

my Dorian Gray portrait." Asked whether he saw himself as a

natural leading man, he said, "Fat chance." And then, "There's

not a skin-care product in the world that would have made that

happen for me."

When he was cast as Bond, filling the position most recently

vacated by Pierce Brosnan, Craig did not seem like an obvious

choice. He was an actor's actor known for his intensity of focus

and his wide range of challenging, counterintuitive roles. He has

played, among other things, a sharp-lapeled pornography baron from

Manchester in the BBC miniseries "Our Friends in the North"; a

college professor pursued by a male stalker in "Enduring Love"; a

builder sleeping with his girlfriend's sexagenarian mother in "The

Mother"; a drug-dealing businessman in "Layer Cake"; a killer

full of murderous rage and heartbreaking tenderness in

"Infamous"; and the poet Ted Hughes in "Sylvia."

"Everybody said, 'Oh, aren't you afraid you'll be typecast?' "

he recalled of taking the Bond role. "And I said, 'Of course I

am,' but if it has to be this -- well, that's not too bad."

Traditionalists were appalled. The British tabloids, whose

writers possibly had not seen Craig in his other films, sniped that

he was too short, too blond, too actory, too potentially

Lazenbyesque; they spread the rumor that he didn't know how to

drive a stick shift, let alone one attached to an Aston Martin.

But from the first scene in "Casino Royale" (2006), in which

Bond brutally kills a man with his bare hands and then coolly

shoots and kills his own corrupt boss, Craig proved to be a rare

combination of plausibility, physicality and charisma. He got rave

reviews, and not just from Bond's traditional fan base.

The latest movie, "Quantum of Solace," which opens Nov. 14, is

full of the usual Bondian big guns, big explosions, big-busted

women and big, improbable, high-testosterone stunts, many of them

performed by Craig. While he bulked up for "Casino" -- he wanted

to "look as if he could kill people just by looking at them," his

personal trainer, a former Royal Navy commando, said recently -- in

this film he focused on building up his stamina, going for lean and

mean over brawn.

(Craig was recently quoted in The Times of London as saying, "I

am not an athlete, although I have always enjoyed keeping fit

between bouts of minor alcoholism.")

Craig said that he had been determined to ensure that the story

made logical and emotional sense. "Quantum" begins moments after

"Casino" ends, with Bond, wielding an enormous firearm, on the

island where he has just shot one of the men responsible for the

death of Vesper Lynd, the treacherous love of his life.

"They're two separate movies, but if you were to punish

yourself by watching them back to back, you'd see a through line,"

Craig said. He particularly wanted Bond to have to contend with the

emotional repercussions of Vesper's death.

"It was very important that we deal with that," he said. "I

just felt that you can't have a character fall in love so madly as

they did in the last movie and not finish it off, understand it,

get some closure. That's why the movie is called 'Quantum of

Solace' -- that's exactly what he's looking for."

He added: "By the end of 'Solace,' there's a conclusion that

I'm hoping will set us up, if all goes well, for a third movie. And

we can set it someplace warm and quiet." (He was kidding, he said,

about the "quiet" part.)

Last fall he and the director of "Quantum of Solace," Marc

Forster, set out to fill in the gaps in the script, left incomplete

because of the Hollywood writers' strike. Forster said he was

struck by how much Craig wanted to get the story right and ensure

that his interpretation of Bond was "not just a cliche, but a

character that people can connect to."

He added: "He's very shy and slightly modest and humble, and he

doesn't like to be the center of attention. It's more like, 'Let's

make good movies and tell a good story and do a good job.' "

Along with "Quantum," Craig is appearing this fall in

"Defiance" (set to open Dec. 31), based on the true story of the

Bielskis, a trio of freedom-fighting Jewish brothers in World War

II. Defying the Nazis (and the odds), they set up an unlikely

community of tough, armed refugees in the punishing Belarussian

forest. Craig plays Tuvia, their complicated leader -- sometimes

hot-headed, sometimes coolly rational; now seeking revenge, now

preaching restraint.

The shoot was tough. The actors had to speak Russian in a number

of scenes; they also had to live more or less in the woods, in

sometimes extreme frigid conditions, for three months. Most of the

cast came down with some sort of bronchial flu, Craig said, "but

when we started drinking more, it seemed to get better."

The director of "Defiance," Edward Zwick, said it was

interesting to watch Craig take on the role, with all its

ambivalence and inner conflict, in tandem with playing the

self-assured Bond.

"You see very clearly his ambition as an actor; he refuses to

be just one thing," Zwick said in a telephone interview. "What

you have to understand about Daniel is that he is a working actor

who considers himself that. He began in the theater and did all

sorts of ensemble work, and in some ways this was a territory in

which he's more comfortable than in being the star who's out in

front of the movie."

Craig grew up in Liverpool and spent much of his spare time

watching movies, sometimes by himself, in a small cinema down the

street from his house. He left home as a teenager to seek his

fortune as an actor in London. He worked with the National Youth

Theater, went to drama school and began being cast as romantic

leads, a designation he brushes aside.

With each part, he explained, "I said to myself: 'Romantic lead

-- what is he? Is he an alcoholic? What's his deal? What's his

problem?' For me, that has always been the way. That's what I did

for Bond and what I try and do with everything."

He is determined to continue pursuing extra-Bond roles.

"I've been so fortunate to land this amazing role in a huge

franchise," he said. "It's set me up in a really good way for

life, and that's wonderful. But I love acting, and I genuinely

think it's an important part of what life is about. I get a kick

out of it, and I'm not good at sitting around."

Craig, who has a teenage daughter from an early marriage,

genuinely seems more interested in talking about other topics -- the

books of Philip Pullman; the exciting-to-him proposition of Barack

Obama being elected president; movies he likes -- than he does in

talking about himself.

But he mentioned his longtime American girlfriend, Satsuki

Mitchell, with whom he lives in Los Angeles and London. He wears a

silver necklace inscribed with a quotation "about taking your

heart wherever you go," he said when asked, sounding suddenly shy.

Recently, he said, the two drove up the American West Coast,

through to the Pacific Northwest. They ducked into a small-town

movie theater to see the Guillermo del Toro movie "Hellboy II: The

Golden Army."

Someone approached Craig.

"Has anyone ever told you you look like Daniel Craig?" the man

asked.

"No," Craig answered, and walked on.

The details don't really matter. What matters is that a few

years before his screenplays for "The Queen" and "The Last King

of Scotland" propelled him to the head of the class, Peter Morgan

was so fed up that he was ready to try anything -- anything! -- that

wasn't a film script.

He considered bungee jumping and mountain climbing, he said not

long ago from his home in London. But he chose something even

riskier. He wrote a play about the landmark 1977 television

interviews that David Frost conducted with Richard M. Nixon.

Relying on the accounts of participants and fictionalizing here and

there for effect, he made sure to write it, he said, "in a way

that breaks every single rule of screenwriting."

"Frost/Nixon" was picked up by the small but prestigious

Donmar Warehouse, where the director Michael Grandage and the

designer Christopher Oram incorporated onstage video screens to

allow close-ups of Michael Sheen's unctuous, eager-beaver Frost and

Frank Langella's sly, subtly decomposing Nixon. Morgan loved the

effect. But, he recalled, it gave him pause: "I hope people don't

make the mistake of thinking this has any sort of filmic life in it

whatsoever."

That was then. Now, for all of Morgan's determination to make it

impossible, "Frost/Nixon" the movie is scheduled to open on Dec.

5, right in time for the Hollywood awards season. Directed by Ron

Howard, whose previous forays into 20th-century history include the

Oscar-winning "Beautiful Mind" and the Oscar-nominated "Apollo

13," the film retains the stage production's acclaimed star

performances, its often verbatim re-creations of interviews that

ranged from droning wonkishness to high-stakes drama and its eerily

familiar litany of military disasters abroad and assertions of

presidential power at home.

Morgan never intended to write a play about George W. Bush, the

Iraq war and government spying, he said. "Frost/Nixon" had been

gestating since 1993, and when he realized that "people were

seeing inferences and parallels," he "went back to the play and

threw stuff out."

"I'm thrilled that it has a contemporary resonance," he said,

"but I'd be perfectly happy if it didn't. I didn't want the

Frost-Nixon play to be seen as a metaphor for Bush-Blair. I hate

when I'm an audience member and I'm being led. Because why write

about Bush when you can write about Nixon?"

It would be hard to overstate the hold Richard M. Nixon still

exerted on the public imagination in 1977, when David Frost paid

him ($1 million, ultimately) to sit in front of a television camera

and answer questions, at last, about the reasons behind his

ignominious resignation in 1974. With a cobbled-together production

team, an oddly assorted collection of sponsors and an ad hoc

network of independent stations, Frost pulled off a coup at once

historic, journalistic and financial. The first installment of what

eventually became a five-part package was seen by an astounding 45

million viewers (the same number, noted John J. O'Connor,

television critic for The New York Times, who sat down every week

to watch "Happy Days," the hit sitcom starring a young actor

named Ron Howard).

Still, there's no question that the resounding success of

"Frost/Nixon" was due in part to its implicit analogy between the

misdeeds that drove Nixon from power and more recent events. And

even before the play moved from the Donmar to the West End, Morgan

was besieged by directors -- including Martin Scorsese, George

Clooney and Sam Mendes -- wanting to turn it into a film. "I had

these mixed emotions," he said. "I thought, on the one hand all

the people I most admire in the world seem to be interested. But

the secret that I can't share with any of them is, as a mechanic,

the motor won't work. The car is not roadworthy."

When Howard first heard about the play, he said, it didn't

immediately suggest a movie to him either. "But I was surprised

when I read it and even more compelled by the performance I saw at

the Donmar," he remembered. "I just had a connection with the

material and a feeling about how to adapt it. I just wanted to do

it."

Howard's partner at Imagine Entertainment, Brian Grazer, was

also tentative at first. "After 30 years of being a producer," he

said, "I never know." But he was intrigued by Morgan's portrait

of two opposites -- the humbled, ill-at-ease ex-president and the

ambitious, charming talk-show host -- both exploiting television to

further their own ends.

Morgan went with Howard as director partly because he thought

Howard's track record would reassure skittish moviegoers that

"Frost/Nixon" would be entertaining. An indication of just how

skittish they might be, Morgan said, was the difficulty of enticing

people into test screenings. "If you go into a mall and say,

'Would you like to come and see a film about the interviews done by

David Frost and Richard Nixon in 1977?"' he noted, "they just

walk past you. They think you're mad."

Because "Frost/Nixon" would be a hard sell, a big-time movie

star for the juicy role of Nixon seemed an inevitability. For

Langella, who had, by his own admission, struggled to find his way

into the character, it was disappointing, but not surprising. "The

story out there is that I was waiting and waiting and waiting,"

Langella said. But he knew even before the production moved from

the Donmar to the West End that the role would be going to Jack

Nicholson, he said. And by the time Langella was on Broadway, en

route to the best actor Tony Award, he knew Warren Beatty would be

Nixon on film. "I had accepted the fact that I wasn't going to

play him," Langella said.

Meanwhile, the producers were coming to the opposite conclusion.

"When you start with a blank canvas," said Eric Fellner of

Working Title Films, the co-producer of "Frost/Nixon," "you

think there are many other ways of going. But by the time the

decision actually had to be made, it was quite clear there were no

other ways of going."

The plan had always been to cast Sheen, who had so memorably

played Tony Blair in "The Queen." And, Howard said, there had

never been any doubt in his own mind that Langella "would be

great."

"Ultimately," he said, "it became quite apparent that anyone

else doing the role would be walking in Frank's shadow."

But there were other problems. Morgan's play had all those

uncinematic elements he had taken such pains to incorporate. There

were two narrators, aides to the title characters, speaking

directly to the audience. There was a plotline, wholly dependent on

the progress of the interviews themselves, that developed largely

in a single room. And the story's climax -- the wished-for admission

from Nixon that yes, he had "let the American people down" -- came

with the two antagonists immobilized in matching easy chairs.

Howard was not concerned. "I think the tight quarters and the

intensity, particularly in the second half, are a huge dramatic

asset," he said, citing his experience making the even more

claustrophobic "Apollo 13." "And I felt that there were ways of

opening it up that didn't have anything to do with scope and scale,

expanding it through detail, through broadening the secondary

characters, through utilizing the television medium and just

through the camerawork and the editing." Another touchstone was

Howard's "Cinderella Man," about the boxer James Braddock: "I

realized how much could be divulged through the reaction of the

people in the corners."

To inhabit those corners, he cast a constellation of first-class

actors. Kevin Bacon plays Jack Brennan, the staunch military aide

who followed Nixon from the White House to become his chief of

staff in California. On the opposing side are Sam Rockwell as James

Reston Jr., Frost's impassioned researcher for the Watergate

segment; Oliver Platt as Bob Zelnick, the hard-nosed reporter

researching the other interview topics; and Matthew Macfadyen as

John Birt, the program's skilled British producer.

In the play, Brennan and Reston provide running commentary as

Frost and Nixon arrange for combat and then go mano a mano. Morgan

thought the dueling narrators would have to be dropped from the

movie; Howard suggested augmenting Brennan and Reston with even

more narrators, all recounting their recollections for a television

documentary.

Of course, those recollections don't exactly match the memories

of the actual players in the drama. Frost, whose current interview

program, "Frost Over the World," runs on Al-Jazeera English,

scoffed at his characterization as a lightweight celebrity-chaser,

ticking off a long list of the presidents and prime ministers he

had already interviewed when he took on Nixon.

Ken Khachigian, the lead researcher for the Nixon team (which

included a young Diane Sawyer), echoed that point. "We viewed

Frost as a tough adversary," he said. "We did our homework.

There's a picture in my office of our briefing books -- about 30 or

35 briefing books piled high on Nixon's desk."

Khachigian and Brennan both take issue with Morgan's most

fanciful invention, the scene in which a drunken Nixon calls Frost

in the middle of the night and confides a secret anguish. "He was

not capable of holding drinks," Brennan said of Nixon. "He knew

that. Any time we went to a party, for example, I would tell the

bartender, 'If one of his big buddies comes over and says he wants

a Scotch for Dick Nixon, just give him blond Dubonnet."' Brennan

said he told Morgan, "You could have made your point without the

presumption of alcoholism."

Reston, who had provided Morgan with a 30-year-old account of

his time on the Frost team (now published as "The Conviction of

Richard Nixon"), was somewhat surprised by his portrayal as a hot

young radical. "I was the quiet one who did all the work," he

said. Like Brennan, he hadn't yet seen the movie, though both men

had met with and been impressed by their film surrogates before

shooting began. As for Zelnick, when he met his screen counterpart,

he said, he advised the much-taller Platt to play him on his knees.

Morgan makes no apologies for his distortions of the facts.

"Whose facts?" he asked. Interviewing the interviewers, he said,

had taught him "what a complete farce history is."

"These were all people that were in the room at the same

time," he marveled, "and they couldn't agree on a thing."

As the legions of teenagers who have read the novel on which the

forthcoming film "Twilight" is based know, the awkward passage

from youth to maturity isn't the very worst problem an adolescent

can have. You could fall helplessly in love with a vampire, which

is what happens to the virginal 17-year-old heroine and narrator of

Stephenie Meyer's book.

"We've all had the experience of being that age and feeling

that everything is life and death," said Melissa Rosenberg, who

wrote the screenplay. "You know, 'I have nothing to wear today,

I'm going to kill myself.' What's so wonderful about this story is

that everything actually is life and death."

The transition from page to screen is itself often a less than

graceful process, and while it's rarely a matter of life and death,

it can give filmmakers that adolescent sense of unease: "If this

movie tanks, I'm going to kill myself." There's no denying that in

the case of "Twilight" the stakes (so to speak) are high. The

four novels in Meyer's horror/romance series for young adults --

"Twilight" was the first -- have sold somewhere near 10 million

copies; the most recent, "Breaking Dawn," racked up sales of 1.3

million on its first day in bookstores in August. And fans are on

the rabid side. "There's all this stuff online," said the film's

director, Catherine Hardwicke. "People were making casting

suggestions, and now they're doing their own trailers and posters.

It's stimulating, in a way."

A particular hazard with books like Meyer's -- or like J.K.

Rowling's Harry Potter novels -- is that younger readers, unlike

their more jaded elders, tend to like their stories just so, with

as little variation as possible. And as any adult who has ever read

bedtime stories to children understands, when youngsters really go

for a story, they'll insist on hearing it again and again, which is

why movies aimed at children, tweens and teenagers can have such a

huge payoff for producers and distributors. Two words: repeat

business.

"I didn't want to be the screenwriter who disappointed all

those readers," Rosenberg said. "Nor did Catherine, I'm sure,

want to be the director who did so."

Hardwicke said that when she was approached about directing

"Twilight," she was handed a script that she later realized was

"very, very different from the book." Soon after, "I read the

novel myself and I thought, let's get back to this story, it's

just so much better."

Neither would admit to feeling any constraints on her creativity

from the readers' demands for fidelity to the novel. "My biggest

problem was how to condense," Rosenberg said. Clearly, the

strategy is to swear undying fealty to the book and hope the fans

will be merciful.

And what, exactly, is this story to which the makers of

"Twilight" (opening Nov. 21) have plighted their troth? It's the

tale of a bright girl named Bella Swan who moves to the gloomy town

of Forks, Wash., and on her first day at school meets, across a

crowded cafeteria, the eyes of a mysterious classmate named Edward

Cullen, whom she describes as "devastatingly, inhumanly

beautiful."

Edward is a little standoffish, but Bella falls for him hard,

while remaining somewhat puzzled by his unteenage-boy-like sexual

restraint. He's determined to keep a tight rein on his impulses,

which include, in addition to the usual ones, a powerful yen to

feed on his new admirer's blood. When she discovers his secret, she

isn't quite sure how to, you know, feel about this unnerving kink

in his personality, but soon decides that being a vampire's

significant other is preferable to depriving herself of this

really, really good-looking guy's company. He remains a perfect

gentleman, she a well-behaved lady and their fatal attraction stays

(at least in the first novel) unconsummated.

Meyer goes to some trouble to persuade her young readers that

there might actually be a Count Charming out there for every shy

Bella in the world. The perennially overcast weather of the Pacific

Northwest allows Edward to attend school on most days, despite his

species' legendary photosensitivity, and he was raised, as it

happens, in a family of "good" vampires, who thoughtfully eschew

the consumption of human blood in favor of the nourishing (though

less tasty) vital fluids of animals. (They're kind of the vampire

version of vegans.) Edward's forbearance, however, is sorely tested

by the power of his feelings, and Hardwicke said she believes that

the ever-present possibility of Bella's death actually enhances the

story's romantic appeal. "If 'Romeo and Juliet' came out now it

would be just as popular," she said. "Look at 'Titanic' a few

years ago."

She's on to something there: the extreme life-and-deathness of

the adolescent notion of romance. But the vein that Meyer's story

taps most obviously is simple, basic fear of sex. Bella is,

recognizably, every teenager who is terrified of going all the way,

and Edward, less grounded in reality, is a fantasy incarnation of

that scared girl's ideal boyfriend, infinitely -- you might say

eternally -- patient with her trepidation. (And have I mentioned

that he's extremely good-looking?)

"The truth," said the writer Sarah Langan, whose novel "The

Missing" won this year's Bram Stoker Award from the Horror Writers

Association, "is that sex can be terrifying at that age, even

when you're in college." But Langan, who considers "Twilight"

"more romance than horror," isn't entirely persuaded by the

fear-of-sex model here.

"Abstinence is a perfectly valid point of view," she said. "

'Twilight,' though, struck me as kind of a strange, wrong version

of what teenagers are like, especially Edward, who doesn't even

seem to want sex all that much. It made me long for Judy Blume."

The truly peculiar thing about "Twilight," of course, is that

the figure presented here as a paragon of masculine self-control is

not, in fact, human and drinks blood. Over the years there have

been a fair number of youthful vampires in film and fiction, and

some have even been portrayed as objects of desire. The title

character of George A. Romero's "Martin" (1977) probably wouldn't

qualify as anybody's romantic ideal. But the young lovers in

Kathryn Bigelow's superb 1987 film, "Near Dark," are tragically

cute, as are many of the teenage bloodsuckers in the lame "Lost

Boys" (1987), a long-unawaited sequel to which was released last

year. There is a broodingly handsome vampire in the lurid new HBO

series, "True Blood," too. "Vampirism is sexy," Langan said

bluntly. "It's inherently arousing."

But until "Twilight," even vampires of the devastatingly,

inhumanly beautiful variety did manage, between tragic embraces, to

be kind of scary. Angel, the hunky, centuries-old love object of

Buffy the Vampire Slayer, would occasionally get a wrinkly,

from-hell look on his face, bare his fangs and give vent to the

darker side of his nature. At those moments the viewer would fully

understand why he was a candidate for what Buffy and her gang

referred to as "slayage." In "Twilight," slayage isn't a

possibility: The only serious question for Bella and her breathless

readers is whether she'll dare to Do It with her bad-boy lover.

Psychologists call this approach/avoidance. And we all might as

well figure out a way to approach this strange turn in pop culture,

because it looks as if there's going to be no way to avoid it. The

20 minutes of "Twilight" footage that the studio has made

available indicate that the film will be, as Hardwicke and

Rosenberg promised, exceptionally faithful to its source material.

The leads, Kristen Stewart and Robert Pattinson, look right --

there's a touch of "Titanic"-era Leonardo DiCaprio to Pattinson --

and the mood is appropriately ominous. Describing the shoot in

Washington, Hardwicke said the weather was almost too apocalyptic

for her taste. "There was hail," she said, still shuddering

with disbelief. "I bought all this Gore-Tex, and nothing worked."

The whole thing has a slightly funky, no-big-deal air about it,

which is perhaps the result of the movie's relatively modest budget

(less than $40 million) and the filmmakers' modest temperaments.

Hardwicke is best known as the director of youthcentric indie films

like "Thirteen" (2003) and "Lords of Dogtown" (2005), while

Rosenberg's background is mostly in television, as a writer and

producer of "Party of Five" and "The O.C." (More recently, she

has worked on the Showtime series "Dexter," whose characters are

grown-ups but which, she said, has something in common with

"Twilight" nonetheless: it's about a "good" serial killer with

"internal demons he's trying to control.")

The movie also appears to capture the oddly timeless atmosphere

of the book, in which e-mail notes are sometimes sent but no text

messages are, no video games are played, and no one seems to have

an iPod crammed with gangsta rap, emo or heavy metal. "You try to

keep current with teenagers' culture and idioms," Rosenberg said,

"but in 'Twilight' some of that feels incongruous. One of the

producers actually said to me, 'I'm uncomfortable when Edward uses

a cell phone.' "

What that means, maybe, is that the world of "Twilight" is one

where incoming calls from the real world can rarely be heard with

any clarity in a fantasy universe of perpetual

neither-here-nor-thereness. Sort of like adolescence itself, only

touched up for maximum (devastating, inhuman) desirability. It's a

place on which the sun never has to set, where the bedtime story

never has to end -- and that's what its fans like best about it.

New laptops that boot up in 30 seconds? Too slow for me. Five

seconds? Better, but what I want is a machine that's ready in about

a second, just like my smartphone.

I'm fully aware that expressing any impatience with a computer's

boot time invites derision. When the entire globe is engulfed in an

economic crisis, measuring the seconds required to start different

computers may seem the most trivial of concerns.

Still, I'm not alone. Unhappiness with boot times, which

commonly run 45 seconds to 60 seconds, is shared by many computer

users, as reflected in much online discussion of the issue.

I've come to believe that the unhappiness does not illustrate

impatience. Rather, it reflects an important shift in computing, as

we increasingly rely on our laptops not as machines that we use for

long stretches at a time, but as machines for using the Internet,

often and briefly, and not much else. We don't tolerate, and have

never tolerated, long wait times that are disproportionate to the

activity that follows them. If we need to spend only a few seconds

looking up something on the Web, it's only natural that we want the

preparatory time to be as close to zero as possible. It's not

impatience, just proportionality.

Smartphones provide access to e-mail and the Web. And now a

fast-growing category of notebook computers, called netbooks, do

the same, but with bigger displays and keyboards than the phones.

Netbooks are lightweight and inexpensive -- around $400 for many

models -- but to be truly useful, they need to be on and ready to go

immediately, the way smartphones are.

We hear computer manufacturers promoting laptops that can boot

faster than ever, but they prudently avoid direct comparisons with

smartphones. The manufacturers have speeded up boot times by

equipping some Windows machines with a separate subsystem that

contains its own central processing unit. If you choose to use this

when you turn on the machine, Windows is bypassed and a

mini-operating system is loaded instead, along with a limited set

of applications that include a Web browser and a few other software

odds and ends.

Limited functionality doesn't bother me: A browser and e-mail

will keep me happy. But these machines take too long to reach a

state of usefulness. At present, the only way to bring a laptop to

life quickly is to summon it not from a cold state, nor from deep

hibernation (suspend-to-disk), but from standby mode

(suspend-to-RAM), in which the last session is stored in memory.

Network connections are lost, however, and holding the data in

memory drains the battery.

One manufacturer whose ultralightweight netbooks have helped to

create the category is Asus, based in Taiwan. To achieve faster

boot times, Asus equips its Windows machines with Express Gate, a

subsystem that it says can boot up in as few as eight seconds,

depending on the speed of the processor and hard drive. The company

sent me a 6.2-pound G50V gaming machine for a test drive. I found

that, in Express Gate mode, it took only eight seconds to boot up,

as promised, but this was only a preparatory step. In checking my

e-mail, 43 seconds elapsed before the browser loaded, my Wi-Fi

connection was established and Gmail opened.

A wholly different approach is taken by Arjan van de Ven and

Auke Kok, engineers at the Intel Open Source Technology Center, who

set out to create versions of Linux that boot up in only five

seconds, instead of the 45 normally required. They were also

determined to boot up with the main system, without relying on a

special subsystem like Express Gate. They succeeded, demonstrating

their feat at the Linux Plumbers Conference in September with an

Asus Eee PC 901, equipped with a solid-state drive, which helps,

but a slow Atom CPU, which does not.

Van de Ven has since used the same techniques to reduce the boot

time to only three seconds on laptops with the much faster Core 2

Duo CPUs. The time needed to connect to the network and load a

browser, however, was not included.

Still another approach, and to me the most intriguing, is being

readied by Dell for release by year-end. Its Latitude On feature

will not try to claim the fastest boot time on the block: it will

still take 40 seconds to 45 seconds to get its special non-Windows

subsystem up and running. But once it is on, it can stay on

indefinitely because it's engineered with a low-voltage processor

to conserve battery power between charges. A Dell spokesman said

the laptops in the laboratory were getting "almost four days" of

use on a single charge.

Here's what catches my interest: When you're not using a

Latitude On laptop, its screen will go dark, but it's not in

standby mode -- it's in a "low-power state," as Dell terms it.

This permits it to keep network connections alive, including Wi-Fi

and 3G mobile broadband and even virtual private networks, while it

continuously loads e-mail in the background. With a touch, the

screen lights up in 1 to 2 seconds, Dell says, just as a smartphone

does.

That's exactly what I'd like to have. In fact, that's all I

want: I don't want to lug around the main system; I want just the

subsystem that's engineered for unbroken Internet connections and

frequent, brief looks. Dell, however, is not offering this as an

inexpensive netbook. Latitude On will be packaged as one feature on

a fully loaded notebook marketed to corporate executives; Dell has

not announced pricing but currently those models begin at $1,999.

More bad news: its intended customers, corporate IT departments,

have directed Dell to require a password from a user every time the

machine returns to full power.

No, thanks. I will wait, then, for the next generation of

instant-on machines, maintaining Internet connections even when the

screen is darkened, serving uncomplainingly for days on a single

charge and priced inexpensively -- and with passwords made optional.

If that takes a while, fine. I'm patient.

My twin brother, Eli, is jealous of sea horses. They are the

only animal species in which the male gives birth to the offspring.

Male sea horses have brood pouches where the female deposits her

eggs. The eggs then hatch in the father's pouch, where the young

continue to live until they are expelled into the ocean after

strenuous labor that can last several days.

Eli is a transgender man, and lived the first 20 years of our

lives as my fraternal twin sister. I have plenty of memories of my

twin as a little girl, as Emma, not Eli. More often, though, my

memories adjust to represent Eli as I know him now, as my brother.

When we were 5, living in a small apartment in Portland, Ore.,

my mother made our favorite breakfast of buckwheat pancakes on

weekends, shaping the batter into K's and E's, for Kate and Emma.

One morning as my mother assembled the ingredients, Emma,

pretending she was a chicken, took two eggs from the counter and

placed them next to each other on the carpet. I remember it was a

pair of eggs, because even at our young age we knew what it meant

to be twins, and whenever we played house, babies came in twos.

Emma jammed her thumbs under her armpits and pumped her arms in

excited flutters before crouching gently above the eggs, as if to

incubate them. Then it was over. The mother hen accidentally sat on

her eggs.

Emma stood up, crying, as egg whites ran down the backs of her

legs. As a 5-year-old girl, she couldn't have known how her

relationship with eggs would again be tinged with tragedy when she

was an adult.

A few years later we were living in an apartment complex with a

swimming pool, and that summer we lived in our swimsuits, which

were practically worn translucent by September. Each evening we

would compare our tan lines and soothe our wind-chapped cheeks.

Sometimes we had the pool to ourselves. Other times visiting

grandchildren or older boys from another building would show up,

towels in hand, interrupting our games with their unpredictable and

explosive splashing.

"God," my usually patient twin fumed when a hulk of a boy

jumped into our floating contest. "I hate boys." She paused to

shake water out of her ear. "You know what they are?"

"What?"

"Baked beans in human skin," she said, her cheeks bright.

I glanced at the boys, then back at her, laughing and feeling

the solidarity of sisters, which, looking back, strikes me as

delightfully ironic. Did an envy of boys already lurk in Emma's

subconscious? Was her mind already puzzling over bodies and skin,

heart and soul, how it all fits together, and what happens when it

doesn't?

Emma and I started menstruating three days apart. She bled

first, which made her seem old and wise when I followed close on

her heels, both of us fumbling with pads and aspirin and new

knowledge.

Growing up a twin, I thought everything that happened to my

counterpart would happen to me. But our shared experience diverged

at age 20, when Emma realized, after several years of grappling

with gender, that she wasn't meant to be female. He was male, and

he chose Eli as his new name. Soon hormone replacement therapy

would begin to change Eli's female body to match his male sense of

self.

Even as this process raised new questions for our family, the

more clearly Eli articulated his identity, the closer I felt to

him. Our mother's support was more tempered by concern about the

inevitable struggles to come: How would Eli be viewed in society?

How would he raise a family?

Eli's gender transition has occurred in many stages. And while

some aspects of his metamorphosis (the deepening voice, the chest

surgery) are permanent, other changes, like Eli's new musculature

and the redistribution of body fat away from his hips, would

reverse if he were to stop hormone therapy.

But when it comes to the effects of testosterone on the female

reproductive system, the impact is profound. And while the

permanence of the damage is not entirely known, reproductive

options for transgender men become more limited the longer they

take testosterone.

Some transgender men have hysterectomies early in their

transitions, eliminating all reminders of their female reproductive

capacity. Others either don't think such surgery is necessary or

defer in the hope that they might someday be able to bear children

themselves.

Eli has confided in me his reservations about sacrificing this

element of female experience. He now faces tough choices about how

to reconcile the reality of his physical transition with his desire

to have biological children.

Researchers continue to explore reproductive technologies, yet

even with possible breakthroughs on the horizon, my brother's

chance of successfully bearing his own child depends on society's

willingness to embrace a new understanding of pregnancy as an

experience no longer reserved only for women -- an understanding, in

fact, that not all people with a uterus are women.

Sometimes the realization that Eli might not be able to bear

children of his own suffocates me, and I ache for simplicity and

answers. We talk often about his worries, and they have become my

own, as with everything we share.

Should he stop taking the testosterone now so that maybe in five

years he can try to become pregnant? Should he suspend the hormone

therapy and try to use his eggs to freeze embryos for later, or

keep taking the hormones and have a hysterectomy to eliminate any

chance that he might get ovarian cancer? Should he pursue other

avenues of parenthood, like adoption?

What 23-year-old should have to face such choices? Eli is full

of life, yet soon to be rendered infertile by the very treatment

that has made possible his visions of himself as father. And so we

wait for the day when science might make a sea horse of him.

A year into Eli's transition, roughly two and a half years ago,

I sat in my college's health services complex awaiting results of

my own pregnancy test. My very regular cycle was late, and I

berated myself for the false sense of security that three years on

the pill had given me. Ten minutes later, when the result was

negative and the nurse told me to check back in a week if my period

didn't come, I still couldn't let out my breath. I sat there

cursing my fertility, its inconveniences and threats.

At the same time, my twin sat in the waiting room of the

Callen-Lorde Community Health Center in Manhattan, facing the

decision of whether to ask for his weekly hormone shot in the thigh

or the backside, depending on where he thought the concentrated

testosterone would cause the least muscle cramping the next day.

(It would be another year of such appointments before he would be

approved to inject himself.)

Eli told me he enjoyed watching the oily liquid be drawn up into

the syringe and then deposited into his muscle. In the months to

come he would continue to worry about his fertility, mourn its

fleeting existence, wish he did not have to give it up. We were

both in awe of the power of hormone therapy to vanquish his

menstrual cycle, but we were learning a lesson in sacrifice.

A year after my pregnancy scare I found myself staring at an

advertisement in a public bathroom for a local fertility clinic

appealing for "exceptional egg donors." I tensed with the

recognition of a truth I had known (if never spoken) since the day

Eli called to announce his transition: If he ever needs eggs that

have a genetic link to his own, I will give him mine.

They could be implanted in a female partner or surrogate, or, in

the event we do one day become like sea horses, in him. There's

something reassuring in the possibility, however remote.

In our attempts to understand disruptions of self and

relationships, we often look to the natural world to tell us

stories of ourselves. We hope the animal kingdom will naturalize

behavior that falls outside of the human binary. We exclaim over

gay penguins in the Central Park Zoo. We note patterns of grieving

in animals from geese to elephants to help locate our own mourning

in a larger continuum of emotional response. We point to

promiscuous chimpanzees, monogamous swans and polygamous walruses

to illuminate the dueling joys and heartbreaks of human mating

behavior.

As the complexities of my brother's transition threaten his

newfound tranquillity, my whole family has turned to the sea horse

to give us perspective. It's easier for me to think about the

unimaginably tough choices my brother has had to make if I can

crack jokes with him about pregnant sea horse fathers bucking the

gender binary from the depths of the ocean.

My mother? She has started compulsively bidding on sea horse

paraphernalia on eBay. With a potential grandmother's curiosity,

she daydreams about Eli's children (perhaps he could have twins,

and surely they would be voracious readers, too) but approaches the

situation with a mother's patience.

Last Christmas she bought Eli a glass bowl with delicately

etched sea horses around its rim. The bowl now sits on a table in

Eli's room, holding his syringes and bottle of testosterone.

Inspired, Eli and I went a step further on our birthday by getting

matching shoulder tattoos of two entwined sea horses.

For just over two years, Eli's body has carried the testosterone

that is responsible for the biggest -- he sometimes says only --

sacrifice of his transition: the loss of his fertility. While we no

longer call ourselves sisters, our identity as twins is unchanged,

and we remain deeply connected: by friendship, by ink and by our

shared conviction that, like the male sea horse, Eli will be an

excellent father.

After President McCain or President Obama takes the oath of

office in January, he may have a shiny new black limousine to go

along with his not-so-new White House. General Motors is believed

to be putting the final touches on a new First Car.

An analysis of unauthorized photographs taken while the car was

being tested last summer on public roads suggests that the

presidential ride will be a truck-based Cadillac. It will

presumably replace the Cadillac that President Bush has used since

2005.

This new car will be a Caddy like no other. The photos by Chris

Doane, a spy photographer who hunts big automotive game -- future

models that haven't been publicly revealed -- for magazines and Web

sites, provide clues about how specialized presidential

transportation has become since the first White House fleet was

ordered for William Howard Taft in 1909. President Taft rode in a

stock White steam car or a conventional Pierce-Arrow, but the next

president will travel in a fortress-like vehicle that was mostly

built from scratch.

The photographer noted that the limousine was being tested,

possibly for comparison purposes, with a pair of GMC Topkick

medium-duty trucks. The limousine seemed to be riding on the same

19.5-inch Goodyear Regional RHS tires as the trucks, indicating

that it is far heavier than a civilian Cadillac -- even the longest

stretch limousines built with the GM division's heavy-duty

coachbuilder package. Indeed, it is believed that the limo is based

on GM's 2500 line of trucks, which includes an extra-heavy-duty

version of the Suburban.

Although the raised roof and wide windshield pillars are

inherited from the ultra-armored limousines that entered

presidential service in 2001, only educated guesses can be made

about the technical details. Because neither the Secret Service nor

General Motors will discuss the car, or even confirm that a new one

has been under development, it is impossible to provide basic

specifications or dimensions. Calls to Cadillac's media relations

department were not returned, and the Secret Service declined to

comment.

So people who are curious about such things look for clues and

make deductions. I have spent almost 30 years paying close

attention to presidential vehicles as part of my interest in what

are called professional cars, which also include hearses and

ambulances. (I am the author of "Professional Cars: Ambulances,

Hearses and Flower Cars," Krause Publications, 2004.)

Other sources I have consulted on cars used by past presidents

include "Presidential Cars and Transportation" by William D.

Siuru Jr. and Andrea Stewart (Krause Publications, 1995) and

"Presidents on Wheels" by Herbert Ridgeway Collins (Bonanza

Books, 1971). But my interest has me looking for clues wherever I

can find them.

For example, television clips showing George W. Bush entering

and exiting the rear doors of his limos indicate that the windows

are at least 5 inches thick, nearly twice the depth of what was

used on presidential limousines in the 1980s and '90s.

While I do not know what type of weapons such thick windows are

designed to guard against, a half-inch of transparent armor is

enough to stop a .44 Magnum round at point-blank range; at a

thickness of 1.25 inches to 1.5 inches, the same material can

withstand higher-velocity bullets fired from military assault

rifles.

Were an attack to occur, the ballistic forces of bullets fired

into the windows would be absorbed within a succession of glass and

plastic layers, after which a flexible inner coating known as an

antispall shield would keep glass from entering the passenger

compartment.

Though the materials protecting the car's body are also

classified, they are probably intended to break up incoming

projectiles with a hard substance before their energy is dissipated

by a soft substance. Material traditionally used for this purpose

includes dual-hardness steel, aluminum, titanium and ceramics.

Large steel overlaps are also typically added to the body

openings of armored autos to deter attackers who might try shooting

through the door gaps.

Denied the convertible tops and sunroofs that were once found on

presidents' cars, and seated behind glass that is half as

transparent and several times as sound-absorbent as that of a

standard car, the president has limited interaction with the public

while inside his limo. But he can make his presence known by

turning on fluorescent interior lighting that makes him visible to

bystanders, or by using the built-in public address system.

Aircraft tie-downs welded to the chassis allow the limousine to

be transported aboard a military cargo jet, which also often

carries the Secret Service's Suburban escort vehicles and at least

one limo used as a backup or decoy.

On television footage of a trip to Pakistan in March 2000, it

appeared as though President Bill Clinton's motorcade used five

decoy cars.

Thus, it is likely that GM is building not just one new

presidential limousine, but perhaps two or three that can be used

as backups or decoys. There will be no way of knowing until the

cars are seen together.

Presidential limos would have great appeal to collectors. But

the Secret Service has shown no enthusiasm for letting recent White

House cars fall into private hands. When the cars are retired, they

often disappear, to be destroyed or used in Secret Service

training.

The Department of State also uses specialized vehicles, and the

agency's disposal methods have been detailed in a document entitled

"Bureau of Diplomatic Security's February 2004 Armored Vehicle

Program." Methods include burial at sea, explosive demolition,

burning, crushing or burial on land controlled by the federal

government.

In the same spirit, the Clinton Presidential Library in Little

Rock, Ark., was not given the keys to the 42nd president's 1993

Cadillac Fleetwood, which is displayed there.

"We can dust the outside of the car, but if we needed to get

inside it, we would have to contact the regional Secret Service

office," Christine Mouw, the library curator, said in an

interview. "We've had requests from people to exhibit it with the

doors open, but we're told we can't do it for security reasons,

which is logical."

Forty years ago, a panel of auto journalists picked the NSU Ro80

as European Car of the Year. Now mostly forgotten, the Ro80 was a

German sedan with an aerodynamic shape that presaged the Audi 5000

and Ford Taurus of the 1980s. As important as its trend-setting

styling, though, the Ro80 featured the first Wankel engine in a

mass-produced car.

Potential game-changers in the auto industry have often ended up

as blind alleys. Dinosaurs at least have birds as their living

legacy, but innovative cars like the Tucker, Corvair and Citroen DS

can be found only in the automotive fossil record. Carmakers have

learned that it doesn't always pay to innovate.

But for a brief time in the late 1960s and early 1970s, it

looked as if real innovation was taking hold in the form of a new

powerplant that was lighter, smoother, simpler than a reciprocating

piston engine and also capable of producing more power for its

size. Companies from American Motors to Mercedes-Benz rushed to

license Wankel engine technology.

Felix Wankel, an engineer at NSU, had been experimenting since

1954 with a simpler internal-combustion engine. His elegant design

consisted of a rounded triangular "rotor" that spun in an oval

combustion chamber. As the rotor moved in its eccentric orbit

around a central shaft, the area of the three combustion chambers

(one for each side of the triangle) contracted, creating

compression and thus power.

But an obstacle to engine longevity emerged: It was hard to get

a good seal on the combustion chambers where the rotor tips, or

apexes, met the inside of the chamber.

Before the Ro80, there had been attempts at Wankel-powered cars

-- NSU's own Wankel Spider and the Mazda Cosmo sports cars -- but the

Ro80 was the revolutionary engine's first shot at the big time. If

things had gone as planned, BMW wouldn't be the only prestigious

three-letter brand of German cars today.

Initial orders for the 1968 NSU Ro80 were brisk. Soon, however,

NSU was dealing in damage control.

In late 1968, the German magazine Auto Motor und Sport reported

that half of the 191 Ro80 owners it had surveyed said that engines

had been replaced under warranty. In neglecting to test the cars in

real-world stop-and-start driving conditions, NSU snatched defeat

from the jaws of victory.

The culprit turned out to be bad bearings and ineffective rotor

tip seals; the warranty claims that resulted nearly drove the

company to bankruptcy. NSU eventually merged with Volkswagen.

However, in a protracted deal involving a cast of many --

including Felix Wankel and, oddly, a group of Israeli bankers --

several former NSU shareholders retained control of licensing

rights to the engine. Still, it fell to the Japanese to perfect the

power plant.

Toyo Kogyo, the parent company of Mazda, was one of about 18 NSU

Wankel licensees. In the late 1960s, Mazda decided that its future

lay in differentiating itself from Toyota and Nissan. It cast its

lot with the Wankel, which the company called the rotary engine.

The first rotary-powered Mazda to make an impact in the United

States was the RX-2, introduced in 1970.

The RX-2 was a small coupe roughly the size of a Toyota Corolla,

but with the pep of a small V-8. Enthusiasts gushed over the smooth

and ample power.

C.J. Batten was the first design engineer that Ford hired for

its Wankel development program in 1971. In a recent interview,

Batten said that Ford began looking at the Wankel because its

archrival, General Motors, "had one that was nearly

production-ready" for its Chevrolet Monza coupe.

In an interview, Batten recalled evaluating a Mazda and being

impressed. "The RX-2 with a little over 100 horsepower would run

like a 200-horsepower Mustang," he said. Batten reckons that the

advantages in packaging and smoothness weren't enough to overcome

the reciprocating engine's advantage of incumbency.

GM's president, Ed Cole, was a proponent of the Wankel. In the

early 1970s, GM showed several Wankel-powered midengine Corvette

design studies that would have been world-class sports cars. Car

magazines said the sleek mid-engine 'Vette was a sure bet for

production. Cole also planned to use the Wankel in mainstream cars.

Batten recalls that as wishful thinking. He said the accountants

who held the purse strings pointed out that Chevrolet could already

sell every Corvette it could build. Why was a more advanced, more

expensive car needed? The logic was hard to dispute, and the

Corvette would soldier on until 1984 with its 1963-vintage

platform.

Not much later, Cole retired and the Arab oil embargo

underscored how thirsty the early Wankels were. GM's Wankel program

came to a sudden halt. Ford ended its development program.

The cancellation of GM's Wankel even had a ripple affect on

American Motors, which had engineered its futuristic, glassy Pacer

to take a GM-built Wankel. Instead, AMC had to make do with a heavy

cast-iron 6-cylinder.

The only automaker other than NSU and Mazda to market a

Wankel-powered production car was Citroen, a company that

celebrated eccentricity. But Mercedes-Benz expressed an interest,

teasing enthusiasts in 1970 with the brilliant C111-II research car

that had gullwing doors and a 370-horsepower four-rotor Wankel that

could reach 180 miles an hour.

The 1974 Arab oil embargo hit Mazda hard. Its small RX-2 could

barely manage 15 miles a gallon, about half as much as the

comparably sized Corolla. The RX-3, a larger successor, added a

wagon body style. But that car was bigger and heavier and had even

worse mileage.

Mazdas piled up at dealers and at the ports, so the company

hedged its bets with piston-engine cars while it improved the

rotary's cleanliness and efficiency. In 1978, it introduced the car

that made the best use to date of the rotary's distinctive

qualities. The 1979 RX-7 was a milestone; at a time when sports

cars were growing flabby, the RX-7 was light, nimble and basic with

an engine so rev-happy that a buzzer had to be installed to let the

driver know when the engine speed had reached the danger zone.

Mazda's new strategy was to reserve the rotary for its specialty

cars, while using piston engines in the rest of its line. Mazda's

rotary design reached its pinnacle with the Renesis engine

introduced in the 2003 RX-8, the most powerful, efficient and

cleanest naturally aspirated Wankel yet. And because it is also

well-suited to run on hydrogen, it may have a future beyond the odd

four-door coupe that it currently lives in.

Early Wankel cars seldom appear for sale in the United States.

The Ro80 is somewhat popular as a collectible in Britain, though

many have been refitted with more reliable Mazda engines. Prices

run around $15,000. A Wankel Spider recently sold on eBay for

$17,000.

First-year Mazda RX-7s are bargains at $4,000 to $6,000. The

1967 Mazda Cosmo is the most collectible early Wankel car. In 2007,

a seller at an auction in Australia turned down an $83,000 bid.

CHALLENGING THE CROWD IN WHISPERS, NOT SHOUTS (Economic View) Robert J. Shiller is professor of economics and finance at Yale and co-founder and chief economist of MacroMarkets LLC. Alan Greenspan, the former Federal Reserve chairman,

acknowledged in a congressional hearing last month that he had made

an "error" in assuming that the markets would properly regulate

themselves, and added that he had no idea a financial disaster was

in the making. What's more, he said the Fed's own computer models

and economic experts simply "did not forecast" the current

financial crisis.

Greenspan's comments may have left the impression that no one in

the world could have predicted the crisis. Yet it is clear that

well before home prices started falling in 2006, lots of people

were worried about the housing boom and its potential for creating

economic disaster. It's just that the Fed did not take them very

seriously.

For example, I clearly remember a taxi driver in Miami

explaining to me years ago that the housing bubble there was

getting crazy. With all the construction under way, which he

pointed out as we drove along, he said that there would surely be a

glut in the market and, eventually, a disaster.

But why weren't the experts at the Fed saying such things? And

why didn't a consensus of economists at universities and other

institutions warn that a crisis was on the way?

The field of social psychology provides a possible answer. In

his classic 1972 book, "Groupthink," Irving L. Janis, the Yale

psychologist, explained how panels of experts could make colossal

mistakes. People on these panels, he said, are forever worrying

about their personal relevance and effectiveness, and feel that if

they deviate too far from the consensus, they will not be given a

serious role. They self-censor personal doubts about the emerging

group consensus if they cannot express these doubts in a formal way

that conforms with apparent assumptions held by the group.

Members of the Fed staff were issuing some warnings. But

Greenspan was right: The warnings were not predictions. They tended

to be technical in nature, did not offer a scenario of crashing

home prices and economic confidence, and tended to come late in the

housing boom.

A search of the Federal Reserve Board's working paper series

reveals a few papers that touch on the bubble. For example, a 2004

paper by Joshua Gallin, a Fed economist, concluded: "Indeed, one

might be tempted to cite the currently low level of the rent-price

ratio as a sign that we are in a house-price 'bubble."' But the

paper did not endorse this view, saying that "several important

caveats argue against such a strong conclusion and in favor of

further research."

One of Greenspan's fellow board members, Edward M. Gramlich,

urgently warned about the inadequate regulation of subprime

mortgages. But judging at least from his 2007 book, "Subprime

Mortgages," he did not warn about a housing bubble, let alone that

its bursting would have any systemic consequences.

From my own experience on expert panels, I know firsthand the

pressures that people -- might I say mavericks? -- may feel when

questioning the group consensus.

I was connected with the Federal Reserve System as a member the

economic advisory panel of the Federal Reserve Bank of New York

from 1990 until 2004, when the New York bank's new president,

Timothy F. Geithner, arrived. That panel advises the president of

the New York bank, who, in turn, is vice chairman of the Federal

Open Market Committee, which sets interest rates. In my position on

the panel, I felt the need to use restraint. While I warned about

the bubbles I believed were developing in the stock and housing

markets, I did so very gently, and felt vulnerable expressing such

quirky views. Deviating too far from consensus leaves one feeling

potentially ostracized from the group, with the risk that one may

be terminated.

Reading some of Geithner's speeches from around that time shows

that he was concerned about systemic risks but concluded that the

financial system was getting "stronger" and more "resilient."

He was worried about the unsustainability of a low savings rate,

government deficit and current account deficit, none of which

caused our current crisis.

In 2005, in the second edition of my book "Irrational

Exuberance," I stated clearly that a catastrophic collapse of the

housing and stock markets could be on its way. I wrote that

"significant further rises in these markets could lead,

eventually, to even more significant declines," and that this

might "result in a substantial increase in the rate of personal

bankruptcies, which could lead to a secondary string of

bankruptcies of financial institutions as well," and said that

this could result in "another, possibly worldwide, recession."

I distinctly remember that, while writing this, I feared

criticism for gratuitous alarmism. And indeed, such criticism came.

I gave talks in 2005 at both the Office of the Comptroller of

the Currency and at the Federal Deposit Insurance Corp., in which I

argued that we were in the middle of a dangerous housing bubble. I

urged these mortgage regulators to impose suitability requirements

on mortgage lenders, to assure that the loans were appropriate for

the people taking them.

The reaction to this suggestion was roughly this: Yes, some

staff members had expressed such concerns, and yes, officials knew

about the possibility that there was a bubble, but they weren't

taking any of us seriously.

I based my predictions largely on the recently developed field

of behavioral economics, which posits that psychology matters for

economic events. Behavioral economists are still regarded as a

fringe group by many mainstream economists. Support from fellow

behavioral economists was important in my daring to talk about

speculative bubbles.

Speculative bubbles are caused by contagious excitement about

investment prospects. I find that in casual conversation, many of

my mainstream economist friends tell me that they are aware of such

excitement, too. But very few will talk about it professionally.

Why do professional economists always seem to find that concerns

with bubbles are overblown or unsubstantiated? I have wondered

about this for years, and still do not quite have an answer. It

must have something to do with the tool kit given to economists (as

opposed to psychologists) and perhaps even with the self-selection

of those attracted to the technical, mathematical field of

economics. Economists aren't generally trained in psychology, and

so want to divert the subject of discussion to things they

understand well. They pride themselves on being rational. The

notion that people are making huge errors in judgment is not

appealing.

In addition, it seems that concerns about professional stature

may blind us to the possibility that we are witnessing a market

bubble. We all want to associate ourselves with dignified people

and dignified ideas. Speculative bubbles, and those who study them,

have been deemed undignified.

In short, Janis' insights seem right on the mark. People compete

for stature, and the ideas often just tag along. Presidential

campaigns are no different. Candidates cannot try interesting and

controversial new ideas during a campaign whose main purpose is to

establish that the candidate has the stature to be president.

Unless Greenspan was exceptionally insightful about social

psychology, he may not have perceived that experts around him could

have been subject to the same traps.

Those who are hoping to earn extra money for the holidays this

year may find the seasonal market anything but generous, as jobs

are likely to be scarce and competition intense.

Because consumers are weighed down with economic worries,

retailers face "incredible challenges heading into the fourth

quarter," Rosalind Wells, chief economist for the National Retail

Federation, said in a statement last month.

To meet those challenges, they may have to trim both inventory

levels and labor costs -- and recent surveys about seasonal hiring

bear this out.

Jonas Prising, president of the North American division of the

staffing firm Manpower, said the company's quarterly employment

outlook survey showed the hiring market for the wholesale-retail

sector to be the weakest in 17 years.

At a time when retailers should be gearing up for the holiday

season, many are taking a wait-and-see approach. "There is a lot

of talent out there looking for work, so the actual decision for

businesses to ramp up a work force can be made later in the

season," he said. "Even in dining, hotels and call centers, they

can wait a little later."

Few companies will acknowledge publicly that they are scaling

back holiday hiring, because it implies slowing sales, said Shawn

Boyer, chief executive of SnagAJob.com, a job board for hourly

positions. But according to surveys done by the company, managers

in general are planning to hire fewer workers this year, he said.

Part of the reason is that existing staff members are agreeing

to take on additional hours. "More people are interested in doing

overtime this year, so businesses are waiting later in the season

to hire," Boyer said.

For some businesses, the credit crisis has compounded the

problem of declining consumer spending because credit lines they

often use to stock stores and finance seasonal hiring are not

available.

Even businesses holding their own during this downturn are being

cautious. John Thrailkill, vice president of stores at the

Container Store, said locations in Manhattan; White Plains, N.Y.;

and Paramus, N.J., were hiring roughly the same number of workers

as last year, partly because people who live in smaller spaces need

more storage capacity. But stores in other parts of the country

with slower sales are likely to cut back their hiring, he said.

"Scheduling has become more important now, too," he said. "We

are really digging into every hour at every store to make sure that

if we only need 12 people on the floor during a particular hour, we

don't have 13."

Emmanuel Tam, who lives in New York's Harlem neighborhood and

was laid off this summer from his job as a media literacy

instructor in the Bronx, says that there is simply too much

competition. Although he has been searching for a full-time job

since July, he is now also applying for temporary holiday work.

"I'm going everywhere," he said. "I've tried retail stores, temp

agencies, SnagAJob. I go out every day and put in applications."

Although Tam expected a competitive landscape for full-time

work, he was surprised at the number of applicants for holiday

jobs. "A year ago I wouldn't have thought I would have trouble

getting one of those positions," he said. "But now I will take

whatever comes along. I have no choice."

Retailers often hire from the same pool of workers they used in

previous holiday seasons, but new job seekers can increase their

chances by highlighting on their applications any special skills

they have -- speaking more than one language, for example, or

experience in customer service, said Rosaleena Marcellus, vice

president of client services and head of the retail practice at

Global Lead, a management consulting firm based in Cincinnati.

Applicants may also need to be more flexible about scheduling

than they were in previous years. "You need to have a wide

availability that is easy to describe, such as 'every afternoon

after 5 p.m. and any time on the weekend,"' said Dan Russell, a

vice president for the human resources firm Aon Consulting in

Chicago who works with retailers on work-force selection. "You

don't want to go in with a really complex schedule, because a

hiring manager doesn't have the time to deal with that."

SnagAJob encourages job seekers to spread their bets by applying

for jobs in a variety of environments and industries -- like low-

and high-end retailing, hotels and restaurants, and airlines.

"It's a numbers game," Boyer said.

It's not all doom and gloom, either. Discount retailers like

Wal-Mart and Target are likely to be hiring more seasonal workers

than higher-end department stores, Marcellus said. "People who

normally go to middle-scale stores are going to shop at discounters

this year," she said.

Another bright spot is online shopping. This season, it is

expected to increase by 12 percent, according to a report released

in October by Forrester, the technology research firm.

Sucharita Mulpuru, an analyst at Forrester covering online

retailing, said: "This is one sector in retail that should be

looking for more people." That means fulfillment centers and call

centers will be looking for workers.

DialAmerica, a teleservices company in Mahwah, N.J., expects its

business to expand about 20 percent this quarter. The company's

clients are in a variety of industries, but about 20 percent are

retailers using customer service agents for online and catalog

sales.

"We are definitely hiring," said Mary Conway, the company's

chief marketing officer. Job seekers with listening skills, the

ability to think on their feet and respond appropriately stand a

good chance of finding work at a teleservices company, Conway said.

"I get the sense our clients are going to raise the numbers of

agents they need for the holidays," she said, "because they are

relying heavily on this to be a successful channel for them.

"Quite frankly," she added, "we're nervous we won't have

enough capacity."

This Tuesday night, as history of one sort or another is being

made, where will you be watching election returns?

If you happen to be in Alaska, know that the doors of the

Wasilla Multi-Use Sports Complex will be flung open at 3 p.m. for

food, beer, wine and -- in between updates on giant televisions --

dancing to a new local rock band, Sarah and the Pit Bulls. Although

this Civic Festival is ostensibly nonpartisan, it is billed on the

Web as a "victory celebration."

At the same hour in Washington -- 7 p.m., East Coast time -- the

doors to the New Bethel Baptist Church will be flung open for what

the Rev. Walter E. Fauntroy, a former aide to the Rev. Dr. Martin

Luther King Jr., calls a "watch-night service," also replete with

food and televisions (but minus the alcohol).

"I am cautiously optimistic that before the night is out,"

said Fauntroy, the church's pastor, "I will experience what I do

at weddings: someone singing, 'This is the moment."'

On the evening of Nov. 4, true believers from each party will

gather at churches, meetings halls, block parties, bars and parks

between Wasilla and Washington, anticipating a communal exaltation

of historic dimension.

But for millions of others, it will be a night infused with

body-quaking fear on a seismic scale, about the economy,

employment, war. Conversations last week with quotidian voters -- as

well as not-so-quotidian ones -- suggest that many people may want

to gather less for a party than for a huddle, a support group.

Republicans are hedging their bets. Democrats say they are wary,

skeptical, superstitious even. Judging by them, and not the polls

that favor Sen. Barack Obama, if there's a donkey braying in the

land, that would be Eeyore.

"I don't know anyone who is planning to whoop it up," said

Diane Asadorian Masters, an Obama supporter from West Lafayette,

Ind.

Kyle T. Smoke, chairman of the College Republicans at the

University of Texas at Dallas, said that his group would not attend

the student government's bipartisan party. Instead, members will

watch with the grown-ups at the Dallas County Republican Party's

gathering. "Tensions are high," he said. "We think it's in the

best interest to be with our own people so we can either celebrate

or sulk together."

Ayelet Waldman, a novelist from Berkeley, Calif., who campaigned

hard for Obama, will fly to Chicago on Tuesday to work the phones,

knocking wood and spitting over her shoulder as she does so. "I

cannot take comfort in the polls," said Waldman, who, with her

husband and four children, planned to gather with Obama supporters

that evening in Grant Park.

Referring to the tight races in 2000 and 2004, she said: "It's

like Charlie Brown and the football: once, twice, a million times

burned. I'll be in Chicago because I either want to celebrate with

Barack or grieve with him."

Pam Young, a Republican mother of three from Fort Worth, Texas,

said she would probably have a few friends over. "I think my guy

is going down for the count," she said, referring to Sen. John

McCain. She has many liberal friends with whom she traded nyah-nyah

text messages during the debates. On Tuesday night, she said, with

a sigh, "They will abuse me with it."

The evening presents an emotional challenge for Susan Bodnar

Schatsky, a Manhattan Democrat. She'll be struggling to contain her

battle-scarred cynicism, even as she encourages the excitement of

her children, 9 and 11, who baked money-raising cookies and knocked

on doors in Pennsylvania for Obama. "Our kids need to be allowed

to idealize," she said. "We'll acknowledge that it's a special,

fun night. But if it doesn't work out, we need to have a protective

place for their tears."

Bob Casselman has his protective place ready. Casselman, a

middle school teacher from Zionsville, Ind., said he was voting for

McCain but was apprehensive about the outcome of the evening, which

he intended to spend at home with his wife. He has a shrinking

retirement account and two college tuitions to cover. "I'll

certainly watch the returns," he said, "but I'll also be reading

a fun book" -- David Baldacci's "Stone Cold" -- "so I can take my

mind off the serious stuff. I've been saving it for election

night."

By contrast, the ebullience of organizers of Tuesday night's

events in Wasilla and Washington seemed unassailable. Perhaps that

was because they will be celebrating themselves as much as their

candidates.

In Wasilla, McCain and the Republican Party seem like

afterthoughts, wafting after what is essentially a love-fest for

Sarah Palin and small-town Alaska.

Typically on an election night, said Lynn Gattis, an organizer

of the Wasilla event, "We go to a local bar or watch on our own

TVs, but this one is a big hoo-hah."

The festival will feature gun-safety sessions, a flag ceremony

from the Boy Scouts and vendors hawking Palin memorabilia,

including wineglass charms -- trinkets to identify one's glass at an

event -- in shapes like lipstick and high-heeled shoes. The Colony

High School Marching Band from nearby Palmer will perform what

Gattis contended would be a special preview.

"The band is going to the inaugural parade!" Gattis said. "We

bought their uniforms on eBay, and they've been practicing. I've

got my inaugural ball gown, tan-spray can and all."

Across the country, Fauntroy, a founding member of the

Congressional Black Caucus, sees in Obama the fulfillment of a

dream more than 40 years old. "This is the great harvest," he

said, his voice breaking. "The moment for which Martin Luther King

Jr. gave his life. I've been saying to people ad nauseam: 'Pray and

then vote. Put feet to your prayers."'

He expects at least 500 people at New Bethel on Tuesday night.

"I am so full of anticipation that I am ashamed of myself,"

Fauntroy said. "I can almost hear the children singing and the

church bells ringing."

As if to defuse their anxiety, some hosts have intentionally

created bipartisan guest lists. The marquee bipartisan party in New

York is likely to be the one given by Harvey Weinstein, the ardent

Democrat (and film and theater producer), and Georgette Mosbacher,

the ardent Republican (and top executive at Borghese, the beauty

company), along with Cindi Leive (undeclared) and Jim Nelson

(Democrat), the editors in chief, respectively, of Glamour and GQ.

During a conference call with Mosbacher and Weinstein, that

notion of friendship trumping partisanship was almost savaged,

especially when Mosbacher, alluding to the candidates' tax

proposals, described herself as "a small-business owner."

Weinstein all but gagged.

"I have a $100 million business," Mosbacher explained. "I

have to make a payroll on the first and the 15th of the month!"

Their guest list includes Robert. M. Morgenthau, the Manhattan

district attorney; Eva Mendes, the actress; and Salman Rushdie, the

writer. There will be, Weinstein chimed in, "a lot of

small-business owners of $100 million and above."

"And a lot of limousine liberals," Mosbacher shot back.

Each acknowledged the gravity of the election, as well as the

historic symbolism. If and when a winner is announced, champagne

will be served.

"If Barack wins, I'm buying," Weinstein said.

"And if McCain wins, he'll still be buying," she added.

AVOID CHOPPY WATER AND SWIM JUST AS FAR (Strategies) Mark Hulbert is editor of The Hulbert Financial Digest, a service of MarketWatch. Critics of market timing argue that it's hard, if not

impossible, to consistently beat a buy-and-hold approach by jumping

back and forth between stocks and cash.

But new research raises the tantalizing possibility that you can

do as well as the overall market -- with much less risk -- by parking

your portfolio in the safety of cash during times like these, when

market volatility spikes higher.

Market timers have yet to translate this new research into a set

of specific rules for trading. But the general idea is to get out

of the stock market whenever volatility measures -- such as the

Chicago Board Options Exchange's Volatility Index, known as the VIX

-- rise significantly, and to stay in cash until they come back

down.

Of course, such a volatility-avoidance strategy faces long odds.

As the critics of market timing often point out, the stock market

tends to produce the bulk of its gains in just a few explosive

sessions. Miss those days and your portfolio's returns are likely

to disappoint you.

Consider someone who was fully invested in stocks over the last

decade -- except for the market's 20 best days, during which he held

cash. Despite holding stocks more than 99 percent of the time, this

investor would have lost 57 percent through the end of October, as

judged by the Dow Jones Wilshire 5000 index, a benchmark that

represents the combined value of all domestic stocks. That is 70

percentage points worse than the 13 percent gain he would have

achieved had he held stocks mimicking that index for the entire 10

years, including the market's 20 best days.

Market-timing advocates say it's unfair to focus only on the

consequences of missing the very best days, because the bulk of the

market's declines are also concentrated in just a few sessions. For

example, a portfolio fully invested in stocks during all but the 20

worst days of the last decade would have gained 215 percent. That's

more than 200 percentage points better than the return from a

straightforward buy-and-hold approach.

The volatility-avoidance strategy takes the middle ground

between these two extremes. It aims to sidestep at least some of

the market's biggest down days and is willing to miss some of the

biggest up days, too. Because the best and worst days tend to

balance each other out during volatile times, a strategy that moves

your portfolio into cash during such periods should produce

long-term returns that are close to those of the overall market,

while incurring much less risk.

This rough equivalence in returns has prevailed in recent years.

Over the last decade, an investor who was out of the stock market

during both the 20 best and 20 worst days would have gained 18

percent. That's just a little better than buying and holding. Yet

the volatility of this investor's monthly returns would have been 9

less than the market's.

But how can you sidestep even a good portion of the biggest down

days?

A growing body of academic research has found that the periods

of greatest volatility are in large part predictable. This means

that the market sessions with particularly good or bad returns

don't occur randomly, but tend to be clustered together. (Perhaps

the researcher most widely credited with documenting this tendency

is Robert F. Engle, a finance professor at New York University who

was the Nobel laureate in economics in 2003 for his work along

these lines.)

The market's behavior over the last couple of months illustrates

this clustering: By Sept. 18, the VIX, the widely followed

volatility index, had climbed to what was then its highest level in

five years, greatly increasing the likelihood that the ensuing

period would have above-average volatility. Sure enough, nine of

the 20 biggest daily percentage losses of the last decade occurred

in the subsequent six weeks, along with six of the decade's 20

biggest daily gains.

But even if they're successful, volatility-avoidance strategies

aren't for everyone. Long-term investors, for example, presumably

don't care about shorter-term gyrations, and therefore aren't

interested in market-timing approaches whose major benefit is

reducing volatility rather than increasing return. Such strategies

require close attention to the market, and generate higher costs

than simply holding stocks for the long term.

Still, a successful volatility-avoidance strategy would appeal

to many investors who have been scared away from the market,

worried that they would suffer through more extraordinary

fluctuations like those of recent weeks.

By its very nature, innovation is inefficient. While

blockbusters do emerge, few of the new products or processes that

evolve from innovative thinking ultimately survive the test of

time. During periods of economic growth, such inefficiencies are

chalked up as part of the price of forging into the future.

But these aren't such times. Wild market gyrations, frozen

credit markets and an overall sour economy herald a new round of

corporate belt-tightening. Foremost on the target list is anything

inefficient. That's bad news for corporate innovation, and it could

spell trouble for years to come, even after the economy turns

around.

"To be honest, we had a problem with innovation even before the

economic crisis. That's the reason I wrote my book," says Judy

Estrin, former chief technology officer at Cisco Systems and author

of "Closing the Innovation Gap." "We're focusing on the short

term and we're not planting the seeds for the future."

In tough times, of course, many companies have to scale back.

But, she says: "To quote Obama, you don't use a hatchet. You use a

scalpel. Leaders need to pick and choose with great care."

There are important things managers can do to ensure that

creative forward-thinking doesn't go out the door with each round

of layoffs. Fostering a companywide atmosphere of innovation --

encouraging everyone to take risks and to think about novel

solutions, from receptionists to corner-suite executives -- helps

ensure that the loss of any particular set of minds needn't spell

trouble for the entire company.

She suggests instilling five core values to entrench innovation

in the corporate mind-set: questioning, risk-taking, openness,

patience and trust. All five must be used together -- risk-taking

without questioning leads to recklessness, she says, while patience

without trust sets up an every-man-for-himself mentality.

In an era of Six Sigma black belts and brown belts, Estrin urges

setting aside certain efficiency measures in favor of what she

calls "green-thumb leadership" -- a future-oriented management

style that understands, and even encourages, taking risks. Let

efficiency measures govern the existing "factory farm," she says,

but create greenhouses and experimental gardens along the sides of

the farm to nurture the risky investments that likely will take a

number of years to bear fruit.

"I'm not suggesting you only cut from today's stuff and keep

the future part untouched," she says. "You have to balance it."

Yet even that approach has its drawbacks. Companies that create

silos of innovation by designating one group as the "big

thinkers" while making others handle day-to-day concerns risk

losing their innovative edge if any of the big thinkers leave the

company or ultimately must be laid off.

"Innovation has to be embedded in the daily operation, in the

entire work force," says Jon Fisher, a business professor, serial

entrepreneur, and author of "Strategic Entrepreneurism," which

advocates building a start-up's business from the beginning with an

eye toward selling the company. "A large acquirer's interest in a

startup or smaller company is binary in nature: They either want

you or they don't, based on the innovation you have to offer. The

best way to foster innovation is to create something, put it to the

test, build a good company and then get it under the umbrella of a

world-renowned company to move it forward."

David Thompson, chief executive and co-founder of Genius.com

Inc., based in San Mateo, Calif., says that innovation "has a bad

name in down times" but that "bad times focus the mind and the

best-focused minds in the down times are looking for the

opportunities."

"You do have to batten down the hatches and reduce expenses,

but you can't do it at the expense of the big picture," Thompson

adds. "You always have to keep in mind the bigger picture that's

coming down the road in two or three years.

"The last thing you want to do with innovation is just throw

money at it. It's a very tricky balance."

In fact, hard times can be the source of innovative inspiration,

says Chris Shipley, a technology analyst and executive producer of

the DEMO conferences, where new ideas make their debuts. "Some of

the best products and services come out of some of the worst

times," she says. In the early 1990s, tens of millions of dollars

had gone down the drain in a futile effort to develop "pen

computing" -- an early phase of mobile computing -- and a recession

was shriveling the economic outlook.

Yet the tiny Palm Computing managed to revitalize the entire

industry in a matter of months by transforming itself overnight

from a software maker into a hardware company.

"Our biggest challenge right now is fear," she says. "The

worst thing that a company can do right now is go into hibernation,

into duck-and-cover. If you just sit on your backside and wait for

things to get better, they're not going to. They're going to get

better for somebody, but not necessarily for you."

Howard Lieberman, also a serial entrepreneur and founder of the

Silicon Valley Innovation Institute, says innovation breeds

effectiveness. It's not about efficiency, he argues.

"Efficiency is for bean counters," he says. "It's not for

CEOs or inventors or founders."

The current economic downturn comes as no surprise to him, he

says, because it mirrors the downturn at the time of the dot-com

bust. Then and now, the companies that survive are those that keep

creativity and innovation foremost.

"Creativity doesn't care about economic downturns," Lieberman

says. "In the middle of the 1970s, when we were having a big

economic downturn, both Apple and Microsoft were founded. Creative

people don't care about the time or the season or the state of the

economy; they just go out and do their thing."

Marilyn Rubinson recalls her stays at the

Fontainebleau hotel as a series of high-fashion snapshots. There

were afternoons at the cabana, "a blue hotel towel wrapped around

my head like a turban and wearing high-heeled Lucite shoes," she

said. There were evenings at the Gigi Room, rubbing shoulders with

New York's dashing mayor, John V. Lindsay; and she remembers

sweeping down the dramatic lobby staircase in a form-fitting,

stone-colored gown. "In those days everyone made an entrance,"

Rubinson, 84, said. "I made lots of entrances."

In that heady era the hotel was the diadem of Miami resorts, a

560-foot-long, sickle-shaped showplace dominating the Collins

Avenue waterfront, where Miamians like the Rubinsons, who own a

chain of clothing stores, and well-to-do snowbirds came in the

winter to roost.

"Everyone who was anyone was there," Rubinson said. "People

wore black tie and jewelry. Everyone was young."

And everyone lived large at the flamboyant resort, conceived

from its outset to evoke a modern Versailles. "It was the place

for entertainment, for glamour -- an icon even among the locals,"

said Cathy Leff, the director of the Wolfsonian museum of design

here. "Even now if one asks, 'Within the city of Miami Beach, what

is the most important landmark in the popular imagination?' it

would be the Fontainebleau."

Can an icon of the past be restored to its former glory? New

owners and architects of the Fontainebleau have invested $1 billion

to buy and restore it in the conviction that it can. Its original

fusion of Modernist rigor and Hollywood cheek, dreamed up by the

maverick architect Morris Lapidus, was derided as Bronx baroque,

until the singular style of Miami Beach was rediscovered by the Ian

Schrager generation.

"In its day in the '50s and '60s, the Fontainebleau was state

of the art in glamour," said Jeffrey Beers, the New York architect

responsible for an extensive update of the interior. "We would

like to restore that in spirit."

When the refurbished resort is officially unveiled Nov. 14 with

a series of parties and a taping for television of a Victoria's

Secret fashion show -- perfect! -- visitors will be able to judge for

themselves if the mission succeeded. Even recently, as the hotel

was still a construction site, it was clear that the old duchess

had flounced out her skirts.

"How many places like this can you go in America that are not

in the desert?" said Jeffrey Soffer, executive chairman and

majority partner of Fontainebleau Resorts, which is building a

Fontainebleau in Las Vegas. Indeed, as he strolled the raised

oceanfront walkway that overlooks the property, it was obvious the

resort had much in common with over-the-top hotels on the Strip.

Visible from the walkway is a pool complex fanning out across

the lawns, and a new 40,000-square-foot glass-walled spa, its steam

rooms and reflecting pools worthy of the emperor Hadrian.

Crescent-shaped rows of cabanas edge the pools and echo the

undulating outlines of the Chateau, the hotel's original building.

Several towers, two of them new, flank the Chateau, for a

combined 1,500 guest rooms, twice the number of the Fontainebleau's

largest competitor, Loews in South Beach. There are also shops, 11

restaurants and lounges, and about 200,000 square feet of meeting

and convention space -- all sprawling over 22 acres.

The three-year renovation was conceived, in part, to lure back

fashionable crowds, which have drifted down to South Beach.

With renovated rooms from $399 and suites from $509, the

Fontainebleau is reopening at a challenging time for tourism. Hotel

occupancy rates in Miami-Dade County were down by 6 percent in

September from a year earlier, and room revenues fell by 4 percent,

said John Lancet, a senior executive in Miami for HVS, a national

hotel consulting company.

But Lancet viewed the Fontainebleau development as only mildly

risky. "It is my impression that the owners went through adequate

planning so that the risk could be mitigated," he said.

The hotel has some $30 million in bookings through early next

year, said Howard C. Karawan, the chief operating officer of

Fontainebleau Resorts, who was brought in by the new owners to

oversee renovations and operations for the company.

Rumors are widespread that the $500 million face-lift was made

in anticipation that the city would legalize casino gambling. The

developers deny this, and gambling has yet to win acceptance with

lawmakers.

At the hub of the resort is the Chateau's 45,000-square-foot

lobby, an elaboration on the original free-form elliptical shape

completed by Lapidus in 1954.

Its original curvaceous outlines were accentuated by three

enormous chandeliers, striated Greek-style columns, swirling

carpets and a mural of a Piranesi print. The lobby's famous focal

point was a "staircase to nowhere," which actually led from a

discreet cloakroom, where ladies could shed their wraps before

descending divalike down the white marble steps.

The new lobby, like its predecessor, is a chambered nautilus,

all undulating walls and recesses. Mr. Beers stripped away '70s-era

carpeting expose the original marble floor with its signature bow

tie design. He covered the wall at the staircase in gold tile and

added a light installation by the artist James Turrell and a lounge

with a blue reflective floor. The staircase to nowhere is back, the

jewel in a set piece expected to draw crowds who want to see and be

seen.

And perhaps to retrace the footsteps of previous guests. Those

who stayed at the hotel in Miami Beach's golden age recall a resort

that Lapidus, who died in 2001 at 98, had envisioned as a

laboratory. It was a place, he wrote, "where I could enlarge upon

all the theories I had been developing about human nature and the

emotional hunger that the average man had for visual excitement."

At bars and supper clubs -- the Gigi Room, the Poodle Lounge --

"women would sit with their little fur stoles and white gloves on

to eat," recalled Deborah Desilets, a Miami architect and former

associate of Lapidus. Sheathed in slinky gowns, "they would stop

at the mezzanine, put on their jewelry and wave at their husbands

in the lobby below," she said.

Michelle Oka Doner, an artist and a frequent guest as a girl --

her father, Kenneth Oka, was mayor of Miami Beach in the late '50s

and early '60s -- remembers the resort, where she had a prom and her

wedding, "as my stage and my launching pad."

The Fontainebleau was a decadent paradise of "flashy diamonds,

illicit sex and overflowing ice cream sodas," she said. To get to

her family's cabana, "you had to walk through the downstairs shops

and past a dance studio where they had all these gorgeous guys

giving cha-cha lessons to all these overdressed matrons from

Scarsdale."

"People came for the half-naked girls and the revues," she

said. And, of course, for trysts. "I knew something illicit was

going on, but I couldn't put my finger on what it was."

The lobby was a hub for celebrity spotting, the hotel itself a

backdrop against which the Rat Pack played poker and James Bond

sprang from the high dive in "Goldfinger."

"The floor was like a mirror, so shiny you could see

yourself," said Levi Forte, a bellman at the Fontainebleau since

the '60s. "Danny Thomas couldn't keep his eyes off that floor.

He'd sit there and comb his hair and ask, 'Levi, how do I look?"'

Mel Dick, who moved to Miami from Brooklyn in the '60s, visited

on his honeymoon. He recalled being drawn to a sign outside the

hotel barbershop that beckoned, "Come and have your shoes shined

by the former lightweight champion of the world." It was Sidney

Walker, known as Beau Jack, recalled Dick, a wine company

executive. "I sat down in the seat and I gave him five dollars. I

told him: 'I don't want you to shine my shoes. I just want to look

at you."'

Rubinson was just as enthralled by her frequent star sightings.

"How many times driving up to the Fontainebleau I would see Frank

Sinatra walking up the drive with a glass in his hand," she said.

"We had a more glamorous lifestyle in those days," she added

wistfully. "But then, of course, things changed."

In succeeding decades the resort lost its sparkle. Like other

supersize hotels lining Collins Avenue north of 44th Street,

including the neighboring Eden Roc, another shiny Lapidus edifice,

it became as dated as Grandma's minaudiere.

Fast forward to the current renovation. "We kept asking

ourselves, 'What would Morris do?"' Karawan said.

John Nichols, a Miami architect responsible for the adjacent

Fontainebleau residential towers, the second of which has just been

completed, was hired to gut and redesign the hotel. He preserved

Lapidus embellishments like the perforated "Swiss cheese" outer

walls. "We had to get down into a very high level of detail,"

Nichols said. "You don't just go in there and take off the

eyebrows."

Oka Doner said she admires the renovation -- to a point. "The

property is kind of post-postmodern," she said. "Morris Lapidus

had real passion," but in its current incarnation, "irony has

trumped passion."

But Desilets, the former Lapidus associate, who visited the site

last month, was over the moon. "They used incredible engineering

to laser trace what was there and rebuilt it with accuracy," she

said. "It's going to be like a Ravenna mosaic. It's a wow type of

extravagance."

The exuberant aesthetic of the original has been resurrected in

three ballrooms, lavish restaurants and five swimming and

reflecting pools.

The pool cabanas have wraparound sofas and flat-panel

televisions. Perched on the property's topmost tier is a VIP pool

deck with six additional teak cabanas, a bar and a DJ booth.

Forte, the bellman, recently viewed the improvements. "The

place is so pretty, the first time I saw it I thought I was in the

wrong hotel," he said. "I said to my wife, 'Just take a look at

what money can do."'

As a senior mortgage underwriter, Keysha Cooper was proud of her

ability to spot fraud and other problems in a loan application. A

decade of vetting mortgage documents had taught her plenty, she

says.

But as a senior mortgage underwriter at Washington Mutual during

the late, great mortgage boom, Cooper says she found herself in a

vise. Brokers squeezed her from one side, her superiors from the

other, she says, and both pressured her to approve loans, no matter

what.

"At WaMu it wasn't about the quality of the loans; it was about

the numbers," Cooper says. "They didn't care if we were giving

loans to people that didn't qualify. Instead, it was how many loans

did you guys close and fund?"

Cooper, 35, was laid off a year ago and is still unemployed. She

came forward to discuss her experiences at the bank to help

shareholders recover money from WaMu executives.

Cooper is one of 89 employees whose stories fill a voluminous

complaint filed against officers of the company by the Ontario

Teachers' Pension Plan board, a big shareholder. Topping the list

of defendants is Kerry K. Killinger, the WaMu chief executive who

was ousted in mid-September.

WaMu was seized by federal regulators in late September, the

biggest bank failure in the nation's history. It was sold to

JPMorgan Chase for $1.9 billion.

The shareholder complaint depicts WaMu's mortgage lending

operation as a boiler room where volume was paramount and

questionable loans were pushed through because they were more

profitable to the company.

When underwriters refused to approve dubious loans, they were

punished, she says.

Cooper started at WaMu in 2003 and lasted three and a half

years. At first, she was allowed to do her job, she says. In

February 2007, though, the pressure became intense. WaMu executives

told employees they were not making enough loans and had to get

their numbers up, she says.

"They started giving loan officers free trips if they closed so

many loans, fly them to Hawaii for a month," Cooper recalls. "One

of my account reps went to Jamaica for a month because he closed

$3.5 million in loans that month."

Although Cooper couldn't see it, the wheels were already coming

off the subprime bus.

"If a loan came from a top loan officer, they didn't care what

the situation was, you had to make that loan work," she says.

"You were like a bad person if you declined a loan."

One loan file was filled with so many discrepancies that she

felt certain it involved mortgage fraud. She turned the loan down,

she says, only to be scolded by her supervisor.

"She told me, 'This broker has closed over $1 million with us

and there is no reason you cannot make this loan work,"' Cooper

says. "I explained to her the loan was not good at all, but she

said I had to sign it."

The argument did not end there, however. Cooper says her

immediate boss complained to the team manager about the loan

rejection and asked that Cooper be "written up," with a formal

letter of complaint placed in her personnel file.

Cooper said the team manager told her to "restructure" the

loan to make it work. "I said, how can you restructure fraud? This

is a fraudulent loan," she recalls.

Cooper says that her bosses placed her on probation for 30 days

for refusing to approve the loan and that her team manager signed

off on the loan.

Four months later, the loan was in default, she says. The

borrower had not made a single payment. "They tried to hang it on

me," Cooper said, "but I said, 'No, I put in the system that I am

not approving this loan."'

Brokers often tried to bribe Cooper to approve loans, she says.

One offered to pay $900 to send her son to football summer boot

camp if she would approve a loan that had been declined by a host

of other lenders. "I told him no and not to disrespect me like

that again," Cooper says.

Hidden fees meant brokers could easily make between $20,000 and

$40,000 on a $500,000 loan, Cooper says.

"WaMu was allowing brokers to get 6 to 8 percent off one

loan," she says. "If I had a loan where the borrower was already

tight and then I saw the broker is getting $10,000 or $20,000, I

would cut their fees back. They would get so upset with me."

Cooper says that loans she turned down were often approved by

her superiors. One in particular came back to haunt WaMu.

Vetting a loan one day, Cooper says she became suspicious when a

photograph of the house being bought showed one street address

while documents deeper in the file showed a different address. She

contacted the appraiser, and recalls that he said that he must have

erred and that he would send her the correct documents.

"So then he sent me an appraisal with a picture of the same

house but this time with the right number on it," Cooper recalls.

"I looked the address up in our system and could not find it. I

called the appraiser and said, 'Please investigate."'

The appraiser came back, reporting that a visit to the

California property had found everything in order and in agreement

with the original appraisal. "I was so for sure that it was fraud

I wanted to get on an airplane," Cooper says.

The $800,000 loan was approved, but not by Cooper. Six months

later, it defaulted, she says. "When they went to foreclose on the

house, they found it was an empty lot," she recalls. "I remember

clear as day this manager comes over to me and asks, 'Do you

remember this loan?' I knew just what she was talking about."

Rejecting loan after loan, however, gave her battle fatigue.

"The more you fight, the more you get in trouble," she says. She

was written up three or four times at WaMu.

After WaMu's mortgage lending unit laid her off, she applied for

work in its retail banking division. She was turned down, she

suspects, because of the critical letters in her personnel file.

Cooper's biggest regret, she says, is that she did not reject

more loans. "I swear 60 percent of the loans I approved I was made

to," she says. "If I could get everyone's name, I would write

them apology letters."

Chad Johnson, a partner at Bernstein, Litowitz Berger &amp;amp;

Grossmann, is lead counsel for shareholders in the suit. He said:

"Killinger pocketed tens of millions of dollars from WaMu, while

investors were left with worthless stock." With WaMu gone, he

added, "it is all the more important that Killinger and his

co-defendants are held accountable."

The lawyer representing WaMu and Killinger did not return a

phone call seeking comment.

Cooper hopes to return to the mortgage business soon. "I loved

underwriting because it's about being able to put a person in their

dream home," she says. "But messing these borrowers around was

wrong."

It is 10:30 a.m., two hours before the Florida Gators will kick

off to Ole Miss, and Max, a 19-year-old freshman, is laboring to

explain how he feels about the drinking age.

"Per-son-al-ly," he says, punching out each slurred syllable,

"I do agree the age should be lowered. It will cut down on binge

drinking." He throws an arm around a fraternity brother. "But we

take care of each other. We will not let anyone drink under the

influence." He pauses. "I mean drive under the influence. I'm

sorry. I'm drunk already. It's been a long morning."

Max and his brothers are pre-gaming. A dozen of them strut about

the courtyard of their house on the University of Florida's

Fraternity Row, each nursing a cold beer in a foam hugger. A

Frisbee flies as Jimi Hendrix blares from the loudspeakers.

The only thing unusual about this day's pre-gaming is that it

actually precedes a game. In the two decades since the legal

drinking age was raised to 21, the term has come to encompass any

rapid consumption of alcohol in private before venturing out to

venues where drinking may not be possible.

This assumes that alcohol is readily available to underage

college students, which of course it is. As ever, older students

provide liquor to friends who are younger, and fake IDs remain as

pervasive on campus as sweatpants.

Though college drinking levels have declined slightly from peaks

in the early 1980s, surveys find that more than 8 in 10 college

students drink and that 4 in 10 are binge drinkers (meaning that in

the previous two weeks a man had consumed at least five drinks in a

sitting, or a woman four).

Here in Gainesville, binge drinking remains ritualized behavior

for many of the 51,000 students, even as admission to the

university has become increasingly selective. Whether or not the

university deserves its Princeton Review ranking as this year's

best party school, few in this classic college town find it

outlandish that the Gators have placed in the top 20 four years

running. To walk the campus and environs on a football weekend is

to navigate an endless river of alcohol, from the flowing taps of

the Swamp Restaurant, a popular hangout near the stadium, to the

off-campus bungalow on Northwest Second Avenue that houses one of

the world's larger beer bongs.

College presidents, while philosophical about the historical

bonds between academe and alcohol, are immensely frustrated by the

universal flouting of the law and the persistence of binge

drinking. Each year, they see its tragic consequences in the form

of alcohol poisonings, drunken-driving arrests, date rapes and

barroom brawls. Even at universities, like Florida, that make

aggressive efforts at enforcement and education, administrators say

they believe success is limited to the margins.

And so this summer, 130 exasperated college presidents, many

from the country's most prestigious institutions, boldly shifted

the debate by calling for a re-examination of the drinking age. In

July, they signed a manifesto, declaring that "21 is not working"

and asserting that "a culture of dangerous, clandestine

'binge-drinking' -- often conducted off campus -- has developed."

In their open letter, labeled the Amethyst Initiative after the

violet gemstone thought by the Greeks to ward off intoxication,

they did not explicitly call for lowering the age from 21. But the

effort's organizer, John M. McCardell Jr., the former president of

Middlebury College, directs a nonprofit group that calls for

licensing drinkers as young as 18. Like drivers, they would first

have to pass a course on responsible alcohol use.

Polls have found little support for lowering the drinking age.

But with surveys showing that three-fourths of high school seniors

have consumed alcohol, McCardell argues that the law is so

meaningless as to breed disrespect. His proposal, he says, would

provide a mechanism for educating youth on the perils of binge

drinking while removing the forbidden-fruit incentive that he says

contributes to it.

"If you assume, and I think you have to assume, that alcohol is

a reality in the lives of 18-, 19- and 20-year-olds, then you've

got two choices," McCardell says. "You can try to change the

reality. We've been trying to do that for 24 years and haven't been

that successful. That leaves creating the safest possible

environment for the reality. and there's plenty of evidence to

support that 21 doesn't do that."

He adds: "We can't know that 18 would improve binge drinking,

but we can't know that it would fail either. If we were able to

draw one at-risk life out of the shadows and into the sunlight,

would the change be worth it?"

It is not a rhetorical question. One recent government study

estimated that 1,700 college students die each year in

alcohol-related incidents, more than 599,000 are injured and more

than 97,000 are victims of an alcohol-fueled sexual assault or date

rape.

In recent surveys by the University of Florida's health care

center, about a third of students said they had blacked out from

heavy drinking in the past year, half said they had vomited, a

fourth said they had gotten into an alcohol-related fight and more

than a fifth reported driving under the influence.

But Alexander C. Wagenaar, a University of Florida

epidemiologist who has studied the drinking age for more than two

decades, says McCardell ignores evidence that raising the age has

saved lives, especially on the roads. The National Highway

Transportation Safety Administration estimates that despite poor

adherence to drinking age restrictions, each year about 900 fewer

people die because the legal age is 21.

After assessing 48 studies, Wagenaar concluded, "The

preponderance of evidence suggests that higher drinking ages reduce

alcohol consumption." Furthermore, he says, there is no

statistical evidence that binge drinking increases along with the

rising legal age, or that it will decline with a drop. Indeed, an

annual University of Michigan survey shows that binge drinking

among college students actually peaked in 1984 and has fallen

since, albeit slightly.

As it happens, that is the year Congress threatened to reduce

highway money for states that did not raise the drinking age to 21.

Most of the country had designated 21 as the drinking age after

Prohibition; then 29 states lowered it during the early 1970s, when

18-year-old draftees were being shipped to Vietnam. Studies soon

showed an increase in traffic accidents among teenagers, and by

1988 all states had returned to 21.

The Amethyst Initiative's signatories include the presidents or

chancellors of Bennington, Colgate, Dartmouth, Duke, Johns Hopkins,

Ohio State, Syracuse, Tufts and the university systems of Maryland

and Massachusetts. They do not include J. Bernard Machen, who

assumed the presidency at Florida in 2004.

In August, Machen and his vice president for student affairs,

Patricia Telles-Irvin, bluntly rejected the initiative in an op-ed

piece in The St. Petersburg Times. There was no evidence, they

wrote, that the 21 age limit encouraged more clandestine binge

drinking than it discouraged and every reason to think that

lowering the age might exacerbate the problem.

"Does anyone really think that if 18-year-olds could buy

alcohol, the social passport conferred by heavy drinking would lose

its cachet?" they asked.

There has been much to celebrate on this sports-crazed campus

since Machen's arrival. The Gators won the NCAA football

championship in 2006 and back-to-back basketball championships in

2006 and 2007. The quarterback Tim Tebow brought home last year's

Heisman Trophy as the outstanding college player.

Academically, the state's flagship university is becoming more

selective in its admissions. With a lottery-financed scholarship

program providing free tuition to almost all in-state freshmen, the

university is twice as selective as it was 15 years ago, admitting

fewer than 4 in 10 applicants. The percentage of freshmen scoring

at least a 600 on the critical reading portion of the SAT has

soared to 70 percent, from 16 percent in 1993.

Machen had not planned on becoming a crusader against binge

drinking when he left the presidency of the University of Utah,

where alcohol was hardly a problem. He had spent much of his career

as a dean of dentistry, and the Florida trustees had hired him to

focus on graduate education and academic ranking.

But in his first two years in Gainesville, six students died in

alcohol-related incidents -- one from alcohol poisoning, two in

falls, two in traffic accidents and one in a fight. As he met their

families, he started to take the waste of promise personally.

"That's when I said, 'Wait a minute,"' Machen says. "The

intensity of those interactions made me want to take some effort in

this area. It wasn't anything I wanted to do, to be honest. A lot

of presidents are counseled against doing this because of the

negative interactions you have with the student body. But we

thought we had to."

Machen fears that Florida's party-school reputation is holding

back its academic ambition. But he is realistic about his ability

to alter a deeply ingrained culture. He emphasizes that he is "not

into abstinence" and that he supports "responsible drinking" as

part of a student's preparation for life. But seeing what he has

seen, he cannot wave the white flag. "The ones who are in danger

of being habitually affected by it are the ones we'd like to get

after," he says. "I think maybe at the margin, for the really

significantly affected kids, we might make some difference."

Machen has watched his campus' binge-drinking rate drop -- to 38

percent last spring from 57 percent in fall 2004 -- as the

university has toughened enforcement, mandated alcohol education

and banned beer advertising, among other initiatives. A number of

other colleges have taken similar multidimensional approaches, and

a third ban alcohol on campus altogether.

It is allowed at the University of Florida. But in September,

the trustees clarified long-standing prohibitions against

"common-source containers," like kegs, as well as "excessive

rapid consumption." That regulation bans drinking games like beer

pong (in which contestants toss table-tennis balls into beer-filled

cups, forcing their opponents to chug), keg standing (in which the

drinker is held inverted over an open tap) and alcohol luges (in

which shots of liquor slalom down an ice block).

Since 2006, the university has required freshmen to pass a

90-minute online alcohol education course before registering for

spring semester. The year before, it banned alcohol ads from sports

events, concerts and broadcasts of athletic events (when it has

contractual control). The school is now drafting a policy to

clarify that intoxicated students who are brought to an emergency

room will not be reported to the university judicial system.

With the help of a federal grant and advice from students, the

campus health center has papered buses with messages cautioning

against binge drinking. One provocative advertisement warns of

"sketchy drunk guys." Another depicts a woman bent over a commode

and pleads: "Don't be that girl!" A third, showing a beer bottle

with a flaccid neck, advises that "drinking too much may

disappoint you ... and your partner." The ads are designed to

change students' perceptions of what constitutes normal behavior, a

national movement that has become all the rage in campaigns against

binge drinking.

The university also stages alcohol-free "Gator Nights" on

Fridays, with films, carnival games and a midnight breakfast that

typically attract more than 1,000 students. Free food seems to be a

major draw. When the funnel-cake maker announced at 11 p.m. that he

had run out of batter, a long line of students let out a collective

groan and dispersed.

"Everyone's off to the kegger," observed Justine R.

McConville, a sophomore from Fort Myers, Fla.

Her classmate, Brad E. Ibach, agreed: "There's no keeping this

crowd here now."

The university and the city have had little success convincing

tavern owners to stop luring cash-strapped students with

two-for-one specials and Ladies Night promotions. They are now

working on an ordinance that would force bars to obtain licenses to

admit underage patrons, under threat of revocation if the police

catch minors being served.

The university accommodates reality by providing buses -- the

"Later Gator" -- to transport students who stagger out of the bars

at the 2 a.m. closing time, and taxi stands have been added. But

the campus, city and county police vigorously enforce the underage

drinking and open-container laws.

Machen says there has been a noticeable toughening since April

3, 2007, the day after the Gators won their second consecutive NCAA

basketball title. Amid the celebration, an intoxicated student from

another university drove his pickup truck onto a closed street and

struck and killed a Gainesville police lieutenant.

In a city of 114,000 full-time residents, the university and

city police made 2,190 arrests for alcohol-related offenses last

year. The police cannot say how many violators were students, but

the university judicial system heard 419 cases. More than 50

arrests were made during this year's Ole Miss weekend in September,

which was muted by the Gators' loss.

On game days, campus cops patrol Fraternity Row by bicycle. On

weekend nights, the Gainesville Police Department's "Party

Patrol" busts up loud parties when neighbors complain. Other

officers roam the teeming bars and clubs, checking driver's

licenses with flashlights.

"This day and age, they all look young to me, so I'm checking

everybody," says Cpl. Tscharna M. Senn, squeezing through bodies

at a club called Gotham, one of 32 bars in the compact downtown

district.

To maximize the deterrent effect, Senn and her fellow officers

cuff offenders' hands behind their backs for a perp walk in front

of their friends. When the police went fishing at the Swamp one

Wednesday night in mid-September, they hauled out 10 underage

drinkers, half of them members of the student government.

David N. Khey, a doctoral student in criminology, has calculated

that at least 1 of every 20 Florida students who arrived as

freshmen in 2004 had an arrest record by the end of 2007, usually

for an alcohol offense. A university spokesman says that it does

not keep such records but that Khey's estimate seems high.

Offenders facing the university judicial system may have to sit

through a seminar or perform community service, with suspensions

and expulsions reserved for serious offenses like driving under the

influence. Underage drinkers caught by city police typically face a

fine of $75 to $125.

Possession of a fake or doctored driver's license is a felony.

As a result, students have learned it is wiser to borrow -- or buy --

a driver's license from an older friend who bears a vague

resemblance, as possession of another person's ID is only a

misdemeanor.

Some students say the risk is manageable.

"It's effortless to get a drink in a bar," says Lydia A.

Snyder, 22, a graduate student who also attended Florida as an

undergraduate. "I had a fake ID and got turned away once in five

years."

For others, the threat of a criminal record is sufficient to

deter them in public, and so they pre-game instead, doing their

heaviest drinking behind closed doors before heading to a bar or

club.

"You want to get drunk enough to last your time at the bar,"

explains Joe D. Alleva, a 19-year-old freshman from Daytona Beach,

Fla. "You want to get hammered drunk."

Supply and demand also dictates that minors drink quickly and

heavily, says Justin A. Willems, an 18-year-old freshman. "If

you're under 21 and go to a party and there's alcohol," he says,

"you don't know when you're going to see it again."

Students seem to universally agree that the current law is

ineffectual, and that it may encourage binge drinking. With 18-,

19- and 20-year-olds serving overseas once again, they wonder why

someone old enough to fight is not old enough to drink.

But they also question whether they would drink any less if the

age was 18.

"There's some truth that when you're underage you're a little

more cautious," Snyder says. "Lowering the drinking age would

just give people free rein."

Brett Bonds, 21, a senior from Jacksonville, Fla., adds: "I

don't think a number is really going to stop binge drinking."

Heavy drinking, the students say, is simply part of college

culture. And buying alcohol by the keg or six-pack has one appeal

that transcends age: It is cheaper than buying rounds at a bar.

That helps explain the happy postgame crowd at Gary J. Anthony's

off-campus house, site of a weekly party that features an

ingeniously engineered beer bong. On this weekend, the Rube

Goldberg contraption is forcing a stream of Natural Light up a

20-foot tower, then down plastic tubes into 40 waiting mouths. (Two

weeks later, for the game against Louisiana State, the bong was

expanded to 100 tubes.)

As at other student gatherings, Machen is not very popular here.

Some students call him a "control freak." Others assume, because

he came from Utah, that he is a Mormon teetotaler, though he is

neither. In mock tribute, a local bar has christened a drink "the

Bernie."

"He's trying to turn UF into the Ivy League, all academics,"

complains Anthony, 22, a junior majoring in advertising.

Telles-Irvin, the vice president for student affairs, takes a

different view. "It's an uphill battle, but it's a mountain worth

climbing," she says. "I remember some students coming to me and

saying, 'You're just trying to ruin our fun.' And I said, 'No, I'm

just trying to keep you alive."'

For their wedding at Oz Farm in Mendocino County, Calif., Kate

Schatz and Jason Pontius came up with unusual gift baskets, which

included head lamps, flashlights, walkie-talkies and other items

better suited for construction workers than teary-eyed guests.

But this was a farm wedding, without hotel-like amenities, and

the couple from Oakland, Calif., wanted to make the 30 or so

friends and relatives staying the weekend as comfortable as

possible.

Unfortunately, they forgot about the bats.

"There were eight bats in our cabin and we had no idea how to

get them out," said Julia Mayer, 29, who was rooming with her

boyfriend and three other guests. "One of us had a head lamp on,

so they were flying in our faces. We opened the window and tried to

turn off the lights, but nobody could see anything. We slept

somewhere else."

Weddings celebrated at farms are not exactly new, but just as

the wine craze decades ago sparked a vineyard wedding industry, the

green crusade, with its emphasis on organic and local products,

seems to be spurring interest in farms as the ideal venue for vows.

But these weddings are not for every bride and groom. The couple

must want not only an outdoor setting, but also a close -- some

might say too close -- connection with the land. While working farms

may offer romantic sunsets over golden fields, and truly local,

organic food and flowers, couples must also be game for some rural

challenges, like uncertain electricity and plumbing and the

occasional runaway chicken or pig, not to mention a family of bats.

In other words, Bridezillas need not bother.

"If you're the kind of person who wants everything to work out

exactly right, I wouldn't let you have it here," said Judy

Lessler, the owner of Harland's Creek Farm, a historic site in

Pittsboro, N.C., which she is preparing for weddings starting next

year. "This venue is for people who like the outdoors, love the

romance of it and are willing to be somewhat flexible."

The farm as a wedding site owes much to agritourism. About

50,000 farms, or roughly 2 percent of all farming operations in the

country, were open to the public in 2004, offering weddings,

lodging, hayrides and horseback riding, according to a survey

released last year by the Department of Agriculture. The survey is

the first to quantify farm-based recreation.

While some farms hold only a few weddings a year, others can't

keep up with demand. Kruger's Farm, on a river island near

Portland, Ore., started holding weddings six years ago and as many

as 50 weddings are now held there annually. It has requests for

three times that many, said Don Kruger, the owner.

"The response has been startling," Kruger said. "It's kind of

an earthy crowd, in their 20s and 30s, educated, who have very

strong leanings toward the environment.

Millie Martini Bratten, editor in chief of Brides magazine, said

that while the majority of weddings still take place in traditional

sites like restaurants and country clubs, her magazine regularly

receives wedding submissions set in farms and ranches.

"People want a relaxed atmosphere and they want to have fun,"

said Jane Eckert, an agritourism consultant who last summer

launched RuralBounty.com, a database of farms, ranches, wineries

and other sites open to the public.

Schatz, 30, and Pontius, 38, who invited 140 guests, were also

drawn to the idea that all their organic flowers, salad greens,

herbs and apples for pies (in lieu of the wedding cake) were grown

at Oz Farm, which is host to a few weddings a year.

"We wanted to support a farm that does this organic work rather

than have the money going to a hotel," said Schatz, a fiction

writer who lectures at the University of California, Santa Cruz.

Schatz and Pontius, a Web designer, also liked the laid-back

attitude. They could decorate any way they wanted, sing karaoke in

the barn as late as they wished and generally have the run of the

place. "We spent half the time on a river drinking beer," Pontius

said.

Farm weddings can cost a fraction of nuptials at more

traditional sites, because couples usually take care of services

like catering and music. And small farmers like pulling out the

hay-covered welcome wagon because it helps them survive.

"This is the future," said Kruger, noting these activities

provide a third of Kruger Farm's net income. "It's what farms are

doing to try to make it."

At Oz Farm, weddings and retreats provide half the farm's

revenues. "It's been a big help," said Shauna Boyd, who leases

the business with her husband.

But farms trying to expand their operations beyond the strictly

agricultural sometimes face opposition from neighbors or county

officials worried about issues like increased traffic, and find

themselves battling zoning and land-use laws.

"Crowds can sometimes surprise farmers new to agritourism,"

said Barbara Berst Adams, author of "The New Agritourism: Hosting

Community and Tourists on Your Farm." "People need bathrooms,

first-aid kits and a place for trash. City kids don't seem to know

the goats aren't video games -- they can bite back. And liability

coverage for both the bride and groom and the farmer really are

issues that need to have been dealt with ahead of time."

Not every farm wedding is glamour free. George W. Winborn and

Glenn Goodfellow, of Portland, Ore., wanted a Kentucky Derby-style

garden party with women in hats and chiffon and men in seersucker

suits. The couple staged their stylish celebration at Kruger's last

August with 135 guests on a lawn surrounded by a field of dahlias,

blueberries, a pigpen and chicken coop. The two grooms made the

cloth napkins, centerpieces and hand-stamped place cards, while

friends made the desserts and party favors.

"We're a very do-it-yourself couple and there was a lot of room

for us to leave our mark on it," said Winborn, 35, a writer.

The setting was a throwback to the grooms' childhood. Winborn

grew up on his grandparents' farm in Arkansas and Goodfellow, 31, a

baker, spent summers in farm camps and visiting family in North

Dakota. Winborn is an expert chicken coop builder who raised

chickens in the couple's backyard when they lived in Dallas.

"People would joke, 'You'll have chicken ring bearers,"'

Goodfellow said. "Some people couldn't comprehend that we were

having a relatively upscale wedding in that location."

They asked, "'Do I have to wear a tie?' Of course you have to

wear a tie," he said he told guests.

Truth be told, some guests must be humored.

Jodi Levy, 29, a designer of gymnastics apparel, and her groom,

Darren Stowell, 35, an executive with a nonprofit organization,

provided their 140 guests at Kruger's with sunscreen packets and

bug spray cans in stainless steel buckets.

"Anybody who would want to get married at a Marriott was

worried," Levy said. Yet some guests can only take so much.

Jonah Silas, 30, a computer consultant, and Yuri Futamura, 29, a

manager at a social-justice foundation, married last month in the

redwood grove at Oz Farm. They said in an interview that some of

the guests passed on the offer to stay in the farm's cabins and

instead booked themselves at the local bed and breakfast.

Perhaps they reacted to the couple's e-mail warnings, sent

before the wedding: "Some of you will have to take a mini-hike to

get to your cabins, even cross a river (over a footbridge)!"

Or, "Electronics like laptops, stereos, cellphone/camera

chargers and hair dryers need to stay home."

Whatever the hardship for guests, most couples find farm

nuptials worth the extra discomfort. Levy was never too concerned

about her wedding at Kruger's, even though she had attended another

farm wedding where temperatures rose to 110 degrees and, she said,

"people were melting."

She brimmed with her memories of vows said under an oak tree, a

reception on a grass field surrounded by a garden of dahlias and a

sunset that lit up the sky through late evening.

Asked if the mosquitoes ever showed up, she said: "I'm sure. I

was oblivious. It was my wedding day."

Kendall Dye remembers precisely when he

found the e-mail message that caused him to question his employer,

ATK Thiokol, the aerospace and military contracting giant. He was

working at home on a Saturday morning in 2005, poring over dozens

of files.

The e-mail message showed that ATK was warned years earlier that

a military flare it produced might endanger American soldiers using

it.

"I thought, oh my God," Dye recalls. "I couldn't believe that

we knew."

As far as he could tell, the company had ignored the warning.

At the time, Dye, an engineer at ATK, was investigating the

safety of flares that his company sold to the U.S. Army and Air

Force. What he found led him to file a lawsuit contending that ATK

cheated taxpayers by selling fragile flares and, by doing so,

knowingly put soldiers at risk.

The flares aren't the small, hand-held versions seen in war

movies, but 3-foot-long, 36-pound aluminum tubes packed with

propellant that burn at more than 3,600 degrees Fahrenheit, hot

enough to melt steel.

When attached to parachutes, the tubes are released from the air

and burn for several minutes, bathing a square mile of battlefield

in bright or infrared light.

They are essential tools in the U.S. arsenal. Early versions of

the devices were used in Vietnam, and they have been used on tens

of thousands of combat missions since then, according to ATK.

They are so powerful that if one were to ignite accidentally --

which, according to Dye, was possible -- it could set off nearby

ordnance, burn a hole in the hull of a warship or melt through the

skin of an airplane high in the sky, according to his lawyers.

At a time when the country is fighting two wars and has more

than 180,000 troops deployed in Iraq and Afghanistan, Dye's

contentions may raise anew questions about the reliability of

military contractors and the safety of their products.

Lawyers for ATK, which was acquired by Alliant Techsystems of

Eden Prairie, Minn., in 2001 and is now called ATK Launch Systems,

contend that the company did nothing wrong. They say that the

flares have injured no one -- an assertion no one has disproved. The

ATK flares have also been redesigned since Dye first raised his

concerns.

"ATK is proud of the fact that we provide the nation's armed

forces with systems that consistently perform exactly to design in

the battlefield," the company says in a statement. Although the

Justice Department has signed on as a plaintiff in Dye's lawsuit --

which seeks to recover tens of millions of dollars paid for

thousands upon thousands of flares -- ATK says the lawsuit is

baseless.

"ATK has determined the allegations made by the Department of

Justice in the ongoing lawsuit to be wholly without merit," the

company says.

But Dye has a different opinion. "Ethics and values got thrown

out the window when there was a lot of money at stake," he says.

The Defense Department pays more than $408 billion for goods and

services. Watchdog groups and some lawmakers have raised concerns

about the government's ability to monitor all that spending. A

report to Congress in March by the department's own inspector

general warned of an "increasing gap between resources and

oversight, which results in a corresponding increase in risk for

fraud, waste and abuse."

Should the government win at trial in the lawsuit against ATK,

it may be entitled to recover three times its damages; Dye's

lawyers estimate that the total could reach well into the hundreds

of millions of dollars.

That the government chose to join Dye's lawsuit -- the Justice

Department is not obligated to take up whistle-blower claims --

suggests that the case is a strong one, said Danielle Brian,

executive director of the Project on Government Oversight, a

Washington watchdog group.

"It means that the government believes that the company knew

that they were providing faulty products," Brian said. "This

isn't a mistake. It's willfully making money off endangering

soldiers. I can't imagine anything worse."

For decades, ATK has sold versions of its flares not only to the

U.S. government, but also to the armed forces of other countries,

including Canada, Italy, Colombia and Spain. The devices cost at

least $700 each, and contracts for bulk purchases totaled millions

of dollars.

In the late 1990s, military buyers complained that too often,

the flares failed to ignite. ATK, which has a huge complex in the

open spaces of northern Utah, permitted a team of engineering

students at Utah State University to design an improved igniter.

(The relationship developed after the university approached ATK

seeking real-world projects for its students; the company, like

others in the industry, often joined with universities to conduct

research.)

Because the ignition mechanism was a relatively simple,

mechanical device that used no proprietary technology, ATK

officials thought that the project offered a low-risk learning

experience.

The students, under the supervision of their professors, came up

with a system that used the force of a flare's opening parachute to

snap a polycarbonate plastic bar, about half an inch long and a

tenth of an inch thick. When the plastic broke, it activated a

series of reactions that ignited the propellant. The students never

tested the new system to see whether the flares might ignite if

they were dropped or accidentally jostled; they couldn't conduct

such a test because they did not have access to complete, live

flares. Specifications called for the flares to be able to

withstand a fall of 10 feet without igniting.

ATK didn't perform those so-called drop tests, either. The

company contends that the flares had been used for a long time

without any problems, and so neither the company nor its customers

were concerned about accidental ignition. The company began

shipping flares with the new igniter in 2000, according to

government court filings.

The Air Force tested the flares for reliability at Eglin Air

Force Base in Florida in June 2000, launching them from warplanes.

The flares ignited 97 percent of the time, exceeding the Air

Force's goal. But the Air Force did not perform tests to see

whether the flares might accidentally ignite if dropped.

Citing pending litigation, an Air Force spokesman declined to

comment.

Lawyers for ATK contend that the armed forces waived tests that

would have determined whether the flares could meet the 10-foot

standard. They have further argued that without the results of

those tests, the government could not claim that the flares were

flawed.

The first report of a potential problem surfaced in 2005, after

the U.S. government and the armed forces of other countries had

been buying the redesigned flares for five years. The Navy,

evaluating whether to buy the devices, simulated accidentally

dropping the flares, letting them fall from 40 feet. They ignited

on hitting the ground. Flares also ignited after falling 30 feet

and 20 feet, the Navy found.

Yet it was still possible that the flares met the 10-foot

standard even if they did not meet the Navy's more stringent

40-foot requirement. It was up to Dye, who had recently been named

manager of ATK's flare program in Utah, to figure out what was

going on.

Dye, 54, a tall man with gray hair and a neatly trimmed

mustache, was a 21-year veteran at ATK. He joined one of the

company's predecessors after finishing college and after a

three-year stint in the Army as a mechanic. Fixing things suited

his temperament: methodical, logical, exacting.

First, he said, he asked an engineer to analyze how much of a

fall that critical piece of plastic in the igniter could survive.

Dye thought that perhaps the plastic could be strengthened to meet

the Navy's requirement. Instead, he was stunned by the answer he

says he got from the engineer: It could snap after a fall of 11

inches -- not 11 feet, but 11 inches.

Dye decided to test the flares directly; the company says he

never sought approval to conduct the tests and didn't document the

results properly.

According to court documents, on Nov. 9, 2005, he and several

colleagues took five flares to a testing site in ATK's complex.

They dropped a flare from 10 feet. It ignited.

They dropped a flare from five feet. It ignited, too.

By the end of the day, Dye and a safety engineer had warned

employees to keep clear of the flares. Production stopped.

That afternoon, the company convened a "war room" of about a

dozen experts to investigate the flares, Dye said, and he was part

of the team. No formal notice was given to buyers of the flares;

ATK asserts that a company official informally advised an Air Force

representative.

No one, Dye said, wanted him to perform any more tests. In his

view, there were simple questions that ATK had to answer to

identify the extent of the problem. For starters, if the company's

contracts for years had required flares to survive a 10-foot drop

test, he said, "Did we do the test or did we not do the test?"

No one, he said, seemed to know. Two days after his drop tests,

Dye asked a secretary for the keys to the office where copies of

contracts were kept. He took the files covering the period shortly

before and after the introduction of the new igniter and brought

them to the windowless conference room where the team was working.

Dye says he remembered saying, "We need to get to the bottom of

what happened."

At the end of the day, he carried the files to his pickup for

the 45-minute drive from the desert to his house, and, that night,

he started reading.

Dye and his wife of 24 years, Elizabeth, live here in North

Ogden, about 50 miles north of Salt Lake City.

The house is remarkably neat, orderly and full of evidence of

Dye's disciplined, project-oriented approach to life. He built

wood-edged glass boxes for three dolls on a shelf above one

doorway. Behind the house sits the hot tub that he installed. In

the garage, he keeps the power drill, saw and other tools that he

uses for those projects.

And on that Saturday in 2005, his project was reviewing the

files related to the flare program.

Among the documents was a printout of an e-mail message sent in

2000 by Ray W. Beus, then the ATK test engineer assigned to

evaluate and report to his supervisors about an aspect of the

student-designed igniter. In the message, Beus warned about a

"more realistic scenario, which might present a significant hazard

to equipment/personnel: If the flare assembly receives a

significant impact (i.e., dropped) I can foresee" the plastic

restraint in the igniter breaking, he wrote, "resulting in

complete ignition of the flare."

Beus recommended performing drop tests to gauge the safety of

the flares with the new igniter. Then he added, "You can relax,

rest assured I did not include this comment/recommendation in the

memo although I would like to have."

But according to the government, no drop tests had been

performed and the company had not passed along Beus' concerns or

recommendation to the Air Force. (In 2003, the company conducted an

"abbreviated" test of a single flare, according to the

government, but the test controlled the angle at which the flare

hit the ground.)

Beus still works at ATK, according to the company. ATK declined

to make him available for an interview, citing the pending

litigation, and Beus did not return phone calls.

After finding the e-mail message, Dye said he called his

supervisor, Robert Winter, the director of flare and decoy

programs. "He listened to me read it," Dye said, referring to the

message. "There was like a pause, and he said, 'Keep that close to

your chest.' I knew what he meant: don't tell anybody."

ATK has strongly denied that anyone at the company told Dye to

keep quiet. The company, again citing the pending litigation, did

not make Winter available for an interview, and he did not return

calls to his office.

Over that weekend, Dye said, he continued reviewing files but

found nothing as significant as the Beus e-mail message. Unable to

sleep, Dye rose well before dawn on Monday, loaded the box of files

into his truck and headed back to ATK's complex.

At the office, he assembled copies of documents to distribute to

everyone in the war room. Dye said he did not share Beus' email

message because Winter had told him not to.

The ATK team was not focused on determining just how fragile the

flares were, Dye said. Instead, he said, his colleagues looked to

see whether a third-party supplier might have modified the flares

and thus introduced a defect.

"They went to the end of that road," Dye said, "and the buck

could not be passed." ATK denies that the company tried to avoid

responsibility.

A week after Dye first conducted the drop tests, ATK sent a

letter to customers, advising them that the flares "may be more

sensitive" than specifications allowed, if dropped.

Dye was furious. "I objected to that letter," he said. "It

had no mention of an 11-inch possibility."

A few weeks later, the Army and the Air Force notified ATK that

they would not accept 6,085 flares that had been manufactured and

awaited delivery. (The company says it retrofitted the flares on

its own dime, modifying the igniter, and delivered them. ATK says

the modified flares met the 10-foot requirement.)

In the weeks after he found the Beus memo, Dye said, he grew

increasingly concerned that the company was not going to fix flares

equipped with the igniter he had tested. He decided to find a way

to tell the government what he had found, and, on the Web, he

learned of the False Claims Act.

That federal law permits private individuals to sue on behalf of

the United States if they believe that they have inside knowledge

of fraud against the government. At first, the lawsuits are kept

secret, under court seal, while investigators look into the

accusations and decide whether to join the case. If the government

intervenes and recovers money, the whistle-blower can receive up to

30 percent of the amount.

Dye also found the Web site for Phillips &amp;amp; Cohen, a law firm

specializing in whistle-blower cases. He filled out an online

application and asked for representation.

"I felt like the only avenue I had was to go outside," Dye

says. He said that he was not motivated by money, and when asked

what he would do if he received millions from the lawsuit, he

paused for a moment and then said he would like a snowmobile.

Eric R. Havian, a lawyer at the firm who is representing Dye,

said he could not recall another case involving such large dollar

amounts that had evidence like the Beus e-mail message. "You don't

see those kinds of documents very often," he says.

The law firm filed a complaint under seal in April 2006. Within

a month, despite Havian's warnings that no lawsuit was a sure

thing, Dye notified ATK that he intended to quit.

"I just couldn't go out and play the game of looking my bosses

in the eye," Dye said, even though no one at the company then knew

that he was working with the government.

The Justice Department investigated Dye's case and decided to

join it just over a year later. Justice Department lawyers declined

to comment on the ATK case.

But the agency's subsequent examinations of ATK's flare program

turned up more unsettling information, according to court

documents.

For example, the government contends that when ATK began

shipping flares with the new igniter in 2000, the company did not

advise one customer, the Canadian government, of the change. (ATK

says the Canadian government was notified.)

The government also contends that when the Canadian government

asked about the igniter, an ATK official responded that the igniter

was the standard in the United States and had been tested by the

Air Force. But the Air Force tests at the Eglin base had not yet

taken place at the time the flares were delivered and in any event

did not include a 10-foot drop test, the lawyers wrote.

In negotiations with the U.S. Army over additional flare

purchases, the company cited the sale to Canada "as evidence of

the flare design suitability," Justice Department lawyers wrote.

In this way, the lawyers contended, ATK misled the Army into

waiving testing requirements. ATK responded that there was no

deception.

ATK appears ready to wage war in court and has challenged each

claim made by the government.

The company has asserted that because the government waived the

drop test, it could not claim that the flares would have failed.

And in court arguments in May, an ATK lawyer dismissed the

significance of the Beus e-mail message.

"It doesn't say that the flares fail to meet a performance spec

or any other contract requirement or even that he thinks they do,"

said Edward J. Shapiro, a partner at Latham &amp;amp; Watkins, which

represents ATK. "He doesn't say there is a contractually required

test that wasn't performed. He doesn't say there is a contractually

required test or, for that matter, any other test that was

performed improperly."

It is not clear how many of the thousands of flares at issue in

the lawsuit are still in use around the world; the U.S. Army

stopped using them, according to Justice Department lawyers, and

the Air Force restricted them to "emergency combat use." Lawyers

for Dye say the government has mothballed at least 40,000 flares.

So far, ATK has retrofitted igniters in 14 flares that were sold

to Chile and about 5,000 sold to Canada, according to a spokesman.

And the company has offered to retrofit at cost the igniters in

tens of thousands of flares sold to the U.S. government. The trial

is set to begin in 2010.

Like his uncle, his grandfather and many of their

neighbors, Arie Versendaal spent decades working at the Maytag

factory here, turning coils of steel into washing machines.

When the plant closed last year, taking 1,800 jobs out of this

town of 16,000 people, it seemed a familiar story of American

industrial decline: another company town brought to its knees by

the vagaries of global trade.

Except that Versendaal has a new factory job, at a plant here

that makes blades for turbines that turn wind into electricity.

Across the road, in the old Maytag factory, another company is

building concrete towers to support the massive turbines. Together,

the two plants are expected to employ nearly 700 people by early

next year.

"Life's not over," Versendaal says. "For 35 years, I pounded

my body to the ground. Now, I feel like I'm doing something

beneficial for mankind and the United States. We've got to get used

to depending on ourselves instead of something else, and wind is

free. The wind is blowing out there for anybody to use."

From the faded steel enclaves of Pennsylvania to the reeling

auto towns of Michigan and Ohio, state and local governments are

aggressively courting manufacturing companies that supply wind

energy farms, solar electricity plants and factories that turn

crops into diesel fuel.

This courtship has less to do with the loftiest aims of

renewable energy proponents -- curbing greenhouse gas emissions and

lessening American dependence on foreign oil -- and more to do with

paychecks. In the face of rising unemployment, renewable energy has

become a crucial source of good jobs, particularly for laid-off

Rust Belt workers.

Amid a presidential election campaign now dominated by economic

concerns, wind turbines and solar panels seem as ubiquitous in

campaign advertisements as the American flag.

No one believes that renewable energy can fully replace what has

been lost on the American factory floor, where people with no

college education have traditionally been able to finance

middle-class lives. Many at Maytag earned $20 an hour in addition

to health benefits. Versendaal now earns about $13 an hour.

Still, it's a beginning in a sector of the economy that has been

marked by wrenching endings, potentially a second chance for

factory workers accustomed to layoffs and diminished aspirations.

In West Branch, Iowa, a town of 2,000 people east of Iowa City,

workers now assemble wind turbines in a former pump factory. In

northwestern Ohio, glass factories suffering because of the

downturn in the auto industry are retooling to make solar energy

panels.

"The green we're interested in is cash," says Norman W.

Johnston, who started a solar cell factory called Solar Fields in

Toledo in 2003.

The market is potentially enormous. In a report last year, the

Energy Department concluded that the United States could make wind

energy the source of one-fifth of its electricity by 2030, up from

about 2 percent today. That would require nearly $500 billion in

new construction and add more than 3 million jobs, the report said.

Much of the growth would be around the Great Lakes, the hardest-hit

region in a country that has lost 4 million manufacturing jobs over

the last decade.

Throw in solar energy along with generating power from crops,

and the continued embrace of renewable energy would create as many

as 5 million jobs by 2030, asserts Daniel M. Kammen, director of

the Renewable and Appropriate Energy Laboratory at the University

of California, Berkeley, and an adviser to the presidential

campaign of Sen. Barack Obama.

The unfolding financial crisis seems likely to slow the pace of

development, making investment harder to secure. But renewable

energy has already gathered what analysts say is unstoppable

momentum. In Texas, the oil baron T. Boone Pickens is developing

what would be the largest wind farm in the world. Most states now

require that a significant percentage of electricity be generated

from wind, solar and biofuels, effectively giving the market a

government mandate.

And many analysts expect the United States to eventually embrace

some form of new regulatory system aimed at curbing global warming

that would force coal-fired electricity plants to pay for the

pollution they emit. That could make wind, solar and other

alternative fuels competitive in terms of the cost of producing

electricity.

Both presidential candidates have made expanding renewable

energy a policy priority. Obama, the Democratic nominee, has

outlined plans to spend $150 billion over the next decade to spur

private companies to invest. Sen. John McCain, the Republican

nominee, has spoken more generally of the need for investment.

In June, more than 12,000 people and 770 exhibitors jammed a

convention center in Houston for the annual American Wind Energy

Association trade show. "Five years ago, we were all walking

around in Birkenstocks," says John M. Brown, managing director of

a turbine manufacturer, Entegrity Wind Systems of Boulder, Colo.,

which had a booth on the show floor. "Now it's all suits. You go

to a seminar, and it's getting taught by lawyers and bankers."

So it goes in Iowa. Perched on the edge of the Great Plains --

the so-called Saudi Arabia of wind -- the state has rapidly become a

leading manufacturing center for wind power equipment.

"We are blessed with certainly some of the best wind in the

world," says Chet Culver, Iowa's governor.

Maytag was born in Newton more than a century ago. Even after

the company swelled into a global enterprise, its headquarters

remained here, in the center of the state, 35 miles east of Des

Moines.

"Newton was an island," says Ted Johnson, the president of

local chapter of the United Automobile Workers, which represented

the Maytaggers. "We saw autos go through hard times, other

industries. But we still had meat on our barbecues."

The end began in the summer of 2005. Whirlpool, the appliance

conglomerate, swallowed up Maytag. As the word spread that local

jobs were doomed -- Whirlpool was consolidating three factories'

production into two -- workers unloaded their memorabilia at Pappy's

Antique Mall downtown: coffee mugs, buttons, award plaques.

"If it said Maytag on it, we bought it," says Susie Jones, the

store manager. "At first, I thought the stuff had value. Then, it

was out of the kindness of my heart. And now I don't have any heart

left. It don't sell. People are mad at them. They ripped out our

soul."

When the town needed a library, a park or a community college,

Maytag lent a hand. The company was Newton's largest employer, its

wages paying for tidy houses, new cars, weddings, retirement

parties and funerals.

As Whirlpool made plans to shutter the factory, state and county

economic development officials scrambled to attract new employers.

In June 2007, the local government dispatched a team to the

American Wind Energy Association show in Los Angeles. Weeks later,

a company called TPI Composites arrived in Newton to have a look.

Based in Arizona, TPI makes wind turbine blades by layering

strips of fiberglass into large molds, requiring a long work space.

The Maytag plant was too short. So local officials showed TPI an

undeveloped piece of land encircled by cornfields on the edge of

town where a new plant could be built.

Although TPI was considering a site in Mexico with low labor

costs, Newton had a better location. Rail lines and Interstate 80

connect it to the Great Plains, where the turbines are needed.

Former Maytag employees were eager for work, and the community

college was ready to teach them blade-making.

Newton won. In exchange for $6 million in tax sweeteners, TPI

promised to hire 500 people by 2010. It has already hired about 225

and is on track to have a work force of 290 by mid-November.

"Getting 500 jobs in one swoop is like winning the lottery,"

says Newton's mayor, Chaz Allen. "We don't have to just roll over

and die."

On a recent afternoon, workers inside the cavernous TPI plant

gaze excitedly at a crane lifting a blade from its mold and

carrying it toward a cleared area. Curved and smooth, the blade

stretches as long as a wing of the largest jets. One worker hums

the theme from "Jaws" as the blade slips past.

Larry Crady, a worker, takes particular pleasure in seeing the

finished product overhead, a broad grin forming across his goateed

face. He used to run a team that made coin-operated laundry

machines at Maytag. Now he supervises a team that lays down

fiberglass strips between turbine moldings. He runs his hand across

the surface of the next blade for signs of unevenness.

"I like this job more than I did Maytag," Crady says. "I feel

I'm doing something to improve our country, rather than just

building a washing machine."

Ask him how long he spent at Maytag and Crady responds

precisely: "23.6 years." Which is to say, 6.4 years short of

drawing a pension whose famously generous terms compelled so many

to work at the Maytag plant. "That's what everyone in Newton was

waiting on," he says. "You could get that 30 and out."

But he is now optimistic about the decades ahead. "I feel

solid," he says. "This is going to be the future. This company is

going to grow huge."

The human resources office at TPI is overseen by Terri Rock, who

used to have the same position at Maytag's corporate headquarters,

where she worked for two decades. In her last years there, her job

was mostly spent ending other people's jobs.

"There was a lot of heartache," she says. "This is a small

town, and you'd have to let people go and then see them at the

grocery store with their families. It was a real tough job at the

end."

Now, Rock starts fresh careers, hiring as many as 20 people a

week. She enjoys the creative spirit of a start-up. "We're not

stuck with the mentality of 'this is how we've done it for the last

35 years,"' she says.

Maytag is gone in large part because of the calculus driving

globalization: Household appliances and so many other goods are now

produced mostly where physical labor is cheaper, in countries like

China and Mexico. But wind turbines and blades are huge and heavy.

The TPI plant is in Iowa largely because of the costs of shipping

such huge items from far away.

"These are American jobs that are hard to export," says Crugar

Tuttle, general manager of the TPI plant.

And these jobs are part of a build-out that is gathering force.

More than $5 billion in venture capital poured into so-called clean

energy technology industries last year in North America and Europe,

according to Cleantech, a trade group. In North America, that

represented nearly a fifth of all venture capital, up from less

than 2 percent in 2000.

"Everybody involved in the wind industry is in a massive hurry

to build out capacity," Tuttle says. "It will feed into a whole

local industry of people making stuff, driving trucks.

Manufacturing has been in decline for decades. This is our greatest

chance to turn it around. It's the biggest ray of hope that we've

got."

Those rays aren't touching everyone, though. Hundreds of former

Maytag workers remain without jobs, or stuck in positions paying

less than half their previous wages. Outside an old union hall,

some former Maytaggers share cigarettes and commiserate about the

strains of starting over.

Johnson, the former local president, is jobless. At 45, he has

slipped back into a world of financial hardship that he thought he

had escaped. His father was a self-employed welder. His mother

worked at an overalls factory.

"I grew up in southern Iowa with nothing," he says. "If

somebody got a new car, everybody heard about it."

When Maytag shut down, his $1,100-a-week paycheck became a $360

unemployment check. He and his wife divorced, turning what once was

a two-income household into a no-income household. He sold off his

truck, his dining room furniture, his Maytag refrigerator -- all in

an effort to pay his mortgage. Last winter, he surrendered his

house to foreclosure.

Johnson has applied for more than 220 jobs, he says, from sales

positions at Lowe's to TPI. He has yet to secure an interview. His

unemployment benefits ran out in May. He no longer has health

insurance. He recently broke a tooth where a filling had been, but

he can't afford to have it fixed.

When his teenage daughter, who lives with him, complained of

headaches, he paid $1,500 out of pocket for an MRI. The doctor

found a cyst on her brain. And how is she doing now? Johnson

freezes at the question. He is a grown man with silver hair, a

black Harley-Davidson T-shirt across a barrel chest, and calloused

hands that could once bring a comfortable living. He tries to

compose himself, but tears burst. "I'm sorry," he says.

He signed up for a state insurance program for low-income

families so his daughter could go to a neurologist.

Although the United States is well behind Europe in

manufacturing wind-power gear and solar panels, other American

communities are joining Newton's push, laying the groundwork for

large-scale production.

"You have to reinvest in industrial capacity," says Randy

Udall, an energy consultant in Carbondale, Colo. "You use wind to

revitalize the Rust Belt. You make steel again. You bring it home.

We ought to be planting wind turbines as if they were trees."

In West Branch, Acciona, a Spanish company, has converted the

empty hydraulic pump factory into a plant that makes wind turbines.

When the previous plant closed, it wiped out 130 jobs; Acciona has

hired 120 people, many of them workers from the old factory.

Steve Jennings, 50, once made $14 an hour at the hydraulic pump

factory. When he heard that a wind turbine plant was coming in a

mere five miles from his house, he was among the first to apply for

a job. Now he's a team leader, earning nearly $20 an hour -- more

than he's ever made. Ordinary line workers make $16 an hour and up.

"It seemed like manufacturing was going away," he says. "But

I think this is here to stay."

Acciona built its first turbine in Iowa last December and is on

track to make 200 this year. Next year, it plans to double

production.

For now, Acciona is importing most of its metal parts from

Europe. But the company is seeking American suppliers, which could

help catalyze increased metalwork in the United States.

"Michigan, Ohio -- that's the Rust Belt," says Adrian LaTrace,

the plant's general manager. "We could be purchasing these

components from those states. We've got the attention of the folks

in the auto industry. This thing has critical mass."

In Toledo, the declining auto industry has prompted a retooling.

For more than a century, the city has been dominated by

glass-making, but the problems of Detroit automakers have softened

demand for car windows from its plants. Toledo has lost nearly a

third of its manufacturing jobs since 2000.

Now, Toledo is harnessing its glass-making skills to carve out a

niche in solar power. At the center of the trend is a huge glass

maker, Pilkington, which bought a Toledo company that was born in

the 19th century.

Half of Pilkington's business is in the automotive industry. In

the last two years, that business is down 30 percent in North

America. But the solar division, started two years ago, is growing

at a 40 percent clip annually.

Nearby, the University of Toledo aims to play the same enabling

role in solar power that Stanford played at the dawn of the

Internet. It has 15 faculty members researching solar power. By

licensing the technologies spawned in its labs, the university

encourages its academics to start businesses.

One company started by a professor, Xunlight, is developing thin

and flexible solar cells. It has 65 employees and expects to have

as many as 150 by the middle of next year.

"It's a second opportunity," says an assembly supervisor, Matt

McGilvery, one of Xunlight's early hires. McGilvery, 50, spent a

decade making steel coils for $23 an hour before he was laid off.

Xunlight hired him this year. His paycheck has shrunk, he says,

declining to get into particulars, but his old-fashioned skills

drawing plans by hand are again in demand as Xunlight designs its

manufacturing equipment from scratch, and the future seems

promising.

"The hope is that two years from now everything is smoking and

that envelope will slide across the table," he says. "The money

that people are dumping into this tells me it's a huge market."

In Newton, the tidy downtown clustered around a domed courthouse

is already showing signs of new life, after the pain of Maytag's

demise.

The owner of Courtyard Floral, Diane Farver, says she saw a

steep drop in sales after Maytag left, particularly around holidays

like Valentine's Day and Mother's Day, when she used to run several

vanloads a week to the washing machine plant. Times have changed

since that decline. When TPI recently dispatched workers to a

factory in China for training, the company ordered bouquets for the

spouses left at home.

Across the street at NetWork Realty, the broker Dennis Combs

says the housing market is starting to stabilize as Maytag jobs are

replaced.

"We've gone from Maytag, which wasn't upgrading their

antiquated plant, to something that's cutting-edge technology,

something that every politician is screaming this country has to

have," he says.

At Uncle Nancy's Coffee House, talk of unemployment checks and

foreclosures now mixes with job leads and looming investment.

"We're seeing hope," says Allen, the mayor.

The town is hardly done. Kimberly M. Didier, head of the Newton

Development Corp., which helped recruit TPI, is trying to attract

turbine manufacturers and providers of raw materials and parts for

the wind industry.

"This is in its infancy," she says. "Automobiles,

washer-dryers and other appliances have become commodities in their

retirement phase. We're in the beginning of this. How our economy

functions is changing. We built this whole thing around oil, and

now we've got to replace that."

A selection of summaries from The New York Times Book Review:

THE REST IS NOISE: Listening to the Twentieth Century, by Alex

Ross. (Picador, $18.) One of the New York Times Book Review's 10

best books of 2007, winner of the National Book Critics Circle

Award for criticism, Pulitzer finalist -- "The Rest Is Noise" has

evoked a crescendo of praise, and now its author, The New Yorker's

music critic, has won a MacArthur Foundation "genius" fellowship.

This cultural history of 20th-century music is "a work of immense

scope and ambition," The Times' reviewer, Geoff Dyer, wrote.

"Time and again Ross finds an event that expresses a larger

movement -- a person or a scene in which tendencies and meanings

converge." Reaching from Strauss and Mahler to Coltrane and

Lennon, this book is "a considerable feat of orchestration and

arrangement."

DIARY OF A BAD YEAR, by J. M. Coetzee. (Penguin, $14.) This

novel frolics on the border of fiction and nonfiction as it follows

the career of a writer called Senor C, who, like Coetzee, is a

South African transplanted to Australia and the author of a novel

titled "Waiting for the Barbarians." Dividing the text into three

parts -- the opinions C is compiling for a publisher, his account of

his dealings with the sexy upstairs neighbor who is typing the

manuscript and her take on him -- Coetzee, who won the Nobel Prize

in Literature in 2003, explores the relations between reason and

passion, writer and reader.

DUE CONSIDERATIONS: Essays and Criticism, by John Updike.

(Ballantine, $20.) Book reviews, essays and occasional pieces on a

wide range of subjects, written with Updike's "customary

geniality" (as he describes it) and graceful style, constitute his

first nonfiction collection in eight years.

ALICE: Alice Roosevelt Longworth, From White House Princess to

Washington Power Broker, by Stacy A. Cordery. (Penguin, $18.) This

biography of Theodore Roosevelt's older daughter, the first in 20

years, is based on her personal papers, including a diary and a

collection of love letters. Alice was the original outrageous first

daughter before her White House wedding to Rep. Nicholas Longworth.

At 41, she had her only child -- by Sen. William Borah. In her old

age, Roosevelt polished her reputation as a Washington wit, calling

Richard Nixon and Robert Kennedy "two of the trickiest politicians

I've known -- and I like tricks."

TIME AND MATERIALS: POEMS, 1997-2005, by Robert Hass.

(Ecco/HarperCollins, $13.95.) Hass' sixth volume of poetry, his

first since his term as poet laureate, includes his "best and most

careful verse in almost 30 years," Stephen Burt wrote in the Times

Book Review. The poems address large topics like global warming and

"Bush's War" as well as smaller ones, but "public and private,

personal and national, now seem to Hass ... sadly impossible to

keep apart." The collection won both the Pulitzer Prize and

National Book Award.

THE STILLBORN GOD: Religion, Politics, and the Modern West, by

Mark Lilla. (Vintage, $14.95.) Lilla, a professor of the humanities

at Columbia, adds complexity to our intellectual account of the

West's post-Enlightenment thinking on religion and politics,

starting with the nature of Christianity itself. In HEAD AND HEART:

A History of Christianity in America (Penguin, $17), Garry Wills

reconsiders American religious history, arguing that the creative

conflict between "head" -- Enlightenment religion, embodied in the

deism of Washington, Jefferson and Madison -- and "heart," or

evangelicalism, has led to the country's religious diversity and

vitality.

MY FAMILY AND OTHER SAINTS, by Kirin Narayan. (University of

Chicago, $15.) Narayan's life as a child in Bombay in the 1960s was

colored by her brother's spiritual questing and her mother's

infatuation with a succession of gurus, as their home became a

headquarters for Americans in search of enlightenment. Another

account of a religious upbringing is FORESKIN'S LAMENT: A Memoir,

by Shalom Auslander. (Riverhead, $15.) Auslander describes growing

up in and eventually breaking away from an Orthodox Jewish

community, although he remains "painfully, cripplingly, incurably,

miserably religious." The Times' reviewer, Benjamin Anastas,

called this a "funny, fierce and subversively heartfelt book."

THE CHILDREN OF HURIN, by J. R. R. Tolkien. Edited by

Christopher Tolkien. (Houghton Mifflin, $14.95.) Some 90 years ago,

Tolkien wrote a story about a battle against evil during the First

Age of Middle Earth. His son combined various successive drafts and

fragments to produce this darkly beautiful tale. Its protagonist is

an antihero who resists the original Dark Lord, 6,000 years before

"The Lord of the Rings."

VOICES, by Arnaldur Indridason. Translated by Bernard Scudder.

(Picador, $14.) At a Reykjavik hotel at Christmas, Inspector

Sveinsson is called to investigate the stabbing death of the house

Santa Claus; he uncovers some sad realities about the mistreatment

of children in the process.

THE KINGDOM OF BONES, by Stephen Gallagher. (Three Rivers,

$14.95.) Gallagher conjures a perfect demon to symbolize the

industrial era of the turn of the 20th century in England and

America in a book that "shows the occult mystery in its best

light," Marilyn Stasio said in the Times Book Review.

-- ELSA DIXLER

ATLANTA Florida State rediscovered a few big offensive threats

in Saturday's 31-28 loss to Georgia Tech.

Freshman TB Jermaine Thomas had a career-high 130 yards on nine

carries, including a 62-yard run in the first half that set up a

touchdown.

That was the longest run by a Seminole this season. He had 2

yards on three carries in the past two games combined, and don't

forget, he left last week's game with a concussion.

Redshirt sophomore QB D'Vontrey Richardson, who had played

sparingly the past four games, ran four times for 41 yards and,

after not throwing a pass since the Wake Forest game on Sept. 20,

was 1-for-2 for 39 yards (a touchdown to WR Preston Parker).

And Parker, who didn't practice much last week because of thigh

bruise, had five catches for a game-high (and season-high) 77 yards

and his first touchdown of the season.

"That put us back in the game. We had to have a big play

somehow," FSU coach Bobby Bowden said of the Richardson-to-Parker

connection that brought FSU to within 31-28 (after a two-point

conversion, that is). "That was a big play."

All of that bodes well.

"It felt good just to be out there helping the team,"

Richardson said.

"I hope I can get out there more."

Streak busted: Christian Ponder's second-quarter interception by

Cooper Taylor snapped a string of 64 consecutive passes without

one.

Turnovers again: After committing no turnovers against North

Carolina State and then Virginia Tech, the Seminoles had three (two

lost fumbles and an interception) against the Yellow Jackets. Tech

had just two turnovers.

In case you were wondering : Georgia Tech had three rushing

touchdowns in the second quarter. FSU hadn't allowed a team to put

up that many scores on the ground in a half, let alone a quarter,

since the 1997 Sugar Bowl loss to Florida.

Oh, by the way, FSU had allowed a total of 13 points in the

second quarter in its first seven games.

All-around kicker: Graham Gano started for the first time as the

punter, a spot he held the past two seasons. But knee surgery in

August meant he was brought along slowly.

By the middle of the second quarter, he took over the kickoff

duties, too.

He averaged 40.3 yards on three punts. Two of his kickoffs went

for touchbacks, and he hit two more field goals (29- and

45-yarders) to push his streak to 15.

Streak continues: Tech senior OT Andrew Gardner, who was listed

as questionable for the game because of a shoulder injury, started

to extend his streak to 48 straight, the longest in the nation.

Jesuit connection: Georgia Tech continues to have a nice

pipeline to Tampa Bay, specifically Jesuit, with CB Michael

Peterson, OL A.J. Smith, WR Andrew Smith, RB/WR Anthony Allen and

OT Phil Smith on the roster.

Peterson had a huge game with six tackles, one for a loss, and a

pass breakup that led to the interception.

Brian Landman can be reached at landmansptimes.com or (813)

226-3347.

ATLANTA Some of the Florida State Seminoles stared blankly as

the final seconds ticked off the game clock. Some couldn't hide

their anger and kicked their helmets. And at least one sat

inconsolable.

The Seminoles, poised to cap an improbable rally with a

last-minute touchdown, had just seen fullback Marcus Sims lose a

fumble at the 1-yard line that preserved Georgia Tech's 31-28 win

on Saturday at Bobby Dodd Stadium.

"Back in 1992, when we first joined the ACC, we had one of the

best comebacks we've ever had right here," coach Bobby Bowden

said. "We were down 14 (in the fourth quarter) and that's when

Charlie Ward went back in the shotgun and we came back and won.

Today, I think, would have been better. Today, I think, would've

been much bigger."

Instead, his No. 16-ranked Seminoles (6-2, 3-2) bid goodbye to a

four-game winning streak and, more important, control of their fate

in the ACC's Atlantic Division. Idle Maryland (6-2, 3-1) now is

alone at the top in the race for a spot in the league championship

game Dec. 6 in Tampa.

"Give credit to Georgia Tech," Bowden said.

The Yellow Jackets (7-2, 4-2 for first in the Coastal), who had

lost 12 straight to FSU, presented a host of problems, especially

for the heretofore staunch FSU defense.

New coach Paul Johnson is one of the few major college coaches

who relies on the triple-option.

Jonathan Dwyer gained 145 yards on 13 carries and scored two

touchdowns (36 and 66 yards). A Seminole barely touched him on

either. When quarterback Josh Nesbitt wasn't giving it to Dwyer, he

was keeping it himself or deftly pitching the ball at the last

possible second to a speedy back for nice gains.

Nesbitt, however, injured his right ankle on a keeper midway

through the third, and backup Jaybo Shaw wasn't the same threat. He

had his team's two turnovers, the second an interception by

cornerback Patrick Robinson that followed FSU backup quarterback

D'Vontrey Richardson hitting Preston Parker on a 39-yard touchdown

with 6:04 left.

Christian Ponder, who orchestrated fourth-quarter drives in wins

against Miami, N.C. State and Virginia Tech, hit Bert Reed for 9

yards on a fourth and 6 from the FSU 45. (FSU was set to punt, but

Tech jumped offsides.)

Then came a pass to Parker for 11. Then freshman tailback

Jermaine Thomas went for 7, 10 and 12 yards to finish with a

career-high 130. Antone Smith gained 3, setting up second and goal

at the 3. In came Sims, who had scored in a similar spot last week

(although he did drop the ball after crossing the goal line).

"Everything was going our way. We had our fans behind us. If

you looked at the Georgia Tech sideline, those guys had their heads

dropped and no emotion about them," FSU defensive end Everette

Brown said. "Then all of a sudden, the ball comes out."

Freshman safety Cooper Taylor, who had an interception that set

up one of his team's three second-quarter touchdown runs, put his

helmet squarely on the ball, and it floated in the air as if in

slow motion.

"Marcus has been playing terrific," offensive coordinator

Jimbo Fisher said, adding he stressed ball security in the days

leading up to this game. "You're not always the hero."

Freshman cornerback Rashaad Reid tried to scoop up the loose

ball in the end zone, but it squirted away from him. That seemingly

gave Ponder a chance to recover it, and he dived for it.

"I was pretty close," Ponder said. "I touched it."

But Reid fell on top of it for a touchback with 45 seconds left.

"This is definitely a loss that we will build off of and not

stumble over for the rest of the season," Brown said. "For one,

we fought. And the feeling we feel tonight I'm sure nobody wants

to feel (again) any time soon."

TAMPA The Lightning wanted to build off a high-flying offensive

effort that had given it its second consecutive victory. Instead,

it ran into an opponent determined not to let Tampa Bay get in a

rhythm.

So, give Tampa Bay credit for perseverance as it outworked and

outshot the Senators for a well-deserved 3-2 shootout victory at

the St. Pete Times Forum on Saturday.

The Lightning (4-3-3) won its third straight and fourth of five

when Evgeny Artyukhin scored in the eighth round of the shootout to

break a 2-2 tie and Ottawa's Dean McAmmond missed the net.

The Lightning, which overcame Ottawa's ferocious forecheck to

gain a 34-31 shot advantage, tied the score with 6:12 left in the

third period on Matt Carle's first goal of the season.

Vinny Lecavalier tied the score 1-1 with 5:51 left in the second

period with his sixth goal on a blast from the top of the faceoff

circle. But the Senators scored 39 seconds later when Dany Heatley

scored after being left alone in front of the net.

Goalie Mike Smith, who took a painful shot off the thumb and

forefinger of his right hand during the morning skate, made 29

saves and was not at fault on either goal and stopped two

breakaways.

Senators goalie Alex Auld also was solid but couldn't stop

Artyukhin, Jussi Jokinen or Marty St. Louis in the shootout.

Both teams had seven first-period shots. The Senators had the

better early chances and missed a huge opportunity 15 seconds into

the game when Daniel Alfredsson had Smith down but backhanded the

puck wide.

Smith was down and the net was open again at 6:34, when McAmmond

had the puck alone in front. McAmmond hunted for the best angle by

skating cross-crease. But Smith somehow got a glove up to make the

save.

The Lightning did not get its first shot until 9:58, when Auld

stopped Vinny Prospal's turnaround wrist shot from the bottom of a

faceoff circle.

That seemed to turn the tide, and Tampa Bay had the territorial

advantage in the second half of the period as it outshot Ottawa

7-3, including Chris Gratton's big slap shot that Auld stopped with

his left leg.

The Senators entered the game with the league's third-best power

play at 24.5 percent.

It cashed in 8:06 into the second period as Antoine Vermette's

goal gave Ottawa a power-play tally in 10 of 11 games. Vermette was

able to sneak behind defenseman Paul Ranger and convert a rebound

after Smith stopped Christoph Schubert's blast from the point.

The Lightning evened the score with 5:51 remaining on

Lecavalier's goal, a slap shot that beat Auld on the short side. It

was not officially a power-play goal, coming exactly two minutes

after Chris Neil was called for interference, but Neil had not left

the box.

The good feelings were short-lived as Heatley, who somehow shook

Ranger, scored off a pass from defenseman Filip Kuba.

Tampa Bay missed a big chance early in the third period but

could not score on a 1:48 five-on-three on which it used five

forwards, passed beautifully and got only one shot on goal.

Damian Cristodero can be reached at cristoderosptimes.com.

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"6"&gt;Lightning wins shootout 3-2

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First PeriodNone. PenaltiesNone.

Second Period1, Ottawa, Vermette 2 (Schubert, Foligno), 8:06

(pp). 2, Tampa Bay, Lecavalier 6 (Krajicek, Prospal), 14:09. 3,

Ottawa, Heatley 7 (Kuba, Vermette), 14:48. PenaltiesProspal, TB

(holding), :34; Malik, TB (tripping), 6:11; Neil, Ott

(interference), 12:09.

Third Period4, Tampa Bay, Carle 1 (Prospal, Krajicek), 13:48.

PenaltiesVermette, Ott (goalie interference), 1:33; Alfredsson, Ott

(hooking), 1:47; Winchester, Ott (tripping), 7:54; Artyukhin, TB

(high-sticking), 9:05.

OvertimeNone. PenaltiesNone.

ShootoutOttawa 2 (Vermette NG, Alfredsson NG, Spezza G, Heatley

NG, Ruutu G, Fisher NG, Foligno NG, McAmmond NG), Tampa Bay 3

(Lecavalier NG, Jokinen G, Prospal NG, Stamkos NG, St. Louis G,

Recchi NG, Malone NG, Artyukhin G). Shots on GoalOttawa

7-10-11-331. Tampa Bay 7-15-9-334. Power-play opportunitiesOttawa 1

of 3; Tampa Bay 0 of 4. GoaliesOttawa, Auld 3-2-1 (34 shots-32

saves). Tampa Bay, M.Smith 3-2-2 (31-29). A16,104 (19,758). T2:41.

RefereesDave Jackson, Justin St. Pierre. LinesmenJonny Murray,

Brian Murphy. Poll result

Before his recent scoring spurt, we asked you whether the

Lightning should keep Steven Stamkos on its roster or send him back

to his junior team for seasoning. Your response:

85 percent

Keep him here. His ice time and production will improve with

experience. 15 percent

Send him back to juniors, where he'll see more ice time and

develop more quickly. Total: 129 votes

JACKSONVILLE Forget all that stuff you heard last week about

how Florida hadn't been thinking about Georgia until the week

leading up to the game, and how last year's loss and the end zone

celebration wasn't a factor in Saturday's game.

You had better believe it was a factor.

So much so, the Gators' summer conditioning workouts with

trainer Mickey Marotti included some Georgia stats: 188 the number

of rushing yards Bulldogs RB Knownshon Moreno gained against the

Gators last season.

They came in evenly divided reps on weights, pushups, crunches

and sit-ups.

"It was all the numbers from the stuff we got embarrassed by,"

UF quarterback Tim Tebow said. "We worked on that. And I think

it's been a lot on our minds all year."

The memory motivated the Gators, they now admit.

"Was it motivation for the summer? Yeah, it was," Meyer said.

"It was. It was the only rival we lost to a year ago and losing

doesn't set well with our team. And that's a good thing."

TIMEOUT?: If you're wondering why Florida called two timeouts in

the final 44 seconds with a 49-10 lead it all depends on whom you

asked.

Meyer said he was trying to get more work for RB Emmanuel Moody,

who just returned from an ankle injury.

"I thought he deserved that chance," Meyer said. "We were

just trying to win a game."

But Tebow and junior WR Percy Harvin seemed to think it was an

opportunity to allow the players and Florida fans a few more

moments to savor the victory.

"We looked at the sideline and saw that all their (Georgia)

fans had gone and we saw our fans still there," said Harvin, who

scored a touchdown in his 10th straight game. "We just wanted to

rub it in a little bit. Not too much, but it was great for us."

MURPHY'S REWARD: St. Petersburg native Louis Murphy got the

opportunity to walk off the field as a winner in his last game

against Georgia.

Murphy, a wide receiver, had one of the game's biggest plays, a

44-yard touchdown reception from Tebow.

"We were ready more than ever," said Murphy, a former Lakewood

High standout. "We came out and hit on all cylinders and we played

a great game. I didn't see this (lopsided score), but I knew we had

the potential."

Harvin said he was especially happy for Murphy because of all he

has been through in the past year. His mother, Filomena, died in

February.

"This was the game that she started to get sick (last season),

and I think it meant more to him," Harvin said. "It meant a lot

to all of us, our staff, but I know it meant a lot to him."

TEBOW SLIGHTLY INJURED: Tebow stood at a podium about 30 minutes

after the Gators' victory wearing a protective boot on his left

foot.

Tebow said he sprained his left ankle on the play just before

his touchdown pass to Murphy with 5:33 remaining in the third

quarter.

The ankle didn't stop Tebow from doing a victory lap around

Jacksonville Municipal Stadium to slap hands with Florida fans and

he said it won't stop him from playing in next week's Vanderbilt

game.

"I just sprained it a little bit, but it's fine," Tebow said.

"This (boot) is just to keep pressure off of it."

JACKSONVILLE When it was all over, when the final seconds had

ticked off the clock and No. 5 Florida was celebrating its 49-10

victory over No. 8 Georgia, the truth finally came through.

Yes, the Gators were bothered all year long, nearly every day,

about their bitter loss to Georgia last season. And no, it wasn't

just about Georgia's infamous end zone celebration. It was just as

much about how poorly its defense had played. How badly Florida

looked overall against the Bulldogs.

So all week long, Florida's sole mission was to play the best

defense it had all season. More important, to stop Georgia star

running back Knowshon Moreno and not allow the Bulldogs to run all

over the Gators as they had last season.

They executed that plan to perfection.

Holding its archrival without a touchdown until the final 3:09,

Florida redeemed itself in front of 84,649 at Jacksonville

Municipal Stadium. The 39-point margin of victory was the

second-largest for Florida in the 86-year series.

With a victory over Vanderbilt next week, Florida can clinch the

SEC East title.

"(Defensive coordinator) Charlie Strong and his staff did a

great job," UF coach Urban Meyer said. "As of Tuesday night, they

were still preparing and adjusting their game plan. I thought he

called a brilliant game and the players executed well. With great

defense, you can win a bunch of ballgames and I thought we played

great defense tonight."

Florida (7-1, 5-1 SEC) gave up 398 total yards, but held Georgia

(7-2, 4-2) to 106 rushing yards. Moreno, the SEC's second-leading

rusher, was held to 65 yards on 17 carries.

"The key was to stop the run," Strong said. "We knew that

(Georgia quarterback Matthew) Stafford could throw the ball and

they have very good receivers, but our whole key was to stop the

run. The way Moreno ran against us last year, we could not let that

happen. "

The Gators intercepted Stafford (18-of-33 for 265 yards) three

times including an 88-yard return by Joe Haden and a 64-yarder by

Ahmad Black. Both led to Florida touchdowns. Dustin Doe also had an

interception and Terron Sanders' 20-yard return after recovering a

fumble also led to a Florida touchdown.

"There's nothing soft about our defense," Sanders said. "It's

a complete turnaround from last season. "

While the defense set things up, the offense delivered.

Florida quarterback Tim Tebow was 10-of-13 for 154 yards and two

touchdowns a 44-yard pass to senior Louis Murphy and a 25-yarder

to junior Percy Harvin.

"This was a game we felt would make our season and we got it,"

said Harvin, who had three receptions for 52 yards and four carries

for 37 yards.

Tebow also rushed for three touchdowns, registering 193 total

offensive yards.

"We were very emotional, but we were a lot more than emotional

because emotion just lasts for 10 or 15 minutes. We were playing

with passion, too. We were very passionate and that lasts a lot

more than emotion does."

The Gators piled up 373 yards against a defense that entered the

game ranked 21st in the nation, and had held opponents to an

average of 20.3 points a game.

" Florida did a good job today, no doubt," Georgia coach Mark

Richt said. " We can't let this loss hurt us the next time we

play. The bottom line is we played and got whipped. "

With so much riding on this game, and the memories of last

season, Meyer admitted the victory meant a great deal to him and

the Gators.

"What does it mean?" he asked. "It means we're first place in

the SEC East all by ourselves. It's a rivalry game and we've done

fairly well against our rivals. It means a lot because it's a Top

10 team. This is a game we had to have."

Antonya English can be reached at englishsptimes.com.

Even through the tough years, Joe Maddon seemed to find a way to

put a positive spin on things. So it was no surprise that he didn't

let any disappointment over a four-games-to-one loss to the

Phillies in the Fall Classic stop him from reflecting on the Rays'

worst-to-the-World Series ride. Nor did it dampen his excitement

over the club's future in an end-of-the-season interview unlike any

he has had as Rays manager.

Favorite moment

from the season?

The whole thing. My favorite moment is to see the faces,

whether it's our players, the guys who work in our clubhouse, the

training staff, the guys upstairs, the front office people who have

been here for so many years. To see the look on their faces right

now, and how happy they are. The fact that all the negativity has

been laid to rest, we have a bright future ahead of us. I've been

looking at faces a lot.

For example, the other day we ended up in Wilmington, Del., in

the middle of the night after a tie ballgame. It was freezing

outside. And we're all outside getting our luggage, at whatever

time it was, and a significant part of the organization was there.

To me, that was a great moment. That might be the one snapshot I'll

take with me.

Things that will be taken

from the World Series into next season?

The biggest part is the little things. You can break down those

games as an example (Jayson) Werth's two-strike hitting, again,

same with (Carlos) Ruiz and (Pedro) Feliz. From our perspective,

the safety squeeze that was done by Jason Bartlett, the wonderful

defensive plays. The little things I want that to be the focal

point next season. We're going to be the target that's beautiful.

For us to be able to withstand the challenge, I don't want us to

play the game any better in a sense of hit more home runs, I want

us to play the game better fundamentally.

What's striking about the players in the clubhouse?

The unity. The closeness. The support among each other. Again we

went from a very low trust organization to a very high trust

organization, built on relationships. And all the right internal

workings are in place to make this successful for many years to

come.

The national debate surrounding your handling of the bullpen in

Game 5?

It is amusing. That's exactly how we had it laid out, it just

didn't work. If they get a couple knocks, it's always going to make

it look wrong. I have had so much confidence in all these pitchers

all year, and that's what people have to understand. We wouldn't be

sitting here right now if it wasn't for that group of people right

there. Truly the bullpen probably is as important as any aspect of

our game this year. And those guys have had a great year, and to

say that I should have done something differently would admit that

I did not have confidence in those people, which, to me, is wrong.

How different everything

is right now?

It is different. It's entirely different. The whole vibe is

different. We've arrived as an organization, and as a force within

major-league baseball. And our guys now have a national face, and I

like that. One of the most gratifying things that have occurred

throughout this postseason is how well our players represented us,

and I'm really proud of that.

Thoughts on the growing excitement around the area about the

Rays?

It's very exciting. I was just driving over the Gandy Bridge

(Thursday) and the guy on the other side just setting up shop on

the grass with a table with some Rays (T-shirts), he had it

advertised. I'm thinking to myself, "Oh, my God, how has that

happened?" You're talking about arriving. I've often talked about

going to Europe and I want to see some Rays gear on just anybody

walking down the street somehow. And I will take a photograph. The

fact people know who we were and they know how we play. I think a

lot of people embraced a lot of what we're about.

TAMPA Coach Barry Melrose made good on a vow to reduce the

minutes played by stars Marty St. Louis and Vinny Lecavalier, who

were first and fourth in the league among forwards last season with

averages of 24:17 and 22:57, respectively.

St. Louis averaged 21:22 entering Saturday, Lecavalier 19:22.

"I'm sure they don't like it," Melrose said.

Lecavalier has said he would prefer playing 20 to 21 minutes.

St. Louis, too, said he wouldn't mind a few more.

"I'm not complaining," he said. "But there are games when you

feel you want to be out there more, especially when you feel great.

Are 25 minutes too much? A little bit; over a long period of time,

absolutely. But I think it all depends on where we are in the

game."

The main cut for Lecavalier has been in penalty-kill time, of

which he had just 37 seconds in his previous seven games.

"Some nights they'll play 23, 24 minutes if we're down a

goal," Melrose said. "But I'd like to keep them in the early 20s.

I think that will make us better in March and April."

CRAIG RETURNS: Ryan Craig played his first game since Nov. 10,

on right wing with C Chris Gratton and Gary Roberts.

Craig, 26, played seven games last season because of back and

knee problems. He was a healthy scratch for two games this season

before going on injured reserve with a strained groin.

"I'm very excited," Craig said before the game. "It's been a

long time. This is what I want to do and what I love to do."

CHANGING SIDES: Ottawa's Filip Kuba, who entered tied for the

league lead among defensemen with 11 points, said he feels "more

involved" in the Senators' offense than he did with Tampa Bay. "A

lot of pucks go through me," he said.

D Andrej Meszaros, whom the Lightning got from Ottawa for Kuba

and D Alex Picard, said of the Senators, "I have a lot of respect

for that organization and the coaches and the players there. I was

upset to leave."

That said, "I want to win. Every guy who's been traded wants to

win against the other team."

FORWARD-LOOKING: As coach of OHL Sault Ste. Marie, Craig

Hartsburg spent the previous two seasons watching future Lightning

rookie Steven Stamkos play for Sarnia.

"Steven is really a gifted player, speed and skill, and he

plays the game hard," said Hartsburg, now the Senators' coach.

"He's going to be a top player in this league. It takes all

players some time to find their game at this level."

ODDS AND ENDS: Stamkos had his first multipoint game in his

ninth career game. It took Vinny Lecavalier 58. Fs Jason Ward and

Matt Pettinger, and D Janne Niskala were scratched.

Times Sports Columnist

JACKSONVILLE It was as close as anyone will ever get to a

perfect crime on a field of play.

It did not merit a penalty, and it probably won't draw a

reprimand from the league office. There will be no YouTube video to

point at and no angry words to recall.

There is absolutely no evidence Urban Meyer did anything wrong

Saturday.

Unless you want to count the embarrassed looks on the faces of

the Georgia Bulldogs when they might as well have had their pants

pulled down around their knees in the final minute of Florida's

49-10 victory.

For no discernible reason other than revenge, the Gators called

consecutive timeouts with 44 and 30 seconds remaining in a runaway

game. There was no attempt to run the score up. No angry gestures

on the sideline. Just an implied middle finger salute from one

rival to another.

"We were enjoying the moment, enjoying the game," Florida

quarterback Tim Tebow said. "We didn't do anything wrong. We were

just playing the game."

Consider it a crime of passion. For more than a year, the Gators

have lived with the memory of Georgia's 42-30 victory that

essentially buried Florida's chances for a Southeastern Conference

title in 2007. More than that, they lived with the humiliation of

the Dawgs doing a team-wide end zone dance after an early

touchdown.

Strength and conditioning coach Mickey Marotti had a photo of

the Georgia boogie mounted in his office almost from the moment it

happened. More photos showed up on the lockers of Florida players

last week.

Throughout offseason workouts, the Gators were reminded of how

soft they played against Georgia when Marotti pushed them to do

repeated sets of push-ups, sit-ups and crunches. Depending on the

workout, the players had to do 42 (for Georgia's points) or 188

(for running back Knowshon Moreno's rushing total) reps.

"This was a lot off of our shoulders," safety Ahmad Black

said. "All we've heard is Georgia, Georgia, Georgia."

The subjects of dancing and payback were off-limits around

Gainesville last week. Meyer would not let his players talk about

it, and he avoided the subject himself. The best gauge of the

Florida coach's feelings was a passage in a recent biography when

he suggested Florida would find a way to "handle" the slight.

So maybe the intent of Tebow's 25-yard touchdown pass with 11:30

remaining could be debated. And even the 7-yard touchdown pass by

backup quarterback John Brantley in the final eight minutes is open

to interpretation.

But, really, there is no mistaking the purpose behind the

timeouts. Unless you want to argue which timeout was kiss-my-butt

and which was stick-it-in-your-ear.

For the record, Meyer said the timeouts were simply a way to get

extra carries for running back Emmanuel Moody. Later, however,

Meyer touched on the importance of respecting the game.

Maybe that was a jab at Georgia's behavior last season, or maybe

it was an explanation for his subtle retaliation Saturday. Perhaps

it was a little bit of both.

No matter how he wanted to spin it, the message was received.

Meyer and Georgia coach Mark Richt did a drive-by handshake at

midfield when the game was finally completed.

Meanwhile, when the final timeouts were called, the bleachers at

Jacksonville Municipal Stadium told the story as accurately as the

scoreboard. The Georgia side of the stadium was nearly empty, and

the Florida side was getting revved up for the postgame

celebrations.

"We looked over at their sideline and saw all of their fans had

gone," receiver Percy Harvin said. "We just wanted to rub it in a

little bit, but not too much."

So if last season's loss kept Florida out of the SEC title game,

Saturday's victory ensures the Gators control their own destiny in

2008. A victory next week against Vanderbilt will clinch the

Eastern Division title and a date in Atlanta on Dec. 6.

As for the Bulldogs, they began the season as the No. 1 team in

the nation. Now, in the final month of the regular season, they are

not even No. 1 in their division.

It has been said if you want to dance, you must pay the fiddler.

On Saturday, a year-old bill came due for Georgia.

John Romano can be reached at romanosptimes.com.

Scouting report: Texas

Jimmie Johnson has finished first or second in three of his past

four at Texas and after his late dash through the field last

weekend at Atlanta, it appears little will get in the way of his

third straight title. Carl Edwards looked crestfallen when he was

told Johnson had rallied to finish second to him at Atlanta, and

with good reason. That 183-point deficit to Johnson is huge with

three races left.

Brant James, Times staff writer

For nine years, Texas Tech coach Mike Leach has

toiled here on the dusty plains of West Texas while often being

regarded as a madman directing a sideshow.

His team has been more known for its spread offense that some

consider gimmicky and his own eccentric personality has been

celebrated in YouTube lore.

But with No. 6 Texas Tech's 38-33 upset of top-ranked and

previously undefeated Texas here Saturday night in front of a

record crowd of 56,333 rowdy fans at Jones AT&amp;amp;T Stadium, Leach took

his team from a novelty act in a remote college town to the center

of the college football universe.

After falling behind 33-32 for the first time with 1:29

remaining in the game, Red Raiders quarterback Graham Harrell

directed a six-play, 62-yard drive to win the game on his 28-yard

touchdown pass to wide receiver Michael Crabtree with one second

remaining.

On the previous play, a pass by Harrell deflected off the hands

of Texas Tech wide receiver Edward Britton and was dropped by Texas

safety Blake Gideon.

The victory is the biggest in Texas Tech history and the first

over a top-ranked team and puts the Red Raiders squarely in the

midst of the national championship chase along with No. 2 Alabama

(9-0, 5-0 SEC) and No. 3 Penn State (9-0, 5-0 Big Ten) and muddles

the race in the Big 12 South division. It also gives hope to teams

like No. 4 Oklahoma (8-1, 4-1 Big 12), No. 7 Southern California

(7-1, 5-1 PAC-10), No. 5 Florida (7-1, 5-1 SEC) and No. 9 Oklahoma

State (8-1, 4-1 Big 12).

More immediately, Texas Tech's victory muddles the race in the

Big 12 South division. And for Texas Tech (9-0, 4-0 Big 12) to

remain in contention, it will have to navigate two treacherous

games against Oklahoma State and at Oklahoma before ending the

regular season against Baylor.

Saturday's game also shook up the Heisman Trophy race. Longhorns

quarterback Colt McCoy had been the clear front-runner for the

award, but can now see Harrell and Florida quarterback Tim Tebow in

the rear-view mirror.

Texas (8-1, 4-1 Big 12) had been trying to be just the second

team to have beaten four consecutive top 11 teams in the Associated

Press poll since Notre Dame did it in 1943.

Leading 22-6 at halftime, Texas Tech punted on its first

possession of the second half and surrendered a 45-yard punt return

for touchdown by Texas wide receiver Jordan Shipley with 10:26

remaining in the third quarter.

But less than three minutes later, McCoy tried to find Shipley

just beyond his own 20-yard line and had his pass intercepted and

returned 18 yards by Texas Tech strong safety Daniel Charbonnet for

a touchdown and a 29-13 advantage.

Texas, however, scored again near the end of the third quarter

on a 37-yard touchdown pass by McCoy to wide receiver Malcolm

Williams to pull within 29-19 of Texas Tech.

That was the start of Texas Tech's near unraveling. The

Longhorns blocked the 42-yard field goal attempt of kicker Matt

Williams. On the next play, McCoy tossed a 91-yard touchdown pass

to Williams to cut Texas Tech's lead to 29-26 with 11:00 left.

But the Red Raiders remained calm on their next possession and

capped a 13-play, 55-yard drive with a 42-yard field goal by kicker

Donnie Carona to extend their advantage to 32-26 with 5:45

remaining.

Texas answered right back on Vondrell McGee's 4-yard touchdown

run for a 33-32 lead with 1:29 left for its lone lead of the night,

only to give away to Crabtree's heroics.

From the outset Saturday night, Texas struggled. On its first

offensive play from its own 2-yard line, tailback Chris Ogbonnya

was tackled in the end zone for a safety to give Texas Tech a 2-0

lead with 10:38 remaining in the first quarter.

After Texas' ensuing kick, Texas Tech scored on Williams'

29-yard field goal with 6:47 left in the first quarter.

Following a 60-yard Texas punt, Texas Tech took over at its own

4-yard line and meticulously drove 96 yards in 10 plays to score on

tailback Baron Butch's 3-yard run to go ahead 12-0 to end the first

quarter.

Texas stalled again on its third possession, but pushed Texas

Tech back to its own 17-yard line with a 67-yard punt. That hardly

slowed the Red Raiders.

Facing third-and-14 from Texas 32-yard line, Harrell held the

ball for almost 10 seconds and retreated to near mid-field before

completing a 14-yard pass to crossing wide receiver Lyle Leong near

the right sideline for a first down.

On the next play, he threw an 18-yard touchdown pass to wide

receiver Eric Morris to extend Texas Tech's lead to 19-0 with 9:39

remaining in the second quarter.

Texas finally scored with 5:27 left in the second quarter on

kicker Hunter Lawrence's 43-yard field goal, was set up by the

recovery of a Texas Tech fumble at the Red Raiders 29-yard line.

The teams traded field goals to in the final 1:37 of the second

quarter that left Texas Tech ahead 22-6 at halftime.

After the winning touchdown, Texas Tech fans ran on to the field

three times prematurely before the game ended after Texas' failed

kickoff return. A sign said, "OUR TIME OUR HOUSE."

Texas Tech and Leach have arrived.

Quarterback Jeff Garcia has a solution for his team's inability

to score touchdowns when it gets into the red zone that area of

the field between the opponent's 20-yard line and the goal line

that has been a dead zone for the Bucs this season. Take a chance.

Throw some caution and maybe a football to the wind. Give the

guys with flypaper hands a chance to snag a pass from a defender.

"We can't go into every single play like there's going to be a

perfect outlet, that there's going to be a person wide open and I'm

going to hit that player and he's going to be able to run and make

a first down," Garcia said. "Sometimes, we just need to be

playmakers, and we need to allow our playmakers which are our

receivers, our tight ends to sometimes go up and outfight a

defender for a football. And we need to trust in that. I think we

get caught up into being such a rhythm-type team, looking for the

best outlet, looking for the open receiver, that we lose sight of

just taking shots at times and just taking chances."

It's mystifying, really. The Bucs offense is 13th in the NFL,

averaging more than 341 yards per game. But in red zone scoring,

Tampa Bay is 29th in the league with only 11 touchdowns in 31

trips, a percentage of 35.5.

No matter how easily the Bucs breeze up and down the field,

their trek inside the dead zone is like traversing a desert on a

broken ankle over shards of glass.

Take last week's 13-9 loss at Dallas. Tampa Bay settled for

three field goals, and the game ended when the Bucs failed to

convert on fourth and 5 at the Cowboys 18.

Garcia didn't throw one pass to the end zone. Sometimes under

duress, he checked the ball down to tight end Jerramy Stevens or

wideout Ike Hilliard on shallow crossing routes. Despite having

three timeouts when the drive started, the Bucs only attempted

passes on their final 11 plays.

On the last play, receiver Joey Galloway put a double move on

Cowboys cornerback Alan Ball, who slipped, leaving Galloway alone

in the end zone. But Garcia never saw him, throwing incomplete to

Stevens.

"Unfortunately, Jeff didn't have a chance to see it," Galloway

said. "That's one of those things where half the play was really

good and we didn't finish it, so it doesn't really matter.

"I've never been a guy that scored much inside the red zone.

I've been a guy that scored outside the red zone. So, of course,

with that in mind, I'd like to let coach know let's go from outside

the red zone."

The Bucs' red zone production has been even worse during their

three losses all on the road. Tampa Bay has scored two touchdowns

in nine trips, or 22 percent of the time.

One problem has been the Bucs' inability or unwillingness to

run in the red zone. When the field gets shorter, it's much easier

for defenses to stack the line of scrimmage.

"That's every red zone tape we look at," coach Jon Gruden

said. "I think our first-down carries last week, we lost yards

twice. And we got stopped on third down on one. And we do have a

pretty good quarterback here, and we're going to try to accentuate

anything we've got to do to win a football game. If we've got to

throw it every snap, we will."

Injuries have been a factor. The Bucs lost fullback Byron Storer

for the season when he tore his right ACL against the Panthers.

Starter B.J. Askew hasn't played since tearing his hamstring in

Week 3 at Chicago. Last week, Warrick Dunn was limited because of a

pinched nerve in his back.

"We had fresh, good players, and we had a neat little rotation

going," Gruden said of the rushing attack earlier this season.

"Obviously, with Warrick's injury lingering and two fullbacks out,

it's something we've got to all clean up. We've got to fight

through this, we've got to do some things better, and that we

will."

Garcia says the Bucs have good red zone practices each Friday,

but so far, they haven't been able to carry over into games.

"I don't know why it's not carrying over," Garcia said. "You

look at the situations we had this past game. We unfortunately on

third and 1 don't convert a third down. We see a defense we didn't

prepare for. Should that matter? It shouldn't matter. We should

find a way. We didn't make it happen. The next time we're down in

the red zone, I get the penalty for crossing the line of scrimmage.

We get into a third-and-long situation. We become our own worst

enemy when we get down to the red zone."

Gruden spent the week admitting his play-calling in red zone

situations could have been better. But Garcia bears a little of the

blame, too. Sometimes, he says, a quarterback has to squeeze a

throw and hope for the best.

"I didn't do a very good job, and we didn't play well enough as

a team," Gruden said. "We've all got to throw our hat in there

and assume some responsibility, but I've got a lot of confidence in

Jeff. Hopefully we can all get clicking again."

Garcia said his training in the West Coast offense taught him to

think touchdown, then check down, whenever his team gets in the red

zone. Coaches such as the late Bill Walsh and the Seahawks' Mike

Holmgren have been notorious for trying to strike as soon as they

reach the opponent's 20-yard line.

"I think somehow, some way, we need to find a way to be back in

that sort of mode," Garcia said. "I think with how we've played

recently in the red zone, we've missed out on a lot of great

opportunities.

"And when you're in those last two minutes, it is important to

take some shots to the end zone."

Red zone efficiency (TDs), through Week 8

Top 5

Team /Poss. /TDs /FGs /Score % / TD %

1. Lions 8 /6 /2 /1.000 / .750

2. Colts 20 /15 /3 .900 /.750

3. Titans 22 /16 /6 /1.000 /.727

4. Steelers 17 /12 /4 /.941 /.706

5. Cardinals 34 /21 /5 / .765 / .618

Bottom 5

28. Falcons 22 / 9 / 8 / .773 / .409

29. Bucs 31 /11 /15 /.839 / .355

30. Raiders 19 / 6 /11 / .895 /.316

31. Rams 10 / 3 / 6 / .900 / .300

32. Vikings 20 / 6 / 11 / .850 / .300

Two weeks ago, after his a concert in Houston, soft-rock

legend Neil Diamond paid an incognito visit to Oak Island, a small,

unincorporated hamlet in Trinity Bay, and was shocked by the

devastation

after Hurricane Ike decimated the area in September.

Left in the aftermath: heaping, rotting piles of debris;

hundreds of

homes washed away; and displaced residents, some still sleeping in

tents

and cars, struggling to rebuild.

Ever since, he has given something of a stump speech about the

former

fishing village at each of his concerts. And, operating almost

completely under the radar, he has promised to donate 100 percent

of the

gross merchandise sales at 20 concerts to assist in the rebuilding

of

the small community, which sits just a few miles south of Anahuac

in

Chambers County. If sales continue, proceeds could exceed $4

million by

year's end.

"These people are in big trouble and I want to help," Diamond

said. "It

may only be a drop in the bucket, but I'm going to ask my audiences

in

every city that I play to help. So far they've come through to the

tune

of more than $700,000. I intend to keep asking until the end of

this

tour."

The money will be administered by the Gulf Coast Ike Relief

Fund, the

charity set up by Mayor Bill White, who piqued the singer's

interest in

Oak Island.

Chambers County was among the areas hardest hit by Ike. In Oak

Island,

more than half the island's homes are gone or uninhabitable.

"As we drove down there, I tried to show him the height of the

storm's

line in the trees, and you could still see the debris up there that

was

carried by the water," said Anahuac Mayor Guy Jackson, who took

Diamond

to the community. "And then we started getting to the homes. The

level

of destruction just gets worse and worse and worse as you get

closer to

water's edge."

Diamond, who performs wildly popular renditions of "America"

and "Sweet

Caroline," also couldn't help but notice that people were living

in

tents and cars next to their destroyed property.

"For a lot of people there, all they got left is a few

belongings and

they don't want to leave them," said Chambers County Judge Jimmy

Silvia.

Officials with the Federal Emergency Management Agency offered

to help

with rentals in Baytown, but that was too far away from many

residents'

jobs. And, as of late last week, FEMA had yet to allow anyone to

move in

to the trailers that were recently brought in, Silvia said.

So, in effect, people were still sleeping in tents and cars

while

trailers sat unused nearby, he said.

Although Diamond recently told concert-goers in Dallas and Tulsa

to

"help get people out of tents," what most got his attention

during his

visit to Oak Island was the community's resolve.

At a meeting he attended outside a small church, people

committed to fix

their homes on their own, as best they could. That's what prompted

him

to continue giving as much as he could, and to tell all his fans

about

Oak Island.

"Texas would be surprised at the cities that have come through

for

them," Diamond said. "My hope is to put as many people as we can

back in

homes as quickly as possible."

He preyed upon older women, some in their 70s, one as old

as

99, police said. He raped them. And sometimes, authorities said, he

beat

them to death.

During the mid-1980s, police had a suspect for these acts, Henry

Lee

Bethune, but no hard evidence linking him to a crime scene. Then a

sergeant in the Houston Police Department's homicide division, Jim

Yarbrough, read a magazine article on the first use of DNA to solve

a

crime mystery in England.

Yarbrough called the pioneering scientist, an English geneticist

named

Alec Jeffreys, setting off a chain of events that would lead to the

conviction of Bethune -- one of the first Texas criminals convicted

with

DNA evidence -- on charges of raping a 74-year-old woman.

This Friday marks the 20th anniversary of that conviction -- the

first

based on DNA in a Harris County proceeding.

"It's hard to believe now, but at that time there were no

law-enforcement DNA labs in the United States," recalled Rusty

Hardin,

who prosecuted the Bethune case when he was assistant district

attorney.

"Essentially, DNA was not being used forensically yet."

The scientific witness in the trial, Dr. C. Thomas Caskey, went

on to

invent the DNA testing standard now used worldwide by crime labs.

At the time of the trial, the goal was simply to end a string of

crimes

in which elderly women were beaten and raped. A victim testified

that

Bethune, who was suspected in at least 14 rapes as well as two

murders,

had told her he preferred old women, because "young women all have

diseases."

Hardin said he had confidence in the testimony of the victim.

But it's

often hard, he said, to get a jury to convict on the basis of such

evidence alone.

The jury foreman, Stan Curry, said at the time, "The DNA just

cinched

it."

Back then, using DNA evidence seemed like a stretch. Yarbrough

said he

learned from his call to Jeffreys, the English geneticist, that

there

were only two commercial DNA laboratories in the U.S. in 1986 and

no

government labs.

Yarbrough collected samples from Bethune and sent those, along

with

crime scene material, to the two labs.

Both returned "hits"; there was just a one in 700 million

chance that

someone other than Henry Lee Bethune had left a semen sample on the

mattress of the 74-year-old Houston woman.

Hardin said the two labs offered experts to testify at trial but

told

him there was no better witness than a DNA expert in Houston.

"I go, 'Well, who is that?' " Hardin recalled. "It was Tom

Caskey. I had

never met him."

Caskey was director of the molecular genetics program at Baylor

College

of Medicine and was interested in getting into forensic DNA. At the

trial, he grew tired of a litany of DNA questions that didn't seem

to

have much to do with the case.

"I don't think they understood the questions they were asking,

and I'm

certain they didn't understand the answers," Caskey said of the

defense

attorneys. "So at one point, I responded, 'I'm sorry, you are just

going

to have to ask better questions.' The judge didn't like that very

much."

Hardin added, "Ahh, but the jury did."

Bethune, who later was convicted of raping another 74-year-old

woman,

remains incarcerated and has been denied parole.

Caskey's primary scientific interest at the time involved the

identification of genes linked to human disease. But, during the

course

of his research, he identified short segments of DNA -- called short

tandem repeats, or STRs -- that vary widely from person to person.

His lab developed an STR identification technique that soon

became the

gold standard for criminal cases.

The method underlies the U.S. Combined DNA Index System, or

CODIS, which

contains DNA information on more than 6 million offenders. The

system

also forms the basis of Interpol's criminal database and that of

most

governments.

After he developed the system, Caskey testified at the first DNA

cases

held in various federal districts. He was often asked by defense

attorneys whether he stood to benefit from the new technology.

"I got mad about it, so I told my dean I was going to give him

all of my

patents," Caskey said.

Today, the patents provide Baylor with enough annual revenue to

fund the

education of eight students working to obtain medical or doctorate

degrees.

"Don't ever say crime doesn't pay. Crime does pay," quipped

Caskey, who

now directs the Brown Foundation Institute of Molecular Medicine

for the

Prevention of Human Diseases, a part of the University of Texas

Health

Science Center at Houston.

Both Caskey and Hardin say incidents such as the O.J. Simpson

trial and

the failings of Houston's crime lab have tarnished DNA science.

"Assuming everything's done properly, the science is not going

to lie,"

said Hardin, now a prominent defense attorney.

After two decades, the science is more promising than ever, said

David

Gangitano, an assistant professor at Sam Houston State University

and a

forensic DNA expert.

New techniques are making it possible to identify criminals with

much

smaller samples of DNA.

And as the price to sequence DNA falls, it's possible that

forensic

scientists will soon be able to match the pollen on a suspect's

clothing

with specific trees or use the DNA of a drug plant to determine its

precise point of origin.

Moreover, DNA from a crime scene may soon allow police to

determine a

perpetrator's eye color, hair color, race or other traits that

might aid

them in the apprehension of a suspect.

State of the league at midseason We're halfway through the NFL

season, so time for our midseason report.

Most surprising team It seems bizarre to consider a team that is

3-4 as a surprise, but we were tempted to put Miami in this slot.

The Dolphins won one game last season and this season already have

victories over New England and San Diego. With parity in the NFL,

it's surprising when any team is undefeated at the end of October.

But who would have thought the Titans would lose QB Vince Young

almost from the start and be 7-0 at this point with journeyman

Kerry Collins at quarterback? So we go with the Titans.

Coach of the year

Plenty of good candidates out there, such as Washington's Jim

Zorn, Buffalo's Dick Jauron, Miami's Tony Sparano and, yes, even

Bill Belichick, who has the Patriots at 5-2 without QB Tom Brady.

But we're starting to think Tennessee's Jeff Fisher just might be

the best coach in all of football. Do you realize he is in his 15th

season with the Titans? In fact, he goes back to the Houston days.

And he is 122-99 for his career, including an improbable 7-0 this

season.

Other surprising teams

The Redskins are 6-2 mostly because QB Jason Campbell, below,

has not thrown an interception this season. The Bills (5-2) got off

to their best start since 1992. And though they have faded, the

Broncos are still 4-3 and lead the AFC West.

Most disappointing team

We knew the Colts were starting to slip a little, but not only

are they 3-4, they easily could be 1-6 had it not been for a couple

of big-time, fourth-quarter comebacks. They were blown out last

week by the Titans, and they likely will not win the AFC South for

the first time since 2002.

Other disappointing teams

Some thought Jacksonville was a Super Bowl contender, but the

Jaguars sit right with the Colts at 3-4. Cleveland and Minnesota

were supposed to be better than 3-4. And although Philadelphia

(4-3) and Dallas (5-3) have winning records, both teams have been

up and down.

Most surprising player

Quite frankly, we had forgotten Kerry Collins, above, even

played in the league. We were reminded when Titans QB Vince Young

went down and wigged out after one game. Collins isn't exactly

winning games (he has only three touchdown passes), but he isn't

losing games, either (he has only three interceptions).

Most disappointing player

He hasn't been a bust, but QB Brett Favre, above, hasn't turned

the Jets into Super Bowl contenders. He is having an okay season

(15 touchdowns, 11 interceptions), and, thus, the Jets are having

an okay season at 4-3. Then comes word that he might have shared

old Packers secrets with the Lions. Is anyone truly happy this guy

unretired?

Offensive MVP

Actually, we're going to go with co-MVPs from the same team.

Washington QB Jason Campbell and RB Clinton Portis, above, are

playing the kind of football that not only has helped the Redskins

build a 6-2 record, but it's the kind that wins in the playoffs.

Campbell has been error-free while compiling the fifth-best

quarterback rating in the NFL. Meanwhile, Portis averages 118 yards

a game and, barring injury, will win the rushing title easily.

Defensive MVP

Because we went with co-MVPs on offense, we will do the same on

defense. We have 11 co-MVPs the entire Titans defense. Keith

Bulluck, above, and the Titans are allowing fewer than two

touchdowns a game (12.4 points). Only one team has scored more than

17 in a game against Tennessee, and that was last week when the

Colts scored a late meaningless touchdown to finish with 21.

Rookie of the year

Not only has QB Matt Ryan, above, made Falcons fans forget about

the past and Michael Vick, but he has them thinking about the

future and the playoffs. Maybe the postseason is a stretch, but

Ryan is playing better than rookies are supposed to play at that

position. He has more touchdown passes (seven) than interceptions

(five), and this is the big number: The Falcons are 4-3.

Five biggest stories of the first half

1. Patriots lose superstar QB Tom Brady for the season with a

left knee injury.

2. Matt Millen finally gets canned as Lions president.

3. Three coaches get pink slips Oakland's Lane Kiffin, San

Francisco's Mike Nolan and St. Louis' Scott Linehan.

4. Saints QB Drew Brees is on pace to break Dan Marino's 1984

single-season passing yards record of 5,084.

5. Anything and everything that happens with the Cowboys.

Five stories to watch in the second half

1. For how long will the Titans remain undefeated?

2. For how long will the Lions remain winless?

3. Can the Cowboys clean up their mess and get back on track?

4. Can struggling teams such as the Colts, Jaguars, Chargers and

Eagles rally to make the playoffs?

5. Who will establish themselves as the Super Bowl favorite?

(Bonus answer: We say the defending champion Giants have already

done that.)

Playoff predictions

AFC East: Patriots

AFC South: Titans

AFC North: Steelers

AFC West: Chargers

Wild-card teams: Bills, Jaguars

NFC East: Giants

NFC South: Bucs

NFC North: Packers

NFC West: Cardinals

Wild-card teams: Redskins, Cowboys

Super scenario Our pick, as of right now, of which two teams

will be playing in Super Bow XLIII on Feb. 1 in Tampa.

Titans vs. Giants

The Titans get another test today by hosting the Packers, but we

think they will pass it. Meanwhile, how impressive did the Giants

look beating up on the Steelers last week in Pittsburgh?

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look beating up on the Steelers last week in Pittsburgh?

It should have been a glorious day for the

Colombian military when a combined air and land assault killed a

high-ranking guerrilla leader.

But rather than celebrating their latest war trophy, front-line

troops

at this hilltop base 30 miles east of the battlefield appeared

shell-shocked.

Watching the TV news over a lunch of rice and beans, they

learned that

27 army officers and enlisted men had been fired over a scandal in

which

11 young men from a Bogota slum were lured into the countryside,

then

executed and presented by the military as enemy combatants.

The killings, known as "false positives," were apparently just

the tip

of the iceberg. Colombian investigators are looking into more than

700

cases from around the country in which young men were allegedly

executed

then registered by army officers -- who were looking to impress

their

superiors -- as guerrillas or paramilitaries killed in action.

"If we end up proving that (illegal executions) are a

systematic and

generalized practice, then it would constitute a crime against

humanity," Attorney General Mario Iguaran said Friday.

The scandal broke amid the most triumphant year in the history

of the

Colombian armed forces.

After 44 years of war, the army finally seems to have the FARC --

or the

Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, the country's largest

guerrilla

force -- on the ropes. This year alone, troops have killed or

captured

about 30 high-ranking or midlevel FARC leaders, including Felipe

Rincon,

an influential rebel ideologue who was slain in last week's

firefight

near La Macarena.

In March, the FARC's maximum leader, Manuel "Sureshot"

Marulanda, died

of a heart attack. And in July, army intelligence officers pulled

off a

spectacular Entebbe-style operation that freed 15 hostages,

including

three U.S. military contractors and former Colombian presidential

candidate Ingrid Betancourt.

But in some ways, military analysts say, the Colombian army has

become a

victim of its own success.

Since 2002, the number of Colombian troops has nearly doubled to

about

263,000. As the army expanded, oversight lapsed. Yet accusations of

human rights abuses were often dismissed by officials as

rebel-inspired

campaigns to demoralize the soldiers.

"There was such a strong push to defeat the FARC that the

government put

too much faith in the military and exercised too little control,"

said

Cesar Restrepo of the Security and Democracy Foundation, a Bogota

think

tank. "Everyone looked the other way."

Another problem was the habit, prevalent among U.S. commanders

in

Vietnam, of measuring progress through body counts. The top brass

offered promotions, cash rewards and days off to troops for killing

guerrillas or paramilitaries, illegal right-wing fighters who ran

drugs

and targeted the rebels.

Officers, in turn, have come under fierce pressure from

President Alvaro

Uribe, who views the conflict not as a civil war, but as a fight

against

terrorists who must be eliminated. Last week, Uribe scolded his

troops

based in southern Meta state for failing to bring in a notorious

drug

trafficker and a paramilitary chieftain.

"Uribe is calling officers on their cell phones at 11 o'clock

at night,"

said Adam Isacson of the Center for International Policy in

Washington.

"What's a colonel going to tell him? The only quantitative results

he

can show are people killed or captured."

Under Uribe, about 30,000 paramilitaries have disarmed. But a

new

generation of militias have sprung up and moved into the power

vacuum.

Sen. Gustavo Petro, an opposition lawmaker, claimed that in some

cases

of "false positives" army officers agreed to ignore paramilitary

drug

trafficking and other crimes in exchange for the bodies of young

men who

could be paraded before their commanding officers.

In a 94-page report released last week, Amnesty International

called on

the United States and other nations to halt military aid to

Colombia

until the number of civilians killed by the nation's security

forces was

substantially reduced. The U.S. government has provided the Uribe

government with about $4 billion in mostly military aid.

Restrepo and other analysts say that the investigations could

strengthen

the army by purging the worst offenders. But now that the army is

winning the war, the more tradition-bound officers complain that

the

institution is losing the fight in the halls of justice.

"Society sent us off to war and now punishes us without pity,"

former

armed forces commander Manuel Jose Bonnet told the weekly news

magazine

Semana.

Despite the forced resignation of three generals, 17 other

officers and

seven enlisted personnel, some government critics are calling for

the

resignation of Defense Minister Juan Manuel Santos, who may run for

president in 2010.

But Santos has been a long-time critic of body counts and

initiated the

investigation of the executions. He says captured and demobilized

rebels

have provided the military with invaluable intelligence.

Here in La Macarena, home to the army's front-line

rapid-reaction force,

many officers appear to have bought into Santos' philosophy.

In a series of briefings, they pointed out that more than 800

guerrillas

in the southern region they patrol have demobilized this year.

"A dead guerrilla becomes a martyr to the FARC," said Gen.

Alejandro

Navas, commander of a Joint Task Force Omega that has been waging

war on

the FARC in southern Colombia for the past four years. "But when

rebels

demobilize, it means we have broken their will to fight," he said.

Yet victory also requires persuading civilians to collaborate

with the

army.

As he patrolled the muddy streets of La Macarena, a one-time

rebel

stronghold, one officer said news of the army executions would have

an

impact.

It would, he said, make his job of winning hearts and minds a

whole lot

harder.

The message that the economy is in the tank is as clear

on

price tags for cars, computers, flat-screen televisions and other

big-ticket items as it is in rising unemployment statistics and

stock

price drops.

Spending took its biggest fall in four years in September.

Consumer

confidence is at an all-time low. And experts are telling people to

pay

off debt and save money, which isn't exactly music to the ears of

retailers.

Even online spending is struggling. Forrester Research projects

online

sales this holiday season will reach $44 billion, up 12 percent

over

last year -- the slowest growth rate ever for online retail.

But the gray storm clouds for retailers have silver linings for

consumers. To unload products they may have ordered several months

ago,

retailers are narrowing profit margins, slashing prices and

starting

holiday sales early. They're offering low or zero interest rates.

They're mailing holiday catalogs early and launching new rewards

programs for customers.

"If you can offer consumers those choices, you're going to be a

big

winner," said Britt Beemer, CEO of America's Research Group, a

consumer

behavior survey research company. He said he's telling his clients

in

the retail industry to cut prices as much as possible. The

alternative

is to go out of business, he said.

More shoppers than ever are planning to take advantage of

one-day

markdowns on Black Friday, the day-after-Thanksgiving shopping

extravaganza, Beemer said, citing a recent survey he did. Sixty-one

percent of the 1,000 adults he asked said they are watching for big

doorbuster deals that day, compared with 48 percent last year.

"A lot of people are going to grab that Thursday morning paper

and map

out where they'll be going at 4, 5, 6 o'clock in the morning,"

Beemer

said.

Beaumont-based electronics and home furnishings retailer Conn's

is

trying to take advantage of its competitors' struggles, chief

operational officer Tim Frank said. Most retailers ordered products

several months ago, before consumer confidence was so low. Now many

are

trying to cut back their orders, and that gives Conn's a chance to

buy

products at a discount as they work their way through the supply

chain

from manufacturers in Mexico, he said.

Those opportunities lead to Conn's "special purchase"

promotions,

currently including a 42-inch Samsung plasma TV for $799, a full

$100

less than at some competitors. Frank said the company plans to

advertise

heavily to get shoppers into stores.

"I know people are talking about how bad the economy is, but I

think

it's a really exciting time," he said. "I believe we're going to

see a

very strong fourth-quarter shopping season."

Car dealers aren't nearly as bullish, but there are deals to be

had for

people who want to put a giant bow on a new car for a holiday gift,

said

Earl Hesterberg, CEO of Houston-based Group 1 Automotive, which

owns 100

dealerships nationwide and nine in Houston. Luxury models are at

lower

prices, and Nissan and Toyota are offering zero-interest loans for

qualifying customers on select models.

"The deals should be the best they've ever been," Hesterberg

said.

But what are consumers to do? Financial experts are telling them

to hold

onto their dollars. Shouldn't they heed that advice?

Probably, but not absolutely, said Cate Williams, vice president

of

financial literacy for Money Management International. With

retailers

hurting, there will be some "unbelievable opportunities" for

buyers, she

said. Just set some ground rules and follow them. Mainly, set a

budget

and follow it. Comparison shop. And whatever you do, try to leave

the

credit cards in your wallet.

And, she says, limit big purchases to durable goods that will be

with

you for a few years before wearing out or becoming obsolete. That

means

cars, appliances, electronics and home furnishings, not clothing or

food.

"And yes, a flat-screen TV is a durable," Williams said.

Houston bartender Carlos Baez, 26, already has a flat-screen,

but he has

noticed prices dropping on other electronics, he said. The Dell

laptop

he wants to buy for his sister was marked down from $899 to $699 at

a

local Best Buy store where Baez shopped Thursday. Baez also said

he's

seen Microsoft's Xbox video game console as low as $199, low enough

that

he'd buy one for his brother for Christmas.

"You're starting to see the holiday prices three months before

Christmas," said Baez.

Not everyone is motivated by sale prices.

Houston real estate agent Ed Melchor also picked out a new

flat-screen

model last week -- one that wasn't even on sale.

"I don't really need this, but I want it," he said.

BUYERS' REMORSE

The past week brought a barrage of data indicating that U.S.

retail

activity was in the doldrums as consumers seemingly clutched their

pocketbooks:

-- CONFIDENCE: Consumer confidence levels dipped to their lowest

since

the Conference Board began doing its monthly reading of citizen

sentiment in 1967. The index, released Tuesday, found that

consumers

were pessimistic both about the present and the future.

-- ECONOMY: U.S. gross domestic product shrank by 0.3 percent

from July

through September, according to initial readings by the Commerce

Department released Thursday. It found consumers decreased spending

by

the most in 28 years and disposable income dropped the most since

1947.

-- SPENDING: On Friday, the Commerce Department said consumer

spending

took its biggest dive since June 2004.

Ever since the late August day when Republican

candidate

John McCain plucked Sarah Palin from political obscurity to be his

running mate, it became inevitable that American voters would make

history in 2008. Either the United States would choose its first

president of African ancestry or its first female vice president.

Whichever party wins the election, "nothing's going to look the

same,"

said Stan Greenberg, a Democratic pollster who conducts bipartisan

surveys for National Public Radio.

But the 2008 election, which concludes at polling places on

Tuesday

after weeks of record-setting early voting, will be historic for

many

reasons beyond race and gender.

It is the first election during a deep economic crisis since

1932, when

Democratic challenger Franklin D. Roosevelt routed Republican

President

Herbert Hoover as the nation sank into the depths of the Great

Depression. Since then, six presidential campaigns have taken place

during economic slumps and only once, in 1972, has the party in

charge

of the White House survived.

"One of the safest propositions in American history is, when

there are

severe economic downturns that affect millions of people, then it's

the

party in power that suffers the most," said Rice University

political

scientist Earl Black.

The 2008 election also is a rare wartime contest -- just the

seventh in a

century. In the past wartime choices, incumbent presidents were

re-elected all three times they ran. But the party in power was

voted

out of office in the three races when the incumbent was not on the

ballot, the last time when Lyndon Johnson pulled out of the 1968

race.

History also tells us that American voters like to change the

party in

the White House every eight years. This year's election is the

sixth

time in the post-FDR era of term limits that a party in power is

trying

to win the presidency in three straight elections. Only once --

George

H.W. Bush in 1988 -- did the "in" party succeed.

"It's kind of a perfect storm for Democrats," said Jim

Granato, director

of the University of Houston's Center for Public Policy. "You've

got an

unpopular war, a severe economic crisis and it's unusual for an

incumbent party to win three consecutive elections."

The 2008 election is also a rare generational contest pitting

candidates

25 years apart in age. In the two similar generation-gap elections

of

the 20th century, the younger candidate, baby boomer Bill Clinton,

defeated World War II veterans George H.W. Bush and Bob Dole. And

in the

other generational shift of modern times, voters in 1960 chose the

nation's first Roman Catholic president, 43-year-old John F.

Kennedy, to

replace 68-year-old Dwight D. Eisenhower.

This year's election could mark the end of three decades of

bitter

post-Vietnam politics and with it the discussions of swift boats,

draft

evasion, National Guard records and anti-war bomb plots. After all,

Obama was 6 years old when McCain's Skyhawk dive-bomber was shot

down

over Hanoi.

The generational divide is evident in the electorate. Obama

holds a

double-digit lead among voters under the age of 45, while McCain

has an

edge among voters older than the Democratic nominee. For

Republicans,

the risk is that the largest generation in American history will

become

loyal Democrats, much as Ronald Reagan and Franklin Roosevelt

influenced

two different generations in the 20th century.

"There's not just a lost election (at stake) here, there's a

lost

generation," said Democratic strategist James Carville.

Republicans face other demographic risks this year. Hispanic

voters, who

cast nearly 40 percent of their ballots for Republican George W.

Bush in

2004, are siding with Obama by margins of about 2-to-1, according

to

numerous polls. The strong anti-GOP backlash among Latinos has

complicated McCain's chances in traditionally Republican states

such as

Nevada, Colorado and Florida.

"Republicans are in a very bad way (among Hispanics)," said

University

of Houston political scientist Granato.

Despite McCain's support for giving illegal immigrants a pathway

to

citizenship, he added, "the Republican brand is viewed as being

hostile

to immigrants."

Given all of the historical precedents that favor the Democrats,

one of

the surprises of 2008 is that McCain has remained competitive for

so

many months, said Rice's Black. He points out that the Republican

nominee continues to hold a large advantage as the candidate better

qualified to serve as commander-in-chief.

But to Houston council member Jolanda "Jo" Jones, Obama's

candidacy has

made history.

She remembers her mother's stories about being forced to drink

from

"colored-only" water fountains. She recalls how her grandmother,

rather

than being forced to sit in the back of segregated Houston buses,

chose

to walk.

Now, with Obama running ahead in polls just two days before the

presidential election, Jones can hardly believe how far the country

has

come.

"I believe that it's probably the most important historic event

in my

lifetime for civil rights," the 42-year-old said. "I'm just happy

it's

happening while my grandmother (now 89) is still alive."

LOS ANGELES - With record numbers of people expected to inundate

the polls Tuesday, voting experts are concerned the sky-high

turnout may overwhelm the system, resulting in long lines and

short-tempered voters.

"Our biggest problem going into this election is that we may

not be able to meet the demand," said Kim Alexander, president of

the California Voter Foundation.

"Do we have the capacity to handle an extremely high turnout?

That's the question that is weighing on the minds of poll workers

and election officials."

More than 1 million Californians have registered to vote since

Sept. 5, catapulting the state's voter registration to an all-time

high of 17.3 million.

Up more than 350,000 voters from 2004, voter registration in Los

Angeles County now stands at 4.3 million. North Carolina registered

about that number in 2004, and each of 41 other states registered

fewer.

Los Angeles County Registrar-Recorder Dean Logan thinks turnout

in the county will exceed the 79.1 percent from four years ago.

"We are expecting there will likely be long lines at the

polling places, especially when the polls first open and before

they close at 8 p.m.," Logan said.

Logan is racing to process a backlog of 13,000 last-minute

vote-by-mail applications and 55,000 voter registrations.

Logan said voters with outstanding absentee ballots should turn

them in on Election Day at their polling place or the registrar's

headquarters in Norwalk.

To process last-minute registrations, Logan said his employees

are working double shifts.

As of Friday, more than 494,000 people had returned vote-by-mail

ballots out of about 1 million requested. That's up from 452,000

returned and 758,000 requested four days before the 2004 election.

"We are getting about 18,000 telephone calls a day," Logan

said. "The phone companies are telling us it's equivalent to what

happens when there is an earthquake and it jams the phone lines."

Statewide, 17.3 million voters are registered, up from 16.6

million in the 2004 presidential election, which saw a 76 percent

turnout.

"Voter interest in this historic election is enormous and I

expect to see a record number of Californians cast ballots on

Tuesday," Secretary of State Debra Bowen said in a statement.

Nationwide, about 13 million people have already voted early and

9 million newly registered people are expected to vote in the

historic election, placing additional strain on the voting system.

Expressing concerns about the record number of newly registered

voters, a recent report by the Pew Center on the States'

electionline.org warned "another perfect storm may be brewing."

Mary Boyle, a spokeswoman for Common Cause in Washington, D.C.,

noted that in the past decade, the country has seen many reports of

Election Day problems, including long lines, untrained poll workers

and machine failures.

"We still see deceptive practices and suppression efforts going

on," Boyle added.

Nationwide, more than 2,800 reports of voter problems had been

made as of Friday afternoon to the Election Protection Web site at

www.ourvotelive.org, or by calling 866-OUR-VOTE.

California received nearly 1,800 reports, and Los Angeles County

had nearly 800 reports ranging from registration and absentee

voting problems to voter intimidation.

One of the most publicized cases involved the recent arrest of

the owner of a firm hired by the California Republican Party to

register voters. Ontario police arrested Young Political Majors

owner Mark Jacoby, 25, after he allegedly registered himself to

vote, in 2006 and again in 2007, at an address where he did not

live.

The arrest came as dozens of voters in San Bernardino and

Riverside counties claimed their registrations were changed from

Democrat to Republican by YPM workers.

Logan is reviewing 9,000 registration affidavits turned in by

the firm to determine if party affiliations were involuntarily

changed.

But California Republican Party spokesman Hector Barajas says

the arrest was "politically motivated."

An attorney for the CRP also requested that U.S. Attorney Thomas

P. O'Brien look into alleged interference with voter registration

activities by party members.

Party attorney Charles H. Bell Jr. wrote in a letter that some

of the party's voter-registration solicitors were detained by the

police for questioning or intimidated by a $5,000 reward offered by

the California Democratic Party for information leading to the

arrest of CRP solicitors who are violating voter registration laws.

On Sept. 27, a CRP solicitor was assaulted in Simi Valley and

250 completed voter registration application forms were stolen,

Bell wrote.

Alexander, with the voter foundation, cautioned the public to be

alert this election season.

"Voters have to beware of the dirty tricks," Alexander said.

"In California, we're not seeing, at least in the presidential

election, the severity of dirty tricks occurring in other states,

but they are popping up in some of the other campaigns and

propositions at the state and local levels."

There needs to be some perspective when it comes to judging

coach Barry Melrose. Making assumptions after 10 games is not only

knee-jerk but shows a lack of understanding about what this team

has gone through since last season:

New owners, new general manager, 15 new players (if you include

Vinny Prospal) trying to learn a new system and about each other; a

new coaching staff trying to mesh, and a training camp on two

continents that was great for bonding but lousy for the on-ice

product.

Add that star center Vinny Lecavalier and best defenseman Paul

Ranger missed camp because of shoulder surgeries, and a

development-stunting schedule that had the team play one game in 10

days, and it's not difficult to figure why Tampa Bay got off to a

slow start.

It also makes that 3-3-3 October record look pretty good.

Melrose, who spent the past 12 years as an ESPN analyst, should

be evaluated constantly as to his preparation, practice methods,

the kind of game he wants to play and the way he motivates players.

And it is right for owners Oren Koules and Len Barrie and general

manager Brian Lawton to demand explanations of Melrose's methods

and thought processes, and if there are concerns, to bring them to

his attention and expect corrections.

But it seems premature less than a month into the season to draw

the conclusion, as some in the media already have, that Melrose is

one step from unemployment.

Tampa Bay has a lot of very good players and potential to be a

very good team. We saw it last week in two notable road victories.

Melrose must maintain the trajectory.

Are there going to be bumps? Sure. It is even reasonable to

believe Melrose's leash is shorter because Lawton, who joined the

team in late June, was not part of the hiring process. So consider

this a feeling-out process for them as well.

Grading any coach is an inexact science. It is even trickier in

Tampa Bay because of the extenuating circumstances. Melrose has

said he believes he has "less than a year" to prove himself. The

guess here is the brass needs at least 25 to 30 games before it can

even begin evaluating whether Melrose was the right choice for the

job.

Until then, let's see what he can do.

LOS ANGELES - Emily Lehrer, a 20-year-old Valley College

student, knows some people think her generation is apathetic,

unmotivated and superficial.

But the aspiring thespian begs to differ. She says her devotion

to politics and the hotly debated issues of this election year is

unquestionable.

Still need proof?

"I broke up with my boyfriend. He's way too conservative," she

said. "I'm a flaming liberal, and it's all we ever talked about.

It was just too much."

While the average young voter of the Millennia generation might

not go to such lengths over politics, there is no doubt this year's

historic election, which could lead to the first black president or

the first woman vice president, has drawn out the youth vote as

never before.

Young voters from 18 to 29 have become one of the

fastest-growing demographics of this election season. In Los

Angeles County, registration for young voters has doubled from the

previous presidential election, according to the county

registrar-recorder.

Nationwide, statistics from this year's presidential primaries

show youth voter turnout also nearly doubled - from 9 percent to 17

percent.

Excitement generated by Democratic presidential candidate Barack

Obama, growing fears about the Iraq war and the future of the U.S.

economy, and sharply divided views about gay marriage are expected

to draw many young voters into voting booths for the first time.

Voter mobilization groups and political experts agree that young

voters have brought an unprecedented amount of energy to this

presidential campaign.

"We have the highest voter turnout in young people that we've

seen since they were eligible to vote in 1972," said Donald Green,

political expert and professor at Yale University.

Green was commissioned to study youth voters in 1996, when young

voter turnout was at an all-time low.

The youth vote crawled upward in the elections that followed,

but Green said it isn't until now that the power of the youth vote

has become evident.

"No one fully understands it yet, and it will take years to

completely unfold but we might be seeing a new generation of voters

developing their political habits earlier than their counterparts

did during the '90s."

So what resonates with young voters?

Green said his studies have shown young people are less likely

to have ties to a candidate based on political affiliation.

Campaign tactics that work for the young citizens of the 21st

century include person-to-person contact, especially via social

network sites or grass-roots meetings.

That approach has worked for groups like Rock the Vote. To date

the organization has had 1.7 million young voters download

registration applications from its site, compared to 800,000 in

2004.

Chrissy Faessen, deputy director of Rock the Vote, said

traditionally the largest obstacle to getting young people to vote

has been the registration process.

"They see it as a confusing process with a lot of steps,"

Faessen said.

"But once we get them registered they turn out at the polls."

According to Faessen, 82 percent of registered young voters cast

a ballot in 2004.

Faessen said Rock the Vote is also hosting poll place parties

for early voters and shuttling in people to get them to cast their

ballot early.

On a grass-roots level, organizations like California Public

Interest Research Group have perched themselves on college campuses

across the state for months, registering students to vote and

encouraging them to get more information on other ballot measures.

The effort to build interest among students has not been

difficult for Kate Harrington, the campus coordinator for CalPIRG

at Valley College in North Hollywood.

"There has been a huge turnout of people on campus and I have

talked to a bunch who haven't voted in years and are now going to

vote," Harrington said.

"The political climate among young people is at a tipping

point. ... Young people are inspired by the possibilities."

Harrington said most young people she's talked to have said

their issues during this election center on the war, the

environment, health care, education and the economy.

Still, not all young voters have managed to become engaged in

this election.

Sam Dorman, managing director for the League of Young Voters,

said on Super Tuesday in this year's primary, 1 in 4 college-track

young people voted compared with 1 in 14 for noncollege-going

youth.

"Just like every other demographic, it takes sustained

investment to engage young people, and most campaigns and

organizations focus their effort in the most accessible places,

specifically college campuses," Dorman said in a written

statement.

"However, at the League we engage and mobilize noncollege youth

through programs that stress long-term, self-sustaining

empowerment. We believe we can harness the excitement of the 2008

election cycle to increase civic involvement and build a base for

organizing, empowerment, and activism in 2009 and beyond."

LOS ANGELES - The paper-or-plastic question at the supermarket

checkout stand is gradually being replaced by another: Plain or

fancy?

The reusable shopping bags that markets offer - they must, by

law, in California - are also becoming a fashion statement for some

ecology-minded consumers. Plain canvas bags are giving way to those

embellished with graphics, logos and slogans as markets, department

stores and other companies jump aboard the green bandwagon.

"Reusable bags are a really simple and easy way to make an

impact," said Dana Page, product leader for Whole Foods Market,

based in Austin, Texas, which recently introduced a line of bags

designed by singer-songwriter Sheryl Crow.

"I love making a statement," Page added. "I also think that

if someone sees me using them, but forgot to bring theirs, they

will think, 'Oh, yeah, I'll remember next time.'

"We're all in this together. We really want to encourage

everyone to use the bags."

California supermarkets have had to offer reusable bags for sale

since July 1, 2007, one of the provisions of Assembly Bill 2449.

The measure sponsored by Van Nuys Democrat Lloyd Levine is designed

to help reduce litter from the estimated 100 billion plastic

shopping bags used annually by U.S. consumers.

While the measure requires stores only to try to recycle plastic

bags, Whole Foods has banned them entirely since April 22 -- Earth

Day.

In addition to offering 100 percent recycled paper bags, the

upscale market has been selling a variety of reusable bags, which

they say are made of 80 percent recycled plastic bottles.

The limited-edition bag designed by Crow recently was added for

99 cents, Page said. A smaller size, which can also be used as a

lunch bag or gift bag, is 79 cents.

The collectible bag helps to support the Natural Resources

Defense Council's "Simple Steps" program - simplesteps.org - that

includes tips on how to reduce, reuse and recycle household

materials and other green-living suggestions.

The reusable bag designed by Wink for Target Corp. incorporates

the discounter's trademark bulls-eye logo as blossoms on two trees.

"Offering the bags is right for business and it's an extension

of our commitment to sustainable living," Target spokesman Steve

Linders said. "They are popular and our guests want them. We've

gotten great feedback."

Locally, other reusable choices include Macy's "Turn Over a New

Leaf" 100 percent cotton bag selling for $3.95 (with $1 being

donated to the National Park Foundation) and Wal-Mart's black bag

embellished with "Paper or Plastic. Neither" for $1.

Many Trader Joe's stores have a wall covered with a variety of

reusable bags, including a red floral cloth bag for $2.99 and a

blue version with surfboards for 99 cents.

Personal-statement bags, including those carrying a wide variety

of ecological messages, can be found on various Internet sites.

Some of the choices include "Alice in Wonderland," Kermit the

Frog, presidential candidates, peace signs, fruits, vegetables and

"Jesus Would Choose Cloth Bags."

At www.cafepress.com/ecobags, there is a fall foliage bag for

about $25, and a cloth tote with the obvious "Grocery Bag" for

$27.95.

Envirosax has two, five-bag sets of reusable bags for $37.95 in

"Ultra-Mod" black and white and "Flora Graphic" in red, green,

blue, yellow and tan.

And, yes, you can buy the European classic cotton string bags. A

California company, The Verde Bag, has them for $7 each in natural

and "garden colors."

Woodland Hills resident Laura Ward said she has about eight

reusable grocery bags that she uses regularly, including some from

Trader Joe's and one she got as a handout at a Woodland Hills'

Concerts in the Park event.

"I'm making much more of an effort to use them. It's just a

matter of remembering," she said.

"I've seen really cute bags. I have looked online but I haven't

purchased them because some are so expensive."

Robert Cichocki said his wife, Sherri, uses their six reusable

bags almost religiously when she goes grocery shopping, but he has

uses for both plastic and paper.

"I still use the plastic when I walk the dog. We use the paper

bags to put our recyclables in that go into the blue bin. For us,

they're not going wasted."

KINGSTON, R.I. - On a sun-splashed afternoon that was in stark

contrast to

the monsoon-like conditions he was subjected to in his visit last

year to

his native Ocean State, Liam Coen could not have been more

picture-perfect.

Despite nursing a bruised left shoulder, the senior quarterback

from

Newport enjoyed a triumphant homecoming by completing all but two

of his 17

pass attempts for 241 yards and three touchdowns to guide the

University of

Massachusetts (6-2, 3-2 Colonial) to a 49-0 triumph over the Rhode

Island

(2-8, 0-6) before a Meade Stadium crowd of 7,201.

"Liam Coen just continues to do what he does," said UMass

coach Don

Brown. "And that's be efficient, run the offense, 15 of 17

((completions))

.. He was special today and, I'll also add, less than 100 percent,

so

taking him out in the third quarter was precautionary.".

The victory not only bolstered UMass's postseason hopes but

avenged a 12-6

loss to the Rams here a year ago in which Coen, playing in severe

weather

conditions produced by Hurricane Noel, completed 7 of 22 passes for

22

yards with two interceptions. Yesterday, Coen was a picture of

efficiency.

He guided the Minutemen to scores on their first six possessions,

completing 88.2 percent of his passes for the second-highest

completion

percentage in school history behind Tim Day's 89.4 percent (17 of

19) in

the 2004 opener against Delaware State.

"All I have to say this year is that there was no rain," said

Coen, who

departed with 13:10 left in the third quarter after he connected

with

Victor Cruz (7 catches, 129 yards, 2 TDs) on a 35-yard TD strike

that made

it 42-0.

"Honestly, I don't like going back on last year, but you saw

what happened

today and there was no rain," Coen said. "It wouldn't have

happened last

year."

Junior running back Tony Nelson rushed 12 times for 65 yards,

and tallied

UMass's first two touchdowns (his ninth and 10th of the season) on

runs of

2 and 13 yards. The 15th-ranked Minutemen shut out the Rams by

forcing

three turnovers (two interceptions, one fumble), limiting URI to 19

rushing

yards on 40 attempts, and ringing up eight sacks for 55 yards,

including

four in the first half on Derek Cassidy (13 of 24, 185 yards, two

interceptions).

Josh Jennings, a 6-foot, 220-pound junior middle linebacker,

intercepted

Cassidy both times, the first of which set up Nelson's 2-yard TD

run and

the second which he returned 40 yards for a touchdown to give the

Minutemen

a 35-0 halftime lead.

"We tried not to give ((Cassidy)) a chance to breathe today and

we

certainly made his pass difficult," Brown said. "We played very,

very

solidly against the run, which made them truly one-dimensional, and

then we

just took care of business."

The Rams, who mustered 212 total yards, came up empty when Louis

Feinstein

missed first-half field goal attempts of 40 and 34 yards.

Sophomore defensive back Shane Viveiros of Fall River, Mass.,

preserved

UMass's first shutout since a 7-0 blanking of Northeastern in 2006

when he

stymied URI's two other scoring bids, sacking Cassidy for a 16-yard

loss on

fourth down from the UMass 5, then recovering Cassidy's fumble at

the UMass

18.

"I was just trying to be a spark of energy for our team," said

Viveiros.

So, too, was Coen. But once his work was done, there was nothing

left for

him to do but reflect on his final trip home as a collegian.

"It really doesn't get much better than that," Coen said.

"Any game you

can sit back and go, 'Hey, I did what I had to do and the team did

what it

had to do,' you feel good about yourself and you feel good about

the way

you finished."

Michael Vega can be reached at vega@globe.com.

The Bruins had long skated off the TD Banknorth Garden ice last

night with

a 5-1 win tucked in their pockets, but Marc Savard was still

watching the

replays of the third-period melee, marveling especially at how

Shane Hnidy

tuned up Dallas counterpart Matt Niskanen.

There is a faction among hockey watchers that turns its

collective nose up

at the fights and brawls that were the norm three decades ago. But

last

night, one of the few occasions when the gloves drop and the fists

fly in

succession, players become fans as well, hungry to consume the

rough stuff

that has been nearly bleached out of the genteel NHL.

"I think the fans may have had a flashback to the old days on

Causeway

Street," said Aaron Ward. "The game hasn't really gone this way.

But

sometimes situations call for teams rallying together and sticking

up for

each other. That's what you saw tonight."

Before last night, the Bruins had practically been peaceniks.

They had

engaged in only two fights all season (a pair of Shawn Thornton

bouts

against Montreal's Georges Laraque and Pittsburgh's Eric Godard),

just one

more than the NHL's pacifists in Detroit and Minnesota.

But when the Stars, led by agitators Sean Avery and Steve Ott

(the new

McFilthy and McNasty?), tried to swagger their way into the Garden

and push

the Bruins around, their hosts responded.

With their fists.

To a man, the Bruins were just as proud for the way they stuck

up for each

other as they were with the result: a victory before 14,576 fans

who got

every penny of their money's worth.

The Bruins survived a second-period barrage in which Tim Thomas

turned

aside all 21 pucks that were fired his way. Marco Sturm, who came

in with

just one goal this season, put two pucks behind goalie Marty Turco.

The

Boston penalty kill, dead last in the league, killed off all six

Dallas

power plays, including a 45-second two-man advantage in the second

period.

But they turned the agitating ways of Avery and Ott against the

Stars,

shaming Dallas and its goon squad in a won't-back-down third that

saw the

two clubs rack up 114 total penalty minutes.

"There used to be a code," said Thornton, who threw down with

Krystofer

Barch in the only clean fight of the game, "that if you did stuff

like

that, you had to answer the bell. But now, we're not allowed to

police the

game ourselves. So they get away with a little bit more."

The Bruins were first angered by an incident early in the second

period

when Ott went low on Stephane Yelle with a hip check. Thornton went

after

Ott and landed several punches, but the Dallas forward didn't drop

his

gloves in return. Thornton was whistled for a double minor

(roughing) that

caused his coach no dismay.

"Yeah, Thorny took a four-minute penalty," said Julien. "But

there was a

guy who almost took our player's knees out."

Later in the period, after Ott belted Mark Stuart, Hnidy shed

his gloves

and tried to fight the agitator. Again, Ott kept his gloves on. At

5:22,

another scrum took place that saw Ott, Avery, Hnidy, and Milan

Lucic sent

off for unsportsmanlike conduct penalties.

In the third period, after Andrew Ference cleaned Ott's clock

with an

open-ice hit, the Boston defenseman fought Avery at 4:54. Then at

7:02,

following an interference call on Turco, Ott went low again on

Lucic,

appearing to target the winger's knees. Ott and Lucic were whistled

for

roughing.

"Not really," said Lucic when asked if he was surprised Ott

never wanted

to fight. "That's what he tries to do. He's an agitator. I'm not

really

surprised."

At 9:31, with the Bruins holding a 3-1 lead (Patrice Bergeron

scored the

go-ahead goal in the second, Phil Kessel netted his seventh goal of

the

year in the third), Thornton and Barch squared off. Both players

landed

punches, with Thornton managing to claw off Barch's helmet.

"I felt bad for Barch to have to mop up the mess that his other

two

teammates couldn't finish," Julien said.

But the biggest explosion took place after Stuart made it a 4-1

game. Avery

stapled Lucic face first into the boards at 11:44, prompting Savard

to jump

the Dallas forward and pop him with several rights. Niskanen tried

to come

to Avery's aid, but was intercepted by Hnidy, who delivered a

string of

heavy rights to the defenseman's head. Avery was called for

boarding and a

10-minute misconduct.

"I think it was a hit from behind," Savard said. "Nothing

other than

coming in and helping a teammate. He's got my back every night. I'm

not a

tough guy, but just sticking up for each other. It wasn't the

cleanest hit.

I'm just trying to help a teammate. It was getting like that in the

third.

Obviously, they're a frustrated team. They've still got a couple

great

players over there. It's just too bad a couple guys do the things

they

do."

FOXBOROUGH - Brandon Meriweather was eventually going to replace

Rodney

Harrison at safety in the Patriots secondary - that was the

long-term plan

- but eventually became immediately when Harrison was lost for the

season

with a torn right quadriceps against the Broncos Oct. 20.

The absence of Harrison, one of the team's spiritual and vocal

leaders,

forced Meriweather not only to step up into the starting lineup

last week

against the Rams, but to speak up as well.

Nobody expects the soft-spoken safety to be as boisterous as

Harrison, but

Meriweather needs to find his own voice while making sure he's

heard when

it comes to communicating with the rest of the secondary. All

reports from

the St. Louis game were that communication was not an issue with

Meriweather and James Sanders calling the shots in the secondary.

Communication will be key again for the Patriots secondary

tonight, as it

faces Peyton Manning and the Colts at Lucas Oil Stadium. Manning is

the

master of adjusting to what look a defense is giving him, and

Meriweather

and fellow starting safety Sanders will have to adjust right back.

"We don't put it all on one guy to make all the calls and

control

everything. It's both of them," said defensive coordinator Dean

Pees.

"They both have to make the calls. They both have to echo it to

each other

and to the corners. They're both held responsible for it.

"Just in the meetings and in practice and stuff, I didn't see

it as any

different if it was Rodney and Brandon, Brandon and James, James

and

Rodney. I didn't see a whole lot of difference, and I hope there

isn't any

difference."

There has been a marked difference in the way Meriweather has

performed

this year. Before Harrison's injury he was seeing significant

playing time

in the team's nickel and dime packages.

Despite not being a starter until last week, the second-year

player leads

the Patriots in interceptions with three, showing the range and

ball-hawking skills that made him a first-round pick (24th overall)

in

2007. Meriweather also has shown that he's not a milquetoast.

"Yeah, he's certainly more vocal than he was as a rookie,"

said Pees. "I

would hope every week he gets more and more so, with the more

things that

he sees and the more he understands, not only our scheme, but he

just

understands what the other team is trying to do. So it has

definitely

improved from a year ago."

Still, the notion of replacing Harrison, who was a big part of

the

Patriots' 24-20 victory over the Colts last season, holding Dallas

Clark

to two catches for 15 yards, is enough to make anyone speechless.

Maybe

that's why Meriweather lapsed into Patriot-speak when asked about

it.

"I treat every game the same," he said. "I'm not looking at

it like I'm

a starter or I'm a backup. I just look at it like it's another game

that I

have to go play."

It's OK for Meriweather to be laconic with the media, as long as

he isn't

on the field.

Five-time Pro Bowl safety and former Dallas Cowboy Darren

Woodson, now an

analyst for ESPN, said the ability to communicate is key for any

safety.

"You have to be a guy that's vocal," said Woodson. "I relate

it to

playing with Roy Williams ((in Dallas)). Williams is a soft-spoken

guy. He

doesn't like to talk. That hurt him as far as guys wanting to know

the

call; that just wasn't his thing.

"Brandon will have to become more vocal if he wants to remain

the guy back

there. The safeties don't get enough credit as far as lining guys

up.

You're the quarterback in that secondary."

Communication aside, Woodson said having Meriweather in the

lineup could

benefit the Patriots.

Woodson said he would have loved to have played with Harrison

and called

him an extremely smart player, but he said that the 5-foot-11-inch,

200-pound Meriweather more closely fits the prototype for today's

sleeker

safeties - guys like Bob Sanders of the Colts, Ed Reed of the

Ravens, and

Troy Polamalu of the Steelers who can cover wide receivers and

tight ends

and cover a lot of ground.

"((Meriweather)) can go get it," said Woodson. "Rodney's

speed and

Sanders's speed, they don't have the same recovery speed and

ability to

recover from hashmark to hashmark," said Woodson.

To Harrison's credit, he took an active role in grooming both

Sanders and

Meriweather. While some veterans would have shunned the men who

eventually

could take their jobs, Harrison embraced them and taught them.

Fittingly for someone as quiet as Meriweather, there wasn't a

speech from

Harrison that made the most lasting impact. It was simply watching

how

Harrison went about his business that spoke volumes.

"Hot Rod, he more leads by example than by words, but the thing

that he

mostly installed in me is play every play like it's your last

because you

never know when your last play is going to be," said Meriweather.

That's the circle of life in the NFL. Somebody's potential last

play could

be the beginning of another player's elevation.

"It's not a positive that Rodney went down, but it might be a

positive in

((Meriweather's)) career because he can grow knowing he's the guy

back

there now," said Woodson. "We'll find out a lot about him the

second half

of the season."

Christopher L. Gasper can be reached at cgasper@globe.com.

The Red Sox' flirtation with moving their spring training site to

Sarasota,

Fla., has come to an end.

In the wake of Lee County's approval of a proposal for a new

stadium last

Tuesday, the team announced yesterday that it has signed an

agreement that

will keep the Red Sox in Fort Myers, Fla., for at least 30 years.

"Our top-line goal is to create the best spring training

environment and

experience in all of major league baseball," Red Sox chief

operating

office Mike Dee said.

"That's a big statement, but we believe we have a great

opportunity with a

clean slate to start from the ground up and construct something

that's not

only a great experience while the games are going on, but we have a

great

deal of fans that show up ((during workouts))."

The new stadium will have 9,999 seats, with standing room and

berm seating

that will increase capacity to 12,000.

City of Palms Park, where the Red Sox have played since 1993,

has a

capacity of 7,290.

One of the most important parts of the new facility for the Red

Sox is that

it will be a single-site facility. Currently, the Sox have minor

league

practice facilities in a different location. The new park will be a

combined-site facility with six practice fields in addition to the

stadium.

The combined-site facility played a role in the Sox' decision.

"It wasn't by itself a determining factor, but it was a

contributing

factor," said Dee.

In Sarasota, the Sox would have had separate locations as part

of the Payne

Park site. Other factors included appealing economic terms, access

to

hotels and shopping areas, and Southwest Florida International

Airport's

numerous direct flights from Boston.

The Red Sox will move into the new facility in 2012. The new

stadium will

be constructed to resemble Fenway. Dee added that, with the vacancy

coming

at City of Palms Park, the Sox were on board with Lee County

attempting to

lure a third team to the area, joining the Sox and Twins.

One piece that has not been determined is the site of the new

park. Lee

County is relying on local landowners to donate an 80-acre plot.

According

to Dee, proposals will be requested in the next week from

developers on a

site in southern Lee County. The Sox will have input on the site

decision.

Though it seemed the Sox were headed to Sarasota, the costs

associated with

the new stadium there were not as favorable for them.

"It's fair to say discussions outside of Lee County heated up

quickly,"

Dee said. "There was a period where primary discussions would have

taken

us out of Lee County, but the leadership demonstrated over the last

eight

weeks, three or four, really, speaks volumes about the way they

feel about

sports in general and the Red Sox.

"I don't think we were ever one foot out the door, but the Lee

County

folks would say they had to play catch up.

"There was just tremendous momentum and the county moved

mountains between

Sept. 15 ((and now)). The more we looked around and the more the

process

moved forward, the more we became comfortable where we are."

Amalie Benjamin can be reached at abenjamin@globe.com.

It's always interesting to hear how other people around baseball

think the

Red Sox will approach their offseason.

The perception of a few baseball officials is that the Sox'

priority is to

come up with a catcher, whether it's bringing back Jason Varitek or

going

another route. One scout said, "They'll try to take care of the

catching

first and then see what's out there and explore a guy like ((Mark))

Teixeira or ((Jake)) Peavy or ((CC)) Sabathia or ((A.J.)) Burnett.

They

might even explore Prince Fielder because they know the Yankees

will. But

think about it; they don't have to do a whole lot. They came within

a game

of going to the World Series."

There are teams looking to see what the Sox do with Mike Lowell,

who told

team officials after his hip surgery that it's the best he's felt

in three

years in terms of range of motion and lack of pain. The real test

will come

in spring training.

The other speculation revolves around Coco Crisp and Julio Lugo.

A National League general manager said, "Crisp has value. He

played very

well, he's fast, a great defender. Lugo is a tougher sell because

of his

contract and the fact he's coming off an injury. But just look at

the

shortstop market and you can see there'd be a limited market, but a

market

for him nonetheless."

Who's the one guy teams would love to pry from the Sox?

"Justin Masterson," said an American League GM. "I'll bet you

the Red

Sox hear that name called a lot in their trade talks. I think the

other guy

is Jacoby Ellsbury. The hope is the Red Sox are down on him and

would move

him. That's probably just a hope."

I never really understood why there aren't more "swap meet" type

deals in

baseball. As in, "You take what I can't use and I'll take what you

can't

use."

There was a consensus among the general managers I spoke to last

week that

they wouldn't mind making those types of deals, but they rarely

happen.

Anyway, may I suggest we set up a few tables for a swap meet at

this

week's GM meetings in Dana Point, Calif., with the items consisting

of

players who are overpriced, underperforming, too old, or not useful

to

their present teams?

Table 1, starting pitchers: Barry Zito (Giants); Dontrelle

Willis and Nate

Robertson (Tigers); Adam Eaton (Phillies); Carlos Silva, Miguel

Batista,

and Jarrod Washburn (Mariners); Daniel Cabrera (Orioles); Jeff

Suppan

(Brewers); Ian Kennedy and Kei Igawa (Yankees); Scott Olsen

(Marlins).

Table 2, relief pitchers: Mike MacDougal (White Sox); Aaron

Heilman and

Scott Schoenweis (Mets); Jason Frasor (Blue Jays); Luis Vizcaino

(Rockies);

Kevin Gregg (Marlins); Justin Speier (Angels); Brandon Backe

(Astros).

Table 3, infielders: Julio Lugo (Red Sox); Jack Wilson and

Freddie Sanchez

(Pirates); Scott Rolen (Blue Jays); Miguel Tejada (Astros); Melvin

Mora

(Orioles); Rickie Weeks and Bill Hall (Brewers); Mark Teahen and

Ross

Gload (Royals); Nick Johnson and Dmitri Young (Nationals); Luis

Castillo

(Mets).

Table 4, catchers: Yorvit Torrealba (Rockies); Ramon Hernandez

(Orioles);

Bengie Molina (Giants); Kenji Johjima (Mariners).

Table 5, outfielders: David Dellucci (Indians); Eric Byrnes

(Diamondbacks); Nick Swisher (White Sox); Dave Roberts and Randy

Winn

(Giants); Kosuke Fukudome and Alfonso Soriano (Cubs); Gary

Sheffield

(Tigers); Gary Matthews Jr. (Angels); Austin Kearns and Wily Mo

Pena

(Nationals); Jeremy Hermida and Josh Willingham (Marlins); Hideki

Matsui,

Johnny Damon, and Melky Cabrera (Yankees); Juan Pierre and Andruw

Jones

(Dodgers); Willy Taveras (Rockies); Jeff Francoeur (Braves).

One National League owner encourages his GM to make these types

of deals

because owners hate dead payroll. They'd rather swap bad contracts

to see

if a change of scenery works. But GMs fear they'll be ridiculed if

the

deals flop.

Matching salaries is the hard part. But the Red Sox, for

instance, could

deal Julio Lugo ($18 million left on his contract) to the Tigers,

who need

a shortstop, for a lefthander such as Robertson ($17 million) or

Willis

($22 million). Could John Farrell straighten out those guys?

Sanchez, Mora,

or Hall would seem to fit as third basemen in Minnesota, but what

could go

back the other way? Could Lugo go for Tejada?

Molina might be a nice fit for the Sox if they can't work

something out

with Jason Varitek. But Lugo might be a hard sell to the Giants

even if

there was some enhancement with the money.

Could the Angels do something with Fukudome and perhaps rid

themselves of

Matthews's remaining three years at $30 million? Matthews, who just

had

knee surgery, had a good end to the season and might help the Cubs.

Byrnes, at two years, $22 million, and recovering from hamstring

injuries,

brings a lot of energy and might be a good fit for a team like the

White

Sox.

Who needs a change of scenery more than Jones, who is 31 and has

one year

left at $19 million? Those closest to him indicate there's no way

Jones

wants to return to Los Angeles, where the fans were tough. He had

knee

surgeries early in the year and late in the year and he wasn't

around the

team at all during the playoffs.

One NL scout said, "Is he done? I wouldn't say that. But he's

probably

not the guy who hit 50 home runs. He can still play the outfield

and he

needs to get in shape."

Mike Easler, Jones's hitting coach for the first half of the

year with the

Dodgers, said, "Andruw is a very sensitive guy, and once everyone

started

getting on him, it was tough on him. He has to change his approach

to

hitting. He was trying to hit everything out, but he would be

someone worth

taking a chance on because he's not done and he has a lot to prove

to

people."

Fukudome (three years, $38 million left) is a very sensitive kid

who

doesn't seem to fit with Lou Piniella's hard-nosed style. Fukudome,

according to one baseball official, "has much more talent than

he's shown.

He has ability and he plays the game right, but that's not a good

place for

him."

There are risks, but if you're trading your risk for someone

else's risk,

why not?

"I think change of scenery is key," said an NL scout. "So

many guys

just don't play well in a certain market. Jones is a good example.

He was

very comfortable in Atlanta and he goes to LA and he just can't

take it."

Paid tribute

Paying scant attention?

Home-field advantage comes in different forms, and Steelers

quarterback Ben

Roethlisberger joked that he was preparing for an unusual road

challenge in

tomorrow night's game at Washington: the Redskins' cheerleaders.

Roethlisberger relayed that in past preseason games, the

cheerleaders

strategically seemed to be warming up outside the visitors' locker

room.

His point: While quarterbacks might be happy to see shoddy coverage

on the

field, the lack of coverage from the cheerleaders proved to be

quite the

distraction.

The biggest loser

Last year, the Dolphins lost their first 13 games before posting

a win,

thus they avoided becoming the first winless team since the

expansion 1976

Buccaneers. The Bengals (0-8) and Lions (0-7) are this year's

candidates,

and based on their schedules, it's not out of the question that

they join

the '76 Bucs. A look at each team's road ahead:

Bengals Lions

vs. Jaguars at Bears

bye vs. Jaguars

vs. Eagles at Panthers

at Steelers vs. Buccaneers

vs. Ravens vs. Titans

at Colts vs. Vikings

vs. Redskins at Colts

at Browns vs. Saints

vs. Chiefs at Packers

Follow the trail

Not only have the Bengals not won this season, they've barely

experienced a

lead. Consider this statistic: Including one overtime game, the

Bengals

have played a total of 486 minutes 21 seconds in eight games. They

have led

for just 43 minutes 20 seconds.

Records are within his reach

The Texans have won three in a row, but receiver Andre Johnson

was sizzling

even before the winning streak. Johnson can set two NFL records

today in

Minnesota, as he looks to become the first player to record five

consecutive games of 130 or more receiving yards and the first

player with

four consecutive games of at least 10 receptions. Having played in

seven

games, Johnson leads the NFL in receptions (56) and receiving yards

(772).

NFL sees red over eye black

Sometimes even the best of intentions can hit players where it

hurts, and

such is the case for Steelers safety Ryan Clark. After etching the

number

21 into his eye black to honor the late Sean Taylor, a former

teammate in

Washington, Clark was fined $5,000 by the NFL. But the fine

apparently

isn't going to stop Clark from doing it again. He is out with a

shoulder

injury this week but said he planned to honor Taylor again.

The 40-40-40 club

Largely because of an explosive passing attack, the Cardinals

lead the NFL

in points (28.5 per game), and the team's top receivers are in

position to

reach a milestone. Larry Fitzgerald, Steve Breaston, and Anquan

Boldin are

vying to become the first trio in history to reach 40 receptions

each

through eight games. Fitzgerald (43) is already there, with

Breaston (37)

and Boldin (36) looking to join him today in St. Louis.

Plenty to go around in Chicago

Bears quarterback Kyle Orton has done a solid job spreading the

ball

through seven games, as Greg Olsen (296), Rashied Davis (254),

Brandon

Lloyd (249), Matt Forte (223), Devin Hester (215), and Desmond

Clark (205)

are all over the 200-yard mark in receiving, while Marty Booker

(183) is

soon to join them. The Bears haven't had seven players with at

least 200

receiving yards in a season since 1989, yet they've almost

accomplished the

feat in seven games.

Ring master

The Rams will honor former coach Dick Vermeil today, inducting

him into the

Ring of Honor. When former Rams coach Scott Linehan contacted

Vermeil about

the ceremony, Vermeil picked today as his date of choice so his

former

quarterback, Kurt Warner, could be present. The Rams host the

Warner-led

Cardinals.

Double runners

The Titans' 1-2 rushing attack of rookie Chris Johnson and

LenDale White

might represent a contrast in style, but they have one obvious

thing in

common: production. Johnson leads the AFC in rushing (626 yards)

and no one

in the NFL has scored more touchdowns than White (10). If they keep

up the

pace, they'd become the first pair of running backs from the same

team to

lead their conference in rushing yards and rushing touchdowns since

1974.

The Broncos' combination of Otis Armstrong (1,407 yards) and Jon

Keyworth

(10 TDs) was the last to accomplish the feat.

Did you know?

The Buccaneers have not allowed a running back to gain more than

100 yards

in a game this season, and have not surrendered a rushing touchdown

all

year. They're the only team not to allow a rushing score.

Mike Reiss can be reached at mreiss@globe.com; material from

personal

interviews, wire services, other beat writers, and league and team

sources

was used in this report.

Value of the four-year extension Daniel Alfredsson received

Thursday from

the Senators. The winger, who will turn 36 next month, will receive

$9.1

million next year (including a $2.1 million signing bonus),

followed by

annual salaries of $7 million, $4.5 million, and $1 million.

Extending Tim Thomas's contract was among Mike O'Connell's last

official

acts as Bruins general manager. When team president Harry Sinden

announced

O'Connell's firing in March 2006, he said part of the reason for

the

abruptness of his protege's dismissal was that O'Connell was making

personnel decisions that could significantly affect the club's

future. With

the decision already made to dismiss O'Connell, said Sinden, it was

in the

club's best interest to cut the cord sooner rather than later.

Meanwhile,

Thomas has turned into one of the NHL's biggest bargains. The

three-year

deal he signed that spring was worth a total of $3.3 million, and

pays the

former UVM star a modest $1.1 million this season. As of yesterday

morning,

Thomas was second in the NHL in save percentage. A look at the

salaries of

the top seven in that category:

Save pct.2008-09 pay2009-10 pay

Mike Smith, Tampa Bay .942 $950,000 $2 million

Tim Thomas, Boston .939 $1.1 million UFA

Carey Price, Montreal .937 $850,000 $850,000

Marc-Andre Fleury, Pittsburgh .929 $3.5 million $5.25 million

Alex Auld, Ottawa .929 $1 million $1 million

Ryan Miller, Buffalo .928 $3.5 million $6.25 million

Henrik Lundqvist, NY Rangers .928 $7.75 million $6.875 million

"I'm serious about it. No green."

Lakers guard Sasha Vujacic, still bitter about the NBA Finals,

insisting to

Los Angeles reporters that he will refuse to wear green this season

because

of the Celtics

For the least expensive single-game tickets in the NBA, head to

Texas. A

look at the top - or bottom - three:

$2 Dallas Mavericks

$5 Memphis Grizzlies

$6.50 Utah Jazz

INDIANAPOLIS - "You're going down, Manning," a New England

bellboy snarls

at the visiting quarterback in the World MasterCard ad that will

air today.

"That's right, I am," agrees Manning. "Fourth floor." But who

would

have guessed that the Colts would be on the down elevator with him,

off to

their worst start (3-4) since 1998, when Manning was a rookie?

If the 2006 Super Bowl champions lose to their archrival

Patriots at Lucas

Oil Stadium tonight, as they have in their last three

regular-season

meetings in Indianapolis, they could well be on the fourth floor of

the AFC

South and their playoff chances could be in serious jeopardy.

"We're so used to winning and our fans are used to us winning,

it's tough

to see," said safety Bob Sanders, who should be back in the lineup

after

missing five games with a high ankle sprain. "But it's something

that you

have to go through eventually in this league, and everyone goes

through

it."

Yet it's still a shock for a franchise that has become used to

supersonic

starts, opening their last three seasons at 13-0, 9-0, and 7-0. Now

the

Colts have all but conceded the division title to undefeated

Tennessee

after last Monday's 31-21 road loss to the Titans, which left

Indianapolis

four games behind with nine to play.

"Right now, we're probably fighting for a wild card unless

Tennessee just

blows up themselves," acknowledged center Jeff Saturday, whose

teammates

have won five straight division crowns and have missed the playoffs

only

once since 1998.

At this point, the Colts happily would settle for any postseason

berth.

"It's not a desperate situation," said coach Tony Dungy, who

had three

consecutive teams at Tampa Bay that started 3-4 and made the

playoffs. "I

showed the team where we are, right in the hunt of the AFC.

"There are probably 12 or 13 teams right now that are fighting

for the

playoffs. There are teams that are 3-4 like us, but they've won

their last

three games. There are teams that are 4-3 and maybe don't feel as

good as

we do."

Last year the Chargers lost three of their first four games and

still beat

the Colts in the playoffs.

"NFL football is really still about November and December,"

said Dungy,

whose team went a collective 37-15 in those two months over the

past six

years. "If you are playing well at that time of year, then that is

what

counts. The Giants proved that last year. Pittsburgh did a couple

of years

ago.

"You don't want to dig yourself in too much of a hole, but

certainly the

season isn't over on Sept. 30 or Oct. 30 even."

The Colts still have ample time to turn things around, along

with a

favorable schedule. Six of their remaining opponents have losing

records

and the Bengals and Lions, whom they play back to back in December,

are a

combined 0-15.

"We just have to learn from the stuff that's happened and move

forward,"

said kicker Adam Vinatieri. "We just have to find a way to play

better,

make less mistakes, less penalties, less everything. Winning is

contagious

and so is losing."

Injuries have hurt

The record has a few explanatory footnotes. Manning, who's off

to his worst

start (10 touchdown passes, 9 interceptions, a 79.0 rating) since

his

rookie year, missed most of training camp and all of the exhibition

season

after undergoing two midsummer knee surgeries. The offensive line

has been

patchwork-in-progress until recently. Joseph Addai, the top running

back,

missed the last two games with a hamstring injury. And Sanders,

voted the

league's best defender last year, has played in only two games.

The Colts' creed ("No Excuses, No Explanations") forbids them

from

reciting that woeful litany. Besides, New England has had even

worse

misfortunes - quarterback Tom Brady, running back Laurence Maroney,

and

safety Rodney Harrison all down for the season and the cornerback

corps

depleted. And yet the Patriots are 5-2 and tied for their division

lead.

"They do it better than anybody I've seen," said Dungy. "They

don't

seem to worry about adversity. They don't worry about who can't

play.

"Frankly, we've taken a lesson from them. I've illustrated them

in the

past as to how they do it. They get everybody ready to go. The

healthy guys

play as well as they can and the new guys do their job. They've

been an

example for everyone over the years."

The Colts have been losing because they haven't been getting the

job done

when it matters. The offense has lost its pyrotechnic pop and the

defense

can't get off the field.

"I think our whole team is in a slump right now," observed

Dungy, whose

squad hasn't lost more than four regular-season games since 2002.

"It's a

team game. Everybody is in it. We have to break out of it. Usually,

it's

just fundamentals and doing things a little bit sharper. I wouldn't

put it

on one person at all. I'm in a slump."

The offense doesn't look anything like the high-speed machine

that usually

averages around 28 points a game. The rushing attack (73.4 yards

per game)

is the league's worst. Manning, whose rating puts him 22d in the

league,

has been throwing picks and missing receivers, who've also been

dropping

balls.

"It seems every time that one part of our offense is failing,"

said

Saturday. "Whether it be the offensive line not giving him enough

time,

not getting open, the ball not being in the right place. Whatever

it may

be, everybody takes their turn not getting it done."

The defense, which gave up 25 straight points in the second half

at

Tennessee, can't get stops when it has to. On the Titans'

game-tying drive

in the third quarter, Indianapolis gave them a first down on their

own 42

with an illegal-contact penalty, then another first down on the

Colts 18 on

a pass interference call.

"In our defense, you shouldn't get pass interference and

illegal-contact

penalties," said Dungy. "We just shouldn't, so it's a little

baffling to

me."

'Gut-check time'

With dysfunction on both sides of the ball, the Colts know they

have to get

on the same page quickly before the season spirals out of control

as it did

in 2001, when they lost five straight after starting 4-3, prompting

coach

Jim Mora's classic "Playoffs? Playoffs?" rant.

"This is a good mental test right now," said Manning. "This

is when

you find out a lot about what you're made of. It's easy to feel

good and be

happy when you're undefeated, but when you're 3-4 and your back's

up

against the wall, it's what we call gut-check time."

If there's a hidden blessing amid this startling downturn, it

may be that

the Colts have been forced into playoff mode two months earlier

than usual.

"We kind of liked it the other way when we were floating along

and

cruising," confessed Dungy. "I've been in both situations and

this,

believe it or not, is more the reality of the NFL. It's not

commonplace to

have those kinds of starts that we had. We certainly appreciated

them and

we didn't take them for granted when we were going through them.

"I've been with a lot of teams that hit the ground running this

way and

improved in November and December and played great, so that's what

we're

looking to do."

Except for the Titans, everyone else in the AFC South is 3-4,

and the

Colts are only a game out of a wild-card spot. So nobody in blue is

panicking just yet.

"We do know that there's a lot of season left to be played and

anything

can happen and there's still a chance for us," said tight end

Dallas

Clark. "We're definitely not checking out yet, no matter what some

people

may be saying or whatever you hear."

"Obviously, the goal is to have a chance to be playing for

something in

the end," said Manning. "But right now, the immediate goal is to

try to

get that one win and see if we can build off of that."

John Powers can be reached at jpowers@globe.com.

Pacers95Celtics79

INDIANAPOLIS - Back-to-back championships is still a realistic

goal for the

Celtics. But back-to-back game situations might not be a team

strength this

season, judging by a 95-79 loss to the Indiana Pacers last night.

The Celtics had an 8-0 record in the second of consecutive night

games last

season. Following a 96-80 win over Chicago at TD Banknorth Garden

Boston

Friday, though, the Celtics displayed the fatigue of a late

arrival. They

were also victims of some aggressive and tactically sound defending

by the

Pacers, who were playing their home opener.

"We don't have to worry about that streak anymore," Celtics

coach Doc

Rivers said. "We started off bad. We were bad all game, sloppy

plays,

missed free throws.

"I don't know if it was them or us, but let's give it to them.

They just

played so much harder than us and that's rare for us. They really

moved the

ball, which we didn't do, and that's rare for us.

"One thing we're going to learn is we can't come out flat,

because we are

going to get every team's best. And, if we come out flat, we are

going to

get our butts whipped, and that's what happened."

There were signs early on this was not going to be the Celtics'

night.

The Celtics went 3:56 of the opening quarter without a field

goal, Indiana

going on a 19-6 run extending into the second quarter, which helped

the

hosts take a 48-41 halftime lead.

The third quarter symbolized the Celtics' performance - they

committed

seven turnovers and were 3 for 9 at the foul line.

"We just didn't play well, in any aspect of the game," Rivers

said. "It

was amazing, we were down 9, 10, it was a miracle. We didn't

deserve to win

that game. We weren't going to make a run, the way we were playing,

it was

just not possible."

The Celtics actually demonstrated a commitment to defense,

Indiana star

Danny Granger (game-high 20 points) losing two front teeth as a

result. But

the Pacers' defending, and the Celtics' lack of shooting accuracy

(27 for

78, 34.6 percent) and propensity for committing traveling

violations were

decisive.

Things continued to degenerate in the final quarter. Indiana

would score

what turned out to be the clinching points as Paul Pierce

goaltended

Granger's drive, giving the Pacers an 81-65 lead with 7:50

remaining.

The Celtics' shooting futility was symbolized by a possession

midway

through the quarter. Pierce and Eddie House missed open 3-pointers

and T.J.

Ford transitioned for a layup and an 85-65 edge with 5:58

remaining.

Kevin Garnett (18 points, 14 rebounds - both team highs) was the

only

consistent offensive threat for the Celtics, though he committed

six

turnovers (four traveling). Pierce (15 points) was 3 for 15 from

the field

and 7 for 12 at the foul line.

"We didn't have the right focus," Celtic guard Rajon Rondo

said.

"There's no way we should ever get beat by that many points. It's

all

focus. They don't press, they aren't a press team, to where we

should turn

the ball over. They are a help defensive team but we didn't make

the right

play and forced the shot when we should have got a better look.

"We let our guard down. We were down 8, 10, 14 points, and

never cut into

the lead. We were in that situation a lot of times last year and

never let

it slip away like that. We never got beat like that since we've

been

together."

The game tipped off at 7:15 p.m., about 15 hours after the

Celtics checked

in at their hotel.

"It was a combination of a lot of things," said Pierce of the

team's

worst regular-season defeat since a 110-92 loss to Utah March 14.

"You

can't point a finger at one thing - free throw shooting, turnovers,

lack of

defense. We've got to expect every team's best, especially on the

road,

their home opener.

"We really got caught up in yelling at the referees, didn't

keep our

composure. Indiana played well defensively, but we had a lot of

looks, they

just didn't fall for us. We just have to get in the gym and focus

on the

next three days. We can't go in to Houston ((Tuesday)) and play

like

this."

Got the word out

A few questions for new Milwaukee manager Ken Macha:

You've been out since 2006. Were you beginning to think you

wouldn't get

back?

KM: "I did. As a matter of fact, I just spoke to Willie

Randolph, and

he'd like to work again, so I gave him some advice. Last year there

were

six openings and I didn't get an interview. So this past year I

went out to

spring training and got myself out there. I spoke to five GMs and a

few

team presidents and I made sure they knew I was available and I

wanted back

in. That's what you've got to do. You've got to make sure people

know you

want a job again. You have to be persistent."

I know you had to answer a lot of questions about players

turning on you

in Oakland, but you don't believe that was the case.

KM: "We had been swept by the Tigers in the playoffs and there

was a lot

of frustration from everybody. I've always respected players. You

can ask

((Barry)) Zito and all the guys who played for me, they enjoyed it.

It was

tough at times with external forces at play. You have to be able to

manage

your team."

You're inheriting good young talent, but the top two guys in the

rotation,

CC Sabathia and Ben Sheets, might be gone.

KM: "In all likelihood, Sabathia is going to receive a

big-money offer

and Sheets is testing the waters. ((General manager)) Doug

((Melvin)) said

we're going to offer them contracts and we certainly have a staff

of some

other pitchers who have performed at a high level in the majors.

Certainly

one of my concerns is the bullpen, so we need to take care of

that."

Can't believe you left NESN for this.

KM: "Loved doing it. The people treated me very nicely."

With Mike Singletary verbally undressing one of his players in a

press

conference, and his behind-the-scenes undressing of himself to

motivate his

team, things in San Francisco just became a whole lot more

interesting.

Can such a hold-nothing-back approach work in today's NFL?

The 49ers are off this weekend, so there will be no immediate

on-field

answers. But in the opinion of one observer close to the scene,

initial

reactions among players, coaches, and team employees to

Singletary's rants

have been mixed - some feel it was necessary, others feel he's

bordering on

out of control.

It started when Singletary, in his first game as interim coach,

told tight

end Vernon Davis to hit the showers during last Sunday's

embarrassing 34-13

loss to the Seahawks. Davis had been flagged for unnecessary

roughness, and

Singletary didn't like his reaction as he arrived to the sideline.

So he

told him to get lost, then gave him a public lashing when answering

questions from reporters after the game.

Later in the week, it was learned that Singletary also used a

unique

motivational technique to get his team's attention at halftime,

pulling

down his pants. His point was that the 49ers were getting their

butt kicked

and they should be embarrassed.

To some older-generation fans, Singletary is surely a breath of

fresh air,

a blast from the past when no-nonsense coaches ruled with an iron

fist. But

can that work today?

"This isn't like some Disney movie where you can keep screaming

at a team

for days and they'll come back and run through a brick wall for

you," said

former linebacker Chad Brown, who played in the NFL from 1993-2007.

"I

think it can work once or twice, not over the long term, but a lot

depends

on the makeup of the team. I'd imagine that would get old pretty

quick with

an older, veteran type of team."

Brown pointed to Giants coach Tom Coughlin as an example of an

ultra-intense, discipline-minded coach who nearly lost his grip on

players

before loosening a bit, an old-school guy keeping an open mind to

new-school methods.

Singletary acknowledged last week that he's from the old school,

having

played under fire-breathing Mike Ditka and aggressive-minded Buddy

Ryan,

who once punched a fellow assistant coach on the sideline.

Longtime NFL coach Dan Reeves believes there's still a place in

the game

for that type of approach, as long as it's genuine.

"I don't think being extremely demonstrative is a bad thing, as

long as

you're being yourself, because players, fans, and everyone else

will pick

up a phony quicker than anything," said Reeves. "I believe

players want

to do the right things, they want to be disciplined, they want to

know how

to win, and I think Mike Singletary can relate to players that

way."

Still, Reeves believes that type of approach was easier to adopt

in the

1980s, when Singletary was in the midst of his Hall of Fame playing

career.

"The greatest motivator in that period of time was fear - the

fear that

you'd lose your job - and that fear pushed you and made you the

best you

can possibly be," he said. "A lot of that has been taken away by

guaranteed salaries and signing bonuses. It is human nature that if

you

guarantee something, that person isn't going to be as fearful. It

takes an

unusual person to not be affected by that."

Former Ravens offensive lineman Mike Flynn, who grew up in

Agawam and

played from 1997-2007, doubts that players will respond if

Singletary

continues with this approach.

"The biggest thing is that these guys are professionals," he

said, "and

it sounds good in theory, and it might work in high school and

college, but

these guys are men. It's hard to disrespect them and treat them a

certain

way, and then not have some kind of consequences.

"I know Mike from Baltimore and he definitely was an old-school

guy. He's

going to be like that in San Francisco. If it doesn't work out

there, he's

going to be that way somewhere else.

"The key is, what kind of respect does he have from the guys?

If the guys

respect him, and listen to him, and believe what he has to say,

that will

be fine and they'll let it go. But if he's a guy that's yelling and

screaming and nobody respects what he's saying, it's only going to

make a

bad situation worse."

On the flip side, Flynn took note that he hadn't heard another

49ers player

defend Davis, which might be an indication that it's been

well-received ...

for now.

"You may be able to turn around a few guys, get them going in

the right

direction, but eventually you have to change your tone and - not

give in to

the player, so to speak - but be more player-friendly and realize

you're

dealing with men," Flynn said.

"Screaming and hollering only motivates you so much."

Others, such as former Patriots Corey Dillon and Artrell

Hawkins, are

buying in.

"I agree with Mike 100 percent, and I think that approach can

work

today," Dillon said. "When I came to New England, I had to put a

lot of

my own personal stuff on hold and check my ego at the door to get

on the

same page with the head coach and organization. He's no-b.s., and

that

reminds me a lot of Bill ((Belichick))."

Added Hawkins, "I think his style can be successful, because

he's not just

a coach, he was a player on the highest level. So you consider the

source.

Every coach can't do it. Mike Singletary can."

Too expensive?

Touching the bases

Apropos of nothing: 1. Are the Pittsburgh Pirates still in the

league?; 2.

Orlando Cabrera is still the best free agent shortstop out there;

3. Great

to hear that the late Ed Kenney will be inducted into the Red Sox

Hall of

Fame next Friday night; 4. I'd love to be Cole Hamels right now; 5.

Mark

Mulder would be the one injury guy I'd take a chance on signing.

Playing catch-up

The only way the Indians would part with catcher Kelly Shoppach

is if they

got a young closer in return. Which means the Sox would have to

part with

someone like Justin Masterson. Third base is another need in

Cleveland,

with Houston's Ty Wigginton on the radar. The Rangers have catching

depth

but probably aren't parting with prospect Taylor Teagarden, and the

Sox are

pretty split organizationally on Gerald Laird, who has matured

quite a bit

from his younger days. But the best bet continues to be Jarrod

Saltalamacchia, whom the Sox could groom while a veteran - Jason

Varitek,

Bengie Molina, Pudge Rodriguez - keeps the seat warm for a year or

two.

Changes at the top

A couple of ownership/ management things to watch: In San Diego,

John

Moores looks to be seeking a buyer for his share of the team.

Moores is

going through a divorce, and his wife shares control of the team.

The Blue

Jays, despite naming Paul Beeston as interim CEO/president, are

trying to

find a permanent person and are interviewing two fairly well-known

baseball

people with experience in other markets, according to a major

league

source.

Wheeling and dealing ...

The Yankees have been very aggressive in calling teams to see

who might be

available. They called the Astros about Roy Oswalt and Lance

Berkman and

were told they were not going to be dealt ... The Mets are still

eyeing

Mariners free agent Raul Ibanez. They need a consistent hitter in

the

outfield, and Ibanez seems to fit what GM Omar Minaya is looking

for ...

Don't rule out the Dodgers as a possibility for Jake Peavy.

Apparently

there are no qualms about trading within the division. The Dodgers

certainly have the young players that San Diego would desire,

including

young pitching (Jonathan Broxton seems to be a target). The Braves

are also

still very much in the hunt, and don't be surprised if the Phillies

get

into it if Peavy waives his no-trade ... The Angels have made

signing Mark

Teixeira their No. 1 priority and Teixeira himself would love to

stay

there. But here's the problem: The Angels' management style is to

go in

hard and get it done quickly, while agent Scott Boras would rather

allow

the market to develop and get other teams involved. For that

reason, the

Red Sox have a chance.

Tigers ready to change stripes

One of the most interesting teams to watch at the winter

meetings will be

the Tigers. If it's true they are looking to cut payroll, then

someone like

Magglio Ordonez could become available. Ordonez, a .312 career

hitter with

seven 100-RBI seasons, will be paid $18 million in 2009 and has

options for

2010 ($18 million) and 2011 ($15 million). If the Tigers are

looking to

regain some of the younger talent they lost in the Miguel Cabrera

and Edgar

Renteria deals, this is the player who can fetch them. Another

player the

Tigers are dangling is setup man Fernando Rodney. They are

desperately

looking for someone to close.

Suitors may be lacking

One NL official thinks there's a limited market for Varitek and

doesn't

buy Detroit as a destination for him. "With the Tigers trying to

cut

payroll and with Jason getting up there in years, I think the best

bet is

staying in Boston," said the official. "He's more valuable to

them than

he is to anyone else. He knows the pitching staff. If he goes

someplace

else, his great ability to work with pitchers won't come into

effect until

he learns a whole new staff. Especially if he goes to the National

League."

Short hops

"Boo: A Life in Baseball, Well-Lived," by Rick Cleveland, is

the story

of former Red Sox hurler Boo Ferriss. The foreword is by John

Grisham, who

was cut by Ferriss when Ferriss was the baseball coach at Delta

State in

Mississippi ... Terry Francona, who has not yet had his back

surgery, will

be honored by the Rhode Island Italian-American Hall of Fame as its

Man of

the Year Nov. 22. For ticket information, go to riiahf.org ... From

the

Bill Chuck files: "Has Pedro Mart?nez pitched his last game? If

the

answer is yes, his last regular-season start was Sept. 25 against

the Cubs.

Pedro went six innings and gave up five runs, but struck out nine.

The last

batter he faced was Ryan Theriot, who he walked. Pedro started 400

games

and has a lifetime record of 214-99 and a 2.91 ERA. Of all the

pitchers

with at least a .684 winning percentage, only Whitey Ford won more

games

than Pedro. Whitey had 236 wins and a .690 W-L pct. and 2.75 ERA."

...

Happy 34th birthday, Orlando Cabrera; happy 45th, Sam Horn; happy

50th,

Willie McGee; happy 53d, Greg Harris.

Nick Cafardo can be reached at cafardo@globe.com.

INDIANAPOLIS - Turn back the clock last night? Never mind one hour.

How

'bout going back a full year?

Last year Patriots-Colts was Ali-Frazier III. It was the 18-12

(Manning-Brady) Overture. It was the Regular-Season Game Of The

Last Two

Centuries, the battle of unbeaten bands, the most hyped non-playoff

game in

league history. The NFL Network devoted 36 hours of pregame

coverage to

Patriots-Ponies on Nov. 4, 2007. It was presented as the de facto

Super

Bowl. Tom Brady entered the game with 30 touchdown passes and two

interceptions.

The Patriots' 24-20 win lived up to the hype, part of New

England's

inexorable, undefeated march to Glendale, Ariz. It was the last

Patriots-Colts game played at the RCA Dome.

Tonight we have the Bradyless Patriots against the sub.-500

Colts in Lucas

Oil (Can Boyd) Stadium.

Sorry, it's just not the same. Like Brady, Rodney Harrison, and

those

unblemished records ... the thrill is gone. Patriots-Colts 2008 is

not even

the NFL Game of the Weekend - that distinction goes to

Giants-Cowboys.

Still, it is a game of considerable consequence, one that should

make you

nervous if you root for the Patriots.

It's fashionable this fall to dump on the downtrodden Colts. In

the

previous three seasons, Indianapolis started 7-0, 9-0, and 13-0.

Going

into their matchups against the Patriots, they were 7-0 each of the

last

three years. The Colts were defending Super Bowl champs when the

Patriots

last visited the Hoosier State. Now they are 3-4 and lame-duck

coach Tony

Dungy has virtually conceded the AFC South to the Tennessee Titans.

Things haven't been the same here since Indianapolis was stunned

by the

San Diego Chargers in the playoffs last winter, denying us a chance

to see

Manning back at Gillette for another conference championship

showdown.

Folks in Indy were still getting over the playoff loss when Manning

had

surgery on a staph-infected bursa in his left knee in July.

Manning's

recovery was slowed by a second procedure on the knee. He missed

all of

training camp.

Patriots fans gave little mind to details of Manning's woes

until Brady

experienced difficulties after his initial knee surgery Oct. 6. Now

even

casual listeners of Patriot Infomercial Radio are experts on

methicillin-resistant staphylococcus and infectious disease

control.

Bottom line: Manning, who has never missed a game, is not the

same player

and these are not the same Colts. He has 10 touchdown passes and

nine

interceptions (Matt Cassel has seven TDs and six picks). Manning's

quarterback rating (79) is lower than Cassel's (84.6).

Indy's surgical-strike quarterback doesn't have as many weapons,

nor does

he have enough time to get rid of the ball. His timing and rhythm

have been

short-circuited and he has been forced to play from behind all

season. The

Colts could easily be 1-6. They haven't been able to run the ball

and for

the first four weeks of the season they couldn't stop anybody's

running

game.

But they are still dangerous, they are desperate, and they are

at home -

just like the Chargers were when Bill Belichick and his players

toured

California last month.

The Colts also are getting some players back from injury,

including

running back Joseph Addai and all-world safety Bob Sanders. It's a

combustible mix for a Patriots team learning to live without Brady,

depleted in both backfields. Even with a hoodied genius plugging

holes and

devising schemes, it's difficult to win without talent and

experience at

cornerback and safety. Especially against Manning playing at home

on a dry,

fast surface.

Jake LaMotta used to say, "I fought Sugar Ray Robinson so many

times,

it's amazing I didn't get diabetes." That pretty much sums up

Patriots-Colts. This will be the ninth meeting between the teams in

the

last six seasons. Belichick, rarely given to humor or hyperbole,

said,

"We have had so many games with them and so much history with this

team,

the scouting report looks like a phone book."

Lucas Oil Stadium is another new wrinkle. It's massive. It makes

the

adjacent RCA Dome look like a guard shack.

"I know it will be a dynamic atmosphere up there Sunday night,

a lot of

noise, a lot of energy, a new stadium," said Belichick. "I am

sure it

will be very challenging for us, and hopefully we will be prepared,

up for

it, and ready to go."

They will be ready. We're all ready. It's a fascinating matchup.

But it's

hard to be here this weekend and not think about the past.

Dan Shaughnessy is a Globe columnist. He can be reached at

dshaughnessy@globe.com.

Today marks the official halfway point of the NFL season, and with

that in

mind, here is one man's ballot for midseason awards:

MVP: Clinton Portis. The Redskins running back leads the NFL

with 944

rushing yards, 260 more than No. 2 rusher Adrian Peterson.

Top coach: Jim Zorn. Considered a reach when he was hired, Zorn

has the

Redskins (6-2) in second place in the competitive NFC East.

Top rookie: Matt Ryan. The former Boston College quarterback has

led the

surprising Falcons to a 4-3 record and looks like a star in the

making.

Best free agent signing: Michael Turner. The backup to running

back

LaDainian Tomlinson in San Diego for four seasons, he has shined in

a

starring role with the Falcons (665 yards, 6 TDs).

Worst free agent signing: Jerry Porter. What has a three-year

contract with

$10 million in bonuses/guarantees produced for the Jaguars? One

catch for

6 yards.

Best unsung performance: Titans offensive line. Left tackle

Michael Roos,

left guard Eugene Amano, center Kevin Mawae, right guard Jake

Scott, and

right tackle David Stewart have surrendered just two sacks all

season to

lead the NFL's only undefeated team.

Worst performance: J.T. O'Sullivan. Hyped after winning the

quarterback job

over former No. 1 overall pick Alex Smith in San Francisco, he

tossed 11

interceptions, was sacked 32 times, and fumbled 11 times (six lost)

before

being benched last week.

Best innovation: Dolphins offense. Their use of the "Wildcat"

formation,

with running back Ronnie Brown at quarterback, sent ripples through

the

NFL.

Most surprising team: Giants. They've sent a decisive message to

those who

thought their Super Bowl win was a fluke.

Most disappointing team: Chargers. At 3-5, they are fortunate to

be playing

in the weak AFC West, so they still have time to turn things

around.

Patriots chairman and CEO Robert Kraft and his family completed an

agreement

last week to become the title sponsors of the Israeli Football

League,

which Steve Leibowitz - president of "American Football in

Israel" -

called a significant development to assist in the "long-term plan

to build

tackle football in Israel from the ground up."

"Having the Kraft family as the title sponsor gives the league

the

credibility it needs to immediately be branded a serious endeavor,

and also

provides the financing needed to ensure a smooth development," he

wrote in

an e-mail.

The league, now in its second season, will have five teams (two

in

Jerusalem, one each in Haifa, Tel Aviv, and Modiin). Expansion is

already

scheduled for 2009 with an agreement in place for Patriots tight

end

Benjamin Watson to sponsor the new team in Beersheva.

Prior to 2007, the only organized football played in Israel was

flag

football, with about 90 teams and more than 1,000 players.

"Now we feel that we are ready to develop tackle football,"

Leibowitz

said. "Mr. Kraft is now fully behind the idea because Israelis are

playing

the game around the country, and this is the best way to spread the

game to

the general public."

Mike Keenan, his stay behind the Boston bench brief (74 games in

2000-01),

earned his "Iron Mike" reputation via his stern, demanding,

oft-unpredictable approach with players, in particular while in

Philadelphia and Chicago in his earlier days.

Holding court with a small collection of Boston media last week

outside

the Flames' dressing room, the 59-year-old bench boss sounded more

like

Mellow Mike when asked if he can scare players in today's hockey.

"I don't know if the word is 'scared,"' said Keenan. "I think

you have

to develop a sense of urgency in your players, and they have to see

that

you're passionate about winning. But scared?

"I don't think I ever scared ((Chris)) Chelios at all ... or

other players

like ((Mark)) Howe, Dave ((Poulin)), or ((Michel)) Goulet. Sure, at

times

maybe I kept things a little bit imbalanced, but I think they came

to

embrace it and enjoy it."

How about Mark Messier in New York, the year (1993-94) Keenan

coached the

Rangers to the Stanley Cup?

"I didn't scare him," said Keenan. "He embraced the

competition."

All true today in Calgary, said Keenan, where he has a built-in

leader in

Jarome Iginla to wrap both arms around any and every challenge.

"I don't have to say anything to him," said Keenan. "He just

senses the

times when he has to say, 'OK, we've got to step it up here, boys.'

After

that, guys like ((Robyn)) Regehr and ((Dion)) Phaneuf, they all

step in

line. You get that kind of cohesiveness, and then your goaltender

does the

job, then you have a competitive team."

At the mention of Iginla's name, a member of Boston's electronic

media

noted that the winger was his favorite non-Bruin in the NHL.

"Really? I thought Joe ((Thornton)) would be," said Keenan,

the coach who

summoned the best out of Jumbo Joe in Boston, "because he's a

pretty good

player, too."

Spurs great David Robinson was not able to repeat as an NBA

champion,

getting two attempts in his illustrious career. While he believes

the

Celtics have the talent to repeat, he warns that it won't be easy.

"Things got to go right," said Robinson. "Physically, you got

be

healthy. Good things have to happen. They have the nucleus back.

They look

good. They look like they can make it happen. But there has to be a

lot of

little things rolling into place, too.

"I remember one year Timmy ((Duncan)) got hurt and he wasn't

even

available for the playoffs. And that's stuff you can't forget. It

happens.

You have to keep your fingers crossed and keep playing hard. But

they're in

a great position to do it, though."

On the Spurs, Robinson said, "They're great. Manu ((Ginobili))

is going to

be out a little bit ((with an ankle injury)). But Timmy looks

great. He got

some real rest this summer. Tony Parker's at the top of his game.

"They have a lot of question marks on some young guys. They're

going to

need some guys to make some shots. But we got the pieces."

Robinson was in Boston on business last week and to support his

ex-Spurs

teammate, Doc Rivers, as the Celtics opened the season with a win

over

Cleveland.

"I'm just being a dad a lot and cheering those guys in San

Antonio,"

Robinson said of his life now. "I'm just trying to keep life on

the simple

side. I just started a business. I'm working on that a little bit

and

trying to get that kicked off."

His "Superman" nickname was snatched away by Dwight Howard. He is

no

longer the most intimidating force in sports, let alone basketball.

And

while his politically incorrect sense of humor is as alive as ever,

his

dominating game has slowed dramatically.

Yes, good things always do come to an end. And the 36-year-old

Shaquille

O'Neal can see the finish line to his illustrious NBA career while

knowing

there will be a lot more to his life than basketball.

"I've made a lot of friends. I have a lot of opportunities. I'm

going to

do a lot of things," said O'Neal, who has one year left on his

contract

after this one. "Being the educated guy that I am, I can probably

do

whatever I want to do."

"The Big Aristotle" has won four NBA championships and an

Olympic gold

medal and is an 11-time All-Star. "The Big Diesel" was named to

the NBA's

50th Anniversary team at just 24 years old, was the 2000 Most

Valuable

Player, and is a three-time Finals MVP. "The Big Cactus" - his

nickname

now with the Phoenix Suns - is also a hilarious quote machine who

once

called himself "quotatious" and said, "Our offense is like the

Pythagorean theorem: There is no answer." His mouth also has

gotten him

into trouble, too.

"All I wanted was one ((championship)) back in the day,"

O'Neal said.

"Then I won it, and I got two and then I got three and then four.

I'm

happy. When I'm done, I'll have a hell of a book."

The final chapters are being written now.

O'Neal, who averaged a career-low 12.9 points last season, has

shown he

still can be effective by averaging 11.5 points, 10.5 rebounds, and

1.5

blocks in his first two games this season. But foes are respectful,

not

scared anymore.

When the Suns failed to advance to the second round of the

playoffs after

acquiring O'Neal in a midseason deal, he took the blame over Steve

Nash and

Amare Stoudemire.

"If we don't win, that's my fault," O'Neal said. "I accept

it. I'm

harder on myself than any of you guys could ever be on me. That's

why all

of you writers don't bother me. I accept that. I've been that way

since my

rookie year.

"If you want to be the man, you have to accept what comes with

being the

man. You want to be the man and you want to make a lot of money and

you

want to be able to do your thing. But when things don't go right,

the man

gets blamed, period."

With a full Suns training camp under his belt and a

defensive-minded new

coach in Terry Porter, O'Neal feels the Suns will shine brightly,

especially since "the pressure is not on us."

"We have all the keys," O'Neal said. "We have shooters. We

have

defenders. I know everybody is overlooking us."

Once he retires, O'Neal will have countless opportunities

awaiting him in

the entertainment world, plus TNT and ESPN begging for his

straightforward

and humorous analysis. And he will be welcomed in his beloved field

of law

enforcement.

So don't feel bad for Shaq, because with a larger-than-life

persona, he is

too big to ever be moved out of the spotlight.

"Lord knows it's going to be a sad day when I leave the game,"

he said.

"I know you guys are going to miss me. But I'm going to have fun

in my

after-NBA life."

HANOVER, N.H. - The best option, even for a 62 percent passer

with a strong

right arm and a collection of gifted receivers, was to tuck the

ball and

run.

Chris Pizzotti stepped back in the pocket, surveyed the

landscape, noting

the number of green jerseys deep in coverage and the open territory

ahead.

He charged through the Dartmouth defense for 8 yards. Two plays

later, the

senior quarterback gathered in the shotgun snap and galloped 11

yards into

the end zone untouched.

One series in, and Pizzotti and the Crimson were off and running

against

the winless Big Green, setting the tone with a punishing ground

attack that

delivered a season-best effort in a 35-7 Ivy League conquest in

front of

4,111 at Memorial Field.

"The offensive line has been a huge strength for us all year,

but it's

been reflected more in the passing game," said Pizzotti, who was

12 for 18

for 98 yards, his final play an 18-yard scoring pass down the left

sideline

to tight end Jason Miller on the first series of the second half

for a 26-0

lead. "This week they just opened up such huge holes. We knew that

we

could come in and establish a running game. Dartmouth was dropping

seven to

eight guys in coverage. I had nothing else to do, so I was just

scrambling

around."

"He just made some great plays, he's a talented guy, which we

all knew,"

said Dartmouth coach Buddy Teevens.

In building a 20-0 lead, 23d-ranked Harvard (6-1, 3-1) rushed

for more

yards (183) in the first 30 minutes than it had in all but one game

this

season (Lafayette). The Crimson finished their 368-yard rushing

effort with

32 straight running plays.

Junior Ben Jenkins churned out a career-high 111 yards and

scored Harvard's

final TD on a 15-yard run. Pizzotti (now 18-2 as a starter) rushed

for a

pair of touchdowns. Sophomore Gino Gordon picked up 78 yards on six

carries. And backup quarterback Liam O'Hagan (66 yards) showed off

his

nifty running skills in the second half. The only downer was the

departure

of halfback Cheng Ho with a bruised collarbone.

"They were doing a great job with pass defense and it really

only gave us

one option," said Harvard coach Tim Murphy. "The guys did a great

job up

front and the backs ran hard."

Harvard's run defense, meanwhile, limited Dartmouth to minus-2

yards on 19

carries. "Our kids really played with a lot of attitude up

front," said

Murphy.

Harvard's ferocious play led to a number of hard hits on Big

Green

quarterback Alex Jenny, who departed early in the third quarter.

The Crimson went ahead, 10-0, on a 34-yard field goal by Patrick

Long.

Pizzotti then directed Harvard on a 10-play march, with the Reading

High

product legging out the final 2 yards for the score.

Aided by a 15-yard personal foul on a helmet-to-helmet hit on

Pizzotti, the

Crimson capped the first half with a 30-yard kick by Long for a

20-0 lead.

In a second half in which the Crimson attempted just three

passes and

recorded a third-quarter safety on Desmond Bryant's pressure on Big

Green

freshman quarterback Conner Kempe, Dartmouth (0-7, 0-4) broke

through with

44 seconds left, with Kempe connecting with Will Deevy for a 3-yard

score.

"The guys are playing hard, but you can always play smarter,"

said

Teevens after the Big Green absorbed their ninth straight loss.

"It's a

steep learning curve ((for a young team))."

Number of games Sam Cassell needs to reach 1,000 for his career.

NEW YORK - This is where unfulfilled Olympians come for redemption

and a

Gotham-sized consolation prize, as Bill Rodgers first did in 1976.

Paula

Radcliffe came up lame in Beijing and placed a career-worst 23d.

Catherine

Ndereba thought she was winning until she discovered that Romania's

Constantina Tomescu-Dita had run away from the pack. Gete Wami,

who'd been

up with the leaders, dropped out with intestinal miseries. And Kara

Goucher

finished well out of the medals in the 5,000 and 10,000 meters on

the

track.

So they've all come here for this morning's 39th New York City

Marathon,

which has gotten so big (39,000 runners) that there will be three

separate

wave starts on the Verrazano Narrows Bridge. The rewards, as

always, are

worth the trip.

For Radcliffe, the defending champion, it's the lure of a third

women's

title, which nobody has managed since the legendary Grete Waitz

claimed

nine between 1978 and 1988.

"What Grete did there winning nine was amazing," said the

world

record-holder, who won here in 2004 after dropping out of the

Olympic race.

"But to even just win New York three times is a big achievement

and would

be to me."

For Ndereba, a Kenyan who has won four times in Boston and twice

in

Chicago, a triumph here would complete the American triple crown

and

possibly clinch the World Marathon Majors title.

"It means a lot," said the two-time world champion and

two-time Olympic

silver medalist, who has been runner-up here twice. "I don't even

have

words to explain."

For Ethiopia's Wami, finishing first or second would mean

retaining her

WMM title and collecting another $500,000 payout. And for Goucher,

a former

miler who'll be making her 26-mile debut, it's a long shot chance

to become

the first US woman to win here since Miki Gorman in 1977, when 2

hours 43

minutes was good enough for a laurel wreath.

"I hope I can fight through the pain," said Goucher, who has

never run

more than a half-marathon. "It's more like, 'Please let me be able

to keep

going for 2? hours."'

In the absence of Kenyan defending champion Martin Lel, who

broke his left

foot in the Lisbon half-marathon in September, the men's race

figures to be

a jostle among the three previous titlists (Brazil's Marilson Gomes

dos

Santos, Kenya's Paul Tergat, and South Africa's Hendrick Ramaala)

plus

Morocco's Abderrahim Goumri, last year's runner-up, and top

domestic hope

Abdi Abdirahman, who dropped out of the Olympic trials here last

year.

"If I didn't have a chance of winning this race, or didn't

believe I can

win the race, I wouldn't come to the race," said Abdirahman, who'd

be the

first US male to win since Alberto Salazar in 1982.

The Americans have been creeping closer, with Meb Keflezighi

placing

second in 2004 and third in 2005. Abdirahman, who was fifth in

2005, would

have a decent chance in a tactical race.

"The things I've been doing the past few months indicated that

I'm

capable of running a real fast time," said Abdirahman, whose

personal best

is 2:08:56 in Chicago. "And I'm ready."

The odds are longer for Goucher, who's up against a brutal field

that also

includes former champions Joyce Chepchumba and Tegla Loroupe of

Kenya and

Ludmila Petrova of Russia and a couple of Boston victors in

Ethiopia's Dire

Tune and Kenya's Rita Jeptoo.

"When I look over the field at everyone's stats and everything

they've

done in the marathon, it's a little bit overwhelming,"

acknowledged

Goucher.

Radcliffe's stats are the most impressive. Besides the world

mark (2:15:25

set in 2003), she has won every marathon she's run outside of

Olympus and

probably should have skipped Beijing since she was recovering from

a

stress-fractured femur.

"It's the Olympic Games," Radcliffe said. "I wanted to go

there and

give it the best shot I could."

Ndereba, who didn't know that Tomescu-Dita already had dashed

away from

the leaders when she joined the pack, thought she had the gold

medal until

she spotted the Romanian up ahead with too little time to catch

her.

"If I win New York," she said, "I just count it as if it was

Olympic

gold."

The Games have come and gone, but there's still one more piece

of

glittering fruit on the global tree this year.

"I don't associate New York with being a place where I have to

go to get

over something bad," said Radcliffe. "But at the same time, I do

have

good feelings about the place that, yes, when I go there I can race

well

and something special can happen there."

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Clemson27BC21

Halloween was over, and it looked like fright night at Alumni

Stadium for

Boston College in its Atlantic Coast Conference showdown with

Clemson.

For the second week in a row, the offense sputtered, the defense

suffered

a few key breakdowns, and the Eagles looked doomed with another

tough loss

in a game they had to win to remain legitimate contenders for

another

Atlantic Division crown.

As has been the case in this series, the outcome wasn't decided

until the

final seconds, which this time worked out in the Tigers' favor as

they hung

on for a 27-21 victory yesterday before a disappointed crowd of

41,863.

The Tigers, who absorbed the forced resignation of coach Tommy

Bowden two

weeks ago, came off a bye week with what looked like a winning

attitude and

formula.

With running back C.J. Spiller recovered from a hamstring

injury,

Clemson's Thunder (James Davis) and Lightning shredded the Eagles'

defense

early. Spiller's 57-yard sprint through the BC secondary set up a

quick

touchdown on a 23-yard run by Davis.

By the half, Clemson had a 17-0 lead, and had the Eagles looking

for

answers, but with a reasonable sense of confidence.

"Coach ((BC defensive coordinator Frank)) Spaziani said 17

points is a

scary lead," said middle linebacker and cocaptain Mike McLaughlin,

whose

third-quarter interception set up BC's first TD, a 1-yard run by

Josh Haden

that made it 17-7. "The team did a great job ((of coming back)).

Unfortunately, we came up little short."

As has been the case throughout the season, the BC defense

carried the

burden and sparked the comeback, which came with a flourish in the

fourth

quarter.

The Eagles drew to within a field goal when Justin Jarvis

blocked a Clemson

punt that was recovered by Roderick Rollins and returned 25 yards

for a TD,

cutting Clemson's lead to 17-14 with 10:36 remaining in the fourth

quarter.

When BC safety Wes Davis intercepted a Cullen Harper pass on the

Tigers'

first play from scrimmage after the blocked punt, the Eagles had

the ball

back. When quarterback Chris Crane (18 of 39, 116 yards, 1 TD)

connected

with Brandon Robinson on a 15-yard scoring pass, the Eagles had the

lead

for the first time at 21-17 with 8:43 left.

But this time neither destiny nor luck was on the Eagles' side.

Spiller returned the ensuing kickoff 64 yards to the BC 15. Five

plays

later, Clemson scored on a 4-yard pass from Harper to wide receiver

Aaron

Kelly, and with the extra point, Clemson was up, 24-21.

A year ago, quarterback Matt Ryan led BC to a dramatic comeback

at

Clemson. Now it was Crane's turn.

With 2:39 left in regulation, the 6-foot-5-inch senior took over

at his 30.

The words Crane heard from BC coach Jeff Jagodzinski were

conflicting. Be

aggressive, but be careful. "I had a conversation with the coach

right

before I went out there and he said, 'Don't end the game previous

to fourth

down,"' said Crane, who couldn't get a first down on the first

three plays

of the series. "Don't have the game end on a first- or second-down

call

((interception))."

Faced with fourth and 4, Crane was forced out of the pocket and

threw a

sideline pass to fullback James McCluskey in front of the Clemson

bench.

The officials ruled, however, that McCluskey was out of bounds.

"We just came up short tonight," said Jagodzinski. "Give

credit to

Clemson. I'm proud of my guys. We fought with everything we had."

Coming up short is not good enough for a team that can't afford

any more

losses. Now the Eagles (5-3, 2-3) have another test Saturday

against Notre

Dame, and then they hit the road for games against Florida State

and Wake

Forest.

Suddenly the season looks more ominous than encouraging.

"It's always disappointing to lose a game, but we need to keep

our heads

up," said Robinson. "We still have games to win. I'm not even

thinking

about it anymore. This one is over. We didn't win and now I'm

focusing on

Notre Dame."

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If Villanova coach Andy Talley looked a little on edge walking

into Parsons

Field yesterday, he had his reasons.

A little of it had to do with 2002, when Villanova left

Northeastern with a

38-13 loss. Some of it had to do with last week, when the Wildcats'

shot at

stunning No. 1 James Madison ended on a 35-yard Hail Mary in the

final

minute. And some of it had to do with Northeastern's record.

The Huskies were 2-6 coming into yesterday's game, according to

Talley,

only because they played the toughest schedule in the Colonial

Athletic

Conference.

"I have been here," Talley said. "I have had my heart broken

before

here. So, I know what can happen in this stadium."

Seeing the Huskies convert on fourth and 8 off a fake punt did

nothing to

ease Talley's jitters.

No. 7 Villanova responded, putting up 20 points in a little more

than 12

minutes. But before the Wildcats could leave with their 20-14 win,

the

Huskies made sure to leave Talley's nerves a mess.

"We were scared of them coming into the game," Talley said.

"It was a

big concern for us. I thought it would be a nasty game. But I

thought in

the end we would have enough to win. That's what happened."

After converting the fake punt, the Huskies (2-7, 1-4) got a

12-yard

halfback option pass for a touchdown from Alex Broomfield to Brian

Mandeville that enabled them to stay within striking distance even

when

Villanova (6-2, 4-1) ran off 20 straight points.

Villanova quarterback Chris Whitney threw for 161 yards on

11-of-16

passing, including a 54-yard missile to Brandyn Harvey that set up

a 6-yard

touchdown run by Aaron Ball (17 carries, 91 yards). It was the

longest pass

play the Huskies have allowed all season.

But in the second half, NU found a way to rattle Whitney. Part

of it was

defensive coordinator Rapheal Dowdye huddling with his players and

telling

them to do their job, and part of it was finally figuring out the

pace of

Villanova's option offense.

"It's different," said Huskies linebacker Cornelius Bunch.

"Game speed

is definitely different than practice speed."

Bunch studied Whitney and realized that on that deep ball, as

soon as

Whitney dropped back that he was looking 50 yards downfield.

"He doesn't look off his receivers," Bunch said.

Which explains the pass Bunch picked off on the eighth play of

the

Wildcats' first possession of the second half, when Whitney dropped

back

looking for Angelo Babbaro.

"I was just watching his eyes," Bunch said.

Anthony Orio needed two passes to turn that 43-yard interception

return

into a Northeastern touchdown, hitting Tony Lott (five catches, 62

yards),

who corkscrewed through defenders until he reached the pylon for a

20-yard

score.

The Wildcats had two chances to close the door, when Joe Marcoux

missed a

38-yard field goal, and when Whitney threw another interception,

this time

to Jocquez Fears.

It wasn't until linebacker Marquis Kirkland picked off a pass

from Orio (16

of 25, 158 yards, 1 TD, 2 INTs) intended for Chris Plum that

Villanova was

finally safe. And when he ran into NU coach Rocky Hager after the

game,

Talley told him as much.

"He felt like they were pretty lucky to come out of here with a

win,"

Hager said.

"Their offense scared us a little bit," Talley said. "They've

been

running so many different things and special plays, and when you're

2-6, I

think you'll try a lot of different things. They do a lot of

things. For

them to be 2-7 right now is a shame. They're an excellent team.

They just

have a rough, rough schedule."

After the game, you could measure Hager's frustration by the

number of

times he said "cotton-picking," as in "cotton-picking" inches

from a

win.

"We will get over the hump," he said. "We'll keep fighting

and

grinding."

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Two days out from the big vote, the Observer finds himself

reviewing this

presidential campaign, which, I swear, began during the second term

of

Dwight David Eisenhower. I mean, my hair was still brown.

I try in vain to recall the key points in this race. (Iowa ...

give me a

minute.) But that task is best left to the men and women, now cast

look-alikes from "Night of the Living Dead," who have covered

this

contest. It's a fool's game for the likes of me.

The truth is, behind the blather about change and experience we

hear from

the candidates, lurk absurdities common to all campaigns.

So forget Barack and Michelle, Hillary and Bubba, John and

Cindy, Sarah

and Todd. Forget the handlers, strategists, pollsters, reporters,

talking

heads, liars, and thieves who form a menagerie you can't find in a

rain

forest.

Remember instead my favorite character in this whole melodrama,

Levi

Johnston. He's the 18-year-old hockey jock who impregnated Sarah

Palin's

lovely daughter Bristol. (Let's be clear here. It takes two to

tango.) I

feel for Levi because he always assumed that what happens in

Wasilla stays

in Wasilla.

Not this time, boyo.

Without mother Palin in the klieg lights, Bristol and Levi would

have had

a wedding on their own terms, unnoticed by the tabloids. Without

fear of

photographers, he'd be free to hunt anything that moved, drink

capacious

frosties with his buddies, lace up his skates on occasion, get a

job

working outside with his hands, take care of his wife and child.

Then John McCain picked Palin as his V.P. and the world as Levi

knew it

blew up in his face. He is now a high-school dropout with a baby on

the way

who must live with the certainty that images of his newborn will

end up in

People magazine. Whoa.

One day, Levi is sitting pretty in Levi World. Then,

abracadabra, Levi is

on the tarmac of the Minneapolis airport meeting the McCains in the

presence of an alarming number of guys in dark suits and shades.

Whoa

again. He denies he was dragooned into matrimony, but you know this

was not

his preferred route to the altar.

Next we see Levi in a suit, seated - no, cemented - next to

Bristol at the

Republican National Convention, a bizarre event on its best day. He

was

clearly shaken by the tectonic shift in his life. You could see it

in his

eyes. Throughout the week, he maintained a dazed, mid-distance

stare that

said Twilight Zone. As in, "This is a bad dream, right?" And:

"Where's

the off button?"

Levi is now burdened with a sentence of good behavior. It could

be a long

one, even if McCain loses, because mother Palin has found a comfy

new home

in the limelight, much as Madonna did all these many years ago. So,

Levi,

think 2012. That's one cruel twist of fate. But look at the bright

side. If

Obama wins, you can forget the White House Easter egg hunts.

Another favorite of mine is David Axelrod, Obama's top

strategist who

always looks like he just rolled out of bed, on the rare occasions

we see

him at all. You wonder how often this guy changes his socks. I like

him

because he's so unkempt in an army of the kempt.

What I'll take with me from this roadshow is less the fine print

of

competing healthcare plans than the campaign moments that, years

from now,

will stick for their transcendent oddity.

Think of a posse moving through Saks and Neiman like a Bradley

Fighting

Vehicle for $150,000 in glad rags and makeup for Palin. Think Obama

running

mate Joe Biden, he of the heralded "open mouth, change feet"

approach to

rhetoric, who said that FDR talked to America during the Great

Depression

on television, some years before the dreadful thing was invented.

Think too of the young man in a red parka atop a snowdrift near

Manchester, N.H., festooned with Hillary signs on a January day

that

reached three degrees above zero. His outstretched arms appeared

frozen at

9:15. I said to myself at the time, whatever they're not paying

him, it's

not enough.

But then Dennis Kucinich volunteers held signs the same day. In

shorts.

I'll remember Ralph Nader, the savant who told us in 2000 there

was no

difference between Al Gore and George Bush. The loon is now reduced

to

setting records for the most stump speeches in one day, across

Massachusetts, for the Guinness Book of Records. This makes me

think of

Anthony Quinn at the tragic end of "Requiem For a Heavyweight,

except

there's nothing tragic about Nader.

I'll remember the balloon drops at the conventions this year

because they

shattered the balloon status quo. It has been a law of political

physics

since the Enlightenment that Republicans do better balloon drops

than

Democrats. They just do. But in a portentous change this summer,

Denver

outdropped Minneapolis.

I'll remember Bill Clinton's boffo speech in praise of Obama in

Denver

because he didn't mean a word he said. No wonder Obama passed on

Hillary

for V.P. Can you imagine Bubba and her ensconced up in the Naval

Observatory residence of the vice president, hatching schemes for a

palace

coup far into the night?

I'll remember Obama's emotional remove, which has made him the

most

intriguing American politician in memory. And I'll remember the

third

presidential debate, when I saw the bile in John McCain, his eyes

aglitter

and his mouth locked in a fake smile, I hadn't seen since his early

appearances on CNN's "Crossfire."

As I load up on Doritos and licorice for election night, I

remind myself

we're not supposed to analyze these campaigns. What we're supposed

to

analyze are the emotions they generate in us.

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CHICAGO - At age 19, South Side resident Conrad Cochran waited in

line to

cast his very first vote for William L. Dawson, a ground-breaking

African-American politician from the neighborhood who was running

for

Congress. Forty-five years later, Cochran stood for more than an

hour to

vote for another exceptional politician who called the South Side

home:

Harold Washington, Chicago's first black mayor in 1983.

Now, at age 89, Cochran, can barely stand at all; the walker he

needs to

get around has a built-in seat. On Thursday, however, the retired

postal

worker was as excited as anyone inside Bronzeville's Martin Luther

King Jr.

Community Center to vote for Barack Obama, a transplanted son of

the South

Side. And it didn't matter that he had to wait in a three-hour-long

line to

do it.

"I've never seen nothing like this," said Cochran, who,

because of his

age, was escorted to the head of the line by poll workers. "It

means

change" that's been long in coming, "and now it's finally

happening," he

said.

The change Cochran referred to isn't from one administration to

another,

or from one set of policies to another: It's a deeper change that

has

allowed Chicago's large African-American community - the incubator

of many

black leaders - to become, for this moment at least, the center of

all

American politics.

Obama ran for the US Senate from Chicago, and he still lives on

the South

Side.

The neighborhood has been home to some of the most significant

black

political figures in American history, including Dawson, a powerful

congressman who served more than 30 years; civil rights activist

Jesse

Jackson, creator of the PUSH-Rainbow Coalition and a two-time

presidential

candidate; and Carol Moseley Braun, who in 1996 became the first

black

woman to win election to the US Senate.

"Only Harlem might have been stronger" in producing black

political

leaders of national prominence, said Michael Dawson, a political

science

professor at the University of Chicago and a relative of Dawson,

who won

his congressional seat in 1942. The city's South Side, Michael

Dawson said,

"developed black politicians at a level no other state has seen."

For decades, Chicago has occupied a unique place in

African-American

history, and a high number of nationally-known black entrepreneurs

got

their start here, from Ebony magazine founder John Johnson to

talk-show

icon Oprah Winfrey. Black Chicagoans such as Jackson and Nation of

Islam

leader Louis Farrakhan, both with strong ties to the South Side,

led

movements that influenced the national agenda.

The political springboard that propelled Obama's astonishing

rise to the

doorstep of the White House, however, was established on the South

Side,

decades before his birth in Hawaii.

Historians note that, beginning in the early 1900s, that area of

Chicago

became a destination for hundreds of thousands of former slaves and

their

descendants who moved to the Midwest, fleeing Jim Crow oppression

and the

grinding, hand-to-mouth poverty of the postwar South. Lured by the

prospect

of good jobs and a more tolerant racial climate, many of them

boarded

trains, hitched rides, or traveled however they could, following a

northbound path that traced the Mississippi River.

Stephanie Davenport, director of educational programs at

Chicago's

DuSable Museum of African American History, said the migrants found

racial

hostility and segregation along with jobs in Chicago's factories

and

foundries. Most of the migrants, she said, didn't have much money

and

settled on the South Side, which had plenty of cheap, substandard

housing.

But the hard times helped forge a strong sense of community and

self-sufficiency, she said; segregation gave rise to the city's

first

African-American doctors, dentists, and attorneys, which in turn

helped

create the city's upwardly-mobile black middle class. As community

leaders

began to demand better working and living conditions, Davenport

said,

"that meant you had to go against the political system" and learn

how it

worked.

Gradually, South Side businesspeople, community activists, and

aspiring

politicians began to realize their collective power. White

politicians

"could see that there were lots of votes here," inspiring

trans-racial

coalitions, Davenport said. "You had all of this coming

together," she

said. "And it found a home on the South Side."

Toni Preckwinkle, a longtime alderman who represents the Hyde

Park

neighborhood in the South Side, said the area has "always had an

interesting relationship with national politics," starting with

Arthur

Mitchell, who was elected to Congress in the 1930s. Dawson, she

said, was

widely regarded as a kingmaker for judges and up-and-coming

politicians -

black and white - during his tenure on Capitol Hill, "the person

Democrats

looked to for recommendations."

The South Side "has produced the preeminent African-American

politicians

in the country," said Preckwinkle, who was an early mentor to

Obama when

he moved to the area as a community organizer in the 1990s.

David Axelrod, Obama's chief political strategist and a former

Chicago

Tribune political writer, was working for the newspaper when

Washington ran

for mayor in "a very, very ugly election" that broke sharply

along racial

lines. But Obama carried nearly all of the city during the Illinois

primary

- including the ones Washington lost. Though it remains to be seen

whether

other young, aspiring black politicians follow Obama's model and

come to

the South Side to establish themselves, the signs for the future

are good,

he said.

"We already elected two African-American United States

senators. We've

made tremendous progress in Illinois in breaking down some of these

old

barriers," said Axelrod, pausing between campaign events in

Florida during

the last week of the presidential race.

"I don't know if it makes it the hub of black politics.

Hopefully, if we

are successful - and even if we're not - at this point it's fair to

say

that Obama has helped shatter some old shibboleths and myths and

barriers,

and I think that will be important," he said.

"But he's not running to be the leader of the black

community," Axelrod

said. "He's running to be president of the United States."

Scott Helman of the Globe staff , who is traveling with the

Obama campaign,

contributed to this report.

While Barack Obama enters the final days of the presidential

campaign with

a clear lead in the polls - but not so big as to rule out a

surprise

victory for John McCain - the impact of the 2008 presidential

campaign will

depend not only on who wins but also on whether the results signify

a

deeper realignment in American politics.

"We like to tell the election story through the candidates,"

said Thomas

Patterson, a professor at Harvard's John F. Kennedy School of

Government.

"But this time there are larger forces in play."

And while Obama's lead, between three and seven percentage

points in most

national polls, is big enough to make him the favorite going into

Tuesday,

the other big questions of the election are all too close to call.

Is the "Reagan Revolution" over? Going down the stretch,

McCain is

campaigning heavily on Obama's comment that he wants to "spread

the

wealth." And McCain has even discovered a seven-year-old radio

interview

suggesting that Obama may believe in "redistributive" economics.

During the heyday of the Democrats' New Deal coalition, which

dominated

politics from 1932 until 1980, the idea of spreading the wealth

around was

hardly political poison - it was the backbone of the party's

economic

philosophy. Since 1980 and the "Reagan Revolution," however,

using tax

policies to redistribute income has been widely viewed as an

outmoded

approach that chokes off economic growth.

Obama hasn't fully embraced '60s-style tax-and-spend liberalism,

but he

hasn't run away from it as much as other Democratic presidential

nominees

since 1984 have done. Bill Clinton, the most successful Democratic

vote-getter of that period, went out of his way to declare that

"the era

of big government is over," and assure voters that he is a

"pro-growth"

Democrat who favors "third way" policies.

Obama also touts his policies as pro-growth, but has emphasized

that he

believes people earning more than $250,000 should bear the brunt of

tax

increases to cover social initiatives that would disproportionately

benefit

lower-income people. To the extent that such a mechanism "spreads

the

wealth," he's in favor of it.

Many observers have noted that Americans want more economic

security in

their lives, including guaranteed healthcare, pensions, disaster

relief,

and improvements to public infrastructure. And the McCain campaign,

in a

break with Ronald Reagan's creed of smaller government, has called

for the

government to pay up to $300 billion to buy up home mortgages and

chop the

monthly payments to reflect diminished home values.

In addition, the McCain proposal that follows the Reagan creed

most closely

- his call for extending the Bush tax cuts and adding new cuts of

business

taxes - seems to be falling on deaf ears; in recent weeks, the GOP

nominee

has concentrated more on warning of tax hikes under Obama than

touting the

benefits of his own tax-cut plan.

David Brooks, the conservative New York Times columnist, has

predicted that

the economic uncertainty will lead to a Democratic sweep followed

by an

intensive return to tax-and-spend liberalism. "What we're going to

see, in

short, is the Gingrich revolution in reverse and on steroids,"

Brooks

wrote last month.

McCain believes that voters still fear the kind of overreach

that Brooks

predicts. A modest victory for Obama could easily be ascribed to a

simple

desire for a change, benefiting a candidate who tried to present

his

policies in modest terms.

A big Obama win, however, could be read as a mandate for just

the kind of

liberalism that Brooks fears. And it could signal a much

longer-term

political realignment. The New Deal era and the Reagan Revolution

each

followed failed presidencies that, fairly or not, are still invoked

as

cautionary tales - the Herbert Hoover and Jimmy Carter

administrations.

George W. Bush's administration, with record-low approval ratings,

may join

the list.

Is America prepared to move beyond its racial divisions? On the

day of

Obama's Democratic nomination acceptance speech, tens of thousands

of

African-Americans, most with children in tow, waited for hours in

security

lines to enter Denver's football stadium to celebrate the crowning

of the

nation's first black presidential nominee.

Despite the football setting, it was more of a church crowd -

uplifted,

generous, and full of faith. While some black voters would express

concerns

for Obama's safety and nervousness about his campaign, many others

have

remained quietly confident, even when polls narrowed and other

Democrats

worried that Obama wasn't as far ahead as he should be, given the

country's

problems.

Much of black voters' faith is in Obama himself. But there is

also a quiet

recognition among many that, whatever the extent of racial

divisions, they

don't preclude a majority-white country from electing a black

president.

That by itself could change racial pathologies that have existed

throughout

American history.

Since George Washington, the president has been the symbol of

the nation,

as much as European monarchs once embodied their nations' identity.

Having

a black president just four decades after the end of legal

segregation

would force a reconsideration of almost all assumptions about race

relations in America.

But if Obama were to lose - and if white resistance to a black

nominee were

cited as a major factor - black hopes would be dashed in a way that

could

increase racial tensions, at least in the short term.

Still, the legacy of the Obama campaign, win or lose, on race

relations

probably won't be clear until long after Tuesday.

Are young people becoming a driving force in American politics?

Back in the

'60s, the emerging Baby Boom generation pushed American politics

leftward.

But through the '80s and '90s, voters under 30 see-sawed between

backing

Democrats and Republicans, while turning out in smaller numbers

overall.

Their strongest sentiment seemed to be their indifference.

In the 2000 race between Al Gore and George W. Bush, only 40

percent of

registered voters from ages 18 to 29 bothered to vote, compared

with 65

percent of voters over 30, according to a survey by the nonpartisan

Pew

Research Center.

In 2004, the turnout of voters under 30 jumped by nine

percentage points,

to 49 percent, while that of older voters increased by only three.

And

those younger voters supported Democrat John Kerry over Bush by a

seven-point margin, 48 to 41 percent.

This year, voters between 18 and 29 are backing Obama by a

whopping 29

points - 61 to 32, according to a Pew survey. And while more young

voters

showed up for this year's Democratic primaries than in 2004, no one

is sure

whether turnout of young voters will take another big leap in the

general

election.

"We're expecting them to at least match their turnout level of

2004, if

not increase it," said Scott Keeter, Pew's director of survey

research.

"Given the enormous lead Obama has among young voters, they'll be

a key to

whether he wins or not."

How much do Americans care about their image in the world?

Arguably, the

opinions of foreigners have never counted for anything in US

politics. Some

of the most unpopular American presidents in the outside world -

such as

Reagan - were hugely popular at home, while those most concerned

with the

world - like Hoover and Carter - were domestic flops.

But the latest plunge in America's standing in the world,

spurred by the

policies of the Bush administration, has gotten some political

attention at

home, especially when linked to the administration's failure to

persuade

enough allies to share the costs of intervention in Iraq.

Obama has cited his own racial background and time spent in

Indonesia as a

reason why "the world will look at America differently when I'm

president."

That argument drew voters to Obama during his primary race

against Hillary

Clinton. And he reinforced just how much his election could do to

improve

relations with US allies by staging a campaign-style rally in

Berlin,

attended by hundreds of thousands of adoring Germans.

Elsewhere in the world, from Europe to Asia, there has been

intense

scrutiny of the American election - and excitement over the Obama

campaign.

The global interest suggests that millions of foreigners might be

prepared

to change their opinions of the United States under a President

Obama.

But in recent weeks, foreign policy has taken a back seat in the

election,

so it will be hard to judge how much an Obama victory would be a

mandate to

be more attentive to US allies. And it remains to be seen whether a

President Obama would be able to meet the high expectations that

American

allies seem to have for him.

What does it mean to be a conservative? The Republican coalition

has been

compared to a stool with three legs - strong national defense, low

taxes,

and conservative social values. It's never been a secret that many

Republicans buy into only one or another of the three legs, but

they've

bought in strongly enough that their disagreements with the others

haven't

mattered. Recently, though, the stool has been wobbling.

Back in Easter of 2005, the president and both houses of

Congress rushed

back to Washington to intervene in the case of Terri Schiavo, a

brain-damaged woman whose husband had chosen to remove her from a

respirator. Polls showed vast majorities of Americans opposed to

government

intervention, but Bush and GOP congressional leaders pushed

legislation

through anyway.

That weekend was a triumph for abortion foes, but may have

driven other

Republicans away. Likewise, the unexpected toll in Iraq has sparked

concerns among evangelicals, and the recent Wall Street meltdown

has made

many middle-class Republicans question their party's economic

policies.

McCain is mostly aligned with the defense wing, but also has

credibility as

a budget cutter. He has tried to hold together all three

conservative

constituencies, even wooing social conservatives - who have long

resisted

him - with his pick of Alaska Governor Sarah Palin as his vice

presidential

nominee.

Still, his presidency, compared with Bush's, would probably

reduce the

impact of the religious right. And if McCain is defeated, the three

branches of the GOP will have to decide whether to hang together -

or go

their own ways.

"They may choose to dampen down the role of social

conservatives, a bit

like the Democrats after the '80s really pushed down as much as

they could

on the African-American agenda," says Patterson. But in the short

term, he

said, much will depend on events outside the party's control, like

the

economy.

"If the economy's weak, they'll gain seats in Congress in two

years,"

assuming that Democrats, as expected, maintain control of the House

and the

Senate, Patterson said. "They'll declare that the party's back."

But in what form will remain to be seen.

DIANNE WILKERSON'S star crashed just as Barack Obama's soars.

For Boston's black community, the anticipated sweetness of an

Obama victory

is soured by the scandal engulfing Wilkerson, the only

African-American

member of the Massachusetts Senate.

Many longtime enablers, black and white, finally cut Wilkerson

loose,

following allegations that she accepted bribes worth $23,500 in an

FBI

undercover operation. Surveillance photos show her not just taking

cash,

but stuffing it under her shirt into her bra.

For years, colleagues looked the other way as Wilkerson broke

federal tax

and campaign finance laws. But last week, the Senate passed a

resolution

calling on her to resign. This time, there was no presumption of

innocence;

just anger that she dragged political friends into what she calls

"the

madness that has become my life." Senate President Therese Murray

and

Boston Mayor Thomas Menino, among others, have been summoned before

a

federal grand jury in connection with Wilkerson's effort to secure

a liquor

license for a Roxbury club.

When the scandal first broke, Wilkerson vowed to continue a

write-in

campaign to save the seat she held for 15 years. She hoped that

black

voters who turned out for Obama would also help sweep her to

victory.

But then a group of Boston's black clergy also called upon

Wilkerson to

step down. When a black politician loses the support of local black

ministers, it's over. On Friday, Wilkerson suspended her write-in

campaign

and said she will not seek reelection. She did not resign, but said

she

will make another announcement on Nov. 5, the day after the

election.

On one level, Wilkerson's humiliating fall is small-time and

strictly

local. But because of Obama's remarkable journey, it is part of a

bigger

story, a generational transition in black leadership that is

sweeping the

country.

As Nov. 4 draws near, the election of the country's first

African-American

president is starting to feel imminent. As the possibility grows,

African-Americans are starting to feel quietly jubilant.

Darnell L. Williams, president of the Urban League of Eastern

Massachusetts, passed along an e-mail that was recently forwarded

to him:

"Rosa sat so that Martin could walk. Martin walked so that Barack

could

run. Barack runs so that our children could fly."

Those references to Rosa Parks, who refused to sit in the back

of a bus in

Montgomery, Ala., and to Martin Luther King Jr., who famously

marched to

the nation's capitol, speak to years of fighting for civil rights

and a

movement that could culminate with Obama in the Oval Office.

But, suddenly in Boston, the headiness of watching Obama's

stunning success

on the national stage ran up against the unpleasant pettiness of

Wilkerson's alleged corruption. Her response to the charges didn't

help.

Faced with damning photographs that allegedly catch her in the

act of being

bribed, Wilkerson complained that the federal investigation was

politically

motivated. Some loyal supporters also cast her as the victim of a

white

political establishment eager to bring her down.

That kind of talk does not mesh with the style and rhetoric

Obama embraced

in his historic run for the presidency.

"Obama has presented a compelling case for change, and ability

to unify

and not divide along racial and gender lines," said Williams, of

the Urban

League. "We have to recognize that part of that change will not

include

activities and behaviors that are attached to the past."

To Kevin Peterson, who heads the Ella J. Baker House in

Dorchester,

Wilkerson represents "a different style of a different generation,

which

may be archaic in terms of leadership in the black community."

After

Obama, he said, "the notion that black people need to employ

racially

polarizing stances is extinct."

To coin the candidate's phrase - as the fierce urgency of now

propels

Obama closer to the White House, it squeezes Wilkerson out of the

Massachusetts State House. Once she was the reformer and symbol of

a new

generation of black leadership. But she squandered her platform and

power,

just as Obama maximized his.

The fault, Dianne, lies not in the stars, but in ourselves.

Joan Vennochi can be reached at vennochi@globe.com.

ROCHESTER, Pa. - Carl Hrelec doesn't like the word "liberal." It

makes him

think of hippies. He does not like the idea of raising taxes on the

rich,

either - it's not fair, he believes, "to take money somebody has

worked

for and give it to somebody else who doesn't work."

But as he looked out over the dimly lit restaurant he owns in

this

once-thriving steel town, he said he liked Barack Obama's proposal

for a

middle-class tax cut. The Point used to fill with workers from the

nearby

asphalt and concrete plants. Now, work has slowed, money is tight,

and the

bar is near-empty some days.

"I don't believe Obama's a socialist," said Hrelec, a

58-year-old

Democrat who voted for George W. Bush twice, and who is undecided

this

year. "The working guy in this country needs a break."

In the final days of the presidential race, John McCain is

forcefully

arguing that Obama is a liberal tax-and-spender - even a Marxist,

he says,

quoting the Illinois senator's remark to Joe the Plumber that he

wanted to

"spread the wealth around." In Beaver County, Pa., a swing

district

northwest of Pittsburgh teeming with Reagan Democrats, McCain's

argument

resonates - but perhaps, in this economy, not as strongly as he

would like.

In the towns along the hilly banks of the Ohio River, where

morning

sunshine cast a milky light on the late foliage last week,

communities are

still struggling to reinvent themselves a generation after the

collapse of

the steel industry here. Voters tend to be right-leaning on social

issues

and uncomfortable with the idea of increasing taxes on anybody,

even the

wealthy. But they also remember the days when their towns had a

stronger

middle class, when good jobs were plentiful, and it wasn't hard for

a

steelworker with a high school education to own a nice house and a

second

car.

Such jobs are much harder to find now in Rochester; in the last

year a

sluggish economy has hurt businesses and slowed construction, and

the cost

of everything has gone up, said Joe Kaminsky, a 38-year-old

self-employed

contractor from nearby Monaca, who remembers the days when his

father could

walk out of one steel mill and find another job at the next mill

down the

street. Standing downtown the other day, surrounded by abandoned

storefronts filled with old junk, Kaminsky was on his way to the

Salvation

Army to see about getting some assistance during the holidays for

his

family of seven.

The way voters like Kaminsky see it, wealth has already flowed

away from

the poor and the middle class toward the rich, and some corrective

action

is in order.

"I think people are fed up with the Republican point of view -

the rich

get the breaks and we get the shaft," said Kaminsky, a Democrat

who

supports Obama.

Even some hard-core Republicans who planned to vote for McCain

dismissed

his argument that Obama is a socialist, pointing out that many

Republicans

voted for the $700 billion bailout package.

"You want to talk about socialism, look who's owning the

banks," said Dan

Rainey, a 60-year-old Republican who works at a sports memorabilia

store in

Beaver, the thriving and picturesque county seat. He once believed

in

trickle-down economics. When Ronald Reagan was president it seemed

to work,

he said. But a bank president "wasn't making $25 million back

then,

either."

Still, there remains a deep distrust of big government programs

here, and

strong skepticism about Obama. A number of voters feared he would

transfer

wealth from the middle class to help people "who don't work" or

who don't

deserve it.

"For me to pay for someone to have insurance who could pay for

it

themselves, I'm not into that," said Debby Jurich, a 47-year-old

stay-at-home mother from Beaver. "I don't think government should

pay for

everything."

Pennsylvania's 21 electoral votes are critical to McCain's

chances of

winning the presidency. Though he is behind in the polls, he hopes

to pull

an upset by picking up conservative Democrats in swing counties

like

Beaver, which only narrowly went for John Kerry in 2004.

McCain's focus on casting Obama as the wealth "redistributor in

chief" is

hard to miss around here these days. In coffee shops and

convenience

stores, Republican radio ads repeatedly warn that "congressional

liberals" want to raise taxes and increase spending by $1

trillion. "They

call it taxing the rich; we call it out of touch with our values,"

the

narrator says.

Chris Borick, a political science professor and director of

Muhlenberg

College's Institute of Public Opinion in Allentown, said his

tracking

polls for the Morning Call newspaper of Allentown suggest that so

far,

McCain's argument is not working - voters believe McCain would help

the

rich while Obama would help the middle class.

The concept of wealth redistribution is as unpopular here as it

is in most

of America, Borick said, and the notion may play on racist fears of

black

welfare recipients siphoning money from working-class whites -

fears that

have special resonance since Obama is black.

But "when your biggest concern is your immediate financial

well-being ...

you're not so much worried about what's going to happen on the

margin," he

said. "You're more worried about the big picture."

Yet this does not mean, he said, that western Pennsylvanians

would be

comfortable with a Democratic Party that fully embraced

old-fashioned

liberal ideals. Voters like Hrelec, the restaurant owner, continue

to

describe themselves as moderate to conservative and prefer a

centrist

government.

"I would like to see the Democratic Party be more along lines

of when JFK

was president," Hrelec said. "He wasn't so far to the left. He

tried to

help the working people in this country, but he didn't punish the

rich

people, either."

To be sure, there are voters here for whom principle trumps

economic

self-interest - people who would pay lower taxes under Obama than

McCain,

but prefer the Republicans' tax policy on the grounds that wealth

redistribution is anti-American. Doug Blaker, a contractor in his

late 40s,

was handing out candy to trick-or-treaters the other night outside

the

Polish Falcons hall in Ambridge, an ailing former steel town.

"People who came to this country came for a free life," said

Blaker, a

Democrat who is backing McCain. "If you start taking away some of

that

freedom, what good is it anymore?"

His friend, Tom Patrician, a 55-year-old Republican and

president of the

local Chamber of Commerce who now as an independent contractor

earns a

fraction of what he once made at a union airline job - said a few

thousand

dollars wouldn't do him much good anyway. He prefers McCain's

experience to

Obama's.

But in an economy like this one, the success of McCain's

argument may hinge

less on ideology, and more on whether he can convince voters that

Obama's

real purpose - as the GOP radio ad implies - is to transfer wealth

from the

middle class to the poor, rather than from the rich to everyone

else.

Kathy Lucci, a 48-year-old saleswoman at a jewelry store in

downtown

Rochester, voted for Bill Clinton and Al Gore, but she plans to

back McCain

on Tuesday. She and her husband work hard, she said, and they give

generously to the St. Jude Society, the Veterans of Foreign Wars,

and

virtually every child selling candy bars for school or sports. But

it

bothers her, she said, when she stands in line to buy hamburger at

the

grocery store and sees someone using a food voucher to buy steak.

"When he's talking to people about spreading the wealth," she

said of

Obama, "I don't think he's talking to the middle class."

Hrelec disagrees. And as he sat in his quiet restaurant the

other day, he

seemed much more inclined to support Obama because of his

middle-class tax

cuts than to spurn him because of his tax hikes for the rich. "I

believe

they spend more on corporate welfare and bailing bankers out than

they give

to the needy people in this country," he said.

The Detroit News plans to move the following stories for clients

of the New York Times News Service for editions of Monday, Nov. 3,

and thereafter. For questions, contact:

News desk: 313.222.2533

Sports desk: 313.222.2260

Features desk: 313.222.2480

Business desk: 313.222.2738-..-

BUSINESS ("f" designation)

AUTOIMPACT (undated): The auto industry has always had a

significant impact on the U.S. economy, and that remains true today

despite the plant closings, job cuts and other restructuring moves

by Detroit's Big Three in the face of intense competition from

foreign rivals and the economic downturn now threatening the

industry. Every job at an automaker creates work for six additional

people, according to the Center for Automotive Research in Ann

Arbor. And the industry still accounts for about 3 percent of the

nation's gross domestic product -- the value of all goods and

services produced here -- although that is down from about 5

percent in previous years. The U.S. auto industry's role as an

economic engine for the country is in the spotlight now as GM, Ford

and Chrysler seek financial aid from the government to help them

survive the worst crisis the industry has faced in years. Sales are

down 13 percent through September and the situation is only

expected to worsen with credit still tight and consumer confidence

at an all-time low. We look at the impact of the auto industry on

the U.S. economy and try to put it in some historical perspective.

By Alisa Priddle. Developing. With graphic, photos.

METRO ("a" designation)

ELECTION (undated): Roundup of the final Sunday of the campaign,

incorporating national and local. We will be out with volunteers in

Metro Detroit, too. By Gordon Trowbridge. Developing.

ENTERTAINMENT ("e" designation)

SCHNEIDERMOVIE (undated): Rob Schneider ("Saturday Night

Live," the "Duece Bigelow" saga) is in town filming "Virgin on

Bourbon Street." The film is about a conservative college student

who gets drunk for the first time and finds out her antics have

ended up on a "Girls Gone Wild"-type video. She then sets off to

track down the tape. We talk to Schneider about the film, whose

crew is largely Michigan-based, and hang out on the set. Schneider

leaves town tomorrow (Tuesday) but filming will go on for a couple

more weeks. By Adam Graham. Developing. With photos.

TVWORSTWEEK (undated): Oscar winning actress Olympia Dukakis

guest stars on CBS' freshman comedy "Worst Week." We talk to her

about the guest spot and why she chose to do the show. By Mekeisha

Madden Toby. Developing

Here are the stories New York Times editors are considering for

the Page 1 of Monday, Nov. 3. The N.Y. Times News Service night

supervisor is Kenneth Walsh; phone: (888) 346-9867; e-mail:

kenwalsh@nytimes.com.

INTERNATIONAL

(Will move in "i" news file.)

ZIMBABWE-AID (Johannesburg, South Africa) -- Questions about the

use of international aid money in Zimbabwe. By Celia W. Dugger.

CONGO-REBELS (Goma, Congo) -- When Congo shakes, Africa trembles.

This vast linchpin of a country, at the green heart of the

continent, covering 905,000 square miles and bordering nine

countries, never goes down alone. When the Congolese state began to

collapse in 1996, it set off a regional war. When it imploded again

in 1998, it dragged in armies from half a dozen African countries.

The two wars and the mayhem since have killed possibly 5 million

people, a conflict-related death toll that human rights groups say

is the worst since World War II. The worry now is that Congo is on

the brink again, with neighbors poised to jump in, which is why the

relatively small-scale bush fighting this past week attracted some

of the most intense diplomatic activity Congo has seen in years.

(News Analysis) By Jeffrey Gettleman.

POLITICS

(Will move in "p" news file.)

CAMPAIGN-OBAMA (Dateline TK) -- On the trail with Barack Obama as

he wraps up his campaign. By Jeff Zeleny.

CAMPAIGN-MCCAIN (Dateline TK) -- On the trail with John McCain as

he wraps up his campaign. By Elisabeth Bumiller.

CONGRESS-ELECT (Fairfax, Va.) -- House and Senate Republicans

appear to be losing their once-tight grip on the near suburbs and

exurbs. Even freshman House Democrats, elected two years ago from

largely exurban districts that Republicans had held -- and thought

to be highly vulnerable -- are now looking strong because of the

wilting economy and demographic changes. Democrats are likely to

make major inroads in areas that the GOP has had a stranglehold on

for many years. The downside: The Democrats' big tent gets even

bigger, and it could make for an unruly crowd for Reid and Pelosi

to manage. By Carl Hulse and David M. Herszenhorn.

(Previously skedded as VA.-CONGRESS-ELECT)

NATIONAL GENERAL

(Will move in "a" news file.)

GITMO-FUTURE (Undated) -- Both John McCain and Barack Obama have

said they would close the Guantanamo detention camp, but the review

of the government's public files underscores the challenges of

fulfilling that promise. The next president will have to contend

with sobering intelligence claims against many of the remaining

detainees. By William Glaberson and Margot Williams.

FINANCIAL

(Will move in "f"' news file.)

PRIVATE-EQUITY-WOES (Undated) -- Chrysler, Neiman, MGM, Toys

"R" Us and several others have one thing in common: in the past,

they were all bought by private equity. Unlike other takeovers,

private equity larded their targets with debt as part of these

deals. Now, they are having to pay the piper. By Andrew Ross

Sorkin.

GM (Dateline TK) -- The Bush administration denies bailout money

to General Motors. By Bill Vlasic.

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'WAKING GIANT': A TRANSFORMATIVE TIME, A REMARKABLE PRESIDENT (Publication notes are at end of review.) John Steele Gordon is a regular contributor to Commentary. The time between the end of the age of the Founding Fathers and

the beginning of the Civil War era was for a long time something of

a historical black hole for many Americans. The presidents in this

period, with one notable exception, are barely remembered today for

anything other than having been president. Politics often revolved

around now obscure issues like the tariff, the Second Bank of the

United States and "internal improvements."

Well, the emptiness has been filled. In 2005 the Princeton

historian Sean Wilentz published "The Rise of American

Democracy," covering at great length (1,044 pages) the 19th

century up to the Civil War. Last year saw the publication of

Daniel Walker Howe's "What Hath God Wrought: The Transformation of

America, 1815-1848," which won the Pulitzer Prize. It too is no

airplane read, coming in at 904 pages, but he covers the period

extremely well.

And now David S. Reynolds, distinguished professor at the

Graduate Center of the City University of New York and winner of

the Bancroft Prize for his book "Walt Whitman's America," offers

his take in "Waking Giant: America in the Age of Jackson" at a

mere 466 pages. That length is in many ways a virtue, and not just

for people who like to read in bed and breathe at the same time.

This period saw a remarkable transformation. There were only 18

states in 1815 but 30 by 1848. Florida, Texas and vast stretches of

the Northwest and Southwest were added to the national territory.

The population of the United States increased to nearly 23 million

from 8 million. And that population became much more diverse as

immigrants began to pour in from Europe and spread out across the

continent with increasing speed.

Americans were a remarkably bumptious, self-confident, ambitious

and materialistic group. The Englishwoman Frances Trollope (mother

of the novelist Anthony Trollope) reported a resident Englishman

telling her that "he had never overheard Americans conversing

without the word "DOLLAR" being pronounced between them." And

yet the country was also in the midst of a major religious revival,

often called the Second Great Awakening. This was the period when

Joseph Smith was founding the Mormons and William Miller the

Adventists, when revival meetings were sometimes attended by tens

of thousands.

Economically the country became much richer and much more

diverse as industry developed in the North, cotton spread through

the lower South, and the Midwest turned into one of the world's

great grain-producing areas. Transportation improved radically as

roads, canals and then, after 1830, railroads began to connect the

various parts of an immense country and to weld it into a single,

continent-wide market.

The Erie Canal was by far the most important of these new

avenues, for it linked the fertile soils of the Midwest directly to

the East Coast. The produce that once had to flow down the

Mississippi began increasingly to flow through the canal to New

York City, which became the greatest boom town the world had ever

known.

Curiously, three men who never became president (although they

wanted the office) -- Henry Clay, Daniel Webster and John C. Calhoun

-- are more familiar to most Americans than many of the men who did

reach the White House. But one president dominated the era to the

extent that he gave his name to the age and received the ultimate

historical accolade of having that name turned into an adjective to

describe his times and policies.

That, of course, was Andrew Jackson. He was the first president

to be born poor, the first not to come from Virginia or

Massachusetts. He shaped the future of American politics so

profoundly that the great 19th-century historian George Bancroft

thought him the last of the Founding Fathers. It was in Jackson's

time that property qualifications for voting were largely abolished

and what we would recognize as democracy (at least for white men)

took firm hold. The modern two-party system evolved in this period

as well, as Jackson became the father of the present-day Democratic

Party. And in the 1850s the anti-Jackson Whigs would give way to

the Republicans.

Reynolds brings this remarkable man to life. After an attempted

assassination misfired, Reynolds reports: "Jackson once said he

never felt frightened in any situation, and he certainly was not

now. He lifted his cane and charged his assailant. Dropping the

pistol, the man pulled out another, aimed and fired. Again the gun

failed. Others wrestled the gunman to the ground. Jackson calmly

continued his day, remarking that he 'was not born to be shot by

an assassin."'

Reynolds' book is, necessarily, a tour d'horizon of the period.

And he describes it thoroughly in a manageable amount of space.

Given the vast size of the subject, the number of people to be

discussed and the number of topics to be covered to give a sense of

this period, that is no small accomplishment.

To achieve his goal, Reynolds deviates from a strictly

chronological approach. Instead he covers many major subjects, like

the religious revival, separately. He has a chapter on the literary

and artistic accomplishments of the time, when the country began

forging a separate identity in the arts. Edgar Allan Poe, Ralph

Waldo Emerson, Nathaniel Hawthorne, James Fenimore Cooper and

others gave America a distinct literary voice. Artists like Thomas

Cole, Asher B. Durand, George Catlin and William Sydney Mount

painted American subjects in new ways rather than copying European

styles.

There's a chapter on inventions that even covers fads.

McCormick's reaper would revolutionize agriculture; Morse's

telegraph speeded up communications by orders of magnitude; Colt's

pistol changed manufacturing profoundly. Spiritualism and

phrenology arose, as did dietary nostrums like those promoted by

Sylvester Graham (who, at least, left the graham cracker as a

lasting legacy of his nutty ideas on nutrition).

Reynolds covers so much with such economy that you sometimes get

the feeling the book was written on index cards. But "Waking

Giant" is, in whole, a terrific introduction of succinct length to

a period in our history that was once ignored, a period

increasingly recognized as a time when the foundations of much of

modern America were laid.

PUBLICATION NOTES:

'WAKING GIANT

America in the Age of Jackson'

By David S. Reynolds

Illustrated. 466 pages. Harper/HarperCollins. $29.95

Janet Jackson has had a rough year. Her current

album, "Discipline," arrived in February to such disappointing

sales that in September, with fewer than a half-million copies

sold, she ended her contract with the label, Island Def Jam,

leaving her independent. So there was an extra edge during her

Madison Square Garden show on Saturday when she shouted, at the end

of her song "Control": "I'm on my own, and I'll call my own

shots!"

Her first tour in seven years started shakily this fall, with

shows suddenly canceled or postponed. Her spokesman said that

Jackson, 42, suffered from vestibular migraines that could cause

dizziness -- a problem for a performer who, in concert, is more a

dancer than a singer. The tour's original opening act, LL Cool J,

dropped off the bill.

Yet none of that weighed down Jackson's Garden show, which had

been postponed from Oct. 16. She strutted through a full-tilt arena

spectacle like those she has mounted since her multimillion-selling

days in the 1980s and '90s, with dancers, video screens,

pyrotechnics and lip-synching. (How much Jackson was actually

singing during the concert is open to conjecture. Except for stage

patter, her voice was rarely fully exposed as she shared lead

vocals with recorded tracks.) But the foundation for all that

razzle-dazzle was one of the most durable catalogs of hits from the

music-video era, and plenty of them. Jackson's set list had three

dozen songs, and all but the oldest and most recent ones triggered

immediate singalongs.

Her constant subject is longing: for sex both tender and kinky

but also for companionship and devotion. To pack all those songs

into just over two hours onstage, she turned them into medleys,

grouped by musical style.

There were minisets of keyboard-driven funk like "Nasty," of

creamy ballads like "Again," of upbeat pop like "Escapade," of

hip-hop-tinged R&amp;amp;B like "Got Til It's Gone" (with Q-Tip rapping

on the video screen) and of guitar-driven rock like "Black Cat."

She had a costume for each one and endless variations of her

familiar angular stop-and-start dance moves; the men in her troupe

spun through gymnastics or groveled at her feet.

With her hair pointing skyward in a faux-Mohawk, Jackson

appeared in futuristic sparkles, in a skintight red formal dress,

in a maroon bodysuit with glittery epaulets and in quasi-dominatrix

lingerie. Her long set piece was the title song of "Discipline."

A man taken from the audience was suspended in a leather harness

above a supine Jackson, who groped between his legs in video

close-ups. At the end he babbled about his love for Jackson into a

convenient microphone.

Jackson also reclaimed the pop she made as a teenager, before

she became her own producer, with a medley from her 1982 debut

album, "Janet Jackson." Now they sound like the beginning of a

style that would merge her brother Michael Jackson's melodic

choruses with the synthesized Minneapolis funk of Jackson's 1980s

rival, Prince. That fusion helped shape Britney Spears, Beyonce,

the Pussycat Dolls and much other current pop-R&amp;amp;B.

Jackson is the kind of performer who made the most of pop's

blockbuster era. She has always relied on every enhancement of the

old star system. She hired skillful collaborators, catalyzing the

best work from her longtime producers and songwriting partners,

Jimmy Jam and Terry Lewis. (Recent songs, without them, have lacked

for melody.) Studio techniques polished her modest coo of a voice,

and videos and photo sessions disseminated her combination of

girlish smiles and sultry teases. High-gloss pop is her rightful

medium, and it could well be endangered by the new austerities of

the recording business and the world economy. But in all their

artificial splendor, her old songs still gleam.

An article of faith among conservative critics of American

universities has been that liberal professors politically

indoctrinate their students. This conviction not only fueled the

culture wars but has also led state lawmakers to consider requiring

colleges to submit reports to the government detailing their

progress in ensuring "intellectual diversity," prompted

universities to establish faculty positions devoted to conservatism

and spurred the creation of a network of volunteer watchdogs to

monitor "political correctness" on campuses.

Just a few weeks ago, Michael Barone, a fellow at the

conservative American Enterprise Institute, warned in The

Washington Times against "the liberal thugocracy," arguing that

today's liberals seem to be taking "marching orders" from

"college and university campuses."

But a handful of new studies have found such worries to be

overwrought. Three sets of researchers recently concluded that

professors have virtually no impact on the political views and

ideology of their students.

If there has been a conspiracy among liberal faculty members to

influence students, "they've done a pretty bad job," said A. Lee

Fritschler, a professor of public policy at George Mason University

and an author of the new book "Closed Minds? Politics and Ideology

in American Universities" (Brookings Institution Press).

The notion that students are induced to move leftward "is a

fantasy," said Jeremy D. Mayer, another of the book's authors.

When it comes to shaping a young person's political views, "it is

really hard to change the mind of anyone over 15," said Mayer, who

did extensive research on faculty and students.

"Parents and family are the most important influence,"

followed by the news media and peers, he said. "Professors are

among the least influential."

A study of nearly 7,000 students at 38 institutions published in

the current PS: Political Science and Politics, the journal of the

American Political Science Association, as well as a second study

that has been accepted by the journal to run in April 2009, both

reach similar conclusions.

"There is no evidence that an instructor's views instigate

political change among students," Matthew Woessner and April

Kelly-Woessner, a husband-and-wife team of political scientists who

have frequently conducted research on politics in higher education,

write in that second study.

Their work is often cited by people on both sides of the debate,

not least because Woessner describes himself as politically

conservative.

No one disputes that American academia is decidedly more liberal

than the rest of the population, or that there is a detectable

shift to the left among students during their college years. Still,

both studies in the peer-reviewed PS, for example, found that

changes in political ideology could not be attributed to

proselytizing professors but rather to general trends among that

age group. As Mack D. Mariani at Xavier University and Gordon J.

Hewitt at Hamilton College write in the current issue, "Student

political orientation does not change for a majority of students

while in college, and for those that do change there is evidence

that other factors have an effect on that change, such as gender

and socioeconomic status."

That may be, said Daniel Klein, an economist at George Mason,

but those results don't necessarily mean there isn't a problem.

Klein, whose research has shown that registered Democrats vastly

outnumber Republicans among faculty in the humanities and social

sciences at American colleges and universities, maintains that the

focus on the liberal-conservative split is misdirected. Such terms

are vague and can be used to describe everything from attitudes

about religion and family to the arts and lifestyles, he said.

The real issue, said Klein, who calls himself a libertarian, is

that social democratic ideas dominate universities -- ideas that

play down the importance of the individual and promote government

intervention.

Such "academic groupthink" means that the works of such

thinkers are not offered enough, he argues. "A major tragedy is

that they're not getting exposed to the good stuff," he said,

citing the works of John Stuart Mill, Adam Smith, Friedrich Hayek

and Milton Friedman.

"Even if we had hard, definite evidence that students weren't

influenced by their professors, there is still reason for great

concern about the composition of the faculty," Klein added.

K.C. Johnson, a historian at the City University of New York,

characterizes the problem as pedagogical, not political. Entire

fields of study, from traditional literary analysis to political

and military history, are simply not widely taught anymore, Johnson

contended: "Even students who want to learn don't have the

opportunity, because there are no specialists on the faculty to

take courses from."

"The conservative critics are inventing a straw man that

doesn't exist and are missing the real problem that does," he

added.

Anne Neal, the president of the American Council of Trustees and

Alumni, which closely follows this issue, agrees that "it is not

about left and right."

Many researchers and critics also agree that a better grounding

in American history and politics is important. "It wasn't too long

ago that schools and universities required civic education and

American history," Fritschler noted. "Almost all of those

requirements have evaporated."

A number of organizations that have a large base of conservative

supporters, like Neal's council and the National Association of

Scholars, have been promoting a return to traditional courses in

Western civilization and American history.

Fritschler said that perhaps the most insidious side effect of

assumptions about liberal influence has been an overall

disengagement on campus from civic and political affairs, and a

reluctance to promote serious debate of political issues. If

anything, he added, the problem is not too much politics, but too

little.

'THAT DON'T MAKE ME A BAD GUY' (Show Dog Nashville)

Toby Keith

"You Already Love Me" has all the makings of a great Toby

Keith song: misbehaving with the boys, disappointing the girl,

knowing perfectly well a relationship isn't built to last. "Baby

girl," Keith sings. "I know that you could do better than me,

maybe." Had he recorded this song five or so years ago, that

"maybe" would have been a winking taunt, an acknowledgment that

he was getting away with something. But here, on Keith's 12th

studio album, "That Don't Make Me a Bad Guy," it's a note of

resignation. "It's too late," he continues. "You already love

me." Nothing to be done now.

For years Keith has been reliably blustery, but today his chest

is no longer puffed. This album continues a genteel streak that

he's been cultivating lately, perhaps as a corrective to his public

persona of swagger and jingoism. This is gentleman country, and

what's surprising is how natural it sounds. While these vocals lack

his characteristic robustness, his gift for melody is intact. And

shockingly, his heart is wide open. On "Hurt a Lot Worse When You

Go," he lets a woman walk all over him: "Go on and call me

up/Tell me you made a grave mistake/You know I never once turned

you away."

But still, the specters of songs that could have been hang all

over this album. The title track has echoes of the excellent 2005

hit "As Good as I Once Was," which insisted, "I'm as good once

as I ever was." Here you can hear Keith practically begging for

re-evaluation. "I'm only good as I gotta be," he notes, though

"that don't make me a bad guy." In 2003 Keith released the single

"American Soldier," a celebration of country-first loyalty that

became one of the defining pop-music statements of this wartime

era. On his new album, in the song "Missing Me Some You," that

soldier is staring at the sky -- "stars down in Dixie look the same

way here" in a way that more recalls "Somewhere Out There," from

the animated film "An American Tail."

Keith produced this album, and his arrangements lack the

dramatic builds that have always been a hallmark of his sound.

Instead he tends to genial blues licks and polite country shuffles.

Only "God Love Her" truly recalls the Keith of old. At the

beginning of the song he runs away with the preacher's daughter.

But by the end he's turned soft: "Like an angel, she saved my soul

from the devil." Back in the day she would never have been allowed

to meddle.

-- JON CARAMANICA

'4:13 DREAM' (Suretone/Geffen)

The Cure

There's wah-wah all over the place on the Cure's 13th studio

album, "4:13 Dream." Through a 30-year recording career Robert

Smith has led the Cure through various recurring modes. Behind his

slurred, quavery, perpetually nervous yelp, the Cure has put across

stripped-down new wave, brooding, synthesizer-dominated dirges;

crisp pop; electronics-dominated dance music; vigorously strummed

folk-rock; and splashy, distorted quasi-psychedelic rock. The new

album is one of the splashy ones, with uptempo songs awash in

guitar reverb and cymbal whooshes, akin to albums like "Wish"

(1992) and parts of "Kiss Me, Kiss Me, Kiss Me" (1987) and "Wild

Mood Swings" (1996). The territory is familiar, occasionally too

familiar. "I've been down here before," Smith sings in "The

Scream." But it's not a comforting nostalgic reprise; it's another

plunge into the maelstrom.

The upbeat songs don't mean that Smith, one of rock's most

articulate mopers, has gotten all happy. The album includes two

love songs in which, amazingly enough, things are working out

euphorically: "The Only One," a list of all the sensations his

lover gives him, and "This. Here and Now. With You.," in which

the rapture of the moment nearly eclipses all the singer's

misgivings. Pealing guitars carry "The Perfect Boy," which turns

out to be about a girl's optimistic self-delusions; Smith leaves

her still hoping for her happy ending.

But it's not like the Cure to settle into lasting contentment,

and the rest of "4:13 Dream" is filled with upheavals. As the

band churns ahead, Mr. Smith blurts lyrics about insecurity

("Sirensong"), disorientation ("Freakshow"), infidelity ("The

Real Snow White") and bitterness about materialism ("The Hungry

Ghost"). In "Switch" Smith returns to his lifelong alienation --

"I'm sick of being alone with myself/And I'm sick of being with

anyone else" -- as Porl Thompson's guitar scrapes and chatters, and

Jason Cooper's live and looped drumbeats go bounding ahead. On this

hyperactive Cure album there's barely any gap between exultation

and desperate flailing.

-- JON PARELES

'THE RENAISSANCE' (Motown)

Q-Tip

The last time Q-Tip put out an album, he was kick-starting a

solo career after the disbandment of A Tribe Called Quest. That was

nine years ago, an eternity in hip-hop, and his record-industry

journey since has been downright purgatorial. An unreceptive label

shelved his intended follow-up; subsequent efforts met with a

similar fate. Small wonder this rapper and producer feels as if

he's emerging from the Dark Ages.

But if "The Renaissance" signals a revival, it also sticks to

an established script. Its sound, an upbeat amalgam of

jazz-inflected funk, will ring familiar to any Q-Tip fan, or even

to the average hip-hop nostalgist. A few of the album's tracks can

also be found, with only slight variation, on "Open," one of

those unofficial releases. And of course there's that voice --

nasal, grainy, a little smart-alecky -- still accentuating the

positive.

Q-Tip took a hands-on role as producer of "The Renaissance,"

to the point that the music can overshadow the rapping. (It's

fitting that he appears on the album's cover with an MPC 2000XL

sampler obscuring his face.) He has a taste for head-bobbing tempos

and in-the-pocket bass lines, some lifted from vintage soul

records. He elicits inventive work from musicians like the

guitarist Kurt Rosenwinkel. And he makes decent use of his guest

singers, including a classically suave D'Angelo, an

androgynous-sounding Raphael Saadiq, a sassy Amanda Diva and a

coolly ethereal Norah Jones.

Some of this works wickedly -- "Believe," the D'Angelo track,

is a keeper, as is "Gettin' Up," a charismatic come-on -- but

there are just as many small missteps. A few tracks, notably

"ManWomanBoogie," generate interesting frictions but no palpable

momentum; "Official" and "You" suffer from lackluster rhymes.

And worse, "Dance on Glass" begins with this dispiriting

couplet: "The people at the label say they want something to

repeat/ But all my people really want something for the streets."

Q-Tip doesn't appear to realize how ridiculous that sounds.

Perhaps tellingly, the standout track is "Move," the only one

created by an outsider. It's credited to J Dilla, the producer who

died in 2006 and worked with Q-Tip on his long-ago solo debut. Here

the resourcefully choppy use of a Jackson 5 tune produces something

deep, funky and layered. Rapping over it, Q-Tip sounds loose and

unburdened.

-- NATE CHINEN

'HEMISPHERES' (ArtistShare)

Jim Hall &amp;amp; Bill Frisell

Bill Frisell is one of the stylistic children of the jazz

guitarist Jim Hall. Both share a mild sense of humor in their music

-- composed and improvised -- and a subtle fanaticism for country and

blues language. These similarities come out in phrasing and

harmonic vocabulary, the bricks of their playing. But it's in the

realm of sound where these musicians find their differences and

challenge each other on "Hemispheres."

Hall started in the 1940s, and his is the sound is modesty: he

plays a hollow-body guitar, de-trebling his soft sound with the

tone knob. Frisell, who grew up on rock 'n' roll, wants to sparkle.

He uses digital effects, and his notes last longer, hovering in the

air; he likes to make his instrument sound like other things --

horns, whales, warped honky-tonk records. Here each guitarist

spends time in the other's extremes. On several tracks there are

few rules at all, and the music becomes purely free and gestural:

no plan, no melody -- just sound. Likewise, on some tracks Frisell

scales back to play traditional forms at Hall's reduced-volume

level, and you have to stick your ear into the rustling to hear

who's who.

They have recorded together before, on "Dialogues," from 1995,

but that was back when record labels were concerned about length.

"Hemispheres" -- half duets, half quartet recordings with the

bassist Scott Colley and the drummer Joey Baron -- is a digital

release on ArtistShare, downloadable from artistshare.com, where

you get more: not just the album but outtakes, previous

performances, videos of conversations and interviews. The package

is geared toward listener satiation, which suits Hall and Frisell

fine. They seem as if they could linger over their family

resemblance for much more than the album's two-hour duration. Days

more, years more.

This record is a lot to take in. It's not austere, but it is so

reserved, so subtonally understated, that to breathe loudly over it

is a minor crudeness. There are originals and jazz standards here,

but also a duet version of Bob Dylan's "Masters of War." And

sometimes it's unapologetically meandering: the dreamlike

"Migration," with Frisell constructing digital loops and Hall

playing droning noises or blues phrases over the shimmering

backdrops, doesn't need to be 15 minutes long.

In the quartet half, though, the performances are focused but

still playful, and at best -- as in "Owed to Freddie Green," in

which both guitarists improvise simultaneously with quiet daring

over swing rhythm -- they connect in a properly complicated way.

-- BEN RATLIFF

The Treasury's schedule of financing this week includes Monday's

regular weekly auction of new three- and six-month bills and an

auction of four-week bills on Tuesday.

According to traders, at the close of the New York cash market

on Friday, the rate on the outstanding three-month bill was 0.44

percent. The rate on the six-month issue was 0.93 percent, and the

rate on the four-week issue was 0.10 percent.

The following tax-exempt fixed-income issues are scheduled for

pricing this week:

ONE DAY DURING THE WEEK

Catholic Health Initiatives, $300 million of debt securities for

Colorado Health Facility, City of Chattanooga, Tenn., Health

Education and Housing, and Montgomery County, Ohio, revenue bonds.

J.P. Morgan Securities.

Empire State Development Authority, $300 million of building aid

revenue bonds. Merrill Lynch.

Harris County, Texas, Flood Control District, $160 million of

debt securities. Citigroup Global Markets.

Harris County, Texas, Health Facilities Corp., $228.4 million of

revenue bonds for Memorial Hermann Healthcare. RBC Capital Markets.

Illinois State Toll Highway Authority, $400 million of toll

highway senior priority revenue bonds. J.P. Morgan Securities.

Indiana Housing and Community Development Authority, $55 million

of single family mortgage revenue bonds. J.P. Morgan Securities.

Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority, $350 million of

assessment bonds. J.P. Morgan Securities.

Massachusetts Health and Educational Facility Authority, $83.6

million of revenue bonds for Tufts University. J.P. Morgan

Securities.

Michigan State Building Authority, $200 million of revenue

bonds. Morgan Stanley.

Mohave County, Ariz., Industrial Development Authority, $206

million of correctional facilities contract revenue bonds for

Mohave Prison L.L.C. expansion project. Morgan Keegan.

Nassau County, N.Y., $150 million of sewer revenue bonds.

Citigroup Global Markets.

Palm Beach County, Fla., public improvement bonds. Loop Capital

Markets.

State of New Hampshire, $150 million of general obligation

capital improvement bonds. Merrill Lynch.

University of Pennsylvania Health System, $200 million of

revenue bonds. Merrill Lynch.

Washington Health Care Facilities Authority, $172.5 million of

Catholic Health Initiatives. J.P. Morgan Securities.

Barbara Broccoli is devoted to honoring her producer dad's 007

empire

MIAMI The most important "Bond girl" in the James Bond movie

series doesn't have a suggestive name like Pussy Galore or Plenty

O'Toole.

Her name is Barbara Broccoli, 48, daughter of the late producer

Albert R. "Cubby" Broccoli, mastermind of the longest-running

movie franchise ever: 22 spy thrillers since 1962 and counting.

Alongside her half-brother, Michael G. Wilson, Broccoli preserves

not only Agent 007's legacy but also their father's.

On a humid day in Miami, Broccoli is cucumber cool while

discussing those responsibilities and the newest Bond adventure,

Quantum of Solace, which opens nationwide Nov. 14 . She's likely

the most relaxed Officer of the Order of the British Empire anyone

could meet, a producer who isn't pushy or prone to hyperbole in

interviews.

Blockbuster confidence gleaned from her father is enough.

Broccoli joined the family business at 22, serving as an assistant

director on 1983's Octopussy. In six years she graduated to

associate producer status, as the elder Broccoli's health began to

fail. During pre-production for GoldenEye, her father handed over

the keys of his Bond kingdom.

"He was very ill," Broccoli says. "He told us: 'Come on guys,

it's time you take over. I'll be around, but you've got to pick up

the baton now.' "

Broccoli and Wilson ran with the opportunity, revitalizing the

franchise by hiring Pierce Brosnan to play the suave secret agent,

then reinventing it with Daniel Craig as a leaner, meaner 007.

Cubby Broccoli died of heart failure in 1996, certain that his life

work was in good hands.

"We do feel very strongly about carrying on his legacy,"

Barbara Broccoli says.

"When my father and Harry (Saltzman) got the rights to these

films they created this genre. There wasn't this type of movie

before Dr. No and From Russia with Love. John Barry created this

kind of music. Peter Hunt, who edited those first movies,

revolutionized that concept. Terence Young, an amazing director,

gave it a look and a style. And Sean Connery simply burst onto the

screen.

"We stand on tall shoulders here, and we have to keep up what

they began."

None stand taller for Broccoli than her father, a

third-generation Italian-American who she says was "the embodiment

of the American Dream." Cubby Broccoli grew his namesake vegetable

imported to the United States by his grandfather on a Queens,

N.Y., farm and made caskets before making his mark in the movies.

"I was very close to my father," Barbara Broccoli says.

"Absolutely adored and worshipped him. I think if he'd been

running a pizzeria I'd be making pizzas.

"It had a lot to do with who he was. He was great company,

entertaining, a really down-to-earth guy and a great teacher

because he shared his knowledge.

"His basic rule was: Put the money on the screen. He believed,

as I do, that there's a lot of goodwill out there for the Bond

movies.

"People constantly come up and say: 'Oh, my dad used to take

me,' or 'We'd go as a family; I really knew I was grown up when

they'd let me see a Bond movie.' All the stories we get from people

are about the Bond movies being part of their family experience."

Cubby taught his children to never disappoint Bond's audience,

including his reluctance to produce any other kind of movie except

1968's Chitty Chitty Bang Bang, based on another Ian Fleming novel.

"He felt, like: 'No, I've got to pay attention, I've got to

make these movies really good because there is an expectation.'

That was something he conveyed to us. Michael and I feel strongly

the same way."

In her father and Fleming's memories, Broccoli produced a London

stage version of the fantasy adventure in 2002. The musical remains

her only major producing credit outside the Bondsphere, just as her

father and Fleming still influence Quantum of Solace and any 007

movies to come.

"We do think about them very much in these situations,"

Broccoli says. "(My father) said whenever you're stuck just go

back to Fleming. That's something we've always done.

"In between movies we read all the books and short stories

again, not because there are things there that haven't been shot

but to kind of saturate ourselves in that world again. It's the

character of Bond that has sustained these films."

Steve Persall is the film critic of the Times and can be reached

at persallsptimes.com. Read his blog, Reeling in the Years, at

blogs.tampabay.com/movies.

Bay area talent loses airtime as stations rely more on

syndicated programming

Forget MJ and Bubba the Love Sponge: Thanks to recent changes in

the Tampa Bay area radio scene, the next local DJ war may pit Ryan

Seacrest against John Tesh or Dave Koz.

That's because more local stations are using nationally

syndicated radio programs in the middle of their broadcast day,

pushing aside local talent for celebrities such as American Idol

host Seacrest, ex-Entertainment Tonight host Tesh and smooth jazz

saxophonist Koz.

The trend emerged in sharp relief last month, when CBS Radio

laid off almost all the programming and on-air staff at smooth jazz

station WSJT-FM 94.1, bringing in a slate of shows offered by

California-based syndicators Broadcast Architecture.

Gone were local jocks Alicia Kaye, George Nix and Al Santana,

replaced by Koz, California-based Miranda Wilson and, on weekends,

shows by saxophonist Kenny G and guitarist Norman Brown. Mornings,

pianist Ramsey Lewis is expected to fill the slot after he recovers

from illness.

At the same time, CBS Radio let go longtime radio personality

"Marvelous Marvin" Boone, who was also working middays at

corporate sibling WRBQ-FM 105 .

Critics say these moves are short-term solutions: quick savings

as tough economic times make it difficult to find new advertisers.

In the meantime, Tampa Bay area radio finds less room for local

voices.

At WSJT, for example, Broadcast Architecture is given commercial

space inside each show to sell on its own. To explain the numbers,

radio consultant Dan Spice referenced Delilah Luke, host of a

nighttime music and advice show syndicated on hundreds of stations

nationwide.

"It looks good on the budget, because there's 200 nighttime

jocks around the country who don't have to be paid," said Spice,

vice president of California-based Lund Consultants. "But you lose

the medium's strongest selling point, which is localism."

Still, Ed Krampf, who took over as Tampa market manager for CBS

Radio in early October, said he's more focused on raising ratings

than shaving costs.

"You cannot save your way to success," he said, noting that

the ad space given up at WSJT is still considered money spent by

CBS. "At the end of the day, people have to listen and they have

to listen longer, or it doesn't matter if we save money."

Radio's covert way to achieve such savings was through "voice

tracking," where a single personality might record on-air patter

for a number of stations owned by the same company in different

markets. DJs might even note local landmarks or talk about recent

community events to build the illusion.

But such audio sleight of hand generally involved personalities

who were not well known. And mistakes with some prerecorded shows

including incidents where weather emergencies weren't acknowledged

on-air have added to the controversy.

At Clear Channel Radio, Tampa market manager Dan DiLoreto

scoffed at the idea that airing syndicated talent such as Seacrest

on WFLZ-FM 93.3 from 1 to 4 p.m. or Tesh on WMTX-FM 100.7 from 9

a.m. to 2 p.m. would save money the same way voice tracking does.

"When you bring in someone who has a national, marquee name . .

. you're paying for that," said DiLoreto, who noted that increases

in out-of-home listening at work have made midday shifts more

attractive to stations.

He also said Clear Channel didn't cut on-air staff to make room

for Seacrest, instead shifting time slots around to make room for

the show.

"We believe John Tesh does a better job entertaining

audiences," DiLoreto said. "I couldn't possibly reproduce that

show locally."

But longtime area personality Tedd Webb worried such trends will

close off the shifts and smaller stations where up-and-coming

talent once learned how to entertain audiences.

"We don't have a minor league anymore," said Webb, who

co-hosts the morning show on WFLA-AM 970. "It's cost prohibitive

today . . . There's no place for people to go and hone their

skills."

Eric Deggans is the media critic of the Times and can be reached

at degganssptimes.com. See his blog at blogs.tampabay.com/media.

Real Florida: Paddle propels time travel

PORT ORANGE, Fla. Paddling a kayak is a balancing act. Dip left

to go right. Paddle right to go left. You'll stay dry as long as

you don't lean too far in either direction.

It's kind of like life. You had better look for balance. I like

to head for the woods or water when I feel overwhelmed by current

events and things outside my control.

The ailing stock market. Another presidential smear campaign

aimed at convincing the ignorant and frightened to vote for the

right guy. Give me a hammock where I might hear an owl. Let me

paddle among ancient reptiles and look for balance.

In our tandem kayak we slip past a great blue heron in a

cypress. We meander around a sunken log. We paddle under the low

branches of an ancient oak.

As we pass below, I automatically check for moccasins above my

head, just in case. Years ago, when I was younger and more

impressionable, an old-timer known for hyperbole told me

breathlessly about the time a moccasin fell from a branch into his

canoe. First he battled the venomous snake with his paddle. It kept

coming, its cotton-colored mouth opened wide. Finally he shot it

with his pistol, killing the snake but piercing the bottom of his

own canoe. He had to swim through alligators to reach the shore.

Anyway, that was his story, doubtless exaggerated. Even so,

watching for moccasins in branches has become a lifelong habit. One

day I hope to see a moccasin in a tree because I like the idea that

anything can happen on a Florida waterway.

Paddling a kayak requires, in addition to balance, paying

attention.

You don't want to dawdle under the wrong tree.

Spruce Creek, which snakes 12 miles east through Volusia County

before flowing into Strickland Bay and the Atlantic beyond, is one

of those half-wild, half-civilized places where you will encounter

alligators sleeping on logs if you are lucky and teenagers on Jet

Skis if you aren't. You may even run into the ghost of Ponce de

Leon.

The first European to visit the continent, Senor Ponce named La

Florida in 1513. According to some accounts, he sailed a skiff

through an ocean inlet into a bay and headed west into a creek,

most likely Spruce Creek. What did he make of our dragons, the

alligators? Surely they focused his attention.

They always do for me. Yes, we have museums and restaurants and

fine universities. But the presence of dinosaurs is what makes

Florida "Florida." I assume that Ponce de Leon declined to take a

dip in Spruce Creek. You couldn't pay me to swim in it on purpose

either.

The water is dark, stained like tea from decaying leaves and

mostly shallow. If you startle a gator off the bank into the creek,

don't be alarmed if its back brushes your kayak. Or be very

alarmed. I have been bumped by an alligator once or twice, but I'm

still here. A manatee, sleeping just under the water's surface, is

much more likely to knock you into the drink if you startle it by

accident. Kayaking among manatees requires balance too.

I have never seen a deer or bobcat sipping from the creek, but

other people have. I mostly see softshell turtles sunning

themselves. I see laurel and live oaks and pignut hickories,

sweetgums, cypress and cabbage palms.

On the wild side of the river, back in the trees, lie the hidden

mounds constructed for burial and ceremonial sites more than five

centuries ago by the Timucuan people, the natives who greeted Ponce

when he came ashore. The wily Spaniard hoped for gold or, if

nothing else, a sip from a magic fountain that would restore his

fading youth.

He got neither. In fact, 15 years later, during his travels to

Florida's west coast, he encountered the far fiercer Calusas, who

deposited an arrow into his hip. He died from the infection.

Belted kingfishers. Green herons. Anhingas. Ponce saw them; a

21st century kayaker sees them too.

Turn around in modern Florida, just before you reach the

Interstate 95 bridge, and head back into old Florida, where an

alligator snoozes on a log. My wife wonders if it might upset our

kayak. I doubt it, but wouldn't it be cool? We'd have such a story

to tell.

Instead, here's my story. A little past the alligator I hear the

roar of a jet. Looking south, through the trees, I see an enormous

house, a mansion really, on the bluff, and next to the mansion is a

two-story airplane hangar.

The Spruce Creek Fly-in, advertised as the "world's finest

residential airpark," can accomodate small jets I find out later.

Whoosh!

I flinch.

Then it's quiet again on the river of the extinct Timucuans .

Jeff Klinkenberg can be reached at klinksptimes.com .

EFF KLINKENBERG Times

Man has encroached some, but nature still rules along Spruce

Creek, where kayakers might get bumped by an alligator.

McCain, Obama diverge on Latin America

President Bush has made more trips to Latin America than any

other president before him nine in total. But during his eight

years in the White House, U.S. influence in the region has fallen

sharply.

Both presidential candidates, John McCain and Barack Obama,

criticize Bush's foreign policy performance. So what would they do

differently, and what challenges would they face in the region?

Sen. Obama has never visited Latin America, as Sen. McCain

reminded the audience at the last debate. Nevertheless, Obama's

candidacy has excited enormous interest there, especially in

countries with large black populations such as Brazil.

McCain has traveled to the region extensively. He was deeply

involved in U.S. policy in Central America during the 1980s when

the Reagan administration sent weapons and financial aid to help

defeat left-wing revolutionaries in El Salvador and Nicaragua.

Experts note that Latin America has never loomed very large on

Washington's radar screen, at least until a crisis explodes. Given

the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, as well as the current economic

crisis, "it seems unlikely that the United States will be able to

give Latin America the attention that it needs in the coming few

years," says Susan Kaufman Purcell, director of the Center for

Hemispheric Policy in Miami.

BRAZIL: President Bush's promotion of ethanol helped develop a

surprisingly close personal relationship with Brazil's moderate

leftist president, Luis Inacio Lula da Silva. Brazil has emerged as

arguably the most important strategic U.S. ally in the region.

McCain supports lifting a tariff on Brazilian ethanol. But this

is unpopular in America's grain states. Obama would keep the

tariff.

Obama is popular with dark-skinned Brazilians, who make up about

half the population.

CUBA: A McCain administration would stick with the

four-decades-old economic embargo. McCain says he would try to

strengthen it through greater international support. Bush tried

that but didn't get anywhere.

Obama says he would immediately lift recent restrictions on

Cuban-Americans traveling to the island and sending money to their

families there. He says he is ready to meet with Cuban leader Raul

Castro, though it is not clear under what conditions.

COLOMBIA: McCain is a staunch supporter of Plan Colombia, the

decade-old $5-billion program to help fight drugs and guerrillas.

He also backs a free trade agreement with Colombia currently

stalled in Congress.

Obama has supported Plan Colombia, but opposed the proposed free

trade pact with Colombia because of abuses of trade unionists.

Obama says he doesn't oppose free trade on principle. He supported

free trade with Peru.

HAITI: Though he leans to the left, Haitian President Rene

Preval is a good friend of the United States. He recognizes the

importance of U.S. aid, especially in the wake of a disastrous

hurricane season.

Obama may be more sympathetic to pressure from the black caucus

in Congress to grant temporary status to undocumented Haitians in

the United States. After Hurricanes Gustav and Ike, which left more

than 500 Haitians dead and destroyed the country's road network,

the Bush administration temporarily suspended deportation of

Haitians.

McCain is also sympathetic on immigrant issues, though he has

not taken an active interest in Haiti policy.

MEXICO: A bloody drug war in Mexico has barely been mentioned in

the campaign.

McCain made a campaign stop in Mexico in July, the first ever by

a presidential candidate, and offered his support for President

Felipe Calderon.

Falling oil production in Mexico has prompted urgent calls for

reform of laws governing Mexico's state oil monopoly. Mexico is the

second-largest supplier of oil to the United States.

Earlier this year Congress passed the Merida Initiative, a

five-year, $1.4-billion plan to bolster security. The first

$400-million in funds will begin to flow before Bush leaves office.

McCain and Obama are sympathetic to calls for comprehensive

immigration reform that could favor undocumented Mexicans. McCain

hardened his position during the campaign to a

"secure-the-border-first" stand.

VENEZUELA: Both candidates have expressed concern over President

Hugo Chavez's antidemocratic ways.

McCain adviser Otto Reich, whom Bush appointed as his top State

Department official for Latin America, says the United States

should suspend all Venezuelan oil imports, 10 percent of the U.S.

total. That would send prices higher in the United States, experts

say, and Chavez would likely have no problem selling his oil

elsewhere.

Obama is more willing to sit down and work out their

differences. "It is important for us not to overreact in relation

to Chavez," he said in one recent interview. "What we must do is

to make him understand that we do not want him to continue

spreading anti-U.S. feelings" in the region and that "we are

interested in a respectful dialogue."

David Adams is the Latin America correspondent of the Times and

can be reached at dadamssptimes.com.

CAMPAIGN ADVISERS ON LATIN AMERICA

John McCain

Otto Reich, former assistant secretary of state for Western

Hemisphere affairs.

Ana Navarro, the Miami-based co-chair of John McCain's National

Hispanic Advisory Council.

Lincoln Diaz-Balart, R-Miami, Cuban-American member of Congress.

Mario Diaz-Balart, R-Miami, Cuban-American member of Congress.

Barack Obama

Frank Sanchez, former Clinton administration official in the

National Security Council and U.S. assistant secretary of

transportation.

Bob Gelbard, former assistant secretary of state for

international narcotics and law enforcement affairs, 1993-97.

Pete Romero, former assistant secretary of state for Western

Hemisphere affairs.

Dan Restrepo, senior fellow and director of the Americas Project

at American Progress. U.S.-born son of Colombian and Spanish

parents.

Commentary: Why I intend to carry a handgun

The weapon was light in my hands, not at all how I imagined a

9mm Glock would feel.

I had never fired a gun in my life. My instructor put both my

hands around the frame and then signaled for me to squeeze the

trigger.

Blam.

The bullet pierced my target, an 8.5-by-11-inch sheet of copy

paper, near the center.

Then it hit me. This is how it is done. This is how you take a

life. My target was fictional, but in my mind he was still a

threat. I felt no sadness.

That's why soon I'll be the first person in my immediate family

and circle of friends to get a concealed weapons permit.

I wanted training before purchasing a gun, so I enrolled in

class at Shooting Sports of Tampa. When I arrived, my nerves

calmed. Half of my class of 15 was female. And a quarter of us were

black.

It's not just me, I thought to myself. Everyone is afraid these

days.

At Shooting Sports, the building smelled as if it were on fire,

and all 15 people in my class were herded into a tiny room off in

the corner where our instructor put the fear of God in us before we

even got into the gun range.

"Just because you have a gun does not mean you are capable of

fighting with a gun," he cautioned. "No sane person in the world

would ever want to be in a gunfight."

Though I was never around them, guns were a part of life where I

grew up, Washington, D.C. But because of a handgun ban, the only

folks who had them were cops and criminals, until the rule was

reversed by the Supreme Court earlier this year.

Still, I never felt unsafe. Not until I moved to Florida alone.

Now I'll take my chances on fighting for myself. I haven't had much

luck with the kindness of strangers.

Since living on my own in Florida, I have not been able to name

the person next door to me at any point. No one has come to

introduce themselves. And the one time I tried to be cordial, the

neighbor peered through the blinds and never opened the door. I am

not confident that woman would have called the police if she ever

heard me scream inside my apartment.

In my junior year of college at Florida A&amp;amp;M University in

Tallahassee, I had a roommate who never spoke to me. Only by

looking at her mail did I know her name. We never interacted.

I spent a lot of time in my room with the door locked. When I

went home for Christmas break, I bought a storage unit for my

valuables because I was afraid she'd rob me. When I returned, she

was gone, and I was living alone for the first time ever. The

summer before I moved in, the house next door was invaded, and a

girl was killed.

I was terrified.

That was the first time getting a gun ever entered my mind. But

I'd never even seen one in person and was sure that 20 was not old

enough to buy a gun. Twenty-year-olds aren't even allowed to drink

beer, they couldn't possibly get hold of a firearm, right?

But in Florida, you can buy a handgun from a private person or a

rifle or shotgun from a licensed dealer at 18. You have to be 21 to

get a concealed weapons permit, and gun safety training is

mandatory. "Permit holders are held to a different standard," my

instructor said.

I had to buy 50 rounds in class to get through my target

practice. Protective ear covers muffled the sounds of the

controlled explosions at the end of my arm. Protective eyewear kept

the little metal shavings from the side walls from flying into my

eyes. A couple of hot shell casings flew out and landed on my

hands, temporarily searing knuckles and making me wince with my

finger still on the trigger.

I'd fired the gun in class. But if my paper assailant was flesh

and blood could I do the same thing? Could I defend my own life?

Then I thought about Nefertiti Williams.

A 20-year-old public relations student, she had leaned on me for

help developing her story ideas because I was the editor of the

school magazine at the time. She was bright, perceptive, had good

instincts and asked the right questions. She called me Momma Robbyn

at times, a nickname I didn't embrace well at 21. The Wednesday

before Thanksgiving 2006, I got a call from my roommate and close

friend telling me Nefertiti hadn't made it back to Bradenton. She

had been murdered in her own home by a roommate after everyone else

had left for the holiday.

He had shot her in the face just under her cheekbone before

shooting himself. Police later said he'd been experiencing

depression because he was no longer enrolled in school and that it

was unclear why he had shot her. It could have been a crime of

passion or just a mistake that he felt he couldn't live with.

When we returned to school, there were candles and vigils and

crying and sorrow. But there were no answers. Would this have been

different if she had a gun in her bedroom or in one of many

designer purses? I don't know. But the odds wouldn't have been so

stacked against her.

Getting my footing was a challenge at the range. When my feet

were far enough apart, my shoulders were too far back. When my

shoulders were above my toes, my thumbs were behind the hammer.

When my thumbs were crisscrossed, my feet were too close together.

I was comfortable firing this gun, but not with following the

instructions. What was wrong with me?

I do understand the power of guns.

My father was gunned down while he was leaving a convenience

store. I was 2. He wasn't a criminal, and he had never owned a gun.

He was in the Air Force. He knew how to use a gun. He learned it in

basic training. He could have had one easily, but the law wasn't on

his side.

Probably not coincidentally, Washington, D.C., was known as the

murder capital for much of my childhood. The law is on my side

here, and I intend to take advantage of the opportunity.

So I started researching the process of obtaining a concealed

weapons permit and purchasing a gun. It's not hard, but it takes

time. You have to really want it.

First you have to submit a form to get the application mailed to

you, which can take two weeks. Then comes certification class. Four

hours of safety training. Proving competency with firing a weapon

was difficult since it was first gun I had ever touched.

But I earned the certificate necessary for my application. Then

I got a $15 passport photo and my fingerprints taken digitally and

put in the state database at the Tampa police station. That service

was $49. Then I took everything to a notary and had them seal my

application, got a money order for $75, paid postage and sent the

application to Tallahassee. If I qualify, the Florida Department of

Agriculture and Consumer Services will promptly issue me my permit

next year. I've been without a gun for 23 years, so I'll just wait

a little longer now.

Is my mother supportive? No. She jokes about it with my brother

and calls me little (Sarah) Palin but something tells me she's not

sold on the idea.

"Why would you want a gun?" she said. "What if someone uses

it on you?" "What if it goes off by accident?" "Do you even

know how to use a gun?" "What if the other person has a gun

too?"

Nothing I said could convince her that there may be an upside to

being able to defend yourself. But she understands that I am an

adult and my decisions are my own. Her nervousness was making me a

bit uneasy with my decision. What if I really can't handle a gun?

What if I'm forgetful with it like my wallet and someone uses it to

commit a crime? What if someone steals my car? Or snatches the

purse I picked out to carry it in?

In the end, I fight one type of paranoia and embrace the other.

At least with a gun, I can level the playing field. I've picked out

my Glock 19 at Shooting Sports and I plan to make my purchase the

day after Thanksgiving. I'm planning to start by carrying my gun

everywhere I'm allowed to on the weekend while attending ladies'

night at the range on Mondays. After that, who knows? Maybe I'll

carry every day. You can't know. And that's the point.

Robbyn Mitchell can be reached at rmitchellsptimes.com.

It was a remarkable cello, with an equally remarkable

pedigree, and by all accounts it was primed to draw a record price

as serious bidding began Friday morning on the Web site of Tarisio

(tarisio.com), auctioneers of fine stringed instruments and bows.

Sure enough, the cello, made in 1717 by Antonio Stradivari and

named after Amaryllis Fleming, the half-sister of Ian Fleming,

quickly attracted a record bid of $1.35 million. But then, silence.

As the minutes ticked by Jason Price, a partner in the company,

refreshed the screen of his Mac PowerBook and fidgeted with his

iPhone, his hopes of a higher figure -- or better yet, a bidding war

-- slowly evaporating. Even more nerve-racking, the one bid in hand,

about $600,000 higher than the record paid for another Stradivari

cello sold by Sotheby's in 1988, failed to meet the reserve price,

which was kept confidential by Tarisio and the Fleming family. The

cello had been valued at $1.48 million to $1.97 million.

"We're down in the zero-second range," Price, 32, said just

before the bidding closed at 1 p.m. "We're getting closer."

At the stroke of 1 p.m., the words "bidding has ended" flashed

on his screen. "Now we begin," he said, closing his Manhattan

office on West 54th Street to visitors and initiating a series of

phone calls he hoped would result in a post-auction agreement

between the bidder and the Flemings. As of Sunday afternoon,

negotiations were continuing.

"I think we are in uncharted territory with our economy, and I

think that puts the fear of God into a lot of people who a year ago

weren't fearful," Price speculated later as he packed for an

evening flight to London to return the Fleming, which had its own

ticket and seat.

Made in Cremona, Italy, the instrument is one of only 60 or so

Stradivari cellos in existence. It is patterned on the B-form like

the Davidoff, which Jacqueline du Pre bequeathed to Yo-Yo Ma, and

the Duport, played by Mstislav Rostropovich. Fleming, who died in

1999, was the daughter of the painter Augustus John and apparently

had both a passion for Bach and a reputation as a femme fatale. She

bought the cello in the 1960s and used it to perform and teach.

(Her students included Raphael Wallfisch.)

The Fleming's value might have increased fivefold had the

cello's top and head not been replaced in the mid-18th-century by

the Spanish luthier Jose Contreras, said Simon Morris, a director

of J &amp;amp; A Beare, the company that would certify the cello upon its

sale.

"I think it's just very unfortunate timing," said Mark

Messenger, head of strings at the Royal College of Music in London,

where Fleming had studied and taught, and which is to benefit from

the sale. "We couldn't have foreseen that people would have been

so reluctant to invest money."

Despite the failure to find a buyer, Morris called the market

for antique stringed instruments "a fantastic investment."

"Nobody needs a calf in a tank of formaldehyde for 8 million

pounds, but if you think you can buy a violin by the best craftsman

that ever lived, it looks pretty reasonable," he said, referring

to Damien Hirst's "Golden Calf," which sold in September at

Sotheby's for $18.6 million.

For decades investors have been tempted by the creations of

master Italian craftsmen like Stradivari, Giuseppe Guarneri and

Nicolo Amati, instruments whose escalating value is fueled by

craftsmanship that can't be replicated, and myth -- was the

instrument heard by Mozart or Beethoven? -- scarcity and need. Until

Friday, the allure only seemed to be increasing.

In 2005 Maxim Viktorov, a Russian lawyer, paid $1.05 million for

a Bergonzi violin made around 1720 and once owned by Paganini;

earlier this year he paid $3.9 million for a 1741 Guarnerius, after

which he flew the violinist Pinchas Zukerman to Moscow, where the

violin was played publicly for the first time in more than 70

years. More recently Ian Stoutzker, a London banker and

philanthropist, is said to have consigned his own 1741 Guarnerius

for a reported $20 million to the Chicago dealer Geoffrey Fushi, of

Bein &amp;amp; Fushi.

Tarisio was founded in 1999 by Price, who studied cello and

later violin-making in Cremona and Parma; Dmitry Gindin, a

London-based dealer and author; and Christopher Reuning, a Boston

dealer and restorer. In the eBay era, the partners hoped to take

advantage of the ease and privacy of online bidding while providing

the services -- viewings, valuations and guarantees -- of

brick-and-mortar auction houses. In 2003 they were awarded the sale

of the Isaac Stern estate, which grossed $3.3 million. Last year

Tarisio, which also brokers private sales, did close to $12million

in gross sales, Price said.

After months of showcasing the Fleming's luscious tone and

vibrant beauty at viewings in London, New York, Boston and Cremona,

Price spent the weekend "trying to put people in touch and make

things happen" on the cello's behalf, though he said there was no

rush.

"I think it takes a magical relationship between an instrument

and the right person," he said with a mixture of wistfulness and

pragmatism. "It's like matchmaking. You can't always be sure to

find your match."

In the recent indie release "Momma's Man," a young

father named Mikey returns to his hometown of New York City on a

business trip, and after spending a few days at his parents' house,

refuses to leave. He putters around his childhood home, an old

TriBeCa loft, and the vastly changed neighborhood, avoiding his

wife, his job, his whole adult life.

In this apartment, where the director, Azazel Jacobs, grew up

and where his parents still live, Mikey regresses, drifting back

through time, getting drunk on his own immaturity.

But it is not a time capsule for just him. Watching this movie

during its run here in late summer was a voyage to a distant past

for New Yorkers who remember when "loft" meant something quite

different from the "luxury apartment with huge windows" that it

has come to signify.

Mikey's loft is the sort of place one might have found in

downtown Manhattan 30 years ago: a wide-open apartment with a

sweeping high ceiling, cut from an old manufacturing space.

There was a romance attached to loft living in those days; they

seemed bohemian and sexy. But it wasn't always easy.

"You go back to the '70s, it was painful to live in a loft,"

said Chuck DeLaney, a founding member of the Lower Manhattan Loft

Tenants association. "People did it because it was cheap and

big."

Those raw spaces are difficult to find these days -- maybe

impossible in Manhattan -- but they do exist in pockets of the other

boroughs. In less-established neighborhoods, they can even be

affordable, especially if you are looking to rent, rather than buy.

Mark Reigelman, 25, a designer from Cleveland, moved into just

this sort of apartment two years ago: a 1,100-square-foot room in

Bushwick, Brooklyn.

Reigelman came to New York two and a half years ago for a design

internship. "After that," he said, "it was either find a job or

try to make my own work successful." He chose the latter.

Now he makes his living as a freelance designer, splitting the

$1,800 monthly rent with two roommates: his cousin Cortney Elias,

an 18-year-old cosmetology student; and Chris Neuman, 25, who

designs graphics for video games.

"It was like a blank canvas," Reigelman said of his apartment.

"It had an identity, but it was so loosely configured, it was

really easy to come in and make it something brand-new, make

something that at the end of the day, we felt was really ours."

Reigelman is trained in sculpture and industrial design, and his

original roommate was a sculptor. "We already had the tools and

the know-how," he said. The two men ordered wood and got to work

building three bedrooms and a loft office, one room stacked on top

of another, creating two rooms on either side of the space.

Their loft is in a building called the Tea Factory, a name drawn

from history. At one point, it was owned by Spice and Tea

Exclusively Ltd.

Light manufacturing of this sort used to be common in New York

City. According to Mitchell Moss, a professor of urban policy and

planning at New York University, only about 100,000 manufacturing

jobs remain in the city, a tenth of the total at the peak after

World War II.

As businesses trickled out of the city, landlords began renting

manufacturing space to individuals, either to fill vacancies or to

get higher rent from residential tenants.

The buildings often had basic plumbing, but heat was unreliable.

Rooms and walls were not part of the deal, much less garbage

pickup. Some lofts were rife with fire hazards. These spaces were

generally not up to code or were not zoned for residential use.

Tenants lived illegally under commercial leases or other tenuous

circumstances.

"There was a shivery feeling that you could be evicted at any

time," said Sharon Zukin, a professor of sociology at Brooklyn

College and the author of "Loft Living: Culture and Capital in

Urban Change" (Rutgers University Press, 1989).

"You had to be a certain kind of person, who didn't require the

Sanitation Department to pick up your garbage, didn't have to have

heat seven days a week," Zukin said. You had "to do a lot of your

own work to make your space habitable." Illegal lofts are still

scattered throughout the five boroughs, from northern Manhattan to

Carroll Gardens, Brooklyn. It is impossible to know how many.

In the 1970s and 1980s, there were several attempts to bring

lofts under a regulatory umbrella. The artist-in-residence program

authorized artists to live in some manufacturing buildings. Next,

the city rezoned large swaths of downtown and created the Loft

Board. Its landlord, tenant and city representatives were meant to

settle disputes, bring buildings up to code and make them a part of

the rent-stabilization system.

"Industry declined very, very rapidly between '69 and '75,"

said Sandy Hornick, the director of strategic planning for New York

City. The loft regulations that followed, he said, were "a

recognition of this sort of changing phenomenon, trying to bring

some order to the chaos."

The original settlers of loft buildings were often artists eager

to take advantage of cheap rents as well as big spaces and

load-bearing floors, which allowed for large projects.

"A lot of them were, if not artists, craftsmen of some sort or

another who both lived and worked in their spaces," said Carl

Weisbrod, the first chairman of the Loft Board and now the head of

Trinity Church's real estate operations. Whatever their

occupations, he added, they had to be "particularly handy and

resilient and resourceful, so they could really create a living

space." Today, a second or third generation of tenants live in

these lofts, often without the hardships that their predecessors in

the '70s experienced.

Two years ago, when Albert Senavitis moved into an apartment in

an old Bushwick loft building once owned by a plastics company, a

sleeping loft was already there. Senavitis, 22, a film student at

the School of Visual Arts, uses the big open space to screen

movies, create art installations with friends, and even shoot

films.

On a corner of his block, a vestige of industrial New York

remains, a stone fabrication shop where slabs of rock are cut and

polished for things like countertops. "You always see dust and

sparks flying around here," Senavitis said. "Then, at like 5

o'clock, it's dead."

Asked if he feels safe in the neighborhood, Senavitis said, "In

this part of Bushwick, definitely; other parts, not so much." Last

spring, he was mugged while walking to a friend's house in a far

corner of the neighborhood. But Senavitis is undeterred. "I love

this area," he said.

He and his roommate split the $1,850 monthly rent.

(END OPTIONAL TRIM.)

However raw the space or cheap the rent, if the apartments are

legal, loft tenants are entitled to the same residential services

as any other New Yorker.

And unlike their predecessors, most of this latest breed of

tenants expect those services. "When I rented lofts -- and I rented

a lot of them -- I took care of everything," said Frank Shifreen, a

56-year-old artist who has lived in New York for several decades.

Now, he owns a loft building on Staten Island that was used for

light manufacturing, probably of textiles.

He finds tenants uninterested in doing the repairs that he took

care of himself. "People want to rent apartments, so I've become a

hands-on landlord," he said with palpable disappointment.

Leila Abdoulaye sublets a friend's loft in an old piano factory

in the South Bronx, and she need never worry about repairs. Her

building, called the Clock Tower, has a 24-hour superintendent.

Abdoulaye, a 25-year-old student and model who also works as a

restaurant office manager, pays $700 a month for her room. She

shares the apartment with a rotating stream of models. Abdoulaye

minds the store, as it were, between work and classes.

"It's the quality of the place, the price of the apartment, and

the social life," Abdoulaye says. "It's a nice place to live. A

happy place to live."

Daniel Lundby, 32, an out-of-work designer from Iowa, also lives

in the Clock Tower, sharing a bright, open space with a roommate.

When he moved to New York City, he lived in a tiny sublet on the

Upper East Side. "Now," Lundby said, "I have three times the

space for the same price." His rent has risen about $100 a year

since he moved in more than four years ago, but he says he is

satisfied. "I think I'm still getting a decent deal. It's still

worth it to me."

For some, the lifestyle of loft buildings that have not been

renovated to shiny opulence is what makes the places appealing.

Ian Roberts, 28, lives in a loft on McKibben Street in Bushwick

-- in one of two buildings that have earned the nickname McKibben

Dorms for their young residents and high turnover, as well as their

wild parties and overcrowded apartments.

The noise and the parties are certainly present, Roberts says,

as well as some persistent leaks. But on the other hand, his share

of the rent is $835 a month and the place can take what he and his

roommates dish out.

"With these floors," he said, pointing to hardwood that had

seen better days, "we don't have to worry about sliding light

stands or doing crafts projects." Roberts and two of his three

roommates are photographers.

"I just like to be able to walk in my apartment," said

Roberts, striding back and forth. "I just like space."

He and Jeff Brown have lived in the loft for three years. They

built the bedrooms themselves -- Roberts' father, a general

contractor, provided some tips.

Like many loft apartments, theirs is a big rectangular room

carved out of a much larger floor. It has windows on only one wall,

which means the bedrooms, built on the interior, are stuffy and

dim. But then again those windows stretch 30 feet wide and are 8

1/2 feet tall.

"One of the best parts about living here is the sun," Roberts

said with his arms splayed wide, pointing left and right. "It

really does come up over there and set over there."

This incident has entered operatic lore: Ten years

ago, the soprano Renee Fleming was lustily booed by an audience at

La Scala in Milan for her performance in the title role of

Donizetti's "Lucrezia Borgia." It's a juicy story. But it's not

quite true.

That night vociferous audience members indeed booed Fleming,

according to eyewitnesses. Others cheered her. But it's hardly

unusual for finicky La Scala patrons to break into warring

factions. Frustration had built up because the conductor that night

had passed out on the podium and had to take a 30-minute break.

Fleming's remaining performances during the run passed without

incident.

In 2000, she proved she could sing this daunting role

impressively in a concert performance with the Opera Orchestra of

New York at Carnegie Hall. And on Saturday night Fleming, who

continually reassesses her repertory choices, returned to this

touchstone bel canto role at the Washington National Opera when a

new production, directed and designed by John Pascoe and conducted

by Placido Domingo, was introduced at the Kennedy Center. This was

Fleming's debut with the company.

Though her performance was vocally uneven, whole stretches were

sumptuous. Making pretty sounds was clearly not her goal. She threw

herself into the daunting role, taking enormous vocal risks,

singing with raw intensity and earthy richness, utterly inhabiting

the character of this beautiful, murderous noblewoman in

Renaissance Italy.

"Lucrezia Borgia," which had its premiere at La Scala in 1833,

is considered a major Donizetti work. Yet it has been produced with

surprising infrequency in America. The only Metropolitan Opera

production was in 1904, and this was the work's premiere with the

Washington company. The score is melodically opulent and

dramatically urgent. Verdi's "Macbeth" would have been impossible

without Donizetti's example here.

No doubt some opera companies are put off by the story, loosely

based on the historical Lucrezia Borgia, the daughter of a ruthless

Machiavellian nobleman who connived his way into power and,

eventually, the papacy. In the opera, Lucrezia is a femme fatale,

married to Duke Alfonso of Ferrara. When the opera begins, Lucrezia

has tracked down Gennaro, a young warrior and her illegitimate son,

though only she knows this. Gennaro falls for Lucrezia instantly,

as things often happen in opera, until he discovers that she is the

reviled Lucrezia Borgia, who willfully poisons rivals in love and

in politics.

In researching the veiled history of the Borgias and examining

the Victor Hugo tragedy from which the opera is adapted, Pascoe has

come to see Lucrezia as a determined woman, probably a victim of

abuse as a girl, trying to survive in a ferociously masculine world

in which revenge and murder become "the wages of love," as he put

it in a program note.

This doesn't seem a revelatory take on the opera. After all,

Donizetti gives his monstrous heroine some anguished and elegant

music. Even her fiery calls for vengeance are expressed through

eerie outbursts of coloratura roulades that make Lucrezia seem

tragically unhinged.

Pascoe's grandly old-fashioned production is spiked with

contemporary psychological twists. Towering brick walls frame the

set. With sunken dungeons always spewing smoke (for some reason),

decadent party scenes in which drunken young men and women entwine

in twos and threes, a menacing prison guard cracking a whip and

more, Pascoe certainly evokes the story's sordidness.

But the garishly ornate, cartoonish costumes baffled me.

Pascoe's aim was to depict the period, applying a modern-day

sensibility to evoke that aggressively masculine Renaissnance

society. Gennaro, sung by the young Italian tenor Vittorio Grigolo,

has punkish blond hair and a tight-fitting, gold-tinged outfit with

sci-fi shoulder pads that give him the look of Flash Gordon. When

Fleming appears in a dress with a similarly gold-tinged stiff top,

she seems like Flash Gordon's space princess.

Grigolo, who has a thriving side career as a pop star in Italy,

is a charismatic performer with undeniable audience appeal. His

voice has ping and plaintive colorings. Handsome, energetic, able

to leap a wall in a single bound, he is a natural onstage. And

there is a comparably athletic quality to his crisp, robust

singing. Still, some shakiness and grainy legato suggested that he

may be forcing his voice.

Singing Lucrezia's manipulative husband, Duke Alfonso, is the

veteran Italian bass Ruggero Raimondi, a great Verdi stylist who

still sounded vocally imposing, if a little woolly at times. In a

way, the only genuinely romantic relationship is the friendship

between Gennaro and his warrior sidekick Maffio Orsini, a trouser

role, here sung by Kate Aldrich, a rich-voiced and dynamic

mezzo-soprano.

Pascoe essentially presents these friends as lovers, and in

fairness, Donizetti's duets for them, when they swear to remain

together until death, are the opera's most tenderly beguiling

moments. But Pascoe makes the homoerotic subtext too overt and

jarringly hip, by having Gennaro and Maffio fondle and kiss like

hormonal adolescents.

Domingo conducted ably, though he sometimes tried so hard to

accommodate the singers that the orchestra's execution faltered.

Still, this is rightly Fleming's show. (Sondra Radvanovsky will

sing three of the remaining six performances.) Fleming may not be

everyone's ideal of a refined bel canto soprano, but her

performance is smart and honest.

Sometimes, as she executes an expressive turn or vocal gesture,

her voice will become breathy in the middle range or hard-edged on

climactic high notes. But she never compromises her intentions. For

the most part her coloratura passagework is accurate and supple,

though she seemed to tire during her fitful and vocally ornate

final scene, when Lucrezia is mad with grief that her son has been

the inadvertent victim of her latest poisoning plot.

The audience gave Fleming a tremendous ovation, with one lone

boo, from what I could tell, amid the hearty bravos. You can't

please everybody.

Prime Minister Gordon Brown of Britain on Sunday urged Persian

Gulf nations to help bolster the International Monetary Fund's

bailout capacity, as leaders around the world spent another weekend

trying to extinguish the brush fires of the economic crisis.

Brown has called on China and Middle Eastern countries to take

an expanded role in financing the IMF's activities as the crisis

has deepened.

"The Saudis, I think, will contribute so we can have a bigger

fund worldwide," Reuters quoted Brown as telling reporters in the

Saudi capital, Riyadh, after weekend meetings with King Abdullah

and Saudi businessmen. "The oil-producing countries, who have

generated over $1 trillion from higher oil prices in recent years,

are in a position to contribute."

The IMF has committed $30 billion in the last few weeks in

bailout packages for Hungary, Iceland and Ukraine. It said

Wednesday that it would lend as much as $100 billion to

economically healthy countries having trouble borrowing as a result

of the turmoil in the global markets.

The fund, a 185-member group, has more than $200 billion in

resources and can draw on additional money from its members.

"We probably will need more resources," Dominique

Strauss-Kahn, the fund's managing director, said last week. "There

is no way the fund can solve the problem on its own."

Brown's call came on the type of weekend that has become common

as the credit crisis intensified, with governments scrambling to

bolster growth and back up troubled institutions.

In Berlin, Chancellor Angela Merkel's government was working on

an economic stimulus plan for Germany that media reports said would

be valued at about $64 billion. Merkel said the Cabinet would

consider the measures on Wednesday, according to Bloomberg News.

She also called on banks to make use of a larger fund the

government has made available for troubled lenders.

In Lisbon, the authorities said they were setting up a credit

line for Portugal's banks and were moving to nationalize one of the

smaller lenders in the country, Banco Portugues de Negocios.

In Russia, where the benchmark Micex stock index has fallen

nearly 60 percent this year, officials announced new measures to

halt capital flight. Igor Shuvalov, a first deputy prime minister,

told state television on Sunday that the government would limit the

sale of rubles by banks that receive government aid.

That came a day after the Russian Finance Ministry said it had

injected more than $6 billion from a government fund into

Vnesheconombank, a state-run bank, which will use the money to

provide loans to banks and to buy stocks and bonds.

In Beijing, the Chinese prime minister, Wen Jiabao, warned that

the economic crisis was raising the risk of social unrest, and he

called for more focus on domestic spending, the China News Service

reported.

Wen said the government's need to promote economic growth was

beginning to override its mandate to keep inflation in check. The

monetary authorities in Beijing cut interest rates on Wednesday for

the third time in two months.

In Mumbai, the Reserve Bank of India, the central bank, said

Saturday that it would "employ both conventional and

unconventional measures" to respond to the crisis, and cut its

benchmark interest rate a half-point.

Chinese regulators said over the weekend that

they had confiscated and destroyed more than 3,600 tons of animal

feed tainted with melamine, an industrial chemical that has

contaminated food supplies in China and led to global recalls of

Chinese dairy products.

In what appeared to be China's biggest food safety crackdown in

years, the government also said Saturday that it had closed 238

feed makers in a series of nationwide sweeps that involved more

than 369,000 government inspectors.

The aggressive moves come amid growing worries that the animal

feed industry could be contaminated by melamine, endangering the

national food supply and posing a health threat to consumers.

In the past week and a half, eggs produced in three provinces

were found to be tainted with high levels of melamine. And in

September, melamine-tainted infant formula supplies were blamed for

sickening more than 50,000 children and causing at least four

deaths.

Regulators in the southern province of Guangdong, which has

about 80 million people and is a major manufacturing center near

Hong Kong, said they had discovered 6 tons of melamine-tainted

animal feed.

An official at the Agriculture Ministry said that the government

would mete out harsh punishment to those who were deliberately

adding melamine to animal feed.

"It is illegal for any individual or any enterprise to add

melamine into feed, and we will crack down uncompromisingly on

melamine," Wang Zhicai, director of the animal husbandry and

livestock bureau at the Agriculture Ministry, said Saturday,

according to a transcript of his news conference.

But government officials also said that China's animal feed

supply was largely safe and that the quality of feed had improved

in recent years. They insisted that only a small number of rogue

operators had deliberately added melamine to feed, often using it

as cheap filler to save money.

The government response was similarly reassuring early last year

when several animal feed makers were caught exporting

melamine-tainted feed ingredients to the United States and other

countries, resulting in contaminated pet food supplies that

sickened and killed cats and dogs.

That case led to the largest pet food recall in American

history. Melamine dealers in China said in interviews last year and

as recently as Friday that it was not uncommon for animal feed

producers to buy melamine scrap, the cheaper waste left over after

producing melamine products, and to use it as filler.

Still, some food safety officials are asking consumers not to be

too alarmed. Although the contaminated eggs found in Hong Kong

exceeded the government limit for melamine, a young child would

have to consume about two dozen of the eggs in a single day to

become sick, they said.

Locally heavy rain will accompany a disturbance crossing

Northern California and the Northwest on Monday. Brisk winds

gusting to near 30 mph will buffet parts of the Pacific Coast north

of San Francisco. As the moist air ascends the mountains and cools,

snow will develop in the higher elevations of the Cascades and

Sierra Nevada. A few light rain showers will occur in the interior

Northwest and northern Nevada.

Generally tranquil weather will prevail from the eastern Rockies

to the Atlantic Coast.

A disturbance near the Southeast seaboard will bring clouds and

gusty rain showers to the coastal Carolinas.

Strengthening breezes from the southwest will carry unseasonably

warm air from the western Plains to the Mississippi River Valley.

Plentiful sunshine will lift afternoon temperatures into the middle

70s as far north as South Dakota and Minnesota.

FOCUS: MARATHON WEATHER

Despite ample sunshine, the weather was on the chilly side for

runners competing in Sunday's New York City Marathon. When the race

began on Staten Island, temperatures were around 40. By the time

most of the runners finished the race in Central Park, temperatures

had climbed into the middle and upper 40s.

Active breezes from the northeast during the race brought an

additional chill to the New York air. Dry air hastens the rate that

runners' sweat evaporates, which aids in keeping them cool. During

strenuous exercising, a quart of water can be lost per hour through

sweating.

Staff Writer

Call Cynthia Jamin the mother of invention.

As the mother of two young daughters who were very picky about

their clothing, Jamin spent hours shopping for cute-yet-practical

dresses with skirts that would flare when the girls twirled around.

Unable to find anything the girls would wear, Jamin bought a

sewing machine, enrolled in a sewing class and started making the

dresses herself.

"I never even took home economics or looked at a sewing

machine," said Jamin, an actress who lives in Glendale. "But my

grandmother used to sew costumes. I think it's in the blood."

Her girls helped design the dresses, which Jamin created in a

reversible style to make them more utilitarian. And after receiving

rave reviews from the girls' friends, and requests for similar

dresses of their own, Jamin used a $20,000 inheritance to launch a

company called Twirly Girl.

The seed money allowed her to put things in motion -- writing a

business plan, registering her trademark, creating a Web site

(www.twirlygirlshop.com) and finding vendors to do the cutting and

sewing.

Started just over a year ago, Twirly Girl is already operating

in the black -- an accomplishment that won her a recent Success

Story Award from SCORE, a nonprofit partner of the Small Business

Administration.

"I think she has touched a nerve," said Jerry Earle, a

volunteer counselor at SCORE. "The idea of telling a young girl

she can design a dress herself is a great idea."

Earle said Twirly Girl stands out from the 400 other locally

owned businesses he's worked with because of Jamin's fresh ideas

and commitment to her company.

"My initial reaction was to her enthusiasm, her preparation and

dedication to obtaining a goal," he said. "Each time I've spoken

to her or seen her since then, it has filled in that feeling."

The advice and support that Jamin received from SCORE is

available to startup companies nationwide. The Los Angeles chapter,

based in Glendale, has just one paid employee -- but 70 volunteer

mentors, each with an entrepreneurial background.

And while the times might not be the best for launching a

business, people with creative ideas might as well take advantage

of the group's free counseling sessions and seminars, said Richard

Hadel, chairman of the L.A. chapter.

"It's definitely a more difficult time. But whenever you say

'Oh, it's not a good time to start a business,' somebody comes up

with something. Mr. Google comes along."

While Jamin is worried that predictions of a sluggish holiday

season will discourage customers -- from retail buyers to parents

looking for a special outfit for their daughters -- she's still

working to expand her line.

"When I'm creating styles, I try them on (my daughters)," she

said. "They help me figure out the best thing to make, because if

they're not going to wear it, nobody is going to wear it."

SCORE WINNERS

Here are other winners of this year's SCORE Success Story

Awards:

-- Dean Paradise, a laid-off engineer from Castaic, used savings

to launch America's Kid Times, a youth-focused newspaper that

includes bedtime stories, movie reviews and articles sent to him by

local school classes. The free newspaper is distributed in

elementary schools and daycare centers in Santa Clarita.

-- Yendi Serwaa, who started a jewelry, footwear, hair accessory

and leather-goods company in 2006. With the advice of SCORE, she

personalized her product line and developed a sales and marketing

strategy that she credits for a 400 percent increase in sales.

-- Karen Jashinsky founded O2 Max Fitness and O2 Max, a

teens-only gym that also includes homework rooms and Internet

connections.

-- Shere Bailey, an attorney, created an online curriculum

called The Money Kids, designed to teach children how to manage

their finances.

As Sen. Barack Obama spends the last of hundreds of millions of

dollars donated to his presidential campaign, the debate over how

future campaigns will be financed is set to begin in earnest.

The outcome promises to have a profound impact on future

presidential runs, either upping the fundraising ante irrevocably

or forcing sweeping changes to prevent such large amounts of cash

from coursing through campaigns again. But just as it has in this

election cycle, it is likely that politics, as much as principle,

will shape the jockeying.

Democrats, in particular, who have traditionally supported

limits on campaign spending, are grappling with whether they can

embrace Obama's example without being seen as hypocritical. They

are keenly aware that they have developed through the Internet a

commanding fundraising advantage over Republicans, much like the

direct-mail money machine that conservatives used to lord over

them.

"I think there is going to be tremendous reluctance on our side

to yield any of that advantage," said Tad Devine, who was a senior

strategist for Sen. John F. Kerry's presidential campaign in 2004.

Bob Kerrey, the Democratic former senator from Nebraska who

serves as an honorary chairman of a group that fights for public

financing of federal races, wrote an opinion article in The New

York Post last week in which he confessed to new-found ambivalence

on the issue in light of Obama's success among small donors and the

energy he has seen in this year's election.

He said in an interview that part of his change of heart might

indeed be related to the existing system's benefits to Democrats,

and he said he believed many others in his party were wrestling

with the issue anew because of the changed calculus. But he added

that Obama's army of small donors had altered the terms of the

debate, causing him to believe that he had been wrong about the

need for such limitations.

"I think the reformers' arguments have been substantially

undercut by the facts on the ground," Kerrey said.

Both candidates have campaigned as reformers and declared that

restoring the public financing system for presidential campaigns

would be a priority in their administration. But Obama apparently

did not absorb much by way of political cost when he broke a pledge

to accept public financing if his opponent did as well.

Obama built a huge financial advantage over the Republican

nominee, Sen. John McCain, which may have written the epitaph for

the current system.

An Oct. 28 USA Today-Gallup poll found most Americans did not

even know who was taking public financing and who was not; only

McCain opted for the $84 million in public financing. But the

survey also found most of those polled supported limits on campaign

spending.

House and Senate leadership aides said it was highly unlikely

that the issue would earn much attention next year, given other

priorities like the economy and the war in Iraq. There is also the

matter of the brewing debate among Democrats, who will probably

control Congress, over whether such limits are even warranted.

"Democrats may decide this is working pretty well," said Rep.

David Price, D-N.C., who last year was the lead sponsor of a

measure in the House to update the presidential public financing

system. "I don't really know what might materialize in the way of

views on our side."

Campaign finance reform has been a signature cause for McCain,

though he declined in recent years to sponsor bills updating the

presidential public financing system.

Yet if McCain were to win on Tuesday, the resistance in

Democratic circles to new financing rules would presumably only

grow as they plot another assault on the Republicans' White House

grip in 2012.

The existing presidential public financing system began in the

1970s after the Watergate scandal as a way to limit the influence

of money in politics, but it has not kept pace with increased

spending. The 2004 race was the first time both major nominees,

Kerry and President Bush, decided to bypass the federal matching

funds for the primary. Obama became the first major party candidate

to opt out of the system for the general election. Such a move

allows candidates to raise more money.

But advocates for tighter restrictions on campaign finance said

they were alarmed by the more than $1.5 billion that had been

raised by the presidential candidates in this year's primary and

general elections -- the first time the presidential aspirants have

topped $1 billion. (The Obama campaign raised $640 million, the

McCain camp less than $250 million.) The advocates said that they

were poised to begin aggressively lobbying for changes to the

public financing system and that they hoped the issue would be

taken up quickly by the new president and Congress.

The bill they are promoting seeks to offer new incentives to

participate in the public finance system by substantially

increasing the amount of public money available to candidates. Its

provisions include increasing the ratio of public matching funds

available in the primary, eliminating state-by-state primary

spending limits and increasing the size of the grant for the

general election.

Advocates for the bill said they were not convinced of Obama's

argument -- now being embraced by many fellow Democrats -- that by

raising unprecedented sums from small donors he has addressed the

problem of big-money influence in politics. Skeptics note that

Obama raised record amounts from large donors as well.

In addition, they said, this year's presidential campaign

highlighted new issues. Among them: megadonors to joint fundraising

committees that benefit the candidate and the party, as well as

questions about the integrity of Internet donations, an issue that

has drawn increasing scrutiny in recent weeks because of the Obama

campaign's lucrative online efforts.

"Whether we get to move this meaningful campaign reform forward

is going to depend largely on the leadership of either Obama or

McCain," said Craig Holman, a lobbyist for Public Citizen, a

watchdog group. "If either one of them decides they don't care,

we're going to have a hard time convincing Congress to take up the

issue."

An article of faith among conservative critics of American

universities has been that liberal professors politically

indoctrinate their students. This conviction not only fueled the

culture wars but has also led state lawmakers to consider requiring

colleges to submit reports to the government detailing their

progress in ensuring "intellectual diversity," prompted

universities to establish faculty positions devoted to conservatism

and spurred the creation of a network of volunteer watchdogs to

monitor "political correctness" on campuses.

But three sets of researchers recently concluded that professors

have virtually no impact on the political views and ideology of

their students.

If there has been a conspiracy among liberal faculty members to

influence students, "they've done a pretty bad job," said A. Lee

Fritschler, a professor of public policy at George Mason University

and an author of the new book "Closed Minds? Politics and Ideology

in American Universities" (Brookings Institution Press).

The notion that students are induced to move leftward "is a

fantasy," said Jeremy D. Mayer, another of the book's authors.

When it comes to shaping a young person's political views, "it is

really hard to change the mind of anyone over 15," said Mayer, who

did extensive research on faculty and students.

"Parents and family are the most important influence,"

followed by the news media and peers, he said. "Professors are

among the least influential."

A study of nearly 7,000 students at 38 institutions published in

the current PS: Political Science and Politics, the journal of the

American Political Science Association, as well as a second study

that has been accepted by the journal to run in April 2009, both

reach similar conclusions.

"There is no evidence that an instructor's views instigate

political change among students," Matthew Woessner and April

Kelly-Woessner, a husband-and-wife team of political scientists who

have frequently conducted research on politics in higher education,

write in that second study.

No one disputes that American academia is decidedly more liberal

than the rest of the population, or that there is a detectable

shift to the left among students during their college years. Still,

both studies in the peer-reviewed PS, for example, found that

changes in political ideology could not be attributed to

proselytizing professors but rather to general trends among that

age group.

The Treasury Department has turned down a request by

General Motors for up to $10 billion to help finance the

automaker's possible merger with Chrysler, according to people

close to the discussions.

Instead of providing new assistance, the Treasury Department

told GM on Friday, the Bush administration will now shift its focus

to speeding up the $25 billion loan program for fuel-efficient

vehicles approved by Congress in September and administered by the

Energy Department.

Treasury officials were said to be reluctant to broaden the $700

billion financial rescue program to include industrial companies or

to play a part in a GM-Chrysler merger that could cost tens of

thousands of jobs.

But it remained unclear whether the officials were also seeking

to avoid making any decision that would conflict with the goals of

a new presidential administration. The Democratic candidate, Sen.

Barack Obama, has said in recent days that he supports increasing

aid to the troubled auto companies, while Sen. John McCain has not

said whether he would support aid beyond the $25 billion.

While GM and Chrysler continue to talk, no deal is expected

until the government clarifies its role, if any. Potential

investors in the deal have been hesitant to back the merger without

federal assistance.

GM's chairman, Rick Wagoner, had lobbied Treasury Secretary

Henry M. Paulson Jr. to provide emergency aid to the auto companies

under the bailout program to stabilize the financial markets.

The Bush administration is still considering a range of options

to aid the Detroit automakers, which are losing billions of dollars

and rapidly depleting their cash reserves, said auto industry and

administration officials, who did not want to be identified because

of the sensitive nature of the discussions.

The first step is to get the Energy Department to expedite the

release of the $25 billion in low-interest loans for GM, Chrysler

and the Ford Motor Co.

Beyond that, the administration is also bringing the Commerce

Department into discussions about channeling additional aid to the

automakers.

With auto sales deteriorating to their lowest level in 15 years,

Detroit's traditional Big Three are struggling to stay solvent and

avoid bankruptcy.

The deepening troubles led GM into merger talks in September

with Chrysler's majority owner, the private equity firm Cerberus

Capital Management, and the request to the Treasury Department for

assistance.

Auto industry executives and analysts said over the weekend that

the loan program is essential to retooling plants and developing

vehicles that meet more stringent government fuel-economy mandates.

Getting the loans will allow GM, Ford and Chrysler to redirect

money already budgeted for cleaner cars to other capital needs.

"The auto companies are clearly running out of cash, and badly

in need of more liquidity," said David Cole, chairman of the

Center for Automotive Research in Ann Arbor, Mich. "Releasing the

$25 billion in loans is a necessary first step."

The Detroit companies employ more than 200,000 workers in the

United States and provide health care and pensions to more than 1

million Americans. The companies are also a lifeline to thousands

of dealers and countless suppliers.

Support for aiding the industry is growing among political

leaders in states with heavy automotive employment. Last week, the

governors of Michigan, Ohio, New York, Kentucky, Delaware and South

Dakota wrote a letter to Paulson and the Federal Reserve chairman,

Ben S. Bernanke, urging "immediate action" to assist the

industry.

"While all sectors of the economy are experiencing difficult

times, the automotive industry is particularly challenged," the

letter said. "As a result, the financial well-being of other major

industries and millions of American citizens are at risk."

Cerberus, which bought Chrysler last year for $7.4 billion, has

been unable to reverse a steady decline in the fortunes at the

company, the smallest of Detroit's Big Three. While overall auto

sales in the United States are down 12.8 percent this year,

Chrysler's sales have fallen 25 percent, mainly because of its

focus on gas-guzzling sport utility vehicles and pickup trucks.

Cerberus has had discussions with the Japanese automaker Nissan

Motor and its French partner, Renault, about bringing Chrysler into

their international automotive alliance. But people familiar with

the discussions said Cerberus is now focused solely on a potential

GM deal.

The depth of the Big Three's problems will become even more

evident this week with the release of October sales figures and

third-quarter earnings announcements by GM and Ford.

Industry sales fell 26.6 percent in September, but October's

totals could be even worse. The auto research Web site Edmunds.com

forecasts that sales of new vehicles during the month will drop

nearly 30 percent from the same period last year.

Ehud Olmert, the departing prime minister of Israel,

announced a series of measures on Sunday in response to a rise in

violence by extremist Jewish settlers in the West Bank, including a

halt to all direct or indirect government financing of illegal

outposts.

The announcement amounted to an acknowledgment that public funds

were still being spent on the outposts, contrary to government

policy and despite a long-standing pledge to the United States to

remove at least two dozen settlements immediately.

Militant settlers in the southern West Bank clashed over the

weekend with Israeli soldiers and border police officers who came

to remove an illegal home built near the settlement of Kiryat Arba,

adjacent to Hebron.

Settlers also have damaged Palestinian property in the area in

recent days, as part of a policy they call "price tag," in which

a price is exacted for actions against the outposts by the army or

the police.

In the weekly cabinet meeting here, Olmert said the overwhelming

majority of Jewish settlers were law-abiding citizens. "But," he

said, "there is also a not small group of wild people who behave

in a way that threatens proper law and governance, not only in the

areas in which they live, but also in the overall atmosphere of the

State of Israel."

Among the measures Olmert proposed for curbing the violence were

an increase in law enforcement personnel, arrests and timely

trials; the use of administrative detention and distancing orders

against settlers who break the law; and a halt to public financing

of the illegal outposts.

In the West Bank not including East Jerusalem, there are at

least 120 official settlements with more than 260,000 Jewish

residents. Most of the international community views all Jewish

construction in the areas conquered by Israel in the 1967 war as

illegal; the United States regards the settlements as an obstacle

to peace.

A damning 2005 report on the outposts was commissioned, under

pressure from Washington, by Ariel Sharon, the former Israeli prime

minister, and was researched and written by Talia Sasson, a former

state prosecutor. It found widespread collusion among officials in

successive governments to spend state funds to build outposts, in

contravention of stated policy and law.

Asked what sort of government funds were still making their way

to the outposts, Mark Regev, a spokesman for Olmert, referred to

the Sasson report and the to government financing of settler

regional councils in the West Bank and said that the government

would "have to be more careful" about where the public funds were

going.

Dani Dayan, the chairman of the Yesha Council, an umbrella

organization that represents all the settlers, attacked Olmert's

announcement about financing as "collective punishment" and said

that politicians were mounting a campaign of incitement and

demonization against the settlers in advance of the national

elections set for Feb. 10.

Dayan said that the only government investment in the outposts

today was indirect, in the form of the regional council funds,

which go to services like garbage collection and school buses.

"Does this mean that they won't clear the garbage?" Dayan asked,

adding that he hoped "this bad government will be replaced with a

better one in four months."

"What's up, Lenny," a broker on the floor of the

New York Stock Exchange says, just before the ringing of the

Pavlovian bell that opens the financial market. Lenny answers this

morning bid with the customary response: "What's up."

Posed less as a sincere inquiry into one's well-being than as a

passing nod to another day in the financial scrum, the greeting can

also be interpreted in these uncertain times as a question baldly

seeking reassurance: What's up?

Stocks? Hopes? Layoffs? Blood pressure?

(BEGIN OPTIONAL TRIM.)

Leaving unexplored the phrase's deeper meaning, the two brokers

melt into a blue-coated sea on the main floor of the exchange,

where the Lennys have come to personify the amorphous,

temperamental, life-altering thing called Wall Street -- an

all-encompassing name for the stock market, the economy, your

401(k).

From the balcony above this gladiator's pit, photographers

crouch to capture expressions of joy, of anguish, of bewilderment,

that are then presented as clues to how we should feel -- even

though that broker's frown may reflect nothing more than digestive

disagreement with a wolfed-down fried egg sandwich.

Not long ago, a floor broker named Danny Trimble cocked a finger

to his head and placed it against his temple, for reasons unrelated

to the market; soon an image of Trimble "shooting" himself made

the newspapers. No matter that he is not a hedge fund manager, bank

CEO, or fat cat; no matter that he is just a financial foot soldier

from Jersey, hoarse from shouting at his son's Pop Warner football

games.

Trimble, 41, works at the edge of the exchange's main floor,

shoulder-to-shoulder with six other men in a booth the size of an

elevator car. Not everyone graduated from college, but all are

resident scholars of the hurly-burly floor, educated in reading

markets, hunting for matches and executing buy-and-sell orders.

They are worth their commissions, they say, because they provide

things a computer cannot, things like experience, intuition -- a

"feel."

Crammed into this booth with no place to sit are Mike Ackerman,

Paul Davis, Billy Johnson and Nick Stratakis, of B and B

Securities; Trimble and Chris Martin, of Greywolf Equity Partners;

and Ralph Roiland, a clerk. Scrappy independents, all; no one works

for Goldman Sachs.

Still, when they step onto Broad and Exchange Streets to breathe

the autumn air, they sometimes get blamed for the world's economic

crisis. "You walk out there and people think you're what's wrong

with this country," says Martin, father of three, of Morristown,

N.J.

With the opening of the market imminent, the men in the booth

send instant messages to clients, asking, hoping, for interest in

trading stock. But the volatile activity in recent weeks has

unnerved many investors; some respond with noncommittal "Thanks"

and "I'm away from my desk."

At 9:30 on the dime, the opening bell rings, clanging off the

century-old walls of white marble, the ceiling of gilded gold.

Brokers rush to the center of the floor, where specialists in

individual stocks track the last best data. Shouts of "Buy off

10,000, pair off 10,000," and "How's Marathon?" feed the low

roar of business.

After a while, though, quiet returns. Brokers gaze at computer

screens in their booths, some to monitor stocks, some to play

virtual games. In one corner, a man is deciphering a crossword

puzzle, while three beside him play cards. The stock exchange has a

different rhythm now, its denizens say, because of technological

advances and the shrinking of the once-dominant house firms. It's

not like before.

Many of the men, and it's still almost all men, remember the

days when they stood several deep around the specialists, nudging,

pushing, staying put for several straight hours, shouting

"Squad!" for pages to hustle handwritten notes to clerks on the

wings, jockeying at the banks of phones now hanging from hooks like

relics.

Those were the days when black humor and practical jokes helped

to blow off steam and show affection for comrades.

The one-liners would fly minutes after, say, the space shuttle

Challenger went down. A trader would return to work, disfigured,

after a serious car accident to find at his station a toy car,

burned and crushed. And he would laugh.

Billy Johnson, 48, a burly former firefighter from Oceanport,

N.J., recalls how his floor colleagues helped him to toast his

approaching marriage: by ripping his jacket and covering him with

shaving cream, perfume and potato chips.

The jokes and put-downs still go on, and lately someone has been

beeping a horn concealed in his jacket. But the humor is not quite

as black.

"A lot of that stopped after 9/11," says Doreen Mogavero, 53,

an experienced floor broker who points out that ground zero is a

couple of blocks away. "It wasn't that funny anymore."

Gone too is that loud physicality of the floor. Headsets and

hand-held computerized pads mean less running around, fewer clerks,

softer voices, a smaller chance for error. Those technological

advances have opened the market to just about anyone with a

computer, making floor trading seem almost quaint. Many traders

retired rather than change their ways; others got laid off,

including one now walking through the exchange. Selling insurance,

someone says.

Of the 1,366 broker's licenses available for an annual fee of

$40,000, only 553 are being used. In 2006 there were 3,534 people

working on the floor; today there are 1,273.

"The stress now is the lack of business," says Benedict Willis

III, 48, a senior broker who started here in 1982. Moments later he

is interrupted by applause. It is the sound of a lost job: a floor

broker of 20 years has just been laid off from a major firm, and

now his colleagues are showing their respect.

"They're clapping him off," Willis says. "It's the second one

this week."

One of the brokers in that small booth, Mike Ackerman, leads a

Scandinavian delegation on a brief tour of the exchange, past

computer screens flashing red and green, past taped-up photographs

of family members, closed baseball stadiums and the Lower Manhattan

skyline when it was intact. As he takes them to the balcony, a

delegate asks a question in halting English: Does Ackerman feel

personally responsible for the collapsing economy?

Good question, answers Ackerman, 39, father of three, from

Basking Ridge, N.J. Good question. But -- no.

He and all the people down on that floor are executing trades on

behalf of others, using a hybrid method that combines a computer's

technology with a human's gut instinct. They do not deal in

subprime mortgages; they do not get golden parachutes. But hey:

Good question.

These brokers make money whether the market goes up or down;

their earnings depend on the volume of trades, and the floor

averages 117 million orders a day. Still, they prefer north to

south. "It's political economics," Willis explains. "We want to

reassure investors that it's OK to come back."

Tomorrow the market will plummet in the very last minutes.

Beaten brokers will repair to bars like Bobby Van's across the

street, where the bartenders know their drinks before they've

ordered.

But right now the market climbs with every tick toward the 4

p.m. closing, as though willed to rise by all the Lennys now eyeing

the electronic board. Up, up, up.

"Two minutes to go," someone says at 3:58. "A lifetime."

Eight paramilitary soldiers were killed

and five were wounded Sunday morning when a suicide bomber rammed

an explosives-laden truck into a security checkpoint in the restive

South Waziristan tribal region, officials said.

Also on Sunday, Gen. David H. Petraeus, the new chief of the

Central Command, made his first visit to Pakistan for talks with

top political and military leaders. The relationship between

Pakistan and the United States has worsened in recent weeks after a

string of American strikes in Pakistan on militant hide-outs.

Petraeus, credited with turning around the war in Iraq, was

accompanied by Richard A. Boucher, the assistant secretary of state

for South Asia. No details on their schedule were released.

The truck bombing took place around 9:30 a.m. Sunday at a post

near Fort Zalai, a base for the paramilitary Frontier Corps about

12 miles from Wana, South Waziristan's capital.

The attack, apparently retaliation for deadly missile strikes

reported Friday, may affect an agreement between militants and

Pakistan's government.

"The attack could be a warning call to Islamabad from Maulvi

Nazir," said Arif Rafiq, a political analyst, referring to a local

militant. Nazir, the Taliban's top commander in South Waziristan,

was reportedly the target of a missile strike from a remotely

piloted aircraft on Friday.

South Waziristan, on the Afghan border, is known as a stronghold

for Taliban militants and sympathizers of al-Qaida.

On Sunday, The News, one of Pakistan's leading English-language

newspapers, reported that militants in South Waziristan had

threatened to scrap a peace accord with the government if the

United States did not halt air attacks against militant leaders.

"Nazir feels vulnerable and wants to make clear to Islamabad

that there will be deadly consequences from his side if the

Pakistan military joins Washington in opposing him," Rafiq said.

Col. Moammar Gadhafi, the leader of Libya, visited

Moscow over the weekend for talks on oil and natural gas deals,

just two months after Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice was his

guest in Libya. The visit here suggested that Gadhafi, a one-time

pariah, is maneuvering to play Russia and the United States off

against each other for commercial and political favors.

During the visit, Gadhafi pitched a Bedouin tent in a Kremlin

garden and invited Prime Minister Vladimir V. Putin for tea.

On Sunday, Gadhafi flew to Belarus for a meeting with President

Alexsander G. Lukashenko, a leader who supported the colonel during

his period of ostracism, visiting Libya in 2000. Gadhafi was

expected to then visit Ukraine before returning to North Africa

after his first visit to the region since the fall of the Soviet

Union.

Gadhafi, whom former president Ronald Reagan once famously

called "the mad dog of the Middle East," is well on his way to

mending ties with the United States and other Western governments

after renouncing terrorism and efforts to build weapons of mass

destruction. The trip showed that he has not closed the door on

former East Bloc allies.

"They want to say, 'Look, we have options,"' said Alex

Turkeltaub, a managing director at Frontier Strategy Group, a risk

consultancy firm. "This is a shot across the bow to the new

administration in Washington."

Russian energy companies have been offering Libya sweeping

cooperation and investment programs. In a bold offer in July, for

example, Gazprom, the Russian natural gas monopoly, offered to buy

all of Libya's natural gas production in a deal that could help

Gazprom corner the European natural gas market. So far, Libya has

been noncommittal.

Now, apparently in an effort to sweeten the deal with something

the Untied States would not likely offer, Russian authorities are

negotiating to provide Libya a civilian nuclear research reactor,

though it was unclear whether the sides reached an agreement on

this issue over the weekend. Libyan officials were quoted by

Reuters as saying that Russia had agreed to build the reactor,

while a spokesman for Putin, Dmitri S. Peskov, said the talks had

not concluded.

In the portion of Qaddafi's meeting with Putin in the tent shown

on Russian television, the two sat on leather arm chairs beside a

bonfire, heedless of the cold autumn wind. "We're becoming closer

and closer," Putin said.

"Russia and Libya are major producers of oil and gas," Gadhafi

said, in comments translated into Russian by the Interfax news

agency. "We think alike about gas and oil policies."

The colonel's visit followed a long courtship by Gazprom, the

world's largest natural gas company, and supplier of about 40

percent of the European Union's gas imports. For now, the North

African nations of Libya and Algeria compete with Russia to supply

gas to southern Europe. But Russia is toying with forming an

OPEC-style group, the Gas Exporting Countries Forum, to eliminate

this competition.

At the same time, Gazprom has been buying licenses to Libyan gas

fields in joint ventures with the Italian company Eni and Germany's

Wintershall. Both companies traded Libyan licenses for access to

coveted reserves in Russia, in a sign of how highly Russia prizes

the prospect of an energy alliance with Libya.

Some analysts say that if Gazprom succeeds in wrapping up supply

from Libya and Algeria, it could dominate the supply to southern

Europe.

Gadhafi seemed to embrace the idea of closer commercial ties.

"Unfortunately, in the past our relations have been mainly

focused on military and diplomatic contacts and there was virtually

no cooperation in civilian sectors," he said at a Kremlin meeting

with President Dmitri A. Medvedev. "I believe that such

cooperation is especially important in the current conditions."

Military deals were not forgotten, however. Interfax, citing

unidentified Kremlin sources, said the Libyans were in talks to buy

$2 billion worth of anti-aircraft missiles, fighter jets,

helicopters, tanks and a diesel submarine.

FOR MONDAY AMs

The following stories are on the front page of the Business

Section of the New York Times for Monday, Nov. 3. They are

scheduled to move by 9 p.m. ET unless otherwise noted.

For information on stories or for reruns, please call:

888-346-9867 or 212-556-1927. For information on NYT photos and

graphics, call 888-603-1036 or 212-556-4204.

(Lede story)

GM (Detroit) -- The Treasury Department has turned down a request

by General Motors for up to $10 billion to help finance the

automaker's possible merger with Chrysler, according to people

close to the discussions. By Bill Vlasic and Micheline Maynard.

(Top display)

ELECTION-STOCKS (Undated) -- There is a long tradition of market

watchers seeking connections between two of America's favorite

pastimes: picking presidents and picking stocks. By Michael M.

Grynbaum.

(Middle display)

POLITICS-MEDIA (Undated) -- The 2008 election may be remembered,

among other things, as the New Media election, when consumers

seized unprecedented choice over how they wanted it covered. Now

media executives are trying to figure out where they went wrong and

where the opportunities are for news going forward. By David Carr

and Brian Stelter.

(Bottom display)

SUMNER-REDSTONE (Undated) -- Even by his standards, Sumner

Redstone has been on a wild ride. Because of his longtime

favorites, the theater business and Midway, he has put a

considerable part of his stake at Viacom and CBS at risk, he's

getting divorced and he's now staring down some debt obligations.

By Tim Arango.

(Bottom right)

NETWORK-RATINGS (Undated) -- Bill Carter assesses how the

broadcast networks are faring this season.

(Editors: Budgets and advisories are internal documents not for

publication or redistribution outside of client news organizations.

Unauthorized use of budgets and advisories constitutes a violation

of our contract terms. All clients receive all budgets, but only

full-service clients receive all stories. Please check your level

of service to determine which stories you will receive.)

ECONOMIC SIGNALS

Data on productivity, employment and consumer credit will

headline the week.

Reports will include the Institute for Supply Management's

manufacturing index for October and construction spending for

September (Monday); factory orders for September (Tuesday); the

Institute for Supply Management's nonmanufacturing index for

October (Wednesday); third-quarter productivity (Thursday); and

employment for October, consumer credit for September and pending

home sales for September (Friday).

COMPANY EARNINGS

It is an active week for earnings, with reports coming from

Belo, Goodyear Tire and Rubber, MasterCard and Viacom (Monday);

Archer Daniels Midland, Marvel Entertainment, Tenet Healthcare and

UBS (Tuesday); Cisco, IAC/InterActiveCorp, Molson Coors, News

Corp., Revlon, Sara Lee, Time Warner and Whole Foods (Wednesday);

Anheuser-Busch, Blockbuster, Cablevision, Deutsche Telekom,

DirecTV, El Paso, PG&amp;amp;E, Qualcomm, Toyota and Walt Disney

(Thursday); and the American International Group, E.W. Scripps,

Ford Motor and Sprint Nextel (Friday).

GLOBAL MARKETS

The European Commission releases forecasts for euro-zone growth,

inflation, employment, debt and the deficit (Monday).

European Union finance ministers meet in Brussels to discuss

responses to the global financial crisis (Tuesday).

The European Central Bank and the Bank of England make decision

on interest rates (Thursday).

European Union leaders hold talks to discuss financial system

reforms ahead of a global summit on Nov. 14 (Friday).

Brazil hosts a meeting for the Group of 20 finance ministers and

central bank presidents (Saturday).

INDUSTRY REPORTS

Automakers report their United States sales (Monday), and

retailers report their same-store sales for October (Thursday).

SEATTLE--Candidates for the "Sheer Gall" award of the 2008

election are numerous, but any competition must be judged not only

on brazenness and mud throwing, but on the effectiveness of it.

We start with a natural nominee, the Building Industry Association

of Washington for its anti-Gov. Chris Gregoire signs in Eastern

Washington with the message: "Don't Let Seattle Steal this

Election."

Two can play this game. The incumbent's feminist supporters claimed

that Dino Rossi will "take away the right to choose." Would a

newly elected Washington governor be empowered to overturn Roe v.

Wade?

As with the "hall of fame" category in the annual "Best

Dressed" listing, initiative king Tim Eyman has earned a lifetime

award for his skill at demonizing and self-promotion.

The academic credentials debate in the Dave Reichert-Darcy Burner

race can't be ignored. The encounter between Burner and KOMO/4

pundits Ken Schram and John Carlson is a classic example of how you

can turn a minor exaggeration into a major liability.

The Sheer Gall winner, however, was instantly evident as I listened

to radio news on Friday.

An ad for Initiative 1000, which would legalize assisted suicide,

condemned a "small group" of "out-of-state religious leaders"

for trying to buy the election, impose their will and defeat

"Washington's death-with-dignity law."

I-1000 is leading in the polls, but its radio spots comprise a

landslide of distortions.

There is no "Washington's death-with-dignity law." Voters are

being asked to change the law to allow physicians to assist in

ending patients' lives.

The "religious leaders" reference is a slam at the Catholic

Church. The campaign has openly bashed Catholics in missives to

liberal bloggers. Code phrases are used in the state Voters

Pamphlet and on the air.

Why has a political figure as distinguished as ex-Gov. Dan Evans

put his name on the line for a campaign that uses this line?

The out-of-state charge is the biggest canard. True, the

Coalition Against Assisted Suicide has raised $1.5 million, much of

which has come from Catholic groups. The Knights of Columbus is the

biggest giver.

But supporters of the initiative have put together a war chest

of nearly $4.9 million--seeking to impose their will on the

Washington electorate.

Out-of-state donors have given life to the campaign for assisted

suicide.

Judy Sebba, an educator at the University of Sussex in England,

gave $253,555. Loren Parks, a Nevada businessman, put in $250,000.

Compassion in Choices, based in Denver, has given $185,000. Oregon

Death with Dignity put in $100,000.

A Compassion &amp;amp; Choices political action committee turned over

$626,500 to the campaign--all of it from out of state. Andrew Ross,

described as a Columbus, Ohio, inventor, put in $400,000.

Of course, ex-Gov. Booth Gardner ($470,000) and the extended family

of the late mogul Norton Clapp gave the most. Including Gardner,

Clapp-related donations total $750,000.

As the campaign wound down, I went to see Rob Luck and Ann

Friedrichsen at Providence Hospice of Seattle. My goal was to have

a look at alternatives to offing yourself, and efforts to bring

terminally ill patients and families in for a soft landing.

"We provide care for those with a life-limiting illness even

before they come in to hospice care . . . and deal with the

(families') emotional aftermath," Luck explained.

"What is the difference between this and hospice? We recognize

even before someone agrees to hospice care--or is referred by a

physician--the need to help those going through emotional and

spiritual struggles."

The Providence transitions program receives no government

help--Nada! Currently, one and a half paid staff and two interns

provide service for 189 people in pre-hospice.

Providence also has 29 patients in a children's program, three in

hospice and 16 with limited life expectancy.

The total amount for such support comes to about 25 percent of what

assisted suicide supporters raised to support I-1000.

Nor is Medicare that generous when patients are formally enrolled

in hospice. It provides $162 a day. The sum covers

everything--medical, nursing, transportation, and life-support

services, even drugs.

Providence pays for transition care from its foundation money, and

absorbs about $10,000 a month in charity care: Nobody lacking

coverage is turned away. Nor are results predictable. "Some people

are told they are terminally ill, and then get better," said Luck.

Supporters of Initiative 1000 are a strong-willed bunch, insistent

on a "right" to end life on their terms. In one argument, a

supporter equated assisted suicide with the Declaration of

Independence reference to the "pursuit of happiness."

Polls show they'll get their way, helped by a secular media that

bought the anti-Catholic propaganda line while accepting gauzy

descriptions of Oregon's assisted suicide law.

A final challenge from this critic: As they celebrate at Rock

Bottom on Tuesday, I-1000 backers might consider helping those who

choose to leave without the prescription of a death cocktail.

A donation of $626,500 would be a gift of life for hospice

programs. A six-figure check from Gardner would help a lot of sick

people, and their families, in the transitions program. A real

meaning of "Compassion &amp;amp; Choices" is not turning away the needy.

How 'bout it, Booth?

This city has long been regarded as the

cultural, intellectual and artistic heart of Pakistan, famous for

its poets and writers, its gardens and historic sites left over

from the Mughal Empire.

The turmoil sown by militancy may have reached into the capital,

Islamabad, but it rarely seemed to intrude here among the leafy

boulevards that are home to many of Pakistan's secular-minded

elite.

But in recent weeks, panic has found its way even here, with a

series of small bombs and other threats that offer a measure of

just how deeply the fear of militant groups like the Taliban has

penetrated Pakistani society.

On Oct. 7, three small bombs exploded in juice shops in a

sprawling, congested neighborhood called Garhi Shahu. The shops,

which had gained a reputation as "dating points," offering

enclosed booths for young couples to cuddle, were gutted in the

blasts. One person was killed, and several others were wounded.

An unknown group called Tehreek-ul Haya, or Movement for

Decency, claimed responsibility and warned of more attacks against

"centers of immorality" in the city.

On Oct. 9, Shabbir Labha, the president of the local traders

association, received an unsigned handwritten letter that

threatened to bomb Lahore's biggest video and music market.

The next day, he got an anonymous phone call asking him if he

could do something about the sale of the pornographic CDs and DVDs

there. "I assured the caller that I can," Labha recalled, sitting

in his basement office on a recent afternoon.

Within a day, the traders had handed over more than 60,000

pornographic videos and burned them in a bonfire as the city's top

government officials, the police and a large crowd looked on.

"We were not sure if the threats were made by the Taliban or

not," Labha said. "But the bomb blasts in Garhi Shahu had made us

apprehensive. We didn't want to take any chances."

The fact that a single, anonymous letter could inspire such a

spectacle surprised many people here. Some voiced alarm that the

tolerant, liberal outlook of Lahore was under attack from

Taliban-style moral policing, usually found only in more restive

corners of the country like the North West Frontier province.

There, in cities much closer to the tribal areas where many

militant groups are based, music stores have been attacked

repeatedly by the Taliban.

But in Lahore, the capital of Punjab province, the music and

video market on Hall Road was famous for the sale of English and

Indian movies, as well as a thriving underground trade in

pornographic movies, which are illegal here. The small stores in

dingy, clustered plazas had attracted buyers for more than two

decades.

Despite repeated crackdowns and warnings, the police had been

unable to stop the trade in pornography. But the specter of the

Taliban achieved in a day what the police had been unable to do for

years.

Ahmad Rafay Alam, a columnist for The News, one of the country's

leading daily publications, wrote afterward that the

"Talibanization of Lahore has begun."

"I was very surprised," said Moonis Elahi, a member of the

provincial assembly, referring to the response of the traders, who

he said were less concerned about making a stand than about saving

their livelihoods.

"The traders wanted to pacify the extremists," he said.

Since then, the lingering threat of bomb blasts and suicide

attacks continues to sow fear, though many of the letters and the

calls have proved to be hoaxes. Elahi said a close friend was so

fed up with threats to a school that his child attended that he was

contemplating a move to Dubai, in the United Arab Emirates.

Police officials, however, dismissed the concerns of

"Talibanization" as overblown and played down the threats. "In

our assessment the letter was a hoax," said Pervez Rathore, the

police chief of Lahore. "It was a local mischief."

In addition to fear, the Hall Road episode has exposed fissures

in society in Lahore, between the city's liberal elite and the

conservative impulses of its working and middle classes, some of

whom have excused or supported the threats and the traders'

response.

Ejaz Haider, an editor at Daily Times, one of the leading

English-language newspapers, said the burning of the CDs did not

necessarily mean that the Hall Road traders had become reformed

Muslims overnight. "It just showed the pragmatism of the

traders," he said.

Khalil Rehman Chugtai, the secretary of the traders' union of

Hall Road, said the threats were in fact a blessing. "We had been

trying to eliminate the sales of porn movies for long with no

luck," he said. "The letter helped us to get rid of them."

Chugtai said there would now be no tolerance for the sale of

such "immoral movies." A few days after the bonfire, he said, one

video store owner was found selling pornography again. "We

apprehended him, blackened his face and paraded him through the

market," he said.

Saeed Ahmad, who owns a juice shop near the three that were

attacked last month, even defended the bomb blasts.

"What happened was for the better," he said. "They didn't

just serve juices there. Immoral acts were going on inside the

cabins set up by the owners, who took money from couples."

Still, Raza Ahmad Rumi, a writer and blogger who takes great

pride in his city, insisted that "Islamic extremism has had very

little appeal here." The cultural life of Lahore goes on, as it

has for centuries.

He said that a recent stage play, "Hotel Moenjodaro," whose

theme was against religious fundamentalism, drew a packed audience.

"It was very encouraging," Ahmad said.

Nonetheless, he said, the Hall Road incident and the juice store

blasts were alarming. "If the traders, the merchant class, which

forms the bulk of the middle class of Lahore, becomes Talibanized,

then the whole complexion of the city will change," he said.

"That's a fear amongst the secular intelligentsia and elite of

Lahore."

In 1967, after several years of research, a young market

forecaster named Yale Hirsch unveiled a grand theory of the

relationship between presidential elections and the stock market.

Tracking data back to 1833, Hirsch found that on average, stocks

performed better in the final two years of a presidential term, a

trend he attributed to maneuvering by the party in power to better

its chances of re-election.

"As presidents and their parties get anxious about holding on

to power, they begin to prime the pump in the third year, fostering

bull markets, prosperity and peace," reads a recent edition of the

"Stock Trader's Almanac," the venerable perennial founded by

Hirsch that collects financial tidbits, gentle market humor and

reams of historical data.

But as with its older cousin in the almanac business, Poor

Richard's, the pattern described in the book has not always panned

out. With the Dow Jones industrial average down 30 percent this

year, it would seem 2008 is going to be such a year.

A decline so startling might suggest that predicting the market

by watching American election patterns is not a practice to, er,

put a lot of stock in. Hirsch's theory, however, was only an early

entry in a long tradition of market watchers seeking connections

between two of America's favorite pastimes: picking presidents and

picking stocks.

Many analysts, looking for a jump on Tuesday's results, have

pointed out that declines in the stock market right before a

presidential election generally point to an advantage for the

challenging party.

Investors looking to make a quick buck this week can dig up

research showing that stocks tend to do better the day after a

Republican presidential victory than a Democratic one. And bullish

types expecting a Barack Obama victory have noted that over time,

stocks perform better under Democratic administrations.

Or, perhaps, there is no connection at all.

Without doubt, declines in the stock market can signal broader

problems in the economy, and the performance of the economy

influences how people vote. But to forecast the market based on a

political event is to enter the murky realm of distinguishing

chance correlations from true cause and effect.

"To me, things like the weather, the Super Bowl and

presidential elections are basically coincidental," said Laszlo

Birinyi Jr., an investment adviser and head of Birinyi Associates

in Westport, Conn.

"I would never consider it in terms of investment

decision-making," he said. "You will find people who will wax

rhapsodically on it, but quite frankly to me, it's an exercise in

futility."

With stocks facing their worst declines in decades, this year

may be particularly difficult to predict. Some investors say the

problems in the economy are so far-reaching that the winner of the

election could, in the short-term at least, hardly matter at all.

"The amount of attention being paid to the election is less

than it would be under more normal circumstances," said Russ

Koesterich, a strategist at Barclays Global Investors. "Right now,

people are still focused on gaining clarity about the solvency of

the financial sector."

Sharp differences divide the candidates on matters like tax

policy and government regulation, and their proposals could

eventually be enacted into law. But Birinyi noted that campaign

speeches are far removed from the hurdles and compromises of

Capitol Hill.

"The process of legislative government is so long and drawn

out," he said. "To isolate the issue and the impact is, to me, to

try to find the function of a bay leaf in a recipe of coq au vin."

Some investors expect the market to stay focused on the problems

in the economy, including the credit freeze and rising corporate

layoffs. "The market realizes that whoever comes into the

administration, it's not going to have much of an impact on growth

over the next couple of quarters," Koesterich said.

Despite the cautions of such sober analysts as Koesterich, it is

difficult for people to resist looking for patterns that supposedly

predict the future.

Jeremy J. Siegel, a professor at the Wharton School, studied

presidential election cycles for his 1994 book, "Stocks for the

Long Run," and found that when a Republican wins a presidential

election, stocks tend to perform better the day after.

Siegel attributed that to the relatively conservative leanings

of the investor class. "The first flush is, 'The Republicans won;

I'm happy,"' he said. "But once it plays out, the Democrats in

the long run have had historically better returns."

Siegel studied stock returns from 1888 to 2004. From Monday to

Wednesday of presidential election weeks, stocks moved higher by an

average of 0.7 percent in the event of a Republican victory. Stocks

fell 0.5 percent on average when the Democrats took the White

House.

The study, which used the Standard &amp;amp; Poor's index as a gauge,

comes with caveats. In the postwar election years, from 1948 to

2004, the average return on a Republican victory was zero, while

stocks dropped 0.2 percent on Democratic victories. Stocks also

tended to do better when the branches of government were divided

between the parties, with the best performance under a Democratic

president and Republican Congress.

But on a longer time scale, much of a president's legacy -- at

least that part of his legacy measured by the Dow Jones industrial

average -- has really been determined by "whether markets are high

or low when you came into office, not what sorts of policies you

bring in to spark it up," Siegel said.

And what of Hirsch's theory of presidential elections? Hirsch

declined to be interviewed. But his son, Jeffrey, who has taken the

reins of the business, defended the theory.

"The advantage of the cycle is it works most of the time, and

it provides you an overarching theme as to when most of the

markets' gains and losses are made," the younger Hirsch said.

"Nothing's 100 percent perfect," he added. "It's not

something used in a vacuum. It's not that you look at the stars and

the calendar, and only follow that."

And his thoughts for 2009? "Next year might not be as bad. Or,

conversely, there's something horrible going on, something negative

in this global crisis, which could mean next year will be even more

difficult."

If Sen. John McCain defies the polls and wins

Pennsylvania, it will be in part because of voters like Harry

Klemash, 67, a Democrat who supported Sen. Hillary Rodham Clinton

in the primary and is still not comfortable with Sen. Barack Obama.

"Obama has too many socialist policies, and he doesn't have

enough experience," Klemash, a retired pressman, said Sunday as he

walked his miniature poodle in Marconi Park in South Philadelphia,

a largely white, Catholic, ethnic neighborhood.

With the presidential election a day away, the polls point to an

Obama victory in Pennsylvania, with Obama holding a big lead in

Philadelphia. But the polls are tightening, and McCain has shown no

signs of letting up in the state.

As the Republicans try to map situations in which McCain could

pull off an upset, they are focusing on Philadelphia's mostly white

enclaves.

"I'm spending a lot of time in Philadelphia," said Robert

Gleason, the chairman of the state Republican Party.

"We're working the Northeast," he said, referring to a largely

white part of the city. "We've got values voters up there,

Catholics. My people up there say they can carry four to six wards

this year, and four years ago, they carried none."

While wealthier whites in Philadelphia, especially in Center

City, overwhelmingly support Obama, some blue-collar Democrats

never made the transition from supporting Clinton. In South

Philadelphia, McCain signs have cropped up in the windows of the

low brick houses and on the postage-stamp lawns.

"Hillary won some of those white wards by 10-1," said Shanin

Specter, son of Sen. Arlen Specter, R-Pa., and a lawyer who is

steeped in local politics. "Obama is likely to significantly

underperform Kerry and Gore in those white row-house wards."

The Obama campaign is fully aware of the challenge.

"This is a tough ward," said Paul Rossi, 61, a data processor

who lives in the neighborhood and is helping out at an Obama office

that opened Saturday not far from Marconi Park. "It's a matter of

convincing people culturally that they won't be harmed by Obama."

It is no accident that Sen. Joe Biden, Obama's running mate, is

being dispatched to speak in Marconi Park on Monday night for his

final rally of the campaign. The white, blue-collar Catholics here

are just the kind of voters whom Biden, also Catholic, was chosen

to help win over. Biden is to be joined by members of the

Philadelphia Phillies, who just won the World Series.

Susan Streicher, 59, a retired secretary and registered

Democrat, acknowledged that Biden's Catholicism was appealing to

her but said she preferred McCain and Gov. Sarah Palin, McCain's

running mate, because they oppose abortion rights. Her husband,

John, 63, a postal worker, dismissed McCain, saying that he was a

"warmonger" and that Alaska, Palin's home state, "is all

wilderness." Both said they thought Obama would win.

There is no doubt that Obama, who won Philadelphia in the

primary, will sweep the city again. But while it is a major part of

the statewide puzzle, it is still only a piece.

In 2004, Sen. John Kerry, the Democrat, won about 80 percent of

the vote in Philadelphia, beating President Bush by 412,000 votes

here. But Kerry won the state by only 144,000 votes.

Gov. Edward G. Rendell of Pennsylvania said Sunday that although

he still expected Obama to win the state, he was "nervous" and

had been on the phone "screaming at Chicago," meaning the Obama

headquarters, to send reinforcements. Hillary Clinton is due in

Pittsburgh on Monday; former President Bill Clinton is to stump for

Obama in Erie and elsewhere the same day.

McCain continues to devote his most precious resource, his time,

to Pennsylvania. He made three in-person pleas to voters in the

eastern part of the state over the weekend and planned a final,

short rally for Monday at the Pittsburgh airport.

Although McCain has paid scant attention to Philadelphia,

Gleason, the Republican state chairman, said McCain hoped to do

better in the city than Bush did, and the party has begun running

advertisements highlighting Obama's ties to the Rev. Jeremiah A.

Wright Jr., his former pastor, which could tap into concerns among

white voters.

"In South Philadelphia," Gleason said, "with the battle

between the African-Americans and all the other wards, we can keep

Obama under a 400,000 margin in Philadelphia." (He added with a

laugh, "I get a big salary to be positive.")

Rendell agreed that because of the white wards, Obama might get

a smaller percentage of the Philadelphia vote than Kerry did,

perhaps 75 percent instead of Kerry's 80 percent. But with

additional Democratic registrations, he said, and a bigger turnout,

Obama would exceed Kerry's numbers.

In addition, Rendell said, McCain could not rely on the

Republicans' deepest well in the state, which, until 1992, had been

the four suburban counties around Philadelphia. Rendell and Gleason

agreed that Montgomery County, the most affluent and liberal of the

four, would vote for Obama, and that Bucks and Delaware Counties

were also likely to swing for him. The fourth, Chester County, is

closely contested.

Elsewhere in the state, McCain needs a big turnout in Central

Pennsylvania and is making an incursion into the Scranton area. In

counterpoint to McCain's appeal there to Catholic Democrats, the

Obama team on Sunday sent in Caroline Kennedy.

Despite the frenzied last-minute campaigning and polls

suggesting a tighter race, G. Terry Madonna, a political analyst at

Franklin &amp;amp; Marshall College in Lancaster, said he expected Obama to

win the state by at least seven points.

As part of the Obama campaign's highly organized

get-out-the-vote operation, scores of volunteers were hustling in

and out of the new branch office here on Sunday.

Many were from out of state, including two women from New York

who said they had expected to be sent to more rural environs and

were surprised when they were sent to Philadelphia.

"We thought, oh, it's an urban area, it's done," said Marian

Masone, 57, a film curator who lives in Brooklyn.

They said they were also surprised by the negative reaction to

them in South Philadelphia. Masone and her friend, Eileen Newman,

62, who works in film management and lives in Manhattan, said that

some people said "no way" to them about Obama and that one told

them, "Get off this block."

As for Klemash, the South Philadelphia resident, he said he was

ambivalent about McCain, too. "McCain is too close to Bush," he

said, yet he admires McCain's military service. Then again, he

said, Palin was a bad choice as McCain's running mate because she

does not have enough experience. But then again, he said, Obama

does not have enough experience, either.

His conclusion: "This is a really hard election."

Why auto industry is worth saving

Analysts: Big 3 woes imperil U.S. economy

By Alisa Priddle

The Detroit News

The auto industry employs hundreds of thousands in Michigan, but

its reach is broader than that.

About 3.1 million people work for automakers, parts suppliers

and their related businesses in the United States.

Every direct job at an automaker in the U.S. creates five more

jobs, said Sean McAlinden, chief economist and vice president for

research for the Center for Automotive Research in Ann Arbor. Two

of the five are related to suppliers and dealers; the other three

are spinoff jobs at businesses where auto industry workers spend

their paychecks.

By contrast, one Wall Street position creates about 2.5 jobs,

McAlinden said. Congress expedited aid to the financial services

industry this year. The next closest industry to autos is high

tech, responsible for a total of four jobs, including spinoffs, he

said.

"The cost benefit to the economy (of helping automakers) is

better than any individual buyout offered on Wall Street,"

McAlinden said.

No other industry in America has as broad and significant an

impact -- even with the restructuring by Detroit's Big Three

automakers in recent years that has closed factories and cost tens

of thousands of jobs, McAlinden said.

That's why Michigan politicians, union leaders, auto executives

and governors from five other states are lobbying for federal aid

for the industry, saying the help is necessary to prevent huge job

losses from a bankruptcy or collapse of one or more of Detroit's

automakers.

Important despite problems

They're lobbying to get a piece of the U.S. Treasury

Department's $700 billion fund to help salvage the economy, or

other aid, as well as accelerate and possibly expand the $25

billion loan program approved to help automakers modernize their

factories to build more fuel-efficient models.

Declining auto sales have contributed to the nation's economic

downturn, but that hasn't diminished the industry's importance,

said Charles Chesbrough, senior economist for CSM Worldwide in

Northville, an automotive market research firm.

"We won't see a turnaround in the economy as a whole," he

said, "until we see improvement in the auto industry."

The importance of the auto sector will be underscored this week

when CAR plans to release a new analysis of the impact on the

economy if operations cease at any of the Big Three. McAlinden said

the resulting drop in tax income and other losses over three years

would far exceed the amount being sought in government aid. Jobs

are tied to everything from buying a car to washing it and refining

the gas that fuels it, and more than 14 million U.S. workers --

about 1 in 10 -- can draw a line from their job back to an auto

factory or office worker, according to C A R .

Minimum of 5 million jobs

In a letter to Treasury Secretary Henry Paulson and Federal

Reserve Chairman Ben Bernanke, Gov. Jennifer Granholm and five

other governors said automakers in the U.S. directly employ about

355,000 workers. The nation has 783,100 people who make parts for

automakers, either for installation at the factory or for sale in

the aftermarket, which includes accessories and repair parts, said

Debbie Maranger Menk, project manager for CAR. They work in all 50

states, including nine in Alaska and 145,000 in Michigan, she said.

Each of those supplier jobs has its own substantial trickle-down

effect. Another 1.97 million workers produce the steel, rubber and

other materials needed to make the parts, or provide engineering,

distribution and other support services -- bringing the total to

2.76 million employees with jobs tied to suppliers. The spinoff

effect then spills into stores and restaurants relying on the

income of this pool of workers.

"There are 1.7 million people who owe their jobs to the fact

the 2.7 million have jobs," Menk said, equaling 4.4 million just

on the supplier side. Factoring in some overlap in the retail

spinoff from each supplier and automaker job, she estimates total

employment in the auto industry at a minimum of 5 million jobs.

She describes CAR's figures, which are based on a study released

earlier this year that used 2006 data, the most recent available,

as conservative. They are significantly lower than figures used by

East Lansing-based Anderson Economic Group. Senior consultant Ilhan

Geckil said Anderson estimated the number of jobs provided by

automakers, suppliers, dealers and aftermarket companies, and the

resulting spinoff jobs amounted to 8.7 million as of 2006.

Big 3's clout slipping away

Admittedly, the auto sector has lost some clout. Sales are down

13 percent so far this year, following year-end declines of 3.6

percent in 2006 and 2.9 percent in 2007.

After years of contributing about 5 percent of the country's

gross domestic product, or GDP, the figure dropped to 2.9 percent

at the end of 2007 and is trending around 2.5 percent now of the

$14.5 trillion total, said Dana Johnson, chief economist for

Comerica Bank in Dallas. Johnson paints a dramatically different

picture of the value of the auto industry nationwide, saying the

sector accounts for less than 1 percent of jobs and that the adage

of 'what's good for GM is good for the country,' is no longer the

case. It is good for Michigan and select states, he said, but not

the U.S. as a whole.

Autos are a key sector within manufacturing, but Johnson said

manufacturing accounts for only about 10 percent of American jobs

compared with 30 percent decades ago.

"I don't believe the auto sector deserves special

consideration," Johnson said . Bailing out financial institutions

was necessary to prevent "terrible contagion effects that could

collapse the economy," Johnson said. "That should be the

standard. To argue national prosperity depends on them (automakers)

operating, to me, is much more of a stretch."

'Black eye on the economy'

It's not to those who have seen Detroit's Big Three eliminate

more than 100,000 jobs the past three years.

Allowing an automaker to crash would wipe out portions of the

supply chain, dragging down healthy foreign automakers, as well,

that would have to scramble to find other suppliers to provide

their parts. Automakers also buy $15 billion a year in advertising

, not counting the huge amount dealers spend.

Automakers spend more on research and development than any other

industry except the government, about $18.5 billion a year,

McAlinden said, with 85 percent of that done in Michigan.

Both presidential candidates have energy policies and tax

incentives for fuel-saving research that cannot be achieved without

a healthy and robust auto industry, CSM's Chesbrough said. "The

auto sector is key to where the country needs to go in the future

to reduce oil dependence," he said.

If GM or Chrysler were to go under, "it would be one more black

eye on the economy" for the nation.

Detroit News Staff Writer Robert Snell contributed to this

report. Reach Alisa Priddle at (313) 222 - 2504 or

apriddledetnews.com.

The government of Zimbabwe, led by

President Robert Mugabe, spent $7.3 million donated by an

international organization to fight killer diseases on other things

and has failed to honor requests to return the money, according to

the organization's inspector general.

The actions by Zimbabwe have deprived the organization, the

Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, of resources

it needs and damaged efforts to expand lifesaving treatment, said

the inspector general, John Parsons. Zimbabwe's actions also

jeopardize a more ambitious $188 million Global Fund grant to

Zimbabwe, due for consideration by the fund's board on Friday,

Parsons said.

The Global Fund has continued to demand that Zimbabwe return the

money, and Global Fund officials say Zimbabwean financial officials

have promised to do so by Thursday. But Parsons said Zimbabwean

officials also said they had not repaid the money because they did

not have enough foreign currency.

The breakdown of trust between the Global Fund and the

government of Zimbabwe comes at a moment of widening humanitarian

crisis and casts further doubt on the willingness of Western donors

to invest heavily in rebuilding the economically broken nation as

long as Mugabe is in charge, even if a deadlock over a

power-sharing government is resolved. Parsons said in an interview

on Sunday that last year the Global Fund deposited $12.3 million in

foreign currency into Zimbabwe's Reserve Bank. He declined to

speculate on how the $7.3 million it was seeking to be returned had

been spent, except to say it was not on the intended purpose. Civic

groups and opposition officials maintain that the Reserve Bank

helps finance Mugabe's patronage machine.

Parsons did offer an example of the human consequences of the

Reserve Bank's failure to hand over the money for disease fighting.

The Global Fund has brought in large quantities of medicines that

can cure malaria, but has been able to finance the training of only

495 people to distribute them safely instead of the planned 27,000.

There were 2.7 million cases of malaria among Zimbabwe's 12 million

people in the World Health Organization's most recent estimates.

"The drugs expire by the middle of next year, and it would be

criminal if we can't use them because of these problems," Parsons

said. "They've got quite a short shelf life."

Zimbabwe's information minister, Sikhanyiso Ndlovu, said Sunday

in an interview that he was not aware of the particulars of the

financial disagreement with the Global Fund, but he defended what

he described as the Reserve Bank's good intentions and accused the

Global Fund of politicizing aid.

"They always want to put certain standards and concoct certain

things to make us look bad and horrendous in international eyes,"

he said.

Gideon Gono, governor of the Reserve Bank, the custodian of the

Global Fund's money, has been spending large sums this year on a

range of things, according to reports in Zimbabwe's state-owned

media.

Gono gave the country's judges new vehicles, satellite dishes

and televisions and allocated 79 vehicles for the Information

Ministry. He announced the provision of 3,000 tractors, 105 combine

harvesters and 100,000 plows for the country's farm mechanization

program. Ndlovu, the information minister, said the Reserve Bank

had been getting foreign currency for imports of food and medicine.

Ndlovu said the Global Fund had sided with Western nations that

had restricted aid to Zimbabwe and imposed sanctions on it --

sanctions that Mugabe and his party blame for the country's

economic ruin.

"The money from the Global Fund is nowhere near what the

Reserve Bank has spent on health care for the country," the

information minister said.

Civic groups and opposition officials contend that Gono and the

Reserve Bank have helped finance the governing party's patronage

operation, essential to Mugabe's hold on power for the past 28

years. Eddie Cross, a senior official in the opposition Movement

for Democratic Change, accused the Reserve Bank of looting the

Global Fund's donation.

International aid groups and U.N. agencies say the country's

annual inflation rate of more than 230 million percent and rules

imposed by the Reserve Bank have severely complicated the logistics

of helping the most impoverished people.

The Reserve Bank suspended electronic banking a month ago,

making it impossible for international organizations to pay for

goods and services with bank transfers. The Reserve Bank has also

severely limited cash withdrawals from commercial banks. And the

inflation rate has rendered check payments nearly worthless by the

time they clear days later.

More than 20 aid groups, donor countries and U.N. agencies wrote

Gono last week asking that electronic banking be restored for

humanitarian aid purposes and that they be allowed to pay service

providers in foreign currency. If agencies are increasingly unable

to pay for their field operations, they wrote, that inability will

"greatly increase the already substantial suffering of those

Zimbabweans who are most in need of humanitarian response."

A third of Zimbabwe's population of 12 million is now hungry and

in need of food aid, the United Nations estimates. A million

children have lost one or both parents. About 140,000 people died

of AIDS there last year.

Mugabe's government banned the work of international aid groups

for almost three months during the election season earlier this

year, accusing them of backing the political opposition. The ban

was lifted on Aug. 29, two months after Mugabe was declared the

victor in a discredited presidential runoff election. His main

rival, the opposition leader Morgan Tsvangirai, dropped out of the

race, citing state-sponsored violence against his supporters.

It has taken time for the aid groups to resume their work. One

major humanitarian group, which declined to be identified by name

for fear of retaliation against its staff by government officials,

said it would be able to get food only to half as many people as

originally planned this month because of the difficulties of paying

for its logistical operations.

The Zimbabwe office of the U.N. Children's Fund, which

coordinates one of the world's largest programs for orphans,

decided Friday that it could no longer pay the local groups it

supported there by check, seriously hampering its ability to help

the most vulnerable children and their mothers, said Roeland

Monasch, UNICEF'S acting representative in Zimbabwe.

Monasch said the United Nations' daily posting of the exchange

rate for the country showed that the number of Zimbabwe dollars

required to buy a single American dollar rose from 3 million on

Oct. 23 to 1 billion the next day, and then to 40 billion on

Wednesday and 1.1 trillion on Saturday. For UNICEF to continue

operating, he said, it must start using American dollars.

Parsons, the Global Fund inspector general, who presented the

preliminary findings of a Global Fund audit on Tuesday in Harare,

Zimbabwe's capital, to donor nations and U.N. agencies, said in the

interview that he had met with Reserve Bank officials to tell them,

"We need our money back."

But Reserve Bank officials have told the Global Fund they do not

have the foreign currency required, Parsons said, so, "One has to

assume they spent it on other things."

In Parson's presentation to donors, a slide on program

management featured a Cameroon saying: "Trust in Allah but tie

your donkey." The Global Fund's management, known as the

secretariat, has not released any new money to Zimbabwe since last

December and will not provide disburse more until the problems in

protecting the Global Fund's donations are resolved, he said.

"We cannot safely leave foreign exchange in Zimbabwe," Parsons

said. "The secretariat has to find some other means to safeguard

our funds -- to keep it offshore and drip-feed it into Zimbabwe. It

can't be under the Reserve Bank or anyone influenced by the Reserve

Bank."

Decision 2008

McCain, Obama plan final state blitz

McCain advisers say race tightening, while Obama camp pushes

supporters to the polls, plans state rallies.

By Gordon Trowbridge

Detroit News Washington Bureau

John McCain and Barack Obama laid out a final day of campaigning

today across a map dominated by states once considered safely

Republican, as nearly two years of presidential politicking come to

a climax.

On Sunday, McCain's campaign maintained that the race is

narrowing, citing its own internal polls and a handful of public

surveys as evidence.

Obama signaled to his supporters that the only way he can lose

is if they fail to come out on Tuesday.

Despite Obama's dominant lead in Michigan polls last week, both

sides manned telephone banks and canvassed door to door Sunday, and

Obama's campaign scheduled get-out-the-vote rallies across the

state today -- including a 11:30 p.m. "midnight madness" rally at

the University of Michigan.

"Go vote now!" Obama told supporters in Columbus, Ohio, one of

several states where his campaign believes early voting is in his

favor.

McCain campaign manager Rick Davis took to the Sunday airwaves,

telling "Fox News Sunday" and ABC's "This Week" that he sees

McCain's deficit narrowing in battleground states such as Iowa and

Pennsylvania. McCain aide Charlie Black told reporters on McCain's

campaign plane that McCain is "probably going to win" those

states.

"That's not what we see at all," said Obama campaign manager

David Plouffe, also appearing on Fox. And the public polling

information was, at best, mixed for McCain. GOP supporters said a

series of Mason-Dixon polls in key battlegrounds were further

evidence the race is tightening.

But the overall picture painted by the surveys Sunday was one of

a solid Obama lead nationwide, and small but significant edges in a

number of states -- many of them held by Republicans in previous

elections -- that could deliver him the White House.

Obama appears poised for a victory in Michigan -- once a major

battleground state. Two more public polls released over the weekend

showed Obama holding a double-digit lead here.

Despite those numbers, and the McCain campaign's decision to

pull out of Michigan last month, partisans on both sides were

pushing Sunday to get their voters to the polls.

"The calls have been very positive," said Lucille Fritz, a

66-year-old retiree, between rounds of calls to GOP supporters from

the party's campaign office in Livonia. "A lot of people want to

talk more about McCain. I wish we had more time."

Meanwhile, a nonstop stream of volunteers passed through the

Obama state headquarters in Detroit.

"We are seeing a surge in volunteerism," said Nina Bentley, an

Obama volunteer since May, who left the headquarters at 1:30 a.m.

Sunday, slept for six hours and came back. "As we get closer to

the wire, more people feel like they want to do something. They

want to get involved. We've had people come in for the first time

in the last two days."

Obama spokesman Brad Carroll said the campaign was on its way to

meeting a goal of contacting 1.5 million Michigan voters in the

final four days of the campaign. Tonight's "midnight madness"

rally in Ann Arbor will feature Gov. Jennifer Granholm and U.S.

Sen. Carl Levin, who is seeking his sixth term Tuesday.

Still, Michigan was out of the limelight in an election centered

on a handful of remaining battlegrounds, most of which Republicans

are defending.

The itineraries for both campaigns reflected the altered map.

McCain was to hold rallies today in Florida, Virginia and Indiana

-- all carried by President Bush in 2004. His running mate, Alaska

Gov. Sarah Palin, was to visit Ohio, Missouri, Iowa, Colorado and

Nevada -- again, all states that Republicans won four years ago.

Obama's schedule was to take him today to three once-Republican

S outhern states: Florida, North Carolina and Virginia.

His running mate, Sen. Joe Biden, planned stops in Missouri and

Ohio before an evening rally in Philadelphia -- making Pennsylvania

the only Democratic state from 2004 to see a member of the

presidential tickets on the last full day of stumping.

It's in Pennsylvania that McCain hopes for an upset in a

traditionally Democratic state that would propel him to victory. He

made two campaign stops there Sunday, and the state's Republican

Party began airing a television ad featuring the Rev. Jeremiah

Wright, Obama's controversial former pastor.

McCain has refrained from raising Wright's incendiary comments

during the campaign, but many Republicans have considered it a

potential weapon for raising doubts about Obama.

Obama had his own weapon on Sunday: Vice President Dick Cheney.

Democrats seized on Cheney's vocal support for McCain, voiced over

the weekend, releasing a TV ad highlighting the endorsement.

Staff writers Marisa Schultz and Jennifer Chambers contributed

to this report. You can reach Gordon Trowbridge at (202) 662-8738

or gtrowbridgedetnews.com.

Explore an interactive feature on the presidential candidates and

the issues. Go to detnews.com/elections

Military and civilian deaths in Iraq for October hit

the lowest monthly levels since May 2004, the U.S. military said

Sunday.

The announcement was further evidence of a decline in violence

since a significant troop increase last year, but the tragedy of

one family in Kirkuk is a reminder of just how dangerous life in

Iraq continues to be.

In the past year, Khudaer Muhammad Abdullah, 49, endured the

loss of his two older sons. On Sunday he lost his last son, and his

4-year-old daughter is now hospitalized with serious wounds. His

last son, Muhammad Khudaer Muhammad, 7, was killed when part of a

rocket-propelled grenade exploded on a vacant lot where he was

playing soccer with three other children, according to police

reports.

Muhammad was killed instantly in the blast. His friend, Ahmed

Hamid Jelu, 9, lost both his legs and died at a hospital shortly

afterward. Two other children -- Hassan Dhaya, 7, and Muhammad's

sister, Ahlan Khudaer Muhammad -- were seriously wounded.

Abdullah, a shepherd, said that he had just returned from

leading his sheep to pasture when Muhammad asked for permission to

play soccer with some friends in the lot across the road from the

family's home.

About 15 minutes later, around 3 p.m., Abdullah heard an

explosion.

"Their bodies were completely torn apart by the blast,"

Abdullah said. His son, he surmised, must have been sitting on the

ground waiting for the ball to be passed to him, because he found

Muhammad seated. An official at Kirkuk's morgue later said that

Muhammad's head had been blown off.

That was just the latest tragedy to befall Abdullah's family. He

already had lost his two older sons as a result of the war, he

said.

First, Muazzaz, 19, was kidnapped and killed. Then, last month,

Saad, 21, was killed in a suicide bombing near the Kirkuk police

academy, where he was a student.

"Today, I lost the last son," Abdullah said. "I have no one

left except my daughter," he added. Ahlan suffered abdominal

injuries, but she is expected to survive.

Abdullah said that he had moved to Kirkuk in 1987 to flee the

violence that the war between Iran and Iraq brought to his home

city of Basra.

"Where should we go now?" Abdullah asked. "Death faces us

everywhere."

That may be a predicament familiar to families across Iraq, but

the U.S. military was still eager to publicize the decline in

deaths.

"Thanks to the strategic partnership we have with the coalition

forces, the Iraqi security forces and the people of Iraq, the

overall situation here with regard to security continues to

improve," Brig. Gen. David G. Perkins, a spokesman for the

U.S.-led forces in Iraq, said at a news conference.

Despite those improvements, violence continued to rage in the

northern city of Mosul, where at least 15 Iraqis were killed and 32

were wounded last week.

On Sunday, two Iraqi soldiers were killed when a roadside bomb

exploded in the path of their convoy in the eastern neighborhood of

Karama in Mosul, said a security official who spoke on the

condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to speak to

the news media.

In the Qandeel Mountains in northern Iraq, officials of the

Kurdistan Workers' Party said that 20 of their fighters had been

killed in attacks by Turkish warplanes, but they said that the

morale of their fighting force remained strong.

'Virgin' territory

Shooting for Rob Schneider's new movie lights up Greektown

By Adam Graham

The Detroit News

Rob Schneider is in a grungy back alley in Greektown dressed

like a pimped-out Jonas Brother, with loud red pants, a suit coat

rolled up to his elbows and a ridiculous faux-hawk atop his head.

He's repeatedly beating a subordinate over the head with a stack of

T-shirts outside an RV emblazoned with the words "Chicks Go

Crazy."

Has Mr. Schneider fallen on hard times? Not quite. Turns out

he's filming a scene for his latest movie, a bawdy romp tentatively

titled "American Virgin" that is the latest film production to

take advantage of Michigan's generous tax initiative.

In the film -- described by director Clare Kilner as "a female

'Superbad"' -- Schneider plays Curtzman, the entrepreneur behind a

"Girls Gone Wild"-type franchise called "Chicks Go Crazy."

Jenna Dewan ("Step Up") plays Priscilla, the virgin in the film's

title, who after a night of drunken debauchery finds herself on one

of Curtzman's tapes and then teams with Naz, her wild-child

roommate played by Brianne Davis, to track down the tape.

Embracing Detroit

The $4-million movie, which will be filmed entirely in Metro

Detroit and has a crew that's 90-percent local, began shooting in

Greektown last week. Filming continues for the next few weeks,

though Schneider is scheduled to wrap his scenes on Tuesday.

The film's producers began scouting locations here in April and

returned in June, ultimately choosing Detroit over a short list of

four other cities. The original plan was to have Greektown stand in

for New Orleans, though the script was eventually rejiggered to

take place in Detroit. That's why the film, originally titled

"Virgin on Bourbon Street," is currently untitled, and using the

working title "American Virgin."

"I hate shooting one location for another. So I thought, 'This

is Detroit, let's embrace it,"' says Kilner ("How to Deal,"

"The Wedding Date"), during a lunch break last week at Old

Shillelagh. "And it's a fascinating place. There's lots of local

color and texture. We've had some great locations, and it's serving

us really well."

Several street scenes were filmed last week, including an

Oktoberfest celebration on the main strip in Greektown, on Monroe

Street between Beaubien and St. Antoine. With the mini-flags

hanging overhead, the bright neon signs and the abundance of

character on the neighborhood's main drag, executive producer (and

Rob's brother) John Schneider says, "This is as good as you get on

the Warner Brothers lot. You wouldn't even know we're not on a

soundstage -- other than the weather." Despite the chilly

temperatures, hordes of extras came out and worked, many for free.

Some received prizes for their time, including electronics donated

locally by ABC Warehouse, which line producer Marvin Towns Jr. says

will get product placement in the finished film.

In addition to the extras, curious onlookers strolled by the set

. Schneider is familiar to audiences from his work on "Saturday

Night Live" where he played Rich, the "making copies" guy, on

films such as "Deuce Bigalow: Male Gigolo," "The Animal" and in

most Adam Sandler comedies. (He usually shows up to perform some

variation on the line, "You can do eet!"). Taking a break from

filming on Thursday, he was serenaded with a "you can do eet!"

from a local passerby, and he groused half-kiddingly, "I've never

heard that."

Schneider, who joked he's approachable because he's the same

size on TV as he is in person, praised the work of the local

extras. "(In L.A.) they could yawn if they see Tom Cruise walking

down the street, but here, people are really excited. They couldn't

have been nicer."

Sex and sexuality

The film deals frankly with sex and sexuality; but, the

filmmakers say, tries not to take a hard-line stance on the "Girls

Gone Wild"-ization of American culture. Dewan's Priscilla is a

prudish virgin who wears a purity ring, and Davis' Naz opens the

film engaged in a foursome; yet the filmmakers say the movie tries

not to judge either of them.

"I'd hate for a film to be judgmental or come across with a

moral position, but I guess my point of view is anything extreme is

kind of repressing in some way," says England-born director

Kilner. "Women are in charge of their sexuality and celebrating

it, but there's a fine line between celebrating it and making your

own choices and being exploited, and this is what this film

explores."

Davis, who plays the party gal, says the film's message is

simple: "Be who you are. Not what people want you to be, not a

trend or a part of a movement. Just who you are."

All of which seems like a surprising amount of depth for a film

where the prop department worked up a license plate that reads "C

BOOBZ."

Schneider -- whose character is loosely modeled after "Girls

Gone Wild's" party-boy troublemaker and founder Joe Francis, and

is revealed to be a father with a daughter the same age as the

girls who populate his videos -- says the film is about balance.

v "There's these women who take the vow of chastity, and then

there's the other extreme that's not appreciating the specialness

of that part of the human behavior that is beautiful and special. I

hope we don't show one side is crazier than the other side," he

says.

"I hope people see the movie, and I hope it's entertaining, but

if they come away with something, I hope they see there should be a

balance, and (sexuality) shouldn't be such a big deal."

You can reach Adam Graham at (313) 222-2284 or

agrahamdetnews.com.

Extras needed

Want to be an extra in Rob Schneider's movie? Here's where and

when the film is shooting:

Tuesday: Elysium Night Club (625 Shelby St., Detroit). Needed:

500 girls, 100 guys, ages 18-25. Dress as if attending a nightclub.

5 p.m.-5 a.m.

Thursday: Old Shillelagh (349 Monroe St., Detroit) and Delux

(350 Monroe St., Detroit). Needed: 100 extras. Dress as if

attending an outdoor party. 5 p.m.- 5 a.m.

Nov. 18: Bouzouki Bar (432 E. Lafayette Blvd., Detroit). Needed:

50 girls for Chippendales-type strip club scene. Dress casually, as

if going to school. 8 a.m.-8 p.m.

Nov. 19: Party/ parade (Monroe Street, Greektown). Needed: 500

extras, 18 and older. Dress as if attending an outdoor party in

clothes without noticeable logos. 8 a.m.-8 p.m.

The Treasury Department has turned down a request by

General Motors for up to $10 billion to help finance the

automaker's possible merger with Chrysler, according to people

close to the discussions.

Instead of providing new assistance, the Treasury Department

told GM on Friday, the Bush administration will now shift its focus

to speeding up the $25 billion loan program for fuel-efficient

vehicles approved by Congress in September and administered by the

Energy Department.

Treasury officials were said to be reluctant to broaden the $700

billion financial rescue program to include industrial companies or

to play a part in a GM-Chrysler merger that could cost tens of

thousands of jobs.

But it remained unclear whether the officials were also seeking

to avoid making any decision that would conflict with the goals of

a new presidential administration. The Democratic candidate, Sen.

Barack Obama, has said in recent days that he supports increasing

aid to the troubled auto companies, while Sen. John McCain has not

said whether he would support aid beyond the $25 billion.

While GM and Chrysler continue to talk, no deal is expected

until the government clarifies its role, if any. Potential

investors in the deal have been hesitant to back the merger without

federal assistance.

GM's chairman, Rick Wagoner, had lobbied Treasury Secretary

Henry M. Paulson Jr. to provide emergency aid to the auto companies

under the bailout program to stabilize the financial markets.

The Bush administration is still considering a range of options

to aid the Detroit automakers, which are losing billions of dollars

and rapidly depleting their cash reserves, said auto industry and

administration officials, who did not want to be identified because

of the sensitive nature of the discussions.

The first step is to get the Energy Department to expedite the

release of the $25 billion in low-interest loans for GM, Chrysler

and the Ford Motor Co.

With auto sales deteriorating to their lowest level in 15 years,

Detroit's traditional Big Three are struggling to stay solvent and

avoid bankruptcy.

Support for aiding the industry is growing among political

leaders in states with heavy automotive employment. Last week, the

governors of Michigan, Ohio, New York, Kentucky, Delaware and South

Dakota wrote a letter to Paulson and the Federal Reserve chairman,

Ben S. Bernanke, urging "immediate action" to assist the

industry.

The depth of the Big Three's problems will become even more

evident this week with the release of October sales figures and

third-quarter earnings announcements by GM and Ford.

Her crowds are smaller now, and most of the

reporters are gone. The campaign posters say his name, not hers.

And instead of championing her ideas for health insurance or tax

relief, Sen. Hillary Rodham Clinton is giving out 1-800 numbers and

Internet addresses for Sen. Barack Obama's campaign.

Watching Clinton campaign for her old rival, masking what

friends say is lingering disappointment, it is easy to recall

happier days. While she often said, during her 17-month race, that

it took "a Clinton to clean up after a Bush," she has now tweaked

that line a bit.

"It took a Democratic president to clean up after the first

President Bush," she said to cheers at a rally here on Saturday in

the political battleground of central Florida. "It will take a

Democratic president to clean up after the next President Bush!"

Moments later, she made another comment that echoed a Clinton

campaign advertisement that ran on the eve of the Pennsylvania

primary in which Clinton warned voters not to "take a leap of

faith" with Obama to protect the country.

But for the crowd in Winter Park, Clinton had this to say: "I'm

not asking anyone to take a leap of faith, I'm just saying, look at

the evidence," arguing that Obama's economic proposals were far

better than McCain's.

The bitterness of that long primary battle, however, is the last

thing that Obama supporters brought up about Clinton in Florida

last weekend. Of 20 interviewed, all effusively praised her. All 20

said that if Obama won, they hoped that she would be his secretary

of state or that she would shepherd his health care or energy bills

through the Senate. All 20 said they hoped she would run for

president again.

"I would have supported her this year if not for her vote for

the Iraq war and the fact that she never said it was a mistake,"

said Jocelyn Bartkevicius, a Democrat and writer and editor who

attended the rally here. "But she has been so strong for Obama

this fall, such a good sport. I wouldn't hold a long-term grudge.

I'd be with her next time."

For the friends and allies already thinking about Clinton's

political future, the possibility of a victory by Sen. John McCain

on Tuesday would upend an array of assumptions, not least of which

that Clinton -- if she were to run again -- would not do so until

2016, when she would be turning 69. At the same time, under a

McCain presidency, Clinton could be well positioned, given her

friendship with him and good standing among Washington Republicans,

to help him with a Democratic-led Congress on alternative energy,

which they have both highlighted on the campaign trail.

While Clinton's high profile in Democratic politics has been

fortified by her work for Obama, her friends say it is too soon to

say what the future holds for her. For one thing, they say, she is

not over her primary loss: some days it is hard for her, even a

little heart-breaking, to campaign for Obama, given how much she

wanted to be president.

Others say that she is being a good soldier because she wants to

be a power player in Washington if Obama wins but that she is not

sure what her role might be. "She is a human being," said Jill

Iscol, a good friend and former supporter of Clinton. "She's a

real person, and so she has her feelings, but what matters to her

most right now is making sure Obama wins."

Clinton told Fox News last month that there was "probably

zero" chance of her becoming Senate majority leader. Several

Senate Democratic aides concur, noting that many of her colleagues

supported Obama for president. Asked about the chances that she

would run again for president, she said, "Probably close to

zero." (The question was not predicated on whether Obama would win

or lose on Tuesday.) Supreme Court nominee? "Zero," she said. "I

have no interest in doing that."

While Clinton still has a campaign debt of several million

dollars, she has been steadily raising money for her political

action committee, which advisers say could become a means to

champion women's issues.

Clinton won about 17 million votes in her presidential primary

campaign, and by all accounts she will emerge on Election Day as a

respected force in the eyes of not only her allies but also of

people around Obama, for whom she has raised several million

dollars and done more than 75 rallies, fundraisers, conference

calls and other tasks.

"It's one of those times where she has won by losing, in a very

real sense," said Sen. Charles E. Schumer, her Democratic

colleague from New York. "Whether people were with her, like I

was, or not with her, I think everyone's respect for her in the

Senate has gone up in the way she has handled herself since the end

of the race."

Over the long term, some political allies believe that Clinton

would be a strong choice to lead the Democratic Senatorial Campaign

Committee in 2010, given her fundraising contacts, her eye for

political talent and her proven ability to raise money for the

party. She has raised several million dollars for Obama and helped

several Senate candidates this year.

Schumer also led the senatorial committee in 2006; he said he

would not think until after Tuesday about doing it again. Some

advisers to Clinton said that the idea was intriguing but that they

did not know how she felt about it. She declined to be interviewed

for this article.

In the near term -- the first year of the next presidential

administration -- several associates said she would like to be an

ally of the White House's next occupant, whoever that is.

For a President Obama, her favorite, Clinton advisers say she

might be positioned to be a point person on his proposal for

expanding access to health insurance or for his energy plan, two

issues that she and Obama promoted during the primaries.

Her hand in health care depends largely, her advisers say, on

Sen. Edward M. Kennedy, given his experience with health care

issues and his seniority. Kennedy has been in the Senate for 46

years, Clinton for 8, and she does not hold a committee

chairmanship, where real power resides. Kennedy has been battling

cancer, and many Washington Democrats believe that he will be too

ill to carry a major legislative program. But Clinton, like other

Democrats, would defer to him.

For a President McCain, on the other hand, Clinton might be an

emissary between his White House and a Democratic-led Congress.

"She has done more for Obama than Dean did in 2004 for Kerry,

more than Bradley did for Gore in 2000, more than Kennedy did for

Carter in 1980," said James A. Thurber, the director of the Center

for Congressional and Presidential Studies at American University

in Washington, D.C. "As much as this must hurt her, she has been

the ultimate trooper this fall."

After years of unfettered growth in military

budgets, Defense Department planners, top commanders and weapons

manufacturers now say they are almost certain that the financial

meltdown will have a serious impact on future Pentagon spending.

Across the military services, deep apprehension has led to

closed-door meetings and detailed calculations in anticipation of

potential cuts. Civilian and military budget planners say that they

are already analyzing worst-case contingency spending plans that

would see their overall budgets frozen or slashed.

The obvious targets for savings would be expensive new arms

programs, which have racked up cost overruns of at least $300

billion for the top 75 weapons systems, according to the Government

Accountability Office. Congressional budget experts say likely

targets for reductions are the Army's plans for fielding advanced

combat systems, the Air Force's Joint Strike Fighter, the Navy's

new destroyer and the ground-based missile defense system.

Even before the crisis on Wall Street, senior Pentagon officials

were anticipating little appetite for growth in military spending

after seven years of war. But the question of how to pay for

national security now looms as a significant challenge for the next

president, at a time when the Pentagon's annual base budget for

standard operations has reached more than $500 billion, the highest

level since World War II when adjusted for inflation.

On top of that figure, supplemental spending for the wars in

Iraq and Afghanistan has topped $100 billion each year, frustrating

Republicans as well as Democrats in Congress. In all, the Defense

Department now accounts for half of the government's total

discretionary spending, and Pentagon and military officials fear it

could be the choice for major cuts to pay the rest of the

government's bills.

On the presidential campaign trail, Sens. John McCain and Barack

Obama have pledged to cut fat without carving into the muscle of

national security. Both have said they would protect the overall

level of military spending, and McCain has further pledged to add

more troops to the roster of the armed services beyond the 92,000

now advocated by the Pentagon, an increase endorsed by Obama.

Some critics, citing the increase in military spending since

Sept. 11, 2001, say it would be much easier to cut military

spending than programs like Social Security and Medicare at a time

when most people's retirement savings are dwindling because of the

financial crisis. Rep. Barney Frank, D-Mass., the chairman of the

House Financial Services Committee, has raised the idea of reducing

military spending by 25 percent. At the Pentagon, senior officials

have taken up the mission of urging sustained military spending.

Adm. Mike Mullen, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, has asked

Congress and the nation to pledge at least 4 percent of the gross

domestic product to the military. And Defense Secretary Robert M.

Gates has warned against repeating historic trends, in which the

nation cut money for the armed services after a period of warfare.

"We basically gutted our military after World War I, after

World War II, in certain ways after Korea, certainly after Vietnam

and after the end of the Cold War," Gates said. "Experience is

the ability to recognize a mistake when you make it again."

Gates acknowledges that military spending is almost certain to

level off, and he expressed a goal that the Pentagon budget at

least keep pace with inflation over coming years.

Apprehension over potential budget cuts has trickled down the

Pentagon bureaucracy to those who draft the military's annual

spending proposals.

"If that's what they want, they have to know that we simply

cannot do everything we are doing now, but for less money," said

one Pentagon budget officer who was not authorized to speak for

attribution. "So if there's going to be less, it's up to the

president, Congress and the public to tell us what part of our

national security mission we should stop carrying out."

Much of the Pentagon budget pays for personnel costs, which are

difficult to cut at any time, particularly while troops are risking

their lives in combat.

Obama has said his plan to begin drawing down American forces

from Iraq would ease a wartime taxpayer burden that now totals more

than $10 billion a month. But budget analysts at the Pentagon and

on Capitol Hill say that even troop reductions in Iraq -- whether at

the cautious pace laid out by President Bush and endorsed by McCain

or at the more rapid pace prescribed by Obama -- would present only

small savings in the first years.

Moving tens of thousands of troops and their heavy equipment

home from the Persian Gulf region is a costly undertaking. And

housing at stateside bases is more expensive than in the war zone,

so savings would be seen only in subsequent years.

Calls by both presidential candidates to shift troops from Iraq

to Afghanistan would add costs to the Pentagon budget, according to

military planners and congressional budget experts. It is

significantly more expensive to sustain each soldier in Afghanistan

than in Iraq because of Afghanistan's landlocked location and

primitive road network.

The federal budget is due to Congress in February, but that

document is expected to be little more than an outline, arriving

soon after Inauguration Day. Congressional officials predict the

new president will require several months to put his imprint on a

detailed spending plan.

On the campaign trail, Obama has said he would initially

maintain overall military spending at current levels.

"Obama has made it very clear that he doesn't see how the

defense budget can be cut now given the commitments we have," said

F. Whitten Peters, a former Air Force secretary now advising Obama

on national security policies. "His sense is that there is not

money to be cut from the defense budget in the near term."

But in looking to future Pentagon budgets, it is clear that

"all the weapons programs cannot fit," he added.

"So," he continued, "you're going to have to make some hard

decisions."

McCain, a former Navy combat pilot who was taken prisoner during

the war in Vietnam, is known for taking on what he has seen as

wasteful Pentagon spending.

According to one of his advisers on military policy, McCain

"feels very strongly that the whole procurement process is totally

dysfunctional."

"He believes that putting order, discipline and accountability

back into the process will stop the gold-plating and bring costs

down," said the adviser, who asked not to be named in order to

discuss the candidate's views frankly.

These budget pressures also seem quite likely to add to the

tensions between Congress and the Pentagon over the best balance

between supporting the troops fighting insurgencies and

developingweapons that might be needed in larger wars.

"I think we need a complete review of this whole thing," said

Rep. Neil Abercrombie, D-Hawaii, the chairman of a House Armed

Services subcommittee. "You cannot make a case for undermining the

readiness of the Army and the Marines in the circumstances that we

face today with a commitment of so much money to weapons systems

that are at best abstract and theoretical."

Executives at the leading defense contractors say they realize

that the Pentagon's spending is likely to be more restrained.

Boeing's chief executive, W. James McNerney Jr., recently wrote in

a note to his employees: "No one really yet knows when or to what

extent defense spending could be affected. But it's unrealistic to

think there won't be some measure of impact."

Ronald D. Sugar, the chief executive of Northrop Grumman, told

stock analysts last month that financing for the company's projects

seemed locked in for the coming year. But, Sugar added, "Clearly

the pressures are going to increase in the out years." A number of

scholars who have examined the subject, including David C.

Hendrickson, a political scientist at Colorado College, predict

that "defense will not prove to be 'recession-proof."'

"Serious savings could be had by reducing force structure and

limiting modernization," said Hendrickson, who posted a

"blogbook" on the financial crisis at

pictorial-guide-to-crisis.blogspot.com. "Though American power has

weakened on every count, there is no reconsideration of objectives.

Defining a coherent philosophy in foreign affairs and defense

strategy that is respectful of limits is vital."

Other analysts, like Loren B. Thompson of the Lexington

Institute, a policy research center, say that weapons spending will

be fiercely defended by many in Congress and their allies in the

weapons industry as a way to stimulate the economy. Buying new

armaments and repairing worn-out weapons, Thompson said, protects

jobs and corporate profits, and therefore benefits the economy

overall.

Dukakis delivers the laughs in 'Worst'

By Mekeisha Madden Toby

Detroit News Television Writer

Mekeisha Madden Toby

Television

LOS ANGELES -- On any other show, the mystery substance inside a

diaper wouldn't be enough to cut it as a punch line.

But CBS' slap-stick sitcom "Worst Week" is not like other

shows and that's why the freshman series was able to get

Oscar-winning actress Olympia Dukakis to not only guest star, but

to deliver the winning line about a, um, fully loaded baby's

diaper.

"With comedy, it's all about timing," says Dukakis between

scenes. "Worst Week" films on the Paramount lot in Hollywood, and

Dukakis looks right at home sitting in a director's chair and

thumbing through the script one autumn afternoon. "We can't say

'crap' so I tried 'poop' but I don't think we can say that either.

So they took away the line and we figured out another way."

Find out what magical words Dukakis ends up using when the

episode airs tonight. In it, Dukakis plays June, Melanie's (Erinn

Hayes) grandmother.

As per usual, Sam (Kyle Bornheimer) makes several bad first

impressions when meeting June. This includes laughably but

accidentally feeding her prized family ring, which is intended for

Sam and Mel's upcoming wedding, to a baby. And that's where the

diaper comes in.

Dukakis, 77, says she decided to do the show after falling in

love with the pilot episode.

"I saw it on an airplane, interestingly enough, without

sound," she says. "I just watched all the physical comedy and saw

how wonderfully expressive everybody was. Physical comedy is

mindless and you just laugh because it's funny."

After swearing off TV comedies, "Worst Week" changed her mind

with stellar writing, she says.

"Three years ago, I was in a comedy called 'Center of the

Universe' (CBS) with John Goodman, Jean Smart and Ed Asner and the

writing, every week, was so painful," she says. "I guess the

trick is a good script."

You can reach Mekeisha Madden Toby at (313) 222-2501 or mmad

dendetnews.com.

On TV

'Worst Week'

9:30 p.m. EST Mondays, CBS

In 1967, after several years of research, a young market

forecaster named Yale Hirsch unveiled a grand theory of the

relationship between presidential elections and the stock market.

Tracking data back to 1833, Hirsch found that on average, stocks

performed better in the final two years of a presidential term, a

trend he attributed to maneuvering by the party in power to better

its chances of re-election.

"As presidents and their parties get anxious about holding on

to power, they begin to prime the pump in the third year, fostering

bull markets, prosperity and peace," reads a recent edition of the

"Stock Trader's Almanac," the venerable perennial founded by

Hirsch that collects financial tidbits, gentle market humor and

reams of historical data.

But as with its older cousin in the almanac business, Poor

Richard's, the pattern described in the book has not always panned

out. With the Dow Jones industrial average down 30 percent this

year, it would seem 2008 is going to be such a year.

Many analysts, looking for a jump on Tuesday's results, have

pointed out that declines in the stock market right before a

presidential election generally point to an advantage for the

challenging party.

Investors looking to make a quick buck this week can dig up

research showing that stocks tend to do better the day after a

Republican presidential victory than a Democratic one. And bullish

types expecting a Barack Obama victory have noted that over time,

stocks perform better under Democratic administrations.

Or, perhaps, there is no connection at all.

"To me, things like the weather, the Super Bowl and

presidential elections are basically coincidental," said Laszlo

Birinyi Jr., an investment adviser and head of Birinyi Associates

in Westport, Conn.

With stocks facing their worst declines in decades, this year

may be particularly difficult to predict. Some investors say the

problems in the economy are so far-reaching that the winner of the

election could, in the short-term at least, hardly matter at all.

Some investors expect the market to stay focused on the problems

in the economy, including the credit freeze and rising corporate

layoffs.

When Congo shakes, Africa trembles.

This vast linchpin of a country at the green heart of the

continent, covering 905,000 square miles and bordering nine

nations, never goes down alone.

When the Congolese state began to collapse in 1996, it set off a

regional war. When it imploded again in 1998, it dragged in armies

from a half-dozen other African countries. The two wars and the

mayhem since have killed possibly 5 million people, a death toll

that human rights groups say is the worst related to any conflict

since World War II.

The worry now is that Congo is on the brink again, with

neighbors poised to jump in, which is why the relatively

small-scale bush fighting last week attracted some of the most

intense diplomatic activity Congo has seen in years. The French

foreign minister, the British foreign minister, top U.N. diplomats

and the State Department's highest official for Africa all jetted

in to the decrepit but important lakeside city of Goma.

The hills around Goma are now firmly in rebel hands after rebel

fighters routed the Congolese army late last month, and if it had

not been for an 11th-hour cease-fire declared by the rebels, Goma

itself would now be theirs.

"The political damage this has caused is enormous," said Koen

Vlassenroot, a professor at Ghent University in Belgium who

specializes in the eastern Congo.

The rebel victory laid bare the fecklessness of the Congolese

government, two years after the most expensive, foreign-financed

election in African history, and despite the muscle of the largest

U.N. peacekeeping mission, with 17,000 troops in the country.

Perhaps even more alarming was the performance of that mission.

Not only were the peacekeepers unable to stop the rebels' advance --

the rebels have already turned a captured U.N. base into an

impromptu bush gymnasium -- but they were unable to protect

civilians, which is their mandate.

On Wednesday night, as the rebels encircled Goma, rogue

government soldiers plundered, raped and killed in their retreat

from the town. This same predatory behavior happened in the 1990s,

when Congo was in a similar state of simmering dysfunction.

The European Union is mulling over the idea of sending more

troops. But right now, the emphasis seems to be on forging a

durable political settlement with the rebels. But the rebels based

in the thickly forested hills around here seem stronger than ever.

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On Thursday, a family in Goma sat in a small, bare room, staring

at the body of a 17-year-old boy, Merci. He was forced at gunpoint

to load everything from their home into an army truck, family

members and neighbors said. As a parting gesture, before they raced

out of town, the government soldiers shot Merci in the back.

There were no peacekeepers around, even though a large U.N. base

is located a mile or two from Merci's home.

"We were abandoned," said Safi Dayoo, a mother of six, who

decided to leave Goma that night. Hundreds of thousands of people

like her have become refugees, and many desperately need food.

John Prendergast, a founder of the Washington-based Enough

Project, which campaigns against genocide, said: "It is remarkable

that 14 years after the genocide in Rwanda, U.N. peacekeeping

remains as ineffectual at protecting civilians as it was then.

This, despite all the rhetoric about the responsibility to protect

and never again. Empty slogans for the people of Central Africa."

Alan Doss, the head of the U.N. mission in Congo, said it had

been very difficult to defend the perimeter of Goma and at the same

time police the streets with a relatively small force of 900

Goma-based peacekeepers.

"We're certainly stretched," he said. "There's only so much

we can do."

The European Union is mulling over the idea of sending more

troops. But right now, the emphasis seems to be on forging a

durable political settlement with the rebels. The trick is that

eastern Congo has always been a headache to rule. And the rebels

based in the thickly forested hills around here seem stronger than

ever.

They are led by a charismatic troublemaker, Laurent Nkunda, who

commands a well-trained, well-equipped guerrilla army from an

abandoned Belgian farmhouse in the jungle. He is an ethnic Tutsi,

and Congolese officials have painted Nkunda, a renegade general, as

a pawn of Tutsi-led Rwanda next door.

Though it is unclear how actively Rwanda might be supporting

Nkunda, Rwandan meddling here would be far from unprecedented.

Congo has suffered a long history of exploitation, going back to

the Belgian colonial times. Various rebel groups and foreign forces

have annexed large swaths of the country to extract gold, diamonds,

tin and timber.

At times, too, the Congolese government has invited its

neighbors in, trying to find defenders at critical moments.

Just a few days ago, for example, the government urged its old

friend Angola to send troops back into Congo, as Angola did in

1998, to counter Nkunda's rebellion and a perceived Rwandan menace.

Villagers near Goma said last week that they had seen uniformed

Rwandan soldiers fighting alongside Nkunda's men and that the

Rwandans had burned homes and killed children.

"I saw them come over the border with my own eyes," said

Jackson Busisi, a farmer.

Rwanda denies all this.

Congo analysts say that Nkunda may have some legitimate

political goals -- and Congolese ones at that. For starters, he

seems determined to eliminate the Hutu death squads who

participated in the massacre of 800,000 people in Rwanda in 1994

and then fled into Congo, where they continue to brutalize, with

impunity. The Congolese government has promised to disarm the

squads. But the rebels -- and many Western diplomats -- say the

government is actually giving the Hutu death squads guns.

"The Congolese army is working hand in hand with these

killers," said Babu Amani, a spokesman for the rebels.

The rebels want to play a bigger role in governing eastern Congo

and even possibly to carve the territory into ethnic fiefs. Nkunda

has recently been reaching out to Hutus, and it seems that he is

trying to refashion himself into a leader for all Rwandan-speaking

people in the eastern Congo province of North Kivu, where Rwandan

speakers make up about 40 percent of the population and dominate

many of the important businesses.

But Nkunda's ambitions may go beyond even that. Across the

country, Congolese are getting fed up with their president, Joseph

Kabila, who has little to show after winning a historic election in

2006, Congo's first nationwide democratic vote since independence

in 1960. The top opposition leader, Jean-Pierre Bemba, a former

vice president, has been in jail in The Hague in recent months,

facing international war crimes charges in connection with

bloodshed and mass rapes in the Central African Republic five years

ago. This may be an irresistible opportunity for Nkunda's rebel

troops, the National Congress for the Defense of the People, or

CNDP, to forge opportunistic alliances with other dissident groups

and possibly try to push Kabila out.

"CNDP has the brains, the money, the muscle and the

determination to achieve it," said a Western analyst who works on

Congo issues and said he would speak only on condition of anonymity

because of the sensitivity of his job. "The other side has none of

the above."

This may explain why Nkunda paused last week right at the

doorstep of Goma, without walking in. He showed that he was

powerful and that the government was weak. He avoided dealing with

the mess of occupying a major city, especially when the United

Nations had urged him to stay out. In the end, he obtained the

leverage he needed for future negotiations, without sustained

fighting or damage to his reputation.

A meeting has now been called between Rwanda and Congo. Aid

organizations are urging the United States to put more pressure on

Rwanda, its ally, to rein in Nkunda. Diplomats are shuttling

between Congo and Rwanda, trying to get the two sides to focus on

peace treaties they have already signed, so another regional war

does not break out.

"There will be a summit," Vlassenroot said. "And there will

be a nice document coming out of it. But it won't change

anything."

What Congo needs, he said, is a true change of culture that

would end the long tradition of corruption and criminally inept

government and the attendant rebellions.

Given the decades of unending crisis here, no one sees that

happening anytime soon.

During its long history, an eight-bedroom downtown

home has served as a shelter for the homeless and been gutted by

fire, and most recently was seized in a bank foreclosure.

But the 1915 quasi-Craftsman-style home on Cedar Avenue was also

where actress Judy Garland spent her pre-Hollywood childhood, and a

local author is hoping that small piece of Hollywood history can

bring a bit of fame -- and tourist dollars -- to Lancaster.

Garland, then known as Frances Ethel Gumm, moved with her family

to Lancaster in 1927 when she was about 5 and left in 1933. Two

years later, she signed her first contract with MGM and by 1939

achieved worldwide fame in "The Wizard of Oz."

For the past year, local author and journalist Bonnie Domrose

Stone has been talking to community groups to drum up interest in

acquiring the house for a Garland museum -- drawing tourists in with

a yellow brick road leading from Lancaster Boulevard to the home's

front yard.

"How valuable it is to have a house on the original property on

the street where she walked," Stone said.

Stone is still in the early stages of planning and has not

obtained funding or a cost estimate yet.

She noted that the nonprofit Judy Garland Museum in Grand

Rapids, Minn. -- where the actress was born on June 10, 1922 --

attracts 20,000 visitors a year.

Stone said the museum could tie in with the city's signature

event, the Lancaster Poppy Festival, and the fact that many films

have been shot in the Antelope Valley.

"We've got the state's only poppy reserve and festival. Those

two things would tie in beautifully with having Judy Garland's

house as a museum and visitor center," Stone said.

"The potential to bring in tourism is there. It just has to be

tapped."

Garland -- who died of an accidental overdose of barbiturates on

June 22, 1969 -- actually lived in three different homes in

Lancaster, and performed with her two older sisters. Mary Jane and

Dorothy, at a movie theater on Sierra Highway operated by her

father. But Stone believes the house at 44665 Cedar Ave. is the

best choice for a museum because it is now in bank foreclosure, and

the other two homes are still privately owned.

At the same time, another group of local residents is looking at

restoring a theater at a school that Garland attended and turning

it into a performing arts venue bearing her name.

Garland attended Cedar Avenue School and performed in the

school's theater, whose double-door, concrete-arched entrance

resembles that of a church.

The school was built in the 1920s and was the first elementary

school in the Lancaster School District. All that remains of the

campus is the theater and a classroom wing.

Retired district superintendent Steve Gocke has promoted the

idea since 2002.

Both the district's board and fundraising foundation have gotten

behind the plan. When Gocke retired at the end of 2006, a few

thousand dollars in donations were made to support the project,

foundation officials said.

"We're in the process of getting enough people interested in it

to get force behind it," said Gocke, who wants to get the

surviving family's blessing to use Garland's name.

Garland's Lancaster roots also recently attracted the attention

of a documentary crew from BBC Radio.

The BBC crew interviewed about 10 people in town a month ago for

the radio program "The Judy Garland Trail," a six-part series

that began broadcasting Oct. 24 on BBC Radio 2. The Lancaster

episode aired Friday and will be available online until next Friday

at www.bbc.co.uk/radio2/ documentaries/judygarland.shtml.

Glen Settle, 97, who was interviewed for the program, played

golf with Garland's father, and his brother dated one of Garland's

sisters. Settle's wife took dancing lessons from Garland's mother

and performed with Garland on Sunday evenings at her father's

theater, about the only source of entertainment in what was then a

small burg of 3,500 people.

"Judy was always the leader," Settle recalled. "She had the

most talent. She was the best dancer and had the best voice."

Within months of the family moving to Lancaster, mother Ethel

was taking Garland and her sisters to perform at Los Angeles radio

shows and theaters.

BBC Los Angeles correspondent Barbra Paskin said she was

surprised that not much had been done previously to recognize

Garland's years in Lancaster.

"I was startled by that, that there wasn't this huge footprint

that had been left behind in her memory," Paskin said. "We were

surprised there wasn't more of that in Lancaster."

Garland lived in the house from 1931 to 1933 before leaving for

Hollywood, Stone said.

In the 1940s, when a housing shortage was caused by the wartime

buildup at what is now Edwards Air Force Base and Air Force Plant

42 in Palmdale, the home became a boarding house. The new owners

built apartments in the rear, and many of the tenants were local

teachers.

The home was a boarding house for the homeless when it was

heavily damaged by fire in 2003. The property, now foreclosed and

bank-owned, is for sale at a price of $199,900, according to the

Realtor handling the sale.

Paskin noted that Garland's time spent in Lancaster was a key

point in her life, her formative time before she made it big in

Hollywood.

"These six or seven years in the life of a youngster is a huge

period," Paskin said. "Especially where Judy's life is concerned,

these were years that shaped her. It was not long after that she

became the property of MGM. Lancaster was her only years of freedom

in many ways."

Outspent and under siege in a hostile political

climate, congressional Republicans scrambled this weekend to save

embattled incumbents in an effort to hold down expected Democratic

gains in the House and Senate on Tuesday.

With the election imminent, Senate Republicans threw their

remaining resources into protecting endangered lawmakers in

Georgia, Minnesota, Mississippi, New Hampshire, North Carolina and

Oregon, while House Republicans were forced to put money into what

should be secure Republican territory in Idaho, Indiana, Kentucky,

Virginia and Wyoming.

Sensing an extraordinary opportunity to expand their numbers in

both the House and Senate, Democrats were spending freely on

television advertising across the campaign map. Senate Democrats

were active in nine states where Republicans are running for

re-election; House Democrats, meanwhile, bought advertising in 63

districts, twice the number of districts where Republicans bought

advertisements and helped candidates.

"We are deep in the red areas," Rep. Chris Van Hollen of

Maryland, chairman of the Democratic Congressional Campaign

Committee, said on Sunday. "We are competing now in districts

George Bush carried by large margins in 2004."

What seems especially striking about this year's congressional

races is that Democrats appear to have solidified their gains from

the 2006 midterm elections and are pushing beyond their traditional

urban turf into what once were safe Republican strongholds,

creating a struggle for the suburbs.

Trying to capitalize on economic uncertainty, House Democrats

are taking aim at vacant seats and incumbents in suburban and even

more outlying areas -- the traditional foundation of Republican

power in the House. With many of the most contested House races

occurring in Republican-held districts that extend beyond cities in

states like Florida, Michigan, Minnesota and Ohio, Democrats said

expected victories would give them suburban dominance.

The same is true for Senate Democratic candidates, who are

seeking to nail down swing counties outside urban centers and move

the party toward a 60-vote majority. That majority could overcome a

filibuster, if party leaders could hold the votes together.

Among open House seats Democrats say they have a good chance of

capturing include those being vacated by Rep. John R. Kuhl Jr. in

New York, Ralph Regula and Deborah Pryce in Ohio, Jim Ramstad in

Minnesota, Jerry Weller in Illinois and Rick Renzi in Arizona.

Incumbents Democrats believe they can defeat include Rep. Joe

Knollenberg in Michigan, Tom Feeney and Ric Keller in Florida, Don

Young in Alaska, Robin Hayes in North Carolina and Bill Sali in

Idaho.

Democrats say they have been able to peel away suburbanites by

emphasizing Republican culpability for the economic decline, a

point they say House Republicans helped make themselves by

initially balking at the $700 billion bailout and sending the

markets into a tailspin that depleted retirement and college

savings accounts.

"Suburban voters are angry that their quality of life and

standard of living is under attack," said Rep. Rahm Emanuel of

Illinois, chairman of the House Democratic Caucus and a leading

advocate of Democrats trying to broaden their appeal in the

suburbs.

The partisan spending gap was stark. As of last week, Senate

Democrats had spent more than $67 million against Republican

candidates, compared with $33.7 million in advertising by

Republicans. In the House, the Democratic Congressional Campaign

Committee had spent $73 million, compared with just over $20

million for the National Republican Congressional Committee,

according to campaign finance reports.

Most of the House Republican money was spent on behalf of

incumbents or in districts where a Republican is retiring,

emphasizing how much the party was playing defense. By contrast,

House Democrats spent most of their money in the last month going

after Republican seats in Colorado, Nebraska, Washington, West

Virginia and elsewhere. On Sunday, Democrats prepared one last

radio advertisement to begin running Monday in an effort to claim

the seat of Thomas M. Reynolds, a Republican retiring from his

upstate New York district near Buffalo.

"That kind of says it all," said Rep. Thomas M. Davis III, a

retiring Virginia Republican whose own suburban seat is likely to

go Democratic on Tuesday. Davis said Republicans simply faced too

many disadvantages heading into Election Day, including a lopsided

number of retirements in the House and Senate, an unpopular

president and an economic collapse.

"You like to see a fair fight," said Davis, a former chairman

of the Republican congressional campaign committee, "but basically

we are playing basketball in our street shoes and long pants, and

the Democrats have on their uniforms and Chuck Taylors."

Neither of the national Senate campaign arms was advertising in

Colorado, New Mexico or Virginia, indicating that Republicans were

virtually ceding those states, where members of their party are

retiring, to the Democrats. Senate Democrats were also optimistic

about the prospects of unseating Sen. John E. Sununu in New

Hampshire and Sen. Ted Stevens in Alaska, where Stevens campaigned

despite being newly convicted on felony ethics charges.

Democrats said they saw themselves with the advantage in

Minnesota, North Carolina and Oregon, giving them a reasonable

chance at claiming eight seats and enlarging their Senate majority

to 59 if they hold their current seats.

If Democrats swept those races, it could leave the potential

60th vote to break filibusters resting on the outcome in Georgia,

Mississippi or Kentucky, where Sen. Mitch McConnell, the Republican

leader, is in a competitive race with Bruce Lunsford, a

businessman. Polls show Democrats trailing but within striking

distance in all three races, with the final results potentially

hinging on the presidential race and turnout among Democratically

inclined black voters.

In Mississippi, which has not sent a freshman Democrat to the

Senate since John C. Stennis was elected in 1947, Sen. Roger

Wicker, a Republican appointed last year to fill the seat left

vacant by Trent Lott's resignation, is in a tight race with former

Gov. Ronnie Musgrove, a Democrat.

"We feel we have a lot of momentum," said Sen. Charles E.

Schumer of New York, chairman of the Democratic Senatorial Campaign

Committee, "but we are ever mindful that getting to 60 is an

extremely difficult thing to do because we are in so many red

states."

Republicans privately acknowledged that there was little hope

for some of their candidates, including Sen. Elizabeth Dole of

North Carolina. But Republicans have not given up on the idea of

unseating Sen. Mary L. Landrieu in Louisiana, a state where Sen.

John McCain was running well against Sen. Barack Obama in the

presidential race. A victory over Landrieu by John Kennedy, the

state treasurer, would be a significant moral victory for

Republicans, and they pointed to internal polls that show a close

race.

In Louisiana, North Carolina and Oregon, Republicans were trying

to energize voters with the threat of Democratic dominance in

Washington, running advertisements that warn voters about

"complete liberal control of government."

"We agree with Chuck Schumer that this is a tectonic

election," said Rebecca Fisher, spokeswoman for the National

Republican Senatorial Committee. "And if Democrats get their way,

this country will shift so far left it will take generations to get

back on track."

Both parties were focusing substantial final energies on the

Senate race in Minnesota, where Sen. Norm Coleman, the Republican,

was in a heated clash with his Democratic challenger, Al Franken, a

former comedian and radio talk show host. The race remained close

as Coleman was named in a last-minute lawsuit in Texas alleging

that a businessman had funneled $75,000 to him through his wife's

business. Coleman, who has filed an unfair campaign practices

complaint accusing Franken of broadcasting falsehoods in his

advertisements, denied any impropriety, but the lawsuit led to a

flurry of news accounts only days before the election.

In Kentucky, McConnell enlisted hundreds of volunteers to knock

on doors and to make phone calls in the remaining hours. He was to

embark on a fly-around of the state's cities Monday in his effort

to repel the serious challenge from Lunsford, who brought in one of

Kentucky's favorite daughters, the actress Ashley Judd, to campaign

on his behalf in the closing days.

Strategists for both parties said it seemed increasingly

possible that the full Senate picture might not even be settled

Tuesday, given that a third-party candidate could cause both Sen.

Saxby Chambliss, R-Ga., and his Democratic opponent, Jim Martin, to

fall short of 50 percent of the vote, forcing a runoff on Dec. 2.

Party operatives also warned that Tuesday was likely to produce

some surprises, considering the strong resentment toward Congress

that has been reflected in polls for months. They predicted upsets

of some House incumbents not thought to be in trouble.

Republicans said they believed some top targets of the

Democrats, like Rep. Dave Reichert of Washington and Christopher

Shays of Connecticut, would be able to hang on because they, and

others, had run strong campaigns built on their individual images

and records.

"Republican candidates who have established their own personal

brand, and have framed their respective races around creating a

clear choice, will succeed on Election Day despite the turbulent

political environment," said Ken Spain, a spokesman for the

National Republican Congressional Committee.

One problem for House Republicans was that freshmen lawmakers

who gave Democrats control of the House after the 2006 elections

were faring much better than party leaders had expected. Some, like

Rep. Kirsten Gillibrand, who represents the Hudson Valley in New

York, became prime Republican targets virtually from the moment

they were elected but are favored to win second terms after raising

formidable sums of money and cultivating moderate voting records

that insulated them from attack.

Rep. John Yarmuth of Kentucky, president of the Democrats' 2006

freshman class, said only two of its members were in serious

trouble: Rep. Nick Lampson of Texas, who represents a heavily

Republican district south of Houston, and Rep. Tim Mahoney of

Florida, who has been entangled in a scandal over extramarital

affairs.

Yarmuth credited House Democratic leaders with pursuing an

agenda that gave the freshmen substantial achievements to promote

back home, especially a generous new education benefit for veterans

that counterbalanced the Democrats' opposition to the war in Iraq.

"I think that was a trademark of this last Congress that

created a moderate image that we were pro-military, pro-troops,"

Yarmuth said.

Military and civilian deaths in Iraq for October hit

the lowest monthly levels since May 2004, the U.S. military said

Sunday.

The announcement was further evidence of a decline in violence

since a significant troop increase last year, but the tragedy of

one family in Kirkuk is a reminder of just how dangerous life in

Iraq continues to be.

In the past year, Khudaer Muhammad Abdullah, 49, endured the

loss of his two older sons. On Sunday he lost his last son, and his

4-year-old daughter is now hospitalized with serious wounds. His

last son, Muhammad Khudaer Muhammad, 7, was killed when part of a

rocket-propelled grenade exploded on a vacant lot where he was

playing soccer with three other children, according to police

reports.

"Where should we go now?" Abdullah asked. "Death faces us

everywhere."

That may be a predicament familiar to families across Iraq, but

the U.S. military was still eager to publicize the decline in

deaths.

"Thanks to the strategic partnership we have with the coalition

forces, the Iraqi security forces and the people of Iraq, the

overall situation here with regard to security continues to

improve," Brig. Gen. David G. Perkins, a spokesman for the United

States-led forces in Iraq, said at a news conference.

Despite those improvements, violence continued to rage in the

northern city of Mosul, where at least 15 Iraqis were killed and 32

were wounded last week.

On Sunday, two Iraqi soldiers were killed when a roadside bomb

exploded in the path of their convoy in the eastern neighborhood of

Karama in Mosul, said a security official who spoke on the

condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to speak to

the news media.

In the Qandeel Mountains in northern Iraq, officials of the

Kurdistan Workers' Party said that 20 of their fighters had been

killed in attacks by Turkish warplanes, but they said that the

morale of their fighting force remained strong.

They were called the "dirty 30" -- bodyguards for Osama bin

Laden captured early in the Afghanistan war -- and many of them are

still being held at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba.

Others still at the much-criticized detention camp include

prisoners who the government says were trained in assassination and

the use of poisons and disguises.

One detainee is said to have been schooled in making detonators

out of Sega game cartridges. A Yemeni who has received little

public attention was originally selected by bin Laden as a

potential Sept. 11 hijacker, intelligence officials say.

As the Bush administration enters its final months with no

apparent plan to close Guantanamo, an extensive review of the

government's military tribunal files suggests that dozens of the

approximately 255 prisoners remaining in detention are said by

military and intelligence agencies to have been captured with

important terrorism suspects, to have connections to top Qaida

leaders or to have other serious terrorism credentials.

Sens. John McCain and Barack Obama have said they would close

the detention camp, but the review of the government's public files

underscores the challenges of fulfilling that promise. The next

president will have to contend with sobering intelligence claims

against many of the remaining detainees.

"It would be very difficult for a new president to come in and

say, 'I don't believe what the CIA is saying about these guys,"'

said Daniel Marcus, a Democrat who was general counsel of the 9/11

Commission and held senior positions in the Carter and Clinton

administrations.

The strength of the evidence is difficult to assess, because the

government has kept much of it secret and because of questions

about whether some was gathered through torture.

When the administration has had to defend its allegations in

court, government lawyers in several cases have retreated from the

most serious claims. As a result, critics have raised doubts about

the danger of Guantanamo's prisoners beyond a handful of the camp's

most notorious detainees.

But as a new administration begins to sort through the

government's dossiers on the men, the analysis shows, officials are

likely to face tough choices in deciding how many of Guantanamo's

detainees should be sent home, how many should be charged and what

to do with the rest.

The Pentagon has declined to provide a list of the detainees or

even to specify how many there are beyond offering a figure of

"about 255." But by reviewing thousands of pages of government

documents released in recent years, as well as court records and

news media reports from around the world, The New York Times was

able to compile its own list and construct a picture of the

population still detained at Guantanamo. Much of the analysis is

based on records of hearings at Guantanamo about individual

detainees, which have been made public since 2006 as a result of a

lawsuit by The Associated Press.

The Times has posted those documents on its Web site arranged by

detainee name.

The analysis shows that about 34 of the remaining detainees were

seized in raids in Pakistan that netted three men the government

calls major Qaida operatives: Abu Zubaydah, Ramzi Binalhibh and Al

Hajj Abdu Ali Sharqawi. Sixteen detainees are accused of some of

the most significant terrorist attacks in the last decade,

including the 1998 U.S. embassy bombings, the 2000 attack on the

USS Cole in Yemen, and the Sept. 11 attacks. Twenty others were

called bin Laden's bodyguards.

The analysis also shows that 13 of the original 23 detainees who

arrived at Guantanamo on Jan. 11, 2002, remain there nearly seven

years later.

Of the approximately 255 men now being held, more than 60 have

been cleared for release or transfer, according to the Pentagon,

but remain at Guantanamo because of difficulties negotiating

transfer agreements between the United States and other countries.

Two of those still held, government documents show, were seen by

bin Laden as potential Sept. 11 hijackers. The case of Mohammed

al-Qahtani, whom the government has labeled a potential "20th

hijacker," has drawn wide notice because he was subjected to

interrogation tactics that included sleep deprivation, isolation

and being put on a leash and forced to perform dog tricks.

The other detainee deemed a potential hijacker, whose presence

at Guantanamo has gone virtually unmentioned in public reports, is

a Yemeni called Abu Bara. The 9/11 Commission said he studied

flights and airport security and participated in an important

planning meeting for the 2001 attack in Malaysia in January 2000.

The Guantanamo list also includes two Saudi brothers, Hassan bin

Attash and Walid Mohammed bin Attash. The government describes them

as something like Qaida royalty. Military officials said during

Guantanamo hearings that their father, imprisoned in Saudi Arabia,

was a "close contact of Osama bin Laden" and that his sons were

committed jihadists.

Walid Mohammed bin Attash is facing a possible death sentence as

a coordinator of the Sept. 11 attacks. Hassan bin Attash was

alleged to have been involved in planning attacks on American oil

tankers and Navy ships.

Hassan bin Attash's lawyer, David H. Remes, said the

government's claims about the detainees were not credible. He and

other detainees' lawyers say that the government's accusations have

been ever-changing and that much of the evidence was obtained using

techniques he and others have described as torture.

"You look at all of this stuff, and it looks terribly scary,"

Remes said. "But how do we know any of it is true?"

The extensive use of secret evidence and information derived

from aggressive interrogations has led many critics in the United

States and around the world to conclude that many detainees were

wrongly held. Nearly seven years after Guantanamo opened its metal

gates, only 18 of the current detainees are currently facing war

crimes charges.

While both presidential candidates said they would close the

detention center, they have not said in detail how they would

handle the remaining detainees.

McCain has said he would move the Guantanamo detainees to the

United States, but has indicated that he would try them in the

Pentagon's commission system established after 9/11. After the

conviction at Guantanamo last summer of a former driver for Osama

bin Laden, McCain said the verdict "demonstrated that military

commissions can effectively bring very dangerous terrorists to

justice."

Obama has said the Bush administration's "system of trying

detainees has been an enormous failure" and that the existing

American legal system -- either trials in civilian or military

courts -- was strong enough to handle the trials of terror suspects.

But in a speech on the Senator floor in 2006, Obama suggested

that the allegations against many of the detainees needed to be

taken seriously. "Now the majority of the folks in Guantanamo, I

suspect, are there for a reason," Obama said. "There are a lot of

dangerous people."

Some of the remaining prisoners, have appeared determined to

show how dangerous they are. "I admit to you it is my honor to be

an enemy of the United States," said a Yemeni detainee, Abdul

Rahman Ahmed, a hearing record shows. Officials said Ahmed had been

trained at a terrorist camp "how to dress and act at an airport"

and to resist interrogation.

A Saudi detainee, Muhammed Murdi Issa al Zahrani, was described

by Pentagon officials as a trained assassin who helped plan the

suicide-bomb killing of Ahmed Shah Massoud, the Afghan rebel

leader, on Sept. 9, 2001.

"The detainee said America is ruled by the Jews," an officer

said at a hearing after interviewing Zahrani, "therefore America

and Israel are his enemies."

One man caught with Abu Zubaydah insisted on his innocence, but

described a training camp outside Kabul, Afghanistan, where,

according to information he gave interrogators, men were given

lessons on how to make poisons that could be inhaled, swallowed or

absorbed through the skin.

Binalshibh was caught with a group of six Yemenis, all of whom

are still held, after a two-and-a-half hour gunbattle. The records

of those detainees include allegations that some were "a special

terrorist team deployed to attack targets in Karachi." One of the

men, Hail Aziz Ahmad al Maythal, was trained in the use of

rocket-propelled grenade launchers, machine guns and "trench

digging, disguise techniques, escape methods, evasion and map

reading," according to the military's allegations.

The records include many of the murky cases that typify the

image of Guantanamo, where detainees take issue with their own

supposed confessions and, sometimes, their identities. And those

doubts, too, are to be part of a new administration's inheritance.

"I was forced to say all these things," an Algerian detainee,

Adil Hadi al Jazairi Bin Hamlili, said at his hearing when

confronted with his confession to murder and knowledge of a plot to

sell uranium to al-Qaida. "I was abused mentally and

psychologically, by threatening to be raped," he said, adding,

"You would say anything."

Abdul Hafiz, an Afghan accused of killing a Red Cross worker at

a Taliban roadblock in 2003, told a military officer that he had

the perfect alibi. The detainee states again that he is not Abdul

Hafiz, the officer reported to a military tribunal.

The government of Zimbabwe, led by

President Robert Mugabe, spent $7.3 million donated by an

international organization to fight killer diseases on other things

and has failed to honor requests to return the money, according to

the organization's inspector general.

The actions by Zimbabwe have deprived the organization, the

Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, of resources

it needs and damaged efforts to expand lifesaving treatment, said

the inspector general, John Parsons. Zimbabwe's actions also

jeopardize a more ambitious $188 million Global Fund grant to

Zimbabwe, due for consideration by the fund's board on Friday,

Parsons said.

The Global Fund has continued to demand that Zimbabwe return the

money, and Global Fund officials say Zimbabwean financial officials

have promised to do so by Thursday. But Parsons said Zimbabwean

officials also said they had not repaid the money because they did

not have enough foreign currency.

The breakdown of trust between the Global Fund and the

government of Zimbabwe comes at a moment of widening humanitarian

crisis and casts further doubt on the willingness of Western donors

to invest heavily in rebuilding the economically broken nation as

long as Mugabe is in charge, even if a deadlock over a

power-sharing government is resolved.

Parsons said in an interview on Sunday that last year the Global

Fund deposited $12.3 million in foreign currency into Zimbabwe's

Reserve Bank. He declined to speculate on how the $7.3 million it

was seeking to be returned had been spent, except to say it was not

on the intended purpose. Civic groups and opposition officials

maintain that the Reserve Bank helps finance Mugabe's patronage

machine.

Parsons did offer an example of the human consequences of the

Reserve Bank's failure to hand over the money for disease fighting.

The Global Fund has brought in large quantities of medicines that

can cure malaria, but has been able to finance the training of only

495 people to distribute them safely instead of the planned 27,000.

There were 2.7 million cases of malaria among Zimbabwe's 12 million

people in the World Health Organization's most recent estimates.

"The drugs expire by the middle of next year, and it would be

criminal if we can't use them because of these problems," Parsons

said. "They've got quite a short shelf life."

Her crowds are smaller now, and most of the

reporters are gone. The campaign posters say his name, not hers.

And instead of championing her ideas for health insurance or tax

relief, Sen. Hillary Rodham Clinton is giving out 1-800 numbers and

Internet addresses for Sen. Barack Obama's campaign.

Watching Clinton campaign for her old rival, masking what

friends say is lingering disappointment, it is easy to recall

happier days.

The bitterness of that long primary battle, however, is the last

thing that Obama supporters brought up about Clinton in Florida

last weekend. Of 20 interviewed, all effusively praised her. All 20

said that if Obama won, they hoped that she would be his secretary

of state or that she would shepherd his health care or energy bills

through the Senate. All 20 said they hoped she would run for

president again.

For the friends and allies already thinking about Clinton's

political future, the possibility of a victory by Sen. John McCain

on Tuesday would upend an array of assumptions, not least of which

that Clinton -- if she were to run again -- would not do so until

2016, when she would be turning 69. At the same time, under a

McCain presidency, Clinton could be well-positioned, given her

friendship with him and good standing among Washington Republicans,

to help him with a Democratic-led Congress on alternative energy,

which they have both highlighted on the campaign trail.

While Clinton's high profile in Democratic politics has been

fortified by her work for Obama, her friends say it is too soon to

say what the future holds for her. For one thing, they say, she is

not over her primary loss: Some days it is hard for her, even a

little heartbreaking, to campaign for Obama, given how much she

wanted to be president.

Others say that she is being a good soldier because she wants to

be a power player in Washington if Obama wins but that she is not

sure what her role might be.

Millions of voters will encounter an unfamiliar low-tech

landscape at the polls on Tuesday. About half of all voters will

vote in a way that is different from what they did in the last

presidential election, and most will use paper ballots rather than

the touch-screen machines that have caused concern among voting

experts.

But the change does not guarantee a smooth election day, as the

nation's voting system remains untested for what is expected to be

an unprecedented turnout. Six years after the largest federal

overhaul in how elections are run, voting experts are still

predicting machine and ballot shortages in several swing states and

late tallies on election night.

Two-thirds of voters will mark their choice with a pencil on a

paper ballot that is counted by an optical scanning machine, a

method considered far more reliable and verifiable than touch

screens. But paper ballots bring their own potential problems,

voting experts say.

The scanners can break down, leading to delays and confusion for

poll workers and voters. And the paper ballots of about a third of

all voters will be counted not at the polling place but later at a

central county location. That means that if a voter has made an

error -- not filling in an oval properly, for example, a mistake

often made by the kind of novice voters who will be flocking to the

polls -- it will not be caught until it is too late. As a result,

those ballots will be disqualified.

Voting rights groups have also filed lawsuits against election

officials in Pennsylvania and Virginia, saying they have not

stocked enough paper ballots to prepare for the expected turnout.

Most voting experts are not predicting a repeat of the Florida

meltdown of 2000, but they are warning that shortages of electronic

voting machines or printed ballots in swing states, along with

problems verifying the identity of voters, could worsen lines and

fray nerves.

"What has traditionally happened in this country is that a

change in voting equipment happens once in the lifetime of an

election official," said Kimball W. Brace, president of Election

Data Services, a voting research firm. "This time, nearly 60

percent of the country will vote in places that in the last eight

years have changed their voting equipment."

About a fourth of voters will still use electronic machines that

offer no paper record to verify that their choice was accurately

recorded, even though these machines are vulnerable to hacking and

crashes that drop votes. The machines will be used by most voters

in Indiana, Kentucky, Pennsylvania, Tennessee, Texas and Virginia.

Eight other states, including Georgia, Maryland, New Jersey and

South Carolina, will use touch-screen machines with paper trails.

In states with early voting, there have been scattered reports

of touch-screen machine malfunctions, ballot misprints causing

scanners to jam and vote-flipping, in which the vote cast for one

candidate is recorded for another.

Florida has switched to its third ballot system in the past

three election cycles, and glitches associated with the transition

have caused confusion at early voting sites, election officials

said. The state went back to using scanned paper ballots this year

after touch-screen machines in Sarasota County failed to record any

choice for 18,000 voters in a fiercely contested House race in

2006.

Voters in Colorado, Tennessee, Texas and West Virginia have

reported using touch-screen machines that at least initially

registered their choice for the wrong candidate or party.

"I pushed the Democrat ticket, and it jumped to the Republican

ticket for president of the United States," said Calvin Thomas,

81, an Obama supporter who tried to vote early in Ripley, W.Va.

"I'm a registered Republican, and I've voted in every presidential

election since 1948. I don't like seeing my vote do something I

didn't tell it to do. I take that real serious."

Thomas' daughter, Micki Clendenin, said the same thing had

happened to her.

In both cases, poll workers at the site had them touch the

screen a few more times, and the voting machine changed their

ballot to their candidate choice. State and local officials said

these were isolated cases and that poll workers had fixed the

problems.

"It was corrected," Clendenin said, "but it still made me

wonder."

It was not supposed to be this way.

After the debacle of 2000, Congress passed a federal law, the

Help America Vote Act, to avoid similar mishaps. It included money

for new machines to modernize the voting process. But in many ways,

things have become even messier. The first machines bought with the

federal money were largely touch-screens and brought new problems,

decreasing public confidence in the process and doubling the number

of election-related lawsuits since 2000.

In the past two years, the pendulum has swung away from

electronic machines, but the change has come during one of the most

dramatic presidential elections in modern history.

"Counties and states are better prepared for machine problems

than they have been in the past," said Lawrence Norden, a voting

expert with the Brennan Center for Justice at the New York

University School of Law. "Problem is that this election may not

be like any other in terms of the strain on the system, and small

problems can have big consequences when there are such tight

margins and so many people showing up to vote."

Most states have passed laws requiring paper records of every

vote cast, which experts consider an important safeguard. But most

of them do not have strong audit laws to ensure that machine totals

are vigilantly checked against the paper records.

Last year, a study by the Brennan Center found that at least 17

of the 38 states with paper records did not require audits after

every election. The states with audits do them inadequately, the

report found.

In Ohio, Secretary of State Jennifer Brunner sued the maker of

the touch-screen equipment used in half of her state's 88 counties

after an investigation showed that the machines "dropped" votes

in recent elections when memory cards were uploaded to computer

servers.

As an extra precaution, Brunner required all counties to provide

paper ballots to anyone who wanted to use them.

On Wednesday, a federal judge ordered election officials in

Pennsylvania to make emergency paper ballots available to voters

when 50 percent or more of voting machines at a polling location

fail. Previously, these ballots would be available only if all the

machines at a polling place broke down.

A report released last month by several voting rights groups

found that eight of the states using touch-screen machines,

including Colorado and Virginia, had no guidance or requirement to

stock emergency paper ballots at the polls if the machines broke

down.

Colorado Catholics supporting Democratic presidential candidate

Barack Obama say church leaders are giving new meaning to the term

"bully pulpit" by asserting the abortion issue should determine

the votes of "authentic" Catholics.

Troubled by some clerics' singular focus on the abortion issue

and de facto opposition to Obama, some local Catholics say fighting

poverty, fixing health care and ending the war also matter.

Denver Archbishop Charles Chaput, nationally prominent as a

politically outspoken prelate, heads a list of clergy and action

groups steering Colorado Catholics in "faithful citizenship" and

away from Obama.

Churches cannot endorse candidates -- it violates Internal

Revenue Service rules for nonprofits. Some Catholic Democrats say

the line is getting blurred, if not crossed.

Colorado Catholics, key swing voters in a battleground state,

are targets of national and local campaigns. They have faced pews

stuffed with arch-conservative voter guides and a barrage of ads,

robo-calls, speeches and even sermons.

"We've had it," said Dennis Haugh, a 66-year-old Catholic who

lives in a Denver suburb. "I admit it rankles me so much because

I'm on the other side of the political spectrum, but I vehemently

object to the notion that I'm not a good Catholic because I see

things differently."

The Denver Archdiocese has distributed voter guides prepared by

the Colorado Family Institute, an affiliate of evangelical media

ministry Focus on the Family.

Chaput has been specifically critical of Obama recently.

The archbishop told a Catholic women's group Oct. 18 that "the

cornerstone of Catholic social teaching is protecting human life

from conception to natural death." Chaput then called Obama "the

most committed abortion-rights presidential candidate of either

major party" since the 1973 Roe vs. Wade Supreme Court decision

legalizing abortion.

"The Democratic platform that emerged from Denver in August

2008 is clearly anti-life," Chaput said.

Many Catholics feel the pressure is inappropriate.

"I think the archbishop in Denver and bishop in Colorado

Springs have taken positions that are bordering, if not crossing,

the line drawn by U.S. bishops against supporting or opposing a

candidate or party," Haugh said.

Denver Archdiocese officials deny partisanship.

"The Church isn't telling people who to vote for," archdiocese

spokeswoman Jeanette DeMelo said. "The Church has been voicing

moral teaching and encouraging Catholics to pray and reflect on

Church teaching so that they are making decisions in good

conscience."

Yet Chaput and Auxiliary Bishop James Conley have left little

wiggle room for Catholics to pick candidates like Obama who support

legal abortion.

Conley, according to the Denver Catholic Register, told

parishioners that given a choice between a "pro-choice" candidate

and a "pro-life" candidate, he couldn't see how a Catholic could

justify voting for a supporter of abortion, an "intrinsic evil."

Notre Dame University theologian Rev. Richard McBrien said

bishops who make a case for one-issue politics or openly oppose a

political candidate are in violation of U.S. Conference of Catholic

Bishops guidelines, set in 1984 and most recently reaffirmed in

2007.

"Catholic voters and their bishops should examine the positions

of the candidates on the full range of issues as well as their

integrity, philosophy and performance," McBrien recently said in

the National Catholic Reporter.

Andrea Merida, a 42-year-old Denver Catholic and Obama campaign

volunteer, said Catholics can't be single-issue voters.

"The bishops like to say abortion trumps every other issue. It

can't. All the issues are too interconnected."

Merida said having grown up in an urban Latino environment, she

knows why many people have abortions. "They feel unsupported. They

can't handle or afford a pregnancy or child."

Berwin Brezina, a 38-year-old mechanical designer who works in

Durango, Colo., and lives in nearby New Mexico, said his parish

priest has openly criticized Obama during Mass.

"I couldn't believe my ears. I feel like the Republicans have

somehow hijacked the church."

Brezina said he voted twice for George Bush because he opposed

abortion and Bush didn't end abortions.

"Maybe abortion legislation isn't what needed. Maybe we need to

change people's hearts," Brezina said.

Diane Mayer, a 50-year-old mother of three who lives in the

Denver suburb of Englewood, said her conscience tells her to look

at the full spectrum of life, including fair wages, affordable

health care, environmentalism and ending the war.

"Archbishop Chaput, when will you stand up for all life issues

and stop advising Catholics to support war-mongering candidates

just because they want to overturn Roe vs. Wade?" Mayer asked in a

letter to the editor Oct. 24.

Chaput has said he sees no cause that could counterbalance the

40 million unborn children killed by abortion.

A cell phone was pressed to Sen. Barack

Obama's ear as he slouched down in a black leather chair in the

front cabin of his campaign airplane. He leaned away from the

headrest, where his name is spelled out in blue stitching.

A few miles away, thousands of people streamed into JFK Stadium

at Parkview High School for a late-night rally on Saturday. But

Obama stayed on his chartered Boeing 757 as he spoke by conference

call to thousands of his team leaders around the country, the

volunteers who form the ranks of an army that he hopes will give

him an edge in the waning hours of the presidential race.

As he pressed his right hand to his forehead, his sober

expression seemed at odds with the confident gleam in the eyes of

his advisers. While Obama smiles less than he once did, gauging his

mood simply by looking at him is risky for a man whose flat-line

temperament has seldom spiked along the rocky points of his

journey.

In a campaign where he has slogged through more competitive

Election Days than any recent nominee, only one more lies ahead.

And it is the long path of the Democratic primary, which lurched

from the ups of Iowa to the downs of Ohio, that his friends say

provided Obama with a steady equilibrium as he enters this final

turn in the race for the White House.

"As painful as the primary season was and how agitating it

could be, it turned out to be a blessing for him," said Eric

Whitaker, a longtime friend from Chicago who joined Obama aboard

the crowded campaign plane for the last three days. "But my role

now is to keep him loose. There's a lot going on in his world."

The lines in Obama's face have grown a bit deeper since he

started his campaign, with the notches of gray hair along his

temples far more pronounced. He often carries the look of

exhaustion, but flying the other night to Nevada, where he arrived

after midnight, Obama passed on the chance to take much of a nap.

Instead, he walked around the cabin of his airplane, which is

about the size of a bedroom, and talked about a favorite diversion

-- the coming basketball season -- as he took care not to step on a

senior foreign policy adviser, Mark Lippert, who was asleep on the

floor.

In the last days on the trail, he is finishing "Ghost Wars: the

Secret History of the CIA, Afghanistan and bin Laden," and taking

an occasional glance at US Weekly. He reads at least two newspapers

a day, vigilantly checks his BlackBerry for updates on early-voting

tallies and browses briefing books.

"In a marathon, when you are on mile 20 you start getting

tired, but when you are on mile 25 you don't," said Lippert, who

has grown familiar with Obama's travel rhythms while accompanying

him on the four foreign trips he has taken since becoming a

senator. "That's where he's at."

Whatever emotion he feels as his candidacy draws to a close, he

displays little of it, either in public appearances or private

conversations with his close advisers. The air of confidence that

he exudes, which some critics castigate as arrogance, grew in part

out of the primary, when he worked to avoid perceptions that he was

weak or not ready.

But now, he is described by friends as feeling as though he has

been thoroughly tested and is prepared to take on the job he has

spent 22 months fighting for. Still, it is hard for even those

closest to Obama to fathom what these days are precisely like, even

for the imperturbable -- often inscrutable -- senator from Illinois.

His world is awash in powerful, conflicting emotions: the

realization, presumably, that he may be about to become president;

the huge optimism that he has unleashed, evident in the crowds he

is drawing (and something he has told aides worries him a bit,

given the expectations set for him); the weighty thinking he is

gradually giving to how he would staff a government and deal with a

transition in such a difficult time. All of this is taking place at

a time where the woman who played a large role in raising him, his

grandmother, is approaching death.

"What if I disappoint people?" Valerie Jarrett, a close friend

and adviser, recalled Obama asking at several points throughout the

campaign. "That's what gives him the energy to keep getting up

every day." It has been months since Obama has ventured with any

regularity to the back of his plane where the journalists sit. (The

one time he played the board game Taboo on a cross-country flight

to Oregon is a distant memory.) He has not taken questions for so

long that reporters have taken to shouting at him as he boards his

plane. As he climbed up the steps of his airplane here on Sunday

morning, headed for Ohio, a reporter shouted to question why he

hadn't held a news conference in weeks.

"I will," Obama said. "On Wednesday."

On a final weekend pass through electoral battlegrounds that

spanned three time zones, the electoral climate and his campaign

organization provide him the luxury of focusing on states that

favored the Republican ticket four years ago. But when his

Democratic crowds jeer at the mere mention of Sen. John McCain, he

offers a gentle scolding: "You don't need to boo, you just need to

vote!"

It is a true crowd-pleaser, and he reprises it in city after

city.

His crowds have rarely been larger or more enthusiastic -- often,

perhaps, more outwardly so than the candidate himself. These days,

Obama is racing through his speeches, whittling down a message that

once stretched for more than an hour to a disciplined 30 minutes.

He works the rope line at every stop, but taking a closer look you

realize that it's as much for a few photographs as for a lot of

handshakes. At each event, though, he stays long enough to sign a

stack of books for supporters.

During a rally outside Orlando, Fla., the other night, where he

was joined for the first time on stage by former President Bill

Clinton, he was visibly chilly in the unusually cool air with a

temperature that dipped into the 40s. He had hoped to wear a coat,

but Clinton did not, so Obama came to the stage without one. Not so

the next night in Virginia, where a cool and damp chill also hung

in the air.

"I did decide to wear a coat, because you want a president who

has sense," Obama told the crowd from behind the podium, where he

was covered in a black wool overcoat.

While he may not be coasting to the finish line, he's not

running as hard as he did during his battle with Sen. Hillary

Rodham Clinton for the Democratic nomination. On Sunday, he was in

the gym of the Doubletree Hotel here shortly after 6 a.m., but he

spent some time with his wife and daughters before boarding his

plane at 9:30 a.m. He didn't arrive for his first public event of

the day at the Ohio Statehouse in Columbus until 1 p.m.

His campaign schedule, like Obama himself, can be slow to start

in the morning, but runs late into the night. After appearing with

Bruce Springsteen at a rally in Cleveland, followed by a stop in

Cincinnati, Obama was not scheduled to arrive at his hotel in

Jacksonville, Fla., until after 1 a.m. on Monday.

If there is a whiff of nostalgia surrounding the Obama campaign

in these final hours before the election, it doesn't seem to be

emanating from the candidate himself. He is eager to be finished

campaigning, several of his friends said, and for months has been

immersing himself in the work of the presidency, well before he

knows if it will ever be his.

He spends far less time on the telephone these days making

political calls to local Democratic chairmen. His call list now

includes officials in Washington, including Treasury Secretary

Henry M. Paulson, to whom he spoke to several times a day for weeks

about the government rescue plan. And he is in frequent

conversations with congressional leaders over how to proceed should

he win on Tuesday.

On Saturday morning, Obama met in his hotel suite at Caesar's

Palace in Las Vegas with Sen. Harry Reid of Nevada, the majority

leader. They spent about 45 minutes together, with Reid ticking

through a list of items sketched on a note card in his breast

pocket.

Obama also spoke about how his life has changed, a point that

was driven home on Friday night when he went home to see his

daughters for Halloween and grew agitated when he felt that a group

of reporters and photographers had crowded him.

"He said he likes to go out trick-or-treating, but he can't

anymore," Reid said in an interview, recalling the conversation he

had with Obama. "He said he guessed he could have worn a Barack

Obama mask."

One of the greatest frustrations of his candidacy -- being away

from his wife, Michelle, and his two daughters, Malia and Sasha --

will come to an end, win or lose. When his plane touched down on

Saturday afternoon in Pueblo, Colo., his step carried an extra

lilt. It was not because of the place that he finds himself in the

closing moments of his campaign, but because his two daughters were

standing on the breezy tarmac, waiting to be scooped up by their

daddy.

dana point, calif. - Beyond the 300-thread-count silky bed

sheets, the marble bathrooms, potted plants and postcard views, the

St. Regis Monarch Beach resort makes a promise: It will personalize

to meet your needs.

So don't be surprised if, upon arriving Sunday, Dan O'Dowd's

first call to concierge went something like this: a well-seasoned

starting pitcher, a spicy reliever and a side of young position

player talent.

"In an ideal world," the Colorado Rockies' general manager

said, "we would like to address all of those areas."

Truth is, O'Dowd feels guilty that baseball's annual general

managers' meetings are being held here, believing it sends the

wrong message in this economy. An airport hotel would suffice,

given how stealthy and busy O'Dowd figures to be this week.

Overlooking the Pacific Ocean, O'Dowd figures to dip Matt

Holliday's and Garrett Atkins' toes into the trade waters. While

O'Dowd declines to talk about the players specifically, multiple

GMs said this past weekend they have been told both sluggers are

available, along with outfielder Willy Taveras.

Angry over being idle during the playoffs, the Rockies spent

this past month assessing other teams' needs and canvassing the

market. Even with valuable chips, deals are not certain given the

difficulty of satisfying other teams' needs and the nation's

current financial climate.

"It's about meeting eye-to-eye with certain clubs that you

think will fit," O'Dowd said. "But every club has a different

mind-set, different needs and a different agenda, so it can be

difficult to trade."

Hard, yes. Impossible, no. A year ago at these meetings,

Phillies GM Pat Gillick acquired closer Brad Lidge and infielder

Eric Bruntlett for three minor-leaguers. The Phillies won their

first title in 28 years, with second baseman Chase Utley admitting,

"We couldn't have done it without (Lidge)."

The line for Holliday begins with traditional bullies: the

Yankees, Red Sox and Angels, with the Cardinals and Mets lurking.

His is an interesting case. He's one of the league's best players

but will be a marquee free agent at season's end. That represents a

double whammy - price to keep him, plus price to acquire him.

The Yankees have pieces such as starter Phil Hughes and second

baseman Robinson Cano that could work, but GM Brian Cashman refused

to part with young players for Johan Santana last winter as he

tries to prevent the Yankees from relying so heavily on free

agency.

Boston can dangle pitcher Clay Buchholz, but it would take a lot

more. And the Angels have starters Joe Saunders and Ervin Santana,

both of whom the Rockies like, but L.A. hasn't dealt a young

pitcher in seven years.

Atkins is more marketable in some ways because he has two years

before free agency and will make roughly $6.5 million this season,

compared to Holliday's $13.5 million. The Angels' interest in

Atkins and Holliday will be tied to their success in re-signing

Mark Teixeira. If he returns, their need for either Rockie shrinks.

The American League Central should be the epicenter for interest

in Atkins, with the Twins and Indians trying to fill needs at third

base and each possessing a bushel of young pitchers.

It's not too hard to see conversations starting around the

Twins' Kevin Slowey and Nick Blackburn or Cleveland's Aaron Laffey

and Jeremy Sowers.

Taveras already has gotten some nibbles from the White Sox,

Nationals and Yankees, who have pitcher Ian Kennedy as a chip.

Because of the uncertain economy - frozen or reduced ticket

prices around the league are a solid indicator - GMs are bracing

for an anxious future.

The big deals - whether for Holliday, Atkins or San Diego's Jake

Peavy -- might have to wait until the winter meetings next month.

Until then, there's nothing wrong with laying groundwork with

castles in the sand.

"The economy will be a factor," Arizona's Josh Byrnes said.

"That's why I don't have a real sense if there will be a great

deal of trade activity at these meetings."

They were called the "dirty 30" -- bodyguards for Osama bin

Laden captured early in the Afghanistan war -- and many of them are

still being held at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba.

Others still at the much-criticized detention camp include

prisoners who the government says were trained in assassination and

the use of poisons and disguises.

One detainee is said to have been schooled in making detonators

out of Sega game cartridges. A Yemeni who has received little

public attention was originally selected by bin Laden as a

potential Sept. 11 hijacker, intelligence officials say.

As the Bush administration enters its final months with no

apparent plan to close Guantanamo, an extensive review of the

government's military tribunal files suggests that dozens of the

approximately 255 prisoners remaining in detention are said by

military and intelligence agencies to have been captured with

important terrorism suspects, to have connections to top Qaida

leaders or to have other serious terrorism credentials.

Sens. John McCain and Barack Obama have said they would close

the detention camp. The next president will have to contend with

sobering intelligence claims against many of the remaining

detainees.

"It would be very difficult for a new president to come in and

say, 'I don't believe what the CIA is saying about these guys,"'

said Daniel Marcus, a Democrat who was general counsel of the 9/11

Commission and held senior positions in the Carter and Clinton

administrations.

The strength of the evidence is difficult to assess, because the

government has kept much of it secret and because of questions

about whether some was gathered through torture.

But as a new administration begins to sort through the

government's dossiers on the men, officials are likely to face

tough choices in deciding how many of Guantanamo's detainees should

be sent home, how many should be charged and what to do with the

rest.

It was bad enough for Rodrigo Sanchez when the tree

trimming jobs began heading for the chipper six months ago.

But as work gradually diminished, so did a pantry meant to feed

him, his wife and three young children.

"It's tough to make ends meet," said Sanchez, 34, of Santa

Clarita, awaiting a truck of fresh produce last week at Valley Food

Bank in Pacoima, a San Fernando suburb about 20 miles north of Los

Angeles. "There's no work. Last week, two days. This week, one

day. ... Right now, there's nothing we can do."

As the economic downturn forces more workers like Sanchez to

seek food aid, demand at food pantries across Los Angeles has

soared. But a month before Thanksgiving, supplies run shorter than

demand.

Donations to regional food banks and local pantries have slowed,

officials say. And as more people seek help -- many for the first

time -- the grub goes out faster than the surplus food flows in.

"We've had a big increase in demand, with a big increase in

food donations," said Darren Hoffman, spokesman for the Los

Angeles Regional Food Bank, which supplies 900 food pantries and

social service agencies across Los Angeles County. "But demand is

outpacing supply."

In the northeast San Fernando Valley, the need for food is

especially acute -- for givers and recipients.

At Meet Each Need with Dignity of Pacoima, demand for food has

doubled since last fall, from 600 new clients in September 2007 to

1,200 new clients last month.

And while it used to take weeks to fill up its list of Christmas

Basket recipients of holiday food and gift care packages,

registration for poor families filled up in a week, a month earlier

than anticipated.

"It's just crazy," said Marianne Haver Hill, executive

director for MEND, the largest service provider to the poor in the

Valley. "We feel like we keep breaking records with the number of

people we help with food and clothes. It's mind-boggling.

"We're concerned about having enough food and financial

contributions for the holidays."

At Valley Food Bank around the corner, food demand has jumped 42

percent over last year, despite a new warehouse location.

Last year, the bank served 55,000 poor families; this year it's

on course to serve 67,500. But while there was a 60-day food supply

of canned goods and dry goods such as rice, beans and pasta a month

before Thanksgiving last year, there's now a 30-day supply.

Turkeys have also become scarce.

The Valley Food Bank was scheduled to get 350 turkeys before

Thanksgiving, but the American Indian tribe that pledged them

pulled out to give them somewhere else.

So the bank has just 25 birds on ice for hundreds in need who

may wish to give thanks.

"It's meager pickings," said Will Hernandez, director of

Valley Food Bank, administered by the San Fernando Valley Rescue

Mission. "The donation stream is much smaller, much smaller.

"(And) we're seeing people that are typically not looking for

assistance -- professionals are showing up in the the receiving

line."

One day last week, volunteers mingled with would-be recipients

at the Valley Food Bank's 10,000-square-foot warehouse.

While its industrial shelves were stacked with nonperishables,

the real treat was on the noonday truck, which arrived with bags of

surplus produce from markets such as Trader Joe's.

"We need it," said Larry Davis of Van Nuys Alcohol and Drug

Treatment, which serves food to clients and the community. "It's

been a blessing.

"A lot of times the kids come in, they're hungry."

One woman injured her back two years ago while managing a retail

store and hasn't worked since. Now her unemployment is running out

as she eases into permanent disability.

But when faced with the need for food this month, she discovered

she received too much for food stamps, but not enough for the

supermarket cashier.

And that left her and a 9-year-old without enough to eat. When

she first resorted to the food bank this month, she verged on

tears. And when she got home, she called the bank to say "God

Bless You."

"You fall through the cracks," said Valerie, 45, of Glendale,

who declined to give her last name. "I'm so amazed, because I

didn't know such places existed. All my life, I've never had any

assistance.

"So it really helps to get food, which gives me money for

gas."

Fifteen-year-old Daniella Escobar picked through the foodstuffs

to fill a grocery cart. Her brother works and her mother baby-sits

part-time, but it's not enough.

"We have, like, hardly no food in the house," Daniella, of Van

Nuys, said. "It's really great to come to a place like this to get

food."

Many pantries say supermarkets and private donors are giving

less food and money because of the poor economy.

The good news is that the U.S. Department of Agriculture has

boosted its food commodities program from $140 million to $250

million, which is just starting to trickle in to such distributors

as the Los Angeles Regional Food Bank.

But that doesn't help Larry Stark, a volunteer at the St.

Vincent de Paul food pantry in Sun Valley, who has been scouring

markets and pantries to feed his client families.

In the past few weeks, the number asking for aid doubled from 50

to 100 families, he said.

"There's no work. No help. And donations are down," Stark

said. "It's getting worse and worse and worse.

"I've been there 25 years. I've never see it so short. I have

to hunt, hunt, hunt."

HOW TO HELP

To give food or other items, contact:

Meet Each Need with Dignity (MEND), 10641 San Fernando Road.,

Pacoima, at 818-896-0246, or www.mendpoverty.org.

Los Angeles Regional Food Bank, at 323-234-3030, or

www.lafoodbank.org.

Valley Food Bank, 12701 Van Nuys Blvd., Pacoima, at

818-510-4140, or www.erescue mission.com/vfb-about.shtml

Valley Interfaith Council Food Pantry Coalition, at

818-718-6460, or www.vic-la.org/FoodPantry.html

Somewhere in a corner of northeastern Ohio,

just five days before the presidential election that more than a

few pundits have declared he will lose, Sen. John McCain sat in the

back of his campaign bus telling his favorite Henny Youngman jokes.

No one laughed harder than he did.

"It was one after another -- 'Take my wife, please,"' said Sen.

Lindsey Graham, a South Carolina Republican and one of McCain's

closest friends.

For 90 minutes, as his bus rumbled from the edge of Lake Erie to

Youngstown, McCain kept up the patter with Graham and his

campaign's high command. He talked about how he once saw the old

borscht belt comedian perform in New Jersey. He told stories about

Morris K. Udall, the legendary Arizona congressman. And he roared

with Graham about a book he was reading, "A Walk in the Woods," a

comic account of an out-of-shape writer's 2,100-mile hike of the

Appalachian Trail.

No one is suggesting that McCain is ecstatic that he is behind

in the polls or that the cognoscenti, as he puts it, "have written

us off."

But in the frantic last days of his nearly two-year second quest

for the presidency, McCain has liberated himself from the

irritable, edgy candidate of a month ago. He has, by all

appearances, decided he will get to Tuesday by having a good time.

His aides say he is relieved that the race is almost over and

for the most part out of his hands. He is also buoyed -- and

obsessed, his staff says -- with polls that show the race tightening

in some battleground states and allow him hope that he might still

have a shot.

He is also now in the role that he finds at least familiar, if

not comfortable -- the scrappy underdog barking at Washington. It

was not for nothing that his first stop Thursday was in Defiance,

Ohio.

"If we were 10 points up, we'd all be a little bit happier,"

said Mark Salter, one of McCain's closest aides. "But you throw a

lot of stuff at the guy, and he fights all the harder."

Graham and McCain's other traveling buddy, Sen. Joseph I.

Lieberman, independent of Connecticut, are a frequent part of the

road show and will fly home with him to Arizona in the small hours

of Tuesday morning.

Aides say they are essential to improving the candidate's mood,

Graham in particular. McCain's wife, Cindy, who is constantly at

his side, introduces Graham at each stop as "my husband's best

friend."

"He's like campaign Prozac," Nicolle Wallace, a top adviser to

McCain, said of Graham. "They just sit there and laugh."

McCain has also been moved these last few days, his aides say,

by the panorama of America that has unfolded before him. He has

made appearances at high school football fields, town squares and

lumberyards, and he held a nostalgic final town hall meeting Sunday

night here in Peterborough, N.H., one of the earliest stops of his

first presidential campaign in 2000.

On Friday McCain marveled to aides about the beauty of the

rolling Appalachian foothills on Ohio's border with West Virginia.

On Saturday his motorcade sped through a tunnel of gold leaves in

Bucks County, Pa.

Two hours later, the caravan was navigating Midtown Manhattan so

McCain could open "Saturday Night Live" with Tina Fey.

There he good-naturedly mocked his circumstances in a faux QVC

segment by saying he could only afford the shopping channel and not

a half-hour of prime-time television for an infomercial like the

one by Sen. Barack Obama. "Look, would I rather be on three major

networks?" McCain said. "Of course. But I'm a true maverick -- a

Republican without money."

Whatever happens on Tuesday, McCain's aides say he is too much a

student of history not to be astonished and humbled by his own

place in it.

As a prisoner of war in Vietnam, McCain mused to his cellmates

about becoming president one day. Now he is amazed that a candidate

who was left for politically dead a year ago has managed to

"lurch" -- his own choice of verb from a recent interview -- toward

the finish line at all. That is not to say that he is about to ease

up on his decade-long pursuit of the White House.

"He wants this very badly," Graham said.

McCain's days begin earlier than they used to, around 6 a.m.,

for morning television and radio interviews that he races through

in 5- and 10-minute bites. Afterward, the drill is the same as it

has been from the start. He and his aides assemble with coffee in

his hotel suite, go over the plan for the day, check out the

newspapers and, lately, pore over the campaign's overnight polls.

McCain tracks every hiccup, particularly anything from his own

pollster, Bill McInturff, that shows him edging toward Obama. He

avidly listens to campaign aides who say that if the unexcitable

McInturff says he is gaining, it must be so. "We do not have a

happy-numbers pollster," Salter said. "We've got Buzz Killer."

By the middle of the day, McCain likes to have news of the

latest tracking polls. "We all kind of know when Rasmussen comes

out, and Zogby," Wallace said. "So we all watch for it."

McCain, in the meantime, is on the phone a half-dozen times each

with his campaign manager, Rick Davis, and his top strategist,

Steve Schmidt, wanting to know everything they are doing and

anything they have heard. "He is an information sponge," Salter

said.

His low point, his aides say, was the suspension of his campaign

in late September to make his way to Washington to help negotiate a

$700 billion bailout of Wall Street, only to have the House

Republicans blow the deal up in his face. His slight edge in the

polls evaporated, and he was described by friends as angry at

himself, his campaign and the world.

Two and a half weeks later he was devastated, aides said, when

Rep. John Lewis, a Georgia Democrat and civil rights leader,

invoked the segregationist George Wallace to rebuke McCain for

tolerating insults and threats hurled at Obama at his rallies.

McCain took the edge off some of his rhetoric and has in the

last few days loosened up in his speeches, although he still

lustily attacks Obama as the tax-and-spend "redistributionist in

chief" who can not be trusted to lead the nation in crisis.

But the "get off my lawn" tone of the angry guy across the

street has at times become a more neighborly "give me a break."

"He's measuring the drapes!" McCain shouted on a chilly

Saturday morning at Christopher Newport University in Newport News,

Va.

The line was a well-worn one from his stump speech about what he

calls Obama's White House presumptions, but he delivered it

laughing out loud, as if he was amusing no one more than himself.

During the day he gets almost no exercise, eats the candy and

junk food strewn all over his bus, and naps slumped in his seat in

the curtained-off front section of his plane. The national

reporters he once called his "base" remain banished in the back;

aides say he is convinced that they are all rooting for Obama.

McCain takes an Ambien if he needs one, but in these last days

there is scant sleep on the schedule. He planned to end Sunday with

a three-hour flight from New Hampshire to a post-midnight rally in

Miami, then rest briefly and head to the airport for an 8 a.m.

departure for Tampa.

From there he was to embark on a seven-state, 18-hour odyssey

across America: north to Tennessee, northeast once more to

Pennsylvania, then west with the setting sun to Indiana, New

Mexico, Nevada and finally home to Arizona, where he will hold a

midnight rally on the courthouse steps of the old territorial

capital of Prescott, the town where he has ended all his Senate

campaigns. He was set to arrive at his condominium in Phoenix

sometime after 2 a.m. on Election Day.

There would in any case be little time for the rolling seminars

he once conducted in the back of his bus. He has local reporters

aboard for short hops, but he and Cindy McCain spend far more time

entertaining a shifting cast of Republican governors and members of

Congress. Last week on the campaign plane, the group included Gov.

Charlie Crist and Sen. Mel Martinez, both of Florida.

Martinez came through the curtain long enough to spin about what

might have been, that if Lehman Brothers and the insurance giant

AIG had not foundered, "we would still be up seven."

In the evenings, Graham and McCain's top campaign advisers --

almost all are now traveling with him -- walk the candidate to his

hotel room, where they go over the plan for the next day and then

leave him alone. McCain turns on ESPN and relaxes after rallies

that blast out a deafening "Life Is a Highway" and other campaign

anthems.

"It's like being in a rock band," Graham said. "You do your

gig, and you've got to wind down a little bit."

Before Monday's marathon, McCain said goodbye to New Hampshire,

the state that gave him two primary victories and twice resurrected

his candidacy. Polls show Obama with a double-digit lead for the

state's four electoral votes, and it was an odd place to devote

five precious hours just a day and a half before the election.

But McCain loves the state. In Peterborough's 90-year-old town

hall, he jettisoned his stump speech to answer questions on

politically dangerous topics like immigration reform that he has

avoided for months. He even had praise for Obama. "I admire and

respect my opponent," he said.

It was a message tailored to his audience of independent-minded

voters, but it was also a display of the old John McCain, or

perhaps of the new one of these last few days.

"I come to the people of New Hampshire -- Republicans,

independents, Democrats, libertarians, vegetarians," McCain said

quietly, to laughter, "and ask again to let me go on one more

mission."

Outspent and under siege in a hostile political

climate, congressional Republicans scrambled this weekend to save

embattled incumbents in an effort to hold down expected Democratic

gains in the House and Senate on Tuesday.

Senate Republicans threw their remaining resources into

protecting endangered lawmakers in Georgia, Minnesota, Mississippi,

New Hampshire, North Carolina and Oregon, while House Republicans

were forced to put money into what should be secure Republican

territory in Idaho, Indiana, Kentucky, Virginia and Wyoming.

Senate Democrats were active in nine states where Republicans

are running for re-election; House Democrats, meanwhile, bought

advertising in 63 districts, twice the number of districts where

Republicans bought advertisements and helped candidates.

"We are deep in the red areas," Rep. Chris Van Hollen of

Maryland, chairman of the Democratic Congressional Campaign

Committee, said on Sunday. "We are competing now in districts

George Bush carried by large margins in 2004."

What seems especially striking about this year's congressional

races is that Democrats appear to have solidified their gains from

the 2006 midterm elections and are pushing beyond their traditional

urban turf into what once were safe Republican strongholds,

creating a struggle for the suburbs.

With many of the most contested House races occurring in

Republican-held districts that extend beyond cities in states like

Florida, Michigan, Minnesota and Ohio, Democrats said expected

victories would give them dominance in the suburbs -- the

traditional foundation of Republican power in the House..

The same is true for Senate Democratic candidates, who are

seeking to nail down swing counties outside urban centers and move

the party toward a 60-vote majority that could overcome a

filibuster.

The partisan spending gap was stark. As of last week, Senate

Democrats had spent more than $67 million against Republican

candidates, compared with $33.7 million in advertising by

Republicans. In the House, the Democratic Congressional Campaign

Committee had spent $73 million, compared with just over $20

million for the National Republican Congressional Committee.

Most of the House Republican money was spent on behalf of

incumbents or in districts where a Republican is retiring,

emphasizing how much the party was playing defense. By contrast,

House Democrats spent most of their money in the last month going

after Republican seats in Colorado, Nebraska, Washington, West

Virginia and elsewhere.

Gov. Jim Gibbons of Nevada has been cleared by the Justice

Department of any wrongdoing in connection with an inquiry into

whether he helped a friend win defense contracts in exchange for

gifts, Gibbons' lawyer said.

The lawyer, Abbe D. Lowell, said the lead prosecutor in the case

informed Gibbons on Friday that no charges would be filed and that

the investigation, related to Gibbons' work as a congressman before

he was elected governor in 2006, had been closed.

A Justice Department spokeswoman, Laura Sweeney, said the

department would not comment.

Lowell said Gibbons, a Republican whose first term as governor

has been dogged by legal, political and personal troubles, would

make a statement on Monday.

The investigation spanned 18 months, Lowell said, and began when

a former staff member of a technology company run by a friend of

the governor made accusations of influence peddling.

The former staff member, Dennis Montgomery, told news media

outlets that his boss, Warren Trepp, the owner of eTreppid

Technologies, had given Gibbons money, casino chips and a Caribbean

cruise to help eTreppid win Defense Department contracts.

Lowell called the accusations "ridiculous" and "hogwash" and

said, "The governor does not even gamble."

"Neither the governor nor I," Lowell added, "have any problem

with the Justice Department having to investigate allegations, even

if they are crazy, because he is a high-ranking public official and

he knows the world he lives in.

"They handled it in a way and a speed that was up to them.

Though we wish it were sooner, they came to the right conclusion."

Lowell said Gibbons had cooperated in the investigation and in

recent months had been interviewed by FBI agents.

The investigation, Lowell said, might have been slowed by a

civil lawsuit between Montgomery and eTreppid, which was settled

last month.

Blxware LLC, the company where Montgomery works, said the terms

of the settlement were confidential, but the company, based in

Bellevue, Wash., disclosed that the agreement included a payment to

Trepp as "compensation for certain allegations" made against him

in the news media.

The closing of the investigation provides welcome news to

Gibbons in a trying period.

A former cocktail waitress filed a lawsuit against him last

month, alleging that he pushed her and threatened to rape her after

a night of drinking in Las Vegas just before the November 2006

election. Gibbons denied the accusation, and criminal charges were

not filed.

Gibbons, 63, and his wife, Dawn, 54, began divorce proceedings

this year after 22 years of marriage. The news media in Nevada have

made much of her accusation of adultery and the disclosure of

hundreds of text messages he sent to a woman he has said was a

friend but who Dawn Gibbons' lawyers suggest was a mistress.

A state employee filed a lawsuit last month claiming that she

was removed from her post on the belief that she had leaked the

messages.

Microsoft plans to report on Monday that the security of its

Windows operating system has significantly improved, while at the

same time the threat of computer viruses, fraud and other online

scourges has become much more serious.

The company blames organized crime, naive users and its

competitors for the deteriorating situation.

In the latest edition of its twice-a-year Security Intelligence

Report, Microsoft said that the amount of malicious or potentially

harmful software removed from Windows computers grew by 43 percent

during the first half of 2008.

The company said improvements in security for its Windows Vista

operating system and security updates to the previous Windows XP

system had made such software a less attractive target for

attackers. Instead they have shifted their attention to security

holes in individual programs.

During the first half of the year, 90 percent of newly reported

vulnerabilities involved applications, and only 10 percent affected

operating systems, according to the report.

Microsoft executives said they were pleased with the progress

made since the company was shaken by a series of destructive

programs that spread rapidly around the world over the Internet

beginning in 2003. But they said that unless software development

practices change throughout the industry, any improvements in the

security of Windows would be meaningless.

"This story is real," said George Stathakopoulos, general

manager for Microsoft's Security Engineering and Communications

group, referring to the improvement in the company's engineering

practices. "Now we have a third-party problem and it's something

we have to go solve."

Security researchers said they were sympathetic to Microsoft's

plight.

"The only thing that Microsoft can patch is their own

software," said Patrik Runald, chief security adviser for

F-Secure, a computer security firm in Finland. "That's not what

the bad guys are using to get into computers these days. It's

certainly a challenge."

Microsoft and the computer industry have also been unable to

solve the so-called dancing pony problem. That refers to the

propensity of many computer users to click on enticing links in

their e-mail or to visit seductive but malicious Web sites, leaving

them vulnerable to Trojan horse downloads and other infections.

Over the last three years the computer security industry has

been fighting a losing battle, as the ability of computer criminals

to profit from identity theft and a variety of other scams has led

to the development of a robust underground industry generating

viruses and other so-called malware.

Microsoft has tried to combat the problem by building a variety

of safeguards into its operating systems and its Internet Explorer

browser, with mixed success. The User Account Control feature of

Windows Vista, which popped up an endless stream of warnings that

irritated users, proved to be one of the key factors in the poor

reception for Vista. Last week in Los Angeles, the company said it

had entirely reworked the user interface of its new Windows 7

operating system to minimize user frustration.

In comparing Web browser vulnerabilities in Windows XP and

Windows Vista in the first half of the year, the new report found

that while Microsoft could be blamed for half of the top 10

vulnerabilities in Windows XP, the top 10 browser vulnerabilities

under Vista all came from third-party add-on software from

companies like Apple and RealNetworks.

A companion report published by Jeffrey R. Jones, a Microsoft

security director, claims that Microsoft is fixing security-related

bugs about three times as fast as three of its rivals: Apple,

Ubuntu and Red Hat.

An Apple spokesman, Bill Evans, said Microsoft had previously

issued similar reports and declined to comment beyond saying that

the data was not supported by users' experience of infections.

Microsoft has a unique vantage point from which to monitor the

world of malware and other threats because it receives automated

data both from free software it has given to users, like the

Malicious Software Removal Tool, and from specialized Internet

reporting systems that monitor threats. It also receives data about

crashes on more than a half-billion personal computers.

The current report indicates that malware infection rates are

generally higher in developing countries and regions than in

developed ones. Infection rates range from 1.8 for every 1,000

computers in Japan to above 76.4 for every 1,000 in Afghanistan.

The United States had an infection rate of 11.2 infected computers

for every 1,000 scanned, an increase of 25.5 percent in the last

six months.

Somewhere in a corner of northeastern Ohio,

just five days before the presidential election that more than a

few pundits have declared he will lose, Sen. John McCain sat in the

back of his campaign bus telling his favorite Henny Youngman jokes.

No one laughed harder than he did.

No one is suggesting that McCain is ecstatic that he is behind

in the polls or that the cognoscenti, as he puts it, "have written

us off."

But in the frantic last days of his nearly two-year second quest

for the presidency, McCain has liberated himself from the

irritable, edgy candidate of a month ago. He has, by all

appearances, decided he will get to Tuesday by having a good time.

"If we were 10 points up, we'd all be a little bit happier,"

said Mark Salter, one of McCain's closest aides. "But you throw a

lot of stuff at the guy, and he fights all the harder."

McCain's days begin earlier than they used to, around 6 a.m.,

for morning television and radio interviews that he races through

in 5- and 10- minute bites. Afterward, the drill is the same as it

has been from the start. He and his aides assemble with coffee in

his hotel suite, go over the plan for the day, check out the

newspapers and, lately, pore over the campaign's overnight polls.

During the day he gets almost no exercise, eats the candy and

junk food strewn all over his bus, and naps slumped in his seat in

the curtained-off front section of his plane.

McCain takes an Ambien if he needs one, but in these last days

there is scant sleep on the schedule. He planned to end Sunday with

a post-midnight rally in Miami, then rest briefly and head to the

airport for an 8 a.m. departure for Tampa.

From there he was to embark on a seven-state, 18-hour odyssey

across America: north to Tennessee, northeast once more to

Pennsylvania, then west with the setting sun to Indiana, New

Mexico, Nevada and finally home to Arizona, where he will hold a

midnight rally on the courthouse steps of the old territorial

capital of Prescott, the town where he has ended all his Senate

campaigns. He was set to arrive at his condominium in Phoenix

sometime after 2 a.m. on Election Day.

As Sen. Barack Obama spends the last of hundreds of millions of

dollars donated to his presidential campaign, the debate over how

future campaigns will be financed is set to begin in earnest.

Both candidates have campaigned as reformers and declared that

restoring the public financing system for presidential campaigns

would be a priority in their administration. But Obama apparently

did not absorb much by way of political cost when he broke a pledge

to accept public financing if his opponent did as well.

Obama built a huge financial advantage over the Republican

nominee, Sen. John McCain, which may have written the epitaph for

the current system.

Democrats, in particular, who have traditionally supported

limits on campaign spending, are grappling with whether they can

embrace Obama's example without being seen as hypocritical. They

are keenly aware that they have developed through the Internet a

commanding fundraising advantage over Republicans, much like the

direct-mail money machine that conservatives used to lord over

them.

"I think there is going to be tremendous reluctance on our side

to yield any of that advantage," said Tad Devine, who was a senior

strategist for Sen. John F. Kerry's presidential campaign in 2004.

An Oct. 28 USA Today-Gallup poll found most Americans did not

even know who was taking public financing and who was not; only

McCain opted for the $84 million in public financing. But the

survey also found most of those polled supported limits on campaign

spending.

House and Senate leadership aides said it was highly unlikely

that the issue would earn much attention next year, given other

priorities like the economy and the war in Iraq. There is also the

matter of the brewing debate among Democrats, who will probably

control Congress, over whether such limits are even warranted.

Advocates for tighter restrictions on campaign finance said they

were alarmed by the more than $1.5 billion that had been raised by

the presidential candidates in this year's primary and general

elections -- the first time the presidential aspirants have topped

$1 billion. (The Obama campaign raised $640 million, the McCain

camp less than $250 million.)

The advocates said that they were poised to begin aggressively

lobbying for changes to the public financing system and that they

hoped the issue would be taken up quickly by the new president and

Congress.

Chinese regulators said over the weekend that

they had confiscated and destroyed more than 3,600 tons of animal

feed tainted with melamine, an industrial chemical that has

contaminated food supplies in China and led to global recalls of

Chinese dairy products.

In what appeared to be China's biggest food safety crackdown in

years, the government also said Saturday that it had closed 238

feed makers in a series of nationwide sweeps that involved more

than 369,000 government inspectors.

The aggressive moves come amid growing worries that the animal

feed industry could be contaminated by melamine, endangering the

national food supply and posing a health threat to consumers.

In the past week and a half, eggs produced in three provinces

were found to be tainted with high levels of melamine. And in

September, melamine-tainted infant formula supplies were blamed for

sickening more than 50,000 children and causing at least four

deaths.

Regulators in the southern province of Guangdong, which has

about 80 million people and is a major manufacturing center near

Hong Kong, said they had discovered 6 tons of melamine-tainted

animal feed.

An official at the Agriculture Ministry said that the government

would mete out harsh punishment to those who were deliberately

adding melamine to animal feed.

But government officials also said that China's animal feed

supply was largely safe and that the quality of feed had improved

in recent years. They insisted that only a small number of rogue

operators had deliberately added melamine to feed, often using it

as cheap filler to save money.

The government response was similarly reassuring early last year

when several animal feed makers were caught exporting

melamine-tainted feed ingredients to the United States and other

countries, resulting in contaminated pet food supplies that

sickened and killed cats and dogs.

That case led to the largest pet food recall in American

history. Melamine dealers in China said in interviews last year and

as recently as Friday that it was not uncommon for animal feed

producers to buy melamine scrap, the cheaper waste left over after

producing melamine products, and to use it as filler.

Still, some food safety officials are asking consumers not to be

too alarmed. Although the contaminated eggs found in Hong Kong

exceeded the government limit for melamine, a young child would

have to consume about two dozen of the eggs in a single day to

become sick, they said.

Eight paramilitary soldiers were killed

and five were wounded Sunday morning when a suicide bomber rammed

an explosives-laden truck into a security checkpoint in the restive

South Waziristan tribal region, officials said.

Also on Sunday, Gen. David H. Petraeus, the new chief of the

Central Command, made his first visit to Pakistan for talks with

top political and military leaders. The relationship between

Pakistan and the United States has worsened in recent weeks after a

string of American strikes in Pakistan on militant hide-outs.

Petraeus, credited with turning around the war in Iraq, was

accompanied by Richard A. Boucher, the assistant secretary of state

for South Asia. No details on their schedule were released.

The truck bombing took place around 9:30 a.m. Sunday at a post

near Fort Zalai, a base for the paramilitary Frontier Corps about

12 miles from Wana, South Waziristan's capital.

The attack, apparently retaliation for deadly missile strikes

reported Friday, may affect an agreement between militants and

Pakistan's government.

"The attack could be a warning call to Islamabad from Maulvi

Nazir," said Arif Rafiq, a political analyst, referring to a local

militant. Nazir, the Taliban's top commander in South Waziristan,

was reportedly the target of a missile strike from a remotely

piloted aircraft on Friday.

South Waziristan, on the Afghan border, is known as a stronghold

for Taliban militants and sympathizers of al-Qaida.

On Sunday, The News, one of Pakistan's leading English-language

newspapers, reported that militants in South Waziristan had

threatened to scrap a peace accord with the government if the

United States did not halt air attacks against militant leaders.

Much of South Africa's self-image

is built on the iconography of the African National Congress: the

long walk to freedom, the devotion to democratic principles, the

racially tolerant rainbow nation of Nelson Mandela. In the three

national elections since the end of apartheid, the ANC has won each

time with the overwhelming support of voters.

So this weekend's convention led by an ANC breakaway faction was

somewhat jarring. Dissidents repeatedly described the party they

once loved as now being authoritarian, hypocritical and corrupt.

Leaders at the convention predicted a stream of defections -- and

victory for their group in elections next year.

"We are starting on the basis that we want to become the next

government, in the provinces and nationally," Mbhazima Shilowa,

one of the main dissidents and the former premier of Gauteng

province, said Sunday at a news conference meant to trumpet what

the convention had accomplished.

Indeed, this weekend may go down in South African history as a

watershed, a time when 6,400 delegates from around the nation

charted a new political course that loosened the ANC's grip. Then

again, the movement might turn out to be a flop, a lot of batting

of wings without any sustained takeoff.

The months ahead will tell the tale. A tug of war is under way

for the loyalty of party members. There are rumors, whispers,

guesses. The Sunday Times, one of the country's leading newspapers,

reports that 100 ANC members of parliament are preparing to desert

the party. The insurrection is thought to be biggest in the

provinces of Eastern Cape, Western Cape and Northern Cape.

Shilowa coyly boasted, "There will be some resignations today,

and there will be some tomorrow and some on Tuesday going

onwards."

If ANC leaders are worried, they manage a brave face in public.

"The wealthy gathered yesterday at their fancy convention" in

the suburbs, Jacob Zuma, the party president, derisively remarked

Sunday at a rally in the township of Soweto that drew about 20,000

people. "There's not much they said."

A cell phone was pressed to Sen. Barack

Obama's ear as he slouched down in a black leather chair in the

front cabin of his campaign airplane. He leaned away from the

headrest, where his name is spelled out in blue stitching.

A few miles away, thousands of people streamed into JFK Stadium

at Parkview High School for a late-night rally on Saturday. But

Obama stayed on his chartered Boeing 757 as he spoke by conference

call to thousands of his team leaders around the country, the

volunteers who form the ranks of an army that he hopes will give

him an edge in the waning hours of the presidential race.

As he pressed his right hand to his forehead, his sober

expression seemed at odds with the confident gleam in the eyes of

his advisers. While Obama smiles less than he once did, gauging his

mood simply by looking at him is risky for a man whose flat-line

temperament has seldom spiked along the rocky points of his

journey.

In a campaign where he has slogged through more competitive

Election Days than any recent nominee, only one more lies ahead.

And it is the long path of the Democratic primary, which lurched

from the ups of Iowa to the downs of Ohio, that his friends say

provided Obama with a steady equilibrium as he enters this final

turn in the race for the White House.

"As painful as the primary season was and how agitating it

could be, it turned out to be a blessing for him," said Eric

Whitaker, a longtime friend from Chicago who joined Obama aboard

the crowded campaign plane for the last three days. "But my role

now is to keep him loose. There's a lot going on in his world."

The lines in Obama's face have grown a bit deeper since he

started his campaign, with the notches of gray hair along his

temples far more pronounced. He often carries the look of

exhaustion, but flying the other night to Nevada, where he arrived

after midnight, Obama passed on the chance to take much of a nap.

Instead, he walked around the cabin of his airplane, which is

about the size of a bedroom, and talked about a favorite diversion

-- the coming basketball season -- as he took care not to step on a

senior foreign policy adviser, Mark Lippert, who was asleep on the

floor.

In the last days on the trail, he is finishing "Ghost Wars: the

Secret History of the CIA, Afghanistan and bin Laden," and taking

an occasional glance at US Weekly. He reads at least two newspapers

a day, vigilantly checks his BlackBerry for updates on early-voting

tallies and browses briefing books.

"In a marathon, when you are on mile 20 you start getting

tired, but when you are on mile 25 you don't," said Lippert, who

has grown familiar with Obama's travel rhythms while accompanying

him on the four foreign trips he has taken since becoming a

senator. "That's where he's at."

Whatever emotion he feels as his candidacy draws to a close, he

displays little of it, either in public appearances or private

conversations with his close advisers. The air of confidence that

he exudes, which some critics castigate as arrogance, grew in part

out of the primary, when he worked to avoid perceptions that he was

weak or not ready.

But now, he is described by friends as feeling as though he has

been thoroughly tested and is prepared to take on the job he has

spent 22 months fighting for. Still, it is hard for even those

closest to Obama to fathom what these days are precisely like, even

for the imperturbable -- often inscrutable -- senator from Illinois.

His world is awash in powerful, conflicting emotions: the

realization, presumably, that he may be about to become president;

the huge optimism that he has unleashed, evident in the crowds he

is drawing (and something he has told aides worries him a bit,

given the expectations set for him); the weighty thinking he is

gradually giving to how he would staff a government and deal with a

transition in such a difficult time. All of this is taking place at

a time where the woman who played a large role in raising him, his

grandmother, is approaching death.

"What if I disappoint people?" Valerie Jarrett, a close friend

and adviser, recalled Obama asking at several points throughout the

campaign. "That's what gives him the energy to keep getting up

every day." It has been months since Obama has ventured with any

regularity to the back of his plane where the journalists sit. (The

one time he played the board game Taboo on a cross-country flight

to Oregon is a distant memory.) He has not taken questions for so

long that reporters have taken to shouting at him as he boards his

plane. As he climbed up the steps of his airplane here on Sunday

morning, headed for Ohio, a reporter shouted to question why he

hadn't held a news conference in weeks.

"I will," Obama said. "On Wednesday."

On a final weekend pass through electoral battlegrounds that

spanned three time zones, the electoral climate and his campaign

organization provide him the luxury of focusing on states that

favored the Republican ticket four years ago. But when his

Democratic crowds jeer at the mere mention of Sen. John McCain, he

offers a gentle scolding: "You don't need to boo, you just need to

vote!"

It is a true crowd-pleaser, and he reprises it in city after

city.

His crowds have rarely been larger or more enthusiastic -- often,

perhaps, more outwardly so than the candidate himself. These days,

Obama is racing through his speeches, whittling down a message that

once stretched for more than an hour to a disciplined 30 minutes.

He works the rope line at every stop, but taking a closer look you

realize that it's as much for a few photographs as for a lot of

handshakes. At each event, though, he stays long enough to sign a

stack of books for supporters.

During a rally outside Orlando, Fla., the other night, where he

was joined for the first time on stage by former President Bill

Clinton, he was visibly chilly in the unusually cool air with a

temperature that dipped into the 40s. He had hoped to wear a coat,

but Clinton did not, so Obama came to the stage without one. Not so

the next night in Virginia, where a cool and damp chill also hung

in the air.

"I did decide to wear a coat, because you want a president who

has sense," Obama told the crowd from behind the podium, where he

was covered in a black wool overcoat.

While he may not be coasting to the finish line, he's not

running as hard as he did during his battle with Sen. Hillary

Rodham Clinton for the Democratic nomination. On Sunday, he was in

the gym of the Doubletree Hotel here shortly after 6 a.m., but he

spent some time with his wife and daughters before boarding his

plane at 9:30 a.m. He didn't arrive for his first public event of

the day at the Ohio Statehouse in Columbus until 1 p.m.

His campaign schedule, like Obama himself, can be slow to start

in the morning, but runs late into the night. After appearing with

Bruce Springsteen at a rally in Cleveland, followed by a stop in

Cincinnati, Obama was not scheduled to arrive at his hotel in

Jacksonville, Fla., until after 1 a.m. on Monday.

If there is a whiff of nostalgia surrounding the Obama campaign

in these final hours before the election, it doesn't seem to be

emanating from the candidate himself. He is eager to be finished

campaigning, several of his friends said, and for months has been

immersing himself in the work of the presidency, well before he

knows if it will ever be his.

He spends far less time on the telephone these days making

political calls to local Democratic chairmen. His call list now

includes officials in Washington, including Treasury Secretary

Henry M. Paulson Jr., to whom he spoke to several times a day for

weeks about the government rescue plan. And he is in frequent

conversations with congressional leaders over how to proceed should

he win on Tuesday.

On Saturday morning, Obama met in his hotel suite at Caesar's

Palace in Las Vegas with Sen. Harry Reid of Nevada, the majority

leader. They spent about 45 minutes together, with Reid ticking

through a list of items sketched on a note card in his breast

pocket.

Obama also spoke about how his life has changed, a point that

was driven home on Friday night when he went home to see his

daughters for Halloween and grew agitated when he felt that a group

of reporters and photographers had crowded him.

"He said he likes to go out trick-or-treating, but he can't

anymore," Reid said in an interview, recalling the conversation he

had with Obama. "He said he guessed he could have worn a Barack

Obama mask."

One of the greatest frustrations of his candidacy -- being away

from his wife, Michelle, and his two daughters, Malia and Sasha --

will come to an end, win or lose. When his plane touched down on

Saturday afternoon in Pueblo, Colo., his step carried an extra

lilt. It was not because of the place that he finds himself in the

closing moments of his campaign, but because his two daughters were

standing on the breezy tarmac, waiting to be scooped up by their

daddy.

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After years of unfettered growth in military

budgets, Defense Department planners, top commanders and weapons

manufacturers now say they are almost certain that the financial

meltdown will have a serious impact on future Pentagon spending.

Civilian and military budget planners say that they are already

analyzing worst-case contingency spending plans that would freeze

or slash their overall budgets.

The obvious targets for savings would be expensive new arms

programs, which have racked up cost overruns of at least $300

billion for the top 75 weapons systems, according to the Government

Accountability Office. Congressional budget experts say likely

targets for reductions are the Army's plans for fielding advanced

combat systems, the Air Force's Joint Strike Fighter, the Navy's

new destroyer and the ground-based missile defense system.

The Pentagon's annual base budget for standard operations has

reached more than $500 billion, the highest level since World War

II when adjusted for inflation.

On top of that figure, supplemental spending for the wars in

Iraq and Afghanistan has topped $100 billion each year. In all, the

Defense Department now accounts for half of the government's total

discretionary spending.

On the presidential campaign trail, Sens. John McCain and Barack

Obama have pledged to cut fat without carving into the muscle of

national security. Both have said they would protect the overall

level of military spending, and McCain has further pledged to add

more troops to the roster of the armed services beyond the 92,000

now advocated by the Pentagon, an increase endorsed by Obama.

Some critics say it would be much easier to cut military

spending than programs like Social Security and Medicare at a time

when retirement savings are dwindling because of the financial

crisis. Rep. Barney Frank, D-Mass., the chairman of the House

Financial Services Committee, has raised the idea of reducing

military spending by 25 percent.

Defense Secretary Robert M. Gates has warned against repeating

historic trends, in which the nation cut money for the armed

services after a period of warfare.

"We basically gutted our military after World War I, after

World War II, in certain ways after Korea, certainly after Vietnam

and after the end of the Cold War," Gates said. "Experience is

the ability to recognize a mistake when you make it again."

Gates acknowledges that military spending is almost certain to

level off, and he expressed a goal that the Pentagon budget at

least keep pace with inflation over coming years.

Shortly after 9 a.m. on Oct. 19, Colin Powell endorsed Barack

Obama for president during the taping of "Meet the Press" on NBC.

Within minutes, the video was on the Web.

But the clip was not rushed onto YouTube; it was MSNBC.com, the

network's sister entity online, that showed the video hours before

television viewers on the West Coast could watch the interview for

themselves.

Old media, apparently, can learn new media tricks. Not since

1960, when John F. Kennedy won in part because of the increasingly

popular medium of television, has changing technology had such an

impact on the political campaigns and the organizations covering

them.

For many viewers, the 2008 election has become a kind of hybrid

in which the dividing line between online and off, broadcast and

cable, pop culture and civic culture, has been all but obliterated.

Many of the media outlets influencing the 2008 election simply

were not around in 2004. YouTube did not exist, and Facebook barely

reached beyond the Ivy League. There was no Huffington Post to

encourage citizen reporters, so Obama's comment about voters

clinging to guns or religion may have passed unnoticed. These sites

and countless others have redefined how many Americans get their

political news.

When viewers settle in Tuesday night to watch the election

returns, they will also check text messages for alerts, browse the

Web for exit poll results and watch videos distributed by the

campaigns. And many folks will let go of the mouse only to pick up

the remote and sample an array of cable channels with election

coverage -- from Comedy Central to BBC America.

But as NBC's decision to release the Powell clip early shows,

the networks and their newspaper counterparts have not simply

waited to be overtaken. Instead, they have made specific efforts to

engage audiences with interactive features, allowing their content

to be used in unanticipated ways, and in many efforts, breaking out

of the boundaries of the morning paper and the evening newscast.

"Old media outlets -- the networks, the newspapers -- learned a

lot of lessons from the last cycle and didn't allow others to own

the online space this time," said Rick Klein, the senior political

reporter for ABC News.

Some of those lessons have been painful. Consider what has

changed since the last presidential election. Four years ago, the

network news operations were still the go-to source on election

night, with a total audience of 38 million in prime time, compared

with 17 million for the three cable news channels. On Tuesday, the

ratings race will surely be tighter. On a historic night in August,

when a black man became the first endorsed candidate of a major

political party, the biggest audience of all belonged to CNN.

"Some of this began back in 2006, but I think that cable news

has transformed the way that elections are covered," said David

Bohrman, the Washington bureau chief for CNN. "I don't think

networks are irrelevant, but network news is less relevant than it

has been."

But those who suggest that 2008 is a postnetwork affair should

consider that, while Gov. Sarah Palin of Alaska was something of a

fixation on the Web, it was her interview with Katie Couric, the

anchor of the "CBS Evening News," and the impersonation by Tina

Fey on NBC's "Saturday Night Live," that defined her in the

public imagination. When Obama's campaign sought to make one last

push with a 30-minute infomercial, it bought time on three major

networks, using money harvested on one platform -- the Web -- to buy

time on another -- broadcast television.

"We should be careful of these zero-sum games where the new

media drives out the old," said Andrew Heyward, a former president

of CBS News who is now a senior adviser to Marketspace, a

consulting firm owned by the Monitor Group. "I think what we see

is growing sophistication about making the channels work together

effectively."

The Republicans have made a habit of running against the media

in elections past. This year, the mainstream media found itself at

times running against both parties. Perhaps drawing on Obama's

background as a community organizer, his campaign decided early on

to build a social network that would flank, and in some cases

outflank, traditional news media.

With a Facebook group that had 2.3 million adherents and a huge

push on YouTube -- last week alone, the campaign uploaded 70 videos,

many of them tailored to battleground states -- the campaign used

peer-to-peer communication to build a juggernaut that did not

depend on the whims and choices of the media's collective brain

trust.

The campaign mined its online community not just for money, but

for content. A video titled "Four Days in Denver" about the Obama

campaign had the kind of access that journalists would kill for,

including the candidate working over his acceptance speech with a

staff member and showing the family backstage making ready for

their moment in the spotlight.

It looked like a big-time network get, but it was produced by

the campaign itself.

"We're constantly experimenting with videos," said Joe

Rospars, Obama's new-media director. "There aren't hard and fast

rules about what will inspire supporters or explain things

clearly." The most popular videos on BarackObama.com weren't TV

ads; they were biographical videos and Web-only recordings.

McCain, in part because he appealed to a less digital

demographic, made sparser use of the Web, but Republicans were not

immune to the charms of new media. The Web never forgets, giving

new life to events from several years ago.

"No one knows the impact of quasi-permanency on the Web yet,

but it surely has changed the political world," said Allan Louden,

a professor who teaches a course on digital politics at Wake Forest

University. "The role of gatekeepers and archivists have been

dispersed to everyone with Internet access."

And late last month, the McCain campaign solicited users to come

up with their own Joe the Plumber videos and showed the results on

its Web site.

"I think that this time around, campaigns got used to the fact

that anything that they put out there could be pirated, remixed,

mashed-up and recirculated," said Henry Jenkins, the author of

"Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide" and a

professor at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. "It is a

much more rapid environment."

Raw footage of political speeches -- which no network except

C-Span considers hot content -- racked up huge numbers. With 5

million views since March, Obama's 37-minute speech about race is

the most popular video on his YouTube channel.

To compete, major media companies had to change how they

produced their coverage. Before almost every big interview of the

year -- ABC's interview with John Edwards about his extramarital

affair, for instance -- the networks released excerpts on their Web

sites.

"SNL" videos proved to be particularly popular online; Fey's

impressions were viewed more than 50 million times.

"The idea that something can be seen more online than on TV,

and arguably have more influence that way, is a tipping point,"

Heyward said.

Politically oriented video, much of it topical and much of the

juicier bits lifted from network programming, is everywhere on the

Web. YouTube videos mentioning either Obama or McCain have been

viewed 2.3 billion times, according to the measurement firm

TubeMogul. A Pew Research Center survey conducted in October found

that 39 percent of registered voters had watched campaign videos

online.

"What is striking here is not the dominance of any one medium,

but the integration of various channels," said Lee Rainie, the

director of the Pew Internet &amp;amp; American Life Project.

By the time the conventions rolled around, some networks

realized the game had changed. Couric christened her own YouTube

channel and was turned loose in Web extras. But network news

divisions are expensive operations based on a television business

model. They can't be run on the relatively small money that online

advertising draws but they can't compete for audiences if they

ignore the Web.

"At a time when almost anyone can check voter turnout in

certain neighborhoods in Cuyahoga County, I don't think everyone is

going to sit there and wait to be spoon-fed the election results in

the order Brian Williams thinks is appropriate," said Joan Walsh,

the editor of Salon and a frequent television commentator on the

election, referring to a closely watched county in Ohio.

Perhaps the only thing that could be predicted with any

reliability is that, viewers who now watch cable news on a set that

looks like the desktop -- running streams of data framing the main

page -- while streaming video on a nearby laptop will probably be

watching just one screen that can do all of those things four years

from now.

"There was a palpable hunger for information and data about

this election that has nothing to do with media," said Mark

Jurkowitz, of the Project for Excellence in Journalism. "Nobody

reports, you decide."

Much of South Africa's self-image

is built on the iconography of the African National Congress: the

long walk to freedom, the devotion to democratic principles, the

racially tolerant rainbow nation of Nelson Mandela. In the three

national elections since the end of apartheid, the ANC has won each

time with the overwhelming support of voters.

So this weekend's convention led by an ANC breakaway faction was

somewhat jarring. Dissidents repeatedly described the party they

once loved as now being authoritarian, hypocritical and corrupt.

Leaders at the convention predicted a stream of defections -- and

victory for their group in elections next year.

"We are starting on the basis that we want to become the next

government, in the provinces and nationally," Mbhazima Shilowa,

one of the main dissidents and the former premier of Gauteng

Province, said Sunday at a news conference meant to trumpet what

the convention had accomplished.

Indeed, this weekend may go down in South African history as a

watershed, a time when 6,400 delegates from around the nation

charted a new political course that loosened the ANC's grip. Then

again, the movement might turn out to be a flop, a lot of batting

of wings without any sustained takeoff.

The months ahead will tell the tale. A tug of war is under way

for the loyalty of party members. There are rumors, whispers,

guesses. The Sunday Times, one of the country's leading newspapers,

reports that 100 ANC members of parliament are preparing to desert

the party. The insurrection is thought to be biggest in the

provinces of Eastern Cape, Western Cape and Northern Cape.

Shilowa coyly boasted, "There will be some resignations today,

and there will be some tomorrow and some on Tuesday going

onwards."

If ANC leaders are worried, they manage a brave face in public.

"The wealthy gathered yesterday at their fancy convention" in

the suburbs, Jacob Zuma, the party president, derisively remarked

Sunday at a rally in the township of Soweto that drew about 20,000

people. "There's not much they said."

However much it was, the activities at the convention drew the

kind of news coverage ordinarily reserved for extraordinary events,

with banner headlines like "The fight is on" and "Hungry for

change."

Not only were ANC dissidents present at the convention, but also

the leaders of most of the nation's small political parties, each

allowed to lambaste the ANC on the podium as the crowd called out

"Bua," meaning "say it."

The minister who delivered the invocation said the ANC was

"stagnating and rotting." Patricia De Lille, leader of the

Independent Democrats, said, "The once proud liberation movement

has lost its way." Helen Zille, head of the Democratic Alliance --

the opposition party with the second-most seats in Parliament --

hinted that a broad anti-ANC coalition was possible.

Zuma, speaking in Soweto, seized on the notion of the dissidents

and their strange bedfellows, four times mentioning the largely

white Democratic Alliance. "Even before the divorce has concluded

they have now announced that they will be getting married to the

Democratic Alliance and other opposition parties to form a

coalition," he said.

Wearing a pullover shirt and a baseball cap, and speaking mostly

in Zulu, Zuma presented himself as more a man of the people than

his opponents at the Sandton Convention Center, in a well-to-do

Johannesburg suburb and part of an exclusive shopping mall. Trays

of cookies sat on pedestals in the lobbies of the convention hall.

Waiters poured coffee and tea.

Shilowa was somewhat evasive about the financing of the event

but said that the cost was at least $500,000 and that an accounting

of the finances would be made public.

The breakaway party has been in the works for about a month, set

off by the ANC's dismissal of one of its own, Thabo Mbeki, as

president of the country on Sept. 20. Mbeki has played no visible

role in the breakaway faction, but many of its leaders are close to

him.

According to Shilowa, the party will be officially established

on Dec. 16 in Bloemfontein, where the ANC, Africa's oldest

liberation movement, was formed in 1912. A name for the new party

will be selected in the next few days, he said. The organization

has tentatively been called the South African National Congress,

but the ANC has gone to court in an attempt to stop use of a name

so similar to its own.

Private equity firms embarked on one of the biggest spending

sprees in corporate history for nearly three years, using borrowed

money to gobble up huge swaths of industries and some of the

biggest names -- Neiman Marcus, Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer and Toys "R"

Us, among them.

The new owners then saddled the companies with the billions of

dollars of debt used to buy them. But now many of the loans and

bonds sold to finance the deals are about to come due at the worst

possible time. Like homeowners with an adjustable rate mortgage

that just went up, some of private equity's titans are facing a

huge squeeze. And that is coming at the same time as consumers are

staying home with their wallets closed.

Already this year, big retailers backed by private equity, like

Linens 'n Things, Mervyn's and Steve &amp;amp; Barry's, have filed for

bankruptcy. And analysts expect an even broader array of companies

backed by private equity -- including resorts like Harrah's

Entertainment and lenders like GMAC, the financing arm of General

Motors -- to face even more pressure as profits shrivel and

creditors come knocking.

"There's absolutely going to a lot of pain to go around," said

Josh Lerner, a professor of investment banking at Harvard Business

School, who wrote a seminal paper on private equity. "The big

question is how apocalyptic it will be."

The shakeout could have enormous implications for the economy:

People who work for companies owned by private equity firms could

lose their jobs as firms cut costs to meet their debt obligations.

And private equity firms like Apollo Management, which owns

Harrah's and Linens 'n Things, face deep markdowns on the value of

their holdings.

Pension funds and college endowments that invested in these

funds in recent years hoping for big returns are likely to suffer

as well, and many of those investors could face a cash squeeze

because they are probably going to have to hold onto their

investments for years, until the economy turns around.

"The dangling other shoe is now about to drop," said Jeffrey

A. Sonnenfeld, senior associate dean of the Yale School of

Management.

Private equity firms, which are lightly regulated, use

investors' money to buy undervalued public companies and take them

private. When the economy was booming, the firms made huge profits

by cutting costs at their new acquisitions, improving operations

and then turning around and selling them. In 2007, at the height of

the bubble, such deals totaled $796 billion, or more than 16

percent of the $4.83 trillion in all the deals made globally that

year, according to data from Dealogic.

Firms like Blackstone Group and Kohlberg Kravis Roberts &amp;amp; Co.,

which faced an image problem at the height of the bubble for

excessive compensation and beneficial tax treatment, but their

returns were so high that even investors like pension funds were

drawn in. Now these firms, built on enormous amounts of debt, are

being forced to go back to the financial markets just as those

markets have nearly frozen up. If history is any guide, the worst

may be yet to come. Steven N. Kaplan, a professor at University of

Chicago Graduate School of Business, found that nearly 30 percent

of all big public-to-private deals made from 1986 to 1989

defaulted. Afterward, private equity players were called in front

of Congress and movies like "Wall Street" and "Other People's

Money" were made depicting financiers as greedy criminals.

To be sure, many companies that were not purchased by private

equity firms are also struggling. Circuit City, the longtime seller

of consumer electronics, is trying to stave off a bankruptcy

filing. And publicly traded automakers like GM are troubled, too.

(GM wants to merge with the struggling Chrysler, which is owned by

private equity.)

Many industry insiders and analysts contend that private

equity-backed companies will not suffer nearly as much as those in

the late 1980s, because the firms pushed for better financing

conditions that allow them to keep operating even if they cannot

make their debt payments.

For example, in an effort to save cash, six of Apollo's

portfolio companies, including Claire's Stores, Harrah's and

Realogy, have announced this year that they will pay some of their

bonds' interest payments by issuing more debt.

Kaplan said he believed that while "it isn't going to be

pretty," today's deals "are much less fragile and used less

leverage." He contended that "on a relative basis to investment

banks and hedge funds, private equity may be in a better place"

because of its long-term focus.

Stephen A. Schwarzman, chairman of Blackstone Group, remains

committed to the future of private equity. "The people rooting for

the collapse of private equity are going to be disappointed," he

said. While some companies may find themselves in trouble, he said,

many more will be able to ride out a downturn in the economy

because of the lax financing conditions that banks agreed to at the

top of the market.

He added that he believes that now may be the best time for

private equity because of the investment opportunities amid the

crisis. "Historically, downturns are when the most money gets

made," he said. Shares of Blackstone are hovering at around $10,

down from the $31 they were at when Blackstone went public in June

2007. (Fortress Investment Group, another big firm, is trading at

$4.90 a share, down from its initial price of $35 in February

2007.)

Lerner, of the Harvard Business School, said that trouble among

private equity firms would probably "precipitate hard questions

about the compensation and fee structure" in the industry. The

firms generally take fees of 2 percent of all money managed and 20

percent of profits. "I would not be surprised if they try to head

of the criticism by returning capital," he said.

The problem for recent deals is that many firms waded into

economically sensitive sectors like retailing and restaurants.

Firms like Apollo, Cerberus Capital Management and Sun Capital

Partners purchased several troubled companies to turn around from

2004 through the first half of 2007.

In the case of Linens 'n Things, a longtime also-ran to Bed,

Bath &amp;amp; Beyond, Apollo knew that it had a tough job ahead of it, yet

it still added lots of debt. Two months before Linens 'n Things was

acquired, it reported $2.1 million in long-term debt; by Dec. 31,

2007, that amount had exploded to $855 million.

At the time, private equity firms assumed that they could

refinance their portfolio companies' debt cheaply. But many appear

to have been blindsided by the size and severity of the credit

market meltdown, which has left lenders unable or unwilling to loan

out more money.

In what seems a worrisome trend, many bonds of private

equity-backed companies have recently plummeted in value, signaling

worries about their solvency. These include Michaels, the crafts

store co-owned by Bain Capital and the Blackstone Group; Dollar

General, a low-price retailer taken private by Kohlberg Kravis

Roberts; and Realogy, the parent company of the real estate

brokerage firms Coldwell Banker and Century 21 that is owned by

Apollo Management.

The bonds issued by Harrah's Entertainment, for example, were

trading at 16.5 cents on the dollar, signaling investors' belief

that the company was drawing closer to a potential default.

Harrah's, too, was saddled with a lot of debt when it was taken

private. A month before the closing of the Harrah's takeover, the

company reported $12.4 billion in long-term debt. By June 30, that

figure had swollen to $23.9 billion. Harrah's has already begun

making selective staff cuts and has begun scaling back costs, even

cutting back hours in its VIP lounge and the free "comps" for its

best customers.

"Unfortunately, the worst-case scenario is now looking like the

base case scenario," analysts from CreditSights, a research firm,

wrote in a research note on Oct. 17 about Harrah's. "While the

company could be able to pull through unscathed, the market is

giving little credit to do so."

The vice-presidential candidates spent the

final, frenetic hours of the 2008 campaign on traditionally

Republican turf, with Sen. Joseph R. Biden Jr. urging Democrats to

get to the polls and Gov. Sarah Palin warning that "the far-left

wing of the Democrat" Party is poised to take over Washington.

Palin addressed large crowds in Florida, North Carolina and

Virginia on Saturday, and made several appearances in Ohio on

Sunday. Biden spent Saturday and Sunday skittering around Ohio and

Florida before heading to Missouri for an early appearance on

Monday.

It is no coincidence that the candidates are appearing only in

states that President Bush won in 2004. The Republican ticket, led

by Sen. John McCain of Arizona, is playing defense while the

Democrats, confident they have locked up the states they won in

2004, are seeking new territory.

Palin's message, at its heart, is a fear-based argument against

electing Sen. Barack Obama of Illinois. She warns voters that Obama

will raise taxes, expand government, capitulate to terrorists and

promote an extreme liberal agenda with the help of broader

Democratic majorities in Congress.

"The time for choosing is near, and the choice is going to come

down to what we believe in, Ohio," Palin said at a rally Sunday in

Canton, Ohio. "We believe in the forward movement of freedom, not

the constant expansion of government."

Biden's message has evolved in recent days, from harsh attacks

on McCain and Palin to a broader appeal for an end to what he calls

the "politics of division." He still mocks the Republican ticket,

arguing that they are not mavericks but rather mere "sidekicks"

to Bush who would continue his foreign and economic policies. He

says that in their desperation, McCain and Palin are using smears

and lies to impugn Obama's character and patriotism.

But Biden, with an unstated sense that victory is within the

Democrats' grasp, has turned to a call for healing a divided

nation. He urges his audiences to "choose hope over fear."

"We have to unite this country," Biden said at a rally at

Florida State University here on Sunday afternoon. "We cannot stay

blue and red, really, we cannot stay divided. We can't strengthen

the economy if we are pitted one against the other."

"We cannot move past the politics of division unless we reach

out to those people in the parking lot," Biden added, referring to

about a dozen noisy pro-McCain protesters near the event.

In Florida on Saturday, Palin used the age-old tactic of warning

elderly people that her opponents were not committed to Social

Security. (Biden did the same thing in Florida last week.) In

Virginia, she affirmed her support for gun owners' rights, drawing

loud cheers. Speaking with a Southern twang, she said she would

work on "keeping Virginia red and making y'all prosperous."

Palin's crowds have been enormous and enthusiastic, shaking

red-and-white pompoms and filling minor league baseball stadiums,

airplane hangars and warehouses. The music at campaign events

reinforces her image as a plain-spoken, hard-working reformer ("9

to 5" and "Straight Talk" by Dolly Parton), while paying tribute

to her appearance ("She's Not Just a Pretty Face" by Shania Twain

and "Isn't She Lovely" by Stevie Wonder).

Palin is almost always accompanied by her husband, Todd, whom

she chirpily introduces as "Alaska's first dude." (Sometimes she

follows up by joking that he "looks like one of those Secret

Service guys.")

Biden has been joined for the last several days by his wife of

31 years, Jill Jacobs Biden, a community college professor. She

tells audiences that this is the most important election of their

lifetimes and adds a few biographical notes about her husband,

including that he lost his first wife and a young daughter in a car

accident in 1972.

When Biden takes the stage -- unfailingly, to "The Rising" by

Bruce Springsteen -- he thanks Obama for choosing him as his running

mate. "The reason I'm so thankful," he says, "is I've never

heard my wife say such nice things about me in public."

Biden regularly warns against complacency and urges those in the

audience who have not voted already to cast their ballots early if

possible.

Biden and Palin have accelerated their schedules, now appearing

at as many as five rallies a day in as many cities. A week ago, two

or three events a day was the norm for each candidate.

They have shortened their stump speeches and are spending less

time greeting supporters. Their exhaustion is beginning to show,

particularly late at night. Palin's voice sometimes grows hoarse

and Biden occasionally stumbles over lines he has repeated dozens

of times. The other night he referred to his running mate as

"Baracko."

Just as Sen. Hillary Rodham Clinton of New York did in the

primaries, Palin dismisses Obama's oratory as "just words," even

as she whips crowds into a frenzy with her own remarks.

"The rousing speeches of our opponent, they can fill a

stadium," Palin said. "But they cannot keep our country safe. And

for a season, a man can inspire with his words, but for a lifetime,

John McCain has inspired us with his deeds!"

Her speeches have relied on repetition, especially words like

"tough" and "guts" when applied to McCain. Speaking in Virginia

on Saturday night, Palin repeated the phrase "Joe the Plumber"

six times.

Palin singles out Biden regularly in her remarks, noting that he

once said it would be patriotic for the wealthy to pay more taxes,

and recalling that, in a verbal slip, Biden said that he and Obama

opposed so-called clean coal technology.

But Biden rarely singles out anything Palin has said or done. He

does not question her qualifications or mention any of her verbal

blunders. She appears, if at all, as "McCain-Palin," merely an

appendage to the Republican nominee for president.

On Monday, Palin will begin her day in Ohio, and then head to

Missouri, Iowa, Colorado and Nevada. Late that night, she will fly

to Anchorage, travel to her home in Wasilla, Alaska, to cast her

vote, and then fly to Phoenix to join McCain.

Biden will start Monday with a speech in Lee's Summit, Mo., then

appear in Zanesville and Akron, Ohio, before ending his day with a

rally in Philadelphia. He will vote in his hometown of Wilmington,

Del., then fly to Chicago to spend election night with Obama at a

large gathering in Grant Park.

Sandy Hammargren is the definition of a patient,

long-suffering wife, except when it comes to Big Bertha.

Her husband, Dr. Lonnie Hammargren, built Big Bertha, a black

10-foot-tall model locomotive, in their backyard from a disparate

collection of parts: a rail car believed to have brought Howard

Hughes to Las Vegas, part of a road girder, a piece of an 1890

steam tractor, a boiler "from something entirely different, I

can't remember what," Hammargren said. The wheels were from

castoff parts of old CAT scan machines.

"Oh, I just hate it," she said. "It's awful to look at."

That she wants Big Bertha gone is not surprising. What is

astonishing is that Big Bertha is all that earns her wrath when

nearly every inch of her vast home is overwhelmed by thousands of

other bits of memorabilia, collections, bizarre shop projects and

unadulterated junk.

The endless displays, which leave nary an inch of floor space

inside or outside their home, in southeast Las Vegas, add up to a

lifetime of acquisitions for Hammargren, a former two-term Nevada

lieutenant governor and retired neurosurgeon.

Hammargren opened the home to the public on Sunday afternoon, as

he does each year to observe the anniversary of Nevada statehood.

Once a stately one-story house, it has three floors and is attached

to homes on each side that Hammargren bought over the years and

loaded with his ever-multiplying collections.

The contents range wildly and appear to have little

organization: a life-size doll of the late entertainer Sammy Davis

Jr. sits as the conductor of a train that came from the Nevada Test

Site nuclear proving ground. Hammargren is predominantly occupied

by items from old Vegas casinos, scale models of famous sites from

around the globe and various NASA space missions. Hammargren, 70,

was a NASA flight surgeon who flew in jets with the likes of the

astronaut Buzz Aldrin, a friend and occasional visitor.

The home goes by at least three names -- the Castillo del Sol,

the Hammargren Home of Nevada History and the Principality of

Paradise. Hammargren calls his stead a country of its own and gives

visitors faux gold coins with his face on them.

Trying to converse with Hammargren is a challenge because, like

the disparate items crammed into his home, his soliloquies move

without pause or logical transition from one world to another.

"My hobbies are astronomy and archeology, put it together

that's archostronomy, which is really the history of the world

through stars, but oh, there's the large pink egg that Liberace

used to come out of every Easter during his Easter show," he said.

"And over there, that's my Saddam Hussein-Osama bin Laden display,

which I call the 'Wacky Iraqi half tacky."'

As a political figure, Hammargren, a Republican, was never taken

all that seriously. His quirky persona helped him win election in

1990 and 1994 as the state's lieutenant governor, an office with

virtually no duty other than to ascend in the event of the

governor's death or removal.

But Hammargren did not seem to see the office that way. He

startled the political establishment when, as acting governor when

Gov. Bob Miller, a Democrat, was momentarily out of the state, he

tried to appoint someone to fill a vacancy on the Lincoln County

Commission. The secretary of state, also a Republican, refused to

notarize the appointment. Hammargren ran for governor in 2000 but

did not earn his party's nomination.

He is well regarded as a physician. When he arrived in Nevada in

1971, he was one of only two neurosurgeons in the state and has

operated on thousands of people since. Among his most notable

patients was Roy Horn, of the illusionist duo Siegfried &amp;amp; Roy, who

was attacked on stage by a tiger in 2003. Yet that, too, got

Hammargren into some trouble when he disclosed to reporters details

of the surgery.

On Sunday, as a crowd wended through the home, many took in the

scenery with a mixture of bemusement, repulsion and, indeed, a

little fear.

"Oh God, what's going to be in the next room?" asked Darren

D'Amato, 44, of Henderson, who decided to visit after hearing a

local radio host say on Friday that the open house was a rite of

passage for Nevadans. "This place is a beautiful monstrosity.

That's the only way I can describe it."

D'Amato wondered how the neighbors cope. Many grouse to the news

media, anonymously, about the clutter and clatter and about

concerns that such an eyesore damages home values in a subdivision

of half-acre lots with neat lawns and tasteful facades. By

contrast, the Principality of Paradise's facade is a huge, homemade

fiberglass replica of a Mayan temple.

The Hammargrens have skirmished with neighbors who have

complained to local authorities, but the doctor has never been

forced to limit or alter his home. Thousands come to see the place

when it is open for visitors, but it has also topped local

newspaper readers' polls as the city's biggest eyesore.

Yet Dotty Reeve, who weeded her yard across the street on

Saturday, said she enjoyed her proximity.

"It's kind of fun, to tell you the truth," Reeve said. "Not

many people like it, but it's not hurting anybody. It's kind of

interesting, really. I think people gripe about it, but the same

people drive by just to see what's going on there."

Thousands of Russians from the pro-Kremlin youth group

Nashi gathered in front of the United States Embassy here on Sunday

night carrying jack-o'-lanterns inked with the names of war victims

and charging that the war in Georgia was part of an American plot

to improve Sen. John McCain's electoral prospects.

As music by Johnny Cash and the Allman Brothers played from

loudspeakers, a stream of young people climbed off buses that had

carried them to Moscow from far-flung provincial capitals. They

held the pumpkins aloft for a moment of silence as a deep bass

thumped and carnival-style lights played on the embassy's facade.

In a film projected on several large screens, an actor playing

President Bush (though with a heavy Russian accent) delivered a

speech in which he gloated over the United States' control over

world affairs. The film asserted that the United States

orchestrated World Wars I and II so that the American economy could

overtake Europe's, carried out the Sept. 11 attacks to broaden

government powers and planned to brand every person on the planet

with the "mark of the beast," as referenced in the Bible.

"When that will happen, we will totally control all humanity,"

said the actor playing Bush, swigging a beer, as a picture of the

globe in chains glowed behind him.

The opinions in the crowd were far more nuanced. Most of the

demonstrators, men and women in their teens and early 20s, said

they held the United States responsible for the war in Georgia,

saying President Mikheil Saakashvili of Georgia would not have

attacked the separatist enclave of South Ossetia without express

permission from American officials.

Several demonstrators said they had become disillusioned with

the United States during the 1990s, saying the reforms it pushed

had led Russia into financial and political chaos.

"We don't like to be told how to live, and we don't like it

when our peacekeepers are attacked," said Yura Yakor, 23. "You're

not likely to find any fans of America here."

As they shivered in the wintry rain, nearly everyone had

something to say about the coming U.S. elections. Many agreed with

the theory, espoused by Prime Minister Vladimir V. Putin in a

televised interview this fall, that the war in Georgia was planned

to increase the chances of McCain, the Republican presidential

candidate. A few said they thought a victory for Sen. Barack Obama

would greatly improve relations between the United States and

Russia.

"If McCain wins, I think everything will get worse," said

Yekaterina Anisimova, 20, who had traveled from Vladimir, about 125

miles east of Moscow, for the rally. "He is categorically against

Russia. Obama is the opposite. All this could end."

Her friend, Yana Vinogradova, agreed.

"We don't hate America," she said. "We just have a bad

relationship with this administration."

As the American reporter departed, Anisimova yelled after her,

"Vote for Obama!"

Gov. Sarah Palin of Alaska was swiftly working

the rope line Friday at an apple orchard in southwestern

Pennsylvania when she met a supporter who brought her to an abrupt

stop.

Amber Brown, 23, held a poster that read, "I have Down syndrome

and I'm voting for you. I'm a fighter too!"

Seeing Brown, Palin wrapped her in a tight hug.

"I love that poster," Palin said. "You're a fighter and

you're beautiful."

Then Palin hugged her again. Before climbing back on her

campaign bus, she circled back to Brown and hugged her a third

time.

Palin, the Republican vice-presidential nominee, continues to

attract enthusiastic crowds wherever she travels, and invariably

among her supporters are those drawn by her advocacy for children

with special needs.

Palin, 44, is herself the mother of a child with Down syndrome,

6-month-old Trig, who frequently travels with her. Within minutes

after boarding her campaign plane at the end of a long day, Palin

can often be seen leaning over Trig, cooing and feeding him from a

bottle.

He is usually brought on stage with the rest of the Palin

family, held by Willow or Piper, two of Palin's daughters. On

Halloween, Trig went trick-or-treating with the Palin entourage,

dressed as a baby elephant.

In the two months since she was named as Sen. John McCain's

running mate, Palin has made Trig, and children like him, the

emotional center of her campaign.

And families have turned out at every stop, carrying signs,

wearing T-shirts and pressing to the front of the rope lines for a

hug or a photo with a candidate many of them see as a potential

first friend in the White House, someone poised to bring better

schooling, more Medicaid financing and greater attention to their

cause.

Palin's first policy speech as a vice-presidential nominee

addressed school financing for special-needs children. She promised

that under a McCain-Palin administration disabled students would

have the option of attending private schools at public expense. As

governor of Alaska, Palin increased funding for special-needs

students, signing a bill that promised to triple per-pupil spending

over three years for those students whose educations cost more.

But beyond policy, the families say they see in Palin someone

who understands their struggles -- who "gets it," as Palin might

say -- and connects with them in a personal way.

After giving that policy address on Oct. 24, in a hotel meeting

room before about 150 parents and children with special needs,

Palin was leaving the room when one of the babies was heard crying.

"Don't worry one bit about any crying baby," Palin said.

"That's the sound of life. I love it, that's good. I say that,

too, because the next one crying could be my son."

Palin's mention of the subject is the emotional high point of

her stump speech, a late moment when she talks about what she would

do as vice president and mentions a "mission that is especially

close to my heart."

Speaking to more than 8,000 people last week in Jeffersonville,

Ind., Palin had just begun to mention children with special needs

when she was interrupted by a shout, "We love you, Sarah!"

She continued, saying they "have been excluded and been made to

feel that there is no place for them in the life of our country.

And this attitude is a grave disservice to these beautiful children

and to their families and to America. And I'm going to work to

change that." The crowd erupted in cheers.

Ignoring her teleprompter, Palin gazed to her left. "I've got

to make a comment about this poster," she said. " 'I'm

extra-special just like Trig.' "

"Now what she's saying there," Palin said, "that extra

chromosome that our blessed bundles of joy were born with. It's

like a bumper sticker that was mailed to me from a Down syndrome

group in Arizona. You know how we have bumper stickers on the back

of our vehicles saying, you know, My kid's a better soccer player

than your kid, and, My kid's on the honor roll and your kid isn't,

well this bumper sticker says, 'We win -- my kid has more

chromosomes than your kid.' "

(BEGIN OPTIONAL TRIM.)

Afterward, Anita Kearns of Louisville, Ky., who had watched the

speech with her children -- Josh, 27, who has Down syndrome, and

Katie, 19 -- was beaming. "She stands for everything that matters

right now," Kearns said. "Free enterprise, the American way,

working for your family."

But most important, Kearns said, "I love that she's an advocate

for special needs. It hasn't been since the Kennedys that we've

heard a politician talk about it, and they talked about it in a

very different way. And that was so long ago."

Many of the families who come to Palin's events would support

the Republican ticket, even if Palin did not speak for their

interests. Like her, many oppose abortion and share her

conservative positions.

Perry and Beth Heslop of Marietta, Ohio, are among them. They

attended a rally in Ohio on Sunday afternoon with their 5-year-old

son, Tucker, who played quietly on the floor.

They said they were also attracted by Palin's position on the

Second Amendment and her Christian faith. "And as parents of a

special-needs child, we admire her for keeping her baby even though

she knew he had Down syndrome," Perry Heslop said.

Heslop said Tucker was born without intestines, a condition they

did not know about until he was born.

Taking care of him, they said, presents a host of challenges. He

cannot eat, so it is difficult to find a qualified caretaker. The

county government provides a part-time nurse, and their church

helps with gas costs.

But Heslop was just notified that his office, the forestry

division of the Ohio Department of Natural Resources, will soon be

closed, and he will lose his health insurance at the end of the

year. Without insurance, the cost of Tucker's care will be

overwhelming. "We're counting on God to help us," Heslop said.

Palin, he said, "knows the difficulties we're going through.

Just having someone who knows what's going on. You really have to

live it to understand."Tracey Schmitt, a campaign spokeswoman,

said several families with special-needs children have kept in

touch with the Palins through Palin's husband, Todd.

David Tolleson, the executive director of the National Down

Syndrome Congress, said the group welcomed the attention Palin has

brought.

"Anytime a celebrity, if you will, or someone in the national

spotlight brings attention to Down syndrome," Tolleson said, "it

drives particularly media interest and interest in the general

public to learning more about what that condition is."

(END OPTIONAL TRIM.)

What happens after the campaign, should McCain-Palin not

prevail, has some of the families concerned. After a rally in an

airplane hangar Saturday in Polk City, Fla., a dozen people in

matching yellow T-shirts from Noah's Ark, a local support group for

people with developmental disabilities, stood around. Among them

were Cindy Thielemann, 49, of Lakeland, Fla., and her 23-year-old

daughter, C.J.

Thielemann said services for her daughter, whom she described as

developmentally delayed, have been sharply reduced in recent years.

"There's been so much cutting, it's just unfair," she said. "Her

Medicaid waiver. We've lost home services. We've lost dental

services. It's getting worse and worse."

"I get goose bumps with this woman, I really do," Thielemann

said of Palin, her eyes welling with tears. "Just knowing that

there will be somebody in office who cares about this. That there

could be someone who cares about this."

At 85, Sumner M. Redstone may be the world's oldest

video game addict.

In recent weeks, the chairman of Viacom and CBS has been forced

to sell more than $200 million of stock in his companies after a

margin call from lenders, and there has been fervent speculation

that he could lose his grip on one of the world's great media

empires.

Like other top executives, he was ensnared by the financial

crisis and the whipsawing stock market, which drove down the price

of stock in Viacom and CBS to a level that breached his lending

agreements with banks -- forcing him to make the big stock sale.

But at least some of Redstone's mounting problems can be traced

to a 25-year bad bet he made on the video game maker Midway Games,

which has cost him hundreds of millions of dollars.

Redstone has always argued -- not incorrectly -- that video games

are part of the media industry's future. But Midway, which is best

known for the 1990s arcade game Mortal Kombat, has eaten up a lot

of quarters without much return. Midway has not reported a profit

since the second quarter of fiscal 2000, and over the last three

full fiscal years the company has lost $258.9 million.

Michael Pachter, an analyst at Wedbush Morgan Securities,

estimated that Redstone has spent $500 million to $700 million on

Midway shares since 1983. In late 2005, the company traded at $23 a

share; last week, it closed at about 80 cents.

As a result, National Amusements -- Redstone's holding company --

has been forced to support the company with loans. This year it

extended some $90 million to Midway to keep it afloat.

Redstone has publicly insisted that he would not sell more stock

in CBS and Viacom to cover his personal debts. But he is

considering selling a financial interest in National Amusements,

the family holding company that is Redstone's vehicle for

controlling Viacom and CBS, according to an executive briefed on

the matter who spoke anonymously because the negotiations were

meant to be confidential.

This was only the latest installment of the topsy-turvy ride

that has been Redstone's life over the last decade -- a span that

has included a messy first divorce, a long and public falling out

with his daughter, a lawsuit over money with his son and the

torpedoing of relationships with his minions and with Tom Cruise.

In the middle of this latest episode, he also filed for divorce

from his second wife.

"It's typical Hollywood soap opera," said Anthony DiClemente,

a media analyst at Barclays Capital who covers Viacom and CBS.

"It's why you cover this industry."

But beyond the personality of Redstone himself, who often jokes

that he plans to live forever, the breach in his lending agreements

with the banks illustrates how the opaque structure at his family's

holding company left Wall Street and even company executives in the

dark about his financial troubles.

National Amusements is a private company with a controlling

interest in CBS and Viacom and is governed by a board that includes

Redstone, his daughter, Shari, and three lawyers that have long

been close to Redstone -- including Philippe P. Dauman, who is also

chief executive of Viacom. That much has always been clear. What

investors and analysts did not know was the link between Redstone's

debt load and the share prices of CBS and Viacom -- and the

possibility that a margin call could force a large stock sale.

On Oct. 10, Redstone surprised his own executives when he was

forced to sell $233 million in nonvoting stock in CBS and Viacom

because he had breached his covenants on $1.6 billion in loans at

National Amusements.

In a matter of hours, lawyers at CBS and Viacom were forced to

release updated financial guidance, which warned that a

deteriorating advertising market would hit both companies' bottom

lines. (The updated guidance was to comply with securities laws

that restrict insider stock sales in the weeks before earnings are

released.)

That Redstone had so much debt, and that the debt was tied to

the value of Viacom and CBS, was a surprise to analysts, some of

whom raised the question of whether it should have been disclosed

earlier.

DiClemente, the Barclays analyst, said, "This is the risk you

take when you invest in a company with a big majority shareholder.

You don't know what the personal balance sheets are of these

guys."

Through a spokesman, Redstone declined to be interviewed. But

Viacom reports earnings on Monday, and Redstone will join the

conference call with Wall Street analysts.

Redstone's wealth and identity are linked with CBS and Viacom,

but his relationship with Midway stretches back further. In 1983 he

began buying shares in WMS Industries, Midway's predecessor, and

has been a shareholder in the company ever since -- a relationship

that even helped him settle his first divorce, which was filed in

1999 and settled in 2002.

Midway was spun off from WMS Industries, a slot machine maker,

in 1996 as a separate public company, and sometime after that

Redstone is said to have decided that video games would become an

important part of the media business.

"I think that he believed in the industry so much so that any

company that was solvent that was in the business had potential,"

said Pachter, who has long followed Midway.

In late 2005, the stake held by Redstone, who owns about 80

million shares through various entities, or 87 percent of the

company, was valued at more than $1.8 billion. Last week, when

shares in Midway traded at about 80 cents apiece, his stake had a

value of just $64 million.

Despite this, in March Redstone appeared at a media conference

in Florida hosted by Bear Stearns and expressed optimism about

Midway, saying he "is committed to Midway. We just gave Midway $90

million. We'll do everything to keep it going."

For all his billions -- dwindling they now may be -- it was stock

in Midway that Redstone used to pay for his divorce settlement with

his first wife, Phyllis, in 2002. After doling out a big chunk of

Midway stock, Redstone proceeded to replenish his portfolio until

late 2005, when he reached about 80 million shares. His stake is

roughly equal to that today. Meanwhile, Redstone has shuffled the

shares in Midway among himself, National Amusements and a third

company he created, called Sumco. In 2005 he transferred 33 million

shares in Midway to National Amusements, in exchange for National

assuming responsibility for a $425 million loan Redstone had with

Citigroup. As part of this deal, Redstone's daughter, Shari E.

Redstone, effectively gained control of the Midway stock.

Today Shari Redstone, who sits on the boards of both Viacom and

CBS, is also the chairman of Midway. Redstone and his daughter have

engaged in a public feud for more than a year over control of the

family business. At one point, the two sides were near a deal in

which Shari Redstone would trade her stake in CBS and Viacom for

complete ownership of the family's movie theater business, but

those talks have halted because of the present financial troubles

at National Amusements.

At the same time, a committee of two lawyers from Boston,

Redstone's hometown, that have long been by his side, and his

daughter are negotiating with a consortium of banks to restructure

some $1.6 billion in debt at National Amusements. As part of those

discussions, several options for raising cash are under

consideration -- including selling a minority stake in National

Amusements, selling pieces of the family's movie theater chain

business or selling stakes in WMS Industries and Midway.

Meanwhile shares in both CBS and Viacom have tumbled. Both have

suffered from the general malaise in the stock market and

fundamental shifts in the media industry. Last week, CBS reported a

$12.6 billion quarterly loss, mainly because of a $14.12 billion

write-down of certain assets.

Redstone remains optimistic, however. He once mostly lived out

of fancy hotels but now spends much of his time in his gated

mansion in Beverly Park, Calif., surrounded by tanks of exotic fish

and tended to by his butler. It was from this perch that he joined

a conference call last week to discuss CBS's quarterly earnings and

said he did not plan to sell any more shares in CBS or Viacom.

"Let me make it sure, clear, certain," Redstone said. National

Amusements "has no intention of selling a single share of Viacom

or CBS. Now there may be uncertainties all around us, but one of

the things I remain absolutely certain of, whatever actions are

required, in no way diminishes my optimism of our CBS and Viacom."

Millions of voters will encounter an unfamiliar low-tech

landscape at the polls on Tuesday. About half of all voters will

vote in a way that is different from what they did in the last

presidential election, and most will use paper ballots rather than

the touch-screen machines that have caused concern among voting

experts.

But the change does not guarantee a smooth election day, as the

nation's voting system remains untested for what is expected to be

an unprecedented turnout. Six years after the largest federal

overhaul in how elections are run, voting experts are still

predicting machine and ballot shortages in several swing states and

late tallies on election night.

Two-thirds of voters will mark their choice with a pencil on a

paper ballot that is counted by an optical scanning machine, a

method considered far more reliable and verifiable than touch

screens. But paper ballots bring their own potential problems,

voting experts say.

The scanners can break down, leading to delays and confusion for

poll workers and voters. And the paper ballots of about a third of

all voters will be counted not at the polling place but later at a

central county location. That means that if a voter has made an

error -- not filling in an oval properly, for example, a mistake

often made by the kind of novice voters who will be flocking to the

polls -- it will not be caught until it is too late. As a result,

those ballots will be disqualified.

Voting rights groups have also filed lawsuits against election

officials in Pennsylvania and Virginia, saying they have not

stocked enough paper ballots to prepare for the expected turnout.

Most voting experts are not predicting a repeat of the Florida

meltdown of 2000, but they are warning that shortages of electronic

voting machines or printed ballots in swing states, along with

problems verifying the identity of voters, could worsen lines and

fray nerves.

"What has traditionally happened in this country is that a

change in voting equipment happens once in the lifetime of an

election official," said Kimball W. Brace, president of Election

Data Services, a voting research firm. "This time, nearly 60

percent of the country will vote in places that in the last eight

years have changed their voting equipment."

The vice-presidential candidates spent the

final, frenetic hours of the 2008 campaign on traditionally

Republican turf, with Sen. Joseph R. Biden Jr. urging Democrats to

get to the polls and Gov. Sarah Palin warning that "the far-left

wing of the Democrat" Party is poised to take over Washington.

Palin addressed large crowds in Florida, North Carolina and

Virginia on Saturday, and made several appearances in Ohio on

Sunday. Biden spent Saturday and Sunday skittering around Ohio and

Florida before heading to Missouri for an early appearance on

Monday.

It is no coincidence that the candidates are appearing only in

states that President Bush won in 2004.

Palin's message, at its heart, is a fear-based argument against

electing Sen. Barack Obama of Illinois. She warns voters that Obama

will raise taxes, expand government, capitulate to terrorists and

promote an extreme liberal agenda with the help of broader

Democratic majorities in Congress.

"The time for choosing is near, and the choice is going to come

down to what we believe in, Ohio," Palin said at a rally Sunday in

Canton, Ohio. "We believe in the forward movement of freedom, not

the constant expansion of government."

Biden's message has evolved in recent days, from harsh attacks

on McCain and Palin to a broader appeal for an end to what he calls

the "politics of division." He still mocks the Republican ticket,

arguing that they are not mavericks but rather mere "sidekicks"

to Bush who would continue his foreign and economic policies. He

says that in their desperation, McCain and Palin are using smears

and lies to impugn Obama's character and patriotism.

But Biden, with an unstated sense that victory is within the

Democrats' grasp, has turned to a call for healing a divided

nation. He urges his audiences to "choose hope over fear."

Biden and Palin have accelerated their schedules, now appearing

at as many as five rallies a day in as many cities. Their

exhaustion is beginning to show, particularly late at night.

Palin's voice sometimes grows hoarse and Biden occasionally

stumbles over lines he has repeated dozens of times.

On Monday, Palin will begin her day in Ohio, and then head to

Missouri, Iowa, Colorado and Nevada. Late that night, she will fly

to Anchorage, travel to her home in Wasilla, Alaska, to cast her

vote, and then fly to Phoenix to join McCain.

Biden will start Monday with a speech in Lee's Summit, Mo., then

appear in Zanesville and Akron, Ohio, before ending his day with a

rally in Philadelphia. He will vote in his hometown of Wilmington,

Del., then fly to Chicago to spend election night with Obama at a

large gathering in Grant Park.

When did CBS, the network awash in cop shows featuring leading

men in their 50s, become the hot network with young audiences?

This is how topsy-turvy the fall television season has become:

Five weeks in, CBS has twice as many shows in the Top 20 ranking

among young adult viewers as any of its network competitors.

CBS is supposed to be the network that does not fixate on the

18- to 49-year-old demographic, which many advertisers pay a

premium to reach. But the network has been beating ABC, NBC and

Fox, in that ratings competition every week this fall.

Of course, CBS has also been winning in the somewhat older

group, 25-to-54-year olds, just as it has been attracting the most

viewers over all.

This has not occurred since the antediluvian days before the

installation of so-called people meter ratings system in 1987.

The secret, at least as the chairman of CBS, Leslie Moonves,

sees it: "comfort food."

While other networks sit and watch their glossy serial dramas

featuring expensive casts crash, CBS has added yet another

successful crime show, "The Mentalist." It has also added a

couple more "funny comedies that probably won't win any Emmy

Awards" as Moonves described them: "Gary Unmarried" and "Worst

Week."

Apparently, what is good for CBS is a bad economy. CBS's lineup

of police procedurals, where the criminals always get caught, and

sitcoms that are reliably funny in unchallenging ways, seems to be

becoming a safe haven for viewers worried about jobs and mortgages.

"When the road gets rocky, the center is the best place to

be," said Kelly Kahl, the chief scheduler for CBS. "It's kind of

a cliche," Moonves said, "on CBS the good guys win." Or as Kahl

put it, "We give people what they want."

The news is not all kind to CBS. Many executives are concerned

that the advertising market will freeze up because of the economy.

Last week, CBS was forced to take a write-down of $14 billion

because the advertising market for its local television, radio and

outdoor businesses is so bad.

"We have a lot of advertising and people are down on

advertising right now," Moonves said.

And it is not as if CBS has found a magic potion; its move to

first place is mostly attributable to standing still while others

slide down. CBS is not actually up in the ratings. It is down,

marginally, about 3 percent. But its competitors are down near 15

percent each.

All of these measures are based on the traditional ratings

system. That ratings system itself is in the midst of upheaval

because of the increasing use of digital video recorders, which

allow for delayed viewing, and the shift by advertisers toward

buying shows on how well their commercials are rated after three

days of viewing -- the so-called C3 measurement.

ABC, which has taken serious hits almost across the board in

terms of traditional program ratings, points to those C3 ratings as

some solace.

"By the most important yardstick, based on the sales currency

of C3 ratings, we're the network leader," Stephen McPherson, the

president of ABC Entertainment, said in an e-mail message.

That may prove helpful if ABC can keep it up. The C3 numbers are

so far available only through two weeks.

Network executives point to a raft of reasons why this season

has been so rocky, starting with last season's writers strike. But

other factors have intruded this fall.

"The economy and the election are the two most important shows

in America right now," said Ben Silverman, the co-chairman of NBC

Entertainment. The faltering economy is threatening the advertising

that pays for most television shows.

The election has proved a powerful attraction, Silverman said.

"People aren't watching network shows as much, but the cable news

networks are setting records," he said. And he said that the four

debates this fall, coming on separate nights of the week, disrupted

every network's schedule.

The most important move CBS made, Moonves said, was to get the

network's series back on the air last spring after the strike

ended, while other networks let shows lapse in production.

Both ABC and NBC had a group of first-year shows that were

truncated by the strike. ABC's entire Wednesday night schedule

consisted of first-year shows that it suspended after the strike

and then brought back this fall. The ratings have plummeted for

those shows: "Pushing Daisies," "Dirty Sexy Money" and

"Private Practice."

Other serialized shows, like the NBC drama "Heroes" and even

ABC's biggest hits, "Grey's Anatomy" and "Desperate

Housewives," have performed well below their levels of a year ago.

That has led to some speculation that the networks may move away

from serialized shows in the DVR era, both because viewers may

increasingly store episodes of serialized shows to watch them in

8-to-10 episode bursts, and because the shows have no repeat value

at all.

At least one network other than CBS is starting to conclude the

same thing about program trends. "This fall, we're trying to build

a spine of shows we can rely on," said Kevin Reilly, the president

of Fox Entertainment. Among them: the emerging hit "Bones," a

crime drama that solves its cases every week and repeats relatively

well.

While its fall numbers are down, no one doubts Fox's overall

strength, not with "American Idol" ready to come back, along with

the drama "24." Reilly may be putting some extra fear in his

rivals by floating the idea that Fox may do something different

with "Idol" this time around -- as in move one of two weekly

editions to a regular slot on Thursday nights, the most lucrative

night for advertising.

That's where the other three networks have arrayed many of their

biggest shows, and "Idol" has not ventured there before. Now,

Reilly said, "We'll certainly explore it."

Meanwhile, Fox's biggest hit drama, "House," has been at the

center of one of the better strategic moves of the season. Fox slid

the show to 8 p.m. from 9 p.m. on Tuesdays this fall, knowing, as

Reilly put it "that we would take a haircut in ratings" for

"House" because viewing levels are lower at 8 p.m. The move,

intended to feed a big audience into the new drama "Fringe," has

paid off. The show is the second true success story of the fall,

along with "The Mentalist."

Silverman and NBC made another big strategic move in slotting

three weeks of special election-based "Saturday Night Live"

editions at 9:30 Thursdays after the hit comedy "The Office." The

plan was to prepare the time period for the low-rated but promising

comedy, "30 Rock."

The network got a big break with Tina Fey's celebrated

impersonation of the Republican vice presidential candidate, Sarah

Palin, on the "SNL" specials. The following she built finally

seemed to carry over into the strongest ratings ever for the "30

Rock" premiere last Thursday.

The urgent need to rebuild comedy -- which has been in reverse

for most of this decade -- may be the most significant message of

the early season.

Silverman said he intended to use a "strategy of patience"

with NBC's new comedy "Kath and Kim," which some critics and

rivals have already written off. Its ratings are hardly special,

but they have stabilized, Silverman said. "We've got great actors

and not-great writing. Let's fix it," he said.

For the last eight months, Adam Aigner-Treworgy's belongings

have been stowed in the back seat of his silver Volvo station

wagon.

When Aigner-Treworgy, a 24-year-old reporter for NBC News and

National Journal, was assigned to cover Sen. John McCain's campaign

in January, his sister packed up his apartment in Washington, D.C.

"I sold as much furniture as I could on Craigslist," he said,

then parked his car at the NBC bureau and flew to Florida to catch

up with the McCain campaign. On a rare free day in the spring, he

drove the car, then lacking air-conditioning and a working gas

gauge, to his mother's garage in Boston, where it remains.

This month, he will resume an ordinary life -- and that means

finding a job in an economy that is gloomy across the board but

especially so for journalists.

"The field of journalism is changing dramatically, so there's

definitely some trepidation about whether companies will be

hiring," he said by phone on Friday.

As politicians enter the presidential primary fray, television

networks assign staff members -- variously called "campaign

embeds" or "off-air reporters" -- to shadow them, video camera in

hand and laptop in backpack. After each campaign event, the embeds

dutifully send summaries to their news divisions, flagging any

news-making nuggets. The dispatches are often posted online and

used to produce newscasts; the "From the Road" blog on

CBSNews.com counted 9 posts from campaign producers on Thursday and

10 on Friday.

As financially struggling newspapers cut back on their coverage

from the campaign trail, the TV embeds and their counterparts from

national newspapers have become the primary witnesses to the

campaigns of McCain and his Democratic opponent, Sen. Barack Obama.

And while the experience is invaluable, the opportunities are

few after the election.

"For so long, this has been in the distance. Now it's real, now

it's here," said Alexander Marquardt, a CNN producer following

Sen. Joseph R. Biden Jr.

There is a certain nobility, subtle as it may be, to chronicling

the statements of the candidates as they roam the country. "You

become the central repository for information about a candidate for

a big news network," Aigner-Treworgy said.

Sunlen Miller, an ABC reporter assigned to Obama's campaign,

answers practical questions from the network's correspondents, like

"how many times has Obama been to Florida in the general

election?"

Mike Memoli, who shadowed Bill Clinton for NBC last winter, said

he was sometimes the only TV reporter with him. "There were no

other cameras, no correspondents, so I would film him at each

event," he said.

For some embeds, like the CBS producer Maria Gavrilovic, the

assignment has lasted much longer than anticipated. She was

assigned to Obama "by chance" more than a year ago, she said,

"and expected the stint to be short-lived."

Gavrilovic worked on the foreign desk for CBS News before the

campaign, and she expects to return there after the election. ABC

and the Fox News Channel also lent staff members from other

departments.

But others are not as lucky. CNN and NBC relied on a mix of

newly hired employees and existing political producers.

The contracts for the NBC journalists who were hired in

conjunction with National Journal to follow the candidates expire

on Nov. 14. Given the economic downturn, the election is ending at

a particularly inopportune time for them.

Matthew Berger, a 30-year-old NBC reporter with Gov. Sarah Palin

of Alaska, is taking his mother's advice not to think too hard

about his postelection plans. "She told me not to ruin the last

couple of weeks of a great experience by worrying too much about

the future," he said. "So I'll worry about afterwards,

afterwards."

Marquardt will celebrate his first anniversary at CNN three days

after the election. But as a freelancer, he does not know whether

he will be able to stay with the network. "So much money has been

spent on this campaign, and the economy's in the tank, so there's

not that many positions out there," he said, although he remains

hopeful.

Although Aigner-Treworgy does not know what he will be doing in

two weeks, he has started looking for a new apartment in

Washington. He is looking forward to being in the same place for

more than an hour. "We're on a bus in Iowa -- I mean Ohio,"

Aigner-Treworgy said Friday afternoon. "I used to know where I

was," he added sheepishly.

Surely, some embeds will be on a beach soon. Memoli talked

excitedly about airline points and hotel points. "I'm figuring out

where my vacation will be when all this ends," he said.

Prime Minister Gordon Brown of Britain on Sunday urged Persian

Gulf nations to help bolster the International Monetary Fund's

bailout capacity, as leaders around the world spent another weekend

trying to extinguish the brush fires of the economic crisis.

Brown has called on China and Middle Eastern countries to take

an expanded role in financing the IMF's activities as the crisis

has deepened.

"The Saudis, I think, will contribute so we can have a bigger

fund worldwide," Reuters quoted Brown as telling reporters in the

Saudi capital, Riyadh, after weekend meetings with King Abdullah

and Saudi businessmen. "The oil-producing countries, who have

generated over $1 trillion from higher oil prices in recent years,

are in a position to contribute."

The IMF has committed $30 billion in the last few weeks in

bailout packages for Hungary, Iceland and Ukraine. It said

Wednesday that it would lend as much as $100 billion to

economically healthy countries having trouble borrowing as a result

of the turmoil in the global markets.

The fund, a 185-member group, has more than $200 billion in

resources and can draw on additional money from its members.

"We probably will need more resources," Dominique

Strauss-Kahn, the fund's managing director, said last week. "There

is no way the fund can solve the problem on its own."

Brown's call came on the type of weekend that has become common

as the credit crisis intensified, with governments scrambling to

bolster growth and back up troubled institutions.

On Monday, the South Korean government unveiled a 14 trillion

won ($10.8 billion) stimulus plan aimed at preventing a recession

In Berlin, Chancellor Angela Merkel's government was working on

an economic stimulus plan for Germany that media reports said would

be valued at about $64 billion. In a podcast posted on the

chancellor's office Web site, Merkel said the cabinet would approve

the measures on Wednesday.

She also called on banks to make use of a larger fund the

government has made available for troubled lenders.

In Lisbon, the authorities said they were setting up a credit

line for Portugal's banks and were moving to nationalize one of the

smaller lenders in the country, Banco Portugues de Negocios.

In Russia, where the benchmark Micex stock index has fallen

nearly 60 percent this year, officials announced new measures to

halt capital flight. Igor Shuvalov, a first deputy prime minister,

told state television on Sunday that the government would limit the

sale of rubles by banks that receive government aid.

That came a day after the Russian Finance Ministry said it had

injected more than $6 billion from a government fund into

Vnesheconombank, a state-run bank, which will use the money to

provide loans to banks and to buy stocks and bonds.

In Beijing, the Chinese prime minister, Wen Jiabao, warned that

the economic crisis was raising the risk of social unrest, and he

called for more focus on domestic spending, the China News Service

reported.

Wen said the government's need to promote economic growth was

beginning to override its mandate to keep inflation in check. The

monetary authorities in Beijing cut interest rates on Wednesday for

the third time in two months.

In Mumbai, the Reserve Bank of India, the central bank, said

Saturday that it would "employ both conventional and

unconventional measures" to respond to the crisis, and cut its

benchmark interest rate a half-point.

Election night offers television the chance to be cutting- edge,

eye-catching, informative and, just possibly, wrong. The goal is

not to venture that far.

One network will introduce holograms. Another has an electoral

map projected on an ice rink. From giant outdoor projection screens

to Twitter, the networks will experiment with delivering election

news.

As if tallying votes wasn't challenging enough.

The rule of the night is caution.

The networks learned a hard lesson in 2000 when they erroneously

called the election for Al Gore.

"That plus or minus polling-error number is on-screen for a

reason," NBC's Phil Alongi said.

He was in the NBC News control booth that night, when Tom Brokaw

famously apologized for having "not just egg but an omelet" on

his face.

"Bottom line: We will be cautious," Alongi said. "Our

marching orders are 'get it right.' "

Similarly, CNN election guru David Bohrman said, "We're not in

a hurry. Our plan is to be right, not to be first."

"You can't discount exit polling, but understand it's

reflective of a sample," Alongi said.

There's a difference between "NBC has confirmed" and "NBC is

reporting." Similarly, there's a difference between "too early"

(not enough votes to make a projection) and "too close to call"

(the statisticians aren't comfortable calling a race).

Exit polling isn't definitive, but "it starts to frame the

story," Alongi said.

While the networks maintain an embargo on calling races before

all of a state's polls are closed, they have no such restraint when

it comes to competitive graphics and gizmos.

The wildest innovation: CNN's holographic images.

Instead of showing them on a split screen, CNN will beam 3-D

images of correspondents and spokesmen from the two campaign

headquarters onto its New York set. Computer software will blend

together the images gathered from 40 tiny cameras placed in a

circle around the individual. They will seem to be talking to Wolf

Blitzer and company.

"It might allow for more intimate conversation," CNN's Bohrman

said.

Think "Star Trek" -- and imagine the inevitable "Saturday

Night Live" parody.

This year, an overhaul of exit-polling graphics is on tap,

through virtual reality and green-screen animation. Investigative

units are on alert, tracking voting problems and irregularities.

The networks promise state-by-state results in real time, down to

the county level.

ABC will treat the night like New Year's Eve minus Dick Clark,

transforming Times Square into "an outdoor global viewing event"

on three screens (including the 23-story-high Reuters sign) as

Charles Gibson, Diane Sawyer and George Stephanopoulos hold forth.

CBS will offer live results, updated every 60 seconds, on its

Web site. Katie Couric will follow up TV anchor duties with a live

webcast, as she did after each convention.

NBC's U.S. map on the Rockefeller Plaza ice rink will turn

states blue and red as results are called. NBC will also have John

McCain and Barack Obama banners rising 16 stories up its building

at 30 Rock, counting to 270, the number of electoral votes needed

to win the presidency.

Fox News will unveil two new HD studios on election night, one

for Fox News, anchored by Brit Hume, and one for Fox Broadcast,

anchored by Shepard Smith. "The Strategy Room" will be webcast on

foxnews.com from outside FNC's New York headquarters. Expect to see

crowds gathered around the 18-by-14-foot screen there, tuned to Fox

News.

PBS is touting headlines on Twitter and mobile-phone updates in

addition to Jim Lehrer's "Newshour" coverage. NPR will venture

into real-time returns via cell phones and live captioned radio

broadcasts for the hearing-impaired.

Aiming for younger viewers, television continues to experiment

with interactive Internet sites. Current, the Gore-backed channel,

had some success with "Hacking the Debate" with Twitter. Now it

intends to "Digg the Election" with the social-media site Digg.

MTV will air an interview with Obama, asking questions submitted by

viewers. (McCain declined the invitation.)

"Young people are on the verge of a massive turnout that could

be the deciding factor in this election. MTV is going all out to

capture this historic moment," said Ian Rowe, MTV's senior vice

president of public affairs.

Niche programmers will seize the moment. A special titled "The

First Black President!?: What Obama Means to America," will play

on BET at 8 p.m. Eastern on Tuesday, leading into prime-time

coverage. Cable/satellite network TV One offers "a uniquely

African-American cultural perspective" with Arthur Fennell, Joe

Madison and Jacque Reid as co-anchors.

On Comedy Central, Jon Stewart and Stephen Colbert will

co-anchor from the same desk for the first time on "Indecision

2008: America's Choice," a satirical roundup, airing at 10 p.m.

Eastern on Tuesday.

Finally, for those who care more about spoiled rich kids dating

than election returns, the CW network will be the only broadcast

network airing regular programming on election night. Original

episodes of "90210" and "Privileged" will run with two local

election updates per hour.

As the American economy prospered, no other

consumer electronics product was more desired than the big-screen

digital TV. As the economy sputters and consumers hold back on

spending, those TVs are still desired, just not as frequently

purchased.

This holiday season, retailers may have no choice but to resort

to aggressive pricing, especially on low-end TVs, as they try

various strategies to draw more people into the stores.

The price cutting could begin before Black Friday, the day after

Thanksgiving when stores offer one-day bargains. According to

DisplaySearch, a market research firm, prices could go as low as

$400 for a 32-inch LCD, and $600 for a 42-inch plasma set -- about

$200 off current prices.

While Stan Glasgow, president of Sony Electronics, said his

company will not match those prices, he said, "those numbers do

not shock me."

"The watchword everyone has is uncertainty," said Stephen

Baker, vice president for industry analysis at the NPD Group, a

market research firm that owns DisplaySearch.

Consumers hoping to pick up a Blu-ray player at a rock-bottom

price will probably be out of luck. To squeeze out additional

profits, prices will not drop much lower than $250 this season,

Baker said. "There is not enough demand for Blu-ray to grow its

installed base. Look to Christmas 2009 for aggressive pricing."

Even with better value for money, the question remains whether

consumers will even venture into the stores to look. "People are

afraid to spend money," Baker said, and there is not a lot one can

do to stimulate demand.

It is clear that the consumer electronics industry has already

slowed drastically. According to Paul Semenza, senior vice

president of DisplaySearch, unit sales in the United States of LCD

TVs increased 22 percent in September compared with the same month

in 2007; but that was less than the 28 percent increase in August,

and July's 32 percent gain.

On a weekly basis, year-over-year sales increased just 3 percent

for the week that ended Oct. 18, compared with an 18 percent gain

for the week that ended Sept. 20. (The data does not include sales

in Wal-Mart and club stores like Costco.)

Nevertheless, some of the manufacturers are hoping for the best.

"In past recessions, consumer electronics has fared rather well,"

said Glasgow of Sony. "I believe we'll sell more TVs than last

year."

Bob Perry, Panasonic's senior vice president for marketing,

concurred. "We've been through wars and national calamities," he

said. "I just don't see sales dropping off."

Analysts are not so sanguine. "The anecdotal evidence is that

the stores are pretty quiet," Semenza said. "There is a whisper

in the industry that the retailers are ordering fewer units."

The sets that do sell will probably be smaller. While TV

manufacturers speak of LCD and plasma TVs in the 42-inch range as

their "sweet spot," for many consumers a TV that big may remain

only a wish. The most popular TVs are in the 30-inch to 34-inch

range. They account for about 26 percent of all sales. TV screens

from 40 and 44 inches represent 20 percent of unit sales.

"The momentum was heading toward the 42-inch size, but now

that's off track. That size is the aspirational sweet spot,"

Semenza said.

Many retailers are cutting costs because they expect a lighter

selling season. Best Buy announced that it would hire 16,000 to

20,000 seasonal employees, a hefty drop from last year's 26,000

seasonal hires.

Best Buy's comparable-store sales in September dropped 2 percent

from the year before. "We'll see less traffic," Brian Dunn, Best

Buy's president, said. "We'll grow our share by offering the right

solution, product and service. We're not looking to get every dime

out of you. If a customer just wants the lowest price on a TV set,

we'll give it to them with a smile."

And to increase the likelihood that customers will pull out

their wallets, several manufacturers, including Panasonic and

Sharp, are working with retailers to offer extended financing with

either same-as-cash interest or deferred payment plans.

Some believe that bundling items, like a flat-screen TV with a

Blu-ray player or an audio system, will provide that extra value

that will push consumers to buy.

Best Buy will offer a bundle "targeted to middle America,"

Dunn said. And Panasonic will offer bundles that use its

proprietary Viera Link technology that allows all Panasonic

components to work with one remote, encouraging consumers to stay

with the brand.

But not everyone believes in bundling. "Putting a bundle out is

absolutely the wrong thing to do," said Baker of NPD. "It raises

the absolute price."

To bolster sales, manufacturers like Sharp and Sony have

introduced lower-price lines for big-box stores. This spring, Sony

began marketing its M line of TVs through Costco, Target and

Wal-Mart. Sharp's lower cost line, stripped of its Aquos brand, is

marketed to mass merchants.

Samsung, which sells the most flat-panel TVs in the United

States, sees consumers deserting the midprice segment. "We may see

some shifting toward entry-level and step-up models," said Jonas

Tanenbaum, vice president for LCD television marketing at Samsung

Electronics America. "It's the middle area that may not do as

well."

To capture those with more limited budgets, Sony this year is

selling LCD TVs in the 19-, 26- and 32-inch sizes. "There are

hundreds of dollars of difference in price between these and

step-up models," Glasgow said.

One other hope of the manufacturers and retailers: the

conversion this February to a digital broadcast signal that makes

most old tube TVs hooked to an antenna obsolete. Consumers can buy

digital-to-analog converter boxes, but the industry is hoping many

will use the conversion as the excuse to buy a new TV.

Sharp's 32-inch set -- at about $600, its best-selling size -- is

appealing to consumers looking to replace a 27-inch tube set, said

Bob Scaglione, senior vice president of the Sharp Electronics

Marketing Company of America.

"Consumers usually buy based on a set dollar amount,"

Scaglione said. "However, we believe they may concentrate on

slightly smaller screen sizes this holiday season. The majority

will try to hang on to 32- and 42-inch sets."

Gov. Sarah Palin of Alaska attracts

enthusiastic crowds wherever she travels, and invariably among her

supporters are those drawn by her advocacy for children with

special needs.

Palin, 44, the Republican vice-presidential nominee, is herself

the mother of a child with Down syndrome, 6-month-old Trig, who

frequently travels with her. Within minutes after boarding her

campaign plane at the end of a long day, Palin can often be seen

leaning over Trig, cooing and feeding him from a bottle.

In the two months since she was named as Sen. John McCain's

running mate, Palin has made Trig, and children like him, the

emotional center of her campaign.

And families have turned out at every stop, carrying signs,

wearing T-shirts and pressing to the front of the rope lines for a

hug or a photo with a candidate many of them see as a potential

first friend in the White House, someone poised to bring better

schooling, more Medicaid financing and greater attention to their

cause.

Palin's first policy speech as a vice-presidential nominee, on

Oct. 24, addressed school financing for special-needs children. She

promised that under a McCain-Palin administration disabled students

would have the option of attending private schools at public

expense. As governor of Alaska, Palin increased funding for

special-needs students, signing a bill that promised to triple

per-pupil spending over three years for those students whose

educations cost more.

But beyond policy, the families say they see in Palin someone

who understands their struggles -- who "gets it," as Palin might

say -- and connects with them in a personal way.

After a rally in an airplane hangar Saturday in Polk City, Fla.,

a dozen people in matching yellow T-shirts from Noah's Ark, a local

support group for people with developmental disabilities, stood

around. Among them were Cindy Thielemann, 49, of Lakeland, Fla.,

and her 23-year-old daughter, C.J.

Thielemann said services for her daughter, whom she described as

developmentally delayed, have been sharply reduced in recent years.

"There's been so much cutting, it's just unfair," she said. "Her

Medicaid waiver. We've lost home services. We've lost dental

services. It's getting worse and worse."

"I get goose bumps with this woman, I really do," Thielemann

said of Palin, her eyes welling with tears. "Just knowing that

there will be somebody in office who cares about this. That there

could be someone who cares about this."

Sandy Hammargren is the definition of a patient,

long-suffering wife, except when it comes to Big Bertha.

Her husband, Dr. Lonnie Hammargren, built Big Bertha, a black

10-foot-tall model locomotive, in their backyard from a disparate

collection of parts: a rail car believed to have brought Howard

Hughes to Las Vegas, part of a road girder, a piece of an 1890

steam tractor, a boiler "from something entirely different, I

can't remember what," Hammargren said. The wheels were from

castoff parts of old CAT scan machines.

"Oh, I just hate it," she said. "It's awful to look at."

That she wants Big Bertha gone is not surprising. What is

astonishing is that Big Bertha is all that earns her wrath when

nearly every inch of her vast home is overwhelmed by thousands of

other bits of memorabilia, collections, bizarre shop projects and

unadulterated junk.

The contents range wildly and appear to have little

organization: a life-size doll of the late entertainer Sammy Davis

Jr. sits as the conductor of a train that came from the Nevada Test

Site nuclear proving ground. Hammargren is predominantly occupied

by items from old Vegas casinos, scale models of famous sites from

around the globe and various NASA space missions. Hammargren, 70,

was a NASA flight surgeon who flew in jets with the likes of the

astronaut Buzz Aldrin, a friend and occasional visitor.

The endless displays, which leave nary an inch of floor space

inside or outside their home, in southeast Las Vegas, add up to a

lifetime of acquisitions for Hammargren, a former two-term Nevada

lieutenant governor and retired neurosurgeon.

The Hammargrens have skirmished with neighbors who have

complained to local authorities, but the doctor has never been

forced to limit or alter his home. Yet Dotty Reeve, who weeded her

yard across the street on Saturday, said she enjoyed her proximity.

"It's kind of fun, to tell you the truth," Reeve said. "Not

many people like it, but it's not hurting anybody. It's kind of

interesting, really. I think people gripe about it, but the same

people drive by just to see what's going on there."

The festive red, white and blue graphics have been designed. The

production rehearsals have been held. The Web servers have been

adjusted in preparation for a great influx of traffic. Now Yahoo

News is waiting for the election results to start streaming in.

Yahoo News, by some measures one of the most popular news Web

sites in the country, has repeatedly broken its own traffic records

during the election year. The news arm of the search engine expects

Tuesday's day of voting and Wednesday's day-after to raise the bar

higher still.

"Yahoo has taken its place as the great starting point for any

big event," said Neeraj Khemlani, the vice president for

programming and development.

With an increasing number of people using the Internet for news,

sites like Yahoo are treating election night as a prime programming

occasion, the way the television networks do.

Web sites have introduced and refined new ways to track the

election, from multiple streams of live video to real-time graphics

of voting patterns. Perhaps the most significant innovations are

the interactive maps of state-by-state polls and potential

Electoral College outcomes. On Yahoo, users of the "Political

Dashboard" spend an average of 10 minutes constructing red- and

blue-state outcome and seeing how they match up to prior elections.

Web sites "put the data in the hands of the audience," said

Liz Lufkin, senior director for front page content. "You can see

John King playing around with his groovy map on CNN, but you can do

something similar on Yahoo."

On Tuesday the election will dominate Yahoo's home page. Users

who search for terms like "Barack Obama" and "John McCain" will

see links to Yahoo's news and results at the top of the results.

Most of the material on Yahoo News comes from The Associated

Press and third-party partners like ABC News and The Politico.

Yahoo will simulcast the coverage of ABC News Now, the digital

video arm of ABC News, which plans to go live from 7 p.m. until at

least 11 p.m. The site will rely on AP's projections of winners in

each state; its breaking news blog will acknowledge when the

television networks make projections.

The site had 80 million page views on election day in 2004 and

142 million the day after, when John Kerry conceded to George W.

Bush. "We expect to do twice and perhaps three times as much

traffic in 2008," Khemlani said.

Helped by interest in the election, Yahoo News had 38 million

visitors in September, according to Nielsen Online. Although Yahoo

News usually ranks No.1 in Nielsen's list of online news outlets,

MSNBC.com's network of sites surpassed Yahoo in September with 43.2

million visitors. CNN.com's network ranked third with 37.3 million

visitors. (Another firm, comScore, placed Yahoo ahead of MSNBC.com

for the same month.)

While television news has viewership spikes on major campaign

days, news sites usually have bigger bumps the day after. "Prime

time on the Internet is first thing in the morning," Lufkin said.

Aug. 29, the day after Barack Obama's acceptance speech at the

Democratic National Convention, was the highest traffic day in the

13-year history of Yahoo News, according to the site's internal

data, which recorded a 446 percent increase above normal days.

August had already been good to Yahoo. During the Olympics,

Yahoo News drew more visitors than NBC's site, even though NBC

owned exclusive video rights to the Summer Games. By the end of

September, Yahoo News had doubled the amount of traffic it had in

all of 2004, according to internal data.

Why pay for milk when you can slander the cow for free?

When Frank magazine arrived in Ottawa in 1989, it enjoyed a near

monopoly on sometimes salacious gossip and mocking satire about

politicians, business figures and journalists. Last week, the

magazine, which once took unvarnished delight in the failings of

others, stopped publishing.

The reason: Insider gossip of varying reliability and tart

opinions, its two mainstays, are now both widely available on the

Internet, not just on individuals' blogs but on the Web sites of

the mainstream newspapers and broadcasters that were once Frank's

prime targets.

With circulation, which had peaked at 16,000 copies, down to

about 5,000 copies, Michael D. Bate, the editor and publisher, said

he and his investors concluded that there was no future for Frank,

a biweekly that was never particularly profitable.

"It was always a shoestring operation," said Bate, a former

musician, software developer and reporter with the Canadian Press

news service. "When it was really successful, we had a ton of

lawsuits. When it wasn't so successful, we had lots of creditors."

In its style, design and tone, Frank closely resembled the

British magazine Private Eye. Both rejected glossy paper in favor

of cheap newsprint and added cartoon bubbles to photos, frequently

of politicians, to create their covers.

While the magazine was despised and read, often in equal

measures, by many Canadian journalists, Frank also broke news that

later received prominent coverage by other news organizations. To

Bate, Frank's biggest contribution was ending what he called a

"gentlemen's club" among political journalists in Canada. It was,

he said, an informal alliance that traded in embarrassing personal

stories about politicians while guarding them from publication.

For its regular targets, Frank used insider nicknames. Conrad M.

Black, the former Canadian publisher now in a Florida prison, for

example, was "Lord Tubby." And while Bate said that the magazine

tried to focus only on prominent or influential people, he

acknowledged that "innocent bystanders, nobodies" were sometimes

unfairly made the subject of articles. "But that's the business we

were in: going too far."

Because it is comparatively difficult for publishers to defend

libel lawsuits in Canada, they were a constant drain on Frank.

Which is not to say Frank was always innocent. A judge from Quebec

successfully sued Frank for writing that he had hired a prostitute.

At the time the episode was supposed to have taken place, the judge

was in Israel with his church choir.

Frank frequently pushed the boundaries of good taste. Late in

his tenure as prime minister, Brian Mulroney, a Conservative,

attended a number of prominent events with his attractive young

daughter rather than his wife, Mila. Frank responded with a mock

contest open to young Conservative party members that offered a

sexual encounter with the prime minister's daughter as its grand

prize. Mulroney later told a television interviewer that contest

had made him want to acquire a gun "to do serious damage to these

people."

Although Mulroney left politics in 1993, Bate is nostalgic about

his tenure.

"I find Canadian politics now so dull, beyond belief dull," he

said. "They're a bunch of ciphers. We're in Ottawa, we're a

political satire magazine, and I don't like politics -- so I've got

a problem."

-- IAN AUSTEN

SALUTING A BANKER IN A BANKING YEAR WORTH FORGETTING

It's like being named the outstanding British soldier of 1776.

The trade publication American Banker unveiled its Banker of the

Year award last week: It went to Kenneth D. Lewis, chief of Bank of

America.

While Lewis is a respected executive, 2008 hardly seems like the

year for any banker, given how unpopular the industry is these

days.

"He's a great executive and B of A's a great bank," said J.J.

Hornblass, the executive editor of BankInnovation.net, a banking

industry blog. "It just doesn't seem like the right time to be

dancing in the streets and celebrating banking."

Richard Melville of American Banker said editors there felt they

had to laud someone this year.

"We never thought twice about it," said Melville, editorial

director for the banking publications of SourceMedia, which owns

American Banker. "We cover banking. We don't stop covering banking

during a bad cycle."

But the discussions this year were more complicated than usual.

"In most years, by the time July, August rolls around, you have a

sense for what you think," he said. "This year was not a year

where you can sit there and say with any great level of confidence

that you understood the present. The present was changing very

quickly."

Corporate executives' fortunes can fall quickly, as many an

embarrassed business editor knows.

For example, in 2001, Fortune put Enron on its most admired

companies list, and Business Week put Tyco International at the top

of its best performers list. Worth magazine placed Jeffrey K.

Skilling, the former chief executive of Enron, at No. 2 and L.

Dennis Kozlowski, the former chief executive of Tyco, at No. 10 on

its list of America's best chief executives.

In August, Business 2.0 put Skilling on its cover under the

headline "The Revolution Lives." A week later, Skilling resigned

as Enron began falling apart. In 2002, Kozlowski resigned. Both

Skilling and Kozlowski are now convicted felons.

But Melville said he was confident his list of best bankers was

solid. "You wouldn't find, on that list, many people who are being

vilified right now," he said. "How do you judge an industry? Do

you judge it by the ones who are doing well or the ones who are not

doing well? By the ones whose practices you respect or the ones

whose practices you don't respect?"

American Banker recently laid off several staff members --

Melville said it was fewer than 20. But it is honoring Lewis in

style. Its party for the bankers of the year is scheduled for Dec.

4 at the Plaza Hotel.

"I would hope they serve a lot of alcohol, at least,"

Hornblass said.

-- STEPHANIE CLIFFORD

WALL STREET CRISIS AS REALITY SHOW

The producers of the reality TV series "Wall Street Warriors"

find themselves in a case of life imitating life.

The show documents life on Wall Street by focusing on a handful

of traders, brokers and fund managers, and the producers, Sean

Skelton and Scott Gill, had a front-row seat as the bottom fell out

of the financial markets.

"We've been capturing a lot of drama lately," Skelton said

Friday as he was shooting in Manhattan. "We've got the backlash of

the credit crisis from last year, which we started capturing about

halfway through the second season. So things started off bad this

year. But about halfway through our season this year, things have

gotten really bad with the bank failures and the bailout and the

drama."

Then about a month ago, the bottom fell out for "Wall Street

Warriors" itself when the high-definition cable channel that has

been carrying the show, MOJO-HD, announced that it would cease

operations in December.

"It kind of happened at the same time" as the markets were

diving, Gill said in a telephone interview from Los Angeles.

Skelton added, "I guess it's somewhat ironic that it's

happening."

But MOJO, which reached only about 10 million homes at its peak,

told the team to finish production and promised to work with it to

find a new home for the show. "Warriors" reached No. 1 on iTunes

in July for downloads of reality television series.

"We'll be done with production in the next four to six weeks,"

Skelton said. "We'll be done editing the show probably by February

or March."

He said that the team is continuing to document the turmoil on

Wall Street and is committed to finding an outlet to distribute the

series.

And with the optimism of stockbrokers telling their clients to

stay in the market, Skelton and Gill say they are confident that

they will find a new network. "I think," Skelton said, "we'll be

around for a fourth season."

-- CARLA BARANAUCKAS

WHAT REALLY WEIRDS OUT WEIRD AL

Visitors to MTV's new online music video site can listen to

songs with plenty of crass and vulgar lyrics, but may be surprised

to find that certain other language had once been deemed too nasty

for broadcast -- that is, the names of the file-sharing sites

Morpheus, Grokster, LimeWire and Kazaa, all of which have been the

bane of the music industry.

The foul-mouthed musician swept up by MTV's speech code is Weird

Al Yankovic, whose lyrics to "Don't Download This Song," a

tongue-in-cheek complaint about file-sharing first released in 2006

included those so-called offensive terms. (Since then, two of those

sites -- Grokster and Morpheus -- have become inactive.)

In an e-mail message on Sunday, Yankovic wrote that he had

bleeped out the names to the file-sharing sites in his song two

years ago, after MTV "told me that they would refuse to air my

video" otherwise. "Instead of subtly removing or obscuring the

words in the track," he wrote, "I made the creative decision to

bleep them out as obnoxiously as possible, so that there would be

no mistake I was being censored."

He complied, "because I was proud of the song and the

accompanying Bill Plympton video, and I wanted to do everything I

could to maximize exposure for it."

All of this would have been largely forgotten, if not for the

introduction last week of mtvmusic.com, a project like Hulu -- a

partnership among companies including MTV's parent, Viacom -- to

wrest control of the delivery of entertainment videos from sites

like YouTube. The MTV music site has nearly 20,000 music videos

available -- once the network's stock in trade -- to play, browse or

imbed on other sites.

The site is still in beta, or introductory phase, and perhaps

that is why a visitor to the site can quickly search for music

lyrics cruder than even the usual litany of gangster rap bravado.

Patti Smith, for example, sings a song with a title that can't be

printed and introduces it with an expletive.

A visitor looked up Yankovic's song there, heard the bleeps,

passed it on to online technology sites like TechDirt blog, and the

censorship battle ensued.

An MTV spokesman did not respond Sunday to a request for

comment.

"I'm not really sure if MTV ever even played the video on the

air after all that," he wrote, "but now that it's apparently up

on their Web site, people are finally getting a chance to see the

official 'MTV-approved' version. The uncensored, 'nonridiculous'

version can be seen on my YouTube and MySpace pages."

-- NOAM COHEN

First it's Graham Harrell vs. Colt McCoy. Next it's Graham

Harrell vs. Denver's Chatfield High School graduate Zac Robinson.

Yes, the Big 12's round-robin king-of-the-hill quarterback

competition returns to Lubbock, Texas, again Saturday night. The

wildest division race in conference history continues with a West

Texas gunslinger against the cool, madly efficient underdog from

the Denver suburbs.

Harrell's Texas Tech Red Raiders, who jumped to No. 2 in

Sunday's BCS rankings, are halfway through their Murderer's Row of

four straight ranked teams. In front of them next is Robinson's

Oklahoma State Cowboys, No. 8 in the AP poll and No. 9 in the BCS,

with the world watching.

Again.

Texas Tech's made-for-shlocky-TV-movie 39-33 win over top-ranked

Texas made the Red Raiders 9-0 for the first time since 1938. But

for all of Harrell's gaudy numbers -- 3,621 yards, 71 percent

passing, 30 touchdowns -- Robinson is second nationally in pass

efficiency and tops the quarterback stable that is the Big 12. He's

129-for-187 for 2,082 yards with 20 touchdowns and five

interceptions for a ranking of 192.5, trailing only Tulsa's David

Johnson.

Robinson beefed up his stats by filleting the sieve that is Iowa

State with 395 yards and five touchdowns in a 59-17 romp. (Note to

University of Colorado at Boulder coach Dan Hawkins: If you can't

top two touchdowns against these guys Saturday at home, hold a

campus-wide quarterback tryout.)

Robinson threw TDs of 80 yards and 95 yards and would have had

another for 70 if backup receiver Bo Bowling hadn't let up on a

flea-flicker bomb in which no Cyclone was within a time zone of

him. Robinson had never thrown a 95-yard TD pass.

But he caught one longer. He was a junior at Chatfield.

"We were on our 2-yard line," Robinson told reporters after

the game. "It was almost identical (a slant pass) but it was on

the right side. It was against Fort Collins (Colo.)."

Robinson's numbers aren't neon enough to get him into Heisman

talk. Harrell's are. So did this -- driving Texas Tech 62 yards in

six plays in the final 1:29.

"As a quarterback, that's what you live for -- a chance to bring

your team back down the stretch against a great team," Harrell

told reporters after the game. "If you're a quarterback and you

don't want to be in that situation, you should probably change

positions."

- Didn't want to say it, but I told you so. Texas' Achilles'

heel is its secondary. It proved it on the last two plays Saturday

night. Blake Gideon, a true freshman starting at safety, dropped an

easy interception on Tech's final drive. The next play, Harrell

threw the pass heard around the college football world. Cornerback

Curtis Brown didn't turn around fast enough on the sideline strike,

allowing Michael Crabtree to turn it into a winning 28-yard TD with

one second left. The Longhorns are 80th in pass efficiency defense.

The road to Kansas City. The Texas win won't mean much if Texas

Tech doesn't beat Oklahoma State, then Oklahoma on the road the

following week. If both beat Tech, the Big 12 South title -- and

possibly the inside track to a BCS title berth -- will likely be on

the line Nov. 29 when Oklahoma plays at Oklahoma State. The Big 12

tiebreaker is the BCS rankings.

- Slip, slipping away. In the Southeastern Conference, where

coaches would have week-to-week contracts if fans had their way,

two stalwarts sound as if the inevitable is near.

Auburn (4-5) lost its fourth straight for the first time since

Tommy Tuberville's first year in 1999, this time to a Mississippi

team that was favored, which is indictment enough. The previous

week, legendary ex-coach Pat Dye hinted that the Tigers all but

quit in their 34-17 drubbing at West Virginia.

"What happens at the end of the year happens," Tuberville said

after Saturday's 17-7 loss, "and there's nothing anybody can do

about it."

Last week, the Knoxville (Tenn.) News-Sentinel reported Phil

Fulmer would be fired if he lost six games. Saturday's 27-6 loss to

South Carolina put the Volunteers at 3-6 and 1-5 in the SEC. Asked

after the game what he'd tell Volunteer fans, Fulmer told the

media, "I think you've probably said about all that needs to be

said."

- K-State defenseless. Yes, it happened. Kansas State does have

a worse defense than it did a year ago when it gave up the most

points -- 198 -- in a four-game stretch in school history. Its total

defense has dropped from 400.58 (69th nationally) to 444.67

(108th), scoring defense from 30.83 (86th) to 33.67 (107th) and

turnover margin from plus .33 (33rd) to minus 1.22 (114th).

John Henderson is a sports columnist for The Denver Post

Maybe the polls are wrong, and John McCain is about to pull off

the biggest election upset in American history. But right now the

Democrats seem poised both to win the White House and to greatly

expand their majorities in both houses of Congress.

Most of the post-election discussion will presumably be about

what the Democrats should and will do with their mandate. But let

me ask a different question that will also be important for the

nation's future: What will defeat do to the Republicans?

You might think, perhaps hope, that Republicans will engage in

some soul-searching, that they'll ask themselves whether and how

they lost touch with the national mainstream. But my prediction is

that this won't happen any time soon.

Instead, the Republican rump, the party that's left after the

election, will be the party that attends Sarah Palin's rallies,

where crowds chant "Vote McCain, not Hussein!" It will be the

party of Saxby Chambliss, the senator from Georgia, who, observing

large-scale early voting by African-Americans, warns his supporters

that "the other folks are voting." It will be the party that

harbors menacing fantasies about Barack Obama's Marxist -- or was

that Islamic? -- roots.

Why will the GOP become more, not less, extreme? For one thing,

projections suggest that this election will drive many of the

remaining Republican moderates out of Congress, while leaving the

hard right in place.

For example, Larry Sabato, the election forecaster, predicts

that seven Senate seats currently held by Republicans will go

Democratic on Tuesday. According to the liberal-conservative

rankings of the political scientists Keith Poole and Howard

Rosenthal, five of the soon-to-be-gone senators are more moderate

than the median Republican senator -- so the rump, the GOP caucus

that remains, will have shifted further to the right. The same

thing seems set to happen in the House.

Also, the Republican base already seems to be gearing up to

regard defeat not as a verdict on conservative policies, but as the

result of an evil conspiracy. A recent Democracy Corps poll found

that Republicans, by a margin of more than two to one, believe that

McCain is losing "because the mainstream media is biased" rather

than "because Americans are tired of George Bush."

And McCain has laid the groundwork for feverish claims that the

election was stolen, declaring that the community activist group

ACORN -- which, as Factcheck.org points out, has never "been found

guilty of, or even charged with" causing fraudulent votes to be

cast -- "is now on the verge of maybe perpetrating one of the

greatest frauds in voter history in this country, maybe destroying

the fabric of democracy." Needless to say, the potential voters

ACORN tries to register are disproportionately "other folks," as

Chambliss might put it.

Anyway, the Republican base, egged on by the McCain-Palin

campaign, thinks that elections should reflect the views of "real

Americans" -- and most of the people reading this column probably

don't qualify.

Thus, in the face of polls suggesting that Obama will win

Virginia, a top McCain aide declared that the "real Virginia" --

the southern part of the state, excluding the Washington, D.C.,

suburbs -- favors McCain. A majority of Americans now live in big

metropolitan areas, but while visiting a small town in North

Carolina, Palin described it as "what I call the real America,"

one of the "pro-America" parts of the nation. The real America,

it seems, is small-town, mainly southern and, above all, white.

I'm not saying that the GOP is about to become irrelevant.

Republicans will still be in a position to block some Democratic

initiatives, especially if the Democrats fail to achieve a

filibuster-proof majority in the Senate.

And that blocking ability will ensure that the GOP continues to

receive plenty of corporate dollars: This year the U.S. Chamber of

Congress has poured money into the campaigns of Senate Republicans

like Minnesota's Norm Coleman, precisely in the hope of denying

Democrats a majority large enough to pass pro-labor legislation.

But the GOP's long transformation into the party of the

unreasonable right, a haven for racists and reactionaries, seems

likely to accelerate as a result of the impending defeat.

This will pose a dilemma for moderate conservatives. Many of

them spent the Bush years in denial, closing their eyes to the

administration's dishonesty and contempt for the rule of law. Some

of them have tried to maintain that denial through this year's

election season, even as the McCain-Palin campaign's tactics have

grown ever uglier. But one of these days they're going to have to

realize that the GOP has become the party of intolerance.

Barack Obama will probably win the 2008 presidential election.

If he does, we conservatives will greet the news with our usual

resolute stoicism or cheerful fatalism. Being conservative means

never being too surprised by disappointment.

But what if John McCain pulls off an upset?

I'm worried about my compatriots on the left. Michael Powell

reports in Saturday's New York Times that even the possibility of

an Obama defeat has driven many liberals into in a state of high

anxiety. And then there's a young woman from Denver who "told her

boyfriend that their love life was on hold while she sweated out

Mr. Obama's performance in Colorado." Well, what if Obama loses

Colorado? Or the presidency? As a compassionate conservative, I'm

concerned about the well-being of that boyfriend -- and of others

who might be similarly situated. I feel an obligation to help.

So let me tell liberals why they should be cheerful if McCain

happens to win.

1. It would be a victory for an underdog. Liberals are supposed

to like underdogs. McCain is a lonely guy standing up against an

unprecedentedly well-financed, superorganized, ExxonMobil-like

Obama juggernaut. A McCain upset victory would be a classic liberal

happy ending.

2. It would be a defeat for the establishment. Obama's most

recent high-profile Republican endorser was D.C. insider Kenneth

Duberstein. Liberals should be on the side of hard-working

plumbers, not big-shot lobbyists -- oops, sorry, big-shot strategic

advisers and consultants. And Duberstein said that Colin Powell's

endorsement was "the Good Housekeeping seal of approval on Barack

Obama." Doesn't that comment embody everything that liberals (and

many conservatives, including me) find creepy about smug

establishment back-scratching and gatekeeping in America?

3. It would be a victory for the future. With President Bush's

approval rating at about 25 percent, a McCain triumph would mean

Americans were making a judgment on two future alternatives, not

merely voting on the basis of their resentment at the past

performance of George W. Bush. It would mean voters were looking

ahead, not back. Liberals should therefore welcome a McCain win as

a triumph of hope over fear, of the future over the past.

4. It would be a victory for freedom. Obama supporter Leon

Wieseltier of The New Republic writes that "tyrants and

genocidaires would sleep less soundly during a McCain presidency."

Liberals should be opposed to tyranny and genocide. Wieseltier also

acknowledges that McCain "was splendidly right about the surge,

which is not a small thing; and the grudging way Obama treats the

reversal in Iraq, when he treats it at all, is disgraceful." The

surge advanced not only our national security but the cause of

freedom in the world. Liberals should be votaries of freedom.

5. A McCain victory would be good for liberalism. Look at recent

history. Jimmy Carter and a Democratic Congress begat Ronald

Reagan. Bill Clinton and a Democratic Congress produced Newt

Gingrich. Who knows what would follow a President Obama and a

Democratic Congress? Here's one possibility: President Sarah Palin.

So liberals shouldn't be too upset at the idea of McCain

winning. Could it happen?

It's possible. What if the polls, for various reasons, are

overstating Obama's support by a couple points? And what if the

late deciders break overwhelmingly against Obama, as they did in

the Democratic primaries? McCain could then thread the Electoral

College needle.

McCain would have to win every state where he now leads or is

effectively even in the polls (including North Carolina, Indiana

and Missouri). He'd have to take Florida and Ohio, where he's about

four points down but where operatives on the ground give him a

pretty good shot. That gets him to 247 of the 270 votes needed.

McCain's path to victory is then to snatch Pennsylvania (which

gets him to 268), and win either Virginia, Colorado, Nevada or New

Mexico (states where he trails by about four to seven points) -- or

New Hampshire, where he's 10 points behind, but twice won dramatic

primary victories.

As for Pennsylvania, two recent polls have McCain closing to

within four points. Pennsylvania is the state whose small-town

residents were famously patronized by Obama as "bitter." One of

Pennsylvania's Democratic congressmen, John Murtha, recently

accused many of his western Pennsylvania constituents of being

racist. Perhaps Pennsylvanians will want to send a little message

to the Democratic Party. And that could tip the election to McCain.

It's an inside straight. But I've seen gamblers draw them.

If McCain wins, think of this column as a modest contribution to

cheering up distraught liberals. If Obama prevails, I'm confident

there are some compassionate liberals out there who will do the

same for hapless conservatives as they hobble out to the

wilderness.

By the end of the Giants' 35-14 rout of

Dallas on Sunday, Jerry Jones, the Cowboys' owner, might have

searched the waiver wire for Seth Maxwell, the quarterback in Peter

Gent's 1973 novel, "North Dallas Forty."

Who could blame him? With Tony Romo out for the third

consecutive week with a broken pinkie, the Cowboys looked weak on

offense, first with Brad Johnson at quarterback, then with Brooks

Bollinger. The Giants intercepted three passes.

Romo is expected back for the next game, after Dallas' bye week.

In the meantime, the last-place Cowboys (5-4) will look up and at

some distance in the National Football Conference East to the

first-place Giants (7-1).

"We're not what I thought we would be at the backup," Jones

said after the game as his players filed out past him. "But I

don't want to load this whole thing on the backup quarterback. He's

not playing behind the team that I thought we'd be playing

behind."

Giants quarterback Eli Manning threw three touchdown passes but

turned the ball over three times, twice on fumbles and once on an

interception that was returned for a touchdown. He completed 16 of

27 passes for 147 yards.

His touchdown passes were to Kevin Boss (13 yards), Steve Smith

(5 yards) and Amani Toomer (11 yards). Running back Brandon Jacobs

carried 17 times for 117 yards, including a touchdown run of 12

yards. Derrick Ward had a 17-yard touchdown run.

Several key Cowboys missed the game with injuries, which would

have made a Dallas victory a shock in this game between

longstanding rivals. The Cowboys were a popular preseason pick to

win the Super Bowl, and the Giants are the defending Super Bowl

champions, so the feelings between the teams were especially

sensitive.

"We hate each other, that's just how it is," Jacobs said.

Defensive end Justin Tuck, who had two and a half of the Giants'

four sacks, said, more gently: "I don't like to throw the word

'hatred' around. There's a dislike that comes from mutual

respect."

Tuck added that the Giants still must play four divisional

games, including one at Dallas against what may be a healthy Romo.

"We're not smiling at anything now," Tuck said.

Tuck and his fellow defenders held running back Marion Barber to

54 yards on 19 carries. Cornerback Corey Webster intercepted two

passes by Johnson, and safety James Butler stole one by Bollinger.

Webster said they were just doing their share.

"The D-linemen have been doing their thing for a number of

years," Webster said. "It was our time to pick up our end of the

deal."

Manning's interception in the second quarter led to a 23-yard

touchdown return by Mike Jenkins that cut the Giants' lead to 14-7.

The pass was intended for Plaxico Burress, who ran long and behind

the secondary as Manning expected him to cut off a shorter route.

"I read one thing, and he didn't," Burress said, "and it

resulted in a touchdown for those guys." On the sideline

immediately afterward, Burress appeared to speak in a demonstrative

way, waving his arms.

Afterward, Manning seemed to confirm the diagnosis of Burress.

"He probably made the right read," Manning said. "A bad play

by me."

Referring to his team's status at midseason, Manning said:

"Seven and one is a great place to be. We couldn't ask for much

more."

Burress later dropped two passes, including one in the end zone,

but he was not the only Giant unable to capture catchable balls.

Ward and Madison Hedgecock also dropped passes. In last week's

21-14 victory at Pittsburgh, the Giants dropped five passes.

The Cowboys made it close again, briefly, in the first minute of

the fourth quarter, when Bollinger threw an 8-yard touchdown pass

to Terrell Owens that cut the Giants' lead to 28-14.

The drive, traveling 75 yards and lasting 16 plays, was aided by

a roughing-the-passer call against Tuck.

The play appeared to be a clean, hard knockdown after an

incomplete pass on third down. Tuck was flagged for landing with

his full 274 pounds on the quarterback.

"I thought the object of hitting the quarterback is to land on

him," Tuck said. "I guess, in the air, I've got to twist my body

to land on the ground."

Down the hall, Jones had other things to worry about. But, as

the Giants showed the Cowboys last season with a postseason upset

in Dallas, the division winners do not always win their playoff

games, and the wild-card qualifier can win the Super Bowl.

"You have to be quite the optimist, and I don't know that I'm

that much of an optimist," Jones said of the divisional race. But,

he added: "Crazy things happen. It doesn't change what I think we

have a chance to do."

In the face of a bitter defeat, Denver Broncos receiver Brandon

Marshall turned and ran.

Is that how a winner acts?

Or did Marshall quit?

"He's one of those soft receivers where he has to have the ball

all the time. If he don't get it, he's going to mope and cry,"

Miami Dolphins linebacker Joey Porter said Sunday.

If you believe Porter, one of the main reasons the Dolphins

upset Denver 26-17 Sunday is because the visitors got in the face

of Marshall and messed with his mind until the young receiver

cracked.

"We got in his head, and he pretty much was done," said

Porter, who insisted Marshall psyched himself right out of the

game.

Faced with the harsh reality of the final score, frustrated by a

lousy individual performance, victimized by a bad call that

nullified a touchdown catch and dissed by smack talk for which he

had no response, Marshall quickly bolted off the field and into the

stadium tunnel leading to the Denver locker room.

On a reeling Denver team that has dropped four of five decisions

after a 3-0 start, it's fair to ask: Is Marshall mentally tough

enough to lead the Broncos out of this mess?

"I'm definitely disappointed," admitted Marshall, credited

with only two catches for 27 yards against the Dolphins.

"Definitely frustrated."

And it showed.

"I went looking for him after the game, but he ran to the

locker room," said Porter, who loves to talk trash and has the Pro

Bowl credentials to back up his sharp tongue.

Did Porter actually try to track down Marshall?

"Yeah, how do you know I seen that he was the first one off the

field? I was looking for him. And he was the first one out of

there," Porter said.

As defenses have gotten tougher on Marshall and his receiving

numbers have gone in steady decline, opponents now see how he

pouts. It's a sign of vulnerability no player can afford in the

NFL.

"I'm not selfish, but I'm a wide receiver," Marshall said.

"I'm not asking for the ball every play, but I would love for us

to throw every play."

From the anger with which Marshall snapped the chinstrap off his

helmet when his 77-yard touchdown catch was wiped out by a pass

interference penalty that appeared incorrect, to the way

quarterback Jay Cutler trudges back to the bench after another

ineffective set of downs by an offense that has lost its mojo, the

body language of Denver's young stars too often suggests they are

beaten men.

Porter knows any player capable of catching 18 passes in a

single game is talented. But here's his advice to Marshall: Grow

up.

Rather than taking the double-coverage the Dolphins used to

blanket Marshall as a compliment, he got so mad that Porter

detected an undeniable loss of composure.

If Marshall comes unglued, how can we expect the Broncos to keep

it together, even in the AFC West, the division that makes a parody

of parity? The team needs Marshall to lead, not whine.

During a break in the action before the fourth quarter began,

Porter broke away from Miami's defensive huddle to shout across the

line of scrimmage at Marshall, until he could no longer ignore the

abuse.

It was a pitiful sight for a Broncos team that now appears too

immature and emotionally fragile to handle the pressure of a league

that shows no mercy for the weak or wounded.

"Once I know you're frustrated, I'm going to ride you all the

way into the dirt," Porter said.

"I seen he was frustrated, because he went from not talking to

me to wanting to talk to me every play. Why you talking to me? I'm

not even covering you. So when you give me all your attention, I

know you're not on your game."

Unnerved to the point of distraction in front of 75,000 irked

paying customers, all Marshall could do was stand there and take

the tongue-lashing from an opponent laughing in his face.

If this is where this Denver team comes undone, then we will

remember it as the sad scene where the season faded to black.

Mark Kiszla is a sports columnist for The Denver Post

"Our game plan going in was to run the football, to establish

the run."

- Mike Shanahan

Welcome to Mount Rushless - a monument to the nadir of despair,

with these four frowning faces of futility carved into the rock

bottom: Michael Pittman, Ryan Torain, Andre Hall and Selvin Young.

What the Denver Broncos established Sunday was they can't run.

The Broncos established their all-time second-nastiest rushing

yardage total for one game - 14 yards.

They had 5 pathetic rushing yards at halftime, 3 - yes, 3,

because of a 2-yard loss - in the middle of the third quarter. They

had only 7 yards until the last, meaningless run for 7.

Fourteen yards and the Broncos were a cloud of dust Sunday

afternoon.

Pittman, seven runs for 4 yards (and hurt again).

Torain, three runs for 1 yard (in his NFL debut).

Hall, one run for 7 yards (but zero fumbles).

Young, zero runs for 0 yards (remains injured, remains 1,740

yards shy of avowed goal of 2,000).

Oh, Henry.

Missing 2 yards? Quarterback Jay Cutler ran once. But he had his

own problems. Cutler threw for three more interceptions. He has

dropped from Most Valuable Player consideration to the Most

Valueless fantasy category.

This may be a rush to judgment, but the Broncos are the

worst-reeking first-place team in the history of American

professional football.

At the halfway point, the Broncos are at their lowest point -

4-4. Some run they're having now. Daylight saving time goes, and

the Broncos run to darkness.

As in 2007, the Broncos' season might as well be over on Nov. 1.

In 1972, against the Oakland Raiders, the Broncos ran for only

13 yards. So, the Broncos finally raced past that number against

Miami. Until Sunday, the next meager mark was 20 against Dallas -

the Dallas Texans of the AFL in 1961.

The Broncos never have run for fewer than 5 yards in a first

half - as far as anybody could tell. And here's how the Broncos

established run:

On the first play of the game, Pittman lost a yard, then gained

a yard (to be back where he started). Then Cutler flung his eighth

interception of the season.

The Broncos couldn't establish the passing game, either.

In the rest of the quarter Pittman went for 2 yards, Torain for

3, Torain for minus-2.

That would be 3 reeking yards. They added two more in the half.

That's not a joke, but the running game certainly was a joke. Where

have you gone, Terrell Davis? Clinton Portis? Floyd Little? Otis

Armstrong?

Olandis Gary?

The rushing game reigned supreme for years. Now it spits. Not

one rusher has more than 320 yards. The rushers have five

touchdowns.

Despite his boasts, Young can't get on the field, and as

Shanahan had suggested, he is an injury always happening. Pittman

was impressive briefly, but got a stinger and left early on Sunday.

Hall fumbled twice against New England and didn't participate

against the Dolphins until one late carry.

And Torain, who is supposed to be Ryan's Express or The Great

Gatsby or somebody, looked ordinary in his brief time. The Broncos'

best player on Sunday was a fullback catching passes.

Torain said the "Dolphins did a good job" of stopping the run.

Squid could have done a good job of stopping the Broncos' runners.

Just when it seems like Shanahan can't be more ashamed of his

performance as a coach (see: an Oct. 20 Monday night game at New

England), the Broncos, after a bye to reconsider life, scored fewer

than 20 points for the fifth consecutive game and turned an awesome

autumn afternoon into a painting of a howling man - Shanahan.

If Shanahan's intention was to "establish" the running game,

he should have called more than 10 running plays (Cutler's one does

not count) in the first three quarters - compared to 32 passing

plays. It's not as if the Broncos were being blown out (again) at

16-10. They needed only one touchdown, and the way Cutler is

overthrowing, underthowing, throwing over and under to the other

team, running seems like the right idea. We've been told that the

offensive line is zone-blocking well. Twilight Zone blocking,

apparently.

If Young and Pittman are injury-prone and Hall is injury-prone

and Torain is not ready, why didn't the Broncos sign Shaun

Alexander, who joined Portis in Washington?

And it's not as if the Broncos were playing against Miami's

No-Name Defense. The Broncos should be playing under assumed names.

"Our ability to stop their running game helped us in all areas

on defense," said Miami defensive end Vonnie Holliday, as if the

Dolphins were special.

Spot in The First Reader could run better than the Broncos.

On Sunday the Broncos were unable to pass or run.

Or hide.

Woody Paige is a sports columnist for The Denver Post

Autumn had always been good to Jim

Leyritz.

Most of the time, Leyritz was just a workaday Yankee on a team

of stars, but the postseason seemed to be his stage, as he twirled

his bat at the plate and hit home runs when it mattered most.

But this has been a very different fall for Leyritz. Now 44 and

eight years into his retirement from baseball, he has been shunned

by the Yankees. The nearly $11 million he earned as a player is

gone, along with his lucrative speaking career. Leyritz is awaiting

trial in Florida on charges of manslaughter and driving under the

influence of alcohol after a crash last December that killed

30-year-old Fredia Ann Veitch. If convicted, he faces up to 15

years in prison.

The player once known for his designer sunglasses and outsize

swagger is so broke that he said he had sought aid from the

Baseball Assistance Team, a charity that helps former players

through tough times. "They basically have been a savior," Leyritz

said in a recent interview. "If it wasn't for them, I don't know

what I would have done."

The fable of the self-destructive athlete has been told before,

and the Leyritz version follows a familiar outline: misspent

fortune, messy divorce, fast lifestyle and a trip to the county

jail. But other details of his life do not fit as easily into the

typical narrative.

Leyritz is the primary caregiver to his three sons, ages 13, 12,

and 7, who live with him in the spotless home he rents in Davie, a

Fort Lauderdale suburb. After his divorce and custody battle,

friends say, Leyritz started over and began earning a comfortable

income from television appearances and corporate speaking

engagements.

Then came the crash. A jury will decide whether it was the

result of criminal behavior, and the trial is scheduled to begin

next Monday. Leyritz's friends and advocates say that no matter the

outcome, his children need him for emotional and financial support.

A day after Veitch died, one of her children sent her a text

message, writing, "I love you momma!! Rest in peace," according

to telephone records in the state attorney's file.

Howard Pomerantz, a lawyer for Veitch's family, said no one was

helping her 14-year-old daughter and 5-year-old son. He described

Leyritz as "someone who has destroyed the lives of a number of

people" and questioned the propriety of giving him assistance.

"I'd be interested in learning whether the Baseball Assistance

Team takes into consideration whether they're pouring salt in the

wounds in the victims in this case," he said.

Jim Martin, the executive director of the Baseball Assistance

Team, spoke about the program only in general because of privacy

restrictions, and declined to say whether Leyritz was receiving

help. In 2008, the charity has awarded more than 175 assistant

grants to people affiliated with baseball. But he said he did not

pass judgment on those in need, especially when children were

involved.

"It's not the kids' fault when someone does something stupid,"

Martin said.

Leyritz's predicament is starkly different from his days as a

Yankee. He was with the team from 1990 through 1996, then in 1999

and 2000. He is probably best known for his three-run homer in Game

4 of the 1996 World Series, which tied the score and led to a

victory over Atlanta.

In the clubhouse, Leyritz had a reputation as a brash upstart,

and he was overshadowed by teammates like Don Mattingly and Derek

Jeter. Still, fans appreciated his clutch performances in the

postseason. By the time he left baseball in 2000, Leyritz had

earned at least $10.7 million in 11 major league seasons, according

to the Web site baseball-reference.com.

Like many professional athletes facing retirement, Leyritz

struggled with living an ordinary life. He and his wife, Karri

Leyritz, consumed lavishly during his Yankees career. In court

filings, Leyritz's lawyer acknowledged that they had spent most of

his baseball earnings by 2002, when he filed for divorce. By then,

little was left to fight over besides their three sons.

The 12 volumes of divorce records on file at the Broward County

courthouse depict a vicious battle in which the couple bickered

over everything from who should get the Ford Expedition to the

whereabouts of Leyritz's 1999 World Series ring.

In 2004, a social worker concluded in a custody evaluation that

neither Leyritz was an ideal parent. Karri Leyritz's live-in

boyfriend had a long criminal history, and in 2003, she tested

positive for benzodiazepines, antianxiety drugs for which she did

not have a prescription. Jim Leyritz, according to the report, used

amphetamines and drank heavily as a player. The social worker also

reported that a marriage counselor determined that he was

struggling with "learning to cope with life transitions and

adjusting to life without baseball."

He and his wife, Leyritz told the social worker, had led a

"partying lifestyle." But he also said: "My life is my children.

I have had my fun, now they are more important to me."

The social worker ultimately recommended that the Leyritzes

share parenting responsibilities, but that Jim Leyritz be the

primary residential parent.

Although the Leyritzes were unemployed, they frequently placed

the children in after-school day care and, in Karri's case, left

them with baby sitters, according to the custody evaluation and the

transcript of a hearing before the divorce judge. Teachers reported

that the children were often absent when in Karri's care, and when

they did attend, they did not have lunch, were missing socks or

wore disheveled, torn uniforms.

Judge Lawrence Korda admonished the Leyritzes to spend more time

with their children. "To me, if two parents aren't working and

both of them are posing as incredibly involved parents, then go get

your kids," he said.

After an initial interview in September, Leyritz declined to

answer further questions, including inquiries about his divorce,

saying he was speaking exclusively to another publication. But

Karri Leyritz said the breakup coincided with his exit from

professional baseball and was a difficult period for both of them.

"We were both just going through a terrible time," she said.

Now, Karri Leyritz said, the children spend nearly equal time

with each parent. She said they had begun to settle into a routine.

"He's a great father and that's really all," she said.

"Obviously, we didn't get along as husband and wife, but you have

to come to an understanding."

Leyritz's easygoing, charismatic demeanor made him popular on

the speaking circuit. Last year, he received repeat requests to

appear at corporate sales meetings, Little League banquets and

Yankees luxury suites, engagements that his agent, Andrew Levy,

said paid up to $7,500 each. Leyritz said he attended 50 events in

2007, in addition to working that season as a Yankees reporter for

ESPN Radio in New York. His contract for 2008 was not extended, a

decision that was made before he was arrested.

"He was starting to turn a corner," said Todd Watson, a close

friend. "He was starting to become a household name."

Everything changed early on Dec. 28, 2007. After a night out

with friends to celebrate his birthday, Leyritz ran a red light

about 3:20 a.m. and crashed into a car driven by Veitch, who had

been drinking after finishing her shift as a bartender, according

to authorities. She was thrown from the car and later died.

An officer on the scene described Leyritz as having bloodshot,

glassy eyes and a flushed face. The officer reported smelling a

"slight odor of alcohol coming from his breath as he spoke."

Leyritz refused to submit to a breath test and failed a field

sobriety test. His blood alcohol level, tested at 6:10 a.m., was

0.14, well above Florida's limit of 0.08.

Leyritz is also the defendant in a civil case filed this year by

Veitch's estate. Although he declined to speak about the accident,

court records show that the defense will probably argue that

Leyritz cannot be entirely blamed for Veitch's death because she

was also drunk -- her blood alcohol level was 0.18 -- and she was not

wearing a seat belt, according to the autopsy report.

"I think the evidence is so favorable on his side that

ultimately he's going to be exonerated of all charges on the

criminal case, and I think we're going to succeed in the defense of

the civil case," said Jeff Ostrow, a lawyer for Leyritz. "Not

only was he not negligent, but she was the direct and proximate

cause of the accident."

Her lawyer holds the opposite view. "Whether or not she was

intoxicated is not relevant, because she was driving with a green

light, in her own lane of traffic, within the speed limit, not

breaking any laws and she was not in any way the cause of this

accident," Pomerantz said.

In a deposition for the civil case, an eyewitness, Karen Rivera,

reported that Leyritz tried to shake Veitch's leg after the

accident and asked if Veitch had been drinking. According to a

police video taken on the scene, Leyritz told an officer, "She hit

me pretty good," and later did not appear to react when he was

told Veitch had died.

Friends say that Leyritz was in shock after the accident and

that his involvement in it -- guilty or not -- has been difficult.

"He came and stayed with me for the first three days," Karri

Leyritz said. "It was horrendous. I don't wish that pain on my

worst enemy. Believe me, it hit him."

In the interview, Leyritz declined to comment on his feelings

about the accident. But he did sometimes show frustration at those

who have avoided him since the crash. He said he was not invited to

the All-Star Game in the Bronx or to the Yankee Stadium finale this

year. Leyritz said that he had a ticket to the final game but that

he was ejected from the VIP area by a security guard and sat in the

stands with fans instead.

The Yankees did not respond to requests for comment.

"Am I disappointed that there's not a little bit more support

there?" Leyritz said. "I would say a little bit. But at the same

time, I really, truly understand the reasonings."

Watson said his friend deserved better.

"He's not a leper and he's innocent," Watson said. "You're

guilty until you're proven innocent in this country,

unfortunately."

Leyritz said the Yankees were not alone in snubbing him.

"If it was just them doing it, I would say yeah," he said.

"But you know what? It's everything."

In the year since the accident, Leyritz has made unpaid

appearances at just three events. In September, he posed with fans

and signed autographs at Suburban Golf Club in Union, N.J., to

benefit the local chamber of commerce.

Bill Liederman, the event organizer, said his friend Leyritz was

still a Yankees hero.

"This is a country of second chances," said Liederman, the

former owner of Mickey Mantle's Restaurant in Manhattan. "There is

no Yankee fan alive who doesn't think, regardless of the outcome of

the trial, that he deserves one."

Levy, Leyritz's agent, said that since the accident, corporate

event organizers have asked to book Leyritz, only to say a few

hours later that "it's just not going to work out for us right

now."

Levy did not have to ask why they canceled. "I knew the

reason," he said.

For now, Leyritz continues to depend on payments from the

Baseball Assistance Team, and he hopes that if he is exonerated,

the work will return. The charity is not paying his legal bills, he

said, just basic living expenses.

"Things so I am able to put a roof over my kids' head and food

on the table," he said.

Private equity firms embarked on one of the biggest spending

sprees in corporate history for nearly three years, using borrowed

money to gobble up huge swaths of industries and some of the

biggest names -- Neiman Marcus, Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer and Toys "R"

Us, among them.

The new owners then saddled the companies with the billions of

dollars of debt used to buy them. But now many of the loans and

bonds sold to finance the deals are about to come due at the worst

possible time. Like homeowners with an adjustable rate mortgage

that just went up, some of private equity's titans are facing a

huge squeeze. And that is coming at the same time as consumers are

staying home with their wallets closed.

Already this year, big retailers backed by private equity, like

Linens 'n Things, Mervyn's and Steve &amp;amp; Barry's, have filed for

bankruptcy. And analysts expect an even broader array of companies

backed by private equity -- including resorts like Harrah's

Entertainment and lenders like GMAC, the financing arm of General

Motors -- to face even more pressure as profits shrivel and

creditors come knocking.

"There's absolutely going to a lot of pain to go around," said

Josh Lerner, a professor of investment banking at Harvard Business

School, who wrote a seminal paper on private equity. "The big

question is how apocalyptic it will be."

Private equity firms, which are lightly regulated, use

investors' money to buy undervalued public companies and take them

private.

The shakeout could have enormous implications for the economy:

People who work for companies owned by private equity firms could

lose their jobs as firms cut costs to meet their debt obligations.

And private equity firms like Apollo Management, which owns

Harrah's and Linens 'n Things, face deep markdowns on the value of

their holdings.

Pension funds and college endowments that invested in these

funds in recent years hoping for big returns are likely to suffer

as well, and many of those investors could face a cash squeeze

because they are probably going to have to hold onto their

investments for years, until the economy turns around.

"The dangling other shoe is now about to drop," said Jeffrey

A. Sonnenfeld, senior associate dean of the Yale School of

Management.

When the economy was booming, the firms made huge profits by

cutting costs at their new acquisitions, improving operations and

then turning around and selling them. In 2007, at the height of the

bubble, such deals totaled $796 billion, or more than 16 percent of

the $4.83 trillion in all the deals made globally that year,

according to data from Dealogic.

Firms like Blackstone Group and Kohlberg Kravis Roberts &amp;amp; Co.,

which faced an image problem at the height of the bubble for

excessive compensation and beneficial tax treatment, but their

returns were so high that even investors like pension funds were

drawn in. Now these firms, built on enormous amounts of debt, are

being forced to go back to the financial markets just as those

markets have nearly frozen up. If history is any guide, the worst

may be yet to come. Steven N. Kaplan, a professor at University of

Chicago Graduate School of Business, found that nearly 30 percent

of all big public-to-private deals made from 1986 to 1989

defaulted. Afterward, private equity players were called in front

of Congress and movies like "Wall Street" and "Other People's

Money" were made depicting financiers as greedy criminals.

To be sure, many companies that were not purchased by private

equity firms are also struggling. Circuit City, the longtime seller

of consumer electronics, is trying to stave off a bankruptcy

filing. And publicly traded automakers like GM are troubled, too.

(GM wants to merge with the struggling Chrysler, which is owned by

private equity.)

Many industry insiders and analysts contend that private

equity-backed companies will not suffer nearly as much as those in

the late 1980s, because the firms pushed for better financing

conditions that allow them to keep operating even if they cannot

make their debt payments.

For example, in an effort to save cash, six of Apollo's

portfolio companies, including Claire's Stores, Harrah's and

Realogy, have announced this year that they will pay some of their

bonds' interest payments by issuing more debt.

Kaplan said he believed that while "it isn't going to be

pretty," today's deals "are much less fragile and used less

leverage." He contended that "on a relative basis to investment

banks and hedge funds, private equity may be in a better place"

because of its long-term focus.

Stephen A. Schwarzman, chairman of Blackstone Group, remains

committed to the future of private equity. "The people rooting for

the collapse of private equity are going to be disappointed," he

said. While some companies may find themselves in trouble, he said,

many more will be able to ride out a downturn in the economy

because of the lax financing conditions that banks agreed to at the

top of the market.

He added that he believes that now may be the best time for

private equity because of the investment opportunities amid the

crisis. "Historically, downturns are when the most money gets

made," he said. Shares of Blackstone are hovering at around $10,

down from the $31 they were at when Blackstone went public in June

2007. (Fortress Investment Group, another big firm, is trading at

$4.90 a share, down from its initial price of $35 in February

2007.)

Lerner, of the Harvard Business School, said that trouble among

private equity firms would probably "precipitate hard questions

about the compensation and fee structure" in the industry. The

firms generally take fees of 2 percent of all money managed and 20

percent of profits. "I would not be surprised if they try to head

of the criticism by returning capital," he said.

The problem for recent deals is that many firms waded into

economically sensitive sectors like retailing and restaurants.

Firms like Apollo, Cerberus Capital Management and Sun Capital

Partners purchased several troubled companies to turn around from

2004 through the first half of 2007.

In the case of Linens 'n Things, a longtime also-ran to Bed,

Bath &amp;amp; Beyond, Apollo knew that it had a tough job ahead of it, yet

it still added lots of debt. Two months before Linens 'n Things was

acquired, it reported $2.1 million in long-term debt; by Dec. 31,

2007, that amount had exploded to $855 million.

At the time, private equity firms assumed that they could

refinance their portfolio companies' debt cheaply. But many appear

to have been blindsided by the size and severity of the credit

market meltdown, which has left lenders unable or unwilling to loan

out more money.

In what seems a worrisome trend, many bonds of private

equity-backed companies have recently plummeted in value, signaling

worries about their solvency. These include Michaels, the crafts

store co-owned by Bain Capital and the Blackstone Group; Dollar

General, a low-price retailer taken private by Kohlberg Kravis

Roberts; and Realogy, the parent company of the real estate

brokerage firms Coldwell Banker and Century 21 that is owned by

Apollo Management.

The bonds issued by Harrah's Entertainment, for example, were

trading at 16.5 cents on the dollar, signaling investors' belief

that the company was drawing closer to a potential default.

Harrah's, too, was saddled with a lot of debt when it was taken

private. A month before the closing of the Harrah's takeover, the

company reported $12.4 billion in long-term debt. By June 30, that

figure had swollen to $23.9 billion. Harrah's has already begun

making selective staff cuts and has begun scaling back costs, even

cutting back hours in its VIP lounge and the complimentary rooms

and meals for its best customers.

"Unfortunately, the worst-case scenario is now looking like the

best case scenario," analysts from CreditSights, a research firm,

wrote in a research note on Oct. 17 about Harrah's. "While the

company could be able to pull through unscathed, the market is

giving little credit to do so."

If Tuesday's election were confined to white America, polls

show, Sen. Barack Obama would lose.

And yet Obama's strength across racial lines lies at the heart

of his lead in the polls over Sen. John McCain heading into

Election Day. Remarkably, Obama, the first black major party

presidential nominee, trails among whites by less than Democratic

nominees normally do.

America's political parties grew decisively polarized by race

after 1964, the year President Lyndon B. Johnson signed civil

rights legislation that his Republican presidential opponent, Barry

Goldwater, opposed. Since then, election pollsters estimate,

Democratic nominees have averaged 39 percent of the white vote. In

last week's New York Times/CBS News poll, Obama drew 44 percent

support among whites -- a higher proportion than Bill Clinton

captured in his general election victories.

Analysts ascribe that success to changing racial attitudes,

Obama's deftness, Republican missteps and the economic crisis.

Whatever the cause, when combined with his two-to-one edge among

Hispanics and his 10-to-1 edge among blacks, it has given him a

national election-eve lead.

The race is not over, and Election Day could bring surprises.

And McCain is capturing a majority of the white vote, according to

these same polls. Yet population shifts have made racial and ethnic

diversity an unavoidable fact of American life. When Ronald Reagan

won re-election in 1984, whites made up 86 percent of the

electorate; by 2004, they had dropped to 77 percent.

With that backdrop, some observers say racial attitudes have

diminished as an independent force, fading into the broader fabric

of cultural concerns that shape voters' choices like religion,

abortion and gun control.

"Anybody who votes against Barack Obama because of the color of

his skin, the Republicans would have gotten on another cultural

issue," said David Saunders, a consultant in Virginia who advises

Democratic candidates on attracting white rural and working-class

voters.

The presidential historian Michael Beschloss credits Obama with

reprising the approach adopted by John F. Kennedy in his 1960

breakthrough as the first Roman Catholic to win the presidency.

"He was running to be president of all the people, not president

of a faction," Beschloss said.

A recent NBC News/Wall Street Journal poll documents Obama's

success in making that case. Asked whether an Obama presidency

would favor the interests of blacks over other Americans, eight in

10 whites said it would not.

For Democratic strategists who have spent their careers laboring

to regain white voters' allegiance, that alone is a striking

achievement. In the mid-1980s, research by the pollster Stan

Greenberg in Macomb County, Mich., concluded that middle-class

whites resented the "raw deal" they received from a political

debate in which Democrats appeared focused on racial minorities and

the poor.

Like Greenberg's client Bill Clinton in 1992, Obama has

emphasized broad-gauged assistance for the middle class. "He's

managed to campaign in ways that may not have changed their world

view but have allowed them to put those feelings aside," Greenberg

said. He added with a note of bemusement, "Maybe he has crossed

over into Tiger Woods territory."

Frustrated Republicans see Obama's steady performances on the

stump and in debates as only part of the explanation for his

surprising level of white support. Just as responsible, some argue,

is that President Bush's unpopularity in threatening economic times

has veered close to Herbert Hoover territory. "You've got to give

Obama an awful lot of credit for his likeability," said Tom Slade,

a former Florida Republican Party chairman, who abandoned his own

Democratic allegiance in 1964 in the early phase of white

conservatives' political migration. More important, he said, "We

have done a miserable job of managing the affairs of government."

In the early 1990s, the political reporter Peter Brown wrote

"Minority Party," a book exploring the pitfalls of the Democrats'

identification with the interests of African-Americans. He credited

Obama with providing "a comfort zone" for white voters, but

pointed to the major boost he received this fall from the financial

crisis on the watch of a Republican president.

"The most important color is green," said Brown, now assistant

director of the Quinnipiac University Polling Institute. "When

Lehman Bros. went under, this thing changed dramatically. People

are just terrified about their financial futures."

In the spring, some Democratic strategists feared Obama might be

crippled in states where he lost working-class white primary voters

decisively to Sen. Hillary Rodham Clinton. In Ohio, carried by Bush

in 2000 and 2004, polls now show Obama is competitive; in

Pennsylvania, a top target for McCain, he is ahead in the polls.

With a message muting racial concerns, Obama didn't begin his

presidential bid with overwhelming strength among blacks; that came

only after he defeated Clinton in the white-dominated Iowa

caucuses. "Ironically, the biggest difficulty about race for Obama

was the doubts among African-Americans about his ability to succeed

in the nominating process," said Tad Devine, a top strategist for

Al Gore in 2000 and John Kerry in 2004.

"It's amazing to me -- almost unreal," said Rep. John Lewis,

D-Ga. Earlier this fall Lewis, a civil rights movement veteran,

accused McCain's campaign of "sowing the seeds of hatred" in a

way that was reminiscent of George Wallace during the 1960s, an

attack that McCain called "brazen and baseless" and that Obama

distanced himself from.

More recently, Lewis added, the campaign has made him "sort of

sad" since leaders of that movement, including the Rev. Dr. Martin

Luther King Jr. and President Johnson, cannot witness Obama's

candidacy.

ON DECK

-- We are running out of decks. This is the last day before

Election Day, and the daily countdown ends.

-- For the candidates now it is all about turnout and getting out

base voters; there aren't many people left to convince. Sen. John

McCain is doing a seven-state swing -- airport hangar rallies --

while Sen. Barack Obama is in Florida, Virginia and North Carolina,

an appropriately aggressive finale to his campaign.

-- And we are getting ready to bid goodbye to what has been the

most compelling campaign we have witnessed. Here's hoping that you

enjoyed reading about it as much as we enjoyed telling you about

it.

-- ADAM NAGOURNEY

MONDAY

John McCain: Tampa, Fla.; Blountville, Tenn.; Moon Township,

Pa.; Indianapolis; Roswell, N.M.; Henderson, Nev.; Prescott, Ariz.

Sarah Palin: Lakewood, Ohio; Jefferson City, Mo.; Dubuque, Iowa;

Colorado Springs; Reno, Nev.; Elko, Nev.; Anchorage, Alaska

Barack Obama: Jacksonville, Fla.; Charlotte, N.C.; Manassas, Va.

Joseph R. Biden Jr.: Lee's Summit, Mo.; Zanesville, Ohio;

Copley, Ohio; Philadelphia

"Wherever I go, America remains a repository for people's

hopes, their desires -- it remains a house of dreams. One thousand

George Bushes and 1,000 Dick Cheneys will never be able to tear

that house down."

Bruce Springsteen, opening an Obama rally in Cleveland

"We've seen a tightening of the race ... I really believe Obama

is the virtual incumbent, and if he's not at 50 percent in North

Carolina he's not going to win."

Sen. Lindsey Graham, R-S.C., on "Face the Nation"

"What we're in for is a slam-bang finish. He's been counted out

before and won these kinds of states, and we're in the process of

winning them right now."

Rick Davis, McCain campaign manager, on "Fox News Sunday"

"In Florida, they finished early voting and absentee voting

40,000 votes ahead. We think we're going to have a 350,000-vote

edge."

David Axlerod, Obama chief strategist, on "This Week"

FROM THE CANDIDATES

"Will our children and grandchildren's future be brighter than

ours? My answer to you is, yes. Yes we will lead, yes we will

prosper, yes we will be safer, yes we will pass on to our children

a stronger, better country. But we must be prepared to act swiftly,

boldly, with courage and wisdom. I'm an American, and I choose to

fight."

Sen. John McCain at a rally in Wallingford, Pa.

"As I've said from the day we began this journey, the change we

need won't come from government alone. It will come from each of us

doing our part in our own lives and our own communities. It will

come from each of us looking after ourselves, our families and our

fellow citizens.Sen. Barack Obama at a rally in Columbus, Ohio

THE DAY

-- John McCain, a proudly superstitious man, spent Sunday holding

the final town hall of his campaign, a tribute to the forum he has

become so identified with during his two runs for president. And

McCain did it in New Hampshire, which delivered primary victories

for him in 2000 and 2008. Though this state went Democratic in

2004, he is hoping that it will support him on Tuesday. "My

friends," he said, "the Mac is back!"

-- Barack Obama is perhaps not as superstitious, appearing at a

packed-to-the-rafters campaign rally in Cleveland with Bruce

Springsteen. You would find nothing but respect here for

Springsteen, but let it not be forgotten that he appeared at a

similarly packed rally for John Kerry in 2004, who went on to lose,

as the Republican National Committee quickly pointed out.

-- Talk of the end infused the candidates' speeches, with Sarah

Palin referring to "the 11th hour" in criticizing Obama's tax

plan.

TAKEAWAY: The gates are closing. The time for new speeches, new

proposals and new attacks has passed. Now there is one goal:

Getting their supporters to the polls. "Ohio, I have two words for

you," Obama said. "Two days."

-- ADAM NAGOURNEY

IN THE HOME STRETCH, THE TONGUE STUMBLES

When you speak thousands upon thousands of words in public each

day, some of them are bound to come out a bit twisted from time to

time -- especially during the grueling, sleepless,

what-state-are-we-in final days of a presidential campaign.

Most of the time they are not so much gaffes as odd verbal

hiccups. So there was Sen. John McCain, the Republican presidential

nominee, on Sunday in Wallingford, Pa., offering up a novel

description of supply-side economics with his observation that

"keeping taxes low creates jobs, keeps money in your pants and

strengthens our economy."

And Sen. Joseph R. Biden Jr. in Melbourne, Fla., on Tuesday,

mangling the name of the Republican vice-presidential nominee as

"Sarah McCain," and making each day seem extraordinarily long

when he said there were "seven more weeks" until the election.

Time -- often an elastic concept on the trail -- also tripped up

his Republican counterpart, Gov. Sarah Palin, who may be hoping

that none of her supporters in Canton, Ohio, wait until Wednesday

to vote. On a campaign stop there Sunday Palin told them, "Now

with just three days from the election, the time for choosing is

near." Two hours later in Marietta, she corrected herself: "We

are just two days away from the election!"

And Sen. Barack Obama, the Democratic presidential nominee,

mixed up his fictional do-gooders Sunday in Columbus, Ohio, as he

reached for a new simile to make his argument that McCain has been

a "sidekick" to President Bush. "He is like Kato to the Green

Lantern," he said. "You all remember that, those of you over a

certain age?"

If the remark drew little crowd reaction, perhaps it was because

Obama had the wrong green guy. He apparently meant to say Green

Hornet, to whom Kato (memorably played by Bruce Lee) was the

sidekick.

-- MICHAELCOOPER

SIGNS OF A SHIFT

CANAL WINCHESTER, Ohio -- Six months ago, the Rev. Rod Parsley

was one of the more prominent evangelicals to hail McCain as a

"strong, true, consistent conservative."

But two days before the election, in a state central to McCain's

hopes, Parsley preached to his vast congregation at World Harvest

Church of hellfire and "circling in on a fight with the eternal

forces of darkness" without ever mentioning McCain.

In part, Parsley's choice could reflect the vagaries of

presidential politics. McCain was forced to disavow him last spring

after church tapes revealed that Parsley had repeatedly claimed

that America was founded, in part, to destroy the "false

religion" of Islam.

Still, some who have studied the evangelical movement see signs

of splintering, as younger evangelicals begin to assert their own

political identity. And Obama has courted them with great ardor.

"You are starting to see some fragmentation; it could be that

the days of a monolithic bloc of evangelicals are over," said Mark

Caleb Smith, director of the Center for Political Studies at

Cedarville University, a Christian school. "The children of the

first generation of evangelical leaders are of voting age, and they

are questioning old allegiances."

Not all churches remained silent in Ohio. Pastors in a number of

the historically black churches all but openly endorsed Obama. And

white pastors in liberal leaning congregations, like the Rev.

Timothy C. Ahrens at the First Congregational Church, United Church

of Christ in Columbus, showered praise on Obama without handing

down an endorsement.

Last Sunday, Ahrens noted in his sermon: "What excites me today

about the historic race of Barack Obama is that we have reached the

place in our country's history that a biracial leader can ascend to

the office of president. Whether he wins or loses, this candidacy

is remarkable."

-- MICHAELPOWELL

A POLITICAL BOSS SOUNDS OFF

CLEVELAND -- For the last year, the classics of Bruce Springsteen

have played at Obama's rallies, the soundtrack to yet another

campaign.

So when Springsteen came to the Cleveland Mall on Sunday to

perform in person, a crowd spilled into Lakeside Avenue and the

surrounding streets. Obama may have been the night's headliner, but

the sun was shining on the Boss.

He sang a series of hits, then gave his own political talk.

"Today, we are at the crossroads. It's been a long, long, long

time coming," Springsteen said. "I want my country back, I want

my dream back, I want my America back. Now is the time to stand

with Barack Obama, roll up our sleeves and come on up for the

rising."

With that, Springsteen went into the song that introduces Obama

at every rally. But a few minutes after Obama took the stage, a

pleasant day faded and the skies opened into a downpour.

"We've been through an eight-year storm," Obama said.

"Sunshine is on the way." He added, "We've just got two more

days of these clouds."

Some did not want to wait. As Obama delivered his stump speech,

going slightly longer than 30 minutes, the crowd, which the police

estimated at 60,000, began to dissipate.

Obama did not seem deterred, largely because he was joined by

his wife and two daughters for the final weekend of campaigning.

"When they're with you on the road, boy, everything looks a

little better," Obama said. "The crowds seem to grow and

everybody's got a smile on their face. You start thinking that

maybe we might be able to win an election on Nov. 4."

-- JEFFZELENY

BAMBI CAN RELAX

As McCain's motorcade wound through golden-leaved valleys on

Saturday in Bucks County, Pa., a pair of hunters watched from the

side of the road, not so much clinging to their guns as keeping

them tucked under their arms. Minutes later, when McCain arrived at

a rally in Perkasie, several people held signs declaring

"Sportsmen for McCain" and one man, in an homage to Ohio's

best-known plumber, held one identifying himself as "Joe the

Hunter."

"We're glad you're here," Sen. Lindsey Graham of South

Carolina said in his warm-up speech. "I know the McCain family's

glad you're here. I'm glad you're here." Then he paused a beat:

"The deer are glad you're here."

-- MICHAEL COOPER

Abderrahim Goumri of Morocco sailed into Central Park

comfortably in the lead of the New York City Marathon on Sunday,

feeling good about winning his first major marathon. He said he had

no worries about the drink stations he had missed along the route.

He certainly did not have any thoughts about how he had finished

second a year ago, losing a tight race in the final half-mile.

But as Goumri repeatedly peered over his shoulder during the

final two and a half miles, he kept seeing the Brazilian Marilson

Gomes dos Santos running behind him. They snaked through Central

Park this way, with Gomes never fading from the picture.

"For me, the race is decided in the end," Gomes said, via an

interpreter. "In the marathon, you know you have won the race when

you cross the finish line, not before."

With less than a mile to go, those missed drink stops might have

taken their toll on Goumri. He stiffened and faltered as Gomes

surged into a new gear. He passed Goumri and won his second New

York City Marathon, in 2 hours 8 minutes 43 seconds.

Goumri finished 24 seconds later, disappointed and spent, a

repeat of his second-place finish a year ago, when Martin Lel of

Kenya outsprinted him at the end.

"After I pass Marilson and I think I had almost 10 seconds, 15

seconds, I said, 'It's my day,"' Goumri said. "But, it's

finishing a marathon. I turned back and saw Marilson come back. I

said, 'I think he is going to win today."'

Goumri, now with three second-place finishes in major marathons,

vowed to return. "I hope I can come back one day and I should win

one day, no problem," he said.

Daniel Rono of Kenya finished third in 2:11:22.

For Gomes, 31, the finish brought back a rush of memories. When

he won here in 2006, he was almost unknown outside of Brazil, and

it was part of the reason he won. When he surged ahead of the pack

on First Avenue in Manhattan, with more than six miles to go in the

race, none of the top contenders followed him. Paul Tergat, the

former marathon world-record holder from Kenya, who was fourth on

Sunday, later said that he had no idea who Gomes was.

Gomes cruised to that finish relatively unchallenged, and the

marathon world -- including the television broadcasters -- scrambled

to find out just who had so unexpectedly swiped the title.

That race vaulted Gomes into the realm of the sport's stars.

Back in Brazil, a country usually fixated on its soccer stars,

Gomes became an unlikely hero. A parade greeted his return.

"Without a doubt, to win a great event like New York is great

for anybody," Gomes said. "I am very well known in Brazil.

Everybody recognizes me. The young kids running now, they look up

to me. There's a lot of new running groups in Brazil, and the

people recognize who I am and what I did."

Gomes has not been able to come close to that result since. He

ran the London and New York marathons last year and finished eighth

in each. He could not finish the Olympic marathon in Beijing,

blaming the heat and humidity.

Meanwhile, Goumri, 32, was taking the marathon world by storm.

He finished second in his debut, the London Marathon, in 2007, when

Lel outkicked him at the end to win by three seconds. In New York

later in the year, Lel again pulled away in the final half-mile to

beat Goumri by 12 seconds.

Goumri also had high hopes in the Olympics, but after running

strong early, faded and finished 20th.

Here, he thought he had put all of that behind him. He called

missing his drink stations a costly mistake. He said he was

concentrating on the race; several times, he could not spot his

bottle on the tables.

"If your sugar is down, you will have a problem in the last

mile," he said. "I missed about three or four. If I did not miss

them, I think, I am strong, I would win today."

Goumri made the move that shook up the race at the halfway mark.

With an unusually large lead pack of about 20 runners, Goumri

decided to surge ahead. The burst immediately splintered the pack

and formed a new lead pack of about eight.

At that point, Abdi Abdirahman had high hopes of contending for

the title. He was considered the top contender to break the 26-year

American victory drought. Abdirahman led for much of the first 10

miles, but when Goumri made his move, Abdirahman felt a stitch in

his side. He watched the leaders go and could not follow.

By the time he felt better, it was Mile 17 and he could not

catch up. He moved up from there and finished sixth, the top

American finisher in 2:14:17. Behind him, three other Americans --

Josh Rohatinsky, Jason Lehmkuhle and Bolota Asmerom -- finished in

the top 10, the most since 1987.

"I thought I had a chance of winning if I would have felt

better," Abdirahman said. "If I didn't have a problem with my

side stitch, I would have done much better than I did. I think I

would have been up there on the podium."

The man at the top of the podium was not such a surprise this

time around. Gomes said he trained specifically to handle the hills

of the New York course. And even though he is accustomed to heat

back home, the cold and wind here does not bother him. He ran most

of the race wearing a knit cap.

At the end, he warmed himself with a wide smile and was greeted

by welcoming cheers. People in New York, as well as Brazil, know

him now.

Gomes said he expected another hero's welcome back in Brazil

"Probably there will be a parade and a celebration," he said.

"But it's going to have to wait a bit because I'm planning on

going on vacation with my wife to Disney World."

Gomes laughed. Brazil, he figures, will soon laugh with him

again.

For elite runners, marathons are not unlike bank

accounts. Only so many withdrawals can be made before the body

exceeds the available balance of miles, and speed and stamina.

At 34, battling recent stress fractures and two Olympic

disappointments, Paula Radcliffe of Britain had come to a moment of

accounting on Sunday -- a victory at the New York City Marathon

would signal that her career remained encouragingly solvent at the

top international level, while defeat might indicate that her legs

had reached the overdraft of inevitable decline.

On a windy, cold morning, Radcliffe ran a pitiless race, leading

from beginning to end over 26.2 miles, hammering the pace, shedding

the rest of the field with four miles remaining and winning in New

York for the third time, in 2 hours 23 minutes 56 seconds.

Radcliffe won so thoroughly that she finished almost two minutes

ahead of the next runner and completed the second half of the race

nearly three minutes faster than the first half. She did not

approach her world record of 2:15:25, but that was not the point

while running into the hills and into a headwind. Victory in New

York is always more important than time.

The victory will give Radcliffe leverage when her Nike contract

comes up for renewal in January and will let the rest of the

world's top marathoners know that she is serious in her ambition of

challenging for a gold medal at the 2012 London Olympics. By then

she will be 38, the same age as the 2008 Olympic champion,

Constantina Tomescu-Dita of Romania.

"I'm sure she can do it," Tomescu-Dita, a spectator on Sunday,

said. "She was so strong today from beginning to end."

Ludmila Petrova of Russia, the 2000 New York champion, took

second at age 40 in 2:25:43 and set a world record for a masters

age-group runner.

Kara Goucher of the United States, competing in her first

marathon, fought off stomach cramps and took third in 2:25:53, a

debut record for an American woman. Deena Kastor held the previous

debut mark of 2:26:58, set in 2001. Goucher's finish was the best

by an American woman in New York since Anne Marie Letko took third

in 1994.

Beyond Sunday's start, Radcliffe knifed into the lead on the

humpbacked first mile along the Verrazano-Narrows Bridge, with the

temperature at 41 degrees and a northeast wind blowing at 15 miles

an hour. That is her style, assertive, unwavering, no patience for

letting others set the pace.

Dressed in a purple singlet with only a pair of white gloves to

protect against the chilly headwind, Radcliffe ran with her

familiar nodding style. She served as a windbreak for the lead

pack. Petrova, Goucher and the other challengers tucked in behind.

"It was tough out there because of the wind," Radcliffe said.

"Everyone seemed to want to run behind me."

Less than three months ago, at the Beijing Olympics, Radcliffe

stopped during the race to stretch her aching, cramping legs and

finished a distressed 23rd. She had been unable to train

sufficiently after a stress fracture in her left femur in May. This

had come after the huge disappointment at the 2004 Athens Games,

where Radcliffe did not finish in the oppressive heat and humidity.

She had no such vulnerability on Sunday. After reaching the

halfway point in 1:13:23 in a pack of five runners, Radcliffe began

to escalate the pace. Wearing black sleeves to warm her arms,

Goucher, 30, seemed comfortable running in Radcliffe's slipstream.

At least for a time. Her return home for her marathon debut bore a

sense of the bittersweet. Goucher is a native of Queens, but she

moved to the Midwest at age 4 after her father was killed by a

drunken driver on the Harlem River Drive.

She won a bronze medal in the 10,000 at the 2007 world track and

field championships and competed in the 5,000 and the 10,000 at the

Beijing Games, which left Goucher entering Sunday's marathon with

ebullient hopes. But hope is not the same as experience.

On First Avenue, Radcliffe covered Mile 17 in 5:16. One moment,

Goucher appeared relaxed, the next she was in trouble. Then she

fell away, as others had before her, including Catherine Ndereba,

the 2008 Olympic silver medalist, and Gete Wami, the 2007 New York

runner-up, who lost a chance to win a $500,000 bonus as part of the

World Marathon Majors competition.

A year ago, Radcliffe did not subdue Wami until the final mile.

The suspense ended much earlier Sunday.

Radcliffe began to bob her head more noticeably, as she always

does, a tic that seems to signify her exertion and determination.

By Mile 20, only Petrova was left to challenge her. Radcliffe did

not look back, fearful of stepping in a pothole and of violating

her father's assertion that peering at other runners "is a sign of

weakness."

Mercilessly, Radcliffe put her foot heavily on the accelerator.

She ran Mile 21 in 5:18 and Mile 22 in 5:12, striding easily and

boldly, while Petrova shuffled desperately behind, fading, trying

to hold off a renewed Goucher for second place. First place had

been long decided, though victory in New York only highlighted

Radcliffe's failures at the Athens and Beijing Olympics.

"It does make it frustrating," she said. "You think, 'Why can

I get it right in New York and I can't get it right there?"'

Others have begun to suggest to Radcliffe that she reduce her

training or her racing in an effort to preserve whatever greatness

remains in her legs. So far, she has resisted the advice. Sunday

demonstrated why.

"There is a finite number of good marathons in anyone,"

Radcliffe said. "But I do believe that number varies from person

to person. You never know until you are kind of on the downside

that you are. So I'm grateful for each one and hope it's going to

hold."

Being a reserve quarterback in the NFL

is not all that dissimilar to the role of vice president, Brooks

Bollinger explained after serving the Cowboys on Sunday as backup

to a backup.

"I was trying to get prepared, knowing I'm just a snap away,"

Bollinger, the onetime Jet, said of awaiting an opportunity that

came in the second half while watching Brad Johnson throw his away

in the first.

By the end of a 35-14 Giants victory, all you could say was that

Jerry Jones could have played quarterback for the Cowboys,

fulfilled a zealous owner's fantasy, and who would have known the

difference from Johnson and Bollinger?

These were the impotent stand-ins for Tony Romo in as unsightly

a Giants-Cowboys game as it gets, won by the home side in bruising,

cruising fashion, largely because Dallas was utterly helpless on

offense. Isn't it amazing when a team with Super Bowl hopes -- which

these Cowboys certainly had but have already downgraded to

wild-card prayers -- embarks on its journey without a competent

quarterback on the bench?

Because what are the chances of an injury within the airtight

security chamber in which the quarterback typically plays?

"It's not all the quarterbacks, obviously," Wade Phillips, the

Cowboys' coach, said after America's Team plunged into the basement

of the National Football Conference's East division. Phillips did

concede that a 1-3 record without Romo and "going from the

third-best offense in the league to whatever we've been the past

few games" -- in a word, bad -- was no endorsement for how the

Cowboys planned for the season.

Johnson, 40 and no Vinny Testaverde, was intercepted twice in

the first half by cornerback Corey Webster, and both resulted in

Giants touchdowns. Bollinger relieved Johnson to start the third

quarter, but his first pass went straight to No. 37 in blue, Giants

safety James Butler. Two play later, Brandon Jacobs was in the end

zone with the Giants' fourth touchdown and a 28-7 lead. The rest of

the game had all the tension of an August exhibition.

Romo and his injured pinkie could be two weeks from returning,

and because the Cowboys (5-4) do not play next week, they naturally

were in no mood to concede anything, least of all their season. The

problem is they weren't all that intimidating before Romo was

injured; they have other issues besides injuries; they are in a

fiercely competitive division with a difficult schedule; and they

have a coach, Phillips, who could conceivably be going bye-bye

during the break, depending on how irritated Jones was watching his

team take such a Giants Stadium beating.

"I don't think we'll fall apart, by any means -- this will be a

test of character, a test of will," Terrell Owens said, suddenly a

cool-headed leader, which is good news for the Cowboys, given the

potential alternative, but bad news if that's what it has come to

for a team that might be ready to implode.

If the Giants taught us anything last season when they

transformed themselves from dysfunctional family to Kumbaya kings

of the road, it is that team character is a quality that cannot be

created with the addition of big-name players. It develops over

time, and with commitment and purpose.

Maybe Jones should have been looking for a legitimate stand-in

for Romo instead of working so hard to elevate the Cowboys' rogue

and knucklehead quotient with his ill-fated pursuit of the

now-suspended cornerback Adam Jones. In case he hasn't noticed,

backup quarterbacks are a crucial commodity -- most notably in

Tennessee, where the former Giants Super Bowler Kerry Collins, who

began the season behind Vince Young, is at the helm of the league's

last undefeated team.

Actually, it took Tom Coughlin and the Giants awhile to grasp

this medical math, too. Remember when the unaccomplished Jared

Lorenzen, with his Charles Barkley body type, was one snap away

from Eli Manning's position? This season, David Carr, a former

starter who is in the prime of his athletic life, provides a major

upgrade.

For his part, Manning continued to rise Sunday with three

touchdown passes, despite an appearance of Early Eli in the first

half on successive possessions. He fumbled while attempting a pass

on the first, but Owens was stripped by Antonio Pierce three plays

later after a reception at the Giants' 6-yard line.

Then Manning was intercepted by cornerback Mike Jenkins, who

returned the pass 23 yards to the end zone. The replay showed that

Manning's throw was to the sideline, intended for Plaxico Burress,

who appeared to run a straight route. Tom Coughlin chose to blame

neither and to credit Jenkins.

Good as he is, Burress remains a headache for the Giants' coach,

although Coughlin is developing a remedy in the person of receiver

Steve Smith, an emerging star in an already deep and versatile

offense.

This is perhaps the most telling contrast: The Giants act and

play like the self-assured defending champions they are; the

Cowboys have the look of a group that has experienced resounding

frustration at the end of their last two seasons and can sense

another slipping away.

It's not over yet. It will be if Romo isn't back soon.

Gov. Jim Gibbons of Nevada has been cleared by the Justice

Department of any wrongdoing in connection with an inquiry into

whether he helped a friend win defense contracts in exchange for

gifts, Gibbons' lawyer said.

The lawyer, Abbe D. Lowell, said the lead prosecutor in the case

informed Gibbons on Friday that no charges would be filed and that

the investigation, related to Gibbons' work as a congressman before

he was elected governor in 2006, had been closed.

A Justice Department spokeswoman, Laura Sweeney, said the

department would not comment.

Lowell said Gibbons, a Republican whose first term as governor

has been dogged by legal, political and personal troubles, would

make a statement on Monday.

The investigation spanned 18 months, Lowell said, and began when

a former staff member of a technology company run by a friend of

the governor made accusations of influence peddling.

The former staff member, Dennis Montgomery, told news media

outlets that his boss, Warren Trepp, the owner of eTreppid

Technologies, had given Gibbons money, casino chips and a Caribbean

cruise to help eTreppid win Defense Department contracts.

Lowell called the accusations "ridiculous" and "hogwash" and

said, "The governor does not even gamble." Lowell said Gibbons

had cooperated in the investigation and in recent months had been

interviewed by FBI agents.

The investigation, Lowell said, might have been slowed by a

civil lawsuit between Montgomery and eTreppid, which was settled

last month.

Blxware LLC, the company where Montgomery works, said the terms

of the settlement were confidential, but the company, based in

Bellevue, Wash., disclosed that the agreement included a payment to

Trepp as "compensation for certain allegations" made against him

in the news media.

The closing of the investigation provides welcome news to

Gibbons in a trying period.

A former cocktail waitress filed a lawsuit against him last

month, alleging that he pushed her and threatened to rape her after

a night of drinking in Las Vegas just before the November 2006

election. Gibbons denied the accusation, and criminal charges were

not filed.

Gibbons, 63, and his wife, Dawn, 54, began divorce proceedings

this year after 22 years of marriage. The news media in Nevada have

made much of her accusation of adultery and the disclosure of

hundreds of text messages he sent to a woman he has said was a

friend but who Dawn Gibbons' lawyers suggest was a mistress.

The Jets spent the first half of their

season talking about what kind of team they could be, talking about

potential and possibility and promise.

They knew as well as anyone the way their extreme makeover of an

off-season unfolded. The palatial new team headquarters. The trades

for nose tackle Kris Jenkins and quarterback Brett Favre. The blank

check the owner Woody Johnson cut for General Manager Mike

Tannenbaum.

All those moves were made for games like the one the Jets played

Sunday. In the division, on the road, against a Bills squad that

won the teams' previous three meetings, the Jets played their most

complete game this season.

They played like the team they were talking about all along,

beating the Bills, 26-17, in front of 71,827 fans, most of whom

left Ralph Wilson Stadium dazed, confused and muttering questions

the home team had no answer for.

"You bring people in, in hopes of what you want to do, to take

a football team on the road into a hostile environment like this,"

Jets fullback Tony Richardson said. "You come in here expecting to

play well, knowing you can win."

After their victory, the Jets (5-3) walked off the field without

so much as a hint of celebration. Some shook hands with the Bills,

others stopped to pray near midfield. All walked toward the tunnel

without the expected screams and without the expected swagger.

Never mind that they had just recorded their most important road

victory since 2006, when they beat the Patriots in Foxborough,

Mass. Never mind that it followed a month of uneven play that had

critics labeling the Jets as more pretender than contender. Never

mind that they had just topped last season's victory total in eight

games. (And never mind that the win, combined with the Patriots'

18-15 loss to the Colts on Sunday night, moved the Jets into a tie

for first place in the American Football Conference East.)

The Jets walked as if they expected this. They talked as if they

expected this.

"It was huge," linebacker David Bowens said. "Good teams do

that. They finish off a game. They're able to run the ball late.

They're able to make stops."

The Jets did all of that on Sunday.

Their defense, which last forced a turnover on Oct. 12,

responded with three takeaways and five sacks. Their offense, last

seen searching for its identity, moved efficiently throughout.

Their kicker, Jay Feely, made four field goals.

"It was our best game, as far as everybody coming together and

doing their job," linebacker Calvin Pace said.

Favre turned in a game memorable for how unmemorable it was.

After throwing seven interceptions in the three games that preceded

this one, Favre stuck with the Jets' offensive plan, throwing

passes short and safe, mixing in the run.

Of the 28 passes Favre threw against the Bills, 19 found the

hands of his receivers and, most important, only one was caught by

a Bills defender. Shedding his wild, gun-slinging ways, he was a

model of efficiency.

Maybe he followed the advice of coach Eric Mangini, who, using a

blackjack analogy last week, told Favre not to hit on 20. Mangini

played down their regular Tuesday meeting -- "It wasn't like we had

a giant summit," he said -- but whatever was discussed worked.

When the Jets needed an efficient drive to milk the clock in the

fourth quarter, they turned not to Favre, whose interception had

just been returned for a touchdown, but to their running game.

Leading by 23-17 with 10 minutes 47 seconds remaining in the

game, the Jets followed their running backs downfield. Richardson,

the fullback, was one of the new additions, as were linemen Alan

Faneca and Damien Woody.

By the time Feely kicked his fourth field goal, the Jets had

bled more than eight minutes off the clock. Mangini called the

drive critical. The Bills needed two scores in about two minutes

and got none.

"That was the biggest part of the acquisitions we made in the

off-season," tight end Chris Baker said of the run game. "It

hasn't become our identity yet. But it should be, with the guys we

brought in and the guys we have to run the ball."

The Jets' revival on offense was accompanied by one on defense.

In their previous three games, the Jets struggled to stop the

lackluster offenses of the Bengals, Raiders and Chiefs.

Not here against the Bills. Not after allowing a touchdown on

the Bills' first drive.

Cornerback Darrelle Revis, in the middle of a Pro Bowl-caliber

season, blitzed Bills quarterback Trent Edwards from his blind

side. Edwards never saw Revis coming, and Revis stripped the

football and recovered it.

That play ended up producing three points, but the Jets' defense

was not done. Late in the first quarter, Jenkins flattened Edwards,

and Edwards' pass floated into the hands of safety Abram Elam at

the Jets' 8.

Elam, who was starting in place of the injured Eric Smith, took

off up the right sideline, slowing before stumbling into the end

zone for a 13-7 lead.

Apparently, Elam made a similar play during the Jets' last

practice before this game. This one meant a little more.

"It was a big momentum swing," Elam said.

Speaking of big momentum swings, the signing of the 350-pound

Jenkins certainly qualifies. The Jets' run defense has been their

primary strength this season, and with Bills running back Marshawn

Lynch missing long stretches of this game with nausea, they held

the Bills to 30 yards on the ground.

Jenkins finished with five tackles, two sacks and three

quarterback hits. He was credited with the fourth-down stop of

running back Fred Jackson at the Jets' 8 midway through the second

quarter. But his impact stretches, like his waistline, far beyond

the stat sheet.

In fact, while Mangini called Jenkins a "beast," several

teammates went further, calling him their most valuable player.

"He's two guys," Revis said. "We don't have 11. We have 12."

Last week, the Jets spent the postgame defending their victory

over the Chiefs, talking again about their unrealized potential.

Now, they have their best record at the midway point since 2004.

They are 2-1 in the AFC East, 2-0 in the division on the road, on a

two-game winning streak.

They have built a top-of-the-line run defense, and they have an

emerging running game, two key ingredients when the weather turns

worse in the coming months. On Sunday, the stoic Mangini even

smiled.

Talking again about potential, safety Kerry Rhodes stopped the

question before it finished.

"The team that we can be?" he said, laughing. "The team that

we've been hoping, saying that can show up at any time now? It

showed up today. Now, we've got to keep it going."

If Sen. John McCain defies the polls and wins

Pennsylvania, it will be in part because of voters like Harry

Klemash, 67, a Democrat who supported Sen. Hillary Rodham Clinton

in the primary and is still not comfortable with Sen. Barack Obama.

"Obama has too many socialist policies, and he doesn't have

enough experience," Klemash, a retired pressman, said Sunday as he

walked his miniature poodle in Marconi Park in South Philadelphia,

a largely white, Catholic, ethnic neighborhood.

With the presidential election a day away, the polls point to an

Obama victory in Pennsylvania, with Obama holding a big lead in

Philadelphia. But the polls are tightening, and McCain has shown no

signs of letting up in the state.

As the Republicans try to map situations in which McCain could

pull off an upset, they are focusing on Philadelphia's mostly white

enclaves.

"I'm spending a lot of time in Philadelphia," said Robert

Gleason, the chairman of the state Republican Party.

"We're working the Northeast," he said, referring to a largely

white part of the city. "We've got values voters up there,

Catholics. My people up there say they can carry four to six wards

this year, and four years ago, they carried none."

While wealthier whites in Philadelphia, especially in Center

City, overwhelmingly support Obama, some blue-collar Democrats

never made the transition from supporting Clinton. In South

Philadelphia, McCain signs have cropped up in the windows of the

low brick houses and on the postage-stamp lawns.

"Hillary won some of those white wards by 10-1," said Shanin

Specter, son of Sen. Arlen Specter, R-Pa., and a lawyer who is

steeped in local politics. "Obama is likely to significantly

underperform Kerry and Gore in those white row-house wards."

The state Republican Party has begun running advertisements

highlighting Obama's ties to the Rev. Jeremiah A. Wright Jr., his

former pastor, which could tap into concerns among white voters.

The Obama campaign is fully aware of the challenge.

"This is a tough ward," said Paul Rossi, 61, a data processor

who lives in the neighborhood and is helping out at an Obama office

that opened Saturday not far from Marconi Park. "It's a matter of

convincing people culturally that they won't be harmed by Obama."

It is no accident that Sen. Joe Biden, Obama's running mate, is

being dispatched to speak in Marconi Park on Monday night for his

final rally of the campaign. The white, blue-collar Catholics here

are just the kind of voters whom Biden, also Catholic, was chosen

to help win over. Biden is to be joined by members of the

Philadelphia Phillies, who just won the World Series.

Susan Streicher, 59, a retired secretary and registered

Democrat, acknowledged that Biden's Catholicism was appealing to

her but said she preferred McCain and Gov. Sarah Palin, McCain's

running mate, because they oppose abortion rights. Her husband,

John, 63, a postal worker, dismissed McCain, saying that he was a

"warmonger" and that Alaska, Palin's home state, "is all

wilderness." Both said they thought Obama would win.

There is no doubt that Obama, who won Philadelphia in the

primary, will again sweep the city, where about 52 percent of

voters are black. But while it is a major part of the statewide

puzzle, it is still only a piece.

In 2004, Sen. John Kerry, the Democrat, won about 80 percent of

the vote in Philadelphia, beating President Bush by 412,000 votes

here. But Kerry won the state by only 144,000 votes.

Gov. Edward G. Rendell of Pennsylvania said Sunday that although

he still expected Obama to win the state, he was "nervous" and

had been on the phone "screaming at Chicago," meaning the Obama

headquarters, to send reinforcements. Hillary Clinton is due in

Pittsburgh on Monday; former President Bill Clinton is to stump for

Obama in Erie and elsewhere the same day.

McCain continues to devote his most precious resource, his time,

to Pennsylvania. He made three in-person pleas to voters in the

eastern part of the state over the weekend and planned a final,

short rally for Monday at the Pittsburgh airport.

Although McCain has paid scant attention to Philadelphia,

Gleason, the Republican state chairman, said McCain hoped to do

better in the city than Bush did, and the party has begun running

advertisements highlighting Obama's ties to the Rev. Jeremiah A.

Wright Jr., his former pastor, which could tap into concerns among

white voters.

"In South Philadelphia," Gleason said, "with the battle

between the African-Americans and all the other wards, we can keep

Obama under a 400,000 margin in Philadelphia." (He added with a

laugh, "I get a big salary to be positive.")

Rendell agreed that because of the white wards, Obama might get

a smaller percentage of the Philadelphia vote than Kerry did,

perhaps 75 percent instead of Kerry's 80 percent. But with

additional Democratic registrations, he said, and a bigger turnout,

Obama would exceed Kerry's numbers.

In addition, Rendell said, McCain could not rely on the

Republicans' deepest well in the state, which, until 1992, had been

the four suburban counties around Philadelphia. Rendell and Gleason

agreed that Montgomery County, the most affluent and liberal of the

four, would vote for Obama, and that Bucks and Delaware Counties

were also likely to swing for him. The fourth, Chester County, is

closely contested.

Elsewhere in the state, McCain needs a big turnout in Central

Pennsylvania and is making an incursion into the Scranton area. In

counterpoint to McCain's appeal there to Catholic Democrats, the

Obama team on Sunday sent in Caroline Kennedy.

Despite the frenzied last-minute campaigning and polls

suggesting a tighter race, G. Terry Madonna, a political analyst at

Franklin &amp;amp; Marshall College in Lancaster, said he expected Obama to

win the state by at least seven points.

As part of the Obama campaign's highly organized

get-out-the-vote operation, scores of volunteers were hustling in

and out of the new branch office here on Sunday.

Many were from out of state, including two women from New York

who said they had expected to be sent to more rural environs and

were surprised when they were sent to Philadelphia.

"We thought, oh, it's an urban area, it's done," said Marian

Masone, 57, a film curator who lives in Brooklyn.

They said they were also surprised by the negative reaction to

them in South Philadelphia. Masone and her friend, Eileen Newman,

62, who works in film management and lives in Manhattan, said that

some people said "no way" to them about Obama and that one told

them, "Get off this block."

As for Klemash, the South Philadelphia resident, he said he was

ambivalent about McCain, too. "McCain is too close to Bush," he

said, yet he admires McCain's military service. Then again, he

said, Palin was a bad choice as McCain's running mate because she

does not have enough experience. But then again, he said, Obama

does not have enough experience, either.

His conclusion: "This is a really hard election."

The New York Times said in editorials for Monday, Nov. 3:

LAME DUCK SUMMIT MEETING

President Bush will be the lamest of ducks by Nov. 15, when

leaders of 20 nations meet in Washington to discuss the global

financial crisis. With only two months left in office, he will not

be around to implement any policy changes he proposes or agrees to.

Bush's bigger problem is his utter lack of credibility when it

comes to the central question of how to regulate national and

global financial markets to ensure that this disaster never happens

again. Eight years and a huge financial crash later, and Bush is

still extolling the corrective powers of unrestrained markets.

Still, the meeting could not, and should not, wait until a more

opportune time in America's political cycle.

With the world entering a U.S.-led recession, the global

economic powers need to air their concerns and global markets need

to see that political leaders are ready to work together to restore

stability.

What this first meeting should not do is try to impose any real

policy changes. With the crisis still unfolding, it's too soon for

extensive reforms. Philosophical differences are also too deep and

with Bush on his way out, the Americans are in no position to sign

anything.

When he first proposed a meeting last month, President Nicolas

Sarkozy of France called for everything from the "moralization of

financial markets" to stricter bank supervision and government aid

for national industries. Bush emphasized the need to preserve

"free markets, free enterprise and free trade."

The two finally agreed that the meeting would "review

progress" on settling the crisis and "seek agreement on

principles of reform." At this point even that is probably too

much.

The summit meeting could still be useful if the leaders used it

to begin a serious discussion about the roots of the financial

crisis and agree to a series of future meetings to discuss

substantive reforms.

They could start the process by calling for formation of an

international high-level group of nongovernment experts to analyze

the causes and implications of the crisis. Once there is some

agreement, another group of experts could lay out a list of

potential policy changes. That would give the next president a

running start.

We congratulate Bush for insisting that the invitation list be

expanded beyond the wealthiest industrial nations to include other

economically important ones like China, India, Australia and

Brazil. They are also being hard hit by the made-in-America crisis,

as turmoil in the financial markets weakens economies worldwide,

threatening vital trade. And these countries deserve a voice in any

long-term solution.

We'd like to believe that Bush, after eight years of disdaining

diplomacy and anything with the word multilateral attached to it,

has finally figured that the United States cannot go it alone.

Given the country the next president will inherit -- heavily

indebted, oil-dependent and the source of the prevailing financial

calamity -- he will be in no position to dictate terms to the rest

of the world. If the Nov. 15 meeting can set the stage for real

collaboration, it will be a success.

GOUGING WOMEN ON HEALTH INSURANCE

As tens of thousands of workers lose their jobs -- and their

group health insurance -- in a worsening economy, they will have to

scramble to find affordable insurance policies in the open market.

The problems will be particularly acute for women, who often pay

far higher premiums than men for the same health coverage, if they

can get coverage at all.

The inequities in the health insurance market were described in

a recent report by the National Women's Law Center and in an

article by Robert Pear in The Times. If women are covered by an

employer's group policy, they are usually protected by federal

antidiscrimination laws. The states, however, regulate the market

for individually bought policies, and most offer women few

protections against discrimination. New York is a notable

exception.

After checking policies around the country, Pear found that

women can pay hundreds of dollars a year more than men for

identical coverage. The Law Center's analysis of 3,500 individual

health insurance plans found that insurers charged 40-year-old

women anywhere from 4 percent to 48 percent more than they charged

men of the same age.

The study also found that in some states insurers are allowed to

reject applicants for reasons that effectively exclude many women,

such as having had a Caesarean section or surviving domestic

violence, and that the vast majority of individual policies don't

cover maternity care.

The insurance industry justifies charging higher premiums on

actuarial grounds -- that women between the ages of 19 and 55 make

greater use of health care services than do men. Women are more

likely to take prescription medications on a regular basis, more

likely to have chronic conditions requiring ongoing treatment, and

their reproductive health needs require them to get regular

checkups whether or not they have children. That doesn't explain

why one Missouri company charges 40-year-old women 140 percent more

than men; another only 15 percent more.

Insurance companies long ago stopped charging premiums based on

race, even though they offered similar actuarial arguments. There

are laws against using gender to set rates in employer-based health

insurance. Surely it is time to eliminate gender-based premiums in

the individual health insurance market as well. Otherwise women,

who typically earn less than men, may find themselves priced out of

adequate health coverage.

THE SOILED ENVELOPE, PLEASE

There are no awards for the season's slimiest political messages

(Swift Boat statuettes?), but two deserve consideration in the

character assassination category.

In the first, Republicans in Pennsylvania flooded 75,000 Jewish

voters with an e-mail alarum from a retired Jewish judge equating a

vote for Barack Obama with the "tragic mistake" of Jews who

ignored the warning signs of the Holocaust. Quick apologies and

retractions were offered once this surfaced in the press, but too

late for the unspeakable to be spiked.

In the second, the campaign of Sen. Elizabeth Dole of North

Carolina, who is in a very tight race, broadcast her desperation by

attacking her opponent, state Sen. Kay Hagan, for accepting

"godless money" at a "secret" fundraiser whose hosts included a

leader of a secularist group.

At the end, the TV screen fills with a shadowy photo of Hagan,

an elder at her Christian church, as a female voice fairly shrieks:

"There is no God!"

Then there is the fringe madness of "Letter from 2012 in

Obama's America" -- an apocalyptic fiction making the rounds from

the conservative Christian group Focus on the Family Action. It

foresees an Obama incumbency marked by terrorist attacks on

American cities, rampant crime as guns are confiscated, a nuclear

attack on Israel and the Boy Scouts' disbanding to avoid

court-empowered gay leaders.

It seems just another straight-line for Jon Stewart until the

nation remembers that the group's leader is James Dobson. He is one

of the most prominent leaders on the evangelical right, with an

audience measured in the scores of millions.

The Democrats have their share of slimy ads, like one targeted

at the elderly that falsely claims John McCain would cut Social

Security benefits in half. We're not excusing that ad or any other

policy distortions. But frankly, it's not even an also-ran compared

with what the McCain campaign and its allies have been up to.

Among the experts, a lot of talk about the military option.

It is a frightening notion, but it is not just the trigger-happy

Bush administration discussing -- if only theoretically -- the

possibility of military action to stop Iran's nuclear weapons

program.

Of course, no president or would-be president ever takes the

military option off the table, and Barack Obama and John McCain are

no exception.

What is significant is that inside Washington's policy circles

these days -- in studies, commentaries, meetings, congressional

hearings and conferences -- reasonable people from both parties are

seriously examining the so-called military option, along with new

diplomatic initiatives.

One of the most thorough discussions is in a report by the

Washington-based Bipartisan Policy Center, founded by four former

senators -- the Republicans Robert Dole and Howard Baker and

Democrats Tom Daschle and George Mitchell -- to devise policy

solutions both parties might embrace.

The report warns that the next administration "might have

little time and fewer options to deal with this threat." It

explores such strategies as blockading Iran's gasoline imports, but

it also says that "a military strike is a feasible option and must

remain a last resort."

Its authors include Dennis Ross, top Mideast adviser to Obama,

and former Sen. Dan Coats, a McCain adviser.

Ashton Carter, a senior Pentagon official in the Clinton

administration, wrote a paper for the Center for a New American

Security, a prestigious bipartisan think tank, that asserts

military action must be seen as only one component of a

comprehensive strategy "but it is an element of any true option."

At a conference in September in Virginia sponsored by the

Washington Institute for Near East Policy, "surrogates" for

McCain and Obama insisted America must focus on preventing Iran

from developing a bomb, not on allowing Iran to produce one and

then deterring its use.

"John McCain won't wait until after the fact," declared the

columnist Max Boot, from the McCain team. The Arizona senator has

previously said risking military action may be better than living

with an Iranian nuclear weapon (and to his regret jokingly sang a

song about bomb, bomb, bombing Iran).

Richard Danzig, Obama's surrogate, said his candidate believes a

military attack on Iran is a "terrible" choice but "it may be

that in some terrible world we will have to come to grips with such

a terrible choice." Early in the primary campaign, Obama declared

that as president he would sit down in his first year in office

with -- among others -- Iran's president, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. (He

has been reparsing that commitment ever since.)

Given the global economic meltdown and other crises, it is not

surprising if the American public is largely unaware of this

discussion. What makes me nervous, is that's what happened in the

run-up to the Iraq war.

In those days Americans were reeling from the shock of 9/11 and

completely focused on hunting al-Qaida in Afghanistan. In

Washington, though, talk quickly shifted to the next target -- Iraq.

Bush administration officials drove the discussion, but the

cognoscenti were complicit. The question was asked and answered in

policy circles before most Americans knew what was happening. Would

the United States take on Saddam Hussein? Absolutely.

As a diplomatic correspondent for Reuters in those days, I feel

some responsibility for not doing more to ensure that the

calamitous decision to invade Iraq was more skeptically vetted.

This time the debate is not so one-sided. Most experts

acknowledge that military action poses big risks and offers no

guarantee of destroying Iran's nuclear program.

Both presidential candidates have also promised new diplomatic

initiatives. McCain talks of tougher sanctions and Obama proposes a

comprehensive approach involving sterner penalties, more compelling

incentives and direct talks with Iran.

Ross, who was top Mideast negotiator for the first President

George Bush and for President Bill Clinton, said that in the

prelude to Iraq, nearly all of the talk focused on military action.

He says this time experts are taking a harder, more systematic look

at all options -- including force -- because diplomatic efforts have

failed to slow Iran's rush to master nuclear technology.

"I want to concentrate the mind and make people understand,

'Look, this is serious and you don't want to be left with only

those two choices"' -- war or living with an Iranian bomb, he said.

With Iran projected to produce enough fuel for a nuclear weapon

by 2010, the next president is going to have to concentrate his

mind quickly. We hope he, unlike George W. Bush, will encourage a

broader public debate about all of America's options, and the high

cost of another war. I will certainly be a lot more skeptical.

Milton Katselas, an iconoclastic acting teacher whose 30 years

in Hollywood raised him to guru status in the eyes of hundreds of

actors, many of them famous, died in Los Angeles on Oct. 24. He was

75 and lived in Los Angeles.

The cause was a heart attack, said Gary Grossman, the producing

director of the Beverly Hills Playhouse, the acting school founded

by Katselas in 1978.

Unlike the methodologists -- Stanislavski, Adler, Strasberg --

Katselas was a pragmatist who declared himself open to any and all

acting theories if they got results. And he was a realist who

wanted audience members to recognize the humanity of the people

they saw being portrayed.

"He said it was important for the butcher to be able watch a

performance of a butcher onstage and say, 'That's how I do it,"'

Grossman said.

Katselas earned the loyalties of generations of students with

keen observations not of the characters they played but of their

own characters, openly challenging his acting students to face

their own weaknesses and problems so that they could better face

those of the people they played.

His Saturday morning master class for professional actors was a

high-caliber Hollywood salon. His students over the years --

including Alec Baldwin, James Cromwell, Burt Reynolds, John Glover,

George Clooney, Kate Hudson, Patrick Swayze and Tyne Daly --

remained deeply loyal, partly because the criticism Katselas

offered was specific and pointed and partly because he spoke not

only about the craft but also about the profession of the actor,

offering ideas on audition preparation and role selection, among

other obsessions of career-minded actors.

"He would use what you are, what was right in front of him,

tweak that," Joan Van Ark, the television and stage actress, said

in a phone interview on Friday. "And what he said on Saturday

almost always served you the next Tuesday."

Doris Roberts, best known for her role as Ray Romano's mother on

the long-running television series "Everybody Loves Raymond,"

said she first met Katselas 45 years ago, when both were students

at the Actors Studio.

"His insight into individuals was extraordinary," she said in

a phone interview on Friday. "He could find the kernel in you that

was holding you back. He asked me once, 'What do you hate about

this business?' And I said, 'Arrogance.' He said: 'You don't have

any. You need some."'

Before opening his school, Katselas had a successful career as a

stage and film director. In 1960 he directed the American premiere,

off Broadway, of "The Zoo Story," the play that announced the

arrival of the playwright Edward Albee. Nine years later, he was

nominated for a Tony for directing "Butterflies Are Free," a

psychedelic-era romance between a blind man (Keir Dullea) and the

flower child (Blythe Danner) who lives in the next-door apartment.

He went to Hollywood to direct the film, an early vehicle for

Goldie Hawn, and directed "40 Carats" with Liv Ullmann in 1973.

In 1983, Katselas was hired to direct a Broadway revival of Noel

Coward's "Private Lives," but, never a shrinking violet, he was

fired during out-of-town tryouts when he couldn't get along with

one of the stars, Elizabeth Taylor. He had no problem, he said,

with her co-star -- yes, Richard Burton.

"I got along great with Burton," he said last year in an

interview with The New York Times Magazine, "and he told me I was

one of the few directors he ever accepted notes from. But I didn't

get along with Elizabeth, and I'd rather not go into why."

Milton George Katselas was born in Pittsburgh on Feb. 22, 1933,

to Greek immigrant parents who owned a restaurant and, later, a

movie theater. On a trip to New York as a college student -- he went

to Carnegie Institute (now Carnegie Mellon University) -- he spotted

the director Elia Kazan on the street and followed him until Kazan,

a fellow Greek-American, engaged him in conversation and promised

him a job. After graduation, he made a beeline for New York, and

Kazan took him on as an assistant on the Broadway production of

"Tea and Sympathy." From there he began taking classes at the

Actors Studio and went to work for the director Joshua Logan.

Katselas' two marriages ended in divorce. He is survived by two

brothers, Tasso, of Pittsburgh, and Chris, of Evergreen, Colo.; and

a sister, Sophia Katsafanas, also of Pittsburgh.

Katselas was also a painter and an amateur architect who

collaborated on the design of a handful of houses. And he was a

Scientologist and friend of L. Ron Hubbard, the founder of

Scientology. Many of the students and employees at the Beverly

Hills Playhouse were Scientologists, to varying degrees of

commitment. And, deserved or not, a faint taint of cultism hung

over the school.

Katselas admitted that he had suggested that half a dozen

students over the years look into the church (just as he admitted

to romantic liaisons with several students); however, the Times

magazine article dismissed the notion that he was a proselytizer,

as did several people who were interviewed Friday.

"I know it played a part in his life," the actor Miguel Ferrer

said. "But what he really cared about was art."

Rabbi Moshe Cotel, an acclaimed pianist and composer

whose works were often infused with themes emanating from his deep

Jewish roots, a weave of influences that only later in life led him

to the pulpit, died Oct. 24 at his home in Manhattan. He was 65.

He died of natural causes, his son, Sivan, said. At his death,

Cotel, who was ordained five years ago, was spiritual leader of

Temple Beth El of Manhattan Beach in Brooklyn.

"My religion changed from Judaism to classical music, and in

adulthood it changed back again," Cotel told the newspaper Jewish

Week last March.

Performing or conducting his own works or those of others around

the world, Cotel was known for a career that arched from early

Romantic compositions to atonal, unpredictable avante-gardist

scores and then to a reversion to Romanticism.

"That Morris Cotel is a composer-pianist of unusual

capabilities seems beyond question," Allen Hughes wrote in The New

York Times in 1977, adding that his playing built "to climaxes of

absolutely torrential fury." Morris was Cotel's birth name.

Among his notable compositions are "Deronda," an opera based

on George Eliot's novel "Daniel Deronda," about an English Jew

who is a proto-Zionist with Kabbalistic ideas; and "Trope for

Orchestra," a choral work that evokes Torah cantillation, or

chanting. His cantata "The Fire and the Mountains" memorializes

the Holocaust.

Not all of Cotel's works were connected to Jewish themes. His

"Night of the Murdered Poets" incorporated writings of poets and

intellectuals murdered in the Stalinist pogrom of 1952. It had its

premiere in New York in 1978 with the actor Richard Dreyfuss as

narrator, and was performed around the country in subsequent years.

An epiphany for the composer came in 1994, nine years after the

premiere of "Dreyfus," a two-act opera. It was based on the

treason conviction in 1894 of Alfred Dreyfus, a Jewish officer in

the French Army whose trial exposed deep-rooted anti-Semitism in

France. Opera News praised it as "compelling in its traditional

lyricism and new-wave originality."

Performances of "Dreyfus" were scheduled for Germany and

Austria in the early 1990s. To improve his German, the composer

found a tutor, an old German widow living in Upper Manhattan. After

returning from Europe, he spotted the woman on the street. She

greeted him in Hebrew and told him that she had been so inspired by

his telling of the Dreyfus story that she had returned to Judaism,

an identity she had forsaken since the Nazi onslaught.

"My life changed right then and there; it was like a voice came

down into my head: 'Become a rabbi,"' Cotel told The Juilliard

Journal in September. "Without knowing it, I had changed this

woman's life, and she had no idea that she had just changed mine."

Since 1972, Cotel had been a professor of music composition at

the Peabody Conservatory of Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore.

Soon after the encounter with the woman, he enrolled part time at

the Academy for Jewish Religion in the Bronx. In 2000, he retired

from Peabody, where by then he was chairman of the composition

department, to focus full time on his rabbinical studies. He was

ordained three years later.

Cotel never turned from music. His most recent compositions

include "Chronicles: A Jewish Life and the Classical Piano" and

"Chronicles II," which combine Torah lessons on subjects ranging

from spiritual intention to the mysterious source of the dye for

the blue threads woven into the traditional Jewish prayer shawl

(that segment incorporating strains from Gershwin's "Rhapsody in

Blue").

Morris Cotel was born in Baltimore on Feb. 20, 1943, the son of

Charles and Lena Bormel Cotel. Besides his son, he is survived by

his mother; his wife, Aliya; and a daughter, Orli Cotel.

Cotel was educated at the Talmudic Academy of Baltimore but at

the same time was enrolled in college preparatory courses at the

Peabody Conservatory. At 13, he told his piano teacher there that

he had written a symphony. The teacher did not believe him until he

pulled the 200-page score out of his book bag.

After studying at the Peabody, Cotel was accepted at the

Juilliard School in New York, where he earned bachelor's and

master's degrees, in 1964 and 1965. At 23, he won the prestigious

Rome Prize in music composition.

Cotel is said to have inspired hundreds of aspiring composers --

and one cat.

In 1996, while he was at his piano playing Bach's

"Well-Tempered Clavier," his 3-year-old cat, Ketzel, pounced on

the keyboard. The professor grabbed a pencil and inscribed a

descending paw pattern from treble to bass. A year later, he

entered the score -- if one can call it that -- in the Paris New

Music Review's One-Minute Competition, open to pieces of no more

than 60 seconds.

The judges gave Ketzel an honorable mention.

NEW YORK TIMES CORRECTIONS FOR MONDAY NOV. 3, 2008

(These corrections will appear in The New York Times on Monday.

Date refers to the original article's transmission by the New York

Times News Service and will need to be adjusted.)

AIRPORTS-EXPAND (moved Oct. 29)

A New York Times News Service article about airport expansions

in the United States at a time when passenger traffic is shrinking

misstated the cost of the new North Terminal at Detroit. The

terminal, which opened in September, cost $431 million -- not $1.2

billion, which was the price of the airport's McNamara Terminal

that opened in 2002.

The Times welcomes comments and suggestions, or complaints about

errors that may warrant correction. Messages about news coverage

should be e-mailed to nytnews@nytimes.com or left toll-free at

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1-800-NYTIMES (1-800-698-4637).

INDIANAPOLIS - He won't be adding to his collection of AFC

Offensive Player

of the Week awards because the stats don't leap on the page. And

this isn't

likely to be remembered as the day he made the quintessential leap,

because

his team didn't emerge with the sort of come-from-behind victory

that can

define a young quarterback.

But it's hard to find much fault with the performance turned in

by Patriots

quarterback Matt Cassel last night.

Cassel completed 25 of 34 passes for 204 yards with no

touchdowns and one

interception as New England fell to the Indianapolis Colts, 18-15,

at Lucas

Oil Stadium.

The numbers don't tell the story of a quarterback who looked

poised and

confident while battling another AFC power in a hostile

environment. If you

squinted hard enough, you might have thought No. 12 was under

center for

the Patriots.

And this was a night the Patriots desperately needed a leader on

offense.

The Patriots wanted to keep Peyton Manning and the Colts' offense

on the

sideline as long as possible, and Cassel put together numerous

sustained

drives.

His only fault was he couldn't turn those drives into

touchdowns, but he

shouldn't shoulder all the blame for that.

Jabar Gaffney dropped what looked to be a sure touchdown pass

late in the

third quarter. The Patriots settled for the last of Stephen

Gostkowski's

three field goals, tying the game at 15 early in the fourth

quarter.

Those were the last points the Patriots scored.

Gaffney took the blame in the locker room, sitting in a chair

and softly

telling reporters over and over again, "I just dropped the ball."

But in an interview room around the corner, Cassel wasn't

willing to pin

the loss on a single play or player.

"I just told him to keep his head up," said Cassel. "Jabar

makes that

play all the time."

Cassel admitted he didn't see how close the pass was to being

caught (a

perfect 39-yard lob down the left sideline with Gaffney wide open

as the

Colts converged on Randy Moss in the slot).

But Cassel did know how close the Patriots came to winning,

which left a

bad taste in his mouth.

"It's tough to take," said Cassel. "We played a tight game

and lost by 3

points. You take your hat off to the Colts. We have to regroup and

get

ready for next week."

When the sting of letting a winnable road game slip away wears

off, the

Patriots should look back fondly on the performance of Cassel and

the

offense.

In only the seventh start of his pro career, Cassel stood in the

pocket

with confidence and didn't take a single sack, despite facing one

of the

league's fiercest pass rushes.

He rushed five times, scrambling early in the game to avoid

pressure, but

otherwise stood in the pocket and delivered his passes with poise.

In

typical Cassel fashion, he praised the offensive line for its play.

"The

offensive line really stepped up tonight," said Cassel.

In the locker room, his teammates were offering the same praise

in return.

Coach Bill Belichick wouldn't directly compliment his

quarterback, choosing

to speak in generalities about Cassel's performance.

"I thought overall we played a good football game, but came up

a couple

plays short," said Belichick. "I thought we played very well in

all areas

and just came up a few plays short."

Cassel would admit as much. While he thrived putting together

lengthy

drives (the Patriots ran 67 plays to the Colts' 50), he struggled

to get

his team into the end zone.

The lone touchdown drive came on the first possession of the

second half,

a 15-play, 72-yard march culminating on a 6-yard run by BenJarvus

Green-Ellis.

Cassel converted three first downs on the drive, scrambling for

one and

finding Moss and Wes Welker for two others.

But he couldn't produce the same magic in the fourth quarter.

After an unnecessary roughness penalty on David Thomas that

pushed the

Patriots out of field goal range with less than five minutes to

play,

Cassel was intercepted by Bob Sanders on a desperation heave to

Benjamin

Watson on fourth and 15 from the Indianapolis 45. The Patriots got

the ball

back at their 20 with 21 seconds to play, but didn't cross

midfield.

"From one week to the next, you just try to continue to get

better," said

Cassel. "You see different looks and you become more comfortable

with your

teammates. That's where I'm at right now."

He didn't make the leap. But if last night was any indication,

it could be

coming soon.

Chris Forsberg can be reached at cforsberg@boston.com.

Patriots come up empty-handed against desperate Colts

INDIANAPOLIS - Time was on the Patriots' side for much of last

night's

contest with the Indianapolis Colts, but in the end time ran out -

both on

their clock-killing game plan and on their penalty-free play.

Despite rising to the occasion in yet another Patriots-Colts

classic, New

England (5-3) went home with an 18-15 loss last night in front of

66,508

fans at Lucas Oil Stadium, dropping them into a three-way tie for

first

place in the AFC East with the New York Jets and Buffalo Bills, who

visit

Foxborough this Sunday.

Without quarterback Tom Brady and safety Rodney Harrison, with

just three

healthy running backs and an inexperienced and injury-saddled

secondary,

the Patriots decided their best defense was a clock-killing,

possessive

offense. They limited Indianapolis to just seven possessions for

the game,

held a 34:24 to 25:36 advantage in time of possession, and held the

Colts

to just 18 points.

The plan worked until the very end when an untimely drop, an

ill-timed

penalty, a lack of timeouts, and a timely clutch kick by former

Patriots

kicker Adam Vinatieri had the Patriots fall back behind the Colts.

"I thought we had our chances," said New England coach Bill

Belichick.

"We've just got to do a little more with them."

After Stephen Gostkowski booted his third field goal of the game

with 11:33

remaining to tie it, 15-15, the Colts got the ball back and drove

from

their 18 to the Patriots 34. Vinatieri then connected on a 52-yard

field

goal with 8:05 remaining to give the Colts an 18-15 lead.

Matt Cassel, who acquitted himself quite well in his matchup

against Peyton

Manning, going 25 of 34 for 204 yards, got the ball at his 19 with

7:59

left and moved the Patriots to the Colts 32, where they had a

second and 2.

But tight end David Thomas committed a 15-yard unnecessary

roughness

penalty, blocking Colts defender Robert Mathis in the back after

the

whistle, on a 1-yard run by rookie BenJarvus Green-Ellis (15

carries for 57

yards and a touchdown).

Suddenly the Patriots, who had no timeouts, were out of field

goal range

and facing third and 16.

With the Indianapolis wide receivers as open as the retractable

roof at

Peyton's New Place most of the night, Belichick elected to go for

it on

fourth and 15 with 4:40 to play and Cassel was intercepted by

safety Bob

Sanders at the Indianapolis 25.

"I was just trying to make a block and I never heard a whistle

and it was

a critical mistake and it really cost us," said Thomas.

Thomas wasn't the only one who made questionable judgment calls

in the

second half. On the Patriots' 15-play drive to tie the game at 15,

Belichick called a timeout, rethinking his decision to go for it on

fourth

and 1, from the Indianapolis 7. The play was executed prior to the

whistle

and Cassel picked up the first down on a sneak, but the timeout

negated it

and the Patriots, who had no timeouts with 11:38 to go in the game,

had to

settle for a field goal.

Belichick said he didn't get a good look at the placement of the

ball and

thought that it was fourth and inches when it was closer to a yard.

"I thought it was too long for a quarterback sneak," he said.

However, it never would have come to that point if wide receiver

Jabar

Gaffney, who was wide open, had not dropped a would-be 39-yard

touchdown

pass at the 6-yard line earlier in the drive.

"I dropped it," said Gaffney. "He made a good throw. I

dropped it. I

don't make any excuses. It hit my hands. I should have caught it."

The Patriots had taken a 12-7 lead on the opening drive of the

second half,

an impressive 15-play, 72-yard march that was capped by a 6-yard TD

run by

Green-Ellis.

But the drive - and the decisions made on it - proved costly in

the long

run

New England had to squander a timeout on the drive and lost

another one

when Belichick, on first and 10 from the Indy 45, chose to issue a

video

replay challenge of an illegal substitution flag against the Colts

that was

picked up by the officials. He lost the challenge.

Trailing, 7-6, at the half, Belichick said he had made up his

mind that if

his team scored he was going for the 2-point conversion. But the

Colts

stuffed running back Kevin Faulk inches short of the goal line.

The Colts wasted no time retaking the lead, four minutes to be

exact, as

Manning (21 of 29 for 254 yards and 2 TDs) capped a nine-play,

57-yard

drive with his second TD toss of the game to Anthony Gonzalez, a

9-yarder.

The Colts also went for 2 and Manning threaded a pass to Reggie

Wayne to

give Indy a 15-12 lead with 3:12 left in the third quarter.

The Patriots' strategy was to take the air out of the ball and

away from

the Colts offense. All of New England's scoring drives were 13

plays or

longer and the shortest lasted 6:18.

It was well-executed, but it just wasn't enough.

"As potent of an offense as Manning and those guys, to keep the

ball away

from them it's basically like playing defense in itself," said

Patriots

cornerback Ellis Hobbs.

"So, the offense, they did their job for the most part. Defense

did their

job for the most part.

"But as a whole we didn't do it enough because we didn't win."

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INDIANAPOLIS - As the years have gone by - Adam Vinatieri has

not been a

Patriot since the 2005 season - there has developed a general

feeling that

the best kicker the Patriots ever had isn't quite what he used to

be,

especially as the length of attempted field goals increases.

Not all share that opinion.

"He's longer than he used to be," stated Hunter Smith, his

holder for

the Colts.

Smith's point was proven dramatically when Vinatieri boomed a

52-yarder in

the fourth quarter that provided the Colts with the winning points

in an

18-15 victory over the Patriots last night.

Vinatieri, of course, had two Super Bowl-winning kicks for the

Patriots.

But after the 2005 season, he signed with the Colts as a free agent

and the

Patriots moved on with Stephen Gostkowski. Vinatieri continued his

magical

postseason career, making three field goals as the Colts beat the

Bears in

the Super Bowl following the 2006 season.

Still, he's been in the league for 13 years and there does exist

a school

of thought that he doesn't have the range he once had. In fact, he

hadn't

made a field goal of 50 yards or longer in the regular season since

2002.

"Really?" said Vinatieri, sounding surprised. "Well, it's

nice to know

I still have some lead left in the pencil."

With the game tied, 15-15, the Colts moved from their 18-yard

line, but

then faced a fourth-and-7 from the Patriots' 34. It was either play

the

position game with a short punt or let Vinatieri try a 52-yarder.

But the

Patriots had put together four time-consuming drives.

There was no hesitation on the sideline, according to Vinatieri

and Smith.

"There's a right time and a wrong time to try ones that long

and this was

clearly the right time," said Vinatieri. "Both Stephen and I were

hitting

them from 55 yards out during warm-ups. We were booming the ball

out

there."

"I hit it pretty well. It definitely left my foot feeling

pretty good."

In fact, it cleared the goal post easily.

"Truth be told, it would have been good from 15 yards

further," said

Smith, who also noted that the snap and hold went perfectly.

There may be some future 50-plus-yarders in Vinatieri's future

because the

new Lucas Oil Stadium seems to be kicker friendly. Besides

Vinatieri's

field goal, the Patriots' Chris Hanson had a 64-yard punt and Smith

averaged 54.3 yards from three punts.

The roof was open in the stadium, but the 244-foot wide by

88-foot tall

window was closed on the north end of the stadium. The window was

at

Vinatieri's back when he kicked the winning field goal, though he

didn't

think the window had any effect.

The Patriots never said that Vinatieri's best days were behind

him when he

left for Indianapolis and Vinatieri expresses no outward bitterness

toward

his old team.

"We just needed a victory," he said. "We need to get back on

the

winning side. We had two straight losses and we needed to find a

way to get

a win. You couldn't call it a must win, but it sure was

important."

The Colts are now 4-4 and the Patriots are 5-3. Both teams are

used to

being playoff locks but they might have to make the playoffs as a

wild card

this season. That's especially true of the Colts, who trail

undefeated

Tennessee by four games in the AFC South.

"Even without Tom ((Brady)) out there, they still have a great

team,"

said Vinatieri of the Patriots. "((Matt)) Cassel manages the team

very

well."

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INDIANAPOLIS - Great games come in different forms. Some are

shootouts.

Some are defensive struggles.

But the entertaining, thrilling game the Patriots and Colts

played last

night fell into a different category - it was possession-based,

filled with

long drives, played with a razor-thin margin for error.

The Patriots needed to go that route if they were to win, mainly

because

their pass defense was a bad matchup against Peyton Manning and Co.

It turns out the Colts, also minus key players in the secondary,

needed to

go the same route because they feared receivers Randy Moss and Wes

Welker.

"It was really a field-position game and both teams were really

working

the clock a lot, and I think that's mutual respect from both

teams," said

Colts kicker Adam Vinatieri, whose 52-yard field goal turned out to

be the

difference in the 18-15 victory.

"You try to keep their offense off the field because both teams

have a lot

of explosive firepower that can put points on the board," said

Vinatieri.

"It seemed like it was real methodical drives that were taking

six, seven,

eight minutes. It just made each possession that much more

important and

you had to capitalize on every one of them."

In the end, both teams had just seven drives, and in games like

that,

coaches and players from both sides agreed that it's the team that

makes

the plays in critical situations that comes out on top.

And that's where the separation ultimately came into play, with

the

Patriots hurt by a dropped would-be touchdown by Jabar Gaffney in

the third

quarter, and a devastating personal foul penalty on tight end David

Thomas

that knocked the team out of range for a tying field goal in the

fourth.

It also hurt that the Patriots were out of timeouts, the result

of a failed

challenge in the third quarter in which Bill Belichick felt the

Colts had

12 men on the field, another timeout taken later in that drive, and

then a

final timeout burned early in the fourth quarter on a fourth-and-1.

With both teams vulnerable on defense, they adopted conservative

plans.

Colts receiver Reggie Wayne and tight end Dallas Clark said the

Patriots

were playing cover-2, keeping their two safeties in the deep part

of the

field to take away the big play. So the Colts adjusted and found

success in

the real estate in front of those safeties.

The same was true with the Colts' defensive approach, as they

were without

starting cornerbacks Marlin Jackson (injured reserve) and Kelvin

Hayden.

"It was a tough matchup on us," said Indianapolis coach Tony

Dungy. "We

played some double coverage on ((Wes)) Welker and then they went to

((Randy)) Moss. We didn't want to single ((Moss)) all that often,

and give

him a chance to make big plays, so we played a lot of zone. Then

they threw

the ball underneath, and they had some good runs ((on)) us.

"It was one of those ((games)) where we did all we could on

defense, and

did keep them from having the big plays."

Said Patriots quarterback Matt Cassel: "You have to take what

they give

you. In this type of ballgame, it comes down to one possession, and

they

were able to get that last possession at the end of the game and we

weren't

able to counter that. We had the penalty late, and that hurt us.

That makes

the difference."

In possession-style games, third down and red zone loom large.

The Colts

were 6 of 10 on third down, while the Patriots were a solid 8 of

14. The

difference came in the red zone, where the Colts cashed in on both

of their

trips with touchdowns, while the Patriots could punch it in just

once in

four tries. That helps explain how the Patriots, who had drives of

13, 13,

15, 15, and 8 plays, could have a commanding time of possession

edge

(34:24-25:36) and still lose.

The game was played in a tidy 2 hours, 41 minutes, tied for the

Patriots'

quickest of the year.

"You really kind of figure that's how it's going to be with

these guys,

because they do a great job of possessing the ball and of time

management," said Clark. "We were scoring touchdowns when we got

into the

red zone, and they were getting field goals, and I thought that was

the big

part of the game."

"We knew it would come down to the last possession," Patriots

linebacker

Adalius Thomas said. "That's pretty much what it came down to."

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INDIANAPOLIS - The game plan was masterful, pure Bill Belichick

genius.

The execution was something else, and in the end, Belichick

heard more

hard questions than Grady Little.

The Colts beat the Patriots, 18-15, at Lucas Oil (Can Boyd)

Stadium last

night and as always, the Ponies and Pats thrilled America with 60

minutes

of bone-rattling, action-packed football. The Patriots came within

a couple

of plays (a Jabar Gaffney drop and a David Thomas penalty) of

winning the

game and still managed to come home with a share of first place in

the AFC

East scramble.

It took a 52-yard field goal from Adam Vinatieri (you may have

heard of

him) to beat New England, and in the midnight hour Belichick was

grilled

about going for a 2-point conversion in the middle of the third

quarter,

calling a timeout that appeared to negate a first down on fourth

and 1

from the Colts' 7 (New England settled for a field goal), and

electing to

go for it on fourth and 15 from the Colts' 45 with 4:40 left.

Belichick also had an unsuccessful challenge in the second half

and burned

his final timeout with 11:38 left to play. Mercy.

Mr. Hoodie has answers for all of the above, but it's difficult

to

remember a game that turned on so many debatable decisions by the

vaunted

New England coach. All of them blew up in his face. And that's

unusual.

It was odd to see the coach on the hot seat after a game in

which his

master plan was particularly brilliant. The Patriots knew the Colts

were

faster and more experienced. New England's defense had four rookies

on the

field for most of the snaps. The climate was ripe for a Peyton

Manning

highlight reel and the Patriots knew they were in trouble.

So what did Belichick do? He shortened the game. He played stall

ball. He

had Matt Cassel throwing a succession of short passes. He ran Kevin

Faulk

on draw plays. He tried a few direct snaps to Faulk.

Cassel carried out his orders nicely. QB 16 was never sacked,

gained 20

yards on five carries, and completed 25 of 34 passes. Cassel

watched

with the rest of us when the game slipped through the fingers of

Gaffney on

what would have been a 39-yard touchdown pass at the end of the

third

quarter.

Had the Patriots won this game, they would have been in sole

possession of

first place in the AFC East. Instead, they are tied with the Bills

and Jets

with a 5-3 record. They play both at Gillette Stadium in the next

week and

a half.

"The Colts made a couple of more plays than we did," said

Belichick.

"We had our chances, disappointing, but we have some pretty good

games

coming up, a game against Buffalo and we are going to turn our

sights

toward that."

Playing on national television, in front of 66,508 people at

spectacular

Lucas Oil Stadium, the Patriots did a masterful job most of the

way.

Belichick's goal was to keep Manning off the field and New England

won the

time-of-possession scorecard, 34:24-25:36.

It was the Patriots' first game in the Colts' new building,

which will be

the home of the 2012 Super Bowl. Named after Forrest Lucas, a

truck-driving man who founded one of the country's largest

producers of

automotive lubricants, Lucas Oil is well known on the NASCAR

circuit.

Stadium officials opened the retractable roof more than two hours

before

kickoff.

There were only seven offensive possessions in the first half,

which ended

with the Colts leading, 7-6.

On Indy's second possession, Manning led the Colts 91 yards on

15 plays

over nine minutes, connecting with Anthony Gonzalez on a 12-yard

touchdown

pass. Dr. Manning was 8 for 8 (69 yards) on the drive. Nothing

close to a

miss. The Colts did not lose yardage on any play in the drive.

The Patriots answered with a pair of drives that produced field

goals,

both lasting more than six minutes. New England's burn-clock

strategy on

offense was obvious. Cassel, untouched by the Colts' speed rushers,

rarely

even looked to his wide receivers. He was 8 for 9 in the first

half, but

the completions totaled only 64 yards.

New England's plan continued at the start of the second half

when the

Patriots ate up almost eight minutes and took the lead on a 6-yard

run by

BenJarvus Green-Ellis. New England went for 2, but Faulk came up

short.

Folks at Lucas Oil scratched their heads. This was ridiculous.

The

battered Patriots, somehow, had the lead.

The Colts roared back, though, with an easy touchdown drive to

regain the

lead. Then came the Gaffney drop. It was bad, people. The perfectly

thrown

ball went through his hands as he crossed the 5-yard line. For good

measure

it fell to his feet and he booted it low and hard. The Patriots

settled for

a tying field goal - after losing what appeared to be a first down

on a

quarterback keeper because time had been called from the sideline.

Ouch.

After Vinatieri's 52-yarder, the Patriots drove right back into

field-goal

range and looked set to tie the game and shoot for overtime.

Green-Ellis

carried to the Colt 31 on a second-and-2 play, and that's when

Thomas was

tagged for unnecessary roughness on a late block.

Out of timeouts, afraid to give the ball back with 4:40 left,

Belichick

had Cassel throw deep on fourth and 15 from the Colts' 45. Bob

Sanders

intercepted. In the words of Tony Kornheiser, "Good night,

Canada."

Weird night for Belichick. The plan worked. A couple of freak

plays beat

the Patriots. All the small stuff went the wrong way, and it'll be

a great

week for the second-guessers and armchair coaches.

Dan Shaughnessy is a Globe columnist. He can be reached at

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Real Florida: Paddle propels time travel

PORT ORANGE, Fla. Paddling a kayak is a balancing act. Dip left

to go right. Paddle right to go left. You'll stay dry as long as

you don't lean too far in either direction.

It's kind of like life. You had better look for balance. I like

to head for the woods or water when I feel overwhelmed by current

events and things outside my control.

The ailing stock market. Another presidential smear campaign

aimed at convincing the ignorant and frightened to vote for the

right guy. Give me a hammock where I might hear an owl. Let me

paddle among ancient reptiles and look for balance.

In our tandem kayak we slip past a great blue heron in a

cypress. We meander around a sunken log. We paddle under the low

branches of an ancient oak.

As we pass below, I automatically check for moccasins above my

head, just in case. Years ago, when I was younger and more

impressionable, an old-timer known for hyperbole told me

breathlessly about the time a moccasin fell from a branch into his

canoe. First he battled the venomous snake with his paddle. It kept

coming, its cotton-colored mouth opened wide. Finally he shot it

with his pistol, killing the snake but piercing the bottom of his

own canoe. He had to swim through alligators to reach the shore.

Anyway, that was his story, doubtless exaggerated. Even so,

watching for moccasins in branches has become a lifelong habit. One

day I hope to see a moccasin in a tree because I like the idea that

anything can happen on a Florida waterway.

Paddling a kayak requires, in addition to balance, paying

attention.

You don't want to dawdle under the wrong tree.

Spruce Creek, which snakes 12 miles east through Volusia County

before flowing into Strickland Bay and the Atlantic beyond, is one

of those half-wild, half-civilized places where you will encounter

alligators sleeping on logs if you are lucky and teenagers on Jet

Skis if you aren't. You may even run into the ghost of Ponce de

Leon.

The first European to visit the continent, Senor Ponce named La

Florida in 1513. According to some accounts, he sailed a skiff

through an ocean inlet into a bay and headed west into a creek,

most likely Spruce Creek. What did he make of our dragons, the

alligators? Surely they focused his attention.

They always do for me. Yes, we have museums and restaurants and

fine universities. But the presence of dinosaurs is what makes

Florida "Florida." I assume that Ponce de Leon declined to take a

dip in Spruce Creek. You couldn't pay me to swim in it on purpose

either.

The water is dark, stained like tea from decaying leaves and

mostly shallow. If you startle a gator off the bank into the creek,

don't be alarmed if its back brushes your kayak. Or be very

alarmed. I have been bumped by an alligator once or twice, but I'm

still here. A manatee, sleeping just under the water's surface, is

much more likely to knock you into the drink if you startle it by

accident. Kayaking among manatees requires balance too.

I have never seen a deer or bobcat sipping from the creek, but

other people have. I mostly see softshell turtles sunning

themselves. I see laurel and live oaks and pignut hickories,

sweetgums, cypress and cabbage palms.

On the wild side of the river, back in the trees, lie the hidden

mounds constructed for burial and ceremonial sites more than five

centuries ago by the Timucuan people, the natives who greeted Ponce

when he came ashore. The wily Spaniard hoped for gold or, if

nothing else, a sip from a magic fountain that would restore his

fading youth.

He got neither. In fact, 15 years later, during his travels to

Florida's west coast, he encountered the far fiercer Calusas, who

deposited an arrow into his hip. He died from the infection.

Belted kingfishers. Green herons. Anhingas. Ponce saw them; a

21st century kayaker sees them too.

Turn around in modern Florida, just before you reach the

Interstate 95 bridge, and head back into old Florida, where an

alligator snoozes on a log. My wife wonders if it might upset our

kayak. I doubt it, but wouldn't it be cool? We'd have such a story

to tell.

Instead, here's my story. A little past the alligator I hear the

roar of a jet. Looking south, through the trees, I see an enormous

house, a mansion really, on the bluff, and next to the mansion is a

two-story airplane hangar.

The Spruce Creek Fly-in, advertised as the "world's finest

residential airpark," can accomodate small jets I find out later.

Whoosh!

I flinch.

Then it's quiet again on the river of the extinct Timucuans .

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EFF KLINKENBERG Times

Man has encroached some, but nature still rules along Spruce

Creek, where kayakers might get bumped by an alligator.

The Most Rev. Katharine Jefferts Schori, head of the Episcopal

Church, visits the Diocese of Southwest Florida this week.

Jefferts Schori, who leads more than 2.4-million Episcopalians

worldwide and 34,000 in the bay area, is coming to Tampa for the

biannual meeting of the National Association of Episcopal Schools.

It's her first visit as presiding bishop. We talked with her

Friday as she prepared for her trip.

What's the state of the Episcopal Church?

Most every place I visit, congregations and dioceses are

energetically engaged in serving their neighbors both nearby and

far away. What gets reported in the media is a matter of a

relatively few people who are exceedingly unhappy and very noisy.

You've been in office for almost two years. Describe the

landscape of the church.

In some sense, I think we're past the worst of the current

controversies. I think most people are realizing that there are a

variety of opinions in this church about the current hot-button

issues as there have always been a variety of opinions about

matters of great interest in the church. I'm fond of reminding

people that in the late 1800s people were arguing vehemently about

whether or not you could put candles on the altar. Significant

numbers of people left the church over that issue. The current

controversy is not new in its heat. What is new is the speed with

which it's communicated around the world. But I think as

Episcopalians we're remembering that we value a diversity of

opinion, and that's part of our health and part of our DNA.

Are you any closer to resolving the controversial issues, which

include disagreements over the ordination of gay priests?

I'm not sure these issues are ever going to be fully resolved. I

think it's a matter of learning to live in the tension of not

moving completely in one direction or the other. That's what

Anglicans are good at and have been good at through our history.

Many people view the Episcopal Church as one of the most liberal

denominations in the United States. How do you feel about that

characterization?

I don't think that's accurate. We're actually very conservative

in our liturgical tradition. We worship in ways that are very much

like the ways the early Christian communities worshiped. We're

conservative in the sense that we retain the best of what comes

from the past. And we're progressive in the sense that we think our

job is, in every generation, to present the gospel in language and

images that can be understood by new generations.

What would you say to individuals who might be considering

leaving the denomination?

I would remind them that their voice and their gifts are welcome

and needed in this church and that we lament their going if they

decide they need to go. At the same time, if they decide they need

to pursue their spiritual journey in another place, we pray all the

best for them.

Why did the denomination feel the need to apologize recently for

its historical role in the institution of slavery?

The proximate cause was a resolution passed at our last general

convention in 2006 asking the church to formally apologize for its

participation in the sin of slavery. We did that in a formal way on

Oct. 4. My hope is that service is the first of many services that

will happen in local dioceses and in congregations as people begin

to discover the history of their communities over the last several

hundred years. How they've participated in slavery, how they've

benefited from slavery, how they continue to benefit from injustice

in this country.

What have you learned about yourself since you've been in

office?

I've learned that I keep on learning. Every day presents

opportunities for discovering in greater depth what it means to be

a messenger of good news in this world.

How would you characterize your time in office?

Busy and full. And a great delight and a great joy to see the

church engaged in mission in all its varied parts and contexts.

What does a bishop do for fun?

I like to go mountain climbing, backpacking and flying.

Sherri Day can be reached at sdaysptimes.com or (813) 226-3405.

. fast facts

Visit to diocese

This week the Most Rev. Katharine Jefferts Schori, presiding

bishop of the Episcopal Church, visits the Diocese of Southwest

Florida.

Following is her itinerary.

Thursday: Preaches the opening Eucharist of the National

Association of Episcopal Schools biannual meeting in Tampa.

Conference attendees only.

Friday: Meets with clergy at DaySpring Conference Center,

Ellenton. At 6 p.m., takes questions at a reception at St. Mark's

Episcopal Church in Venice. Tickets required.

Saturday: Visits young adults at retreat in Ellenton. Lunches

with Southwest Florida diocesan bishop, the Rt. Rev. Dabney T.

Smith. Tours Berkeley Preparatory School and St. John's Day School

in Tampa.

Sunday: Celebrates the Eucharist and preaches at St. Mary's

Episcopal Church, 4311 W San Miguel St. in Tampa. The public is

invited.

Questions? Call the Episcopal Diocese of Southwest Florida at

(941) 556-0315.

Long before the doors opened, they lined up outside in the dark.

Later, they stood in a cold, steady rain. Some cradled sleeping

children as they waited in line for hours.

In an age of voter apathy, these people really wanted to make

their voices heard.

Thousands of Tampa Bay residents turned out to the polls Sunday,

the last day of early voting. Their passion showed why this has

been a record-shattering season of early voting in Florida.

More than a third of the state's registered voters have cast

ballots for Tuesday's election, according to numbers released

Sunday by the state elections division.

About 37 percent of the 11.2-million registered voters, or

4.2-million, had cast ballots. Nearly 2.6-million of those votes

were cast at early voting locations. The rest were submitted via

absentee ballot, nearly 1.7-million.

Many who waited in long lines Sunday saw this as their last

chance to vote. While it's true that the polls are open for 12

hours on Election Day, a lot of people with children and jobs

doubted they would be able to cast ballots on Tuesday.

"That's why we're here," said Andrew Meyer of St. Petersburg.

"My wife has to open up her business in the mornings. I work in

Tampa and take our two kids to school."

The couple went to St. Petersburg's early voting site and found

a line stretching for three blocks. So they drove to Largo, only to

wait for two hours.

The lines that snaked around government buildings Sunday were

dominated by supporters of Barack Obama. A striking number of them

were first-time voters, no matter their age.

"I never cared before," said Stephanie Patten, 31, of

Clearwater.

"People around me encouraged me to vote," said Chris Monastra,

31, of Seminole, who waited with his wife and two small children

from 7 a.m. until the polls opened at noon. Why vote Sunday? "I

can't afford to take a day off. I work for a moving company and

don't know when I get off from day to day."

Some counties are reporting double or triple the number of early

voters this year compared with 2004, said Jennifer Davis of the

Florida Division of Elections.

In Pinellas County, many of the 3,000 people who voted Sunday

were angry about long lines. Some criticized the county elections

supervisor, Deborah Clark, for opening only three early voting

sites, the minimum required by law. (Hillsborough County had 13

sites. Pasco had seven.)

Clark, a Republican, said Sunday that it was difficult to find

sites with enough space and parking, and that she hopes to see the

Legislature allocate more funding to early voting. She says her

office's aggressive absentee ballot campaign is more cost-effective

and easier for voters because they can vote at home.

Pinellas had 43,226 early voters and 160,039 absentee voters

through Saturday far fewer early voters and far more absentee

voters than Hillsborough or Pasco counties.

Democrats are more likely to visit early voting sites;

Republicans are more likely to vote via absentee. The result:

331,000 more Florida Democrats than Republicans had cast ballots as

of Sunday.

Many of the Obama supporters waiting in line Sunday said they

didn't trust mail-in ballots. "Not in Florida," said Debra Gooden

of Clearwater.

Making their pitch

The long column of voters outside the Supervisor of Elections

Office in Largo provided a captive audience for a slew of local

politicians.

Jim Coats, Pinellas County's Republican sheriff,

matter-of-factly made his case to Obama supporters as he used one

of his campaign signs to shield himself from rain.

County Commissioner Karen Seel talked about road construction

projects on U.S. 19. Just a few feet away, her opponent, Norm

Roche, was giving voters an update on the Tampa Bay Buccaneers

score.

Pinellas was the only local county to have early voting as late

as Sunday, but Hillsborough voters waited in two-hour lines Sunday

for absentee ballots at the County Center in Tampa. Elections

employees shuttled groups of 20 on elevators to the 16th floor,

where they could fill out ballots in the office or take them home.

Out of 705,000 Hillsborough voters, more than 100,000 have

requested absentee ballots and more than 147,000 have already

voted, said Herold Lord of the elections office.

Many of those filling out absentee ballots Sunday hoped to avoid

a long wait on Tuesday.

"Otherwise I'd probably be standing outside in some other

line," said Ed Fine of Lutz. "But I wouldn't miss this for

anything."

Staff writers Chandra Broadwater and Joni James contributed to

this report. Mike Brassfield can be reached at

brassfieldsptimes.com or (727) 445-4160.

TAMPA They wore Hawaiian shirts and flip-flops and clutched

foot-tall margaritas, but this was a different kind of concert for

Jimmy Buffett fans Sunday.

For one, it was free. And for another, even the parrots on their

heads wore Obama pins.

"I feel a volcano of change," said Rep. Kathy Castor, D-Tampa.

"You can hear it on the 'Coconut Telegraph.'?"

They roared. The name of the rally? "Last Chance for Change."

As Election Day closes in, Sens. Barack Obama and John McCain

are clawing for Florida's 27 electoral votes, staging a flurry of

personal appearances and sending big-name stand-ins like Jimmy

Buffett when they can't be here themselves.

McCain held a midnight rally Sunday and will be in Tampa first

thing this morning. Obama is in Jacksonville today.

The equation is a simple one. Obama can reach the magic 270

electoral votes even if he doesn't carry Florida, but McCain

cannot. So for McCain the late, hard push to win Florida is about

survival; for Obama it is about reaching checkmate.

David Chroman, who spent the week volunteering for Obama, took a

break in the stands of the Ford Amphitheatre in Tampa for Sunday's

free Buffett concert. He was among about 15,000 who showed up for

the free show that ran a full hour.

He wore a tie-dye shirt, and said he understood why Buffett

would support Obama.

"They both stand for positivity," he said. "Jimmy is one of

the most optimistic people I've ever seen. Obama's call for hope

rings a similar tune."

Craig Cameron from Brandon sang a different song. As an

outnumbered McCain fan, he came strictly for the music, and said

he'd ignore the politics. "I still like Jimmy Buffett," he said.

But McCain isn't going it alone in Florida. At Square One

Burgers in South Tampa earlier in the day, about 225 people turned

out to see former New York City Mayor Rudy Giuliani.

Among them were New Jersey residents Carl Ceragno and A.J.

O'Connor, who happened to be in town. They hadn't been to any

McCain rallies yet, but didn't want to miss a chance to see their

Northeast neighbor.

"We really wish he could've stayed in the running," Ceragno

said.

"But we love McCain, too," O'Connor quickly added.

Giuliani walked through the standing-room-only restaurant crowd

to cheers of "Ru-dy! Ru-dy!"

Giuliani got serious. He said polls that show Obama in the lead

are "just trying to psych you out," and he said he expects McCain

to pull off "the greatest comeback victory" in history. "Right

now," he told the crowd, "we need John McCain more than he needs

us."

He brought up remarks by Obama's running mate, Sen. Joe Biden,

who recently told supporters that Obama would be tested by a

foreign crisis soon after coming into office. Giuliani suggested

that might be good reason to elect somebody else.

"Nobody tested Dwight Eisenhower. Nobody tested Ronald

Reagan," Giuliani said. "Nobody with half a brain is going to

test John McCain."

In a three-stop swing across North Florida, Biden focused on the

economy. He spoke to a crowd of more than 1,000 at Langford Green

at Florida State University in Tallahassee.

He borrowed the old Reagan campaign slogan "Are you better off

today than you were four years ago?" but offered it with a twist:

"Democrats and Republicans know we're not better off," he said.

Biden talked about the "longest walk a parent can take" being

the walk up the flight of stairs into their child's bedroom to tell

them they're going to have change schools because a parent has lost

a job.

"Folks, if we can help Wall Street, we should be able to help

Monroe Street," said Sen. Biden, referring to one of Tallahassee's

main commercial arteries.

Biden drew comparisons between McCain and President Bush,

pointing out how McCain said on Meet the Press last week that he

and Bush "share a common philosophy."

"You can't call yourself a maverick if all you've been in the

last eight years is a sidekick," Biden said.

Florida State and Florida A&amp;amp;M university students packed the

speech, which also drew a couple of dozen student protesters who

chanted "John McCain" and made siren noises throughout Biden's

speech.

"We're witnessing history right now," said Florida A&amp;amp;M

junior Antonio Rosado, 23, who voted for Obama and Biden on

Thursday. "Obama is the best candidate for the economy. It won't

change right away, but he's the best person to jump-start it."

Alexandra Zayas can be reached at (813) 226-3354 or

azayassptimes.com.

McCain in Tampa

Sen. John McCain stops in Tampa this morning as part of his

"Road to Victory Rally." The event will take place at Raymond

James Stadium, South Parking Lot, 4201 N Dale Mabry Highway, Tampa.

Doors open at 6 a.m., with the event starting a few hours later.

For tickets or more information, visit florida.johnmccain.com.

Flying from the Tampa Bay area to the Panhandle or the Florida

Keys these days can be a jarring experience.

Gone are the sleek regional jets. The only choice left are

19-seat turboprops, among the smallest planes in commercial

aviation. There's no flight attendant or bathroom. Passengers can

look into the cockpit and see pilots handling the controls.

Even the airline's name is unfamiliar: Gulfstream International.

The little Fort Lauderdale carrier that flies as the Continental

Connection has taken on a more prominent role at Tampa

International Airport as bigger competitors retreat from

less-profitable Florida destinations.

Gulfstream has been the only airline flying directly between

Tampa and Tallahassee since Oct. 1, when Delta Air Lines dropped

the route. The carrier also has a monopoly on flights from Tampa to

Pensacola, Key West and Fort Walton Beach all routes Delta

previously abandoned.

"We've always tried to do what the bigger airlines can't,"

says Gulfstream CEO David Hackett.

The company's rising profile has come with some controversy,

including questions about the way it trains pilots and allegations

from a former pilot that Gulfstream cut corners on maintenance and

flight safety.

Hackett called the claims "nonsense."

"We run a good airline," he said.

Just the sight of propellers on a tiny plane is enough to turn

off many travelers

Customers much preferred Delta's 50-seat regional jets to

Gulfstream's slower, noisier, bumpier Beechcraft 1900 turboprops,

Hackett admits. But they no longer make economic sense flying

between most Florida cities.

The jets guzzle 600 gallons of fuel per hour. That's about four

times as much as a turboprop, with jet engines that turn propellers

instead of fan blades. Jets fly twice as fast at cruise altitude.

But they don't pay off on short flights with too few passengers to

spread out the additional costs.

"When gas was $1 a gallon, you could use them to poach

passengers from other carriers," says John Cox of St. Petersburg,

a retired US Airways pilot who owns an airline safety consulting

firm. "But not at $3 or $4 a gallon."

Gulfstream has nearly 700 employees and makes about 200 daily

flights, most within Florida and connecting South Florida with the

Bahamas. The carrier pays Continental Airlines to handle its

reservations, ticketing and revenue accounting. Gulfstream flies

customers connecting from Continental flights to their final

destinations.

Its parent, Gulfstream International Group, went public in

December after 20 years of private ownership. The company lost

$3-million on revenue of $112-million in 2007.

One of the company's other businesses has raised eyebrows in the

pilot community.

It runs an academy that trains pilots as first officers.

Students with commercial aviation licenses pay $29,900 for the

six-month program that includes flying 250 hours in the right seat

of a Gulfstream cockpit.

Airlines typically require applicants to fly a minimum number of

hours on specific types of planes just to get an interview, said

Cox, who chaired safety committees for the Air Line Pilots

Association International and its US Airways branch.

"The pay-for-fly operations as a general rule have

less-experienced first officers than traditional operations," he

says.

Students fly on 15 to 20 percent of Gulfstream flights, Hackett

said. All come to the academy with commercial, instrument and

multi-engine proficiency ratings from the Federal Aviation

Administration and fly beside experienced captains. Ninety-nine

percent of graduates pass training courses and earn jobs at their

first airline, Gulfstream says.

The company also faces a whistle-blower complaint filed in

December by a former Gulfstream captain. Kenny Edwards tried to

cancel a flight from Tampa to West Palm Beach that he considered

too hazardous. A device in the cockpit that warns pilots of

potential mid-air collisions wasn't working, he said. Edwards

worried about flying the plane through thick clouds over an area of

South Florida crowded with student pilots.

Supervisors told him the plane was legal to fly without a

working collision-avoidance device and ordered him to fly back to

West Palm Beach. When Edwards refused, they found another captain

to make the trip. Edwards was fired the next day.

"They like to say if it's legal, you've got to go," says

Edwards, now working at a restaurant near his home in Phoenix. "I

think passengers would rather have the captain decide if it's not

good to go. But it's not like that."

He also told investigators that Gulfstream managers tried to

intimidate pilots into flying beyond FAA duty-time limits and

mechanics sign off on aircraft inspections they never performed.

The agency concluded in February that Gulfstream hadn't broken any

safety rules.

But officials reopened the investigation two months later after

Edwards took his complaints to staffers of the House Transportation

and Infrastructure Committee. The panel was investigating

maintenance deficiencies at major airlines.

Hackett points to a U.S. Labor Department investigation that

found the airline was within its rights to fire Edwards. Gulfstream

has won the FAA's Diamond Award for maintenance training and is

certified by the Defense Department to carry military personnel.

The FAA has completed its investigation of the allegations but

is still reviewing the results, said spokeswoman Kathleen Bergen.

Steve Huettel can be reached at huettelsptimes.com or (813)

226-3384.

Who's flying to Florida cities from TIA

(number of daily flights)

To Fort Lauderdale:

Southwest (9); Spirit (2);

Gulfstream (2)

To Fort Walton Beach:

Gulfstream (3)

To Jacksonville:

Southwest (3)

To Key West: Gulfstream (3)

To Miami: American (5);

Gulfstream (4)

To Pensacola:

Gulfstream (4)

To Tallahassee:

Gulfstream (5)

To West Palm Beach:

Southwest (4) Who's flying to Florida cities from TIA

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Gulfstream (2)

To Fort Walton Beach:

Gulfstream (3)

To Jacksonville:

Southwest (3)

To Key West: Gulfstream (3)

To Miami: American (5);

Gulfstream (4)

To Pensacola:

Gulfstream (4)

To Tallahassee:

Gulfstream (5)

To West Palm Beach:

Southwest (4)

politics, Part 1

Pinellas political observers have noted to the Gradebook that

the Pinellas County Democratic Party has endorsed candidates in two

of three nonpartisan School Board races. The party recommends Janet

Clark over Jennifer Crockett in the District 1 race, and Nina

Hayden over Sean O'Flannery in District 2. The common element? The

preferred candidates are Democrats, and their opponents are

Republicans. Absent on the party's official list of endorsements is

the District 4 race. Both candidates Ken Peluso and Robin Wikle

are Republicans.

Politics, Part 2

Blue and red politics are starting to bleed all over the race

between Carol Kurdell and Stephen Gorham. Last week, the Republican

Party of Florida sent out a mailer noting that "your Republican

leadership team needs you." Inside, Kurdell's name is on the list

of GOP-approved candidates. Kurdell said she was not aware of the

mailer until a reporter showed it to her. She declined to speak

about her party affiliation. Meanwhile, local Democrats are

stumping for Gorham, whose name appears among the candidates

recommended by the Hillsborough Democratic Black Caucus. Gorham is

widely known as the Democrat who did surprisingly well against

conservative Ronda Storms in a state Senate race two years ago.

About that FCAT

If you wrote to the next president, what would you say? The

National Writing Project asked young people to think about that

with an initiative called "Letters to the Next President: Writing

Our Future." To date, 2,500 have responded, including 157 from

Florida. One student says the next president should allow gay

couples to adopt. One wants more murderers executed. And then

there's a big raspberry for the FCAT. "Kids are being pressured

and schools are misgraded," writes Ashley P. from Cypress Creek

High in Orlando. "Its (sic) obvious that FCAT is not the solution

in measuring student abilities, let alone determine there (sic)

chance of graduating."

Show the benefits

Loads of Pasco teachers and support personnel have e-mailed

School Board members to complain about health insurance benefits.

Open enrollment ends Nov. 7, yet they have no formal guarantee the

district will pay the $191 increased cost per employee. "Our

employees need a signed agreement for their benefits," asid USEP

president Lynne Webb. Retiring board member Marge Whaley urges

teachers not to worry. "Last year it wasn't signed off until after

open enrollment was over, and nobody said a word," Whaley said,

attributing this year's more militant stance to Tuesday's

superintendent's election.

Gradebook contributors: Ron Matus, Letitia Stein, Jeffrey S.

Solochek and Donna Winchester.

TAMPA

In New Kids on the Block's 15-year break from Tiger Beat nation,

a few things have changed.

The pretty boys of early '90s pop have trimmed the rattails and

retired the acid wash. They've sprouted muscles, thrusty groins and

naughty mouths.

Their fans, once boppy 'tweens in scrunchies and leggings, are

now career women and moms. They have pregnant bellies, cleavage and

husbands holding down the bar. They've swapped Kool-Aid for Cosmo.

But some things never change.

The five Boston-bred popsters performed to a frenzied crowd of

women at Tampa's St. Pete Times Forum on Sunday. The boys proved

they can still fill an arena, still wail a high C to the last row.

The fans, decked in souvenir buttons and their old shirts,

proved they can still scream with the fervor of a thousand silly

kiddies. One hardcore New Kids soldier even heaved a bra on stage.

"Is this really happening?" shouted Joey McIntyre, the group's

blue-eyed tenor with arguably the strongest pipes.

He was right. For fans who slow danced to Please Don't Go, Girl

at the eighth grade dance, who drooled on New Kids pillowcases, who

lived in their black bomber jackets from the 1989 Hangin' Tough

tour, it was surreal.

Performing a mix of old hits and new songs from their album, The

Block, the New Kids filled the stage with a thoroughly

entertaining, glittery spectacle. This time around, they stepped up

the sexual innuendo to satiate their grown fans hip thrusts timed

with fireworks, anyone?

Opening new song Single caused piercing shrieks. But that was

beans compared with the cries when heartthrob Jordan Knight wailed

falsetto on the 1990 tune, My Favorite Girl, or when the guys

flexed their old-school dance moves during megahit You Got It (The

Right Stuff).

There were awkward moments. Shy guy Jonathan Knight looked like

he'd rather be home watching West Wing than popping his booty under

floodlights. A weird video tribute to people who have died

(Aaliyah, James Brown, Heath Ledger) gave the guys time to get to

the middle of the venue where they danced on a round platform in a

sea of fans.

They brought the energy right back, flirting with women on the

sexy 2 In the Morning. They ended the night with a blissful mix of

giddy classics Step By Step and Hangin' Tough. The loyal Boston

sports fans even briefly donned Tampa Bay Lightning jerseys.

The whole thing left fans sweaty, tipsy, lusty and thoroughly

reminded of a simple time in life when their biggest problem was

whether your mom would get you the right New Kids stuff for

Christmas.

Whatever their magic formula, it's back. The New Kids say it

best in their new song, Summertime "It's been a few years and I

can't deny, the thought of you still makes me crazy."

Stephanie Hayes can be reached at shayessptimes.com or (727)

893-8857.

Tuesday's election is expected to draw a record number of

voters. While voting is a right, it also carries certain

responsibilities in fact, state law says it's up to the voter to

bring proper identification to the polls, be familiar with how to

use the voting equipment and know the hours and locations for

voting.

Here are a few commonly asked questions about what you should do

and what might happen.

How long will the lines be?

Peak times, such as early morning, lunch and after work, will be

the busiest and there could be waits of an hour in some locations.

What sort of identification should I bring to the polls?

Valid IDs include a Florida driver's license or an ID card

issued by the state; a U.S. passport; a debit or credit card with

your picture on it; a military ID; a student ID; a retirement

center ID card; a neighborhood association identification, and a

public assistance ID. If your ID does not include both your photo

and your signature, you need to bring in something with your

signature on it. If you fail to bring any ID, you might be required

to cast a provisional ballot, and then it's up to the canvassing

board to decide if your vote counts.

Can I vote anywhere there's a polling place?

No. You have to vote in the precinct where you're registered. If

you don't know where that is, contact your county elections

supervisor (see contact information inside).

I was sent an absentee ballot but I didn't use it. Can I still

vote in person?

Yes, but you should take your blank absentee ballot with you and

turn it in. Otherwise you could be required to cast a provisional

ballot, so the canvassing board can make sure you're not trying to

vote twice.

Is it too late to mail my absentee ballot?

No. Ballots postmarked on Tuesday will count. You can also

return it in person to the county elections supervisor's office by

7 p.m. Tuesday.

Can I wear a button or a T-shirt supporting my candidate?

Yes. But you are not allowed to actively campaign inside the

polling place, so let your shirt or pin do your talking for you .

Can I bring my children with me to the polls?

Yes. But you'd be a smart parent to bring them something to keep

them entertained during the wait .

My mother has a disability. Can I help her vote?

Yes. A disabled voter can bring someone into the booth for

assistance. Ask a poll worker if there's a form you need to fill

out first. A voter can also ask the poll workers for help. And each

precinct will have a touchscreen machine as an option for disabled

voters.

If I am still waiting in line to vote when the polls close at 7

p.m., will I be turned away?

Generally, poll workers allow anyone in line at closing to vote,

as long as you're willing to keep waiting.

Will we get election results Tuesday night?

If we do, they will be unofficial . Election officials count

absentee ballots first, then it's a matter of how fast the

computers in 67 counties can tabulate the results from all the

optical scans. Official results are days away, as the state

considers any absentee ballot mailed by Tuesday to be part of the

tally. Plus, counties have two days to consider whether to count

each provisional ballot cast on Election Day.

. fast facts

Contact us

Have trouble at the polls on Tuesday? Please let us know what

happened, when it happened and where it happened. E-mail

pollreportstampabay.com or call (727)893-8924.

Have more voting questions?

Contact your elections supervisor.

Pinellas: www.votepinellas.com or call (727) 464-6108

Hillsborough: www.votehillsborough.org or call (813) 272-5850

Pasco: www.pascovotes.com or toll-free 1-800-851-8754

Hernando: www.hernandovotes.com or (352) 754-4125

TAMPA Pastor W. James Favorite teaches preaching to preachers.

His is a broad-shouldered presence on the pulpit. His flowing

baritone requires no microphone. He has a poet's sense of rhythm,

of accelerating passion and crescendo. The pastor of Beulah Baptist

Institutional Church, Tampa's oldest black Baptist house of

worship, preaches the red off the devil.

He is preaching to a group of black Tampa pastors about HIV. He

is laying out his vision for prevention, to be realized by Tampa's

black churches. He wants screening, counseling, family assistance.

The pastors feed him quiet yeses and amens.

"For a long time, churches have pushed AIDS to the side. We put

our heads in the sand."

Amen to that.

"It's not here, not in our churches. Then we found members of

our congregations dying. How could we treat them? We didn't even

want to shake their hands."

Amen to that, too, Pastor Favorite.

"How do we bring into our teaching the use of condoms? We

believe abstinence is the answer, but there are those who will not

listen. We have to tell them that the least they can do is use a

condom."

Pastor Favorite gets polite silence.

In Tampa's black neighborhoods, the statistics scream: black

family disease. More blacks have HIV than any other ethnic group.

One in 85 blacks in Hillsborough County is infected. That is more

than four times the rate for whites. The disparity is more

pronounced among women. One in every 92 black women in

Hillsborough is infected. That is 11 times the rate for white

women.

This black family disease that's what Favorite calls it preys

on even fathers and mothers in the pews, children in Sunday school.

He wants the full gamut of services for his vulnerable

congregation, and he wants it based in his landmark church, one

founded in 1865 for freed slaves. He wants a partnership with the

Health Department similar to one initiated by Florida's black AME

churches. AME's Florida bishop has committed to providing a church

for HIV screening in every county. They're halfway to their goal.

But pastors whose beliefs are biblically founded get caught in a

moral paradox. If they base an HIV prevention program on abstinence

alone, they're bound to fail. If they provide the common medically

recommended option condoms they've compromised their principles.

Religion has never been about options.

One church in Miami resolved the paradox by leaving condoms in a

garbage can outside the church. Rev. Favorite isn't about to build

an HIV outreach program for Tampa's black families on garbage cans.

To understand the silence Favorite must contend with, talk to

Abe Brown.

No one need educate Abe Brown on the devastation of AIDS in

Tampa's black communities. No one need convince Abe Brown that

religion and medicine pose a powerful partnership against the

disease.

Ramrod straight at 81, the retired senior pastor of First

Baptist Church of College Hill is the unbending oak staff of

Tampa's black religious community. He is Favorite's mentor and

founder of Pastors on Patrol, a street ministry that Favorite now

leads. Brown has seen HIV face-to-face, on his patrols, in his

prison ministry, among ex-inmates, and among wives and babies.

He has seen it in the church pews. "We don't require physicals

of people who come to church," he says. "We don't turn away

people who come to church for help."

So Abe Brown supports whatever HIV intervention program Favorite

comes up with. If Favorite wants to include condoms, that's his

decision.

But Brown can't quite let it go at that. He frowns, struggles

just to say the word condom. It's not a word he has ever used in

his ministry.

Brown was once known famously as Mean Dean Brown the

disciplinary dean at Chamberlain High School. He likes to tell how

he patrolled the parking lot, looking for cars that took up two

spaces. He wrote down the tag numbers and traced the owners,

summoned them to his office. They gaped at him, asked how he

tracked them down.

"That's my secret."

His personal feelings about HIV are not that different. You park

your car right, in one space. You live right, you sleep in one bed.

Brown will not criticize Favorite's HIV strategy, but the Mean

Dean Brown in him can't bring himself to find any good in the word

condom. It's another way to sin safely, a cheap detour past the

hard road to salvation. It's two parking spaces.

"From the pulpit, we teach abstinence. The Bible says, 'Don't

do it.'?"

To understand the need for the churches' blessing, talk to the

Rev. Jerry Nealy. He is an associate pastor at the tiny wood-frame

Friendly Missionary Baptist Church on Central Avenue. He teaches

Sunday school. He is a member of Favorite's Pastors on Patrol. But

by now, his name should have been better known in Tampa. He should

have been a star in the NAACP.

He broke the color barrier at Chamberlain High. He found the

Lord when he was 20. Ralph Abernathy offered him a job with the

Southern Christian Leadership Conference in Atlanta and helped him

get into Morehouse College. He came back to Tampa to work for the

NAACP.

In 1988, he got HIV.

He doesn't want to spell out how. All anyone needs to know is

"I got baggage." He lost his job, his name and his home. He kept

his infection a secret for six years.

"I was no Magic Johnson. I didn't want anyone to know. What

would people say? There was a taboo in the black churches. There

was no compassion."

Nealy stopped hiding in 1994, obtaining the medicines that have

saved his life. Now 57, he advocates for openness through the

Minority AIDS Council in Tampa. He would like the words HIV and

condoms to be everyday conversation, "at the dinner table, over

the coffee table." He'll talk about his own infection, his own

downfall, if he thinks it will help anyone.

Still, he lives in alternate worlds. The faith and church he

follows point toward abstinence. His own hard experience points

toward choices.

"If they won't accept a spiritual medicine," he says, "in the

interest of life, let's offer an alternative."

To understand how hard it is to commit to the long haul, talk to

the Rev. Bernard Smith. He calls himself the "total pioneer, the

lone eagle" of HIV outreach. For more than six years, Smith has

offered HIV testing at Greene Chapel AME Church in Largo. His was

the first in Pinellas.

He has formed partnerships with the Pinellas County Health

Department, the state, and the giant HIV-testing company Abbott

Laboratories. Together, they launched a pilot screening program at

six Tampa Bay AME churches. People came in, got their mouths

swabbed. The swabs were sent off for state testing. Those who

tested positive received counseling for "life after HIV."

The pilot ended on Aug. 31. Smith called it a big success. But

it's over. His volunteers still swab for HIV three times a week at

Greene Chapel, but no longer have the sponsorship that paid for

food and supplies. Smith would like to move the screening to a

separate building. He has been turned down for bank loans.

Continuity of support has always been iffy.

Smith has now put almost 20 years in HIV prevention. "Where do

we go from here?"

Even he has a problem saying the word "condom." "We believe

in abstinence," he says.

Has Smith ever placed a condom in someone's hands?

He pauses for several seconds.

"We don't advertise them," he says. "Our No. 1 focus is

abstinence."

But has he ever put a condom in a person's hand?

He pauses again.

"We serve the saved and the unsaved."

To understand the possibilities of biblical reconciliation, talk

to Favorite. He leads his deacons through the Oakhurst Square

apartments behind Beulah Baptist on a Saturday morning. Once a

month, the deacons knock on doors throughout the downtown Tampa

neighborhoods. They're not just selling salvation. They're urging

people to come to the church on Wednesdays when a nurse offers

basic health screenings. They find every kind of medical need

imaginable among those who answer their knock.

Favorite grew up on a Louisiana plantation. He studied teaching

at Southern Louisiana University. Where he grew up, the only

successful blacks he knew were schoolteachers. If Favorite had ever

met a black medical doctor as a child, he is certain he would have

studied medicine instead.

One of his friends at Beulah Baptist is Dr. Emile Commedore,

director of Florida's Office of Minority Health. When Favorite

preaches HIV prevention to fellow pastors, Commedore has his back.

He stresses the public health aspects of AIDS, and the innocence of

many of its victims including wives and children. "Condoms are no

more than a means to an end," the doctor tells the preachers.

Favorite is willing to debate HIV from a biblical perspective.

He is a serious student of the Bible, as well as its Hebrew and

Greek roots.

He often refers to 1 John, Chapter 2, Verse 1: If any man sins,

we have an advocate with the Father.

Here in the humble Oakhurst Square apartments, words like that

resonate. There are many sinners. Even they have an advocate.

There's a Greek word in the New Testament that also resonates

with Favorite. Metanoia. Because of its complexity, Favorite likes

to apply it to his vision for HIV outreach.

In its biblical context, the word means repentance.

In classical Greek, metanoia has another meaning. It means to

change one's mind, to change one's heart.

John Barry can be reached at jbarrysptimes.com or (727)

892-2258.

To donate

Donations to the Rev. Bernard Smith's HIV screening program may

be sent to the Greene Chapel HIV-AIDS Action Committee, 1905 134th

Ave. N, Largo, FL 33778.

The series

This is the third in a series of occasional stories looking at

how people reconcile faith, reason and religion in their lives. To

read the others, go to magazine.tampabay.com.

Dean Rivett sold his home in a short sale in September.

Like millions of others across the country, the 36-year-old

private investigator was a casualty of the subprime mortgage

crisis. He couldn't make the $3,300 monthly mortgage payments after

he refinanced his Lutz home last year to pay bills.

Some blame greedy lenders preying on those in financial trouble.

Others point the finger at homeowners who should have borrowed more

wisely.

While Rivett admits he should have scrutinized the deal more

closely, he doesn't think he's the only one at fault. He has sued

Regions Bank, accusing it of predatory lending.

"We're looking for restitution in the seven figures," said

Jesse Ray Wagoner, an attorney in Tampa representing Rivett. "I

think they really targeted Dean. They trapped him in a loan that

almost guaranteed he'd lose his house."

There are dozens of cases across the state where homeowners are

striking back at lenders, said April Charney, a consumer lawyer at

Jacksonville Area Legal Aid. Most get settled out of court, making

it harder to use the misdeeds whether by the homeowner or lender

as a lesson to others.

But assigning blame isn't always productive, she said.

"When you're in a M..A..S..H unit doing triage every day, do you

really want to look back and say, 'Who put this hole in this

person?'?" Charney said. "You just want to fix it."

Rivett's lawsuit specifically targets two bank employees,

Nicolas Rodriquez and Steve Kriegbaum, who he says befriended him

over several months before offering to refinance his home.

Rodriquez and Kriegbaum declined to comment for this story,

referring questions to a bank attorney who did not return repeated

calls.

Rivett said he met Rodriquez, branch manager and vice president

of Regions Bank at 14965 N. Florida Ave., in early 2007 when the

banker came into Rivett's private investigations office to market

business accounts. Rivett opened one.

Rivett says Rodriquez would take him to lunch, out for drinks

and to sporting events. He said he grew comfortable enough with

Rodriquez to share personal problems, including a growing addiction

to painkillers that he started taking after a car crash in 2004.

Around that time the economy was slowing down, Rivett recalled.

That, combined with his addiction, was taking a toll on his

business. His credit card debt was building; his cash flow was not.

Rodriquez told Rivett re-financing could help and the bank was

offering a great deal. Rivett's home, which he purchased in 2002

for a little more than $200,000, had built equity.

On June 12, 2007, over Chinese food at lunch, Rivett signed a

stack of documents for a $430,000 loan at a 9.2 percent fixed

interest rate. It wasn't great, but the $30,000 cash he'd receive

at the end would allow him to pay off debt and market his business.

A closer look at the documents, provided by Rivett's attorney,

revealed problems:

According to the Hillsborough property appraiser, Rivett's home

was worth $233,874. Plus, the application prepared by Rodriquez did

not list Rivett's daughter as a dependent.

When asked now if the inconsistencies gave him pause, Rivett

confides: "Truthfully, I didn't read it. I just signed. I thought,

'I can get my life back on track, he's going to save me.'?"

By June 20, 2007, Regions bank had denied Rivett's loan,

according to paperwork given to Rivett's attorney. Rivett said he

wasn't immediately told about the denial.

Instead, Rodriquez and Kriegbaum, assistant vice president of

the Regions bank and mortgage at 13902 N. Dale Mabry, asked to meet

with Rivett for lunch.

All was well with the loan, Rivett said they told him.

On June 22, 2007, a new appraisal valued Rivett's house at

$460,000, according to paperwork submitted by the bank.

A few weeks later, Rivett was asked to provide information about

his business, including the number of clients.

"At the time I told him I had about 500 clients," Rivett said,

recalling a phone conversation with Kriegbaum. "He goes, 'Hey, put

it up to like 5,000; it'll look better to the underwriters.'?"

That was only one of several red flags.

At the July 25, 2007, closing, Rivett and his wife, Debbie,

noticed her name had been removed from the loan because of her

credit score, yet her income was still listed.

At the time, Kriegbaum told them that Regions denied the loan so

they had to go through a new out-of-state bank to get it, Rivett

said. The new loan had a 10.7 percent adjustable interest rate.

Rivett's payments would go from $3,345 for the first three years to

$3,832 for the next 26 years, with a $282,000 balloon payment at

the end.

Debbie Rivett was angry: "I said, 'This is ridiculous.'?"

Kriegbaum tried to ease their apprehension, she said.

"He said, 'I know all this seems kind of fast and real high,"

Debbie Rivett recalled. "But this will put money in your bank

right now, and we'll turn around and refinance in a couple

months."

A few days later, when Rivett went to pick up his $50,000 check

the cash increased during the deal he wasn't empty-handed. He had

stopped to buy three bottles of Crown Royal for Kriegbaum and a

$300 watch for Rodriquez. Earlier, both men had requested the

thank-you gifts for helping Rivett out of his jam, Rivett said.

By the time the first payment arrived, Rodriquez and Kriegbaum

had stopped calling, Rivett said.

The money lasted less than a year.

In April, Rivett had a heart attack because of his drug use.

After a stint in rehab helped clear his mind, he said he decided to

sell the home and go after the bank.

By then he was a month behind on his mortgage and CitiBank owned

his loan. The bank allowed Rivett to sell his home for about

$277,656 a loss for the bank of about $136,000 because of his

health problems, he said.

"It's not just losing your house," he said. "It's these

people you thought were your friends taking advantage of you."

Nicole Hutcheson can be reached at nhutchesonsptimes.com or

(727)893-8828.

Shooting from the lip Times staff writer Tom Jones looks back at the best and worst from a weekend of televised sports. Most accurate line "(Florida quarterback Tim) Tebow had better stats last year, but he's a better quarterback this year." CBS college football analyst Gary Danielson Biggest praise Is Arizona quarterback Kurt Warner a Pro Football Hall of Famer? He has one future Hall of Famer in his corner: former Bucs standout Warren Sapp, who said on the NFL Network pregame show, "You have to. His body of work is something not too many people have done. He went from bagging groceries to lighting up people. Warner has put together a body of work that rivals the greats."together a body of work that rivals the greats."

Times staff writer Tom Jones looks back at the best and worst

from a weekend of televised sports.

Most irresponsible

Look closely at the Associated Press college football poll and

you'll see Florida got a first-place vote. Despite losing to Ole

Miss at home, the Gators are No. 1 on the ballot of Jon Wilner from

the San Jose (Calif.) Mercury News. Wilner even has Texas at No. 2,

even though the Longhorns lost Saturday to undefeated Texas Tech

which is fifth on Wilner's ballot. Wilner has Alabama third and

Oklahoma at No. 4 with undefeated Penn State at No. 6.

Wilner explained in his blog how he put together his ballot, but

it is ballots like this that make all media types look like clowns

in the eyes of the public. You can argue about whether Alabama or

Texas Tech or Penn State belongs at No. 1 and, ultimately, all of

this will sort itself out. (Plus, the AP poll doesn't affect the

BCS.) But Wilner's ballot ranges from irresponsible to ludicrous.

Second-biggest poll question

The BCS got it right. Texas remains ahead of Florida in the BCS

standings. But, in more strange AP poll doings, Florida is ahead of

Texas, and I don't understand. Florida lost at home to Ole Miss.

Texas lost on the road to undefeated Texas Tech on the last play of

the game. Plus, it's not as if Texas hasn't played anyone. The

Longhorns already have beaten Oklahoma, Missouri and Oklahoma

State.

Having said all that, however, here's what College GameDay's

Kirk Herbstreit said:

"If we're just ranking these teams based on who you think is

(the best) if we threw them all in the field (and asked) who's

going to beat who, the best team in college football, in my

opinion, is the Florida Gators."

However, Herbstreit was responsible enough to vote Alabama, Penn

State, Texas Tech, Florida and Oklahoma in that order as his top

five.

Harshest criticism

NFL pregame analysts blasted away at new 49ers coach Mike

Singletary for sending a player off the field midway through the

fourth quarter last week and also for apparently pulling down his

pants in a motivational half-time speech.

CBS's Shannon Sharpe called Singletary's actions

"unacceptable." CBS's Bill Cowher called it "inappropriate."

Boomer Esiason, also of CBS, said, "You just can't do that."

Fox's Michael Strahan said Singletary pulling his pants down was

"overboard," while Jimmy Johnson cut straight to the point: "I

actually think it's kind of stupid."

But major kudos to the NFL Network. It interviewed Singletary,

who said, "I will tone it down a bit."

Biggest praise

Is Arizona quarterback Kurt Warner a Pro Football Hall of Famer?

He has one future Hall of Famer in his corner: former Bucs standout

Warren Sapp, who said on the NFL Network pregame show, "You have

to. His body of work is something not too many people have done. He

went from bagging groceries to lighting up people. Warner has put

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Most accurate line

"(Florida quarterback Tim) Tebow had better stats last year,

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CBS college football analyst Gary Danielson

Best use of cards

CBS's Gary Danielson said there were so many factors that could

decide the outcome of the Florida-Georgia game that you could put

each one in a deck of cards. The card that Danielson held up,

however, was the Joker which stood for special teams. How true

that turned out to be. Georgia missed two first-half field goals

and didn't surprise anyone on what was supposed to be a surprising

onside kick.

The Gators led 14-3 at halftime, but one could argue that if the

special teams had done its job, Georgia should've been down only

14-9, or perhaps even up 9-7.

Best story

Back in 2004, Illinois Republicans tried to talk former Bears

coach Mike Ditka into running for Senate. He didn't, and the seat

was won by Barack Obama, who could be voted president this week.

ESPN's Sunday NFL Countdown, where Ditka is now an analyst,

wondered what would've happened if Ditka had run and won the Senate

seat.

"He is a tough guy," Obama said. "I don't think he would have

backed off an inch. I am glad he ended up staying doing commentary

on SportsCenter rather than wading into politics. I'm not sure he

would have enjoyed having to go to chicken dinners. I don't think

that is his style."

Ditka sounded like a politician when he said, "Barack Obama is

a good man and so is John McCain."

Biggest mistake?

Everyone is celebrating Texas Tech coach Mike Leach today, and

for good reason. His Red Raiders knocked off No. 1 Texas on

Saturday in the best college game of the season so far. But The

Red Raiders scored with one second left to take a 38-33 lead. Leach

elected to go for one and Texas Tech made it 39-33 on the extra

point. Because of penalties for celebrating (something Leach knew

before he elected to kick the extra point), Texas Tech had to kick

off from its 7 . Texas Tech squibbed the kick, and had the Texas

returner fielded the ball from his knees, Texas would've been able

to run one play from the Texas Tech 42 certainly close enough for

a desperation pass . If Texas had scored , it would've tied it at

39, and an extra point would've won the game. So shouldn't Leach

have gone for two to give Texas Tech a 40-33 lead?

Best line

As Texas Tech was roughing up No.??1 Texas on Saturday night,

ABC's Brent Musburger said, "It's November, folks. Here comes BCS

chaos. Just when you think you've got it figured out, the ghosts

appear."

Forgotten rivalry?

Oklahoma and Nebraska played Saturday night. Time was, that was

right up there with Ohio State-Michigan as the game of the year in

college football. True, the game was nationally televised on ESPN,

but it was on while the country (minus Sooners and Huskers fans)

was tuned in to Texas-Texas Tech. How strange is it that

Oklahoma-Nebraska wasn't even the best game in that conference on

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Oklahoma-Nebraska wasn't even the best game in that conference on

that day, let alone the game of the year?

KANSAS CITY, Mo. After watching his team fall behind by 21

points in the second quarter, Matt Bryant never dreamed the

greatest comeback in Bucs history would come down to his right

foot. But it did actually three times within a matter of seconds

in overtime and the seventh-year pro out of Baylor made it count

when it finally mattered. His 34-yard field goal with 4:36 elapsed

in overtime gave Tampa Bay an improbable 30-27 victory over the

Chiefs.

Bryant's first attempt of 37 yards sailed through the uprights,

but not before Kansas City called a timeout forcing a rekick on

third and 5 from the 20.

His next attempt fluttered wide right . But that effort didn't

count either, thanks to a false-start penalty against Bucs tackle

Jeremy Trueblood. Facing third and 10 from the 25, the offense went

back on the field, and quarterback Jeff Garcia hit fullback Jameel

Cook for 9 yards, setting the stage for Bryant's winner.

Bryant, 33, spoke about the emotional roller-coaster:

What was going through your mind after the missed field goal?

Just to have a short memory. The wind was doing goofy things in

that stadium. It was swirling and all of a sudden on that one kick,

it kind of straightened out. It went right when it should have come

back left. You block it out and go to your next kick and here we

are.

Can it be helpful to have some practice kicks before the real

one?

Kind of. But each kick is different, no matter how far it is or

what the situation is. At least we try to approach it that way.

What did this win mean for the team?

It's great. It would have been terrible to go into the bye week

with a loss. But to win the way we did, I think it's just going to

make us hungrier for when we get back from the bye week.

Did you think it would come down to a field goal at 24-3?

You never know, but at 24-3, probably not. I wouldn't have bet

that.

When you won the toss in overtime, how did you feel about your

chances?

Clifton Smith was doing a great job all day giving us excellent

field position. So from the very beginning, you know you're going

to have a legit shot. And Jeff (Garcia) has done this many times,

leading the offense down there. It was a total team effort to be

down by that many and to hold them and keep scoring.

KANSAS CITY, Mo.

Ike Hilliard held his face in his hands after dressing slowly at

his locker at Arrowhead Stadium until there was no denying how the

topsy-turvy afternoon had taken its toll on the Bucs' 32-year-old

receiver. He already had pulled on his slacks, shirt and vest for

the flight home to Tampa. According to Hilliard, all that was

missing from his suit was a straightjacket. "I'm too old for

this," he said. "Unreal. They're making my life very interesting.

That's the very best I can say. They're allowing me to have a lot

of fun. It was crazy. Crazy." Relief, mixed with disbelief, was

the prevailing sentiment of Bucs players and coaches after their

historic 30-27 overtime victory over the Chiefs on Sunday. After

watching his team fall behind 24-3 in the first half only to

outscore Kansas City 27-3 from there and record the biggest

comeback win in franchise history, Hilliard put it into perspective

heading into the bye week.

"Bye week or no bye week, you look at our team and how we've

been able to play and the talk that we had all week about avenging

(the Dallas) loss," Hilliard said. "To come out and play so

poorly, we have to look at what we've done and regroup to a man and

figure out how to not be so flat coming out on the road against a

team we should've beat and put away.

"That's no disrespect to the Chiefs. We felt we had a chance to

go out and make a statement after a tough loss on the road. On the

other hand unreal in terms of the resiliency that these guys

showed."

Nowhere was that more apparent than in the final two drives

directed by Jeff Garcia, whose 24-yard touchdown pass to Antonio

Bryant and two-point conversion bullet to Alex Smith tied it with

19 seconds left in regulation.

Garcia kept the football away from the Chiefs in overtime,

hitting Michael Clayton for 29 yards on the first play to help set

up Matt Bryant's 34-yard field goal.

It was an improbable finish for the Bucs, who committed four

turnovers (three fumbles and an interception) against a team that

entered 1-6. Two fumbles came in the red zone, where Tampa Bay has

scored 13 touchdowns among 37 trips this season, including 2-of-6

on Sunday.

All last week, the Bucs stewed over their failures at Dallas,

when Garcia failed to launch a pass into the end zone in four tries

on the final drive of a 13-9 loss.

This time, trailing 27-19 and facing a first and 15 at the

Kansas City 24, Garcia took his shot against a Cover 2 defense.

He noticed the Chiefs safeties had been cheating to the middle

of the field, making it hard to help their cornerbacks over the

top. So he dropped a perfect pass over the head of cornerback

Maurice Leggett, and Bryant made a tremendous catch while

tightroping the sideline in the end zone.

"The protection up front gave me the time," Garcia said;

"gave me the lane to step up and basically look inside to hold

defenders and put a ball where it got over the corner's reach and

gave Antonio a chance to make a play."

Garcia finished 31-of-43 for 339 yards, one touchdown and one

interception. He spread the ball around to nine receivers. But his

favorite target was Bryant, who hauled in a team-high eight catches

for 115 yards and the touchdown.

Smith's sliding catch of the two-point conversion, which

resulted in a sprained right ankle, came on a play they had worked

on during practice for several weeks.

"There was a whole lot going on, and you just want to secure it

and hold on tight for dear life," Smith said.

The Bucs, who at 6-3 sit a half-game behind the idle Panthers

for first in the NFC South, won the coin toss to start overtime.

Then Clayton stayed alive for a scrambling Garcia and managed to

keep his feet after a short reception and turned it upfield,

getting a good block from tight end Jerramy Stevens.

"Huge play by Michael," Garcia said. "The guy is a physical

receiver. He made some clutch catches all day long, but that was

the biggest catch he made in this game."

The comeback, however, would not have been possible if not for

two plays, Clifton Smith's franchise-record 97-yard kickoff return

for a touchdown late in the first half and the forced fumble and

recovery by safety Tanard Jackson in the fourth quarter.

Jackson's play came one snap after Clifton Smith, this time in

at running back, fumbled at the Chiefs 10. On the Bucs' first play

after their recovery at the 3, Earnest Graham completed a halfback

option pass to Alex Smith to cut the Chiefs' lead to 24-19 (the

two-point conversion failed).

"We made a play. That's the difference in this league," Bucs

coach Jon Gruden said. "Sometimes, guys make great plays. And

sometimes, the other team makes them. We had a dramatic victory in

Chicago (on Sept. 21), much like this. And we had a dramatic

victory (Sunday) for us; close, hard-fought losses three other

times.

"That's why you spend so much time working on the two-minute

drill. And boy, did our guys play extremely well when we got into

that phase of our offense."

Bucs' biggest comeback wins

Date OppONENT DefiCIT Score

Sunday at Chiefs 21 (24-3) 30-27??..

Jan. 2, 1983 Bears 17 ( 23-6) 26-23??..

Sept. 9, 1979 at Colts 17 (17-0) 29-26??..

Nov. 17, 1996 at Chargers 14 (14-0) 25-17

Sept. 16, 1984 Lions 14 (14-0) 21-17

..??Overtime

Number of the day

6 Road OT victories for the Bucs in franchise history (against

nine losses); two have come this season, including 27-24 over the

Bears on Sept. 21.

It's not likely anyone will suggest Bucs RB Earnest Graham

should be playing quarterback after the first touchdown pass of his

career Sunday, but the play was big nonetheless. Graham found TE

Alex Smith for a 3-yard touchdown on a halfback pass in the fourth

quarter, the fruition of weeks of flirting with the idea of using

the play. "We tried it out a little bit earlier in the season but

never called it," Smith said. "We put it in (the game plan) this

week because we thought we had a good chance for it. It was a great

call and a great throw by Earnest. He said he couldn't really see

me, so he just put it in the vicinity. Fortunately, the defense bit

pretty hard." Said Graham: "It worked out just like we thought.

We have a million plays; we've just never used that one." The

call was indeed a savvy one. The Bucs had just created a turnover

with S Tanard Jackson's strip and recovery, and the Bucs had first

and goal at the Chiefs 3. It looked like a run all the way. "They

were going hard after the run," Smith said. "We could see they

were digging their cleats in there."

Depending on how you look at it, Sunday's victory by the Bucs

made Jon Gruden the team's all-time winningest coach or it tied

him with Tony Dungy. If you include postseason victories, Gruden

takes the lead with 57 (54 in the regular season and three in the

postseason all during Tampa Bay's Super Bowl run after the 2002

season). If you just count the regular season, Gruden is tied with

Dungy at 54 (Dungy has two postseason wins). John McKay is third on

the all-time list with 45 wins in 1976-1984. In his seventh season

with the Bucs, Gruden has won three division titles, the most in

team history, and led the team to its only Super Bowl

championship.

It's hard to say what was more remarkable about Clifton Smith's

97-yard kickoff return for a touchdown in the second quarter. Was

it the feat itself, which featured Smith darting through traffic

with abandon, or was it the timing? For coach Jon Gruden, the

answer was unequivocal. "Right then, we were struggling," he

said. "It was a hot day, and it was not going well. That gave us a

chance. Clifton gave us a chance and gave us some life and some

energy." Facing a seemingly insurmountable 24-3 deficit and the

offense floundering, the Bucs needed a pick-me-up. They got more

than that with the franchise's second kickoff-return touchdown,

this one clearly swaying momentum. The rookie free agent from

Fresno State wasn't on the active roster until last week, when it

was decided he would be promoted from the practice squad and

supplant second-round pick Dexter Jackson (inactive Sunday) as the

return man. Boy, does that move look permanent now.

Not so fast

. Bucs CB Phillip Buchanon, below, nearly made one of the game's

biggest plays when he intercepted Chiefs QB Tyler Thigpen and raced

42 yards to the Chiefs 3-yard line in the fourth quarter. The Bucs

appeared poised to score the go-ahead touchdown. But SS Sabby

Piscitelli was called for illegal contact against TE Tony Gonzalez

before the change of possession. The timing of the infraction

negated the play, and the Chiefs kept possession. An interesting

thing: the conversation between Buchanon and Tanard Jackson before

the play. "(Jackson) said to me, 'Hey, one of us is going to make

a play here,'?" Buchanon said. "I was thinking hopefully it would

be me. I made the play, but it got called back. I guess he was

right for both of us." Jackson had a forced fumble and recovery

earlier that set up a touchdown.

Keep him clean

. For the fourth time this season, the Bucs didn't allow a sack.

Sunday's achievement was notable because QB Jeff Garcia attempted

43 passes in an effort to rally, making their offense predictable.

"I thought the pass protection was outstanding," coach Jon Gruden

said. LT Donald Penn was happy with the effort because it came

against a defensive front that the Bucs regard highly. "They

probably are underrated," he said of the Chiefs defense. "They're

a good defensive line. We executed when it counted, and that's what

helped us come out on top." The Bucs weren't successful in giving

Garcia adequate time to throw late in last week's loss to Dallas.

Against Kansas City, Garcia was able to consider multiple options

before delivering the ball. "They're different games and a lot

different circumstances," Penn said. "All I know is we did it

when it counted. I think it's an example of our hungriness. It's

determination."

Keep him clean

. For the fourth time this season, the Bucs didn't allow a sack.

Sunday's achievement was notable because QB Jeff Garcia attempted

43 passes in an effort to rally, making their offense predictable.

"I thought the pass protection was outstanding," coach Jon Gruden

said. LT Donald Penn was happy with the effort because it came

against a defensive front that the Bucs regard highly. "They

probably are underrated," he said of the Chiefs defense. "They're

a good defensive line. We executed when it counted, and that's what

helped us come out on top." The Bucs weren't successful in giving

Garcia adequate time to throw late in last week's loss to Dallas.

Against Kansas City, Garcia was able to consider multiple options

before delivering the ball. "They're different games and a lot

different circumstances," Penn said. "All I know is we did it

when it counted. I think it's an example of our hungriness. It's

determination."

Third and gold

. Games are often won and lost on third down, and perhaps the

Bucs have finally figured that out. Their 62 percent effort

(8-for-13) Sunday was a dramatic improvement from last week's 35

percent result. Many of the conversions came late. In the Bucs'

final five possessions, they were 4-for-5 on third downs. "Against

the Cowboys, it felt like we were something like 3-for-17," WR Ike

Hilliard said. "If you do that all year, you don't have

opportunities. When you don't have opportunities, you usually get

your (butt) kicked."

K.C.'s wild plays

. The Bucs had suspicions that Kansas City's Chan Gailey-led

offense might try unconventional methods. Tampa Bay just didn't

know it was going to be the preferred method of attack. The Chiefs

used direct snaps to running backs, a reverse and a halfback pass

on their way to taking a 24-3 lead. "We expected some of that from

(offensive coordinator) Chan Gailey," Bucs coach Jon Gruden said.

"He's got a history of being very creative. They really had us on

the ropes. They mixed it up quite well. They had a unique package.

Maybe we'll steal a few of those ideas next week." Two highlight

plays: WR Mark Bradley's 37-yard touchdown pass to QB Tyler Thigpen

off a reverse, and a direct snap to RB Jamaal Charles that picked

up 16 yards on third and 1.

Fumble trouble

. RB Earnest Graham hasn't had a propensity for fumbles in his

Bucs career, but he won't soon forget his two cough-ups against

Kansas City. In 271 touches in 2007, when he had his heaviest

workload, Graham fumbled once. That wasn't the case Sunday.

Graham's first fumble came at the Bucs 41 on the team's first play

from scrimmage. The gaffe set up a Chiefs touchdown. Graham fumbled

again after the Bucs had driven 60 yards to the Chiefs 7 in the

fourth quarter. He lost the ball on a hit by DE Tamba Hali with S

Jarrad Page recovering 5 yards into the end zone. Graham wasn't

alone. Rookie Clifton Smith fumbled inside the red zone, too, after

making a catch and attempting to shake a tackler. "Those are

terrible plays by us," coach Jon Gruden said. "You don't want to

make a habit of doing that. We have to do a much better job." But

Gruden didn't hesitate to go back to his two playmakers after their

turnovers. Both had key plays on the tying drive late in the fourth

quarter. "The biggest thing is just overcoming adversity," he

said. "You're going to have a lot of ups and downs. That's life in

general. It's about what you do after that."

Quick hits

. Bucs QB Jeff Garcia's 339 yards passing gives him 18 300-yard

passing games in his career.

. Bucs TEs Alex Smith and John Gilmore combined for 52 yards on

six receptions. Gilmore recorded a career-high four receptions, for

40 yards, while Smith had two receptions for 12 yards, including a

touchdown and the tying two-point conversion. The Bucs are 5-0 this

season when a tight end catches a touchdown.

. RB Kolby Smith's 1-yard touchdown dive for the Chiefs marked

the first rushing touchdown allowed by the Bucs this season.

. Chiefs RB Jamaal Charles became the first opposing back to

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Maybe we'll steal a few of those ideas next week." Two highlight

plays: WR Mark Bradley's 37-yard touchdown pass to QB Tyler Thigpen

off a reverse, and a direct snap to RB Jamaal Charles that picked

up 16 yards on third and 1. It's not likely anyone will suggest

Bucs RB Earnest Graham should be playing quarterback after the

first touchdown pass of his career Sunday, but the play was big

nonetheless. Graham found TE Alex Smith for a 3-yard touchdown on

a halfback pass in the fourth quarter, the fruition of weeks of

flirting with the idea of using the play. "We tried it out a

little bit earlier in the season but never called it," Smith said.

"We put it in (the game plan) this week because we thought we had

a good chance for it. It was a great call and a great throw by

Earnest. He said he couldn't really see me, so he just put it in

the vicinity. Fortunately, the defense bit pretty hard." Said

Graham: "It worked out just like we thought. We have a million

plays; we've just never used that one." The call was indeed a

savvy one. The Bucs had just created a turnover with S Tanard

Jackson's strip and recovery, and the Bucs had first and goal at

the Chiefs 3. It looked like a run all the way. "They were going

hard after the run," Smith said. "We could see they were digging

their cleats in there." Fumble trouble

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Gruden didn't hesitate to go back to his two playmakers after their

turnovers. Both had key plays on the tying drive late in the fourth

quarter. "The biggest thing is just overcoming adversity," he

said. "You're going to have a lot of ups and downs. That's life in

general. It's about what you do after that." Depending on how you

look at it, Sunday's victory by the Bucs made Jon Gruden the team's

all-time winningest coach or it tied him with Tony Dungy. If you

include postseason victories, Gruden takes the lead with 57 (54 in

the regular season and three in the postseason all during Tampa

Bay's Super Bowl run after the 2002 season). If you just count the

regular season, Gruden is tied with Dungy at 54 (Dungy has two

postseason wins). John McKay is third on the all-time list with 45

wins in 1976-1984. In his seventh season with the Bucs, Gruden has

won three division titles, the most in team history, and led the

team to its only Super Bowl championship. It's hard to say what

was more remarkable about Clifton Smith's 97-yard kickoff return

for a touchdown in the second quarter. Was it the feat itself,

which featured Smith darting through traffic with abandon, or was

it the timing? For coach Jon Gruden, the answer was unequivocal.

"Right then, we were struggling," he said. "It was a hot day,

and it was not going well. That gave us a chance. Clifton gave us a

chance and gave us some life and some energy." Facing a seemingly

insurmountable 24-3 deficit and the offense floundering, the Bucs

needed a pick-me-up. They got more than that with the franchise's

second kickoff-return touchdown, this one clearly swaying momentum.

The rookie free agent from Fresno State wasn't on the active

roster until last week, when it was decided he would be promoted

from the practice squad and supplant second-round pick Dexter

Jackson (inactive Sunday) as the return man. Boy, does that move

look permanent now. Quick hits

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the first rushing touchdown allowed by the Bucs this season.

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rush for more than 100 yards (106) against the Bucs defense this

season.

TAMPA Lightning left wing Mark Recchi considered the package

that is teammate Evgeny Artyukhin 6 feet 5, 254 pounds of

straight-ahead aggression and gave an oral shudder.

"I don't want him coming at me," Recchi said. "I'm glad he

was away for a couple of years."

The timing has been perfect for Recchi, whose first season with

Tampa Bay coincides with Artyukhin's return after two years playing

in his native Russia.

It was perfect for Artyukhin as well, as the Lightning, in

desperate need of big, physical bodies, settled a two-year contract

dispute and gave the right wing an opportunity to succeed.

He was a differencemaker in Saturday's 3-2 victory over the

Senators at the St. Pete Times Forum with a game-high eight shots

and six hits, and the winning goal in the eighth round of the

shootout.

"He's getting more confident," coach Barry Melrose said after

Tampa Bay's third straight win. "I think he's starting to realize

what we want out of him, and he's getting rewarded with ice time

for the way he's playing."

Artyukhin, 25, who during the summer signed a two-year,

$1.9-million deal, is a rough-edged work in progress.

He loves carrying the puck but tends to lose control, though not

as much as earlier in the season.

He is not afraid to battle for pucks and get to the net. As he

improves his puck control, which will translate into more shots, it

would seem a matter of time before he starts putting some in the

net.

Most notable, though, is Artyukhin's speed and fluidity as a

skater.

It doesn't take long, despite a seemingly effortless stride, for

him to build up a head of steam. That is when heads need to be up

because Artyukhin will hit you with full board-rattling force.

"I'll tell you," Melrose said, "when Arty goes over the

boards, guys on the other team know. You can see them elbowing each

other. They don't want to play against that guy, and that's good."

Artyukhin, with zero goals, one assist and four penalty minutes

while averaging 11:19 of ice time on a line with Recchi and Jussi

Jokinen, said he wants to be a complete player.

Converting his first NHL shootout opportunity was another step.

"I score it and goals will come, so it was real important for

me," said Artyukhin, who had four goals, 17 points and 90 penalty

minutes in 72 games for Tampa Bay in 2005-06.

"In my mind, I feel like I can be a better player, score and

help the team win games, play physical. I feel like right now I'm

picking up my game because the coach is giving our line more ice

time."

Artyukhin played 16:02 against Ottawa and made the most of it.

His rink-long rushes jazzed the fans, but even Artyukhin admitted

they too often ended with the puck rolling off his stick.

Even so, "He's getting more confident with the puck," Recchi

said. "And he's starting to understand the concept of stops and

starts. He's so big and strong, when he stops and starts, he's

going to be much more effective."

Coming right at you.

Damian Cristodero can be reached at cristoderosptimes.com.

TALLAHASSEE Coach Bobby Bowden can't recall losing in quite the

same fashion as Saturday's three-pointer at Georgia Tech a fumble

near the goal line in the final minute.

"I guess if you live long enough, everything will happen," he

said Sunday. "That's the first time we've lost one like that."

Oh, sure, his Seminoles have misfired on last-minute field

goals. And there was the night in 1995 at Virginia when Warrick

Dunn was stopped just short of the winning touchdown. Not the same.

This one, he said, would have been one of the best comebacks in FSU

history, a "masterpiece," perhaps mentioned with the 1994 rally

from 28 down to tie Florida in the "Choke at Doak," and the 1992

win at Georgia Tech.

The challenge now is getting his young team to bounce back.

"We'll attack it positively," he said. "We won't let them

feel like they're a bunch of losers."

In his mind, his players continued to fight and believe that,

despite trailing by 14 in the first half and 11 in the fourth

quarter, they would win.

"I'm not worried about their attitude," he said. "I've got to

be sure we coaches do a sound coaching job where we can give these

kids every opportunity to win."

Question of the day: Bowden said he's confident that junior FB

Marcus Sims, who was hit at the 1-yard line and lost the ball with

45 seconds remaining, will respond positively.

"He just has to get those things out of his mind," he said.

"You watch pro football. It happens every Sunday to these great

players and they have to keep playing, they have to go on."

Bowden said it's typical that young running backs struggle

holding on to the ball.

"You never know," he said, "that might be his last fumble."

The long run: If FSU wins one more and becomes bowl eligible

(only one of the I-AA wins counts for that), it will take over as

the program with the longest active streak for bowl berths at 27.

Michigan's loss Saturday ended its streak at 33 years.

"Who would have suspected that? I wouldn't have thought that,

but anyway it did (happen)," Bowden said. "They'll get it back

and we have to keep fighting hard so we can maintain this streak

for ourselves."

Time, TV set: Saturday's home game against Clemson begins at

3:30 p.m. (Ch. 28).

Brian Landman can be reached at landmansptimes.com or (813)

226-3347.

The Bucs'

Jon Gruden

On the game overall:

"That was a great effort by our team, a great effort by Kansas

City the biggest comeback in the history of our franchise today. A

lot of guys deserve credit. "

On the resiliency of the Bucs:

" We got a field goal at the end of the half. We just have a

lot of veteran leadership. We've got a lot of guys who love the

game and believe in what we're doing. And they know that Kansas

City made some great plays, and they knew they had to make a few of

their own to get right back in the game. They had a lot of poise.

We've got a long way to go, but to win six games before the bye

with the amount of guys we've had play for us is a great

accomplishment. We're going to build off this."

On how far a win like this can carry a team:

"It's a hard league to win in, you know that. To be 6-3 and

alive and have a chance to regroup and get some guys back is

exciting. It doesn't guarantee us anything. We've got to play

better than we did today and last week. But we do have character

and we are in the race, and that's significant."

On getting deep plays from receivers, especially on third down:

"Antonio (Bryant) played great. He made a touchdown catch; he

made a catch earlier on our sideline, made unbelievable catches.

It's a credit to our guys. I'll try to get (Joey) Galloway more

work after the bye. "

The Chiefs'

Herm Edwards

On mistakes by his players:

"The problem was we lost our starting nickel corner and our

nickel back. We had two young guys in there, and one of them was

cut earlier and we brought him back this week and he had to play a

lot. No fault of his, but he had to go play. (Maurice) Leggett had

to play a lot because (Brandon) Flowers went down. We tried to hide

him as much as we could, but they found him and completed some

passes that way."

On Bucs QB Jeff Garcia:

"He got into rhythm and tacking is the key with these guys

because they run a lot of crossing routes. They put the ball inside

the numbers for the most part. He did a good job of getting guys

open. They made some plays. At the end of the game, they got it

going and we didn't slow them down."

On the pass interference call against Tony Gonzalez:

"We'll look at it, but it's a bang-bang play and is something

not for instant replay. The official made the call, and Tony made a

great catch. If we get that catch, the game is probably over."

On the pass play from WR Mark Bradley to QB Tyler Thigpen:

"We practiced it this week. Actually, (Thigpen) dropped it in

practice and then we came back the next day to make sure he wasn't

going to drop it. We moved it back a little farther. The one we did

in practice he was standing in the end zone. Mark threw a good

ball."

LONDON If Sen. John McCain thinks the American media have

treated him unkindly, he ought to see how he has fared in the

British press.

The day after his final presidential debate with Sen. Barack

Obama, British papers gave huge play to what must have been the

year's most unattractive photo of McCain a closeup shot of him

with tongue hanging out, as if he were about to gag or throw up.

In fact, it was a simple expression of frustration as McCain

realized he was heading the wrong way to shake the moderator's

hand. But it was a pictorial metaphor for how millions of people

worldwide regard the thought of another four years of Republicans

in the White House.

If everyone on Earth could vote in Tuesday's election, Obama

would win in a landslide, according to an online poll by the

Economist, the respected London weekly with a global circulation.

In a play on those red-state, blue-state maps so familiar to

American TV viewers, the magazine has divided the world into

"red" countries (McCain supporters) and "blue" countries

(Obama), with the latter so overwhelming in number as to make a

global map appear almost entirely blue

(www.economist.com/vote2008).

The Economist, which has supported both Republicans and

Democrats in the past, said it would vote for Obama if it could.

"The Democratic candidate has clearly shown that he offers the

better chance of restoring America's self-confidence," the

magazine said. "Given Mr. Obama's inexperience, the lack of

clarity about some of his beliefs and the prospect of a stridently

Democratic Congress, voting for him is a risk. Yet it is one

America should take, given the steep road ahead."

If the United States has one ally it can wholeheartedly count

on, it is Britain. Former Prime Minister Tony Blair was so

supportive of President Bush's decision to invade Iraq that critics

called him "Bush's poodle."

But many Britons feel their country's image has been tarred by

close association with a Republican administration widely condemned

for Abu Ghraib, Guantanamo and other perceived abuses of power. In

2004, the Guardian newspaper was so aghast at the idea of Bush's

re-election that its readers sent letters to 14,000 Clark County,

Ohio, residents, urging them to vote for John Kerry. (It backfired:

The "swing" county went for Bush.)

Britain's current prime minister, Gordon Brown, got off to a

rocky start, but has improved his own ratings by distancing himself

from the unpopular U.S. president.

Many commentators who slammed Brown as a failure just a few

months ago now call him a hero for upstaging the Bush

administration in dealing with the global financial crisis. They

gleefully note that the administration meekly followed suit after

Brown pumped money directly into beleaguered banks, seen as a

smarter approach than the convoluted U.S. plan to buy up

mortgage-backed securities.

Better regarded than Bush, McCain is generally viewed by Britons

as brave and honorable, but also cranky and short-tempered. With

the economy the No. 1 global issue, his bumbled attempt to take

leadership of the U.S. bailout plan made him seem "all at sea,

emitting panic and indecision," the Economist said.

And McCain doesn't fare much better on foreign policy despite

Britain's own experiences with Islamic extremism (the 2005 London

bombings; the foiled 2006 plot to blow up U.S.-bound airliners). In

a country that has suffered significant casualties in Iraq, McCain

is seen as too eager to exert U.S. power abroad.

On the other hand, many Britons are genuinely excited about

Obama. One reason is that Britain, like America, has an

ever-increasing nonwhite population.

With an Obama presidency, "a generation of black children would

grow up with a different sense of what was achievable," Daniel

Hannan, a conservative member of the European Parliament, wrote in

the Daily Telegraph. "Some white Americans, too, might reconsider

their attitudes. Bad news for white supremacists and black

grievance mongers."

Contact Susan Taylor Martin at susansptimes.com.

GAINESVILLE The celebration is over, new preparations have

begun and apparently there won't be any talk this week about

championships among the Florida players and coaches.

With its 49-10 victory over rival Georgia in the records, the

Gators practiced Sunday night to prepare for Vanderbilt (8 p.m.

Saturday, ESPN2). Florida can clinch the SEC East title and a trip

to Atlanta for the SEC Championship Game with an 18th consecutive

win over the Commodores (5-3, 3-2 SEC).

The Gators (7-1, 5-1) moved up one spot to No. 4 in the AP poll

Sunday, and rose two spots to No. 5 in the coaches' poll. And with

then-No. 1 Texas losing to Texas Tech on a last-second touchdown

Saturday night, UF coach Urban Meyer knows talk is swirling about

the Gators being back among the many contenders for the national

title.

Talk everywhere but anywhere near him.

"There will be no talk whatsoever about championships," Meyer

said Sunday morning. "There will be no talk about anything other

than how we prepare to win and how we prepare for a game."

Meyer said immediately after Saturday's game that he's not

concerned about complacency.

"We're going to do what we've got to do, and the way we keep

guys focused around Florida is we practice really hard," Meyer

said. "Those kids want to go to Atlanta. What's the program goal?

Every year, we battle for Atlanta."

DEFENSIVELY SPEAKING: Big-time defensive plays set up several

touchdowns against Georgia. Considered the Gators' weak link

entering the season, the defense is ranked No. 5 nationally in

scoring, allowing 11.6 points per game, and No. 13 in rushing,

103.1 yards.

The Gators have not allowed a rushing touchdown in two games,

and they are tied for first nationally with four interceptions

returned for touchdowns.

Florida has had at least one interception in seven of eight

games. The Gators' plus-14 turnover margin leads the nation.

"Talking about our defense last year, 'soft' was a very

accurate statement," DT Terron Sanders said. "But if you look at

us this year, it's a complete turnaround. We have more experience

and everybody is playing their part. The way we look at it,

especially when we rotate the D-line, everybody is a starter. It's

not like I'm No. 2 and I just have to do enough until No. 1

returns. Everybody goes out and thinks they are starters."

Antonya English can be reached at englishsptimes.com.

NEW YORK - He seemed a dead man running yesterday morning, seven

seconds

behind Abderrahim Goumri with little more than a mile to go. But

Marilson

Gomes dos Santos has been around the block here a few times and he

figured

there still was plenty of sidewalk left for a final charge.

"I have seen many marathons that are decided in the last

minute," Gomes

said. "So I never lose hope."

So the Brazilian kept pushing along Central Park South. He

passed the

flagging Moroccan and won his second New York City Marathon in

three years

with a time of 2 hours 8 minutes 43 seconds, his 24-second margin

providing one of the most remarkable reversals in major marathon

history.

"I proved it wasn't luck when I won the first time," said the

31-year-old

Gomes, who, in 2006, outran five Kenyans and the Olympic champion

but was

eighth last year.

Though Abdi Abdirahman's dream of becoming the first US men's

winner in

26 years dissolved on First Avenue after he'd struggled with a side

stitch

for 4 miles, it still was a creditable day for the homeboys. There

were

four American men in the top 10 for the first time since 1982, with

Abdirahman (Tucson) sixth, Josh Rohatinsky (Portland, Ore.)

seventh,

Jason Lehmkuhle (Minneapolis) eighth, and Bolota Asmerom (San

Francisco)

10th.

By contrast to Gomes's late dash, Britain's Paula Radcliffe had

a walk in

the park, winning her third title in five years by finishing in

2:23:56.

She crossed 1 minute 47 seconds ahead of Russia's Ludmila Petrova,

with

Kara Goucher a startling third in 2:25:53, the best women's

marathon

debut by a domestic runner, and the fastest time here by an

American and

the first podium finish since Anne Marie Letko in 1994.

"As much as I was hurting the last 5 miles, it was awesome,"

said the

30-year-old Goucher, who was born in Queens and whose father was

killed

here by a drunk driver in 1982. "I'll be back for sure."

It was the first time in her three victories that Radcliffe

wasn't pushed

all the way into Central Park. In 2004, when she also was coming

off a

disappointing Olympics, Radcliffe had to outkick Kenya's Susan

Chepkemei

by three seconds in the closest women's finish in race history.

Last year,

though she won by 23 seconds, Radcliffe didn't shed Ethiopia's Gete

Wami

until the final 400 meters.

This time, the world record-holder ran alone for the final 4

miles,

posting the biggest victory margin in nine years.

"It was nice to win it different this year," said the

34-year-old

Radcliffe. "Make it a bit easier on my husband and the others."

Radcliffe became the only woman other than nine-time victor

Grete Waitz to

win three times here and now is 8 for 8 in marathons not held at

Olympus.

Radcliffe, always a front-runner, ran alone even when she had

company,

rarely looking back to see who might be on her heels.

"Nobody else wanted to lead into the wind," she said.

"Everyone was in

single file behind me. I thought, 'C'mon, you've got the whole

road."'

As Radcliffe cranked up the pace after the Queensboro Bridge,

her pursuers

dropped off one by one - Boston champion Dire Tune, Wami, Olympic

silver

medalist Catherine Ndereba, and former Boston victor Rita Jeptoo.

At 18 miles, only Goucher and the 40-year-old Petrova still were

with her,

and not for much longer.

"She just hammered us from about 8 miles to go," said Goucher,

who

finished out of the medals in both the 5,000 and 10,000 meters in

Beijing

and never had run longer than a half marathon.

As soon as she came out of the Bronx and back into Manhattan,

Radcliffe

took it up a gear, gaining 12 seconds on Petrova between the 21st

and 22

miles and another 22 seconds by the 23d mile. From there, it was a

fun run.

Gomes, who'd won here two years ago by boldly busting a move on

First

Avenue, had no such luxury yesterday. After the pack broke up going

through

East Harlem, Gomes and Goumri ran shoulder to shoulder in and out

of the

Bronx, until the Moroccan broke away. With 4 miles to go, he led by

three

seconds. With 3 miles, by five. With 2 miles, by nine.

"It's my day," thought Goumri, who was outkicked by Kenya's

Martin Lel

last year.

But Goumri, who'd been missing water stations, was running on

fumes and

Gomes began closing before they came out of the park. By the time

they went

back in for the final time, Gomes was long gone.

It was the third time in two years that Goumri had finished

second in a

major marathon, but he was philosophical about it.

"I should win one day, no problem," he said.

Gomes has done it twice here now, and he knows it's about going

the

distance - the full distance.

"In the marathon, you know you've won the race when you cross

the finish

line," he said. "Not before."

Yesterday's biggest winner didn't even race.

Germany's Irina Mikitenko claimed the World Marathon Majors

women's title

and the $500,000 payout after the five race directors declared her

the

victor by breaking a tie with Wami, last year's champion.

"It is a dream come true for me," said Mikitenko, who won in

London and

Berlin this year and was second in Berlin last year. "It was a

good two

years."

Lel, who withdrew from yesterday's race after breaking his foot

in the

Lisbon half marathon, already had wrapped up the men's title by 21

points

ahead of Kenya's Robert Cheruiyot, last year's winner.

Had Wami finished first or second, she would have won the title

by

improving on her third-place finish in London last spring. When she

placed

sixth, she ended tied with Mikitenko with 65 points. Since they

were tied

in head-to-head results at one apiece, the directors unanimously

chose

Mikitenko based on her scoring her points in three races to Wami's

four and

her better average time, electing not to split the jackpot.

"We'd always rather see it come down to the playing field,"

said New York

director Mary Wittenberg.

Mikitenko, who chose not to race here after her Berlin triumph

at the end

of September, observed the race nervously from the finish-line

bleachers.

"It is much easier to run a marathon," she said, "than to

watch it."

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the day.

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RUNNING THE TRAPS ON A PHRASE IN THE AIR

Sometimes a phrase is around so much it hardly gets noticed.

Lexicographic research shrugs it off either as a "nonce term" --

here today, gone tomorrow -- or something that has been around so

long that it needs no examination or explanation.

So it is with let's do this. You've heard it a thousand

times: When someone asks helplessly, "What'll we do?" your reply

goes, "Let's do

this," and you show the way.

Ah, but what happens to the phrase's meaning when the emphasis

shifts to "Let's do this"? The gentle instructive changes to

the strong imperative; it's a whole new ballgame. (I follow common

usage in dispensing with the adverb wholly because of confusion

with its homonym holy.)

I ran the traps, as the hunters say, on the emphasis shift in

this phrase with my favorite etymological sources and got a series

of shrugs and eye rolls because the phrase as written rather than

spoken is too commonplace. But Joe Pickett, editor at the American

Heritage Dictionary, tracked down an early usage of the shifted

stress in a violent song by the heavy-metal band Korn titled

"Let's Do This Now" and noted that "it's the

doing that is stressed, not the thing itself. And while it

anticipates future action, the expression functions as a

clincher."

That was the meaning picked up by television advertising

copywriters in scenes dramatizing creative work in boardrooms: An

executive asks for ideas, fixes on one tossed out by a low-paid

minion, stands up and snaps to his colleagues with the Voice of

Authority, "Let's DO this!"

We saw it during the late political campaign when Sarah Palin

was asked by Sean Hannity of Fox News for the reaction of her

daughters to her coming campaign: The governor said she "asked the

girls what they thought, and they're like: 'Absolutely. Let's do

this, Mom!' " (The use of "they're like" rather than "they

said" reflects a current dismissal of the dull verb said; I

used a variation above as "your reply goes" rather than

is to demonstrate with-it-ness.)

Turn now to the defiantly unexpurgated Urban Dictionary, a

down-and-dirty repository of what the pioneer slanguist Francis

Grose in his 1811 dictionary called "the vulgar tongue." Today's

urban (meaning "street") Web site defines the new phase of the

phrase as "Commonly said by uppity groups of people, but also

those ready to ... just get down to business." (I primly

bowdlerize.) A second sense: "Usually said before a fight, or when

an event is about to go down. You are wanting to be part of this

event."

Here is a vogue phrase in which punctuation marks define

meaning. If

let's do this is followed by a colon, it coolly suggests a

specific course be taken together. If the phrase is followed by an

exclamation mark, it's a command to get moving, Buster, or get

trampled in the rush.

BOOTS ON THE GROUND

"From the barrage of television ads to boots on the ground"

began the lead on Dan Balz's report in The Washington Post of the

Obama campaign's final thrust in Colorado. This used to be a

football metaphor -- the "air game" and the "ground game" -- but

the military metaphor has carried the field.

Infantry footwear has been slogging though mud for centuries,

but boots on the ground is a relatively new expression. Earliest

citation that Matthew Seelinger, chief historian of the Army

Historical Foundation, can find is in an April 11, 1980, article in

The Christian Science Monitor. During the Iranian hostage crisis,

plans for a rescue operation1 were made in the Carter

administration, and there were worries that the Soviet Union would

intervene. "Many American strategists now argue that even light,

token U.S. land forces -- 'getting U.S. combat boots on the ground'

" -- as the four-star general Volney Warner put it -- "would signal

to an enemy that the U.S. ... can only be dislodged at the risk of

war." The vivid figure of speech soon triumphed over the formal

"infantry in the field."

The word boot, in this symbolism, does not stand for a

high-ankle shoe but for the person who wears it. In 1944, Marine

inductees were called

boots, and their introduction to service in World War II was in

boot camp. As mechanized armor, air and naval technology

advanced, the role of the "foot soldier" -- wearer of the boot

-- was sometimes overshadowed, but as T.R. Fehrenbach wrote in 1963

about the Korean conflict, to hold a position "you must do this on

the ground, the way the Roman legions did, by putting your young

men in the mud." By the time of the 1991 operation "Desert

Storm," that strategy was ascendant: Although air and sea power

were highly important, a war could not be decisively won and

territory controlled without a credible component of armed

individual human beings on the ground.

Throughout 2007 and the 2008 presidential campaign, focus was on

timetables or benchmarks for ultimate withdrawal of U.S. "boots"

from Iraq. However, candidates in both political camps (military

metaphors are common in politics) agreed on the need for additional

brigades of U.S. combat troops to suppress a rising threat in

Afghanistan. In time, defense and diplomatic officials responsible

for national security in the incoming administration will face a

question framed in a phrase with historical echoes: Will there be a

need for more or fewer boots on the ground?

(William Safire is the author of 27 books. Please send your

comments and suggestions to: safireonlanguage@nytimes.com.)

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Syndicate features.

Gunmen kidnapped a French aid worker in

central Kabul Monday morning and shot dead an Afghan bystander who

tried to thwart the abduction, police and witnesses said.

The kidnapping was the latest of a series of incidents spreading

alarm among foreigners in the capital. It was carried out just

after 9 a.m. on a busy street of shops and homes

Last month, a British aid worker with dual South African

nationality, Gayle Williams, 34, was killed in Kabul and the

Taliban said it had executed her for spreading Christianity. There

was no immediate claim for Monday's kidnapping but the Taliban

denied involvement.

Two French aid workers were making their way from their

residence to their office when three gunmen armed with assault

rifles tried to seize them, shopkeepers and bystanders said.

One French citizen from a group known as AFRANE, meaning Amitie

Franco-Afghane, or French-Afghan Friendship, escaped when an Afghan

working as a driver in the intelligence service tackled one of the

kidnappers and grabbed his gun.

The gunmen killed the driver, pushed the other aid worker into a

car and drove off, witnesses said.

News reports in Paris said the abducted man was a French citizen

and education expert who had been in Kabul for only a week. He had

been staying with colleagues from AFRANE, which also specializes in

education projects, but worked for a different French

nongovernmental organization.

The news reports identified the kidnapped man as Dany Egreteau,

32, but did not specify the organization he worked for.

The slain man was identified only as Malik, 26. His uncle,

Ghulam Hazrat, 50, said the kidnappers were dressed as security

guards.

"They looked ordinary, they were young, 30 to 35," Hazrat

said. "They aimed their Kalashnikovs at me and Malik's father,

warning us not to approach."

There has been a string of kidnappings in the capital and

neighboring provinces recently involving both foreigners and

prominent Afghans. Many of them have been blamed by Afghan

officials on criminal gangs seeking ransom.

A relative of the royal family, Homayun Shah, and the son of a

prominent banker were kidnapped in recent weeks but were freed by

the intelligence service, the National Security Directorate.

The head of the service, Amrullah Saleh, went on national

television and complained that the man behind these kidnappings was

a known criminal who had been jailed by security forces, only to be

released because of failings in the judicial system.

In a separate incident last Thursday, a suspected Taliban

suicide bomber shot his way into the Ministry of Information and

Culture in central Kabul, then blew himself up, leaving at least

two others dead. A few days earlier, a South African and a Briton

working at the international courier service DHL were shot dead

outside their office in Kabul. The police said the assailant was

one of their security guards.

Mainland China's top negotiator on Taiwan matters

arrived in Taipei on Monday to begin five days of talks aimed at

reaching agreements on transportation and economic deals.

The negotiator, Chen Yunlin, is the highest ranking mainland

Chinese official to visit Taiwan since the end of the civil war in

1949 and his arrival signals a further warming of relations between

the two governments.

Chen, the head of the Association for Relations Across the

Taiwan Strait, landed at the Taipei airport and went to the

historic Grand Hotel, where he made a few remarks to a crowd of

reporters. Talks are expected to begin on Tuesday, when Chen meets

with Chiang Pin-kung, the chairman of the Straits Exchange

Foundation, the main negotiating body for Taiwan.

"The step is not easy and is a crystallization of the joint

efforts of many compatriots across the strait," Chen said,

according to Xinhua, mainland China's state-run news agency.

The negotiating bodies for the two governments met in June in

Beijing after a long hiatus and signed a deal to start regular

weekend charter flights between mainland and Taiwanese cities. The

meeting took place shortly after the inauguration of President Ma

Ying-jeou of Taiwan, who was elected last March after promising to

improve both the economy and relations with the mainland.

But Ma's popularity has sagged in recent months -- Taiwan's

economic performance has been lackluster, and many Taiwanese

citizens say Ma and his party, the Kuomintang, or KMT, are moving

Taiwan into mainland China's orbit too quickly.

Protests against Ma's China policies by the Democratic

Progressive Party, or DPP, the main opposition party, have been

fierce. On Oct. 21, protests took place when Zhang Mingqing, the

vice chairman of the mainland's negotiating body, toured Taiwan.

Zhang was shoved to the ground by a local politician while visiting

the Confucius Temple in the southern city of Tainan, a bastion of

the DPP.

During Chen's visit, the National Policy Agency is deploying

10,000 security officers, according to the news service of the KMT.

Traffic controls have been put in place to guard Chen's motorcade,

and 800 policemen have been posted to the Grand Hotel, the news

service reported.

The Chinese Communist Party sees Taiwan as a rebel province that

split from China in 1949, when the KMT sought refuge on the island

after losing the Chinese civil war, and must be brought back into

the fold. Many Taiwanese prefer to maintain the current status quo

of de facto independence, and some, especially members of the DPP,

advocate formal independence. The former president, Chen Shui-bian,

the first DPP member to hold that office, tried moving the island

closer to independence.

Chen, the mainland negotiator, and Chiang are expected to sign

agreements that increase the charter flight schedule to every other

day and open maritime shipping lanes. They are also expected to

discuss economic cooperation as a way to fight the global financial

crisis.

"It is imperative that the two sides join to help each other to

cope," Chen said on Monday, according to Xinhua.

Chen has also said the mainland is again offering to give two

pandas to Taiwan, a move that the Beijing government first made in

2005 but that was rejected by the former Taiwanese president. Ma

has indicated he would accept the pandas.

There is rampant speculation in both China and Taiwan over

whether Chen and Ma will meet. If so, the big question is: Will

Chen address Ma as zongtong, or president, thus acknowledging that

Ma holds a title that in international affairs is usually accorded

only to the head of a sovereign nation?

Cox News Service

As if it hadn't damaged the commonweal enough through eight years

of favoring commercial interests over public interests just about

every time they have collided, President Bush's crew is working

feverishly to get in a slew of last-minute licks before the clock

runs out.

Federal bureaus, agencies and so on are rushing to change rules

and regulations by administrative order in time to immunize them

against easy reversal by the incoming administration.

Up to 90 changes are afoot that would lower product safety

requirements, increase air pollution, ease drinking water

standards, revive damaging mountain-top strip mining and, of

course, overall batter the environment, which the Bushies have been

regularly beating up for fun and political profit through two

terms.

We owe much of our awareness of what's up to The Washington

Post, which at the git-go of the Bush presidency gave itself the

largely thankless task of keeping tabs on the bureaucracy, where

much of the government's work gets done without public notice and

whose mis- and malfeasances rarely rock the news cycle even when

they are exposed.

(What will we do for such knowledge when newspapers, grievously

ailing, die off? The blogs, Web sites and other new-media

gimcrackery aren't interested, couldn't afford the staff even if

they were and, anyway, often revel only in being fiendishly biased.

But that's a ponderation for another day.)

Bush salted government offices with partisan commissars assigned

to watch department heads for any sign of apostasy from the

conservative party line or animus toward its supportive financial

interests. Science was quashed when it proved inconvenient.

Appointees who misunderstood the game and took their titular duties

seriously were booted; Christine Whitman at EPA was an

early-warning dead canary.

So now the Bureau of Land Management has filed notice it wants

to lease 9.5 million previously protected acres in eastern Utah for

oil and gas drilling - land the bureau itself had earlier

classified "wilderness quality." Never mind that the industry

already is sitting on vast tracts of land and seabed it has never

developed.

The Justice Department's antitrust division - for eight years

unable to find a single case - has published guidelines which would

hold that monopolies need leave only some pitiful remnant of

floundering competition in order to be free of antitrust

prosecution.

The National Marine Fisheries Management Service is publishing

rule changes that would lift the environmental review requirements

for some fishery-management decisions.

The list goes on, of course - one item could shield shipping

data from antiterrorist oversight - but there is a small glint of

hope. It rests, perversely, with the Bush administration's amazing

record, all policy matters aside, of plain, old-fashioned

incompetence.

The Clinton administration had rushed through regulations that

had been in the works for years so late in the day that the

requisite period to secure them hadn't expired before Bush took

office. He canceled them wholesale on his Inauguration Day.

To protect against the same fate, Bush's Office of Management

and Budget sent out a memo last spring urging that all new rules

and regs be wrapped up by November 1. But this is an administration

unable to learn from its own example.

There is at least small hope in the fact that the sound of paper

still being desperately shuffled is loud.

Tom Teepen is a columnist for Cox Newspapers. He is based in

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Cox News Service

WASHINGTON- It could be an early night for election viewers

Tuesday because the trends in the presidential and congressional

races may be apparent within an hour or so of the first polls

closing.

Here is a viewers' guide of what to watch for in the

presidential contest between Democrat Barack Obama and Republican

John McCain and the battle for control of the Congress.

Times indicate the latest polling closing in the state (some

states have multiple closing times). But in the past, in some

states, officials have responded to complaints of irregularities by

ordering the polls to be held open past the closing time.

The number of its electoral votes follows the name of each

state. It takes at least 270 electoral votes to win the presidency.

7:00 PM (6 states - 58 electoral votes)

Georgia (15), Indiana (11), Kentucky (8), South Carolina (8),

Vermont (3), Virginia 13).

If Obama carries Virginia and Indiana, two staunchly Republican

states in presidential voting, it is probably going to be a good

night for the Democratic nominee. But if McCain wins or is very

close in Virginia, where Obama has had a solid lead, it could be

evidence that polls showing Obama with a similar lead are off base

and Election 2008 is going to be much closer than many pundits say.

Also, Virginia will likely be the first Senate seat pickup for the

Democrats in their bid for a 60-seat filibuster-proof majority.

Former Gov. Mark Warner is the overwhelming favorite in the

Commonwealth. But also watch Georgia and Kentucky. A loss of the

Senate seat held in Georgia by Saxby Chambliss would be a hard blow

to the GOP. But an even more devastating GOP loss would be the

Senate seat in Kentucky held by Mitch McConnell, the Republican

leader in the Senate, who is in an unexpectedly tough re-election

contest.

7:30 PM (3 states -- 40 electoral votes)

North Carolina (15), Ohio (20), West Virginia (5).

The prize here is Ohio, ground zero in the last presidential

election and a must win for McCain to stop an Obama landslide. But

if Obama wins the Buckeye state, then takes North Carolina, which

rarely votes Democratic in presidential elections, that landslide

could be in the making, possibly even burying the Tar Heel state's

Republican incumbent senator, Elizabeth Dole, as well.

8:00 PM (15 states and DC -- 171 electoral votes)

Alabama (9), Connecticut (7), Delaware (3), District of Columbia

(3), Florida (27), Illinois (21), Maine (4), Maryland (10),

Massachusetts (12), Mississippi (6), Missouri (11), New Hampshire

(4), New Jersey (15), Oklahoma (7), Pennsylvania (21), Tennessee

(11).

The largest chunk of electoral votes will be awarded this hour,

with the two biggest prizes being Florida and Pennsylvania, two of

the most important states in this year's presidential campaign. But

viewers should pay close attention to Missouri as well. The Show Me

state has voted for the winner in every presidential election since

1904, with the exception of 1956. Also, the New Hampshire Senate

race could be another signal of a big Democratic night if former

Gov. Jeanne Shaheen unseats Republican incumbent John Sununu.

8:30 PM (1 state --6 electoral votes)

Arkansas (6).

9:00 PM (15 states -- 159 electoral votes)

Arizona (10), Colorado (9), Kansas (6), Louisiana (9), Michigan

(17), Minnesota (10), Nebraska (5), New Mexico (5), New York (31),

North Dakota (3), Rhode Island (4), South Dakota (3), Texas (34),

Wisconsin (10), Wyoming (3).

The Obama and McCain camps will be watching the swing states of

Colorado and New Mexico this hour. These are key states in the

Obama strategy. But both camps will also be watching the returns

from McCain's home state of Arizona. The polls have been tightening

there in recent days. Several Senate races are worth checking out,

too. In New Mexico and Colorado, Democrats are trying to pick up

seats vacated by Republican incumbents. And in Minnesota, former

"Saturday Night Live" comedian Al Franken, the Democrat, is

trying to unseat Republican incumbent Norm Coleman.

10:00 PM (4 states -- 20 electoral votes)

Iowa (7), Montana (3), Nevada (5), Utah (5).

The drama this hour will be in the swing states of Iowa and

Nevada. But Montana, a Republican state that has been trending

Democratic in state elections, could be a surprise Obama victory

and a measure of the party's success in targeting the West.

11:00 PM (5 states -- 81 electoral votes)

California (55), Hawaii (4), Idaho (4), Oregon (7), Washington

(11).

A big hour for Obama, no matter how you slice it. But check out

the Senate returns in Oregon. Republican incumbent Gordon Smith has

been hammered by State House Speaker Jeff Merkley for his ties to

the Bush administration, but Smith has countered with ads touting

his work in the Senate with Obama.

1:00 AM (1 state -- 3 electoral votes)

Alaska (3).

Gov. Sarah Palin, McCain's running mate, will almost certainly

deliver her home state to the GOP. Alaska rarely votes otherwise.

But the only reason to stay up for this late show is to see if

six-term Republican Sen. Ted Stevens rises from the political dead.

Stevens was convicted just weeks ago on seven felony counts of

political corruption. He trails Democrat Mark Begich, but not by

much.

Scott Shepard's e-mail address is sshepardcoxnews.com

Vehicle sales in the United States tumbled in October

compared with a year ago, in a month filled with turmoil for the

auto industry, as tightened credit markets and an economic slowdown

kept consumers away from dealerships.

The Ford Motor Co. on Monday said its sales fell 30.2 percent

from October a year ago amid "an economic gauntlet, the likes of

which haven't been seen in more than two decades." Overall sales

at Toyota declined 23 percent.

The pain was spread among all types of vehicles. At Ford, sales

of trucks, sport utility vehicles and crossovers down 28 percent,

while car sales declined 27 percent. At Toyota, light truck sales

fell 34 percent and autos fell 15 percent.

Another carmaker, Volkswagen, reported that its sales declined

7.9 percent.

Other automakers are scheduled to release sales results later

Monday. Analysts estimated that total industry sales fell more than

30 percent compared with October a year ago, to a seasonally

adjusted annual rate of about 11 million vehicles.

"The all-time low level of consumer confidence in October was

reflected in particularly poor showroom traffic," Brian A.

Johnson, an analyst with Barclays Capital, wrote in a report to

clients.

General Motors and Chrysler, which are involved in merger

discussions as they rapidly deplete their cash reserves, were

expected to fare worst in October. New restrictions by the two

company's respective lending arms, the General Motors Acceptance

Corporation and Chrysler Financial, have significantly hindered

sales. GMAC now offers financing only to consumers with credit

scores of at least 700, which excludes 42 percent of Americans, and

Chrysler Financial no longer offers leases.

Automakers have had difficulty attracting customers for much of

the year, but September and October were particularly challenging

amid the chaos in the financial markets. Fewer than a million

vehicles were sold in September, the first time that happened since

February 1993.

Sales have continued to fall even as gasoline prices fall

sharply, to less than $2 a gallon in some states. Sales of

profitable trucks and sport utility vehicles have rebounded to

become about 14 percent of the market in October, up from 8.6

percent in May when gasoline was selling for about $4 a gallon.

But small cars remain popular, as consumers look for vehicles

that not only are more efficient but cost less up front.

"Gas prices is not the be-all, end-all explanation that

predicts what people are going to buy," Ford's chief sales

analyst, George Pipas, said. "Some people who really need or

really want a truck are back into the market now because they were

just sitting on the sidelines."

Over all, Pipas described October as "similar to what we've

seen after a natural disaster," with consumers putting off major

purchases until the economy settles down.

Commerzbank on Monday became the first commercial lender

in Germany to accept government cash, while several other European

banks reported poor earnings, an indication of the continuing

weakness in the sector.

Commerzbank, based in Frankfurt, said it would avail itself of

8.2 billion euros, or $10.5 billion, from Germany's financial

markets stabilization fund to strengthen its capital base.

In Paris, the French bank Societe Generale said its

third-quarter profit slid 84 percent from a year earlier, to 183

million euros, as revenue fell 5 percent, to 5.1 billion euros. The

bank's profit was well below market expectations, but investors

said there had been relief that there were no major surprises.

Societe Generale is still trying to restore confidence after it

announced a $7.2 billion loss in January that it pinned on a junior

futures trader, Jerome Kerviel. It wrote off 1.4 billion euros in

the latest quarter.

"This shows that banks are not only suffering from market

dislocation, but also from the economic downturn," Mamoun Tazi, a

banking analyst at MF Global in London, said.

Markets worldwide were buffeted in the third quarter, when the

investment bank, Lehman Brothers, collapsed and the insurance

giant, American International Group, received a bailout. Interbank

lending largely ground to a halt in the quarter.

After factoring out the turmoil, Tazi said, the effect of the

slowing global economy is evident in terms of declining asset

quality. "This is going to continue for a number of quarters," he

said.

The Commerzbank chief executive, Martin Blessing, said the

government's aid would be in the form of "silent participation" --

meaning there would be little dilution to shareholders' interest.

The state's infusion of cash will raise the bank's core capital

ratio, a crucial measure of financial strength, to 11.2 percent,

Commerzbank said. The bank will pay no dividend in 2009 or 2010,

and will limit Blessing's pay to 500,000 euros ($632000) a year.

Commerzbank said in August that it would pay 9.8 billion euros

to buy Dresdner Bank from the insurance company, Allianz. The

government cash will allow that deal to go ahead without requiring

Commerzbank to raise more capital from private investors.

The German government agreed to guarantee 15 billion euros of

new Commerzbank debt as part of the bailout. Blessing said the bank

had no immediate need for the guarantee, but that it offered

"additional and attractive refinancing options, in case markets

should deteriorate again."

Commerzbank also posted a third-quarter net loss of 285 million

euros, compared with year-earlier profit of 339 million euros, and

wrote down 952 million euros in investments.

Last week, Hypo Real Estate, a mortgage lender, said it would

seek 500 billion euros from the government and BayernLB, a regional

state-owned lender, said it would seek 5.4 billion euros. Deutsche

Bank, the biggest German lender, reiterated Sunday that it had no

plans to seek government funds.

In Edinburgh, HBOS, the British mortgage lender that is selling

itself to Lloyds TSB with government help, said Monday that its

losses grew sharply in the first nine months. It said it had booked

impairment charges of 1.7 billion pounds, or $2.8 billion, for

soured loans in its corporate division, and had lost Ãº1.8 billion

on its treasury portfolio. It said further losses of 150 million

pounds were likely in relation to losses on Icelandic bank

investments.

Lloyds TSB is planning to buy HBOS in a deal worth more than 6

billion pounds. A deal is contingent on the banks raising 17

billion pounds through a government-backed share offering that

would leave the British Treasury the biggest investor. The banks

said the deal remained on track.

For its part, Lloyds said Monday that it expected to write off

300 million pound in corporate loans in the second half, and that

it would likely book another 120 million pounds charge related to

declining real estate prices.

Shares of Commerzbank rose 1.6 percent in Frankfurt afternoon

trading, while Societe Generale rose 0.2 percent in Paris. In

London, shares of HBOS rose 3.2 percent, and Lloyds TSB fell 2.2

percent.

South Korea announced a $10.9 billion stimulus

package on Monday, and Australia was widely expected to cut

interest rates on Tuesday, the latest in a string of steps by

governments seeking to prop up growth and cushion the impact of the

financial crisis.

South Korea, which has been hit hard by reduced demand from the

United States and Europe, and where the financial crisis has left

banks struggling to pay billions of dollars in short-term loans,

has announced a series of emergency measures in recent weeks.

The latest, announced by President Lee Myung-bak on Monday,

included an additional 11 trillion won in government spending and 3

trillion in tax cuts. These are aimed mainly at the real estate and

construction industries.

"Now is the time that a financial markets crisis is being

transferred to the real sector and we need to get down to start to

manage the situation," the finance minister, Kang Man-soo, said,

according to Bloomberg News. The package is intended to bolster

growth next year by an additional percentage point to around 4

percent, and was announced as fresh data showed export growth had

slowed to its lowest level in 13 months in October.

Economists said the export figures were also likely to prompt

the South Korean central bank to reduce interest rates at its

policy meeting on Friday. This would be the second cut in two

weeks, after last week's surprise cut of three-quarters of a

percentage point.

Weak economic data in Australia were also expected prompt that

country's central bank to reduce its key rate by another half a

percentage point to 5.5 percent on Tuesday. The cut would be the

third since Sept. 3, and bring the total in rate cuts to 1.75

percentage points.

The moves have been intended to prop up the Australian economy,

which is highly dependent on raw materials production and has

suffered from falling prices for iron ore and copper in recent

months. Data out on Monday showed retail sales fell 1.1 percent in

September, much more than had been expected, while house prices

fell 1.8 percent during the third quarter.

China, which last week joined a flurry of interest rate cuts in

the United States and elsewhere, over the weekend announced it was

loosening limits on bank lending. Signs in China also indicate that

growth is slowing.

A wave of violence, including an assassination attempt

against a deputy oil minister, swept through Baghdad and

neighboring Diyala province on Monday as Parliament passed a bill

that would grant the country's embattled minorities fewer

guaranteed seats in upcoming elections.

The prospects for the enactment of the bill, which must still be

approved by Iraq's executive council, are unclear. In the most

lethal attack of the day, six people were killed and 20 wounded

when two roadside bombs exploded in quick succession in front of

the headquarters of the Ministry of Interior's criminal

investigations unit in Baghdad's central Karada district, according

to a source at the ministry who spoke anonymously because he was

not authorized to speak to the media.

The deadliest of the bombs was planted in front of the

protective concrete wall ringing the government building. The other

was about 70 yards away. Two badly burned bodies were stretched on

the street shortly after the explosions.

"I cannot believe what happened," said a bewildered policeman

at the scene, who said he had worked for the directorate for 35

years. "Who can plant a bomb in this fortified area in the

presence of police patrols?"

The assassination attempt on the deputy oil minister came about

30 minutes before the Karada blasts. The official, Saheb Salman

Qutub, was wounded along with his driver when a bomb planted in his

car exploded, according to a ministry spokesman, Asem Jihad.

The attack happened as Qutub was getting into the car at his

home in the northern Baghdad neighborhood of Ataifiya to go to

work, said Jihad.

The attack happened on a day a Japanese delegation visited the

ministry to discuss investments in Iraq's lucrative oil and gas

sectors.

In other violence Monday, a huge car bomb exploded in a parking

lot next to the headquarters of the local government in Baquba in

Diyala province, killing at least three and wounding 13, eight of

them policemen, according to security and provincial officials.

The blast destroyed 22 vehicles and badly damaged several

government buildings located nearby.

Ibrahim Bajlan, who heads the Diyala provincial council, said

that the attack was proof that the situation in the province

remained "fragile" and that the government's lauded recent

security operation in Diyala had "only accomplished a fraction of

its goals."

The attacks in Baghdad and Baquba came one day after American

and Iraqi military officials said that overall levels of violence

across the country were at their lowest since May 2004.

In a move that could stoke further tensions between Iraq's

fractious ethnic and sectarian groups, Parliament voted Monday in

favor of a bill that would guarantee minorities significantly fewer

seats on provincial councils than had been recommended by the U.N.

Assistance Mission for Iraq.

The bill would give Christians a single seat on councils in

Baghdad, Basra and Nineveh instead of the three seats proposed by

the U.N. mission in each of Baghdad and Nineveh.

The Yazidis, a Kurdish-speaking minority who, like Christians,

have been reeling from attacks and displacement since the start of

the war in 2003, were given one seat in Nineveh instead of the

three proposed.

The new bill is supposed to be a compromise following the

controversy that erupted in late September when Parliament had

passed a new provincial election law but deleted an article that

had provided 13 seats in six provinces for Iraqi Christians,

Yazidis and other minorities. The new bill grants a total of six

seats. The U.N. mission had proposed a total of 12.

Younadim Kanna, one of two Christians in Parliament, called

Monday's vote "a great insult."

"There is no desire to respect minorities as the indigenous

people of this country," said Kanna. "This quota is simply a face

saving mechanism by the ruling parties."

No matter what happens with the possible sale or breakup of

Chrysler, there is no doubt that the company's marvelous minivans

will live on.

That's because whoever buys Chrysler, if indeed it is sold, will

want to keep the company's highly profitable minivan business.

Chrysler invented the modern minivan with its 1983 introduction

of the Dodge Caravan and Plymouth Voyager, and ever since, the

company has dominated this segment in much the same way the Ford

F-150 has dominated the full-size pickup class.

The Chrysler minivans, now called the Dodge Grand Caravan and

Chrysler Town

&amp;amp; Country, have been taken to an even higher level that

competitors will find hard to match.

In fact, General Motors and Ford have given up on the minivan

segment for lack of a product that can come close to the current

models in the Chrysler LLC minivan lineup.

Sales of minivans have cooled somewhat since the arrival of SUVs

and now crossover utility vehicles, but the segment is still

strong, accounting for nearly a million units sold annually.

The only minivan competition Dodge and Chrysler face now is from

the import-brand models, the Honda Odyssey, Toyota Sienna, Nissan

Quest, Hyundai Entourage and Kia Sedona.

GM says its new family of large crossovers, which includes the

Chevrolet Traverse, GMC Acadia, Saturn Outlook and Buick Enclave,

are intended to compete against the minivan segment, but they lack

the sliding passenger doors that most minivan consumers love.

While they are still minivans, the revised exterior styling of

the Chrysler and Dodge models gives them more of a crossover look,

while retaining the sliding passenger doors on each side that allow

for quick and convenient access to the second and third rows. Power

doors are available on both sides and can be operated from the key

fob or using switches up front or on the door pillars on each side.

For 2009, the Chrysler and Dodge minivans come in five different

models, with three different seating and storage systems and great

new entertainment options, including live satellite TV.

The Chrysler Town &amp;amp; Country models are the base LX, midlevel

Touring and top-of-the-line Limited, with prices ranging from

$25,730 to $36,530 (plus $770 freight and options). The

short-wheelbase models previously known as the Dodge Caravan and

Chrysler Voyager have been dropped; all of the new vans are of the

extended length.

Dodge versions come in base SE and uplevel SXT models, with base

prices of $23,530 and $27,825, respectively.

For this report, we tested the 2009 Grand Caravan SE, which

comes with the base 3.3-liter V-6 engine and a four-speed automatic

transmission.

Standard on the SE model are the latest in Chrysler's

stow-and-go seats, which can be folded completely into the floor to

create a flat cargo surface from the back of the front seats all

the way to the tailgate.

But our tester came with the new Swivel 'n' Go seats, a $495

option. With this feature, the middle-row seats swivel to face the

third row, and there is a stowable table that can be set up between

the seats so the people in the back can play games or eat their

snacks on it.

Another great option is the new Sirius live satellite TV system,

which delivers favorite children's shows from the Disney Channel,

Nickelodeon and the Cartoon Network. It was not included on our

test vehicle, but I have seen it on other models.

Three powertrain options are available, beginning with the SE's

3.3-liter V-6, rated at 175 horsepower and 205 foot-pounds of

torque. This engine can operate on E85 fuel, which is 85 percent

ethanol and 15 percent gasoline. It comes only with the four-speed

automatic.

Standard on the SXT is a 3.8-liter V-6, which offers 197

horsepower and 230 foot-pounds of torque. It comes with a new

six-speed automatic transmission.

Optional is a 4.0-liter V-6, which puts out 251 horsepower and

259 foot-pounds of torque. It's also connected to a six-speed

automatic.

Oddly, the biggest engine has the best EPA rating -- 17 miles per

gallon city/25 highway, while our SE model with the base engine was

rated at 17 city/24 highway. The midlevel 3.8-liter engine is rated

at 16 city/23 highway.

Chrysler made some improvements to the 4.0-liter engine for 2009

that boosted its fuel economy from last year's 16 city/23 highway.

Chrysler should offer the six-speed automatic as at least an

option on the SE, as it would boost highway fuel economy to above

that of the SXT with the 4.0-liter engine.

The biggest advantage of the small V-6 is the price rather than

the mileage.

Although it gets just 1 mpg less on the highway, the 3.3-liter

comes in a vehicle whose overall price is several thousand dollars

less than the SXT with the optional 4.0-liter V-6. To add that

engine to the SXT costs $630.

I'm no speed demon, though, and I found the 3.3-liter engine to

be adequate for my needs, although I didn't have the opportunity to

load the Grand Caravan SE full of people and cargo during my

weeklong test. With a full load, one of the larger engines would

offer better acceleration and more hill-climbing power.

The ride and handling of the SE model are more carlike than you

would expect for a boxy people-hauler such as this, a credit to the

engineering changes that went into the new model. It's a smooth and

comfortable ride, but the handling is surprisingly crisp.

The van also is very quiet inside, the better to listen to the

kids' quarreling or the great optional audio system.

Models with the swivel middle-row seats also feature an optional

integrated child booster seat. Also available is a one-touch

power-folding third-row bench seat ($595).

Among standard safety features are roof-mounted side-curtain air

bags for all three rows, along with electronic stability control

and anti-lock brakes.

Included on our tester was the "Popular Equipment Group"

($1,495), which added power sliding doors and liftgate. Also on our

vehicle was the "Climate Group" ($995), which brought three-zone

manual air conditioning. We also had the upgraded MyGIG audio

system ($725) with a 30-gigabyte hard drive and the rear back-up

camera.

Total sticker price of our test vehicle was $28,235, including

freight and options.

The package: Extended-length, front-drive, six-cylinder, seven-

to eight-passenger minivan.

Highlights: Completely redesigned for 2008, these are the best

minivans yet -- from any automaker -- and include lots of innovative

new features.

Negatives: Less expensive short-wheelbase Voyager model has been

discontinued, as has the four-cylinder engine, which offered the

best fuel economy.

Engines: 3.3-liter V-6, 3.8-liter V-6, 4.0-liter

V-6.Transmission: Four-speed automatic (base model), six-speed

automatic (uplevel models).

Power/torque: 175 HP/205 foot-pounds; 197 HP/230 foot-pounds;

251 HP/259 foot-pounds.

Length: 202.5 inches.

Curb weight: 4,431-4,499 pounds.

Cargo capacity: 32.7 cubic feet (3rd seat in place).EPA fuel

economy: 17 city/24 highway (3.3 engine); 16/23 (3.8 engine); 17/25

(4.0 engine).

Major competitors: Honda Odyssey, Toyota Sienna, Nissan Quest,

Hyundai Entourage, Kia Sedona.

Base price range: $23,530-$27,825 (plus $770 freight).

Price as tested: $28,235 with freight and options (SE model).

On the Road rating: 9.2 (of a possible 10).

Prices shown are manufacturer's suggested list; actual selling

price may vary.

A CLOSE FRIEND of President Bush's is trying to build a golf

course in

northwestern Connecticut. Many residents in the towns of Norfolk

and North

Canaan oppose the 780-acre project, lamenting its effect on the

forests,

meadows, and trout streams in their corner of the Litchfield Hills.

And

while a federal agency has concluded that the project would not

harm the

habitat of a turtle on the government's list of threatened species,

opponents suspect - not without reason - that the decision was

rushed

through while Bush is still in office.

The developer, Roland Betts, knows Bush from his college days

and was a

co-owner with Bush of the Texas Rangers baseball team. His plan

would draw

150,000 gallons a day of groundwater from the highland site.

Wildlife

biologists are worried that this loss of water, the use of

pesticides on

the golf course, and the movement of 480,000 cubic yards of soil to

create

the 18 holes could make Betts's land and surrounding acreage less

hospitable to bog turtles. In 1998, a Connecticut state biologist

found a

female bog turtle on land near, but not on, Betts's property.

In July, a consultant hired by Betts filed a report with the US

Fish and

Wildlife Service, stating he could find no bog turtles on Betts's

land and

that the land was at a higher elevation than the turtles usually

inhabit.

Even though Fish and Wildlife officials knew that consultants for

project

opponents were on the verge of filing their own report, the

officials

immediately notified the US Army Corps of Engineers that the golf

course

presented no problems with regard to threatened or endangered

species.

As a result, neither Fish and Wildlife nor the corps weighed the

report of

the opponents' consultants, which found - not surprisingly - that

wetlands

near Betts's land are suitable sites for the turtle, especially as

global

warming makes higher elevations more to their liking.

This is not the first time that consultants on opposite sides of

an issue

have come up with conflicting findings. But Fish and Wildlife,

which

denies there was pressure for a quick decision, should have

considered both

before reaching its conclusion. The Endangered Species Act requires

the

agency to use the best scientific data available in making

decisions.

To abide by the law and end any suspicion that Betts is getting

special

treatment from his buddy in the Oval Office, Fish and Wildlife

should

withdraw its finding until appointees in the next administration

have a

chance to review the evidence - all the evidence. The State of

Connecticut,

for its part, should freeze consideration of the project until the

turtle

question gets a more thorough airing.

THE NUMBER of homeless families has surged to a record high in

Massachusetts. Some 2,500 families are homeless, up from about

1,500 two

years ago. And more than 600 homeless families are staying in

motels,

caring for children in rooms, often far from school, with little

more than

beds, a TV, and maybe a hotplate. Given the faltering economy, even

more

families could end up in shelters.

This renewed dependence on putting homeless families in

temporary quarters

represents a step backward for Massachusetts. Especially under the

Patrick

administration, the state had sought to end homelessness by 2013 by

moving

people out of shelters and toward the stability of economic

self-sufficiency and permanent housing.

While the number of households falling into economic jeopardy

will test the

state's ability to handle each case in a comprehensive way, this

far-reaching approach remains the best way to make sure families

stay off

the streets in the long term.

Shelter alone may not be enough to keep the homeless off the

streets. What

they may really need is help paying back rent, finding a new job,

or

getting treatment for an addiction. And families who are already in

shelters need help moving out more quickly.

Fortunately, Massachusetts is still working on transforming its

homelessness efforts to provide the "right resources to the right

people

at the right time," as the Massachusetts Commission to End

Homelessness

called for earlier this year. Armed with $10 million in state

funds, the

state's Interagency Council on Housing and Homelessness plans to

start a

sweeping experiment: Instead of automatic placement in shelters,

homeless

families will be able to get a personalized response to their

problems.

This might be a short shelter stay, but it might also be rent money

or a

referral for mental health counseling. Some of the interagency

council's

money will also fund job training.

State officials are looking for private funding to boost this

effort, and

they will track the outcomes and figure out how to expand the

programs that

work best.

"If we weren't doing this now, it would be worse," Robert

Pulster, the

interagency council's executive director, says of the state's

homelessness

problem.

For now, Massachusetts has to keep its shelters open, to cope

with current

housing emergencies. But over the next few years, some of the money

that

the state now spends on shelters should be shifted to programs that

help

people develop the skills to support themselves in permanent

housing. The

state's overburdened shelter system is a relic that has to give way

to more

modern and effective solutions.

In his new position as head of the U.S.

Central Command, Gen. David H. Petraeus met top Pakistani officials

for the first time Monday and heard one message wherever he turned:

American air strikes against militants in the tribal areas are

unhelpful.

Petraeus, the former commander of American forces in Iraq,

arrived in Pakistan as missile strikes from drone aircraft against

the Taliban and al-Qaida in Pakistan's tribal areas have escalated.

There were two separate missile attacks by American drones on

Saturday. In retaliation, a suicide bomber killed eight Pakistani

paramilitary soldiers in South Waziristan Sunday.

After the meeting with Petraeus, President Asif Ali Zardari of

Pakistan said in a statement, "Continuing drone attacks on our

territory, which result in loss of precious lives and property, are

counterproductive and difficult to explain by a democratically

elected government. It is creating a credibility gap."

There was no comment or public appearances by Petraeus, and it

was not clear how he responded to the complaints. Messages left

with his press aides were not immediately returned.

Petraeus, who has been consulting in recent weeks with a wide

range of people on the efforts by the Pakistani military to quell

the insurgency in the tribal areas and on the deteriorating

situation in Afghanistan, on Friday took over Central Command ,

putting him in overall charge of the American-led military

operations in both Iraq and Afghanistan.

The general's visit came as the Pentagon and the White House are

completing reviews on policies towards Afghanistan, and as Sen.

Barack Obama, the Democratic presidential nominee, has made clear

that Pakistan and Afghanistan would be more of a foreign policy

focus if he were to win the election. In an interview on CNN

broadcast this past weekend, Obama said he believed it was

necessary to convince Pakistan that the main threat to its security

came from the militants, and not India, its historical enemy.

During his round of calls with the Pakistani government Monday,

Petraeus met with the commander of the Pakistani military, Gen.

Ashfaq Parvez Kayani, and the defense minister, Ahmad Mukhtar.

The American missile attacks in the tribal areas were generating

"anti-American sentiments" and creating "outrage and uproar

among the people," Mukhtar said in a statement.

A senior Pakistani military official said the army wanted to

"bring home the point that the missile strikes are

counter-productive, and that this is driving a wedge between the

government and the tribal people."

Pakistani officials have consistently complained about the air

strikes that have been aimed at Arab fighters and Pakistani

militants connected to al-Qaida.

But the statements against the air strikes have been couched in

less dramatic language than Kayani's declaration after an American

ground raid in September in which he said Pakistan would defend its

borders at "all costs." There have been no known ground raids in

the tribal areas since.

On a more positive note, the senior Pakistani military official,

who declined to be identified by name because of the sensitivity of

the subject, said that the United States had started to "listening

to us" and had moved towards sealing the border between

Afghanistan and Pakistan in the area of Bajaur in the tribal area.

The Pakistani army is fighting Taliban militants in Bajaur, and

has criticized the United States for what it says is the failure of

American troops in Afghanistan to stop Afghan militants crossing

into Bajaur and joining the battle.

The Americans had moved some of their forces to the east of the

Kunar river last week and this had helped curb the flow of

militants into Bajaur, the Pakistani military official said. "It

is bearing positive results," he said.

In an effort to show Petraeus the hard terrain that the

Pakistani forces face against the insurgents in the tribal areas,

the military planned to fly him over some of the terrain Tuesday,

the military official said.

That way, the general would get an idea of the long porous

border between Afghanistan and Pakistan. "We will let him see

where the roads end and where the mountains start," the official

said.

"It will be a glimpse of the Tora Bora from the other side,"

he said, referring to the area in Afghanistan near the Pakistani

border from where Osama bin Laden is believed to have escaped from

American troops in late 2001.

During a visit Tuesday to Peshawar, the capital of the

North-West Frontier province, Petreaus planned to meet with Maj.

Gen. Tariq Khan, the new leader of the Frontier Corps, the

paramilitary force that is fighting in Bajaur.

After a long delay, several dozen American and British trainers

began instructing Pakistani officers last month, who in turn will

train the Frontier Corps in an effort to turn the paramilitary

force into a more effective group of indigenous counterinsurgency

fighters.

The Pakistani military officials planned to ask Petraeus for

help in increasing the army's "operational capabilities," meaning

equipment. But the army was reluctant to accept training. "Why

should they get into our areas?" the senior military official

asked.

Why adults foist Albert Lamorisse's "The Red Balloon" (1956)

on children

seems obvious enough. Its human protagonist, Pascal, is a wee

Parisian

grade-schooler, and its non-human protagonist is a levitating bag

of air.

Whimsy guides all 34 minutes of the film. But like the best works

that

orbit around children, "The Red Balloon" is also about the world

- good,

bad, and ugly. Pascal finds the balloon tethered to a white rope

tied to a

lamppost. They forge a fast friendship whose mutual devotion

delights some

(there's a lovely montage of people sharing their umbrellas with

Balloon)

and annoys others (did that woman just swat it while boarding a

streetcar?). Balloon is more than alive. It's old and ineffably

human.

"The Red Balloon" is on the same disc with Lamorisse's "White

Mane"

(they were released separately last spring). The latter film is

about a

wild stallion that refuses to be lassoed. Arrestingly photographed

in black

and white ("The Red Balloon" is in Technicolor), "White Mane"

is "The

Red Balloon" with an older boy and unadulterated anger, all of

which comes

from that eponymous horse.

The ruling response to both movies, whether you're 31 or 13, is

awe. But

while both have happy endings of a sort - "The Red Balloon" made

me cry;

"White Mane" stressed me out - they're complicated: Lamorisse is

showing

us flights from man's cruelty and covetousness. If neither makes

sense when

you're 9, come back to them in about 10 years.

Extras: Theatrical trailers for each film (Criterion, $19.95)

A Better Angel, By Chris Adrian. Strange and unforgettable

stories from the

author of "The Children's Hospital," (Farrar, Straus &amp;amp; Giroux,

$23).

The King's Gold, By Arturo P?rez-Reverte. The fourth novel in

the

consistently fine Captain Alatriste series involves a secret cargo

of

ingots (Putnam, $24.95).

The Girl With the Dragon Tattoo, By Stieg Larsson. A bestseller

abroad,

this debut crime novel features two indelible sleuths and admirable

pacing

(Knopf, $24.95).

A Most Wanted Man, By John le Carr?. A satisfyingly bleak novel

of

intrigue set in Hamburg (Scribner, $28).

The Hemingses, of Monticello, By Annette Gordon-Reed. A family

history

concentrating on Thomas Jefferson and the children he had with

Sally

Hemings, his slave (Norton, $35).

Selected from books recently reviewed in the Globe.

Poetry and motion

Dan Chiasson, poetry critic for The New Yorker and The New York

Times Book

Review as well as a poet in his own right, has added a new title:

poetry

co-editor at The Paris Review. On the masthead of the fall issue,

he

replaces former US poet laureate Charles Simic.

Earlier this year, Chiasson was awarded a Guggenheim fellowship,

which

allowed him to focus on his own poetry. He has published two

collections

and has a third coming out next year. He has also written a book

about the

role of autobiography in poetry.

The roots of Chiasson's identity as a critic and poet lie in his

education. When he attended Amherst College, a great deal of

importance was

placed on literary criticism. Later, when he was working on his

doctorate

in English at Harvard, he decided to try his hand at poetry. He

audited

Frank Bidart's workshop at Wellesley College. Now Chiasson teaches

there,

too.

Grapes redux

Bunch of Grapes Bookstore, badly damaged by a fire in July, has

a new

owner and a new, albeit temporary, home on Martha's Vineyard. Late

last

month Dawn Braasch, a store employee who coordinates author events,

bought

it from Jon Nelson, who moved to Texas.

The bookstore on Main Street in Vineyard Haven - two blocks from

Braasch's

home - is expected to be rebuilt by spring. Braasch promises that a

temporary Bunch of Grapes store will open in town before

Thanksgiving.

Braasch has a background in business, having launched a catering

company

and managed a trucking firm. To get up to speed on her new venture,

she

attended a school for bookstore owners and dived into Paco

Underhill's

"Why We Buy: The Science of Shopping."

Salute to an icon

The unconventional war correspondent Martha Gellhorn, born in

St. Louis

in 1908, may have spent more time outside the United States than in

it.

Before she died, at 89, she had covered D-day, the liberation of

Dachau,

the Vietnam War, and the US invasion of Panama in a career that

spanned six

decades. She sought out soldiers and civilians, not generals, and

bluntly

expressed her opinions.

The fact that she was best known for her marriage to Ernest

Hemingway

irritated her to no end. (She divorced him.) "Why should I be a

footnote

to someone else's life?" she once snapped. Yet her marriage to

Hemingway

is the catalyst for an upcoming appraisal of her legacy. The John

F.

Kennedy Library, home to Hemingway's papers, is hosting a forum on

Gellhorn's groundbreaking career at 2 p.m. next Sunday. Gellhorn

biographer

Caroline Moorehead will be joined by Geraldine Brooks and Ward Just

- both,

like Gellhorn, war correspondents turned novelists - for a panel

discussion. Reservations are recommended.

Gellhorn's papers are archived at Boston University. Moorehead

edited a

selection of Gellhorn's letters, but the collection won't be opened

to

other researchers for another 15 years.

Coming out

"The World Is What It Is: The Authorized Biography of V.S.

Naipaul," by

Patrick French (Knopf)

"Divine Justice," by David Baldacci (Grand Central)

"The Writer as Migrant," by Ha Jin (University of Chicago)

Pick of the week

Rich Chasse of the Kennebunk Book Port, in Kennebunkport, Maine,

recommends

"Once Were Cops," by Ken Bruen (St. Martin's Minotaur): "If you

haven't

read any Bruen yet, this gritty noir tale of a wild Irish cop on

the loose

in the NYPD is a great introduction, with twists and turns

aplenty."

Jan Gardner can be reached at JanLGardner@yahoo.com.

Dianne Wilkerson has finally given up her campaign to retain her

Massachusetts state Senate seat. Whether or not the senator resigns

from

office after the election on Tuesday, she will soon be gone.

But the effects of Wilkerson's arrest on corruption charges will

linger.

Since the US attorney unsealed documents last Tuesday, neighborhood

activists and elected officials have been raking over their past

dealings

with the senator, reassessing them in the context of the bribery

allegations. A blizzard of suspicions has blanketed the state, some

of them

backed up by federal subpoenas.

Here are just a few of the many questions raised by last week's

events.

Will Wilkerson take anybody down with her?

A handful of city and state politicians have been drawn into the

morass

already. Senate President Therese Murray, Mayor Thomas Menino of

Boston,

and others have denied specific charges contained in the FBI

affidavit,

that they helped deliver the liquor license for which Wilkerson

allegedly

was paid handsomely. But so many subpoenas have rained down upon

the city

that it's clear there will be more casualties.

What is the real deal with Columbus Center?

Why did Wilkerson throw herself behind the controversial and

now-stalled

project with such passion? Why did she go to the mat again and

again to get

support and public subsidies for the $800 million hotel,

residential, and

retail complex over the Massachusetts Turnpike when many of her

constituents opposed the project? What was her relationship with

Columbus

Center developer Arthur Winn?

The feds are quite interested in answering these questions

themselves,

apparently. Winn got served last week.

And Columbus Center was just one of the many developments in

which

Wilkerson took an interest.

What about that big 22-story dormitory Northeastern University

is building

on the corner of Ruggles and Tremont streets? Why did Wilkerson

support

that project over many of her constituents' objections that it was

far too

big and that the school had not provided enough benefits to the

community

in return for the right to bring more than a thousand students into

the

neighborhood?

And why did the senator oppose other Northeastern plans to

expand farther

into her district a year later? Was she acting in the best

interests of her

constituents, or was she really working to help one of the many

developers

with whom she had close relationships?

The same question could be asked of her stances on other

projects in her

district - the biolab proposed by Boston University, for example,

which she

backs and other elected officials in her district vehemently

oppose.

Maybe her dealings on these and other development proposals -

and she had a

say in many of them - were on the up and up. Maybe she supported

these

projects for the jobs they'd bring into her district or for other

perfectly

good reasons.

But Wilkerson's alleged willingness to take bribes to subvert

the

legislative process in the interests of one developer in Roxbury

has cast

suspicion on her dealings with all of the others, too.

There are other mysteries.

What about that $6,000 in cash Wilkerson was carrying when she

was arrested

on Tuesday?

Was she really going to pay personal bills with it, as her

lawyer

claimed? What kind of bills does one pay with six grand in cash

anyway?

While we're at it, what did the senator buy with the $23,500 in

bribes she

allegedly collected during the 18-month FBI sting? Was it all

squandered on

trips to Foxwoods like the one described in the affidavit?

Lastly, is the Boston Licensing Board really the easily

influenced,

backroom deal-making body Wilkerson allegedly describes in a

conversation

recorded by the FBI?

What qualifications do you need to be paid between $85,000 and

$100,000 for

a part-time job dispensing the coveted right to sell booze, beer,

and wine?

Do you have to be politically connected, or does anybody have a

shot?

If it's the latter, where do I apply?

Yvonne Abraham is Globe columnist. Her e-mail address is

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NANTUCKET, Mass. - The day tourists have vanished, the summer

millionaires

have retreated, and parking spaces sit vacant for hours on the

uncrowded

cobblestone streets.

But something new this off-season is staying on the island,

where a sign

in the town clerk's office reads, "Thank you for not discussing

the

outside world."

That something is fear, planted among lifelong islanders by two

horrific

rapes in which an intruder, still at large, walked into unlocked

homes in

the dead of night. In the first crime, in July, the rapist bound

his victim

and assaulted her for several terrifying hours. The second rape

occurred

Oct. 5.

The rapes are the most prominent crimes in a surge of violence

that has

startled year-round residents on this small island. In the first

nine

months of this year, the number of sexual assaults reported was

nearly

double the number reported in all of 2007. Aggravated assaults

surged to

23, nearly four times the six recorded in 2007, and 100 simple

assaults

were on pace to outnumber the 107 tallied throughout last year.

Now, in a place where unlocked doors were the norm, residents

are flocking

to hardware stores for locks and deadbolts to protect themselves.

"It was almost a badge of courage in the old days that you

didn't lock

your doors," said Charles Tennant, hardware manager at Marine Home

Center.

"All of a sudden, we're getting 40 to 50 calls a week."

At Valero &amp;amp; Sons, employee Ellie Huyser said the locksmith there

has been

busy with about 20 jobs a week.

"It's good for business," said Huyser, a lifelong Nantucket

resident.

"But not for the other reasons."

The surge in crime has unnerved an island that has long

burnished an image

as a placid place apart, buffered from the pressures and influences

of the

mainland. Some blame the economy for the crime wave, or an increase

in

alcohol and drug problems. But also in the mix, many say, is a

massive

surge in population, largely because of workers who come for summer

jobs

but end up staying without showing up on town rolls as permanent

residents.

Nantucket officials say that 10,880 residents are recorded in

Nantucket,

but that an estimated 20,000 people are living on the island,

straining

police and social services.

For police, the end of summer used to signal a respite from the

full-tilt

pace of watching over an island packed with tourists and seasonal

residents.

"Now, instead of slowing down, it's literally been 100 miles

per hour

constantly," said Police Chief William Pittman.

Town Clerk Catherine Stover, whose family dates back eight

generations on

Nantucket, began locking her door after the second rape. Peter

Swenson, who

directs a social service agency here, recently moved with his wife

and two

small children to what he believes is a safer location on the

island. And

Nikki, a waitress who begins work before dawn, said she has started

locking

her doors and windows.

"I used to be able to walk to work with a flashlight, but I

don't do that

anymore," Nikki said. "Now I take a cab for $17 each way.

Seriously. It's

too scary."

In other violence this year, two cyclists were beaten and robbed

at night

on a bike path. A 9-year-old special-needs child allegedly was

abducted

from a playground by a landscaper and sexually assaulted in his

truck and

home before being placed on a bus. And reports of domestic violence

have

increased across a broad range of income and ethnic groups, said

Kat

Robinson Grieder, executive director of A Safe Place, whose staff

works

with victims of such violence.

Swenson, executive director of Family and Children's Services of

Nantucket, sees alcohol as a continuing factor in many of the

island's

problems, particularly during tough economic times when the

construction

industry is suffering.

"The use of alcohol and other drugs has increased," Swenson

said. "Mix

that with stress and anxiety, and you tend to have violent

acting-out."

Swenson said his staff, many of whom are women, now always leave

the

office with somebody else at the end of the day.

Pittman, the police chief, said there have been fewer total

arrests this

year, but he acknowledged that there has been a surge in violent,

high-profile crime. Although the reason is hard to pinpoint,

Pittman agreed

that Nantucket had changed in the four years he has worked here.

"You go to a lot of neighborhoods today and people say, 'I

don't know who

lives beside me anymore,"' Pittman said.

Over and over, in interviews across the island, residents

described an

increasing sense of vulnerability and alienation, exacerbated by

the

population increase.

"There are just too many rats in the cage," Stover said of

Nantucket,

"and every one of us is a rat."

As they have for decades, laborers, landscapers, and workers in

the

construction trades have looked to Nantucket for quick money and

entertainment. But unlike in the past, Pittman and others said,

many of the

transients are putting down roots and staying through the winter. A

large

percentage of them are foreign nationals, from Salvadorans to

Bulgarians to

Irish to Jamaicans, whose presence sometimes has caused what

Pittman called

"cultural differences and misunderstandings."

Some of that tension results in imagined threats. Police once

were called

about a suspected drug deal, the chief said, when the reality was

an

innocent exchange of packaging between two friends. In another

incident, he

said, a suspected attempted assault was actually an unexpected

encounter

between a young cyclist and a surprised Hispanic laborer.

"You've got some guy sitting in the bike path, ... and suddenly

the cops

are swooping in on him," Pittman said.

Those extra residents, legal and otherwise, use the schools,

seek care at

the hospital, and put strains on other municipal services that

Nantucket

must subsidize.

"If people are here, they deserve services," Stover said.

"But we also

deserve, in return, to know who they are and receive state and

federal

funding for those services."

In the meantime, police are pressing their investigation of the

rapes,

which Pittman believes were committed by the same person. And as

his

officers work, the chief said, he understands why no amount of

reassurance

will allay the fears of some residents.

"We proceed as if that suspect is still among us," Pittman

said.

On Nov. 19 at the Los Angeles auto show, Nissan will roll out

the 2009 370Z sports car, a completely redesigned, higher-power

version of the iconic Z car that has been in the automaker's lineup

off and on for nearly 40 years.

It replaces the 350Z, with the new numerical designation

referring to the bigger engine -- a 3.7-liter V-6 that replaces the

current 3.5-liter.

For those who want to take a virtual spin in the new Z car,

about eight weeks before it goes on sale, a new video game from

Electronic Arts will go on sale Nov. 18 featuring the 370Z as its

star.

Called "Need for Speed: Undercover," the new game was

developed by Black Box of Vancouver, Canada, in conjunction with

Nissan's designers.

It will be offered in all of the key video game formats. Those

include Xbox 360, PlayStation 3, Wii, PlayStation 2, Nintendo DS,

PlayStation Portable handheld and PC.

This is the first time an automaker has made the world

introduction of one of its new models in a video game, Nissan said.

"For the past 15 years, 'Need for Speed' has helped define

contemporary automotive culture by bridging the gap between gamers

and the world's hottest cars," Keith Munro, vice president for

marketing at Electronic Arts, said in an announcement.

"As such, we are very excited to partner with one of the

automotive powerhouses today to exclusively reveal the all-new

Nissan Z," he said. "'Need for Speed' is about style, fast-paced

action and power; this is definitely a car made for 'Need for

Speed' fans."

It's also the first time a new vehicle can be driven in a game

before it's available at dealerships, he said.

"Our relationship with EA has been instrumental in bringing the

Nissan brand to a passionate and unique audience," said Christian

Meunier, Nissan's marketing vice president. "By launching the

all-new 2009 Nissan Z first through 'Need for Speed: Undercover,'

we also gain the spirit and energy that EA gamers experience so

strongly. Together with EA, we have truly integrated the all-new

370Z in the overall game experience in a meaningful, multilayered

and profound way."

EA's designers worked with Nissan to "accurately replicate the

overall look, feel and performance" of the new Z, the automaker

said, adding that, "From the game's opening moment, players will

be thrust right into the action with gamers whipping the 370Z in

and out of traffic at high speed."

Not even the automotive media have been given a chance to drive

the new Z yet. But a few of us were treated to a close-up look at

the car in July in a secure future-product vault in the basement of

Nissan's new $100 million headquarters building near Nashville,

Tenn. That sneak preview came during grand opening ceremonies for

the building, which the automaker began occupying in early July.

The car will come with a 3.7-liter version of the award-winning

VQ engine series, replacing the 3.5-liter VQ engine used in the

2008 model. The current

350Z was introduced for 2003 as the fifth generation of the Z,

bringing the vehicle back to the Nissan lineup after a nearly

seven-year absence. The previous generation, the 300ZX, was

discontinued in 1996.

The 2009 370Z has been changed enough to qualify it as the sixth

generation, and the new engine should be a big hit with Z

enthusiasts. A version of that engine was introduced last year to

power the new Infiniti G37 coupe, and has been added to the G35

sedan for 2009, forcing it to be renamed the G37.

No horsepower rating has been released yet for the engine in the

370Z -- but in the 2009 G37 coupe, it's rated at 330 horsepower; in

the G37 sedan, it has 328 horsepower.

A seven-speed automatic transmission is offered as an option on

the '09 G37 and presumably would be available in the 370Z as well.

The 2008 Infiniti G models have a six-speed automatic, which is

carried over to the new G models as the base transmission.

In the 2008 model of the 350Z, the 3.5-liter engine is rated at

306 horsepower. The only transmissions offered are a six-speed

manual and five-speed automatic.

No other details of the new Z have been given yet, but one

exterior photo has been released, as well as some shots of the car

from the video game.

The 2009 370Z Coupe will begin reaching dealerships early next

year, the automaker said.

What language does your bank speak?

Foreign banks could soon control nearly a third of all

Massachusetts bank

deposits, one of the highest ratios of any state. And that could

lead to

big changes.

Overseas executives have hinted at major developments for their

US

operations including Citizens Bank and Sovereign Bancorp, after a

series of

emergency deals cut during the credit crisis last month. The lack

of

details has some local leaders jittery the changes could reduce

local

lending, contributions, or employment at Citizens and Sovereign,

the second

and third largest banks in Massachusetts.

"We're on pins and needles," said Paul Grogan, chief executive

of The

Boston Foundation, the nonprofit that counts banks among big

contributors

to its $630 million endowment for charitable giving.

First, as part of an arrangement to get needed cash from the

British

government, on Oct. 13 Citizens Bank parent Royal Bank of Scotland

replaced

its chief executive and started reviewing assets it might put on

the block.

"There are no sacred cows," new chief executive Stephen Hester

said on a

conference call that day when asked if the bank might sell American

assets.

Second, Banco Santander of Madrid has promised cost savings when

it takes

over Sovereign after a flight of depositors and a free-fall in its

share

price.

Both banks and their parent companies have declined requests to

interview

executives about their strategies. On its earnings call with

analysts last

week, Santander barely mentioned its pending purchase of Sovereign.

But analysts and business figures see changes coming. In the

case of

Citizens Bank in particular, Grogan and others wonder whether

Hester will

allow local executives the same independence as his predecessor,

Sir Fred

Goodwin, an architect of Royal Bank's US strategy.

Terrence Murray, the former chief executive of FleetBoston

Financial Corp.,

said in an interview he expects Citizens will wind up being sold as

a way

for Royal Bank to pay back the government's cash infusion.

"They'll want to contract and de-leverage and get some of their

money

back," Murray said. Executives at both Citizens and Royal Bank

declined

comment on a potential sale.

Meanwhile, Sovereign's deal with Santander can only improve its

fortunes,

Murray said. "Sovereign was flat on its back, and with Santander

it's a

lot stronger."

Between them, Citizens' and Sovereign's total deposits of $35

billion

amount to 19 percent of total deposits in the state, according to

the

latest federal figures. The local financial industry had already

faced an

upheaval after Bank of America Corp., the state's biggest lender,

said on

Sept. 15 it would buy brokerage giant Merrill Lynch &amp;amp; Co. for $50

billion

and began to combine some wealth-management operations including

many in

Boston.

Also, the fourth-largest bank in the state, TD Bank, is owned by

Canada's

Toronto-Dominion Bank, with deposits of $7.5 billion. Florida data

firm SNL

Financial says that assuming the Sovereign deal is completed, 28

percent of

deposits in Massachusetts would be held by foreign institutions,

far above

the US average of 6 percent. Only four other states ranked higher,

including two that are Citizens Bank strongholds: Rhode Island,

where 55

percent of deposits were held by foreign-owned institutions, and

New

Hampshire, with 47 percent.

"We're now part of the great experiment that's going on in

terms of

globalization," said Robert L. Culver, chief executive of

MassDevelopment,

the quasi-public business financing agency.

Foreign ownership so far hasn't meant major differences in the

way the

banks conduct themselves locally to customers. After Royal Bank of

Scotland, whose total US deposits of $94.7 billion make it the

country's

eighth-largest bank, other big foreign lenders operating here

include

Britain's HSBC Holdings plc and France's BNP Paribas Group.

Culver said the test now is whether the new leaders will allow

Citizens and

Sovereign to continue to lend money both to individuals, in the

form of

mortgages or home equity and auto loans, and to commercial

businesses, both

staples of Citizens' and Sovereign's businesses to date.

So far so good, say some business representatives like Brian

Gilmore,

executive vice president of the trade group Associated Industries

of

Massachusetts. Both banks have told him they're looking to make new

loans,

he said, and so far companies say they're still able to borrow

money.

"I haven't heard anyone clamoring for lending compared to what

I heard 20

years ago when we were all sitting on our doorstep," he said.

The bigger changes may be for other banks, said New Hampshire

Bankers

Association president Jerry Little, such as if a foreign owner

moves to

replace computer systems with its own. That could give smaller

banks the

chance to peel away some of its customers. "There are always

customers who

get a little frustrated" during bank mergers even because of

simple

changes like having to get new checks or dealing with new

executives, he

said. "The challenge to these institutions is to pull off these

mergers so

they don't lose any of their current book of business."

Citizens Bank is run by Citizens Financial Group of Providence.

In a

statement to the Globe on Oct. 13, Hester included Citizens among

assets he

called "very attractive."

Hester is becoming Royal Bank chief executive as part of a deal

by Royal

Bank to accept an infusion from the British government as part of a

$64

billion package spread among three banks. The cash comes with many

more

strings than similar infusions to American banks from Washington,

such as

requirements the bank continue lending at 2007 levels. A Citizens

spokeswoman said those limits don't apply to the domestic bank. In

London,

a British treasury spokesman said commercial decisions such as

whether to

sell assets would be made by Royal Bank itself.

Meanwhile, Santander has said little about its intentions for

Sovereign, in

which it had already purchased a 25 percent stake three years ago.

On Oct.

13, it disclosed plans to buy the remaining 75 percent for $1.9

billion in

stock, ending a period of uncertainty for Sovereign after it saw

steep

customer outflows and replaced its chief executive suddenly in

September.

Santander has since told Sovereign employees it will keep

incoming chief

executive, Paul Perrault, and called Sovereign "an attractive

entry

point" into the Northeastern US market. It has also made

references to

cost-cutting and efficiencies, which could lead to job cuts.

At the least the Sovereign deal seems to have reassured

depositors who in

the third quarter had pulled $4.2 billion out of the institution,

nearly 9

percent of its deposits. Sovereign said its deposits have

stabilized and

stressed a similar theme in newspaper advertisements it began

running last

week about new owner Santander.

One reads: "You can have confidence in Sovereign because one of

the

world's largest banks does, too."

Ross Kerber can be reached at kerber@globe.com.

Recently I walked through the Prudential Center shopping arcade

toward

Boylston Street and passed Brentano's Bookstore, and the branch

office of

my bank, the Provident Institution for Savings. No wait, I thought,

this is

2008 - they're long gone.

Down on the sidewalk, I looked across the street and saw The

Bulkie

restaurant, Cramer Electronics, Paul's Mall, and Jazz Workshop, and

just to

the right, the Brodney Gallery, specializing in antique jewelry.

You don't

see them? Right, I know - they're gone too.

On and on down Boylston: Guild Drug at one corner of Exeter

Street, and

BU's College of Basic Studies on the diagonal corner, between the

Hotel

Lenox and the library. Ken's Restaurant at Copley, Cokesbury

Bookstore,

Peck &amp;amp; Peck, the Book Clearing House, and Thayer McNeil Shoes.

And the people. I glance up Exeter Street to No. 88 and see in

memory my

terribly sick father sitting in a lawn chair on the stoop, waiting

for me

to come home from school. But no, that yellow brick house is a

Marriott

boutique hotel.

We hear the gloomy voices deplore the young's ignorance of

history, and we

think and worry about memory loss in ourselves and loved ones. But

another

curious phenomenon as we get older - which no one warns us about -

is the

tenacious web of memory for objects, incidents, and people that

increasingly surrounds us and won't leave us alone. Especially if

we've

lived in one place all our lives, everywhere we look we see things

as they

used to be.

Later, on the subway (not called the Red Line, just the

Ashmont-Harvard

Line), I board the greenish old train with windows you can open,

hold

overhead the white porcelain handle, and see in the dark tunnel the

reflected face of a pimply adolescent. I blink and the face is

deeply

furrowed with gray whiskers.

I go to a night game at Fenway Park and see the cloud of

cigarette smoke

rising from the grandstand against the lights and the Three Monks

wine

billboard poking up beyond center field, and hear John Kiley

playing the

organ. I look at the $45 price on my ticket, turn to the younger

person

next to me and say, "You know, I remember when bleacher seats were

$1, the

grandstand was $2.50, and the expensive box seats were $5."

He looks at me with patient indifference and says, "Oh yeah?",

then turns

back to watch the next pitch.

It dawns on me with horror that I sound just like one of those

denizens of

a bygone age who fastens like the Ancient Mariner on a young

person, quite

sure that the memories rattling around in his brain must be as

interesting

to the listener as they are to him. He doesn't know what a bore he

is. The

listener thinks, "Right, Gramps, I know - things aren't the way

they used

to be."

Often we are interested in elders' memory of historic events

that we're

curious about for other reasons; the Depression, say, or World War

II - or

Ted Williams's last home run. I was fascinated that my mother

remembered

the World War I victory parade on Beacon Street, and the North End

molasses

flood of 1919, which killed 21 people, and that she always objected

when it

was treated as a joke. "It was not funny," she said, "it was a

horror.

The smell hung in the streets for years."

The young listener is right, of course: The next pitch is what

matters.

Most of the thicket of stuff clogging our brains is of no

importance to our

present and matters not a bit to someone else. It interests us

because

change in our lives is a proof of time. I might not feel much

different

from my past self, but if that orange MTA (sic) car I used to take

is now

on display, like Lenin's corpse, in Boylston Station, that means I

can't be

that far from a shunt myself.

None of this is to say that the stuffed scrapbook of the past is

ridiculous

to add and hang on to, as long as we don't yammer on about the

details.

They're just part of who we are. And they give a gift that can be

appreciated, such as when we look at an old movie of someone like

84-year-old Lauren Bacall, who looks every bit of her age. "What a

knockout she was," we think, and then, "That beauty is all still

there -

it must be, just under the luggage of the years."

David Mehegan can be reached at mehegan@globe.com.

Chevrolet's revived 2010 Camaro coupe, which goes on sale early

next year, will start at an affordable $22,995 (including $750

freight) for the base V-6 model, while the performance-oriented V-8

SS model will begin at $30,995, General Motors has announced.

Dealers already are taking orders for the cars, which are

generating a lot of excitement among baby boomers who grew up with

the Camaro, as well as younger aficionados who may have owned some

of the newer versions. The previous model went out of production in

2002.

GM showed the concept version of the new Camaro coupe at the

2006 Detroit auto show, and a concept of the convertible version,

which will arrive later, was on display at the recent San Antonio

International Auto &amp;amp; Truck Show, as well as at the Texas State Fair

auto show in Dallas.

No prices have been announced yet for the convertible.

"The wait is almost over," GM North America Vice President Ed

Peper said in an announcement of the pricing. "The return of the

Camaro gives sports car enthusiasts a reason to rejoice. It's a

21st-century sports car with a distinctly American legacy."

Auto sales are down this year, for sure, having been scared off

earlier by $4-a-gallon gasoline prices and now the credit crunch

and uncertainty about the national economy.

But with gasoline prices now down to levels we haven't seen in

about two years (and actually under $2 a gallon in some areas),

consumers are returning to dealer showrooms to buy the vehicles

they had been holding off purchasing.

That bodes well for the Camaro when it arrives in the first

quarter of 2009.

But fuel economy isn't expected to be an issue, anyway, as the

V-6 model is rated at up to 27 miles per gallon on the highway.

GM says more than 600,000 potential buyers already have

requested information on the vehicle -- just since production plans

were announced this past summer. Those consumers, most of whom

checked out the Camaro on a special GM Web site

(www.chevrolet.com/camaro), are the ones the automaker believes

will be the first to order the car.

At the Web site, consumers will find all of the available

information about the 2010 Camaro, along with ordering

instructions. Pricing, options packages and specifications are

included on the site.

GM says production will begin in mid-February at the plant in

Oshawa, Ontario, Canada; and the cars will begin arriving at

dealerships by early March.

Also coming at the same time will be a group of accessories that

can be purchased at dealerships to customize the cars, including

"21-inch wheels and tires; ground effects and stripe kits; and a

classic-styled Hurst shifter," GM said.

All of those accessories can be ordered and installed before

delivery, and in some cases even can be "rolled into the monthly

payments," the company said.

Already, the new Camaro is starring in a TV show -- a new NBC

drama called "My Own Worst Enemy," with Christian Slater as a man

with two personalities, suburban dad and covert spy. Earlier, the

Camaro also appeared in a movie -- 2007's "Transformers."

Three trim levels will be offered, the V-6 LS and LT models, and

the V-8 Super Sport or SS version, intended for the diehard

enthusiasts.

Two V-8 engines are offered. The LS3 engine from the 2008

Corvette, with 422 horsepower and 408 foot-pounds of torque, will

be available only with a six-speed manual gearbox.

Those who want the six-speed automatic transmission will get the

L99 engine, rated at 400 horsepower and 395 foot-pounds of torque.

The L99 engine will feature active fuel management, which cuts

out four of the cylinders during normal highway cruising to help

conserve fuel. That will give the car an EPA highway rating of 23

mpg.

No city mileage ratings have been announced yet for either the

V-6 or the V-8 models, and no estimates at all have been given for

the manual-gearbox V-8 model.

While the V-8 versions obviously offer the most excitement, the

V-6 is not your average Sunday go-to-church car, either. It's rated

at 300 horsepower and 273 foot-pounds of torque. That's the same

horsepower as the V-8 version of the 2009 Ford Mustang.

It was the success of the newest generation of the Mustang, for

2005, that led GM to revive the Camaro, which was the GM answer to

the original Mustang in the mid-'60s. For its part, Dodge has

introduced a new version of its late '60s Challenger muscle car

this year, also a response to the retro-styled new Mustang.

While the current Mustang and Challenger borrow heavily from

their 1960s predecessors, the Camaro does not. It's a modern

interpretation of the muscle car with a few basic styling cues from

the 1969 model.

This new Camaro also has some styling cues from the current

Corvette, as well as from some high-performance aircraft, the

company said. That gives the new Camaro the feel of a 'Vette with a

back seat. The car seats up to four people.

Features include a four-wheel independent suspension, four-wheel

disc brakes (with four-piston Brembo calipers on the SS models),

Bluetooth phone connectivity, GM's electronic stability control,

OnStar and XM satellite radio.

GM will offer 18-, 19- and 20-inch wheels; and a premium Boston

Acoustics audio system will be available, along with ultrasonic

rear parking assist and remote vehicle starting. Cloth upholstery

will be standard, but heated leather seats will be available.

THE REAL WORLD A photo is being sent to NYTNS Photo Service subscribers. Non-subscribers can make individual purchases by calling 212-556-4204 or 888-603-1036. Kymaunii Godfrey, Breanna Blocker, and Chanel Cowan-Cummings

talk

spiritedly about the types of books they like to read.

Cowan-Cummings, a

freshman at Melrose, Mass. High School, says she finds most of the

literature she peruses for class "boring." Blocker is suspicious

of books

created specifically for young adults.

"The books for young kids, they be, like, hiding stuff," says

Blocker,

15, of Roxbury.

So the three teenagers have turned to the very adult genre of

urban

fiction. One of Godfrey's favorites is "The Coldest Winter Ever,"

by

activist and hip-hop star Sister Souljah, which tells the story of

the

privileged daughter of a Brooklyn drug dealer. Blocker has read "A

Gangsta's Girl" and "A Hood Chick's Story," tales of girls who

get

caught up in street life.

Urban fiction - also known as street lit or street fiction - is

a style of

literature that depicts drugs, violence, and sexual promiscuity in

black

and Latino neighborhoods. Some of the books detail the extravagant

lifestyles of drug dealers. Others describe the bloody violence

associated

with the drug trade. The sex scenes in some of the novels are

extremely

explicit, and sex is often used as a form of power rather than an

expression of love.

The genre is not new: Authors such as Donald Goines and Iceberg

Slim began

writing about the world of pimps, gangsters, and drug dealers in

the 1970s.

But recently a younger generation of writers such as Teri Woods,

Carl

Weber, and Nikki Turner have begun delving into urban fiction. Some

started

as self-published authors who sold their books from the trunks of

their

cars. The books quickly won great acclaim among readers, allowing

the new

authors to establish independent book companies and ultimately sign

deals

with major publishers. In the past few years, the genre has

exploded in

popularity. According to Nielsen BookScan, only 4,000 urban fiction

novels

were sold in 2005, representing 0.2 percent of adult fiction book

sales. In

2007, urban fiction accounted for 4 percent of the adult fiction

market,

with 82,000 copies sold.

From the genre's rebirth, it has experienced scrutiny and

controversy. The

books initially were criticized for their racy sexual content as

well as

their spelling and grammatical errors. As more teenagers fall under

the

spell of street-lit novels, some adults worry about how the content

is

influencing teenagers. But teens and some adults insist that the

content

of the books doesn't change mind-sets.

As a result of the controversy, major publishing houses have

released

young-adult series such as Kimani TRU, Bluford, and Hotlanta for

teens

yearning for books with an inner-city vibe. These new series have

avoided

criticism because the violence or drug use tends to be mentioned in

passing

rather than described explicitly.

The tension between adults and teens mirrors the dialogues in

mainstream

pop culture about the appropriateness of R.L. Stine's young-adult

horror

stories or the sexual promiscuity in the book and television series

"Gossip Girl," says Amy Pattee, an assistant professor in the

Graduate

School of Library and Information Sciences at Simmons College. In

the past,

debates have developed around whether young people should read

Jackie

Collins or Stephen King.

"For a long time, librarians have struggled with the issue of

kids reading

grown-up books," Pattee says. "There are certain adult books that

we

consider to be more adult than others."

Pattee says she doesn't have a problem with teens reading urban

fiction. In

fact, she wrote a positive review of "Ride Wit' Me," a street-lit

novel

for young adults, for the School Library Journal. Pattee says she

appreciates the social commentary in books such as Nikki Turner's

"A

Project Chick." "A lot of these books point out the ways in which

the

larger world is failing people who have incredible internal

resources,"

Pattee says.

Denene Millner and Mitzi Miller launched the "Hotlanta" urban

series for

teens. The first book, released in April, tells the story of two

rich teens

whose estranged father is released from prison.

"I've been pretty passionate about speaking out about how much

our teenage

girls love to read, but how inappropriate the material is that's at

their

fingertips," Millner says.

Millner's 14-year-old niece had read the "Gossip Girl" and

"A-List"

series but yearned for books with characters with whom she could

identify.

Millner's niece soon turned to street fiction. "She's been reading

Teri

Woods, Zane," Millner says. (Zane writes best-selling erotic

novels.)

"I'm not saying there's anything wrong with Zane, but it's not

right for a

14-year-old child to read that work."

Felicia Cowan, the mother of Chanel Cowan-Cummings, agrees with

Millner to

an extent. Cowan won't let her daughter read Zane's sexually

explicit

novels, which Cowan personally peruses. By being a hands-on parent,

Cowan

says she limits the detrimental effects of the books she does allow

Chanel

to read, such as Eric Jerome Dickey's romantic novel "Milk in My

Coffee."

Cowan is open about the harsh realities of life. She's answered

Chanel's

question about why some men cheat - infidelity is a perennial theme

in

urban fiction - but Cowan also makes sure that she knows where her

daughter

is at all times.

"I try to keep it on the level that I don't hide everything

from her,"

says Cowan, 43, who lives in Roxbury. "I let her know what's real.

I try

to keep it on an even keel. If it's too grown-up for her, 'No, you

can't

read that.' Even if she understands what's going on, 'No, you can't

read

that yet."'

Kymaunii Godfrey, Breanna Blocker, and Chanel Cowan-Cummings say

the

content of urban fiction books doesn't affect them. "It's not

taking away

my innocence," says Cowan-Cummings, 14. "It's making me more

knowledgeable about what's going on."

Blocker describes an encounter she and Cowan-Cummings had that

day.

Blocker was wearing a yellow bandana around her neck, and some

people

asked her if she was a member of the Latin Kings, a gang known for

wearing

yellow bandanas. For Blocker, the incident showed how relevant the

content

of urban fiction is for teens living in certain neighborhoods.

"The same

things that are happening in the books," she says, "is happening

in

Boston today: the gang violence, the guns, the drugs."

Ricketta Pryce, 17, visited Frugal Book Store in the Washington

Park Mall

in Roxbury recently to buy "A Gangster's Girl" and "Me and My

Boyfriend." Both deal with young girls who fall in love with drug

dealers.

The bookstore owner, Leonard Egerton, doesn't think teens should

read those

books. "I have some integrity," he says. "I don't think it's

appropriate

to sell adult literature to an underage person."

But Egerton says he also realizes that there's no law preventing

teenagers

from buying urban fiction and that he can't turn his personal

stance into

store policy - even though some parents have berated him for

selling the

books to their teens without their permission.

Pryce ultimately took home the books she wanted. "People want

to read

it," Pryce says, "so you have to give it to them." "A

Gangster's Girl"

was so good, she says, that she finished it in one sitting.

Cox News Service

TULUM, Mexico - The Mayan Riviera along the Yucatan Peninsula is

renowned for its spectacular beaches, stretching from the

increasingly Las Vegas-like Cancun to solitary stretches of white

and turquoise to the south.

But in the beach town of Tulum, about two hours south of Cancun,

a new kind of tourism is emerging: the jungle vacation. A growing

number of developers and hoteliers are beginning to market the

allure of the area's thick jungle, home to Mayan villagers,

mysterious underground pools and the occasional jaguar.

Pioneers of this movement into the jungle are Mari and Lou

Pintkowski, a Colorado couple who came to Tulum about five years

ago with the familiar dream of building a bed and breakfast. But

when the process of building a beachfront hotel turned into a

bureaucratic nightmare, the couple moved their operations into the

jungle town of Macario Gomez, about 12 miles from the beach.

"We had just fallen in love with the jungle," Mari Pintkowski

remembered. "It was so peaceful and we woke up every morning with

the singing of the birds."

Recently, my wife and I had a chance to stay at the Pintowski's

unique La Selva Mariposa - they call it an "Elegant Jungle Bed and

Breakfast" - and see for ourselves what the fuss was about.

The place is just a 20-minute drive from Tulum and another 20

minutes from the spectacular Coba ruins, where centuries-old Mayan

temples are enshrouded by creeping jungle.

As we drove down an unmarked dirt road to the tiny four-room bed

and breakfast, I quickly realized the Selva Mariposa was unlike

anything I've ever seen: The couple has fashioned exquisitely

landscaped pools in front of the rooms with cool, transparent water

from nearby underground sources. A hammock hung invitingly over our

pool, nestled into a riot of colorful vegetation.

Inside, our room was made of luxurious Tzlam and Cataloch wood

cut out of the surrounding jungle and cleverly illuminated Mayan

sculptures made of polished limestone.

The bathroom was also unique, with an open-air shower. In the

mornings we could look up and see the sun playing off the jungle

canopy (and got a few mosquito bites in the process). A

hollowed-out tree trunk holding a living fern sat in the corner of

the shower.

We were also reminded that despite our plush surroundings, we

were indeed in the jungle - the room came with a long pickup stick

to grab scorpions. Luckily we never had to use it, but we made sure

our feet were shod whenever we walked around the room.

Beyond the explosion of interesting plant life (think wildly

colored orchids and fire-orange palms), the best part of the jungle

are the sounds: at dawn and dusk the hotel was overrun by local

birds, their singing and warbling mingling with the occasional cry

from a howler monkey. And once the sun falls, the air fills with

the relaxing hum of thousands of insects.

But being in Tulum, we couldn't deprive ourselves of the water.

Cenotes (pronounced se-NO-tays) are underground pools of water that

were worshiped by the ancient Maya who saw them as portals to the

afterlife. The Yucatan is virtually river-less, and cenotes provide

drinking water as well as diversion, the result of rainwater

filtering through porous limestone.

One of the most breathtaking is the Grand Cenote, just a few

miles from the hotel on the modern highway to Tulum. In a huge

natural cavern, snorklers swam through crystal clear water and

under tunnels covered with hanging stalagmites. Far cooler and more

refreshing than the ocean, the cenote was filled with hundreds of

small fish that darted between our legs.

For lunch we headed into downtown Tulum, which has a decidedly

hippie and European vibe. Unlike the mega-resorts of Cancun, Tulum

is mostly visited by younger, backpacker types staying at one of

the many eco-hotels along the beach (most generate their own

electricity through solar and wind power).

Several larger resort-style places have moved to Tulum in recent

years, but are embroiled in a lengthy legal battle with the

government over environmental laws. Several have been temporarily

shut down because they were built too large or in sensitive areas.

There is a large Italian population in the Mayan Riviera, and as

an extra bonus, a high concentration of delicious, authentic

Italian restaurants. We ate at La Nave along Tulum's main boulevard

and feasted a calzone the size of a small television and an

impeccable seafood linguini stuffed with fresh shrimp, squid and

octopus.

It would be criminal to leave Tulum without visiting its

majestic Mayan ruins, built along a beach-side cliff. The ruins,

which once served as an important trading hub with what is now

Belize and Guatemala, are best visited early in the morning. Not

only is the heat less oppressive, but you'll avoid bus loads of

tourists. Even though we visited during the rainy off-season,

hordes of mostly European tourists overran the place.

There's a beach within the ruins where you can bodysurf among

ancient temples, but unfortunately it was closed because of high

surf when we were there.

As the crowds made their way back to their beach-side hotels, we

drove back into the jungle and considered two options: ride a zip

line through the jungle canopy or explore the ruins in Coba.

Hanging lazily in our hammock, suspended above the natural pool, we

decided that nothing beat doing nothing.

Where to Stay:

La Selva Mariposa (www.laselvamariposa.com) has four rooms, one

of which is a larger suite. Prices range from $125 per night for

the smaller rooms to $225 for the larger suite. No credit cards

accepted and you must mail a deposit.

Where to Eat:

La Nave, Avenida Tulum between Orion and Beta streets, offers

fresh baked Italian breads, authentic pastas and delicious seafood;

Restaurant at the Om Hotel in Tulum's beach-side hotel zone is a

great place to eat while overlooking the ocean. The ceviche is

exceptional.

What to do:

Swim and snorkel at Grand Cenote, about 2.5 miles from Tulum on

the Tulum to Coba highway (admission about $8); Check out the Tulum

ruins just north of town along the beach (admission about $4); The

Coba Ruins about 40 minutes from Tulum is a chance to see ruins in

a pristine jungle setting (admission about $4); You can zip line

through the jungle canopy with several outfits including

alltournative.com.

How to get there:

Roundtrip non-stop from Miami to Cancun $273 on Mexicana; from

Atlanta $580 non-stop on Aeromexico and $672 non-stop on Delta;

from Austin $310 non-stop on Viva Aerobus.

Tulum is about two hours south of Cancun and reachable by bus,

although renting a car is the easiest way to get around. Macario

Gomez, home to La Selva Marioposa, is located 12 miles west from

Tulum on the highway to Coba.

Jeremy Schwartz's e-mail address is jschwartzcoxnews.com.

THE WRITING ON THE WALL Photos are being sent to NYTNS Photo Service subscribers. Non-subscribers can make individual purchases by calling 212-556-4204 or 888-603-1036. NORTH ADAMS, Mass. - A few months ago, in a cavernous new

gallery space at

the Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art, Lacey Fekishazy took

out a

pencil and began to draw on a white wall.

Nobody bothered the Brooklyn artist. After all, she was doing

her job,

which was to create a Sol LeWitt wall drawing. The subtitle - "Ten

thousand lines about 10" (25cm) long, covering the wall evenly" -

pretty

much described the task. Each day, ruler in hand, Fekishazy added

to the

piece, 10 inches at a time.

"I HAVE DRAWN 5,000 LINES!!!!!!" she wrote on a sheet of scrap

paper

taped nearby after four days of work. When it was over, after day

eight,

Fekishazy spoke of the surprising pleasure she took from the

process, which

rendered the wall a mesmerizing sea of cross-hatched marks.

"I found it really meditative and calming," she said.

This month, the work of Fekishazy and 68 others brought in by

Mass MoCA

last summer will open to the public: a sprawling, unprecedented

retrospective of the late LeWitt's wall drawings. This 105-work

project,

created according to specifications set out by the Conceptual

master,

covers three floors, nearly 30,000 square feet, and four decades of

the

artist's work. Mass MoCA's Building 7, formerly an abandoned mill

building,

was renovated especially for the show at a cost of roughly

$5million. The

exhibition, created through an unorthodox collaboration with the

Yale

University Art Gallery, Williams College Museum of Art, and LeWitt

estate,

will remain up for at least 25 years, until 2033.

For LeWitt fans, the project serves as a vast embrace of the

artist's

legacy and a new destination for a wall-drawing pilgrimage. For

those less

familiar with LeWitt, the installation is an eye-opening

introduction,

showcasing the dry humor of some of his early pencil drawings, the

pulsating colors of his later paint and ink-wash creations, and the

deceivingly complex textures and almost trompe-l'oeil quality of

his final

graphite works.

"What becomes clear is that Sol was interested in making

beautiful

things," said Mass MoCA director Joseph C. Thompson during a

recent walk

through Building 7. "They're exquisite. You can feel human touch

right

through them."

A maze of creation

It is hard to stay in one place for long within the LeWitt

installation.

Each piece leads to another, every corner revealing the next

sprawling

creation. You are drawn in, as if visiting a multihued version of

an

English hedge maze. At different moments, you're surrounded by

geometric

shapes, swirls, and blinding colors.

Before he died last year, LeWitt designed the entire exhibit's

layout, with

new internal walls that stand in contrast to the aged brick

structure that

surrounds them. He didn't want stanchions keeping viewers away from

the

works - which, while making Mass MoCA's leaders a bit jittery,

creates an

intimacy and flow for the show.

Why Mass MoCA? For LeWitt, a Hartford native whose art has been

exhibited

at some of the most prestigious institutions around the world, from

New

York's Museum of Modern Art to London's Tate Modern, Mass MoCA

offered

something many other institutions could not: space. At 16 acres,

Mass MoCA

has the largest campus of any contemporary museum in the United

States,

with a series of buildings once occupied by the Sprague Electric

Co.

Jock Reynolds, director of the Yale University Art Gallery, was

key to

making the connection. In 1993, Reynolds, then director of the

Addison

Gallery of American Art at Phillips Academy, staged an important

exhibit of

LeWitt wall drawings. When the show ended the walls were

whitewashed, as

was typical for such a LeWitt exhibition.

"There was a certain sadness, but I never felt a sense of

desperation,"

said Reynolds by phone. "I was quietly confident that we'd have

more

chance to work together."

Around 2001, LeWitt began treatments for the cancer that, six

years later,

would kill him. Facing his mortality, the artist, whose sense of

artistic

adventure had always been matched by his playfully self-deprecatory

view of

his own work, began to get serious. How, he wondered, would he

maintain his

legacy? The impermanent nature of his wall drawings, something he'd

encouraged, appeared in conflict with the notion of an archive.

Reynolds made a suggestion: What about Mass MoCA? Thompson, a

friend of

Reynolds, loved the idea. He hosted LeWitt for a nearly six-hour

visit in

2003. Not long afterward, the artist sent along a proposal.

"We have space and time and access to interns and housing, and

we make art

here," said Thompson. "It was a good fit. Sol's response was that

a good

idea like this would be hard to screw up."

Follow directions

LeWitt began creating wall drawings in the late '60s. A response

to the

color-splashed Pop Art movement, the works were creations of

geometric

possibility, with more than a splash of humor. The directions for

installing the pieces were generally in the subtitles. For example,

1970's

"Wall Drawing 56" includes the following subtitle: "A square is

divided

horizontally and vertically into four equal parts, each with lines

in four

directions superimposed progressively."

LeWitt's idea was that anybody could create the work by

following

directions. In this sense, he helped pioneer the Conceptual notion

that the

idea of an artwork is the most important aspect of the piece, not

its

temporal manifestation. Works would then be executed the way an

orchestra

might perform a symphony. And each time, a piece would not

necessarily be

the same. Much depended on the technique, from how lightly or

darkly lines

might be drawn to an installer's preferences following directions.

By

giving his installers freedom, LeWitt turned what could have been a

paint-by-the-numbers exercise into something more collaborative.

"The key to keeping you interested is the room that Sol leaves

between the

instructions and the complete piece," said Tomas Ramberg, a LeWitt

installer for a decade who served as one of the leaders of the Mass

MoCA

project. "You get to sort of feel like you're the one doing it."

Ramberg described a typical working process with LeWitt. "We

would get a

plan from Sol and look at it and try to make sense of it," he

said. "Sol

would see it and refine his description of what he was after." For

the

late-period pencil sketches, other than the shapes LeWitt dictated,

"the

only thing he knew was he wanted scribble gradations from 0 to 6.

Zero

being white and six being completely closed up."

If LeWitt didn't like the result, he would offer more

instruction, Ramberg

recalled: "It needs to look more like corrugated steel," he might

say.

Creating the wall drawings can be mentally taxing. In the past,

Ramberg

says, he has watched as installers left at the end of a day and

never

returned. That didn't happen at Mass MoCA. That's partly because

this

summer, there was the camaraderie of the team. Over the summer, as

work

progressed, the installers - all of them artists in their own right

- taped

pages of humorous messages ("Attn:" Bugs, NO Dying on the Wall!!!

TAKE

YOUR DEATH ELSEWHERE") and R. Crumb-like cartoons on the brick

walls of

Building 7.

They shared rented apartments in town and blasted music in the

space as

they worked. Nick Kozak, a sculptor from the Hudson Valley, created

Wall

Drawing 38, a three-panel piece that required rolling up dozens of

1-inch-long slivers of colored paper to be inserted into pegboard

holes.

His secret weapon? Breaks.

"It's very relaxing in a way because you have an idea of what's

going on

and what's expected," he said. "But you always need to take a

step

back."

Or, as Fekishazy said, "On the most frustrating days, when it

gets hot and

the colored leads can get soft and break, you at least know that

it'll be

over someday."

Many of the workers left in August, and the rest were gone by

the end of

September. That left Mass MoCA to get ready for the Nov. 16 opening

and

surrounding events.

Composer Steve Reich, a longtime LeWitt friend, will be on hand

the night

before, playing at a small private party for project supporters and

LeWitt's widow, Carol.

In a phone interview from New York, Reich talked first of

LeWitt's

generosity toward others. The artist was famous for helping artists

and

musicians who needed support. Reich remembers LeWitt coming to

visit him in

1971, at a time when Reich needed to purchase three glockenspiels,

which he

couldn't afford.

"Sol said, 'I'd like to buy one of your scores,"' said Reich.

"I didn't

drop a beat, and said, 'What would you like?' Sol didn't need my

score. He

just decided he admired what I was doing and knew I could use the

help

financially."

Reich calls the Mass MoCA project a "fantastic undertaking."

"Sol is a great artist of the 20th and 21st century, and wall

drawings are

one of his major contributions," he said. "Sol deserves it."

Thompson, the museum's director, agrees. While touring the

space, he showed

off his favorites, including "Wall Drawing 880," a 70-foot-long

swirl of

intertwined bright green and orange.

"The edges buzz and vibrate," he said. "As you look at it,

your eyes

begin to flicker. You can feel Sol with his finger right in your

rib

cage."

Thompson said raising money for the LeWitt project, not only for

the

renovation but for an archivist who will work out of Yale and an

endowment

to operate Building 7, was easier than he expected. He considers

the

project a model for other long-term, single-artist installations

that Mass

MoCA might stage to augment the museum's regular slate of changing

exhibits.

Walking through the newly renovated space, Thompson pointed

through a

window, across a courtyard, to Building 6. Abandoned long ago, it

sits

empty.

"There's room right over there."

Geoff Edgers can be reached atgedgers@globe.com.

Tom Stoppard thought he might write a play about a rock star

living like a

hermit in suburbia. The inspirational recluse was Syd Barrett,

fallen

cofounder of Pink Floyd. The British playwright, a lover of music

and

chronicler of the intersection of personal and political identity,

became

fixated on two photos of Barrett: one a beautiful young romantic,

the other

a thickset bald man pedaling home from the supermarket.

"The knowledge that they are the same person, or that one

person turns

into the other person, is something which I find affecting,"

Stoppard

says. "As usual with me, the play turned out to be about a lot of

different thoughts I was having."

Specifically, it took him to his native Czechoslovakia during

the pivotal

years between 1968 and 1990. "Rock 'n' Roll," Stoppard's latest

theatrical brain tickler, is a heady collision: of politics,

poetry, the

nature of consciousness, cancer, family dynamics, human spirit, and

yes,

rock 'n' roll. Yet the play isn't without a throughline. Near the

end, a

Czech intellectual named Lenka sits at a table in Cambridge,

England, with

an aging communist, a Sappho scholar, and a music fanatic, among

others,

and offers this tidy summation of the preceding hours and decades:

"'Make

love, not war' was more important than 'Workers of the world

unite."'

It would be foolhardy to reduce "Rock 'n' Roll" to such a

simplistic

cultural legacy. But Lenka's line is a window on what makes this

play - and

Stoppard at 71 - tick. Set in Cambridge and Prague, "Rock 'n'

Roll"

ultimately asks: What lasts?

Music does, and watershed recordings by the Rolling Stones, the

Velvet

Underground, Pink Floyd, John Lennon, the Doors, and Bob Dylan

serenade

every scene change. But rock is more than a symbolic soundtrack to

the

revolutions of heart, mind, and state in "Rock 'n' Roll," which

opens

Friday at the Huntington Theatre. Barrett is a character in the

play,

albeit one seen only fleetingly: The young, beautiful incarnation

opens the

play with a pan flute, playing "Golden Hair" to a teenage flower

child

whose daughter, 22 years on, will become the bald Barrett's

self-appointed

guardian. (Drug-addled and mentally ill, Barrett was booted out of

Pink

Floyd in 1968; he died a month after "Rock 'n' Roll" opened in

2006.)

Even more integral to the plot is the Plastic People of the

Universe, a

Czech band that became a symbol of resistance under the communist

government during the 1970s. At the end of Act I, when the young

Czech

academic Jan finds his treasured record collection has been smashed

by the

authorities, he says to his friend: "It's only rock 'n' roll."

For Stoppard, there's a deeper sentiment, a creed for living,

really, that

courses beneath the feel-good surface of that cliche.

"Rock 'n' roll is a potent phrase for me," says the

playwright. "It's

much more than a description of a certain kind of music. It also

has

implications of a certain kind of lifestyle, of wishing to live

more freely

from the conventions of society. And when things go wrong it

implies an

attitude of philosophical stoicism."

That spirit is the connective thread in "Rock 'n' Roll," as

Stoppard

chronicles 22 turbulent years (bookended by the Prague Spring and

the

Velvet Revolution) in the life of Max, a brilliant Marxist

professor; his

music-obsessed protege Jan; Max's cancer-stricken wife, Eleanor, a

Greek

poetry teacher; and their daughter Esme.

Like Jan, whom the author concedes is something of an alter-ego,

Stoppard

was born in Prague, in 1939. His family fled to Singapore, then

India when

the Nazis invaded Czechoslovakia; his father, who remained behind,

was

killed during the invasion. Stoppard moved to England in 1946, when

his

mother married a British army officer.

"If I'd gone back to Czechoslovakia at the age of 8 I don't

know what kind

of life I would have had, but in one way Jan's could be considered

a

pseudo-autobiographical life I never had to live," Stoppard says.

For that reason, and others, "Rock 'n' Roll" is described by

many as the

playwright's most personal work to date - a shift away from more

abstract

politically themed works such as "Every Good Boy Deserves

Favour," about

a dissident imprisoned in a mental hospital; "Indian Ink," which

examines

British rule in India; and "The Coast of Utopia," a trilogy about

the

origins of modern political radicalism in 19th-century Russia.

"As he gets older I think he's thought a great deal more about

himself,

what it means to come from that background, how he feels about

England,"

says director Carey Perloff, widely considered to be Stoppard's

leading

American interpreter and the artistic director at San Francisco's

American

Conservatory Theater, with which the Huntington collaborated on

this

production. "Also about mortality and love, and what is constant

about the

human heart. The things you think are going to be important turn

out not to

be so important. Things that look permanent disappear, like the

Soviet

Union. And things that seem transient, like a moment between a

young girl

and a man, last."

And things that would by all logic be cast in stone - say, the

script for

a hit play - are not. Stoppard and Perloff tinkered with dialogue,

scene

structure, the placement of music - over the phone, no less. They

took a

scalpel to the ending.

"I have never heard of this," says Huntington artistic

director Peter

DuBois. "I have never heard of a writer revisiting a work after

their West

End and Broadway premieres. It's a testament to Tom's work ethic

and his

belief that a play is a constantly evolving thing."

Interestingly, Stoppard describes the changes as

"insignificant" and

Perloff calls the A.C.T./Huntington production "radically

different."

"The main thing was the dynamics of bringing it to a close

without things

spilling over and getting lumpy," says Stoppard. "We had a long

discussion about whether to change 'biscuit' to 'cookie'. And the

production has a new design, thank goodness."

"Who am I to tell Tom Stoppard to change his play?" Perloff

asks

rhetorically. But she reports that their relationship is built on

such a

fruitful history of collaboration and trust that the director felt

free to

make numerous (and well-received) suggestions, such as giving one

character's line to another, adding dialogue to clarify a veiled

exchange,

and making more pointed use of songs.

"Music is the currency of Jan and Esme's love. It's their

code," Perloff

says. "It couldn't just be casual. Sometimes Tom is very subtle

and buried

in those relationships and you really have to piece it together."

Stoppard's plays are famously cerebral, and while "Rock 'n'

Roll" is

perhaps the most sentimental of his works, it's packed with ideas

and

references that may well elude the casual theatergoer. In the lobby

at the

recent Philadelphia production, playgoers could purchase a 60-page

glossary

covering Czech history, Greek poetry, Stalinist vocabulary, and

Cartesian

Dualism. The New York Playbill included an insert explaining

playwright and

former Czech president Vaclav Havel's relationship with the Plastic

People

of the Universe, a primer on Marx and brain function, and a Syd

Barrett

bio.

"I don't think I could actually rationalize how all the bits

fit together,

and I'm not really very interested in doing that," Stoppard says.

"Theater is the event while it's happening. It's not really a

text, except

in a secondary way, and if you were interested in writing a text in

which

these different parts of the map were connected in some

interesting,

intelligent way, then the text would be an essay and not a play.

The thing

which really holds everything together is the personal narrative.

The play

can be described as a love story, principally, a love story in the

context

of all these other things."

That, notes Perloff, makes "Rock 'n' Roll" something

distinctly

un-Stoppardian: an everyman tale.

"Sometimes people are scared of Stoppard's work because they

think you

need a PhD to see it. Although there's a lot to learn, I think that

it's

emotionally resonant enough that if you don't know who ((the late

Czech

politician Alexander)) Dubcek is you can watch a young music-loving

intellectual struggle and a couple grapple with death and a

teenager grow

up in the shadow of her brilliant parents. Anyone can connect to

that,"

Perloff says. "Those are very human experiences."

Not unlike the experience - primal, galvanizing, and cathartic -

of

listening to a rock song.

Joan Anderman can be reached at anderman@globe.com.

Cox News Service

WEST PALM BEACH, Fla. -- Organized baseball folks just love to

quote Jacques Barzun, a certified intellectual, who said, "Whoever

wants to know the heart and mind of America had better learn

baseball, the rules and realities of the game."

He wrote that in 1954, when there were only 16 major-league

teams, the World Series was the only postseason event, and we had

not come to the time when nearly half of all Americans reflexively

hate or fear a new president. But it is still true today, adjusted

for differences.

On Tuesday, we end the longest presidential campaign to date.

Barack Obama has been talking about when "we started 22 months

ago" as if two years of repeating himself is something to be proud

of. The World Series ended last week in the worst possible weather

conditions because the baseball season also lasts too long for

Philadelphia. (OK, OK, a blizzard would have been worse. But you

can't physically start a game in a blizzard. You can, and they did,

start a game last week in sleet that left it possible to play but

made it impossible to play well.)

Why is the summer game played when the frost is on the pumpkin?

Why does it take our candidates longer to get from New Hampshire to

New Jersey than it takes other countries to nominate, campaign and

elect?

The answer is money and entertainment. Big-league baseball,

which never had enough competent pitchers for 16 teams when that's

all there were, expanded into any city willing to soak the

taxpayers to build a stadium and become "big-league." Then it

needed playoffs to keep interest alive longer, but that extended

the season and made Major League Baseball more like a youth sports

league where everyone gets a trophy.

Two more words: television contracts. With the premier games

deep in football season, baseball has to play at times convenient

to the network, not to the "realities of the game" as Barzun knew

them. But the money is good, and the show must go on, so the

reality changes.

Politicians are also part of a show. Trapped in a doctor's

office, one could hear a cable network go from John McCain live to

Joe Biden live. Neither said anything he hadn't said the day before

and the day before that. Crowds at Obama's and Sarah Palin's

rallies are sprinkled with people whose behavior labels them as

fans, if not groupies. We have seen that before, though.

When the campaigns began, McCain was for staying and surging in

Iraq, and Obama stood for "let's go home." That was to be the

issue. All these months later, the surge has worked militarily but

failed politically in Baghdad, and the Bush administration is

talking about coming home. Obama wanted to fight in Pakistan, and

McCain didn't want to talk about it in public. Now, the Bush

administration fights in Pakistan and talks about it.

While babies were being born, learning to walk and starting to

date, the campaigns droned on. Last week, both candidates spoke as

if it were still two years ago and the economy still manageable.

The reality of the economic game is that enormous changes are

happening. When the senators plotted economic strategy, no one

would have predicted that a Republican administration would

"invest" in banks and an insurance company and talk about

absorbing home mortgages and "investing" in failing auto

companies. It would not have been credible.

It remains so incredible to a time-warped McCain that he throws

the "socialism" spitball at his opponent even though the

country's main commissar is a former Goldman Sachs chief whom

President Bush picked to run the Treasury Department.

Reality is that the baseball championship was decided in a game

that started on Tuesday and ended on Thursday. The 2008 campaign

has been so similar to that saga that you need to study one to

figure out the other.

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Cox News Service

Q: We have a 1-year-old, 42-inch, 1080p Panasonic plasma TV that

has developed two horizontal "rolling lines" on the screen. Our

TV worked fine until recently, when our cable company came out to

do some work at our home, including the switching out of our HDTV

cable box. What can we do to fix this problem?

-- Doug Calvert

A: There's a strong chance there's nothing wrong with your

television. The cable installation almost certainly is to blame.

While it's impossible to know for sure without checking out the

television, you seem to be experiencing a well-known problem called

ground loop.

If you search Google with the terms "rolling lines tv" you'll

find plenty of others in the same boat. The problem is caused by an

improper ground for the cable system.

You'll find some homebrew grounding solutions on the Internet,

but I strongly recommend you not try to fix the problem yourself

unless you are a trained electrician.

Instead, call the cable folks and tell them you believe the

installation is not correctly grounded. If you're lucky, they'll

understand the ground loop problem. If not, your Google search

should give you enough background to explain the problem to a

technician.

Q: In one of your columns, you spoke of free MS Office downloads

and named a site where it can be found. As is usual, I misplaced

the article, so could you redirect me?

-- R. Shawn Bennett

A:\u2009It's not a free Microsoft Office download, it's a

program that performs the same functions - including the ability to

use files created by Office. You'll find the program at

http://www.openoffice.org/.

While the download is free, there is a charge of around $65 for

a full version. That's still a sizeable discount from the price of

Microsoft Office.

Q: I have a problem that is driving me nuts. These days, most of

my e-mails come with attachments. When I click to open an

attachment and I see .htm on it, I automatically know the text will

be there, but the pictures will be blocked. I just get big empty

boxes with a red X in the left corner. I have tried everything to

remedy this problem to no avail. I have been told it must be the

way I have my security set, but what should I do?

-- Diane Farina

A:\u2009It's a common problem. If you're using Microsoft Outlook

as your e-mail program, go to Tools, then Options then Security.

You'll see an item that offers to block images when sent in HTML

format used on the Web.

I'll bet there is a check mark by the entry that offers to block

HTML images. Remove it. The feature is designed to protect you

against malicious attachments and some sneaky programs that hide in

image form and let spammers determine if you actually received the

e-mail.

Other e-mail programs may use slightly different terms but

generally you'll find an entry like the one I just described in

either the Advanced Options or Security section.

HAVE A QUESTION?

Please send your questions to Bill Husted at tecbud AT

bellsouth.net. While he reads every e-mail, not all are answered.

E-mails are selected for publication based on the likelihood that

the answers will be of general interest.

With every election comes a changing of the guard, and so it

will be for

Fox News Channel. Brit Hume, 65, the television news veteran known

for his

growling voice and detached delivery, plans to step down from his

day-to-day duties as Washington, D.C., managing editor and host of

"Special Report With Brit Hume." (He'll remain on the air as a

senior

political analyst, and calculates - he's counted - that he'll work

1.3

workdays per week.)

We spoke to him by phone last week about the past and the

future.

Q. Your voice on Fox has been notable compared to other anchors.

I've

always thought you sounded detached - not in the fray, but above

it.

A. Well, I appreciate that thought. One of the people that I

used to look

at when he was in his heyday was Roger Mudd, and Roger always had

that

slightly amused, detached quality about him, and I always admired

that. I

can't say I copied it, but as I've gotten older it becomes more of

the way

I look at things. There's really nothing new under the sun.

Obviously it's

a new thing that we have an African-American so close to the

presidency,

but you get down to the things he's doing and talking about, the

ideology

... It's something I'm very familiar with.

Q. Yet in this election, the pitch of the rhetoric seems angrier

and more

extreme than ever. Do you attribute that to blogs? Talk radio?

24-hour

cable?

A. To some extent it's become more visible because of the

accelerated news

cycle and omnipresence of coverage. Plus you have things that have

happened

here in Washington that have contributed. When I was a reporter,

"Democratic Congress" seemed redundant. They'd had it over

decades. I was

there when the Republicans controlled the Senate for a few years

but the

House ... it never seemed close to change. And then it did, and I

think it

was very difficult for Democrats to stomach that. Newt Gingrich was

a very

polarizing figure. After that was the impeachment of Bill Clinton.

And then

there was the Florida recount. Then you have the war in Iraq. You

add all

those things together and you get this brew of ingredients that

gives us

this current atmosphere that is pretty polarized and pretty ugly.

It makes

news but it's disheartening.

Q. Doesn't the partisanship of the media outlets themselves

contribute? You

can now get your news filtered through a left- or right-wing lens.

A. You can do that if you want to. But I'm bound to say that the

difference

we have now is - I worked in the mainstream media for years as a

correspondent at ABC News, I was there for 23 years. Before that I

worked

for newspapers. There was never any doubt in my mind, after I woke

up to

it, that the media tilted left. There's a homogeneity of viewpoint

about a

whole range of issues. There's an unspoken consensus about abortion

and the

environment and tax policy and the use of military force. Now,

there are

some countervailing forces. There's a blend in the media and more

of a

balance.

Q. When you anchor on Fox, do you see yourself as providing a

sort of

antidote to left-wing bias?

A. Not quite. What I would say about Fox News is that we saw the

competitive opportunity that was afforded us. ... Strictly talking

about

news coverage now, there were two places we could look to run to

daylight.

One was stories that were legitimate, but they just were not being

emphasized or done at all. ACORN: That's a very good story, we had

a free

run with that for a couple of weeks before anyone got into it. And

then

there are stories that we develop in a different way than others do

it. It

is now a consensus in the media that the Swift Boat Veterans for

Truth were

a bunch of liars. What we found is that they were mistaken some of

the time

and they were right some of the time. I think those are

journalistically

valid approaches. Sherrod Brown, the Democratic senator from Ohio,

was

supposedly on the ((Senate)) floor, talking about how hard it is

going be

for Bill O'Reilly on election night when he has to report that

Barack Obama

won. But it's not going be Bill O'Reilly. It's going to be me.

Q. Still, are you conscious, when you anchor, of trying to

perpetuate a

balance?

A. I'm a conservative, but I was a reporter long before I was a

conservative, and I'm still a reporter first. And unless people

have ideas

that only liberals should be reporters, I would think they wouldn't

have

any problem with me. When I'm sitting in the anchor chair, I don't

state my

opinion, and I try very hard to be evenhanded.

Q. Can we recover from this partisanship once the election is

over?

A. I don't have any doubt there will be a honeymoon as there has

been in

the past. Now if the president comes stumbling out of the blocks

the way

poor Bill Clinton did, the honeymoon won't last very long. ((But))

Barack

Obama, he's a tremendously likable and appealing guy, and if he's

elected,

most Americans will say, 'Give him a chance.' That's the way

Americans are.

And I think it's a nice thing and a good thing. If he turns out to

be as

moderate in policy as he is in temperament, the honeymoon could

last a long

time.

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Cox News Service

ATLANTA -- I am more thrifty these days. I buy bulk coffee beans

instead of the Starbucks ground coffee I once used. I've cut back

on restaurant meals. And I wash and iron some clothes that once

were sent to the dry cleaners.

But on rare occasions I allow myself a luxury or two. While few

of us can afford a Rolls-Royce or private jet, almost anyone - even

a semi-retired newspaperman - can enjoy owning a top-of-the-line

gadget. There's a joy in luxury.

Maybe I'm fooling myself, but I think it can be practical, too.

These rare flings with luxury make it easier for me to cut corners

cheerfully and live an economical life. There's an even better

benefit: High-end products often last longer, perform better and

come from companies eager to stand behind their products. You won't

always save money over the long run, but in some cases the cost of

luxury may be less than it seems.

Today we'll look at items that fit my definition of sensible

high-tech luxury. While these aren't the most expensive gadgets

available in their class, they represent the kind of quality money

can buy.

I can easily recommend any item described here, but that's not

the point. Spend your luxury money on gadgets you crave, not the

ones that fit my life. But here are some examples to get you

thinking.

Loud and clear

I'll start with my Koss Cobalt wireless headphones. It would be

easy to find wireless headphones for less than the $200 price tag.

But the famed Koss sound quality is especially impressive when you

consider this set uses BlueTooth technology to deliver audio with

no wires.

No tinkering is required to get them going. The supplied audio

transmitter plugs into the earphone jack of your sound system, MP3

player, or television. Those with BlueTooth-equipped cellphones can

also use them.

But here's what money really can buy. After using my headset for

more than two years, it went on the fritz. I had never bothered to

send in the warranty information. I called Koss with low

expectations, especially given the state of customer service in

general.

What a surprise! No warranty information? No problem. A

2-year-old gadget? That's OK; there's a lifetime warranty. The

U.S.-based customer service representative volunteered to send a

new transmitter unit immediately along with a prepaid mailer to

send the old one back.

Pay more, get more

In these days of $50 inkjet printers, I own one that costs 10

times that amount. I did a quick Web search on prices for my Canon

i9900 wide-format inkjet and found they start in the mid-$400s and

extended to $600.

Here's what I got for the money: My printer is now about 4 years

old and is still working fine. One of my hobbies is studio

photography, and I've made 16-by-20 photographic prints that stack

up against what you'd get from a custom processor.

It'll do the routine chores, like cranking out letters and

printing envelopes, but unless high-quality giant photographic

prints are important to you, it may well be a luxury that most

could do without. But, for me, it's a true joy.

IPhone calling

It would be impossible to talk about luxury gadgets without

mentioning the iPhone. It is one of those rare products that

redefines technology. I don't own an iPhone but I'm anything but

typical. I seldom even know where my cellphone is. I prefer to

remain out of touch.

Still, I've been tempted to buy one just to own such a marvelous

gadget. When I've used the iPhone, I marvel at the user-friendly

screen and the built-in features, such as the way it uses GPS and

cell towers to pinpoint your location. Just as the first IBM PC

did, this product will force other manufacturers to change how they

think of cellphones.

Like I said, this isn't a shopping list but rather a rationale

for occasionally splurging on top-end technology. For those of us

cutting back on spending, a few small splurges make the cut-rate

coffee taste better and the time spent at the ironing board a

little more bearable.

Bill Husted writes for The Atlanta Journal-Constitution. E-mail:

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A PSYCHIATRIC PATIENT'S FLIGHT LEADS TO A NEW LIFE A photo is being sent to NYTNS Photo Service subscribers. Non-subscribers can make individual purchases by calling 212-556-4204 or 888-603-1036. Muddied and panting, Jonathan Delman pelted through the forest

"like a

banshee, like there was no tomorrow."

Behind him was McLean Hospital in Belmont, Mass., where the

staff wanted to

hold him against his will. Another stay in a mental hospital, he

felt,

would unravel the life he had begun to put back together. He

zigzagged

between brush and trees to leave no clear tracks.

This was the climax in a series of psychiatric implosions that

had landed

Delman in hospitals, driven away girlfriends, stymied his attempts

to find

work as a lawyer, and left him feeling lost and often suicidal.

What kept

him alive, he believes, was what powered that escape: "Grit and

determination against all odds."

That wild woodland run happened just about a decade ago. Last

week,

Delman received one of the nation's most prestigious awards for

community

health work: a $125,000 leadership prize from the Robert Wood

Johnson

Foundation. The award honors people who "conquer huge obstacles

and take

commanding action in local communities" on healthcare issues.

Delman, who is 49 and lives in Stoneham, founded and runs

Consumer Quality

Initiatives, a groundbreaking Boston agency staffed mainly by

people with

mental illness. They survey other people who receive mental health

services

from the state and analyze the data for ways to make improvements.

The

group, for example, identified problems encountered by young people

who

"age out" of the state's mental health system for children, work

that

contributed to significant changes, including a $3 million program

to help

with the transition to the adult system.

Given the stigma that mental illness still carries, and the

traditional

dominance of academics in research, Delman has had to fight long

and hard

for his group to gain legitimacy, said Marylou Sudders, the former

state

commissioner of mental health, who has known Delman since the

mid-'90s.

"If he ever has any doubt about himself, which he shouldn't

have, getting

a Robert Wood Johnson award is like the Good Housekeeping Seal of

Approval," she said.

Delman's bipolar disorder has not disappeared. He still takes

six

psychiatric medications a day, three for sleep. But he has been

able to

build his recovery on two of the central pillars of many lives:

work and

love.

"It's hard to recover from where I was - on Social Security

disability,

with serious mental illness, hospitalized numerous times, down in

the dumps

and facing so many barriers," he said. "I was able to overcome

those

barriers because of advantages in my life - family and education -

and my

own intense desire to overcome them, and finally, my loving

relationship

with my wife, and a job."

All around him, Delman said in an interview, he sees people in

positions

similar to his a decade ago caught in the Catch 22 that because

they have a

mental illness, they cannot get the work and support that would

help them

overcome it. "I see a lot of unrealized potential and it makes me

very

sad," he said.

Despite Delman's bipolar disorder, he graduated from Tufts

University summa

cum laude and from law school at the University of Pennsylvania.

But after

his crises and hospitalizations began in his thirties, he found it

impossible to get work as a lawyer, even when he was functioning

well. He

"came out" as a person with mental illness in the mid-1990s, as

he sought

to fight discrimination and educate others about their employment

rights.

Around that time, he met his future wife, Deborah, who is also a

leading

Massachusetts advocate for people with mental illness. She had

mixed

feelings about him, Deborah Delman said; he had not been working,

and as a

single mother, she could not support both him and her son, Pete. As

Jonathan Delman tells it, his temper also put her off.

But he was great with Pete, and they worked shoulder to shoulder

toward

their common causes for many months. One day, at a table at a

Bickford's

restaurant in Waltham, he was confessing his love for her - not for

the

first time - and she reached across the table, tears welling up in

her

eyes, and took his hand.

To her own shock, she said, "I love you."

"It was the greatest moment in my life," Jonathan Delman said.

Since his McLean escape soon before they married, "I have not

been back to

a hospital," Delman said. "And I will never go back to a

hospital."

But what he learned as a psychiatric patient now informs

Delman's work in

helping others.

For example, he said, he experienced first-hand how arbitrary

rules or

petty cruelties by hospital staff can demoralize and alienate

patients.

Patients can feel that if they complain, they risk retribution, and

nothing will change anyway.

So when his agency began to survey psychiatric patients in

hospitals, it

asked about staff-and-patient interactions. It also asked about

other

issues that can deeply affect patients: Were they treated with

respect and

dignity? Did they have needed privacy? Did they have access to a

telephone?

Or consider psychiatric medications. The antidepressant Zoloft

helped

Delman, but when he was hospitalized in the mid-1990s, he was

abruptly

taken off it without being consulted, and put on another medication

that

made him physically ill. He felt like a zombie for months, until he

finally

asked to be put back on his previous medications and greatly

improved.

These days, Consumer Quality Initiatives is working on a project

to give

consumers decision-making tools to help them have more input into

their

prescriptions, including guidance on which websites have the best

medical

information. Some of his prize money will go toward that project,

Delman

said.

"A lot of the work Jon has done has changed thousands of

people's lives in

Massachusetts, but they don't know Jon was part of it," said Alisa

K.

Lincoln, an associate professor of health sciences and sociology at

Northeastern University, who has worked with Delman for years and

nominated

him for the prize.

Delman began by focusing on giving consumers more voice in the

treatments

they received, but he is focusing increasingly on dragging academic

research out of the Ivory Tower and orienting it more toward

changing the

real world.

Delman is also working at Boston University's School of Public

Health

toward a health services research doctorate, which he is on track

to

receive in 2010.

That leaves little free time, but he has no complaints - quite

the

opposite: "I love responsibility," he said. "It was when I

didn't have

it that I felt depressed."

Carey Goldberg can be reached at goldberg@globe.com.

Cox News Service

DAYTON, Ohio -- In early October, the U.S. Department of Health and

Human Services released its recommendations for physical activity,

stating that adults gain substantial health benefits from

performing 2.5 hours per week of moderate aerobic exercise.

Children benefit from an hour or more of physical activity each

day, according to the new Physical Activity Guidelines for

Americans. The guidelines are designed so that physical activity

fits into a daily plan, and they encourage incorporating activities

that are enjoyable.

We know that being active reduces risk of coronary heart

disease, high blood pressure, type 2 diabetes, stroke, colon

cancer, breast cancer and depression. It also improves

cardiorespiratory function and builds bone and muscle tissue while

burning excess body fat. Regular physical activity also helps

people with arthritis or other rheumatic conditions affecting the

joints.

The Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans are the most

comprehensive of their kind and are based on the first thorough

review of scientific research about physical activity and health in

more than a decade.

Key guidelines by group are:

Children and adolescents: One hour or more of moderate or

vigorous aerobic physical activity a day, including vigorous

intensity physical activity at least three days a week. Examples of

moderate intensity aerobic activity include hiking, skateboarding,

biking and brisk walking. Vigorous intensity aerobic exercise

includes jumping rope, running and sports such as soccer,

basketball, and ice or field hockey.

It is recommended that children and adolescents incorporate

muscle-strengthening activities, such as rope climbing, sit-ups and

tug-of war three days a week, and bone-strengthening activities

like jumping rope, running and skipping three days a week.

Adults: Substantial health benefits for adults can be gained

from 2.5 hours a week of moderate intensity aerobic physical

activity, or one hour and 15 minutes of vigorous physical activity.

Examples of moderate intensity aerobic activities are brisk

walking, water aerobics, ballroom dancing and general gardening.

Vigorous intensity aerobic activities include racewalking, jogging

or running, swimming laps, jumping rope and hiking uphill or with a

heavy backpack. Aerobic activity should be performed in episodes of

at least 10 minutes.

For more extensive health benefits, adults should increase

aerobic activity to five hours per week if exercising at a moderate

intensity or two and one half hours weekly if the activity is

vigorous. Adults should incorporate muscle-strengthening activities

such as weight training, push-ups, sit-ups and carrying heavy loads

or heavy gardening, at least two days per week.

Older adults: Older adults should follow recommendations for

other adults when they are physically able to do so. Where a

chronic condition prohibits following these guidelines, older

adults should be as physically active as their abilities and

conditions allow. If risk of falling is an issue, this group should

also do exercises that maintain or help to improve balance.

Women during pregnancy: Healthy women should get at least 2.5

hours of moderate intensity aerobic activity a week during

pregnancy and the time after delivery, preferably spread throughout

the week. Pregnant women whose habit it is to engage in vigorous

aerobic activity or who are highly active can continue during

pregnancy and after delivery, provided they remain healthy and

discuss with their health care provider how and when activity

should be adjusted over time.

Adults with disabilities: Those who are able to should get at

least 2.5 hours of moderate aerobic activity a week or one hour and

15 minutes of vigorous aerobic activity weekly.

Muscle-strengthening activities involving all major muscle groups

two or more days a week should also be incorporated. If

circumstances do not allow for meeting these guidelines, engaging

in regular physical activity according to abilities is recommended.

Individuals with chronic medical conditions: Regular physical

activity provides important health benefits for adults who have

chronic conditions. Individuals beginning an exercise program

should do so with the guidance of a health care provider.

For more information, visit www.hhs.gov.

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article appeared in the Dayton Daily News.

Before there was Han, there was Napoleon - Napoleon Solo, that

is.

For slightly more than three years, from September 1964 to

January 1968,

"The Man From U.N.C.L.E." had one of the giddier rides in

prime-time

history. It went from near cancellation to cultural phenomenon (and

a brief

spot at No. 1 in the Nielsen ratings). In the process it created a

spy

mania on network television. So great was the show's popularity it

even

inspired a short-lived companion series, "The Girl From

U.N.C.L.E."

Soon enough came self-parody and eventual cancellation. In its

third

season, "U.N.C.L.E." didn't just jump the shark. It pole vaulted

it. Even

so, for those of a certain age, the names Napoleon and Ilya (as in

Kuryakin, Solo's sidekick) aren't much behind John, Paul, George,

and Ringo

in summoning up the onset of the '60s.

Last month Warner Home Video released "The Man from U.N.C.L.E.:

The

Complete Series." It comprises all 105 episodes, on 41 DVDs, with

an

additional 10 hours of bonus features. Completists will mourn the

absence

of the 1983 TV movie, "The Return of the Man From U.N.C.L.E."

Well, let

them mourn. In the meantime, there is much explaining to do for the

uninitiated.

In the hierarchy of '60s spy TV, "U.N.C.L.E" stood alone.

"Mission:

Impossible" was too gimmicky, "I Spy" too jokey, "The Wild,

Wild West"

too anachronistic. Among "U.N.C.L.E." scriptwriters were Robert

Towne and

sci-fi master Harlan Ellison. Richard Donner directed four episodes

in 1964

(making Solo and Kuryakin the lethal weapons of their day). It's no

wonder

Quentin Tarantino long spoke of making a movie version.

Robert Vaughn played Solo. Asked his opinion after reading the

script for

the pilot, he blurted out, "It's James Bond for television." In

fact,

Bond's creator, Ian Fleming, had briefly assisted in creating the

series.

His sole contribution was the name of Solo's character: a dashing,

debonair

secret agent who looks good in a tux and is caviar to the ladies.

Sound

familiar?

The unaired pilot (included in the DVD set) was called "Solo."

Bond

really was a solo operator, albeit with the inevitable supporting

cast of M

and Q and Moneypenny and the occasional appearance by CIA agent

Felix

Leiter (can't forget the US market!). And Solo was supposed to live

up to

his isolating name. Yet the beauty of the eventual title was the

balance it

struck between individual and organization

U.N.C.L.E. stood for United Network Command for Law and

Enforcement. The

organization's name simultaneously evoked Uncle Sam and the United

Nations.

During the show's run, tourists frequently asked UN guides for the

whereabouts of U.N.C.L.E. headquarters. Despite the weekly thanks

offered

to the organization in the show's closing credits, it didn't exist.

Nor did

Thrush, U.N.C.L.E.'s thoroughly nefarious rival operation.

Emphasizing the organization did two things - and they are

easily the two

best things about the series. First, it played up Leo G. Carroll,

in the

role of professorial spymaster Alexander Waverly, the head of

U.N.C.L.E. In

a nice bit of foreshadowing, Carroll had played a similar part in

Alfred

Hitchcock's "North by Northwest" (1959). His droll avuncularity

was an

enormous asset.

Even better was David McCallum's Kuryakin. Lizardy and vaguely

epicene,

Vaughn's Solo had a slightly nasal voice and ever-present smirk.

The

overall effect was one of effete chilliness. Imagine a suave Hugh

Hefner

trading in his pipe and Pepsi for a Walther P38. Small wonder that

in

Vaughn's best-known film role, in "Bullitt" (1968), he would be

cast as a

villain.

Ah, but where Vaughn's Solo was chilly, McCallum's Kuryakin was

cool - very

cool indeed. If Julie Christie had the '60s' sexiest lower lip, as

she most

certainly did, then McCallum was a distant second. Add in his blond

bangs,

high cerebral forehead, and penchant for dark turtlenecks, and a

teen idol

was born. An air of distracted bemusement helped, too. When

Kuryakin

pretended to be the son of Lawrence of Arabia in a season two

episode, it

didn't seem at all implausible. McCallum could have been Peter

O'Toole's

more subdued Scottish cousin. Or Oskar Werner's.

McCallum received more fan mail than any actor in the history of

MGM, the

studio that produced "U.N.C.L.E." The show became the first

beachhead of

the '60s youthquake in prime time. It was a fluke. McCallum had all

of two

lines in the pilot. The producers quickly realized what genuine

chemistry

existed between him and Vaughn, a chemistry no less effective for

being

endothermic, and quickly built up the role. Ilya and Napoleon mixed

together like tonic water and gin.

"U.N.C.L.E." had its share of gimmicks. Agents entered the

organization's

headquarters through the fitting room of a tailor shop. Viewers,

like

Thrush, never thought to wonder what a skyscraper was doing behind

a

storefront.

There were gadgets, of course, most notably agents'

ballpoint-pen

"communicators." Each episode was divided into four "acts,"

which

seemed sort of classy; and transitions denoted by blurry rapid

pans, which

seemed very up to the minute. So did the fact of Kuryakin's being

Russian:

He was a one-man precursor of d?tente.

Heavy on flutes and bongos, Jerry Goldsmith's theme doesn't

quite rank with

John Barry's for the Bond movies or Lalo Schifrin's for "Mission:

Impossible" (Schifrin would be called in to reorchestrate the

"U.N.C.L.E." theme for the second season). But it holds up

surprisingly

well.

The guest stars are a fascinating bunch, if not always for the

right

reasons. Seeking to cash in on McCallum's youth appeal, the

producers

brought in the likes of Sonny &amp;amp; Cher and Nancy Sinatra - who sang a

duet

with McCallum. More common were fading movie stars: Janet Leigh,

Vincent

Price, Eleanor Parker, George Sanders. Most memorably, Joan

Crawford

concluded season three getting slapped around by Herbert Lom. Maybe

he

preferred wire hangers?

Most guests came from a stable of '60s TV standbys: Ricardo

Montalban, June

Lockhart, Jack Lord, Victor Buono, Robert Culp, Leslie Nielsen.

Spotting

their overexposed faces is like a Nick at Nite version of "Where's

Waldo."

Sometimes familiarity breeds amazement rather than contempt.

Yes, that

really was William Shatner and Leonard Nimoy making a joint guest

appearance two years before the debut of "Star Trek." Martin

Landau,

looking ahead to "Ed Wood Jr.," played a villain who dresses up

like

Dracula. A matinee-idol slender Rip Torn opened season two toasting

marshmallows and bellowing, "It's not so simple to conquer the

world today

as it was in the days of Alexander the Great!" No, it wasn't,

especially

with Napoleon and Ilya on the case.

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REVIEW

FIRST DOUBT:

Optical Confusion in Modern Photography

At the Yale UniversityArt Gallery, 1111 Chapel St., New Haven,

through Jan.

4.

Call 203-432-0600 or

go to www.artgallery.yale.edu.

NEW HAVEN - Seeing is believing? Seeing is (ital) confusing,

(endital) or

it can be. The whole point of "First Doubt: Optical Confusion in

Modern

Photography," which runs at the Yale University Art Gallery

through Jan.

4, is to demonstrate this basic fact of our visual existence. It

does so

with nuance, variety, and skill. "First Doubt" is the rare

high-concept

show that manages to be smart without preening over its smartness.

Photography puts a frame around the world. "First Doubt" aims

to remind

us how arbitrary that frame can be. Drawn from the collection of

Yale

graduate Allan Chasanoff, the show consists of images that present,

as he

puts it, "a dislocation in the usual."

That dislocation can take many forms: cropping, foreshortening,

mirroring,

extreme close-ups, unusual perspectives, superimposed planes,

unfamiliar

subjects, incongruous juxtaposition. It does not take the form of

darkroom

manipulation. The 114 images in the show are all examples of

straight

photography - which makes for that much more upending of

expectations.

Dislocation can mean revelation. "First Doubt" underscores

something we

generally prefer to ignore: how often what is visually transparent

can be

conceptually opaque. Each specific element in Raghubir Singh's

"Pavement

Mirror Shop, Howrah, West Bengal" is clear as glass, yet viewed as

a whole

it's pure puzzlement. The title explains all.

Stillness is no small part of the artifice of still photography.

Many times

it's motion that provides resolution in figuring out what's before

our

eyes. For example, all we'd need is the slightest bit of follicular

flapping in Jessica Raimi's "Liz on Piermont Pier" to realize

that what

the image presents is a long-haired woman's head on a windy day.

There's one famous photograph in the show, William Klein's "Gun

1, New

York (103rd St. and Broadway)." You've likely seen it: grimacing

kid

thrusts toy gun into camera lens while buddy calmly looks on in

profile.

The rest are relatively unfamiliar, even if many of the

photographers

aren't (Ansel Adams, Bill Brandt, Imogen Cunningham, Walker Evans,

Robert

Frank, the list goes on). Such unfamiliarity makes perfect sense.

Fame is a

concomitant of familiarity, and optical disorder is something the

eye tends

to avoid.

It's true that part of what makes Lee Friedlander "Lee

Friedlander" is

how unconventionally he can array subject matter (his shadow on the

blonde's back; the reflection of Mount Rushmore, rather than

mountain

itself, in front of camera-toting tourists). Yet the play of

picture planes

and tension between continuity and disruption in the Friedlander

picture

here, "England," are so ambiguous that that surely helps account

for it's

being one of his lesser-known works.

You'd expect Aaron Siskind to be included ("Acolman 2"), with

his

fondness for eccentric surfaces seen in minute detail, or even

Andre

Kertesz ("Steps of Touraine"), with his poet-geometer's taste for

the

tango of angles and planes. But a photojournalist like Gilles

Peress

("Victims of Shah and CIA on a Signboard at the US Embassy,

Teheran")? Or

Lewis Hine?

The Hine photo is a full-body portrait of man standing in front

of the

camera. What could be plainer? Nothing, except it's not the

plainness that

causes confusion. The man is an amputee, but because he seems

otherwise

healthy and a sleeve covers his stump we keep trying to account for

the

lack of bilateral symmetry. By the same token, the overhead

perspective

with which Herbert Bayer took "Xanti Schavinksy in a Handstand

Position"

makes it look as though the subject's disembodied legs are emerging

from a

wall. It's a spooky sight, like something out of Cocteau's

"Orphee."

Instead, it's an acrobat, as the title informs us.

That's assuming the viewer has a title to read. This happens to

be a show

where there's no peeking at the labels. There aren't any. Rather

than a

label, each photograph has next to it a number, which can be looked

up on a

checklist. There's a big stack of them by the entrance. As a result

of this

very sly move on the part of curator Joshua Chuang viewers revert

to the

status of children. Again and again, the old sleeve-tugging

questions

arise: "What is it?" "How did they do that?" Sophisticated

museumgoers

(who know to peek at the label!) can readily provide answers. Not

here.

Reference and evaluation must defer to instinct and guesswork. This

is not

necessarily a bad thing.

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FALL RIVER, Mass.- Not three weeks after the state commander of

the

Salvation Army tearfully asked his officers not to turn any

families away

this winter, Major Elizabeth Deming realized just what she was up

against.

On the first day she took applications for Thanksgiving turkeys

and

Christmas baskets last month, 344 families showed up, filling the

chapel

and the hallway and lining up outside. In the days that followed,

hundreds

more brought the total to 1,050, more than twice the number of

people who

applied by Thanksgiving last year.

"Lord, what are we going to do?" Deming recalled thinking.

"Where are

all the turkeys going to come from? I'm still thinking 'Where are

all the

turkeys going to come from?"'

At a time of widespread concern about joblessness and sky-high

heating

prices squeezing people this winter, relief organizations in

communities

across the state are facing profound increases in families seeking

food and

are girding for a spike in holiday demand. The Greater Boston Food

Bank

released a survey last week of 163 pantries and soup kitchens:

Ninety

percent reported a sharp increase in need.

"We're seeing both the individual who's on the edge has tipped

over to the

other side and the individual that never even could imagine needing

a food

pantry has found themselves unemployed or lost their homes," said

Catherine D'Amato, president of the food bank, which supplies food

to 600

hunger-relief agencies and food pantries, including some Salvation

Army

branches.

Between last October and May, the number of people turning to

the Salvation

Army for help with food or energy bills soared; in Framingham,

requests

were up 66 percent, in Hyannis 47 percent, and in Milford 48

percent.

Greenfield experienced an eye-popping 86 percent spike.

The latest data are even more alarming: Cambridge served twice

as many

people in the soup kitchen this September as it did last September,

and

the number of families seeking help during the same period swelled

from 117

to 145.

The high food prices that are squeezing consumers are squeezing

relief

organizations as well. Last year, the Food Bank bought Thanksgiving

turkeys

for 77 cents a pound. This year, the price soared to $1.06.

Concerned about raising enough money to meet the demand,

Salvation Army

bell-ringers will put out their kettles earlier than usual

statewide for

the first time - beginning Nov. 12 - in the hopes of restoring

Christmastime donations that slipped 8 percent last year and are

expected

to drop further as larger donors and private foundations face their

financial losses for the quarter.

"We're hoping at the very least to stay flat. But even if we

stay flat,

we're not going to be able to take care of the increasing needs,"

said

Major Raphael Jackson, general secretary of the Massachusetts

Division of

the Salvation Army.

At the Salvation Army Fall River Corps food pantry - where

demand went

from 56 families in October 2007 to 150 last month - there are

plenty of

new faces. During a particularly busy month in September 2008, 165

families were served, 95 of them newcomers, said Deming.

Last week brought a 46-year-old Fall River woman who had been,

for the

first time ever, scrounging up change to buy her family's groceries

- and

was only able to buy about $60 worth, down from $150. Interviewed

outside

the food pantry, she declined to give her name out of concern for

her

husband's job, as well as sheer embarrassment.

"I didn't want any of my neighbors seeing me coming over

here," said the

woman. "My husband wouldn't even come in with me ... I wouldn't

even

consider letting my son know."

Her chief concern is keeping the condo her family bought early

this year

for about $190,000 - a mortgage her husband's salary can pay. But

since the

woman left an untenable workplace - and has been unable to find

another job

- she no longer has enough money for utilities, gas, and food. A

$500

deductible for repairs after a car accident put the bills over the

edge.

Now, she's coming to the food pantry and considering a job offer

from the

Salvation Army: ringing a bell by the red kettle for $8 an hour.

Like families and businesses tightening their belts this season,

the

Salvation Army finds itself making tough decisions.

Take Thanksgiving turkeys. This year, its South End Thanksgiving

Distribution is 400 turkeys short - and officers are warning senior

citizens who expected to pick up turkey dinners that the meals will

be

reserved for those who have families to feed. Seniors without

children or

grandchildren will have to go to group Thanksgiving dinners

instead.

Whether the organizations will be able to raise enough money to

meet the

increasing need is an open question. A report by Giving USA

Foundation

released in September found that during recessions or economic

slowdowns,

charitable giving slows - but does not screech to a halt.

Last week, the Greater Boston Food Bank, Citizens Energy

Corporation, the

United Way, and the Red Cross were among the recipients of an

unusual grant

release by the Boston Foundation to help stem the local economic

crisis.

Unlike many foundations whose levels of giving ride the market, the

Boston

Foundation has an endowment that keeps its donations relatively

level.

"We're trying to help the community rise to this occasion,"

said Paul S.

Grogan, president and CEO of the Boston Foundation. "Of course,

everyone's

worried about the state budget cuts as well and how severely those

will

diminish the capacity of the nonprofit sector. Just at the moment

human

need will be the greatest, the public-sector capacity to support

these

agencies is going to contract."

Both the food pantry and the Salvation Army are hopeful that

donors will

step up to meet the increasing demands. The Salvation Army - an

evangelical

Christian relief organization - relies on something in short supply

in many

other corners these days: faith.

Major William H. Bode, commander of the Massachusetts division,

choked up

when he recalled how he used to be the one in an Ohio branch buying

$40,000

worth of toys for Christmas and ordering $60,000 worth of food for

the

holidays. He would have it delivered later and promise to pay.

"We trust the Lord," Bode added. "And trust the donor."

Stephanie Ebbert can be reached at ebbert@globe.com. Readers

interested

in donating turkeys or other items to the Salvation Army can call

617-542-5420 (ext. 410) or check the website

www.salvationarmy-ma.org

Interviewing Charlie Kaufman is like sprinkling salt on a slug.

Each

question seems to lay a psychic burden on the 49-year-old

writer-director's

soul; answers emerge painstakingly from some dark well within.

Often he'll

scrunch his eyes tightly shut as he speaks, as though trying to

read his

thoughts on the back of his eyelids.

And this is one of his good days. Kaufman is in town to promote

"Synecdoche, New York," - actually, that sentence is unusual in a

number

of ways. The film, which opens in Boston on Friday, is the

acclaimed

screenwriter's first foray behind the camera, after having penned

head-spinning meta-dramas like "Being John Malkovich,"

"Adaptation,"

and "Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind," the last earning him

a best

original screenplay Oscar.

Second, the movie actively resists promoting - indeed, it's

almost

impossible to describe other than as a feature-length M.C. Escher

drawing.

Set in Schenectady, N.Y., "Synecdoche" stars Philip Seymour

Hoffman as

another of Kaufman's cosmically miserable artist heroes, this one a

theater

director who re-stages his own life in a downtown warehouse. The

film is

jammed with great actresses doing remarkable work - Samantha

Morton, Dianne

Wiest, Hope Davis, Catherine Keener, Emily Watson - and features

one

character named Ellen Bascomb who may not exist at all.

"Synecdoche"

might be Kaufman's definitive word on creativity, the mystery of

women, and

the larger mystery of life itself. Not exactly a talking Chihuahua

movie.

Third, Kaufman hates to be interviewed and has mostly resisted

the

promotional dog-and-pony show on his other films. This time,

though,

there's no Spike Jonze or Michel Gondry to take the heat, and

Kaufman does

want to get the word out about the movie. Well, some of the words.

And

maybe he doesn't want you to see the movie. It's up to you, really.

Welcome

to Charlie Kaufman's Bizarro Hollywood, where movies stand or fall

on their

merits and the filmmaker's a self-effacing mensch.

Q. What's the one question everyone's asking so I don't have to

ask it

again?

A. 'What does the burning house mean?' Every Q&amp;amp;A, I get that

one. I say I

don't explain what happens in my movies because I want the audience

to have

their experience of it, and if I say 'this is what it means,' then

you

can't have that. I'm giving them permission to have their own

experience.

Q. Most moviegoers resist that, though. They're afraid of making

a mistake.

A. But you can't make a mistake, and that's what I try to tell

people. This

is your movie now. I'm done with it. Take it, leave it, interact

with it.

It's yours to do what you want with, and you can't possibly be

wrong.

Q. In a way, subjectivity is the subject of the film.

A. It's the subject of the film, but the film's also a metaphor

for how

people live their lives - how people project onto the world a story

about

this very messy, confusing non-story world. Because of how the

human mind

works, we organize life into these stories and cast people as

characters

and understand their motives and tell ourselves why they're doing

this or

why they're doing that. It becomes this kind of fiction, being a

person.

Q. Can you talk about the difference between writing, which is a

solitary

endeavor, and going on a set and directing, which is the opposite

of

solitary?

A. I think you've just said it all. (laughs)

Q. How does it feel in practice?

A. I like writing but it's very lonely sometimes, and it

requires a lot of

discipline. It's the opposite of pragmatic, and directing is

enormously

pragmatic. It's also very structured. I mean, ((as a director))

every

moment I know exactly where I'm supposed to be, and if I forget

there's

someone there to tell me. And it's managerial, so I have to figure

out how

to talk to people on an individual basis. It's not like there's one

way to

talk to actors; they're all different. I also have to let go of my

natural

personality traits, which are sulking and moodiness, and kind of

become an

adult, because that's required.

Q. You have to be the designated adult in the room.

A. I do, and I'm not allowed not to be. In some ways it's like

being a

parent. I don't mean that in a condescending way, but simply that

if you

have a child you have to hold it together. So that was my

responsibility

and I did it. It was easier in the mornings. The days which ran

very, very

long, for the first 10 hours I could do it very well, and then once

I

started to get tired, I wanted to go somewhere and have a fit. And

I

couldn't. That was sort of a regular occurrence.

Q. How far back have you been interested in writing these

nonlinear boxes

within boxes? When did you start writing, for lack of a better

word,

recognizably Charlie Kaufmanesque works?

A. I remember reading "Six Characters in Search of an Author"

in high

school and being amazed that this had been written. At the same

time there

was stuff like Monty Python and National Lampoon in the '70s,

Ionesco,

stuff that questioned what we accept as reality, sometimes in a

very comic

way. At the time I was mostly thinking about comedic things.

Q. You were at Boston University for a while.

A. I was in the acting program at BU. I had grown up wanting to

be an

actor, and I decided suddenly, during my freshman year, that it

embarrassed

me. I left and went to NYU film school to study production. It was

basically a giant workshop. I wrote this script which took place

over one

night about an insomniac trying to go to sleep. It's actually not

that

different from some of the things I would write now. It was fairly

experimental in terms of structure, and the professor really loved

it. I

remember my classmate was Chris Columbus, and the professor held up

our two

scripts as shining examples of really great writing, but at the

same time

recognizing they were polar opposites. And of course Chris went off

to

become enormously successful immediately, and I couldn't get a job

for 11

years after graduating. I answered phones that whole time.

Q. I'm assuming you wrote "Malkovich" on spec. How much

resistance was

there to it?

A. No one wanted to make it. I didn't write it to be made, I

wrote it

thinking maybe it would get me assignment work. But I was told that

it

would never be made.

Q. By whom?

A. By everybody. People would tell me they loved it, they

thought it was

hysterical, they had it on their bedside table and read it a lot,

but it'll

never be made. And for a couple of years that seemed to be the

case, and

then Spike Jonze read it and wanted to make it, and he was in a

position to

be able to.

Q. Why did you set the new film in Schenectady? Because of the

wordplay

with "Synecdoche"?

A. No, I don't think so. ((Pause)) I don't know why.

Q. As you're writing all these different female characters, are

you

consciously creating aspects of women or are they popping up more

organically?

A. They're based on people that I know, or parts of people that

I know, or

ideas about relationships that I wanted to explore. And then as it

evolves,

they start to make sense to me and I like them, so I continue in

that

direction. It's more of an intuitive process than a calculated

process.

Q. Do some of the characters take on lives of their own?

A. Well, I think that they always do. You don't know how to

write dialogue

for Claire at first, and then you start to realize what she sounds

like and

it becomes easier to write her. That happens with everybody. It

becomes so

that you can actually have a conversation almost in real time

between

characters.

Q. Who is Ellen Bascomb?

A. What do you mean?

Q. Who is Ellen Bascomb?

A. ... What do you mean?

Q. Isn't she the cleaning lady?

A. Yeah.

Q. We never see her, do we?

A. Uh-uh.

Q. OK. So who is she?

A. What do you mean? (laughter) I don't know who she is! She's

someone who

may or may not exist. Obviously she never comes to do her job, so I

guess

that brings her existence into question. But I don't know if she

exists.

Q. Sorry, that's my one "what does it all mean" question.

A. I read this anecdote about a classical composer who played a

piano piece

and somebody asked him, 'What does it mean?' And he sat down and

played it

again. That's what people do - they want to impose a meaning or a

structure

onto what is what it is.

Q. Well, it's also that "Synechdoche, New York" comes to us in

the form

of a commercial movie, with movie stars. It's not like it's hanging

in a

museum, where a museumgoer would bring different expectations to

bear on

it.

A. But that's exactly the example that I use. It is to me like

the

interaction that I have with a painting at a museum. Most of the

time

there's no verbal thing going on but it can be incredibly moving. I

do

consider this an art form, and my goal is to treat it that way. I

don't

know if there's a market for that. I guess we'll find out. I'll

talk about

the movie, but I'm not going to tell people to go see it and I'm

not going

to tell them what it's about. I don't want to trick people into

going to

see it.

Q. That's my job.

A. Well, I'll leave you to it, then.

Ty Burr can be reached at tburr@globe.com. For more on

movies, go to

www.boston.com/ movies.

THE CHANCE OF TWO LIFETIMES A photo and graphic are being sent to NYTNS Photo Service subscribers. Non-subscribers can make individual purchases by calling 212-556-4204 or 888-603-1036. Dumanel Luxama began his life in rural Haiti doubly unlucky. He

was born

with a rare deformity, a hole in his skull that let his growing

brain bulge

outward into a lump between his eyes as big as half a tennis ball.

And an

even larger cyst, swelling unseen inside his brain, threatened to

suppress

his vital functions and kill him.

But when he was just a few months old, Dumanel's luck began to

change. Many

in his family held old folk beliefs about health: They thought

Dumanel's

lump might have been caused by his mother's cravings during

pregnancy, or

an evil spirit. But his father, Almane, believed in Christianity

and

Western medicine. He sold his only two cows to seek the best

possible help

for his son.

A 14-hour bus-ride from their dirt-floored house last March

brought the two

to a hospital in the town of Hinche. It lacked all but the simplest

medical

instruments, but Operation Smile and Partners in Health, both

nonprofits

famed for providing free health care to poor people around the

world, were

sponsoring a special clinic for cleft-lip patients that week.

Dr. John Meara, chief of plastic surgery at Children's Hospital

Boston,

happened to be volunteering when Dumanel arrived and easily

identified the

lump that would have mystified most doctors. It was called an

encephalocele

(en-SEF-a-lo-seel). He had treated them in Australia, even written

papers

on them. They were not just unsightly, they were dangerous. Dumanel

needed

major brain surgery.

"We can't do this here," he said.

Partners in Health handled the red tape; Children's donated

money, time,

and venue. On Aug. 21, Dumanel lay at Children's on one of the

highest-tech pediatric operating tables in the world as Meara and

colleagues, working for free, re-engineered his brain and skull in

a

concert of neuro- and plastic surgery. Only in the last few years

has such

a complex operation become feasible, he said.

What once would have taken 24 hours was over in eight, and

Dumanel was out

of the intensive care unit a day or so later. Now, he bears a

scalloped

line of faint scars around his head and a light line across his

nose, but

he is crawling and pulling himself up on chairs to stand like any

near-toddler and has moved on from "Ooohh," his only sound before

the

operation, to "Da da" and "Ma Ma."

On Tuesday, Dumanel and his father will leave to return home to

their small

farming community on Haiti's Central Plateau.

"Now he can start on his road in life," Luxama said gratefully

during a

recent follow-up visit to Children's.

Dumanel is one of only about a dozen Haitian children who have

been brought

to the United States for surgery this year, said Dr. David Walton,

a

Partners in Health physician who helped get Dumanel to Boston.

"There are literally hundreds and hundreds of these kids out

there," many

with congenital heart defects whose problems are never detected

until it is

too late, he said; others are diagnosed but still die of diseases

that

could be treated with surgery. Haiti has the highest infant

mortality rate

in the Western hemisphere: 62 out of every 1,000 live births.

Meara emphasized that while Dumanel, of course, benefited from

his medical

care, so did the doctors who provided it: His case offered trainees

a

valuable opportunity to learn about the care of a rare anomaly and

observe

skills and strategies that can be applied in future complex cases.

"It's good at both ends of the airplane," he said. "It's

really

important to have these kinds of cases" at an institution of top

specialists like Children's, "so when the next case comes along,

clinicians have the experience and knowledge" to handle it.

Dumanel's surgery involved several procedures, each one of which

would be

considered a major operation, said Children's neurosurgeon Ed

Smith. "It

was a real skullbuster - no pun intended - to put together the

steps and

sequence of events," he said.

It was the encephalocele that brought Dumanel to Boston, but

once he

arrived, a routine brain scan showed that the right side of his

brain had

been all but taken over by an arachnoid cyst, a great bubble of

fluid

surrounded by spider web-like tissue that normally lines the brain

to

protect it.

His doctors "got the scan and said, 'Holy Moly, this is not

what we were

expecting at all!"' Walton said.

Smith and Meara first had to decide whether to operate on the

cyst and the

encephalocele at the same time. The entire neurosurgery department

discussed it, Meara said, and decided it made sense.

Smith went first, to tackle the fluid-filled cyst. Imagine, he

said, a big

balloon, "filled with water and plopped in the kitchen sink,"

blocking

the drain. "What we did was cut the dome of the balloon away, so

there was

a big pop and the fluid came out, but there is still rubber sitting

over

the drain at the bottom of the sink."

The fluid couldn't drain away without a second step. Using a

microscope to

make sure he was preserving important tiny parts of Dumanel's

brain, such

as the optic nerve, he created a new drainage system so fluid could

flow

properly down into the brain stem and spinal cord's drainage

pathway.

Then Meara and Smith focused on the encephalocele, cutting away

the pale,

non-functional brain tissue that bulged out of Dumanel's face and

repairing

the dura, the brain's lining. With the lump gone, Meara had to

rebuild

Dumanel's skull. He moved pieces of it around and fit them together

like an

anatomical jigsaw puzzle. He created a nasal bone and new forehead

bone

for Dumanel where the encephalocele hole had been and moved

Dumanel's eye

sockets closer together.

Where gaps remained, he filled them in with fragments of bone.

In this, a

baby's skull is far superior to a jigsaw puzzle: Once the pieces

are in

place, they will eventually fuse together into a smooth whole. In

older

patients, there is no such fusing.

In general, Dumanel's risk for complications was high, from a

surgical

glitch to an infection. But Smith and Meara sound like they are

pinching

themselves as they report on Dumanel's health to date. "I'm just

pleased

as punch with how he's done," Smith said. "I'm hopeful that he

will have

fully normal function as a completely normal kid when he grows

up."

Dumanel's left side remains slightly weak from the cyst, but

"I'm sure

with some therapy, he'll be fine," said Dr. Hermide Mercier, who

has been

hosting Dumanel and Almane at her Brockton home as Dumanel

recovers.

"He's moving more than he used to," she said. "Now he's all

over the

house, pulling himself up. That's a big change."

"Da da da!" said Dumanel, who turned 1 in September. "Ba!"

Almane, 27, has been calling Dumanel's mother, Louisinette,

every day, he

said, "and she practically shouts, 'Come home!"' Dumanel is the

couple's

only child.

Last Wednesday, Meara checked over Dumanel for the last time and

began to

arrange for follow-up care through Partners in Health's Haiti

clinics.

"When you want to go home," he told Almane in Spanish, their

common

language, "it's possible."

Almane looked upward: "I thank God first," he said, and then

looked at

Meara, "and you second."

Almane hopes Dumanel will grow up to help him work on his leased

farm,

where he raises rice, corn, and potatoes.

"Before, he couldn't do anything," Almane said, "Now, he can

do what he

wants."

Carey Goldberg can be reached at goldberg@globe.com.

The newest computer vision technology can't literally see

through your

sweater and slacks, but it can determine the shape of your unclad

body.

Brown University computer scientists have developed software

that takes

ordinary images of people dressed in street clothes and digitally

peels

away the layers to determine their 3-D body shape.

The potential applications are many: Shoppers could create a

customized,

anatomically accurate avatar to see how well clothes would fit them

without

stepping into a dressing room; doctors could use a scan to

understand how

body shape plays a role in disease risk; people playing video games

could

upload their virtual bodies as a character in the game.

The researchers are patenting their technology, and see

potential uses

everywhere from Hollywood special effects departments to sports

medicine.

The software originated in efforts to solve a more low-tech

challenge:

fighting crime at the corner store.

In a partnership with Rhode Island State Police, Brown computer

scientist

Michael Black developed tools to figure out a person's basic

physical

attributes from a grainy surveillance video.

"They want to know how tall is this person, how much do they

weigh? So we

developed some simple tools," Black said. "But if we wanted to

(get) a

few other measurements ... we have to deal with clothing." Or,

more

specifically, the figure under the clothing.

Using more than 2,000 laser scans of minimally clad people,

Black and

graduate student Alexandru Balan gave the computer information

about what

the human body looks like. Then, they used images of different

poses -

along with a model that factors in how clothing becomes looser and

tighter

when a person moves - to create nude digital mannequins.

As a test, they had six subjects pose in a variety of poses and

outfits,

and then used the computer program to predict measurements and

gender.

They were able to predict gender accurately 94 percent of the

time, and

their calculations closely matched people's actual body shape. But

it's not

fool-proof - a trench coat tripped them up.

Stan Sclaroff, a computer science professor at Boston

University,

commended the technology: "This is the first work I've seen that

can ...

come up with a reasonable estimate of (a person's) dimensions,

without

making them strip down."

Carolyn Y. Johnson can be reached at cjohnson@globe.com

In the pantheon of medical screening tests, patients reserve a

particular

place of dread for the colonoscopy. Faces blanch. Eyes narrow. A

root canal

suddenly seems appealing.

"Americans in particular are just very squeamish about dealing

with

colorectal issues," said Dr. Sapna Syngal, a gastrointestinal

cancer

specialist at Boston's Dana-Farber/Brigham and Women's Cancer

Center. Not

only do they avoid the screening, they avoid the topic. "You

wouldn't talk

about it at the cocktail party," she said.

Unless, of course, it's to tell your middle-age pals that they

could avoid

some of the poking and probing of a traditional colonoscopy by

opting for a

virtual version of the test - a high-tech X-ray of the belly that

is

designed to provide identical information.

After years of study, virtual colonoscopies appear closer than

ever to

widespread adoption, with a federal advisory panel scheduled later

this

month to review evidence on the test, a review that could prove

pivotal as

health plans decide whether to pay for the screening.

There's widespread agreement that virtual colonoscopies track

down the most

dangerous polyps - the harbingers of cancer - just as well as the

more-invasive test.

"I may get tarred and feathered for this, but I'm actually

pretty

enthusiastic about the potential" of virtual colonoscopy, said Dr.

Patrick

Lynch, a gastroenterologist at M.D. Anderson Cancer Center in

Houston. "It

has tremendous promise as a screening tool, so long as a few ifs,

ands, or

buts are taken into account."

Two major concerns linger. One is the exposure to radiation that

comes with

any X-ray. Another is whether the extra images generated by the

virtual

test - pictures of the kidney, liver, and pancreas - could lead to

unnecessary testing.

But if the virtual colonoscopy prompts more people to be

screened, those

concerns may be offset. Colon cancer kills more Americans (an

estimated

50,000 this year) than any other form of the disease, except for

lung

cancer. Yet barely half of the patients who doctors say should be

screened

- essentially, anyone 50 or older - submit to testing.

"We have a huge untapped, unscreened source of patients," said

Dr. Judy

Yee, a radiologist at the University of California, San Francisco.

"We

have to keep our eye on the ball, which is preventing colon cancer

in

Americans."

All screening methods for colon cancer, including comparatively

primitive

stool tests, share the same premise: find and remove polyps before

they

turn malignant.

There has never been a gold-standard study proving that

colonoscopy extends

lives; that would require not testing a comparison group, which

some see

as unethical. But "it has been very strongly demonstrated that if

you take

out polyps, you reduce the risk of colon cancer," said Dr. David

Forcione,

a Massachusetts General Hospital gastroenterologist.

For decades, that has meant that as Americans crest 50, they're

offered two

things: an AARP membership and a colonoscopy.

Before the colon cancer test, patients quaff a drink designed to

empty the

intestines. For many, the worst part is drinking the foul fluid,

and the

diarrhea that follows.

To perform the test, a doctor snakes a thin, flexible tube

through the

twisting highways of the colon. A Lilliputian camera is attached to

the end

of the tube to look for evidence of cancer or polyps. Anything that

can

become cancerous is removed.

Given the contorted geography of the intestines, the tube can

perforate

the colon. Studies estimate that happens to as many as 2 of every

1,000

patients.

"I think that's another reason people are hesitant about having

a

colonoscopy," Syngal said.

Another reason: the sedation given to patients to keep them

still.

"Sedation is not trivial," said Dr. Carl Jaffe, of the National

Cancer

Institute - in part because it means groggy patients need help

getting

home.

Given those drawbacks, there was considerable interest in

developing an

alternative. Enter the virtual colonoscopy, known in medical lingo

as

computed tomographic (CT) colonography.

One recent afternoon, Dr. Michael Zalis sat in a darkened suite

at Mass.

General packed with dozens of flickering computer monitors. With

hands that

navigate the computer like a piano keyboard, Zalis, a radiologist,

reviewed

images from a recent virtual colonoscopy.

First, two-dimensional black-and-white snapshots of the

patient's

mid-section appear. Then, a computer program assembles those images

into a

three-dimensional "ride" through the flesh-hued cave of the

intestines,

as Zalis looks for signs of trouble.

Nothing, nothing, nothing - until he reaches one spot where

there's a

glowing green blob.

Could it be a polyp? By rotating the image, he determines it is

simply

fecal matter.

If something suspicious does appear on the scan - and

specialists said that

happens in about 10 to 15 percent of cases - the patient would need

a

regular colonoscopy to confirm the result and, potentially, remove

polyps.

That's not such a big deal if it can all be done on the same day.

But if

not, the patient has to endure another bowel-cleansing episode.

"This may seem minor, but if you put yourself in the position

of the

patient, it's not easy," said Lynch, the Houston

gastroenterologist.

That inconvenience aside, the virtual test is nearly as reliable

as the

traditional method in detecting the polyps most likely to threaten

the

health of patients, researchers reported in the New England Journal

of

Medicine.

But the test's accuracy diminished with the size of polyps.

"And the

question you can argue over and over again is, are these small

polyps

significant? Do they need to be taken out?" Forcione said. There

is,

specialists said, no agreement on those points.

An independent panel of scientists that reviews evidence on

disease

prevention said last month that it remains undecided on whether

virtual

colonoscopy should be used routinely. Specifically, the US

Preventive

Services Task Force said it could not find evidence to erase

worries about

the potential for unnecessary testing and radiation exposure.

Zalis dismissed the first concern; radiologists usually can

distinguish

what's worrisome on other organs, he said, meaning few patients

require

further review. As for radiation, specialists said exposure is less

of a

concern for adult patients. And the radiation amount is so slight,

said

Zalis, as to pose "zero harm."

Ron Dow was 71 when he signed up for his first colon screening.

When

researchers at Mayo Clinic's Arizona outpost asked if he would like

one of

the newfangled tests, he said sure. The scan showed something

suspicious. A

traditional test was done and, later, a cancerous growth was

removed.

All things considered, he preferred the virtual colonoscopy.

"If nothing

shows up, you're not going to go any further - it can end right

there," he

said.

Stephen Smith can be reached at stsmith@globe.com.

HE WALKS THE WORLD, TALKS AIDS WITH TEENS A photo is being sent to NYTNS Photo Service subscribers. Non-subscribers can make individual purchases by calling 212-556-4204 or 888-603-1036. John Chittick is short and round and Hawaiian shirts are his

standard

attire. The four Fitchburg State College students who work as

interns in

the basement of his house point this out because, they say, it is

precisely

this nonthreatening manner that allows him to do what he does:

approach

teens on the street to talk about HIV.

"A lot of cultures don't want you on the streets talking about

sex to

kids," Chittick said. "That's what I do."

He runs a nonprofit organization called TeenAIDS-PeerCorps, its

objective

is to teach teenagers the facts about HIV and AIDS. Chittick's work

takes

him to some of the poorest and most dangerous countries in the

world,

remote locales where high HIV rates and poor prevention education

go

hand-in-hand.

He started a decade ago with a two-year round-the-world trip,

and now makes

one major international trip each year. So far he's covered 80

countries.

In two weeks, he'll set off on what may be his most dangerous

mission to

date - to the Sudan (including Darfur); Rwanda; the Democratic

Republic of

Congo; and Angola.

For a month, the 60-year-old will walk through their streets and

refugee

camps to execute what he calls his "AIDS attacks." He'll approach

teenagers, hand them a business card with information on HIV

written in

their native language, and then deliver his hook. "This info here

could

possibly save your best friend's life," he'll say, through a

translator,

in a refined tactic to pull them in. "Do you want to hear it?"

His message does not always go over smoothly. He's been arrested

in Cuba,

detained in Kenya, and has had his business cards confiscated in

China. But

his tourist-in-a-Hawaiian-shirt disguise has helped him speak with

an

estimated 300,000 kids on the streets of the world. He hopes to add

another

10,000 on his upcoming trip.

"They say you can't judge a book by its cover," said Barry

Ansin, who

founded Common Sensitivity, a central Massachusetts organization

that

worked on HIV and AIDS education. "But the cover has everything to

do with

your interest in reading the first page. His unique look and style

gives

him an opportunity, but that would be short-lived if he didn't then

have

the substance to back it up. He gets teens to really respond by

treating

them in an intelligent manor. He gives them the facts and allows

them to

make their decisions."

Chittick first became aware of AIDS in the 1980s when he owned

an art

gallery on Beacon Hill and saw this "mysterious disease that

nobody

understood" wreaking havoc on many young artists. When one of his

business

partners tearfully told him that he'd acquired the virus, Chittick

understood so little about how HIV was spread that he was afraid to

give

him a hug.

Chittick sold his business, went back to school at Harvard to

work on a

model for HIV education, earned a master's and doctorate in

education, and

was lecturing at the Harvard School of Public Health in the mid-90s

when he

realized that his place was not in the classroom. It was, he

realized, with

teenagers. (He says he takes little pride in the fact that his

Harvard

thesis argued, correctly, that HIV would soon become a big problem

for the

young.)

In 1997, he launched TeenAIDS, created what he says was the

Web's first

site for teens and HIV, teenaids.org, and started his "World

Walks." He

operates on a shoestring budget from private donations, and has

avoided

government funding because he doesn't "want any strings

attached." (He

shakes his head at the Bush administration's abstinence-only

education.)

Every penny goes toward the mission, he says, which means he

lives on the

constant edge of financial disaster. He operates TeenAIDS out of

his

childhood home in Fitchburg, and the house, which was left to him

by his

parents, was scheduled to be foreclosed on the day before his next

trip

(thanks to the help of his board, an anonymous donor, and the

Fidelity Bank

of Fitchburg, he's been given a one-year reprieve).

He's able to laugh about his finances and most else, but the

joviality

disappears when he gets to why he's sacrificed all for his cause.

"I am certain," he said recently in his living room, just

before he had

to get on a conference call about the foreclosure, "that I'm

saving lives,

and I'm enabling kids to do the same.

"Every time I leave a kid, I look them in the eye and say:

'You're now a

teacher. You have the ability to save lives. Go out and do it."'

Hometown: Fitchburg, where he grew up.

Education: Bachelor's degree in government and history from

Dartmouth in

1970; master's in visual studies from MIT in 1980; master's and EdD

from

Harvard, in 1989 and 1994, respectively.

Hobbies: "I do a lot of artwork. I do technical and abstract

drawings. And

I love Jazz," he said, referring to his yellow Labrador retriever.

Here are the stories New York Times editors are considering for

the Page 1 of Tuesday, Nov. 4. The N.Y. Times News Service night

supervisor is Mitch Keller; phone: (888) 346-9867; e-mail:

mikell@nytimes.com.

POLITICS

(Will move in "p" news file.)

(EDS: For all campaign-related photos and graphics, search

nytimages.com for the key word ELN08.)

CAMPAIGN-CHANGE (Undated) -- The 2008 race for the White House

that is now coming to an end fundamentally changed the way

presidential campaigns are fought in this country, a legacy that

has almost been lost with all the attention being paid to the

battle between Sen. John McCain and Sen. Barack Obama. It has

rewritten the rules on how to reach voters, raise money, organize

supporters, manage the media, rack and mold public opinions, and

wage -- and withstand -- political attacks. It has challenged the

consensus of the contours of the American presidential battleground

-- look no further than the states where Obama and McCain ended

their campaigns. Campaign Memo. By Adam Nagourney.

ELECTION-DAY-GUIDE (Undated) -- Pundits and pollsters may be

trying to take all the fun out of Election Day. So many have

predicted a lopsided win for Sen. Barack Obama over Sen. John

McCain that you might wonder why to bother watching the returns on

Tuesday night. The fact is, there is plenty of mystery -- and only

one poll that counts. Aim to have the popcorn popped and to be in

your favorite chair no later than 7 p.m. Eastern time. (That's

assuming you have a day job and haven't been glued to the

television set all day.) A guide of what to watch for on Tuesday.

By Katharine Q. Seelye.

CAMPAIGN-FINAL-DAY (Undated) -- The final full day of campaigning

was a blur of rallies, plane rides and meet-and-greet encounters

for the candidates, and at every step of the way four New York

Times reporters were there to chronicle the hectic final push.

Dispatches from Elisabeth Bumiller on the McCain campaign, Jeff

Zeleny on the Obama campaign, John M. Broder on the Biden campaign,

and Julie Bosman on the Palin campaign.

CALIF-GAY-MARRIAGE (San Francisco) -- The scene at San Francisco

City Hall on the next-to-last day that same-sex marriages may be

allowed in California, depending on the outcome of the ballot

initiative to ban them. By Jesse McKinley.

With photos.

ELECTION-TV-COVERAGE (Undated) -- Looking at the preparations at

the networks and cable channels as they contemplate where to place

their correspondents. By Jacques Steinberg.

INTERNATIONAL

(Will move in "i" news file.)

VENEZUELA-SUITCASE-TRIAL (Miami) --A Venezuelan businessman was

convicted on Monday for his role in a plot to conceal what U.S.

prosecutors say was an illicit contribution from his country's

leftist government to the election campaign of Argentina's current

president. Franklin Duran, 41, was found guilty by a federal court

jury in Miami of conspiracy and acting as an illegal foreign agent

in the United States in a case dubbed the "suitcase scandal" by

the Argentine media. Duran's attorney, Ed Shohat, argued during the

eight-week trial that prosecutors had pursued the case to embarrass

the anti-American government of Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez.

(Summary from wires.) By Carmen Gentile.

UKRAINE-ECON-CRISIS (Kiev, Ukraine) -- Four years ago this month,

hundreds of thousands of people took to the streets of this capital

city to topple a Soviet-era strongman. That outpouring, called the

Orange Revolution, brought fresh hopes for freedoms and a turn

toward Europe that few other post-Soviet societies had ever

experienced. The early promise of those days had frayed in recent

years but economically times were good, and the country always

seemed to manage. But now, confronted by the global financial

crisis, the new Ukraine is facing the single biggest test of its

stability and its leaders, by all accounts, seem to be flunking. By

Sabrina Tavernise.

FINANCIAL

(Will move in "f"' news file.)

FCC-RADIO-SPECTRUM (San Francisco) -- Tuesday marks the end of a

battle that has lasted for more than two years, with each side

predicting apocalyptic consequences should it lose. Not the fight

for the presidency. The one pitting Google against Dolly Parton.

The tech titan and the Queen of Country are two of the many

combatants in a high-tech dispute over precious slices of the

nation's airwaves. The issue comes to a head on Election Day when

the Federal Communications Commission votes on a proposal to make a

disputed chunk of radio spectrum available for public use. Google,

Microsoft and other tech companies say the spectrum could be used

to carry low-cost, high-speed Internet to and from new wireless

gadgets. But a coalition of old-guard media say signals sent over

those frequencies could interfere with broadcasts, sporting event

transmissions and wireless microphones at live productions. By Matt

Richtel.

BANKS-BAILOUT (Washington) -- There was a rare moment of levity

at the Treasury Department on Friday as the children of government

workers scampered from office to office in Halloween costumes. A

few minutes later, the kids were gone and the hallways were retaken

by grim-faced grown-ups -- handing out tricks and treats of a

different sort. The Treasury building is ground zero for the Bush

administration's $700 billion rescue of the financial system -- an

ambitious, increasingly embattled program that passed an early

milestone last week when the government wired the first $125

billion to the nine largest banks in the United States. It is new

and unfamiliar terrain for the group, which is making monumental

decisions -- a form of industrial policy, some critics say -- that

contradict the free market philosophy they espouse. By Mark Landler

and Edmund L. Andrews.

AUTO-SALES (Detroit) -- Vehicle sales in the United States

tumbled to multi-decade lows in October as tightened credit markets

and an economic slowdown kept consumers away from dealerships. The

General Motors reported a 45 percent decline in sales, and the Ford

Motor said it sold 30.2 percent fewer cars and trucks. Toyota Motor

said its sales were 23 percent lower, despite offering no-interest

financing and large discounts on many models. Light truck sales

fell 34 percent and autos fell 15 percent. By Bill Vlasic and Nick

Bunkley.

With graphic.

Editors: An early lede has moved.

ECON-EUROPE (Dateline TK) -- Like many once bustling cities

throughout Europe, Zaragoza, Spain, looked -- until recently -- as if

it might escape the effects of the financial crisis that has swept

through the banking systems of Spain and the rest of the Continent.

As the capital of Aragon, Spain's fastest-growing region, inland

Zaragoza kept booming even as the overbuilt Mediterranean coast

came to symbolize how real estate excess wasn't just an American or

British phenomenon. But this region has suddenly been hit by a

downturn just as the cold autumn wind is blowing down from the

Pyrenees, with layoff announcements by big manufacturers like

General Motors and a sudden tightening of credit stunning locals

who grew accustomed to the long boom. By Nelson D. Schwartz.

SCIENCE

(Will move in "a" news file.)

SCI-DENGUE-FEVER (Bangkok, Thailand) -- In the U.S. Army's

largest overseas medical research laboratory, in Bangkok, military

scientists are offering hope for a vaccine against dengue fever. By

Thomas Fuller.

With photo.

SCI-FISH-FARMS (Echo Bay, British Columbia) -- A profile of

Alexandra Morton, who is on a crusade to find evidence against the

salmon farms she believes drove most of the killer whales away, in

part by infecting the wild salmon the whales eat with parasites

called sea lice. By Cornelia Dean.

With photo.

SCI-TIERNEY-COLUMN (Undated) -- Who has a better sense of humor,

liberal or conservatives? On liberal and conservative humor. By

John Tierney.

SPORTS

(Will move in "s" news file.)

SOC-MARADONA (Undated) -- "Soccer has a god. That god is

Argentine, and his name is Diego Armando Maradona," proclaims the

Web site of the Church of Maradona, an online fan club of

Argentina's unrivaled athletic icon that boasts over 10,000

members. But this month, the country's 48-year-old sporting titan

will try his hand at an all-too-earthly task: managing the

Argentine national team, which has failed to reach the semifinals

of the World Cup since "El Diego" himself starred for them in

1986 and 1990. After retiring 11 years ago, Maradona has remained

in the spotlight primarily as the country's leading real-life soap

opera star, waging a series of well-publicized battles with drugs,

obesity, the media and past lovers. By Dan Rosenheck.

(Editors: Budgets and advisories are internal documents not for

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of our contract terms. All clients receive all budgets, but only

full-service clients receive all stories. Please check your level

of service to determine which stories you will receive.)

Many people think beauty resides on the edge

of a scalpel or the point of a Botox shot, but I know better: True

beauty fills the dance space of my exercise class every day.

For 3-1/2 years, I have been an avid Jazzerciser (yes, it's

still around).

There are about 130 of us in our area, ranging in age from 16 to

70-something, representing a wide variety of sizes, shapes and

fitness levels. We come from all walks of life and gather in groups

of about 25 to lunge and chasse, kickbox and shimmy in an effort to

turn back the hands of time -- and hang on to our last threads of

sanity.

The routines are great fun and they work. Fairly soon after

starting class, I began to notice a difference in my fitness level.

But the endorphin high isn't the only thing that keeps me coming

back. My classmates are the most amazing group of people; they are

welcoming and fun, and never fail to inspire me.

When I became the Stamford Advocate's features editor last fall

and asked the franchise owner, Kristen Hallett Rzasa, to help me

celebrate by doing the routine to the Black-Eyed Peas' "Let's Get

It Started," she called me on stage to dance with her and I was

overwhelmed by the response of the class as they cheered for my

milestone. I'll never know fame, but for those 3 minutes and 49

seconds, I was on top of the world.

That sense of camaraderie was very much in evidence again this

past summer as three of our group took the plunge to become

instructors. In class, as they repeatedly practiced their audition

routines, we all offered as much encouragement as we could, then

cheered as one by one they received their certifications.

Outside of class, many of the women are wives and mothers, some

also care for elderly parents and hold down demanding jobs, but

still find time to help out at their children's schools, their

houses of worship and in the community.

Indeed, they give freely and happily of themselves time and

again, without seeking recognition for their actions.

Women from the group have collected soccer balls to send to Lt.

Daniel Merritt, instructor Eleanor Casale's nephew, who is

stationed in Iraq, so he and other soldiers can distribute them to

children there. Annually, many of the women reach into their

closets for clothing to donate to Dress for Success, and into their

wallets to purchase gift certificates for needy families at holiday

time.

Last spring, several instructors organized a breast cancer

awareness event a high-energy, team-taught workout and cocktail

party, complete with raffle prizes that raised more than $5,000 for

the Susan G. Komen foundation.

Plans are in the works to create a more successful fundraiser

for next year. And this past May, others from the fitness center

gathered friends to participate in the Bennett Cancer Walk

fundraiser in Stamford.

These are just a few of the ways the women stretch themselves to

make a difference to others. Individually, they offer the most

basic kindnesses: support for those battling illness or going

through other rough patches; an ear for those of us needing to

vent; parenting advice; recipes; book titles to share; even

hand-me-downs! In short, together we form a secondary family unit.

Thanks to time logged on the dance floor, I've learned that

sometimes, the simplest acts affect us most.

And these days, as airbrushed beauties seem to beckon from every

magazine cover, billboard and TV screen, I'm not keen to imitate

their looks. Indeed, as I pack up my sneakers and weights after

class, and survey the flushed, sweaty faces of my workout friends,

I think: I want to look just like them.

(Terri S. Vanech is the features editor of the Stamford (Conn.)

Advocate.)

FROM A STRANGE BREW, CHEAPER FUEL A graphic is being sent to NYTNS Photo Service subscribers. Non-subscribers can make individual purchases by calling 212-556-4204 or 888-603-1036. LEBANON, N.H. - What does it take to brew a tank of biofuel?

At the Mascoma Corp. lab, the recipe might include a dash of

enzymes from

termite guts, elephant stomach mixed with yeast, a load of

pulverized

switch grass or paper sludge, and a few days of fermentation.

Anything goes here, as scientists try to find a quicker, cheaper

way to

make cellulosic ethanol, a "second generation" biofuel that uses

non-food

plant residue and other waste as its main ingredients, instead of

corn or

soy.

The key is splicing together the right combination of genes,

such as those

found in termites or an elephant stomach, to create a super bug

capable of

producing cellulose-digesting and sugar-fermenting enzymes that

will help

to streamline the brewing process from four steps to one.

"Don't ask, 'How did you get something that used to be in an

elephant

stomach?"' joked Bruce Jamerson, Mascoma's chief executive and a

member of

Massachusetts' Advanced Biofuels Task Force, which was created by

the state

last November.

Jamerson's company, which has corporate offices in Boston,

recently

partnered with General Motors Corp. to help further its scientists'

work at

the research facility in Lebanon, which has 66 employees.

"I'd like to be ((test)) driving some vehicles by the end of

this year

with our product," Jamerson said.

If successful, Mascoma's biofuel could be a locally produced

substitute for

gasoline made out of petroleum, as well as for gas alternatives

made from

food crops. Such "first generation" biofuels have come under fire

because

crops that once fed people were being used to make fuel, possibly

driving

up food costs, and producing more greenhouse gases than first

thought.

Environmentalists say Mascoma's biofuel looks promising because

it has the

potential to be both affordable and sustainable.

"One of the big things ((they're doing)) is making it possible

to use a

lot of different materials like grasses or wood chips," said

Jeremy

Martin, a senior scientist with the Union of Concerned Scientists,

a

nonprofit group in Cambridge.

And it appears Mascoma is asking questions that Martin said

early biofuel

makers often did not ponder, such as, "Where do those

((materials)) come

from and what's the impact of getting them?"

But commercial production of an environmentally friendly,

cost-competitive

biofuel like the one Mascoma is developing is still years away,

according

to the state task force. It estimates that by 2025, the biofuels

industry

could add up to $1 billion a year to the Massachusetts economy and

create

up to 4,000 jobs. Challenges include getting production and

fuel-distribution facilities running and making vehicles powered by

biofuels more available.

For now, Mascoma researchers in Lebanon are still trying to hit

upon the

right ingredients for their biofuel recipe, which is likely to

include a

strain of the microbe Thermoanaerobacterium saccharolyticum, or T.

sacch.

Jamerson said his company's ethanol-making process takes less

time than the

traditional four-step process, which calls for the addition of

costly

enzymes that range in price from 50 cents to $1 or more for every

gallon of

fuel produced.

On a recent afternoon, bottles filled with samples of microbes

lined the

shelves in the "organism discovery" room of the Mascoma lab. It's

here

that microbes, some of which were found in hot springs at

Yellowstone

National Park, are tested in an oxygen-free chamber to see what

they do.

"Just because they grow in a hot spring doesn't mean they're

going to grow

in a plant," said Larry Feinberg, a research scientist.

In the "molecular biology" room, which is permeated with the

odor of

yeast, scientists splice together genes to develop microbes with

specific

properties, trying to find the right combination. The cultures -

which look

like little dots of cake frosting - are grown in petri dishes.

Later, they

are transferred to shaking flasks.

"They like the agitation," explained lab manager Nathan

Margolis.

In the pretreament room, materials such as switch grass, corn

stover, wood

chips, and paper sludge get heated and turned into a substance the

color of

coffee grounds that resembles ripped-up peat moss.

Eventually, everything gets tossed together in a fermentation

tank that

looks like an oversize French press accessorized with random tubes.

"This is where the action is," Margolis said of the dark

beer-like

substance brewing in the tanks. "At the end of the day we're going

to send

it over to analysis and find out, you know, how much ethanol is in

there.

More is better."

Environmentalists, Massachusetts officials, and others are

monitoring

Mascoma's progress.

Ian Bowles, secretary of the state Executive Office of Energy

and

Environmental Affairs, called biofuel a key part of Governor Deval

Patrick's energy vision.

The state recently passed legislation giving cellulosic biofuels

an

exemption from the gas tax.

"Job one is to be an alternative to petroleum," Bowles said of

such

fuels. "The second is to do that in an environmentally benign

way."

Environmentalists say that's going to be one of the biggest

hurdles for

companies like Mascoma to overcome.

The Conservation Law Foundation, a nonprofit environmental

advocacy group

with offices throughout New England, is calling for a low-carbon

fuel

standard that would scrutinize every fuel - not just biofuel - and

its

production, and regulate and rank them based on which pollute the

least

through their life cycles.

"You are looking at how to get the greatest greenhouse gas

reductions from

every step in the process rather than just at the tailpipe," said

Shanna

Cleveland, a staff attorney with the foundation.

Erin Ailworth can be reached at eailworth@globe.com.

At the age of 71, after a half-century career in

the pharmaceutical industry that left her with investments on which

she could have comfortably retired, Joan Dembinski went back to

school full-time to pursue a passion for cooking.

The oldest student in the history of the culinary-arts program

at Schenectady County Community College, Dembinski attends classes

during the day Monday through Thursday, and she spends at least

three nights per week in the kitchen at Yono's restaurant in

Albany, making and plating desserts.

"I just love to be around young people -- they have such

energy," says Dembinski. "Why would I want to retire? I love to

cook, and I love to learn. One of the things I really fear is a

day with nothing to do. That's what I think retirement would be

like."

Though she's in a dramatic minority -- just 4 percent of SCCC's

culinary students are older than 50, fewer still older than 60 --

Dembinski is not a dilettante or dabbler, says Toby Strianese, who

has been on the SCCC culinary faculty for 34 years and chaired the

culinary and tourism department for the past 17. Nor does she

expect or receive deference or dispensation because of her age.

"She's absolutely serious about this. Joan is an excellent

student," says Strianese.

Indeed: straight A's since starting at SCCC in January, even in

her first semester, when she took five courses.

"There was so much work I really felt like I'd been hit by a

train that first week," says Dembinski. But going back to school

wasn't as big a shock for her as it might have seemed to someone

else who had been, for example, a stay-at-home mom and grandmother

for decades.

As a manager involved in clinical drug trials from 1959 until

her retirement in January, just before school started, research and

report-writing were skills Dembinski had honed for decades.

"I could always tell which were her essays in (wine-tasting)

class," says Strianese. "She was the only student who used

chemical symbols when writing about the wine."

Dembinski was born in Albany, the daughter of a family that ran

a health club downtown from 1935 until 1983. Her father, an Albany

native, held multiple weightlifting titles and was a candidate for

the 1924 Olympics; her mother took her to farmers markets and

taught young Joan to speak Italian, a language she still uses

during her twice-annual trips to Italy to see friends she's made

over a lifetime of visits to her maternal grandparents' homeland.

(She climbed Mount Vesuvius again during spring break in April.)

After graduating from Mount Holyoke College, Dembinski applied

to Albany Medical College, intending to go into surgery.

"They told me, 'There's no place for a woman in surgery. We'll

give you all this training, then you'll leave to get married and

have children,'?" she says. (She never married or had children.)

Instead of going to med school, Dembinski took a job in drug

research at Sterling-Winthrop Research Institute in East Greenbush,

N.Y.

She stayed for 28 years, then moved to a similar post at

Omnicare Clinical Research's local office, also in East Greenbush,

finishing as a manager of clinical trials, a job with a six-figure

salary. Now she's a student again, earning a couple of dollars more

per hour than minimum wage -- though if she had her way, she'd work

for free.

Donna Purnomo, who with her chef-husband owns Yono's and is its

pastry chef, says, "She said to me, 'Miss Donna' -- she always

calls me Miss Donna, even though she was in high school when I was

born -- 'I shouldn't be paid, I'm just an apprentice.' But we

insisted. She deserves it."

Although Dembinski is an expert home cook, she recognized gaps

in her knowledge. "Anybody can cook, but I needed to go back to

school to learn things I didn't know," she says, including

sanitary techniques, dining-room service and cooking for banquets.

She doesn't envision opening her own restaurant, nor does she

delude herself that she could -- or would want to -- spend 10-hour

days throwing saute pans around a hot line or grilling meat on a

broiler.

But she loves being in a professional kitchen, and has quickly

proven herself an able member of the Yono's team. She even has a

nickname, as do many of the restaurant's employees.

A bearish cook is known as "Manimal"; another fellow, named

Brian, is called "No. 2," because a Brian was already on staff

when he was hired; and Dembinski is "Betty White," after the

sparky octogenarian actress.

Dembinski landed the job a couple of months ago, when she

stopped in at the restaurant to meet the Purnomos, who were to be

honored at an upcoming SCCC fundraising dinner. Because Yono's

regularly opens its kitchen to culinary students for brief visits,

Donna Purnomo casually offered Dembinski a chance to watch and

help. Dembinski replied, "How about tomorrow night?"

Donna Purnomo admits she at first thought she would be indulging

a sweet old lady's harmless passing fancy, but Dembinski acquitted

herself.

"It was obvious that this was somebody who's very bright,"

says Purnomo. "I didn't have to tell her anything twice. Whatever

I said to her, she'd say, 'Understood,' and she did. She just got

it."

Soon after Dembinski started at Yono's, she called Purnomo at

home and volunteered to make more of a dessert that was running

low.

Says Purnomo, "I came in the next day, and the bread pudding

could not have been better if I'd made it myself."

After Dembinski graduates in the spring, with an assistant

chef's certificate, she's hoping for a permanent position in a

kitchen.

"Working in a restaurant would be fun," she says. "Remember

where I am age-wise. It's so important to pursue your passions.

That's why I go to Italy, as a restorative. Walking on the beach

at Lido, with that Adriatic wind and crystal-blue sky -- I'm

hungering for that right now. I'm at a place in my life now where I

know how important it is to do what matters to you, and I'm able to

do that. So I'm pursuing cooking."

Touching lightly at the waist, their sweeping movements a poem,

Ellie and

John McKey fell in love dancing on ice, and judges of competitions

swooned

while watching the couple.

"It was like a perfect duet," John McKey said of dancing with

his wife.

"It was a matter of harmony, of communication. That was what was

so

wonderful, the mutuality of movement. And to do it to beautiful

music in a

room filled with other dancers that were beautifully dressed - the

men in

their tails, the ladies in their ball gowns - it was elegant."

Often, the McKeys were the most elegant couple on the ice rink

or the dance

floor as they won eight regional, national, and North American

amateur

competitions for seniors. Mrs. McKey, who met John on a skating

rink in the

early 1970s, died Oct. 10 in her Brookline home of complications

from a

stroke. She was 80 and also shared a home with her husband in Vero

Beach,

Fla.

"She had a wealth of spirit, a lovely easy wisdom," her

husband said.

"She knew what to do, and when to do it, and how to do it, and she

did it

all with such grace, with such a lovely appreciation for what was

good and

beautiful in life."

The two met after Mrs. McKey was widowed and decided to pursue

skating,

something she had wished to do as a girl before marriage and

motherhood.

One evening she was at the Skating Club of Boston, on the ice

during the

time set aside for families.

"And she did a beautiful little three jump in front of me,"

her husband

said. "I can see it as clearly now as the day I met her. She was

wearing a

lovely turquoise green skating dress with a Mandarin collar. I

asked her if

she would skate around the rink with me, and she did."

They conversed through dinner and cocktails, and through the

structured ice

dancing session that followed. Into the evening they talked.

"And we found we had so much in common," he said. "We courted

for about

a year, and then we were married. And we had almost 36 years

together. It

was a great gift."

Eleanor Crocker grew up in Manchester-by-the-Sea and was married

to Edward

A. Taft Jr., who became executive director of the New England

Aquarium.

They lived in Manchester, where they raised their sons Edward and

David.

At 42, Edward Taft Jr. was driving home from Worcester in 1967

when he died

in a car accident on the Massachusetts Turnpike. When the aquarium

officially opened two years later, his widow and two sons cut the

ceremonial ribbon of seaweed.

In 1973, the McKeys married and for the next quarter century

were among the

top amateur dancers, on ice and on the floor.

They were New England senior champions in ice dancing three

times, and

their training led them from the rink to the dance floor. Their

coach was

Cecilia Colledge, an Olympic silver medalist who had moved from her

home in

England to Boston.

"She thought it would amplify our presentation on the ice if we

learned

the international style of ballroom dancing," John McKey said.

"So off we

went and took lessons."

Then a back injury prevented him from skating with enough

precision for

competitions, and the McKeys turned their attention to the

ballroom. The

male partner is the leader, but John McKey said he often felt as if

she

guided them around the dance floor through the purity of her

enthusiasm.

"The letters I have been reading about her all speak of her

lovely smile

and the delicious laugh she had and the joy she had in what she was

doing,

especially when she was dancing," he said. "She just entered into

her own

world at that point and brought me along with her. She was a

wonderful

partner. She knew what I wanted to do even before I had thought

what was

next."

He added that "another expression that comes up in the letters

is that she

was such a lady. She was so poised on the ballroom floor. In a

competition,

I never saw her get rattled, and people loved watching her. She had

many

fans."

Among the fans were the judges of amateur ballroom dancing

competitions.

The McKeys won the US senior championship four times and the North

American

championship once.

Practicing was never a chore. They danced for two hours each

morning, "and

frequently, we'd be out dancing for two hours at various ballroom

dance

practices held at different studios, or even at old Moseley's on

the

Charles, which had a wonderful dance floor."

Sharing the floor with couples less experienced called for some

restraint,

however.

"We had to be very careful," he said with a laugh. "If it was

a crowded

floor, we moved with such speed and covered such distances that

they would

have murdered us if we hadn't behaved."

They competed until the mid-1990s, then continued to give the

occasional

dance demonstrations. The McKeys shared other passions, too. They

painted

together, studied French, and traveled to France.

"I miss her so and wish she was here, but we had such a full,

beautiful,

beautiful life together," he said. "We were very lucky. We were

fortunate

we found each other when the time was right for each of us."

In addition to her husband and her sons Edward of Los Altos,

Calif., and

David of Seattle, Mrs. McKey leaves three grandsons.

Services have been held.

Many historians, professional and amateur, believe the wrong

Roosevelt is carved on Mount Rushmore.

H.W. Brands is one of them.

Brands, who is the Dickson Allen Anderson Professor of History

at the University of Texas in Austin, as well as the author of 16

books whose subject matter range from capitalism ("The Money

Men," 2006) to Andrew Jackson ("His Life and Times," 2005) to

Benjamin Franklin ("The First American," 2000) and even Teddy

Roosevelt ("TR: The Last Romantic," 1996), has just published

what Pulitzer Prize-winning historian David Oshinsky says "will

quickly emerge as the finest one-volume biography of FDR."

"Traitor to His Class" is a remarkably vivid and readable

portrait of a man who was an enigma to many. Here was a man born to

family wealth and influence, whose doting parents (especially his

mother, Sara), good looks and charm "made life easy."

Brands writes of the youthful FDR, "He waltzed from triumph to

triumph, scarcely breaking a sweat."

Why, wondered those of his privileged class, did he consort with

and champion the causes of the masses? The question was not just

why was Roosevelt a Democrat -- his cousin, Teddy, the president,

was a good Republican -- but why was he involved in the sordid world

of politics in the first place?

When FDR was pursuing his first term as president in 1932,

Walter Lippman, the great political commentator, challenged anyone

to "point to a single act of his which involved any political

risk."

He continued his assessment: "Franklin D. Roosevelt is no

crusader. He is no tribune of the people. He is no enemy of

entrenched privilege. He is a pleasant man who, without any

important qualifications for the office, would very much like to be

President."

How wrong the founder of The New Republic turned out to be --

except the part about FDR wanting to be president.

Nearly a century after FDR's political rise, he remains a

historical figure carved in our collective memory; he's the man

noted for his "fear itself" and "day of infamy" speeches.

What Brands has done, through exhaustive research and a natural

storyteller's flair, is bring to life, to humanize, a man and his

circle, including "the Franklin and Eleanor team," who, like

Lincoln, led the country at one of its most critical crossroads.

Brands recently answered a few questions for the Express-News.

Q. The title is intriguing. Why was FDR "A Traitor to His

Class"?

A. The wealthy felt Roosevelt was selling them out to the

masses, preaching cheap populism when he should have been

protecting their (and his) birthright.

Most of them were believers in trickle-down economics -- the

well-being of the rich and powerful would find its way down to the

ordinary folks. Roosevelt thought this was backward -- the welfare

of the ordinary folks would bubble up to the rich.

Q. When you set out to write a biography of FDR, what did you

plan to achieve? There are hundreds, if not thousands of books on

FDR; what about the man hasn't been illuminated?

A. I wanted to answer the implicit question of the subtitle: How

did a son of privilege become the sponsor of policies that

radically reshaped the landscape of American politics?

Q. What do we owe FDR? How would this country be different if he

hadn't come along at such a crucial moment in our history? And I'm

thinking first, the Great Depression and the New Deal, and second,

World War II?

A. Roosevelt radically reoriented American thinking both

domestically and in foreign affairs. At home he made Americans

believe that government should help the less fortunate and those

who, through no fault of their own, found themselves in tough

straits. Americans still believe this, even if we quibble about the

nature of this help. In foreign affairs Roosevelt attacked the

isolationist thinking of the 1930s, convincing Americans that their

own safety required permanent attention to the affairs of the

world. As with domestic affairs, this conclusion is one Americans

have never seriously reconsidered, even 60 years later.

Q. You must have done a mountain of research for the book. Was

there something that completely surprised you or was totally out of

character with the image you held of the man?

A. Many public figures are most truly themselves when they act,

speak and write in private. This is why historians spend so much

time looking at old letters and diaries. Roosevelt was most himself

in public. Roosevelt's press conferences and fireside chats were

consistently brilliant pieces of political theater -- which didn't

make them less sincere . . .merely more effective. To listen to his

fireside chats, which are available on the Internet, and to read

the transcripts of his press conferences is to be transported to a

time when the occupant of the Oval Office was the most riveting

personality in the country.

Q. If FDR was alive today, what advice do you think he would

have for both presidential candidates?

A. He would tell the president-elect to remember who hired him:

the people of the United States. Forget the lobbyists, forget the

big donors -- put the people first, and all will come right.

Traitor to His Class: The Privileged Life and Radical Presidency

of Franklin Delano Roosevelt

By H.W. Brands

Doubleday, $35

The Detroit News plans to move the following stories for clients

of the New York Times News Service for editions of Tuesday, Nov. 4,

and thereafter. For questions, contact:

News desk: 313.222.2533

Sports desk: 313.222.2260

Features desk: 313.222.2480

Business desk: 313.222.2738-..-

BUSINESS ("f" designation)

AUTO-SALES (undated): General Motors' October U.S. sales plunged

45 percent and Ford's dropped 30 percent, as low consumer

confidence and tight credit combined to scare customers away from

showrooms. The results released Monday -- along with a 23 percent

drop at Toyota and a 25 percent decline at Honda -- are strong

indications that sales for the industry as a whole may perhaps be

the worst in 25 years. GM remained ahead of Toyota, but the

dramatic drop in demand for GM products also suggested consumers

may be fearful of buying GM models amid talk of a possible merger

with Chrysler. Chrysler sales plunged 35 percent. Detroit-based GM

said its light trucks sales tumbled 51 percent compared with the

same month last year, while demand for passenger cars fell 34

percent. The results were less severe at Ford Motor Co., which said

its Ford, Lincoln and Mercury car sales were off 27 percent, while

light truck sales for the three brands were down more than 30

percent. Overall, GM sold 168,719 vehicles, down from 307,408 in

the same month last year, while Ford, including its Volvo brand,

sold 132,278 light vehicles last month down from 189,515 in the

same month last year. Mike DiGiovanni, GM's executive director of

global market and industry analysis, said the credit crisis and

financial market turmoil are affecting the industry to a

"frightening" level. "Clearly we're in a very dire situation,"

he said. Despite the steep drop, GM's total was enough to keep it

ahead of Toyota Motor Corp. for the No. 1 U.S. sales spot. Toyota

sold 152,101 vehicles, down from 197,592 in October 2007. By

Christine Tierney. Developing.

MINIVAN (Windsor, Ont.): Chrysler LLC celebrated the 25th

anniversary of the minivan Monday, a vehicle that started life

during a corporate crisis and is one of the few models likely to

survive the automaker's uncertain future today. Chrysler continues

to plan future innovations for the Chrysler Town &amp;amp; Country and

Dodge Grand Caravan to try to retain leadership in a segment it

dominated for most of its 25-year history. Plans include an

electric minivan as early as next year, and a new V-6 as early as

2010. But employees also have vivid memories of the risk involved

when the minivan debuted in the fall of 1983. By Alisa Priddle.

Developing.

METRO ("a" designation)

PREZELECT -- When the votes are counted today, the nation will

have elected either the first African-American president or the

first female vice president. And while Montague and Spears can

rattle off issue after issue on which they agree with their chosen

candidates, both admit that the thought of breaking down a barrier

adds resonance to their votes. By Ron French. Developing.

SPORTS ("s" designation)

PISTONS-TRADE (CHARLOTTE, N.C.): The Detroit Pistons on Monday

traded Chauncey Billups, Antonio McDyess and Cheikh Samb to the

Denver Nuggets for Allen Iverson. The trade, well received by both

of the main players, was approved by the league office Monday

afternoon. Iverson, 33, is in his 14th season and the final year of

his contract ($20.84 million). He had expressed a desire to leave

Denver and join a contending team. He felt the Nuggets were in a

cost-cutting mode after they dumped center Marcus Camby in the

summer. In Billups, 32, the Pistons are giving up their captain, a

two-time all-star and the MVP of the 2004 NBA Finals. But Billups

wasn't blindsided by the trade. By Chris McCosky. Developing.

ENTERTAINMENT ("e" designation)

MOVIE-PRESIDENTS -- As we the people stand on the precipice of

history, readying to elect a new president of the United States in

hopes of steadying the shaky ship of state, it may be time to

consider the wisdom of previous presidents. Not real presidents,

obviously. They're all politicians. We're talking about movie

presidents. Because while only fictional, movie presidents

inevitably reflect both our fears and hopes about those who would

ascend to this country's highest office. They have an honesty about

them that no candidate might dare, they wear their strengths and

weaknesses on their sleeves, and they are beholden to no special

interests beyond the box office. By Tom Long. Developing.

Los Angeles and the West Coast brought stars to the eyes of my

daughter, Michelle, and husband, Don.

I had been in L.A. once before with my parents many years ago

and felt it was time to re-explore the city of glitz and glitter

with my husband and daughter.

What was planned as a small family reunion with my California

cousins evolved into an indulgence of gastronomic delights, sandy

beaches to die for and outrageous flowers and fruits.

You can stand for hours waiting on line for a scrumptious hotdog

at Pink's in Hollywood along with the likes of a Simon Cowell or

Ryan Seacrest of "American Idol" or you could dress to the nine's

and go top shelf at one of Beverly Hills' in dining spots for those

who like to see and be seen, such as Spago, one of Wolfgang Puck's

out-of-this-world dining establishments.

For us, our stay commenced at The Peninsula, a luxurious hotel

tucked away in Beverly Hills. Before we even checked in, we were in

the lap of luxury.

My L.A. cousins gathered for chatting and munching on fresh

California pecans, chips and cool refreshments as we caught up on

family things. We started out in the elegant salon furnished with

comfortable couches, chandeliers, fireplaces and antiques, all

surrounded by towering windows. This area also serves the legendary

Peninsula Afternoon Tea from 2:30 to 5 p.m. We then meandered over

to the bar area with more comfortable couches and tables.

One of the staff escorted us up to our hotel room, graced by

antique furniture, mirrors, a Bose radio, bowls of fruit, freshly

baked cookies, bottled Evian and Figi water and even a personalized

note from the managing director of The Peninsula wishing us a most

enjoyable stay. The bathroom had more grand effects: marbleized

floors and shower, surrounded by glass and mirrors.

Waking up to a breakfast at The Roof Garden, top of the hotel,

adjacent to the pool and Jacuzzi, was invigorating. Under the early

morning California sunshine, we sat at an elegant umbrella shaded

table. We nibbled on croissants, sweet rolls and fresh fruit,

washed down by fresh juice and flavorful and robust coffee.

One of the epicurean highlights of L.A. is Spago, a Beverly

Hills restaurant with highly attentive waiters, maitre d's and

busboys. Securing a reservation at this hot spot took months (and a

bit of help from my cousin who has a few connections); we were

seated at a choice table in the center of the patio.

We entered in our elegantly casual dress, subtly checking all

the glamorous customers. A group of wait staff attended to our

every need as we quenched our thirst with a very fine California

wine.

We began our dinner with a taste of smoked salmon pizza,

Wolfgang Puck's renowned favorite. Throughout the meal, we were

offered a variety of freshly baked bread slices on a tray served

individually including pumpernickel raisin, whole wheat and flat

bread crackers. We each supped on a different entree. I chose the

roast leg of young Sonoma lamb, a mouth-watering delight served

with saut?ed escarole, garlic, golden raisins, pine nuts, creamy

goat cheese polenta and black olives; my husband feasted on a spicy

beef goulash; and my daughter ate pan-roasted duck breast.

This gastronomic experience left our stomachs full, our palates

expanded, and our demeanor relaxed.

Topping off the evening, we went on a driving tour around the

palatial Beverly Hills mansions of celebrities, including Hugh

Hefner's Playboy Mansion and the homes of Larry King and the late

Aaron Spelling. Along Sunset Boulevard, we passed the Chateau

Marmont, a castle-like hotel where many celebrities have spent the

night; the spot is somewhat infamous for being the place where John

Belushi died.

The next morning, my cousin picked us up at the hotel to take us

on a day of touring, deli hopping, celebrity chasing and California

dreamin'.

Who says New York City is the only place to find a good Jewish

delicatessen. We felt at home seeing a "New York" sandwich (hot

pastrami, coleslaw and Russian dressing served on a choice of

breads) on the menu at Nate 'n Al's Delicatessen in Beverly Hills.

This celebrity magnet since 1945, owned by the Mendelson family,

is the hangout for many notables including Larry King.

On the morning we had breakfast, King was there surrounded by

his former Brooklyn buddies.

We were given the history of the deli by our waitress, Raisa

Katsman of Belarus. She pointed out a framed waitress uniform and

photo of "Kaye," a waitress who died after a life devoted to the

deli and its patrons.

After several hours of touring, and still craving the taste of

L.A., we drove to the other side of town to Alvarado Street, where

we feasted on the best pastrami sandwich on either coast at

Langer's Deli.

We were greeted by second-generation owner Norm Langer, who

proudly told us that Langer's was nominated as one of the top

attractions by Los Angeles Magazine.

Cruising along Pacific Coast Highway (California Route 1) with

the roof open in my cousin's Porsche SUV was the perfect way to see

the sights. Breathing the fresh sea air, we drove past Venice

Beach, a Woodstock-style community with a lovely wide beach and

eclectic shops. Then on past Santa Monica Pier offering a great

view of the ocean, lovely beach, carnival rides and even a bungee

jump.

We drove north to Malibu, where palatial homes hugged the shore

and mountains towered on the other side of the highway, with more

homes dotting the hillsides.

We also browsed around Los Angeles' Farmer's Market, an open-air

market established in 1934, with 70 permanent storefronts offering

everything from international cuisine to fresh fruit and

vegetables.

While shopping for a souvenir T-shirt, we popped over to the

Mexican food stand where you can buy a bottle of the real Classic

Coke. We discovered a stand selling the "hottest" sauces in L.A.

and stumbled upon purveyors of freshly made donuts and chocolate

and all types of Israeli and Jewish delicatessen food.

We also discovered that you don't have to head down to New

Orleans to savor the flavors of the Gumbo Pot, which offers

mouth-watering dishes like gumbo yaya.

In the midst of it all, an MTV pilot was being filmed at one of

the outdoor cafes; seeing film crews in action was a frequent

occurrence throughout all of our L.A. adventures.

Right next door to the Farmer's Market is The Grove, also an

outdoor mall and one of L.A.'s favorite shopping destinations. I

couldn't drag my daughter away from stores like Lucky Brand,

Anthropologie, a boutique featuring women's clothing, soaps,

dishware, jewelry and home furnishings; and Nordstrom, where

footwear by such designers as Stella McCartney was a big

attraction.

Even the parking garage at The Grove was noteworthy: It offered

valet services including package delivery to your car and personal

shopping. It was just another reminder that we were in a world

apart from our everyday lives, a fun place to vacation and to

dream.

Citizens policies shifted BY IVAN PENN Over the past three years, the state has quietly reduced the number of homeowner policies in Citizens Property Insurance by almost 800,000, delivering many of them to startup insurers with poor financial ratings. Efforts to decrease the number of policies in Citizens the state-run property insurer dramatically escalated this year, with almost a half-million homeowners moved to private insurers. But the private firms are not the State Farms or Allstates of the insurance world. They are mostly small companies, created in the last three or four years, that upon state approval can take policies out of Citizens by notifying the homeowner with a letter. Homeowners who do not "opt out" of the transfer are automatically moved to the private firm. About 160,000 homeowner policies will leave Citizens in November and December. Many are in the Tampa Bay area. Of the 14 companies that took policies out of Citizens this year, 10 were rated "D" or "E" by TheStreet.com, a financial poorly rated insurers, is the state risking that all Floridians

will end up paying for more Poe-like collapses?

Chief Financial Officer Alex Sink, who heads the Department of

Financial Services, did not comment directly about the takeout

companies; her spokeswoman, Nina Bannister, issued this statement:

"The Office of Insurance Regulation (OIR), under Insurance

Commissioner Kevin McCarty, is responsible for authorizing and

regulating insurance companies." Sink "expects Commissioner

McCarty to ensure authorized companies operate in a sound manner,

to monitor and take quick action when problems are detected, and to

apprise the commission of any emerging issues that demand broader

attention."

The OIR said it had reviewed the financial records of these

companies to ensure they are sound but acknowledged that a major

storm could wipe them out, leaving all Floridians on the hook.

Said spokesman Tom Zutell: "It appears from the numbers that

enough companies in the private sector have demonstrated to the

office that they have the proper surplus and reserves to pay out in

the event of a storm. Could there be another monster like Katrina

or worse? God forbid if there were. All bets are off at that

point."

Lisa Miller, a Tallahassee insurance company consultant who

represents one of the takeout insurance companies, American

Integrity Insurance Co. of Florida, said the state's tough

regulations many of which resulted from Poe's collapse ensure

that the companies are sound.

"We do have tough financial scrutiny," Miller said. "This is

the most heavily regulated industry in the country."

TheStreet.com rated American Integrity a "D-" and said after

its Sept. 4 review: "The D- rating means that this company

currently demonstrates what we consider to be significant

weaknesses which could negatively impact policyholders."

American Integrity was rejected in its bid to garner part of a

$100-million incentive program in Louisiana because it did not meet

requirements for the program's risk-to-capital ratio.

Miller said the Louisiana requirements were overly stringent.

She said she did not know about TheStreet.com's rating but pointed

to the "A" American Integrity received from the rating firm

Demotech Inc.

Unlike TheStreet.com, which is independent and generates revenue

from its publishing arm and through advertising sales, insurers pay

Demotech an average of $6,000 a year to be rated; two-thirds of

them receive an A.

Demotech president Joe Petrelli said the A ratings are based on

the insurers' having substantial capital and backup insurance to

cover claims.

"These are small companies, but they have substantial capacity

because of reinsurance," Petrelli said.

By law, the takeout companies must offer premiums equal to or

lower than Citizens.

Consumers who switch to private companies gain another

advantage, said Citizens spokesman John Kuczwanski: If the

state-run insurer could not cover losses from a storm, Citizens'

policyholders would be the first assessed to cover a shortfall.

Policyholders under private companies would be second.

The takeouts help Citizens reduce its exposure, which stands at

$437-billion for about 1.2-million policies, he said.

Zutell, of the Office of Insurance Regulation, noted a problem

in this for Citizens: The takeouts are focusing on the housing

stock's "creme de la creme," leaving most of the worst policies

with Citizens.

"If you are a company taking out policies, you would think they

are not going to be snatching up very high-risk policies along the

coast," Zutell said. "They're not taking the old homes in

Largo."

Ivan Penn can be reached at ipennsptimes.com or (727) 892-2332.

. fast facts

Insurers' ratings

TheStreet.com rated these takeout insurance firms based on five

general categories that include profitability, liquidity and

stability. Companies that have taken policies out of Citizens this

year:

?American Integrity Insurance Co. of Florida: D- (weak)

?Argus Fire &amp;amp; Casualty Insurance Co.: D (weak)

?Avatar Property &amp;amp; Casualty Insurance Co.: (no data)

?Edison Insurance Co.: E+ (very weak)

?Federated National Insurance Co.: E+ (very weak)

?Florida Peninsula Insurance Co.: C- (fair)

?Homeowners Choice: D (weak)

?Homewise Preferred Insurance Co.: D ( weak)

?Landmark One Insurance Co.: C (fair)

?Magnolia Insurance Co.: (no data)

?Northern Capital Insurance Co.: E (very weak)

?Southern Oak Insurance Co.: D+ (weak)

?Sunshine State Insurance Co.: D (weak)

?United Property &amp;amp; Casualty Insurance: E+ (very weak)

Mysteries of the "Phantom"

How does that boat float? What could ever go wrong?

The Phantom of the Opera, Andrew Lloyd Webber's musical

adaptation of a French novel about a disfigured murderer hiding

below a Paris opera house, has been enchanting audiences since 1986

and is the longest-running musical on Broadway.

Even if you've seen The Phantom 50 times, it's easy to be wowed

by the eerie travels across a fog-shrouded lake, the elaborate

costumes and the breathtaking escapes of the man in the half-mask.

How does it all happen? Tampabay.com took a tour backstage as

the North American touring production was setting up for a run in

Tampa, Fla. Here are a few interesting factoids we learned during

our expedition through the Opera Populaire:

GREAT BIG CONVOY: Most touring stage productions need three to

seven trucks to transport sets and costumes from city to city.

Wicked, another popular and elaborate production, requires 14

trucks. Phantom's 230 costumes, 1.5 ton staircase, 28 hanging

backdrops , stage facade and opera boxes require 20 trucks. Yes,

that means it's three times as large as most productions.

OH, THE HUMANITY: How many people does it take to stage one

show? About 130 cast and crew members and musicians from 40 states.

About 35 are actors. Between 55 and 60 locals are hired in each

city as dressers and technicians, but no local actors are hired to

appear in the touring production.

PREP TIME: It takes 10 days to set up the Phantom production in

each city, during which the venue cannot accommodate any other

shows. When the final show is over, it takes only 12 hours to pack

it up.

WIGGED OUT: Because it's a period piece set 100 years ago,

Phantom makes use of 200 wigs, most of them made from human hair.

They're washed as needed and then placed in a "wig oven," in

which a soft, low heat gently dries them. A staff of five

hairdressers sets the wigs before each performance.

SCARY MOMENT: With such a large-scale production, there are

several hold-your-breath and cross-your-finger moments for the

crew. Here's one: At the beginning of the show, when the dust

covers are yanked from the stage facade as the music begins, the

sheets have on occasion fallen onto the poor musicians in the

orchestra pit or gotten snagged in the rigging for the chandelier.

In either case, the production then pauses while it's sorted out.

That pesky Phantom is not to blame, we're assured.

CRUISE CONTROL: The most elaborately staged scenes of the show

are the two boat journeys with the Phantom and Christine. The boat,

which seems to glide effortlessly over the underground lake below

the opera house, is not on a track. Rather it's guided by infrared

beams of light and a stage technician with a joystick just inside

the wings of the stage. The drive mechanism and battery are hidden

below the pillows of the boat actually only "half" a boat

because the audience can see only the front of it.

STILL A MYSTERY: While much of the set was open for us to

inspect, a few production icons remain strictly off limits, and

photographs are forbidden of many set pieces, which remain

trademarked. Yes, that means no trying on the Phantom's mask, which

remains locked away when not in use. And the method behind the

Phantom's breathtaking escapes during the Masquerade number and in

the finale are closely guarded secrets. "I can't say," advance

stage manager David Hansen swears. "I gotta keep my job."

On the Web

For more behind-the-scenes images, video and history of The

Phantom of the Opera, go to entertainment.tampabay.com.

Note for Florida media:

The touring production runs through Nov. 22 at the Tampa Bay

Performing Arts Center. $18.50-$78. (813) 229-7827 or toll-free

1-800-955-1045; tbpac.org.

Cox News Service

ATLANTA -- Saturday typified the 2008 ACC football season.

Two games went to overtime. Another was decided with less than a

minute left. The fourth was decided by six points and was,

naturally, an upset.

And very little seemed to clear up in the race for the ACC's

division titles.

With four weeks left in the regular season, 11 of the league's

12 teams are mathematically alive.

It's not quite anybody's ball game, but it's pretty close.

"I've felt all along that we've just got to take care of our

business and let it work out," Georgia Tech coach Paul Johnson

said. "If we can finish with only two losses in the ACC, I feel

good about our chances."

Here's a look at the eight teams with the best shot at earning a

trip to Tampa for the ACC title game, with reasons why and why not

each team can make it there.

Atlantic Division

Maryland (6-2, 3-1)

-- Games remaining: at Virginia Tech, North Carolina, Florida

State, at Boston College.

-- Why they'll make it: The Terrapins are the only Atlantic team

that controls its fate and can even afford to drop one game (so

long as it's not against Florida State).

Maryland plays its best against tough competition. It has won

its last five games against ranked teams.

-- Why they won't: While the running game has returned to form,

running back Da'Rel Scott (ACC-best 102.6 rushing yards per game)

may not play Thursday against Virginia Tech with a shoulder injury.

Maryland might be the most unpredictable team in the league. The

Terps beat Cal the week after losing to Middle Tennessee State and

shut out Wake Forest after being shut out by Virginia. Not exactly

the consistency you'd want for a team trying to run the table.

Florida State (6-2, 3-2)

-- Games remaining: Clemson, Boston College, at Maryland,

Florida.

-- Why they'll make it: Saturday's loss aside, the Seminoles are

ranked first in total offense and defense in the league and have

won four of their last five.

In a season where so many games have come down to the last

minute, having the conference's best kicker (Graham Gano, who has

made 15 field goals in a row) is an asset.

-- Why they won't: Florida State coaches will have to be wary

that the heart-wrenching loss to Georgia Tech does not have a

carryover effect.

The Seminoles' young offensive line has had trouble the past two

weeks against tough defensive lines. They'll face two more against

Clemson and Boston College.

Wake Forest (5-3, 3-2)

-- Games remaining: Virginia, at N.C. State, Boston College,

Vanderbilt.

-- Why they'll make it: While he's had an up-and-down season,

quarterback Riley Skinner has been down this road before, having

led Wake Forest to the ACC title in 2006.

Kicker Shane Popham, subbing for injured all-ACC kicker Sam

Swank, was 3-for-3 against Duke, suggesting his inconsistent play

of the previous three games may be in the past.

-- Why they won't: Prior to beating Duke 33-30 in overtime

Saturday, the Demon Deacons had not scored more than 17 points

since the second game of the season. Given that all of Wake's

scoring drives in regulation began inside Duke territory, this

would seem more like an aberration than a new trend.

Wake Forest has not delivered a dominating performance against

anyone since its season opener. It isn't easy to imagine the

Deacons turning it on down the homestretch.

Coastal Division

Georgia Tech (7-2, 4-2)

-- Games remaining: at North Carolina, Miami, at Georgia.

-- Why they'll make it: Tech's 288 rushing yards against Florida

State suggest that its option-based attack, spearheaded by

quarterback Josh Nesbitt, may be finding its form.

Most teams would likely take a 6-2 record and take their

chances. At 4-2, Tech is closer to that finish line than anyone

else.

-- Why they won't: The Jackets, after allowing an average of

11.6 points per game in their first seven games, have now given up

26.0 in the last two. Tech needs its secondary to get well soon.

Paul Johnson acknowledged that the team, even players who were

in the lineup, is banged up. That won't help against a rested North

Carolina team Saturday.

Miami (6-3, 3-2)

-- Games remaining: Virginia Tech, at Georgia Tech, N.C. State.

-- Why they'll make it: With four wins in a row, including an

overtime victory over Virginia in Charlottesville, the Hurricanes

are the hottest team in the ACC. They have this week off before

playing Virginia Tech at home in two Thursdays.

By starting 2-3, Miami has stayed below the radar. That will

likely help a team loaded with underclassmen perhaps not ready to

handle the burden of expectations.

-- Why they won't: The flip side of being hot is that no team

has won more than three league games in a row. The Hurricanes may

be ripe for a stumble.

Quarterbacks Robert Marve and Jacory Harris have led the

Hurricanes this far, but have not provided consistent play.

Virginia (5-4, 3-2)

-- Games remaining: at Wake Forest, Clemson, at Virginia Tech.

-- Why they'll make it: If the Cavaliers run the table, they'll

own tiebreakers over North Carolina, Georgia Tech and Virginia

Tech, which is a nice ace in the hole.

Despite a costly fumble against Miami, running back Cedric

Peerman has been one of the league's best running backs and will

play two teams - Wake and Clemson - that are vulnerable against the

run.

-- Why they won't: The Cavaliers finish with two of three games

on the road. In the last four years, Virginia is 7-13 in road

games.

Virginia has given up an average of 173.0 rushing yards in its

past three games. That doesn't bode well.

North Carolina (6-2, 2-2)

-- Games remaining: Georgia Tech, at Maryland, N.C. State, Duke.

-- Why they'll make it: Georgia Tech coach Paul Johnson said the

Tar Heels might be the best team in the conference. So they've got

that going for them.

Quarterback T.J. Yates, the Heels' starter earlier this season,

may be able to return from a sprained ankle for Carolina's final

four games.

-- Why they won't: Especially this year, four games left on the

schedule means four games left to trip up.

Kickers Casey Barth and Jay Wooten are a pedestrian 11-of-16 on

field goals. It cost them in a three-point loss to Virginia Tech,

and may bite them again.

Virginia Tech (5-3, 2-2)

-- Games remaining: Maryland, at Miami, Duke, Virginia.

-- Why they'll make it: With wins over Georgia Tech and North

Carolina and remaining games against Miami and Virginia, the Hokies

are the only Coastal team that controls its fate.

Further, three of its final four games are at home, including

the finale against Virginia.

-- Why they won't: Virginia Tech may be without quarterbacks

Tyrod Taylor and Sean Glennon Thursday against Maryland. Both

sprained their ankles in the Oct. 25 loss to Florida State.

Regardless, the Hokies' problems on offense go beyond

quarterback. The offense is ranked 112th in Division I-A.

Ken Sugiura writes for The Atlanta Journal-Constitution. E-mail:

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My husband, Richard, smoked cigarettes for 50 years, having

failed several attempts to quit on his own. When a friend told him

in August 1994 that hypnosis had enabled her to quit, he decided to

give it a try.

"It didn't work; I wasn't hypnotized," he declared after his

one and only session. But it did work; since that day, he has not

taken one puff of a cigarette.

Gloria Kanter of Boynton Beach, Fla., thought her attempt in

1985 to use hypnosis to overcome her fear of flying had failed.

"When the therapist brought me out, I said it didn't work," she

recalled in an interview. "I told her, 'I heard everything you

said."'

Nonetheless, the next time she and her husband headed for the

airport, she was not drenched in sweat and paralyzed with fear. "I

was just fine," she said, "and I've been fine ever since."

Like many others whose knowledge of hypnotism comes from movies

and stage shows, my husband and Kanter misunderstood what hypnosis

is all about. While in a hypnotic trance, you are neither

unconscious nor asleep, but rather in a deeply relaxed state that

renders the mind highly focused and ready to accept suggestions to

help you accomplish your goals.

Hypnosis has been mired in controversy for two centuries, and

its benefits are often overstated. It does not help everyone who

wants to quit smoking, for example; then again, neither do other

kinds of treatments.

And the patient's attitude is critical. In the words of Brian

Alman, a psychologist who practices hypnosis in San Diego, "The

power of hypnosis actually resides in the patient and not in the

doctor."

Roberta Temes, a clinical hypnotist in Scotch Plains, N.J.,

insists that hypnosis cannot make people do anything they don't

want to do. Hypnosis can succeed only in helping people make

changes they desire, she said in an interview.

In her book "The Complete Idiot's Guide to Hypnosis," Temes

points out that success in achieving your goal is the best proof

that you were really hypnotized. She also suggests a second or

third session if you didn't quite reach your goal after the first

try.

In effect, hypnosis is the epitome of mind-body medicine. It can

enable the mind to tell the body how to react, and modify the

messages that the body sends to the mind. It has been used to

counter the nausea of pregnancy and chemotherapy; dental and

test-taking anxiety; pain associated with surgery, root canal

treatment and childbirth; fear of flying and public speaking;

compulsive hair-pulling; and intractable hiccups, among many other

troublesome health problems.

Writing in The Permanente Journal in 2001, Alman said that

"useful potential" for benefiting from hypnosis "exists within

each patient." "The goal of modern medical hypnosis," he said,

"is to help patients use this unconscious potential."

Alman described a 65-year-old concentration camp survivor who

repeatedly choked when she tried to swallow, though examinations of

her esophagus revealed no obstruction. After three hypnotherapy

sessions, her problem was solved. "I was liberated from my

esophagus," the patient said.

You may not even have to be face to face with a hypnotist to

benefit medically. Temes said hypnosis could be helpful even if

done with a cassette tape or CD, or by telephone, which she offers

as part of her practice. She said many helpful CDs could be found

through the Web site www.hypnosisnetwork.com.

Ellen Fineman, a physical therapist in Portland, Ore., had had

five surgeries to repair a retina that kept detaching. Hoping that

a sixth attempt would hold, she used a hypnosis tape prepared by

Temes for patients undergoing surgery.

The tape "was very calming and reassuring," Fineman said in an

interview.

"It told me that I would be in the hands of professionals who

would take good care of me and that I'd have minimal swelling,"

she said. "This time the surgery went superbly -- no inflammation,

no swelling and no more detachment. The surgeon was amazed and

asked what I had done differently this time."

As with any other profession, some hypnotherapists are more

talented than others. Temes suggests that word of mouth may be the

best way to find someone practiced in hypnosis for the kind of

problem you're trying to solve. Also helpful is the American

Society of Clinical Hypnosis, at www.asch.net, which maintains a

referral list of therapists, both certified and not, by location

and specialty.

While not everyone is easily hypnotized, nearly everyone can

slip into a therapeutic trance, Temes maintains. Another of her

patients, Dr. Susan Clarvit, a New York psychiatrist, thought she

could not be hypnotized -- she was too scientific, too rational a

person, she said.

"But I was desperate," Clarvit said in an interview. "I was

pregnant with my second child and too nauseated to be alive. Dr.

Temes asked me what I held most often, and I said a pen. She

hypnotized me so that when I held a pen I had an overall feeling of

wellness. I held a pen all the time, even while driving, and didn't

feel nauseated."

Under hypnosis, Clarvit was given a posthypnotic suggestion that

linked holding a pen to feeling well. Such suggestions enable

people to practice a new, desired behavior after being brought out

of the trance.

Someone trying to overcome snacking on sweets might be told,

"When you are hungry, you will eat vegetables." The suggestion to

a smoker might be "you will drink water when you want a

cigarette," and someone terrified of public speaking might be told

"you will do deep breathing when you feel scared."

Many patients are also taught to practice self-hypnosis to

reinforce the new behavior. Dr. Karen N. Olness, a professor of

pediatrics at Case Western Reserve University who is the president

of the International Society of Hypnosis, said that "self-hypnosis

training in children is an effective and practical strategy to

prevent migraine episodes."

Sometimes patients with well-established illnesses can benefit

indirectly from hypnosis.

Alman told of a woman with multiple sclerosis who was treated

with hypnosis for depression that had failed to improve with

antidepressants. Almost immediately, he reported, not only did the

woman's depression ease, but her gait and speech improved markedly.

He explained that for many patients the medical problem is so

complex that specific directions and commands may be ineffective.

The benefit from hypnosis may rely more on unleashing unconscious

processes within the patient. He suggested that there exists "a

wealth of material in the patient's unconscious that can be used in

healing" but lamented the fact that although medical hypnosis can

often produce rapid change even in difficult cases, it is

"underutilized as a therapeutic tool."

Q: When scum is skimmed off homemade soup, what nutrients are

lost?

A: Soup scum consists primarily of coagulated protein combined

with fat, said Christina Stark, a nutritionist at Cornell

University.

"As you begin making soup, heat causes a small proportion of

the dissolved meat or vegetable proteins to coagulate, or clump up,

in new ways," she said. "As the soup continues to heat, oils in

the water also go to the surface and combine with the proteins,

creating the foam or froth you see."

"We get plenty of those nutrients in our diets," she said,

"so skimming the scum away won't lead to any significant nutrient

losses." She pointed out that if taking off the scum entices you

to eat a larger serving of clearer and more appetizing vegetable

soup, "then you could end up consuming more nutrients than if you

left the scum."

A more important nutrient loss can occur in the vegetables

before and during preparation, Stark said. Vitamins and minerals

vary in their sensitivity to environmental factors. Vitamin C is

water-soluble and is sensitive to oxygen, light and heat, but

stable in acid conditions. Folic acid, another water-soluble

vitamin, is unstable in acid and light, but stable when exposed to

oxygen or heat. Minerals and fiber are generally stable in all

these conditions.

"So for example, if the broccoli was shipped across country and

then sat for days on the store shelf or at home before being used,

there may be significant losses of vitamin C before it ever gets

into the soup," she said.

But the good news with soup is that "you generally consume any

water-soluble vitamins that have leached into the broth," Stark

said.

THE CLAIM

Soy can lower cholesterol.

THE FACTS

Soy foods have been credited with all sorts of health benefits,

but perhaps none so appealing as this assertion.

The notion was cemented in 1999, when the Food and Drug

Administration allowed companies to claim that 25 grams of soy

protein a day, in a diet low in saturated fat and cholesterol,

"may reduce the risk of heart disease." The agency evaluated

studies -- including an industry-financed analysis published in The

New England Journal of Medicine in 1995 -- concluding that soy

protein could cut cholesterol.

But studies since have raised doubts. In 2006, an American Heart

Association advisory panel reviewed a decade of studies and

determined that soy products had no significant effects on HDL

("good" cholesterol) or triglycerides, and little or no ability

to lower "bad" cholesterol, or LDL. Another study, published in

August in The American Journal of Clinical Nutrition, found that

consuming 24 grams of soy protein daily had no "significant effect

on plasma LDL" in people with mildly elevated cholesterol.

But the issue is far from clear-cut. Another line of research

shows that soy seems to help when combined with foods low in fat

and high in fiber and the compounds called plant sterols -- in other

words, an overall healthy diet.

THE BOTTOM LINE

There is evidence that soy can improve cholesterol, but the jury

is still out.

Damp weather and gusty winds from the northeast will prevail

from the Carolinas to the Middle Atlantic Coast as slow-moving low

pressure strengthens off the Southeast Coast on Tuesday. The

heaviest and steadiest rain is expected over southeastern Virginia

and eastern North Carolina. The rain will spread north into

Pennsylvania and New Jersey on Tuesday night.

Unseasonably mild, dry weather will cover a large area from the

western slopes of the Appalachians to the western Plains. Afternoon

temperatures will average 10 to 20 degrees above normal.

Cool, unsettled conditions will sweep into the West in the wake

of a strong Pacific cold front. Scattered valley showers and

mountain snow will be common from the Pacific Northwest to the

western slopes of the northern Rockies.

FOCUS: ELECTION WEATHER

The weather on Election Day is usually reported with extra

emphasis because of a long-standing conviction among political

pundits that atmospheric conditions will affect voter turnout. A

study published in 2005 by researchers from the University of South

Carolina suggests there is a statistically significant

relationship. Using county data from presidential elections between

1948 and 2000, the research finds that rainfall reduces voter

participation at a rate of about 1 percent per inch. Two inches of

snow also decreases voter turnout by about 1 percent. Today,

locally heavy rain will occur near the Southeast Coast while patchy

rain and mountain snow will fall over the interior West, but much

of the nation will be dry.

FUNGUS MAY BE CAUSE OF DIE-OFFS IN BATS, RESEARCHERS SAY

Something is killing the little brown bats of the Northeast, and

researchers may have fingered the culprit: a fungus.

David S. Blehert of the U.S. Geological Survey's National

Wildlife Health Center in Wisconsin and colleagues identified a

fungus linked to white-nose syndrome, a condition that has affected

bats in recent winters in upstate New York, Massachusetts and

Vermont. The fungus, newly described, is unusual in that it grows

in the cold, dotting areas of the bat's skin with white strands. It

penetrates the skin through hair follicles and sweat glands and may

cause the bats to starve as they hibernate, the researchers said.

"We do have good circumstantial evidence that this could be the

primary pathogen" causing the deaths of large percentages of

populations of little browns and other bats in caves in the region,

Blehert said. The die-offs are one of the worst calamities to hit

bat populations in the United States.

It had been thought that the fungus was a secondary symptom of

whatever was killing the animals -- a virus or a toxin like an

environmental contaminant. But the fact that the identical organism

was found in bats from several caves "kind of rules out the

possibility that there are all kinds of fungi out there and that

opportunistically they are infecting the animals," said Alan C.

Hicks of the New York State Department of Environmental

Conservation, a co-author of a paper on the fungus published online

by Science.

Blehert said the infection could have led to starvation because

of the way bats hibernate -- they cycle through two-week stages of

deep torpor interrupted by brief wakeful periods. The fungal

infection may make the bats wake up more often, and since each

period of wakefulness uses up vast stores of fat, the bats may

deplete their energy reserves much sooner than normal.

More research is needed to determine how to combat the die-offs,

but one thing is clear, Blehert said: just spraying a cave with

fungicide could do more harm than good.

"Wiping out all the fungal organisms in a cave probably would

be a bad idea," he said.

BACTERIA ON THE MOVE, EATING THEIR FILL

Bacteria move in mysterious ways. Myxococcus xanthus, for

example, a harmless soil microbe, forms rippling swarms by the

millions as it devours other microbes as prey.

This organized back-and-forth behavior "was thought to occur

particularly in response to starvation," said John R. Kirby, a

microbiologist at the University of Iowa. But Kirby, James E.

Berleman and others at Iowa report in The Proceedings of the

National Academy of Sciences that M. xanthus acts this way in

response to food, and uses chemical sensing and signaling pathways

to do so.

Directed bacterial movement that is controlled in this way is

known as chemotaxis, and has been observed in individual microbes

as well as in colonies that organize into biofilms or other

structures. Because M. xanthus uses chemotaxis-like pathways to

move over its prey, the researchers call this behavior predataxis.

(A video is at nytimes.com/science.)

The swarming changed over time. When a lot of E. coli was

available, the bacteria moved back and forth tightly; Kirby likened

it to a vacuum cleaner moving repeatedly over a dirty spot. As the

prey was consumed, the pattern lengthened and dissipated.

Presumably the bacteria needed to release a lot of digestive

enzymes at first, but less and less as time went on, he said.

Further study of this kind of coordinated behavior may help in

understanding certain diseases that involve motile bacteria, Kirby

said, and in developing methods to clean up environmental

contaminants using microbes.

COMMERCIAL PRODUCTION OF CHICKENS TAKES TOLL ON GENETIC

DIVERSITY

To the connoisseur of fine food, chicken may seem depressingly

monotonous no matter how it's prepared. But scientists worry about

a more basic degree of sameness -- a lack of genetic diversity in

the birds that are raised for meat and eggs.

An analysis of commercial chicken populations around the world

by William M. Muir of Purdue University and colleagues has revealed

the extent of the problem. Fifty percent or more of the diversity

of ancestral breeds has been lost, they report in The Proceedings

of the National Academy of Sciences. That could make chicken

production more susceptible to disease outbreaks for which

resistant genes have disappeared.

Sampling about 2,500 birds, the researchers looked at several

thousand instances of genetic variation and used that to estimate

what a hypothetical ancestral population looked like genetically.

"Then we were able to say what is missing" in commercial birds,

Muir said.

Their findings indicate that most of the diversity was lost with

the advent of wide-scale commercial production in the 1950s. Only a

handful of hundreds of breeds have been crossed to produce broilers

and layers.

Muir said restoring some diversity was not simple a matter of

crossing with more breeds -- producers would lose the improvements

they have made in existing lines. Instead, one approach would be to

use genetic markers to aid in cross-breeding, "to select for the

parts that are good," he said.

STUDY LINKS DEPRESSION TO PREMATURE DELIVERIES

Pregnant women with symptoms of depression are at increased risk

for premature delivery, a new study has found.

The report, published online Oct. 23 in Human Reproduction, used

a 20-question depression scale to interview 791 women early in

their pregnancies. Scores on the questionnaire range from 0 to 60,

with higher scores indicating more, and more frequent, depressive

symptoms.

After controlling for previous preterm births and miscarriages,

socioeconomic status, education and other variables, the scientists

found that compared with those who scored below 16, those with a

score of 16 to 21 had a 60 percent increased risk of delivering

prematurely. Women who scored 22 or higher had more than twice the

risk.

"Depression during pregnancy is frequently dismissed or

underdiagnosed," said Dr. De-Kun Li, the lead author. "I hope our

study will raise a red flag."

Li, an epidemiologist at Kaiser Permanente's research division

in Oakland, Calif., said that the safety of antidepressant use

during pregnancy was not known, but that treatment did not have to

involve drugs. "Support from peers, family and friends can help,"

he said. "If you do have to use medication, you have to weigh the

risks and benefits with your doctor."

BIG WEIGHT GAIN IN PREGNANCY CAN LEAD TO HEAVY BABY

Women who gain more than 40 pounds during pregnancy are about

twice as likely to give birth to a heavy baby as those who gain

less, according to a large new study.

Mothers of babies who weigh more than about nine pounds at birth

are at greater risk for birth complications, and heavy babies are

more likely to be overweight or obese later in life.

It is well known that mothers with gestational diabetes are more

likely to have large babies, but this study showed a strong effect

of weight gain even in mothers who were not diabetic.

The study, published in the November issue of Obstetrics and

Gynecology, used data from 41,540 births from 1995 to 2003 at a

large health plan in the Northwest and Hawaii.

Among women who were not diabetic, 19 percent of those who

gained more than 40 pounds had large babies, compared with 11

percent of those who gained less. Nondiabetic women who put on more

than 40 pounds were more likely to have a large baby than women

treated for diabetes who gained less.

"Our study provides one more good reason for women to gain the

ideal amount of weight during pregnancy," said the lead author,

Dr. Teresa A. Hillier, an endocrinologist at the Kaiser Permanente

Center for Health Research in Portland, Ore., "and for physicians

to do a better job counseling women about weight gain."

While Americans choose their next president, let us consider a

question more amenable to science: Which candidate's supporters

have a better sense of humor? In strict accordance with

experimental protocol, we begin by asking you to rate, on a scale

of 1 (not funny at all) to 9 (hilarious) the following three

attempts at humor:

A) Jake is about to chip onto the green at his local golf course

when a long funeral procession passes by. He stops in midswing,

doffs his cap, closes his eyes and bows in prayer. His playing

companion is deeply impressed. "That's the most thoughtful and

touching thing I've ever seen," he says. Jake replies, "Yeah,

well, we were married 35 years."

B) I think there should be something in science called the

"reindeer effect." I don't know what it would be, but I think

it'd be good to hear someone say, "Gentlemen, what we have here is

a terrifying example of the reindeer effect."

C) If you saw two guys named Hambone and Flippy, which one would

you think liked dolphins the most? I'd say Flippy, wouldn't you?

You'd be wrong, though. It's Hambone.

Those were some of the jokes rated by nearly 300 people in

Boston in a recent study. (You can rate some of the others at

TierneyLab, nytimes.com/tierneylab.) The researchers picked out a

variety of jokes -- good, bad, conventional, absurdist -- to look for

differences in reactions between self-described liberals and

conservatives.

They expected conservatives to like traditional jokes, like the

one about the golfing widower, that reinforce racial and gender

stereotypes. And because liberals had previously been reported to

be more flexible and open to new ideas, the researchers expected

them to get a bigger laugh out of unconventional humor, like Jack

Handey's "Deep Thoughts" about the reindeer effect and Hambone.

Indeed, the conservatives did rate the traditional golf and

marriage jokes as significantly funnier than the liberals did. But

they also gave higher ratings to the absurdist "Deep Thoughts."

In fact, they enjoyed all kinds of humor more.

"I was surprised," said Dan Ariely, a psychologist at Duke

University, who collaborated on the study with Elisabeth Malin, a

student at Mount Holyoke College. "Conservatives are supposed to

be more rigid and less sophisticated, but they liked even the more

complex humor."

Do conservatives have more fun? Should liberals start describing

themselves as humor-challenged? To investigate these questions, we

need to delve into the science of humor (not a funny enterprise),

starting with two basic kinds of humor identified in the 1980s by

Willibald Ruch, a psychologist who now teaches at the University of

Zurich.

The first category is incongruity-resolution humor, or INC-RES

in humor jargon. It covers traditional jokes and cartoons in which

the incongruity of the punch line (the husband who misses his

wife's funeral) can be resolved by other information (he's playing

golf). You can clearly get the joke, and it often reinforces

stereotypes (the golf-obsessed husband).

Ruch and other researchers reported that this humor, with its

orderly structure and reinforcement of stereotypes, appealed most

to conservatives who shunned ambiguity and complicated new ideas,

and who were more repressed and conformist than liberals.

The second category, nonsense humor, covers many "Far Side"

cartoons, Monty Python sketches and "Deep Thoughts." The punch

line's incongruity isn't neatly resolved -- you're left to enjoy the

ambiguity and absurdity of the reindeer effect or Hambone's

affection for dolphins. This humor was reported to appeal to

liberals because of their "openness to ideas" and their tendency

to "seek new experiences."

But then why didn't the liberals in the Boston experiment like

the nonsense humor of "Deep Thoughts" as much as the

conservatives did? One possible explanation is that conservatives'

rigidity mattered less than another aspect of their personality.

Rod Martin, the author of "The Psychology of Humor," said the

results of the Boston study might reflect another trait that has

been shown to correlate with a taste for jokes: cheerfulness.

"Conservatives tend to be happier than liberals in general,"

said Martin, a psychologist at the University of Western Ontario.

"A conservative outlook rationalizes social inequality, accepting

the world as it is, and making it less of a threat to one's

well-being, whereas a liberal outlook leads to dissatisfaction with

the world as it is, and a sense that things need to change before

one can be really happy."

Another possible explanation is that conservatives, or at least

the ones in Boston, really aren't the stiffs they're made out to be

by social scientists. When these scientists analyze conservatives,

they can sound like Victorians describing headhunters in Borneo.

They try to be objective, but it's an alien culture.

The studies hailing liberals' nonconformity and "openness to

ideas" have been done by social scientists working in a culture

that's remarkably homogenous politically. Democrats outnumber

Republicans by at least seven to one on social science and

humanities faculties, according to studies by Daniel Klein, an

economist at George Mason University. If you're a professor who

truly "seeks new experiences," try going into a faculty club

today and passing out McCain-Palin buttons.

Could it be that the image of conservatives as humorless,

dogmatic neurotics is based more on political bias than sound

social science? Philip Tetlock, a psychologist at the University of

California, Berkeley, who reviews the evidence of cognitive

differences in his 2005 book, "Expert Political Judgment," said

that while there were valid differences, "liberals and

conservatives are roughly equally closed-minded in dealing with

dissonant real-world evidence."

So perhaps conservatives don't have a monopoly on humorless

dogmatism. Maybe the stereotype of the dour, rigid conservative has

more to do with social scientists' groupthink and wariness of

outsiders -- which, come to think of it, resembles the herding

behavior of certain hoofed animals. Ladies and gentlemen, what we

have here is a terrifying example of the reindeer effect.

There was little that doctors could do for a

3-year-old boy brought to Bangkok's main children's hospital two

weeks ago with dengue fever. Like thousands before him, he had

reached the most dangerous phase of the disease, dengue shock

syndrome, and he died of internal bleeding and organ failure three

days after being admitted.

Directly across the street, in the U.S. Army's largest overseas

medical research laboratory, military scientists are offering hope

for future generations: a vaccine. Developed after decades of

trying, it is one of two experimental vaccines that experts believe

may be commercially available by the middle of the next decade.

Dengue (pronounced DENG-ee), a mosquito-borne illness once known

as breakbone fever for its intense joint and muscle pain and

crushing headaches, has a relatively low death rate -- about 2.5

percent of hospitalized patients, the World Health Organization

reports.

But because patients can require constant, careful monitoring,

it is one of the costliest diseases in tropical countries. Each

year, it leads to about 500,000 hospitalizations around the world.

Dengue is seldom seen in the United States or Europe, though it

is the second-most common cause (after malaria) of feverish

symptoms for Western tourists returning from developing countries.

But it is important to the Army: American soldiers have

contracted dengue as recently as the 1990s, on missions in Haiti

and Somalia. So it is one of the tropical diseases that are the

focus of research here at the Armed Forces Research Institute of

Medical Sciences, which the Army has operated with the Royal Thai

Army for five decades.

The research center, which employs several hundred people, is

housed in an unremarkable 1960s building alongside a greasy alley

where food vendors hawk fried grasshoppers and freshly mashed

papaya salad.

"There's no dengue in Kansas," said Col. James W. Boles, the

commander at the laboratory. "No malaria, either. That's why we

are here."

In wars past, disease has often proved a greater foe than

opposing armies. During the Anglo-Boer War in South Africa in the

late 19th century, more soldiers died of typhoid than in battle.

Thousands of cases of hepatitis during the Vietnam war among

soldiers spurred Army researchers to help develop two of the

vaccines now in use to prevent hepatitis A and B.

"All we care about is that we get a vaccine that protects

soldiers," said Lt. Col. Stephen J. Thomas, a medical doctor who

is director of dengue vaccine development in the Bangkok

laboratory. "Fortunately, a lot of our concerns are also global

health concerns."

For many years, the leading drugs used to treat malaria were

developed by the Army. Today, research on tropical diseases is

spread across a broader constellation; in the hunt for a dengue

vaccine, money and research have come from the Thai government,

nonprofit organizations like the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation,

and drug companies like GlaxoSmithKline, which is working with the

Army.

The other vaccine at an advanced stage of development is being

jointly developed by the French drug company Sanofi-Aventis and a

Thai university on the same Bangkok street as the Army lab.

"We're further along with the dengue vaccine than we've ever

been," said Duane J. Gubler, director of the emerging infectious

diseases department of the Duke-N.U.S. Graduate Medical School in

Singapore. "There's a good possibility that we'll have a vaccine

in five to seven years."

The dengue virus is transmitted mainly by a mosquito called

Aedes aegypti, which survives on human blood. Aedes rarely travels

more than about 100 yards from its birthplace and thrives in

populated areas.

The mosquito can breed in something as small as a soda bottle,

but its ideal breeding conditions are large containers common in

many parts of Southeast Asia to store drinking water. (Unlike other

mosquitoes, Aedes aegypti prefers clean water, according to Thomas

W. Scott, a professor at the University of California, Davis, who

is a leading expert on the species.)

The mosquito cannot survive freezing weather, and though it is

endemic to some parts of the United States, mainly the South,

experts say good sanitation practices have kept it from spreading

the dengue virus. It commonly lives inside people's homes,

lingering in closets or curtains.

The World Health Organization estimates that 50 million people

are infected every year. But most of those infected, perhaps as

many as 90 percent, experience only minor flulike symptoms or none

at all.

In more serious cases, like that of the boy who died here last

month, symptoms include severe headaches, rapid onset of a high

fever, debilitating joint and muscle pain, nausea, vomiting and

internal bleeding. Generally, though, dengue is considered

treatable as long as patients are brought to the hospital on time

and the disease is properly diagnosed.

Scientists believe the disease has existed for centuries -- an

outbreak appears to have occurred in Philadelphia in 1780 -- but

dengue has become more common and more virulent over the past

half-century.

In 1970, only nine countries were known to have had epidemics of

the most serious form of the disease, dengue hemorrhagic fever. By

the mid-1990s that number had quadrupled, and experts say the

disease is particularly well adapted to an age of air travel and

international trade.

There are four types of dengue virus. Patients who have been

infected with one of them are believed to develop immunity to that

type only -- and, paradoxically, are more vulnerable to dengue

hemorrhagic fever if they are exposed to a second type.

The four types have intermixed as people carried them on

airplanes to far-flung places; outbreaks of the hemorrhagic fever

have been traced to specific flight paths and trade routes.

"What we've done is provided the ideal mechanism for these

viruses to move around the world," said Gubler, who has researched

dengue for nearly four decades.

It was probably soldiers who caused the original spread of

dengue hemorrhagic fever around Southeast Asia, during World War

II.

"You had a movement of soldiers from England, the U.S.,

Australia and Japan," said Dr. Suchitra Nimmannitya, a pioneer in

dengue research who developed a handbook on how to treat the

disease. "Soldiers flew from city to city."

A Japanese scientist first isolated the virus during the war,

and a U.S. Army physician, Albert Sabin, made the discovery that

there were distinct virus types. (Sabin went on to help develop the

polio vaccine.)

The development of a vaccine is especially difficult because it

will need to counter all four types of virus.

"If dengue was a single virus we would have had a vaccine

already, for sure," said Dr. Jean Lang, director of research and

development at Sanofi's emerging vaccine program.

Sanofi's dengue vaccine, which will undergo trials in 4,000

children in Thailand in a few months, is one of the first vaccines

to be produced using genetic engineering.

The Army's vaccine, which is at a similar stage of development

and has been tested on volunteers in the United States, Puerto Rico

and Thailand, was produced using live, attenuated viruses, a more

traditional technique. The two or three doses, spaced months apart,

are administered by injection.

Experts say the wide array of researchers involved -- some with

profit motives and others without -- increases the chances of

success and could help make the vaccine affordable to people in

developing countries.

For a man whose scholarly specialty is one of the grimmest

topics on earth -- extinction -- Stuart L. Pimm is remarkably

chipper. On a recent morning, while visiting New York City, Pimm, a

59-year-old zoologist, was full of warm stories about the many

places he travels: South Africa, Madagascar and even South Florida,

which he visits as part of an effort to save the endangered Florida

panther. Fewer than 100 survive in the wild. In 2006, Pimm, who

holds the Doris Duke professorship of Conservation Ecology at Duke

University, won the Heineken Prize for Environmental Sciences, the

Nobel of the ecology world.

Q: How does a person make extinction the centerpiece of a

professional life?

PIMM: In 1978, I went to Hawaii, supposedly a tropical paradise.

I am an enthusiastic birder, and I looked forward to getting into

the lush forest to view the abundant flora and fauna the islands

were famous for. Here you had this rich island chain, out in the

midst of the Pacific, full of wondrous birds and plants -- a place

supposedly richer in natural diversity than even the Galapagos.

I had brought with me field guides to the fauna and flora, all

published in the early 1970s. Yet once in the Hawaiian forest, I

had a shock: my books were listing species that were extinct -- or

about to become so. I was in the forest six days a week and I kept

thinking, "If I give it enough time, I'll certainly see most of

the species still left." But I saw very little. In fact, in Hawaii

today, I'd say there are only about 10 remaining native land bird

species, with another 10 clinging to survival.

So suddenly this extinction business seemed very real. Whenever

you'd meet biologists over coffee, there'd be the same

conversation: "Do you ever wonder what Hawaii was like before,

with 150 species of birds and 1,500 species of plants?" That

changed my life.

Q: How did it do that?

PIMM: Well, I realized that extinction was something that as a

scientist, I could study. I could ask, "Why do species go

extinct?" and "How fast does it happen?" Once armed with that

information, one might do something about it.

I now spend a fair amount of time in Washington, working for

laws to protect species. I train young people to do the same. I

often tell my students that if they want to become environmental

biologists, they have to be prepared to go out into the field at

dawn to collect their data and then dress up in a suit in the

afternoon to meet the visiting politician.

Q: Which would you say are, at this moment, the most endangered

of the world's creatures?

PIMM: There are too many to name. Something like 12 percent of

all birds, a third of all amphibians and, likely, similarly large

numbers of plants are in serious danger, I'd say. What's more,

about 1 percent of all species on the planet are in such trouble

that if we don't do the right things immediately they will be gone

in a decade.

The river dolphin in China was declared extinct just last year.

Another small dolphin in the Sea of Cortez is in immediate danger.

Q: What can one person do to stop extinctions?

PIMM: One of the things I've done is start an NGO -- a

nongovernmental organization -- called SavingSpecies.org. And it

does what its title suggests. We've been working with local

conservation groups and governments in Brazil and Madagascar doing

a variety of projects that we hope will halt the potential

extinctions there.

One of the things we know is that many endangered animals live

over large areas. But their populations become fragmented because

of farming and development. The remaining creatures can't find a

date on a Saturday night. So we've been trying to buy up degraded

land around their broken environments and try to create land

corridors for the wildlife.

Q: Have you had any successes yet?

PIMM: Yes. On the Atlantic Coast of Brazil, we've been trying to

help save the golden lion tamarin, an endangered primate about the

size of a house cat. Last year, with the involvement of local

conservationist groups, we helped purchase about 270 acres of

cattle pasture that separated two patches of their habitat. This

former pasture is now being replanted with trees. The two areas

will soon be bridged, and it will be possible for lonely hearts to

meet members of the opposite sex and go forth and multiply.

In another South American region I won't name here, there have

been a lot of illegal logs taken. Why? Because a local godfather

there was getting kickbacks from loggers. My friends and I decided

we'd give him a bit more money and we stopped the illegal logging.

I may burn in hell forever for paying protection, but it did help

the animals and the indigenous people, who were not subjected to a

lot of bad things. In terms of what we got for the money, it was a

very good deal.

Q: Your group has been doing a lot of work with indigenous

tribes. Why is that important?

PIMM: Because when you set aside indigenous reserves, it reduces

deforestation.

There's another project in Northern Amazonia that my group has

been involved in. This particular area is inhabited by indigenous

peoples who have clear title to the land in their village.

Recently, settlers came into the area, wanting to turn the forests

outside of the village -- the very places where these people hunt

and fish -- into rice fields. Their claim was that no one owned the

forests. So my Brazilian students and a local Catholic mission have

been teaching the tribe's teenagers the use of modern global

positioning technologies -- GPS. The idea is that GPS can help them

record where they hunt and fish and that will help them define the

forest land as theirs. So here's an example of when we help the

local people maintain their traditional ways, we're helping the

flora and the fauna survive.

Q: How do you finance SavingSpecies.org?

PIMM: We raise money in the traditional way, but we're also

selling symbolic carbon offsets to sympathetic donors.

As you know, when you restore forests, you soak up CO2 from the

atmosphere. There are people who'd like to be carbon neutral --

they'd like not to burn any more carbon than they are soaking up.

So if someone buys an airline ticket and feels badly about all the

carbon they're putting into the atmosphere during that flight, we

sell them very beautiful, very cheap offsets from the forest

restoration we have done.

We hope that this kind of swap will eventually become a

financial obligation in a lot of the world.

Q: Are you religious?

PIMM: I'm a believing Christian. "God so loved the cosmos that

he gave his only son." That's an injunction from St. John. To me,

this says that Christians have an obligation to look after the

world -- stewardship. We cannot pointlessly drive species to

extinction and destroy forests and oceans. When we do that, we are

destroying God's creation.

That said, I'm not a vegetarian. I like a good steak now and

then. Do I go out and slaughter cattle? Yep.

A new virus that causes fatal hemorrhagic fevers has been

discovered in southern Africa. It killed four people in South

Africa and sickened a fifth, but health authorities believe the

outbreak has been contained.

The virus is a member of the arenavirus family, which also

includes the causes of Lassa fever in West Africa and several South

American fevers. While new viruses are often found in animals -- a

new blue-tongue virus was found in Swiss goats last month, for

example -- it is relatively rare to discover one fatal to humans,

like the SARS coronavirus in 2002 or the sin nombre hantavirus in

1993.

How the first victim was infected is unknown, but arenaviruses

are common in rodents; their dried urine, inhaled while sweeping,

can transmit infection.

Confirmation that it is a new virus was made by the National

Institute for Communicable Diseases in South Africa and by the

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in Atlanta.

The first victim was Cecilia Van Deventer, a safari tour booker

in Lusaka, Zambia, who fell ill on Sept. 2 and was airlifted to

Johannesburg. She apparently infected Hannes Els, the paramedic who

accompanied her, and Gladys Mthembu, a nurse tending her at the

Morningside Medi-Clinic in a Johannesburg suburb.

The fourth to die was Maria Mokubung, who cleaned the room where

Van Deventer died Sept. 14. According to South African news

reports, the last death was originally misdiagnosed because the

victim had tuberculosis and meningitis and was hemorrhaging and

confused when her family sought medical care.

A fifth victim, a nurse who cared for Els, was in critical

condition but responded to early treatment with the antiviral drug

Ribavirin.

The disease progresses from flu symptoms to diarrhea and a

measles-like rash and then to respiratory and circulatory collapse.

The authorities said they knew of no new cases but would wait

until 21 days from the last infection to declare the outbreak over.

Disease detective work was difficult, South African news media

said. Because Van Deventer feared needles, little blood was drawn

from her in Zambia; also, her body was cremated before the alarm

was raised. Tissue samples from later victims had to be taken

carefully in a high-security laboratory that was under renovation

and had to be reopened.

Arenaviruses are named for their round sandy granules; "arena"

is Latin for sand. A name for the new virus is being debated;

Zambian authorities do not want one that will hurt tourism.

According to a government news service, Zambia's first response

to the outbreak was to close its border with Congo, the former

Zaire, where Ebola fever, which is not related, originated.

Still puzzling over how warm and wet Mars may have once been,

scientists are now seeing global mineralogical signs that the

planet was at least occasionally wet for the first 2 billion years

of its existence.

In an article in the November issue of the journal Geology,

scientists working with data from NASA's Mars Reconnaissance

Orbiter report that they have spotted widespread deposits of opals

and related minerals on the surface of Mars.

Opals belong to a class of minerals known as hydrated silicas,

with water molecules wedged into silicon-based minerals like

quartz. The formation of hydrated silicas requires liquid water.

Most interesting is that the opal deposits lie in areas that

appear to have formed only about 2 billion years ago. Previously,

spacecraft have detected other water-bearing minerals like clays in

regions that date back more than 3.5 billion years. Mars, like the

other planets in the solar system, is about 4.5 billion years old.

"The water was more widespread and extended to younger times,"

said Scott L. Murchie, a staff scientist at Johns Hopkins' Applied

Physics Laboratory and the principal investigator for the orbiter's

spectrometer, which found the opal evidence.

In July, Murchie and other scientists reported that the orbiter

had detected vast deposits of the claylike minerals on the older

terrains. Images also showed ancient lakebeds with accumulations of

the minerals, indicating standing water persisted for thousands of

years.

The presence of water on Mars has been known for many years; its

ice caps, easily visible from space, are largely made of frozen

water. The unanswered question is how often the ice has melted. The

Phoenix Mars Lander, now nearing the end of its six-month mission,

is exploring whether the arctic ice has melted in recent millennia.

The most intriguing possibility is that Mars, when it was less

than a billion years old, was warm enough for lakes and oceans of

liquid water -- and with that, the possibility of life. The planet's

landforms offer compelling evidence for flowing water: immense

canyons and channels, dried-up river deltas.

"I think most people agree there was lots of water on the

surface in the first few hundred million years," said Maria Zuber,

a professor of geophysics at the Massachusetts Institute of

Technology. "It's later on when I get confused, although I'm

confused about the whole thing. That's what makes it interesting."

Some scientists have suggested that rare catastrophic floods

carved the landforms, either in the aftermath of an impact by an

asteroid or comet or by underground water -- melted by residual

volcanic warmth -- bursting to the surface.

Those who believe that liquid water was more persistent were

nonetheless perplexed when earlier spacecraft detected only small

quantities of carbonates, minerals that should have formed in large

amounts from reactions involving carbon dioxide and liquid water.

But data collected by the two Mars rovers, Spirit and

Opportunity, show a highly acidic environment that prevented the

formation of carbonates. "That part of the story is fairly well

agreed upon," Zuber said.

The two rovers have also found signs of past water. Opportunity

found hydrated sulfates in the Meridiani Planum rocks; Spirit found

opal-like minerals similar to those spotted by the Reconnaissance

Orbiter from space.

But planetary scientists are still trying to explain the

transition of Mars from lots of water to today's cold and dry

climate. In fact, they are still trying to explain how it ever had

lots of liquid water. Even if young Mars was enshrouded in a thick

atmosphere of carbon dioxide belched by giant volcanoes,

climatologists have had trouble coaxing enough global warming in

their computer simulations to push temperatures above the melting

point of ice.

James F. Kasting, a professor of geosciences at Penn State,

believes he may have figured out how to warm up Mars. In research

that he will present in December at a meeting of the American

Geophysical Union, the key may be nitrogen dioxide.

In his climate models, carbon dioxide did act as a greenhouse

gas, trapping heat near the surface, but it also reflected shorter

wavelengths of light back into space, limiting the amount of

heating. His models peaked at about minus-40 degrees Fahrenheit.

Nitrogen dioxide, which is also released by volcanic eruptions,

reduces the reflectivity of Mars in the models. With more light

absorbed, temperatures jumped 100 degrees. "That would be more

than you need," Kasting said.

He said he still needed to demonstrate that the nitrogen dioxide

would mix throughout the atmosphere rather than remain in pockets

around the volcanoes.

Even if scientists figure out the water question, they have

another problem: what happened to the Martian air? The climate

models suggest early Mars had an atmosphere denser than Earth's.

Now, it's a faint wisp.

"Well, we don't know," Zuber said. "One day we're going to

nail that one. There's a whole bunch of things on my list of things

to do."

Economists, health researchers and consumers are struggling to

answer that question as food prices rise and the economy slumps.

The World Bank says nearly a billion people around the world live

on a dollar a day, or even less; in the United States, the daily

food-stamp allowance is typically just a few dollars per person,

while the average American eats $7 worth of food per day.

Even middle-class people struggle to put healthful food on the

table. Studies show that junk foods tend to cost less than fruits,

vegetables and other healthful foods, whose prices continue to

rise.

This fall a couple in Encinitas, Calif., conducted their own

experiment to find out what it was like to live for a month on just

a dollar a day for food. Overnight, their diets changed

significantly. The budget forced them to give up many store-bought

foods and dinners out. Even bread and canned refried beans were too

expensive.

Instead, the couple -- Christopher Greenslate, 28, and Kerri

Leonard, 29, both high school social studies teachers -- bought raw

beans, rice, cornmeal and oatmeal in bulk, and made their own bread

and tortillas. Fresh fruits and vegetables weren't an option.

Leonard's mother was so worried about scurvy, a result of vitamin C

deficiency, that they made room in their budget for Tang orange

drink mix. (They don't eat meat -- not that they could have afforded

it.)

Breakfast consisted of oatmeal; lunch was a peanut butter and

jelly sandwich. Dinner often consisted of beans, rice and homemade

tortillas. Homemade pancakes were affordable, but syrup was not; a

local restaurant gave them a few free syrup packets.

One of the biggest changes was the time they had to spend in

meal preparation.

"If you're buying raw materials, you're spending more time

preparing things," Greenslate said. "We'd come home after working

10 to 11 hours and have to roll out tortillas. If you're already

really hungry at that point, it's tough."

While he lost weight on the budget diet, Greenslate said, the

larger issue was his lack of energy. During the experiment he was

no longer able to work out at the gym.

A few times they found a bag of carrots or lettuce that was

within their budget, but produce was usually too expensive. They

foraged for lemons on the trees in their neighborhood to squeeze

juice into their water.

Leonard said that after the 30-day experiment, one of the first

foods she ate was a strawberry. "I almost cried," she said.

The couple acknowledged that the experiment was something of a

luxury, given that many people have no choice about how much to

spend on food.

"People in our situation have the leisure to be concerned about

issues like this," Leonard said. "If we were actually living in

this situation, I would not be taking the time to be concerned

about what I could and could not have; I'd be worried about

survival."

Researchers say the experiment reflects many of the challenges

that poor people actually face. When food stamps and income checks

run low toward the end of the month, they often do scrape by on a

dollar a day or less. But many people don't know how to prepare

foods from scratch, or lack the time.

"You have to know how to cook beans and rice, how to make

tortillas, how to soak lentils," said Adam Drewnowski, director of

the Center for Public Health Nutrition at the University of

Washington. "Many people don't have the knowledge or the time if

they're working two jobs."

Last year, Drewnowski led a study, published in The Journal of

the American Dietetic Association, comparing the prices of 370

foods sold at supermarkets in the Seattle area. The study showed

that "energy dense" junk foods, which pack the most calories and

fewest nutrients per gram, were far less expensive than

nutrient-rich, lower-calorie foods like fruits and vegetables. The

prices of the most healthful foods surged 19.5 percent over the

two-year study period, while the junk food prices dropped 1.8

percent.

Obesity researchers worry that these trends will push consumers

toward less healthful foods. "The message for this year and next

year is going to be affordable nutrition," Drewnowski said. "It's

not the food pyramid, it's the budget pyramid."

The experiment in California was hardly the first of its kind,

though the teachers' budget was tighter than most. Last month Gov.

Jennifer M. Granholm of Michigan and her family took a weeklong

"food stamp challenge," spending only $5.87 per day per person on

food -- the Michigan food stamp allotment. She told reporters that

she ended up buying a lot of macaroni and cheese. Last year Gov.

Theodore R. Kulongoski of Oregon lived for a week on his state's

$3-a-day food stamp allocation.

Leonard and Greenslate, who chronicled their dollar-a-day

experience on their blog, onedollardietproject.wordpress.com, say

they are looking at other ways to explore how difficult it is for

people with limited income to eat a healthful diet.

"I challenge anyone to try to live on a dollar a day and eat

fresh food in this country," Greenslate said. "I would love to be

proven wrong."

The woman could be the girl next door, posing for a portrait or

selling cereal or soap. Her hair is neatly parted. Her earnest eye

and smile seem to telegraph innocence.

Beware.

"She may look clean," the poster warns. But "pick-ups,

'good-time girls,' prostitutes spread syphilis and gonorrhea."

The poster, one of many created by the Public Health Service

during World War II to warn the troops about the dangers of casual

sex, is on display as part of a retrospective of 20th-century

health posters from the permanent collection of the National

Library of Medicine.

Titled "An Iconography of Contagion," the exhibition features

work from numerous countries on an array of diseases, among them

syphilis, malaria, tuberculosis and AIDS. The posters are on

display at the National Academy of Sciences in Washington through

Dec. 19.

Much of the exhibition suggests a mash-up of advertising and

public health. The posters tried to convey the danger of disease

and get people to change their behavior, said the curator, Michael

Sappol, a historian at the library of medicine, part of the

National Institutes of Health.

But "they're also about the pleasure of the image," he

continued, adding, "There have been some very sexy, colorful,

playful posters about some very serious diseases."

The visual world underwent rapid changes in the late 19th and

early 20th centuries. Newspapers featured larger headlines and more

drawings and photographs. The advertising industry integrated text

and images, and it turned to behavioral science to sharpen its

pitches.

At the same time, public health groups like the National

Tuberculosis Association, founded in 1904, took some cues from

advertising and began to rely on mass communication, with

pamphlets, posters and, later, films and radio spots. For diseases

like tuberculosis that lacked effective treatments, efforts to

promote screening and change people's behavior were especially

important. "Media campaigns were themselves seen as magic

bullets," Sappol said.

In an iconic poster from around 1940, a mother and two children

gather around an armchair, smiling, as the father reads a

newspaper. An urban throng, in monochromatic red, appears in the

background. "Tuberculosis Undiscovered Endangers You: Discover the

Unknown Spreaders!" reads the caption.

"At the time, many people who had TB, including some who were

contagious, were unaware that they were infected," said Dr. Mary

E. Wilson, an associate professor of global health and population

at the Harvard School of Public Health. A large number of them were

identified through mass screening using X-rays. (Many were exposed

to large doses of radiation that would be unacceptable today, she

added.)

Another poster, created in China in 1935, was intended to

discourage spitting, which could spread TB. The image shows a man

in traditional dress walking past a group of playing children. A

line extends from the man's mouth to a clump of spittle on the

ground; from there, an arrow points to a pool of pink bacteria

magnified under a microscope.

The caption reads, in part: "TB is rampant in our country

because of the error of spitting anywhere. This is unforgivable!"

It continues: "Spit into a handkerchief and boil it, or spit into

paper and burn it. This not only ensures virtue but is a gift to

mankind."

The poster includes a symbol that resembles that of the National

Tuberculosis Association in the United States -- a vertical line

with two horizontal crosses. In the Chinese version, the edges of

the cross are curved upward, resembling a pagoda.

A similar message was promoted in many countries. In a Danish

poster from 1947, the emphasis is on screening. A couple, shown as

a shadowy form with green and red highlights, strolls arm in arm,

wearing hats that could be merry or devilish. "Tuberculosis

examination -- a citizen's duty," reads the text.

The poster has "a beautiful, creamy texture" and was "part of

the Danish enchantment with modernity, both in health

infrastructure and in aesthetics," Sappol said. "It seduces you

into paying attention."

In the 1960s, the enchantment with health posters declined, at

least in the United States. "There was a general feeling among the

public that we've got the polio vaccine, penicillin, DDT and other

magic bullets, and that's going to conquer disease," Sappol said.

But that confidence plummeted in the 1980s and 1990s with

HIV/AIDS, which brought about a renaissance of public health

posters, said John Parascandola, a former historian for the Public

Health Service. Activist groups like Act Up and Gran Fury in the

United States and the Terrence Higgins Trust in Britain campaigned

to raise awareness about the disease.

One poster from the mid-1980s shows a muscular man leaning down

to perform oral sex on a partner of ambiguous gender. A tattooed

tiger bulges on his shoulder. The poster, which reads "Discover

safer sex," is from the Terrence Higgins Trust's "Love Sexy, Love

Safe" campaign. The text notes that safer sex can also prevent

unwanted pregnancy, suggesting that the campaign hoped to draw in

heterosexuals.

AIDS posters tended to be less moralistic than many earlier

ones, said Wilson, who noted that the World War II campaigns

against syphilis and gonorrhea often treated the woman "as the

villain, the temptress, and men almost as innocent bystanders."

By contrast, she said, while AIDS patients were often

stigmatized in the broader society, the major public health

campaigns "tried very hard to work against that stigma."

Ultimately, the posters tried to sell ideas to specific

audiences, Parascandola said. They were a compelling form of

advertising -- and perhaps they still are.

For those who love the civic cheer and lukewarm coffee of their

local polling place, an absentee ballot has all the appeal of a tax

form. The paperwork, the miniature type, the search (in some

states) for a notary public: it's a tedium bath, and Pam

Fleischaker, a lifelong Democrat from Oklahoma City, had every

reason to take a pass this year.

Fleischaker, 62, was in New York recovering from a heart

transplant, for one. And in her home state, the Democratic

candidate, Sen. Barack Obama, was polling hopelessly behind his

opponent, Sen. John McCain. She mailed in her absentee packet

anyway, and hounded her two children, also in New York, to do the

same.

"That one vote isn't going to be decisive makes no difference

to me," Fleischaker said in a telephone interview last week.

"Your vote is your voice, and there's more power in it than in

most of the things we do. It's a lost pleasure, the feeling of that

power."

In recent years psychologists and neuroscientists have tried to

get a handle on how people make voting decisions. They have taken

brain scans, to see how certain messages or images activate emotion

centers. They have spun out theories of racial bias, based on

people's split-second reactions to white and black faces. They have

dressed up partisan political stereotypes in scientific jargon,

describing conservatives as "inordinately fearful and craving

order," and liberals as "open-minded and tolerant."

None of which has helped predict people's behavior in elections

any more than a half-decent phone survey. The problem is not only

sketchy science, some experts say; it's that researchers don't

agree on the answer to a more fundamental question: Why do people

vote at all?

"There's a longstanding literature looking at why any rational

person would vote, when the chances of actually influencing an

election are about the same as getting hit by lightning," said

John Londregan, a professor of politics and international affairs

at Princeton. "In most theoretical models, it's hard to get a

predicted turnout above one. That is, one voter."

Yet new models have done better, predicting elections with

turnouts closer to the nation's average of about 50 percent of

eligible voters. They have also revealed some of the basic motives

underlying both personal and group decisions about when to vote and

why.

Casting a ballot clearly provides a value far higher than its

political impact. The benefit may include side payments -- say, the

barbecues and camaraderie of a campaign, or the tiny possibility

that a single vote may be decisive.

But recent research suggests that it has more to do with civic

duty and the maintenance of moral self-image. In a series of

experiments, researchers from Northwestern University and the

University of California, Berkeley, have had study participants

play a simple election game involving monetary rewards. A group of

designated voters cast their vote for Choice A, an equal

distribution of money among voters and nonvoters in the study; or

B, a payout to be split only among the designated voters -- a

smaller group, so a higher amount. It cost money to vote, and

participants could abstain at no cost.

The study authors, led by Sean Gailmard at Berkeley, called

Choice A "ethical" and Choice B "selfish." They found that

ethical voting ran highest, at about 20 percent, when individual

votes were least likely to affect the outcome. Selfish voting ran

highest, also about 20 percent, when individuals' choices were most

likely to change the outcome.

This finding could explain why people might vote against a local

tax increase but for a congressional candidate who was likely to

raise their income taxes: their vote carries far less value in a

national race than in a local one.

This study and others also imply that there is a core of voters

who not only turn out at the polls but also cast their ballot for

the candidate or proposal they believe represents the larger good.

This makes sense to those who study the evolution of group

behavior. Small communities often have a scattering of people who

stand up and do the right thing; their compensation is the private

knowledge that they are willing to pay some cost to do what they

believe is right, even if that price amounts to standing out in the

cold for 15 minutes waiting to pull a lever.

"It may be a form of identity construction for individuals,"

Gailmard wrote in an e-mail message. "Or it could be a duty to do

the right thing, or a social norm."

Fleischaker, the absentee Oklahoma voter, put it this way: "Who

are we to ask others to do things for this country, small or very

large, like fighting in a war, if we ourselves are not going to

take the trouble to vote?"

The military analogy is not overdrawn, Londregan says. In a 2006

paper, "Voting as a Credible Threat," he and Andrea Vindigni of

Princeton argue from historical and sociological evidence that at

times of deep division, elections function as an X-ray into the

strength of the opposition, the number of people willing to bear a

cost to have their way. In the extreme, election returns prompt

factions on the brink of civil war to reassess their chances and

negotiate -- making communities, small and large, far more stable

and adaptive.

"We started to see that elections function as a kind of SAT

score to show what kind of guerrilla you'd be," Londregan said.

"They're a way to see how many people would actually fight to

oppose a policy -- and how much is just bravado."

Dutiful voters know all this, at some level, no matter how they

define the larger good. They think more broadly about what others

of their stripe will do, spending more effort if they feel their

home team will be underrepresented, political scientists have

found.

By taking into account such calculations, as well as ethical

voting, the costs of casting a ballot and other parameters, Timothy

Feddersen and Alvaro Sandroni of Northwestern University --

Gailmard's co-authors on the ethical voting research -- have

designed a model that accurately predicted turnout in several local

Texas elections.

"The model predicts that in states where the election is close,

turnout will be high among all groups," Feddersen said, adding

that in the toss-up states, "partisans are less likely to vote

when they are in the majority and more likely to vote when they are

in the minority," or expect to lose.

In short, expect the race in states like New York and Oklahoma

to be closer than polls show, not because of hidden racism or

"inordinate fear" but because many people find it satisfying to

stand up and be counted -- even if they're doing the counting for

themselves.

A federal court has blocked the Bush

administration's effort to save money on Medicare by paying for

only the least expensive treatments for particular conditions.

Congress sets Medicare payment rates and never intended to give

officials broad discretion to alter them, the court said in an

important test case last month.

The case, closely followed by Medicare officials and consumer

advocates, involved drugs used to treat chronic obstructive

pulmonary disease.

Judge Henry H. Kennedy Jr. of U.S. District Court here said the

policy of paying for only "the least costly alternative" was not

permitted under the Medicare law.

The administration's position would give the health and human

services secretary "enormous discretion" to determine the amount

paid for every item and service covered by Medicare, without

reference to the detailed formulas set by Congress, Kennedy said.

"This flies in the face of the detailed statutory provisions," he

added.

Over the years, Medicare officials have often tried to adopt

regulations that allow them to consider cost in deciding whether

the program should cover various goods and services. Health care

providers, manufacturers and some patients' advocates have resisted

these efforts, saying that coverage decisions should be made based

on clinical effectiveness and not cost.

"We are disappointed with the ruling and continue to believe

that our policy is supported by the statute," Peter L. Ashkenaz, a

spokesman for the federal Centers for Medicare and Medicaid

Services, said Monday. "We are still considering our options and

next steps."

Federal health officials said the decision would make it more

difficult to rein in Medicare costs.

Kennedy found that Medicare and some of its contractors had

unlawfully limited payments for DuoNeb, an inhalation drug taken

through a nebulizer, which turns the medicine into a fine mist.

The drug, made by Dey, a unit of Mylan Inc., makes breathing

easier by opening up the bronchial tubes. A single dose provides a

combination of two commonly prescribed bronchodilators, albuterol

and ipratropium.

Congress set forth the touchstone for Medicare coverage in a

1965 law that created the program. The law generally prohibits

payment for items and services that are "not reasonable and

necessary for the diagnosis or treatment of illness or injury, or

to improve the functioning of a malformed body member."

If an item is covered, the payment rate is specified in other

parts of the law.

The Bush administration argued that Medicare officials had the

right to decide whether the expense incurred for a given item, not

just the item itself, was "reasonable and necessary."

Kennedy said this argument "does not make sense" because

Congress went to great lengths to establish payment rates.

Similar disputes have come up over other treatments.

Another pharmaceutical company, Sepracor, has for years

challenged the government's authority to use the "least costly

alternative" as a basis for setting reimbursement rates for

Xopenex, prescribed for asthma and chronic obstructive pulmonary

disease.

In a friend-of-the-court brief, Sepracor said that Congress had

set the payment rate at 106 percent of the average sales price.

"Congress consciously chose to entrust the amount of reimbursement

to the market, not to a government agency or its contractors," the

company said in its brief.

Patrick Morrisey, a lawyer representing Sepracor, said, "If you

extend the agency's logic to its natural conclusion, Congress would

never need to pass any payment laws and policies."

Scott T. Williams, vice president of Men's Health Network, an

education and advocacy group, said the decision would be "a

springboard to help ensure that prostate-cancer patients have

access to drugs like Lupron and Zoladex, rather than being forced

to use the least costly alternative products."

Williams said that if Medicare paid only for the least costly

drugs, low-income and minority patients might not have access to

more expensive treatments deemed appropriate by their doctors.

A wave of violence, including an assassination attempt

against a deputy oil minister, swept through Baghdad and

neighboring Diyala province on Monday.

Also on Monday, parliament passed a bill that would grant the

country's embattled minorities fewer guaranteed seats in upcoming

elections than the United Nations had recommended.

The prospects for enactment of the bill, which requires the

approval of Iraq's executive council, are unclear. In September,

parliament passed a law on provincial elections but, in a

controversial action, deleted from it an article dealing with

representation of Iraq's many minorities.

The council, composed of the country's president and two vice

presidents, signed that measure into law early last month but

directed parliament to pass separate legislation on the issue.

In the most lethal attack of the day, 6 people were killed and

20 wounded when two roadside bombs exploded in quick succession in

front of the headquarters of the Ministry of Interior's criminal

investigations unit in Baghdad's central Karada district, according

to an official at the ministry who spoke anonymously because he was

not authorized to speak to the media.

The deadlier bomb was planted in front of the protective

concrete wall ringing the government building. The other was about

70 yards away. Two badly burned bodies lay on the street shortly

after the explosions.

"I cannot believe what happened," said a bewildered policeman

at the scene, who said he had worked for the directorate for 35

years. "Who can plant a bomb in this fortified area in the

presence of police patrols?"

The assassination attempt against the deputy oil minister came

about 30 minutes before the Karada blasts. The official, Saheb

Salman Qutub, was wounded, along with his driver, when a bomb

planted in his car exploded, according to a ministry spokesman,

Asim Jihad.

The explosion occurred as Qutub was getting into the car at his

home in the northern Baghdad neighborhood of Atafiya to go to work,

Jihad said.

A Japanese delegation visited the ministry Monday to discuss

investments in Iraq's lucrative oil and gas sectors.

In other violence, a huge car bomb exploded in a parking lot

next to the headquarters of the local government in Baqouba in

Diyala province, killing at least three people and wounding 13,

including eight police officers, according to security and

provincial officials.

The blast destroyed 22 vehicles and badly damaged several nearby

government buildings.

Ibrahim Bajlan, who heads the Diyala provincial council, said

the attack was proof that the situation in the province remained

"fragile" and that the government's lauded recent security

operation in Diyala had "only accomplished a fraction of its

goals."

Fourteen other people were wounded in four other bombing attacks

in Baghdad, according to the official of the Interior Ministry.

In the northern city of Mosul, a child was killed and five other

people wounded in a roadside bombing aimed at a police patrol,

security sources said.

The attacks came a day after U.S. and Iraqi military officials

said that overall levels of violence across the country were at

their lowest level since May 2004.

In passing legislation that could stoke further tensions between

Iraq's fractious ethnic and sectarian groups, parliament voted to

guarantee minorities significantly fewer seats on provincial

councils than had been recommended by the U.N. Assistance Mission

for Iraq.

The bill would give Christians a single seat on councils in

Baghdad, Basra and Nineveh, instead of the three seats in Baghdad

and three in Nineveh, as well as one in Basra, that were proposed

by the U.N.mission.

The Yazidis, a Kurdish-speaking minority who, like Christians,

have been reeling from attacks and displacement since the start of

the war in 2003, were given one seat in Nineveh, instead of the

three proposed. Two other minorities, the Shabaks and the Sabeans,

were given one seat apiece.

The new bill is supposed to be a compromise following the

controversy that erupted in late September when Parliament passed

the elections law but deleted an article that had provided 13 seats

in six provinces for Iraqi Christians, Yazidis and other

minorities. The new bill grants only six seats. The U.N. mission

had proposed a total of 12.

Younadim Kanna, one of two Christians in parliament, described

Monday's vote as "a great insult."

"There is no desire to respect minorities as the indigenous

people of this country," Mr. Kanna said. "This quota is simply a

face-saving mechanism by the ruling parties."

Elections are expected to be conducted in most of the country

early next year.

Growing up in Connecticut,

Alexandra Hubbard did not want to be Joan of Arc. She wanted to be

Jane Goodall. But instead of chimpanzees, her animals would turn

out to be killer whales.

In 1984, 26 years old and armed only with a bachelor's degree

and enthusiasm for her task, she moved to the Broughton

Archipelago, in the Queen Charlotte Strait of British Columbia,

where the whales, or orcas, were abundant. She and her husband,

Robin Morton, a Canadian filmmaker, lived on a 65-foot sailboat and

followed the orcas in an inflatable boat with a shelter in the

back, stocked with Legos and books for their son, Jarret.

She came to know the archipelago's long-lived orca clans and the

matriarchs who led them. She knew she would find them in Fife Sound

at the ebb tide, or moving up Johnson Strait with the incoming

tide. Using a hydrophone, an underwater microphone she hung from

the boat, she recorded their vocalizations and began to recognize

what she called the dialects of the clans.

Her husband drowned in 1986, when Jarret was 4, but Morton

stayed on, supporting her work by writing articles and books,

designing T-shirts and working as a deckhand on a fishing boat.

Today, she hardly uses her hydrophone. There's no point, she

says, "since my subject is so rare now." These days, when Morton

noses her workboat away from her dock here, she is on a crusade,

seeking not orcas, but evidence against the salmon farms she

believes drove most of the killer whales away, in part by infecting

the wild salmon the whales eat with parasites called sea lice. Her

work is a challenge to the salmon farm industry and to the Canadian

and British Columbia officials who regulate it.

Once dismissed as an outsider and amateur, Morton has gradually

gained the respect of fisheries experts like Ray Hilborn, a

researcher at the University of Washington. "She doesn't come from

a science background but she has had a lot of influence in

highlighting the issue," he said. Daniel Pauly, director of the

Fisheries Center at the University of British Columbia, calls her

"a spunky hero."

That may be because she takes the issue personally. The

disappearance of the orcas in the Broughton "ruined my life,

absolutely," Morton said one day recently as she headed off to net

baby salmon and check them for sea lice. "A lot of people have

lost stuff they set out to do but, yeah, it ruined my whole plan."

According to the British Columbia Salmon Farmers Association,

salmon farms produce $450 million worth of Atlantic salmon a year

in British Columbia. At any given time, 70 to 80 farm sites operate

in provincial waters, perhaps 15 or so in the Broughton, a hardly

inhabited area across Queen Charlotte Strait from the north end of

Vancouver Island. Typically, each installation has a collection of

net pens, usually crossed by metal walkways, floating in a cove or

bay. Individual sites typically contain 500,000 to 750,000 penned

fish.

As tiny young wild salmon, smolts, pass by these pens on their

way to sea, they can pick up so many lice they die, Morton and

other researchers have reported.

Farm operators like Marine Harvest, a Norwegian concern that is

a major presence in salmon farming here, concede that penned fish

are vulnerable to microbes and parasites but say drugs and

pesticides minimize the problem, virtually eliminating the risk to

wild fish stocks.

For example, Kelly Osborne, who manages farm sites in the

Broughton for Marine Harvest, said penned fish were treated with an

antilouse drug called Slice as smolts began their migration to the

ocean. The drug is so effective, he said, that perhaps only 1 in 10

penned fish would have a live louse.

Government officials say it would be premature to blame the

farms for declines in salmon runs seen here recently because those

numbers fluctuate naturally.

But Morton and researchers like Martin Krkosek of the University

of Alberta and John Volpe of the University of Victoria predict

that some local salmon runs will disappear unless the farms are

altered or removed. And because salmon loom large in the diets of

orcas, bears, eagles and other animals, their disappearance would

unravel the region's web of life.

"A lot of wild salmon populations have been on the edge for

quite a long time," threatened by logging, dams and "plain old

overfishing," said Ellen Pikitch, a fisheries biologist who heads

the Institute for Ocean Conservation Science at Stony Brook

University in New York. "The sea lice problem could be the nail in

the coffin for some of these fish."

(Pikitch also pointed out what some scientists say is an even

bigger problem with salmon farms. It takes more than one pound of

fish, processed into pellets, to produce one pound of salmon. Even

though farms are working to bring the ration down -- some say they

have achieved a one-to-one ratio -- Pikitch said the growing need to

feed farmed salmon had greatly increased the demand for anchovies,

herring and other fish, and "aquaculture is indirectly pulling the

rug out from under the ocean ecosystem.")

When Morton arrived at the Broughton, she was a graceful young

woman with dark hair that flowed halfway down her back. "I thought

she was another crazy hippie," Billy Proctor, locally acknowledged

as the Broughton's master fisherman, said in an interview.

She still moves gracefully but her flowing hair is gray now. And

she long ago won Proctor's admiration for her devotion to the

Broughton and its wildlife. When her husband died, Proctor took

Morton on as a deckhand. They collaborated on a book, "Heart of

the Raincoast" (Touchwood Editions, 1998), an account of his life

and changing times.

Today, when Proctor and other fishermen find escaped Atlantic

salmon in their nets, they often bring them to her. She cuts them

open and records, among other things, whether they have been fed

the chemicals that farms add to feed to color their grayish flesh a

more appealing pink. Then she disposes of the bodies, usually by

dumping them in the water for crabs and other scavengers to eat.

Meanwhile, in what she calls "partnered science," she works

regularly with experts from several universities. Typically, they

design a research plan and Morton organizes the collection of field

samples and other data to help carry it out.

At first, Morton reported her observations "naively," Pauly

recalled. "It was simply 'Hey, look at this, wild salmon are

riddled with parasites."' Her opponents attacked her as

inadequately credentialed, he said.

In the years since, papers Morton has helped write have appeared

in major scientific journals like Science, which in December

published a study in which she and her coauthors link fish farms to

precipitous declines of pink salmon in the Broughton.

Scientists at the University of Alberta, Simon Fraser University

and the University of Victoria are sending graduate students to the

Salmon Coast Research Station she established here at Echo Bay, a

community of a few families that clings to rocky crags that plunge,

beachless, straight down into cold, clear water.

There is so little flat land that many people live in float

houses -- cabins built on rafts or "floats" of foot-thick logs

lashed to the shore. There are no roads, no cars and no shops

except the few shelves of staples in the post office in Simoom

Sound, around a wooded promontory from Morton's home, where mail

arrives once a week.

Morton acknowledges that "the three Ws: widow, whales,

wilderness" draw a lot of attention to her work. She embraces it.

"The problem with this whole issue is if nobody sees it nothing

happens," she said one day recently as she motored past one of the

farming operations. And because most of the fish farmed here end up

in trucks heading down I-5 to California, she said, "it can't just

be the Canadian public. It has to be the American public."

So just as Jane Goodall speaks for chimps, Morton said, she

wants to tell the world about the troubles afflicting the orcas,

not as a crusader, but as "a woman cleaning house."

The research station occupies a shedlike building on a float.

The graduate students and other researchers live in a cluster of

houses, their wooden walls untouched by paper or paint, perched on

the rock slope inland. One is a former float house that Proctor

lived in as a boy and which Morton and her son occupied after

Proctor and other neighbors hauled it up onto the rocks, a

disaster-filled episode she recounts in her autobiography,

"Listening to Whales" (Ballantine Books, 2002). Jarret, who

graduated from the University of British Columbia, works as an

engineer in Utah now, Morton said.

Another is a house she built with Eric Nelson, whom she met

several years after her husband died and who is the father of her

12-year-old daughter, Clio. Still another is a house she built

herself, she said, when it was clear the couple would split up.

The station is supported in part by Sarah Haney, a retired nurse

and environmental campaigner from Ontario whose philanthropic

resources come from the game Trivial Pursuit -- her former husband

was one of its inventors and she was an early partner in the

venture. One of her major interests is whales, Haney said in a

telephone interview, so she learned about Morton and her work. When

the compound came up for sale, Haney bought it and paid "a lot of

money" for improvements including a new dock, and a laboratory

building.

This summer, she deeded the whole place over to Morton. "This

is one of the most important philanthropic ventures I have ever

been involved with," she said.

When Morton first came to British Columbia, she did not have a

traditional academic background. She was a prep school dropout

(Milton Academy in Massachusetts) who had worked in California for

John Lilly, an eccentric researcher who studied dolphin

communication. By then, she had taken enough college courses to

earn a bachelor's degree, she said. She first encountered orcas at

Marineland, an oceanarium in La Jolla, Calif., and decided she had

to see them in the wild. She had thoughts of returning to school

for a doctorate. Instead, she said, "I met Robin and just fell so

crazy in love with him that before I really thought about it I just

totally jumped tracks."

In September, after decades off the grid, Morton moved to a

small town on Malcolm Island, in the Queen Charlotte Strait, where

she will stay until Clio finishes high school.

She will live in a house on the water, a fixer-upper, she called

it, and she will visit the research station by boat. Because she

won't have to chop wood or perform other Echo Bay chores, she'll

have time for projects like studying statistics online. And she is

looking forward to conversation. In a tiny community like Echo Bay,

she said, encountering new people with something new to say is a

real treat.

"Billy and I now have a bet," she said, referring to Proctor.

"He says nobody ever comes back. But I have a research station

here. My life is here."

Meanwhile, she will be putting her hydrophone in the water

again, just in case.

FOR TUESDAY AMs

The following stories are on the front page of the Business

Section of the New York Times for Tuesday, Nov. 4. They are

scheduled to move by 9 p.m. ET unless otherwise noted.

For information on stories or for reruns, please call:

888-346-9867 or 212-556-1927. For information on NYT photos and

graphics, call 888-603-1036 or 212-556-4204.

(Lede story)

FCC-RADIO-SPECTRUM (San Francisco) -- Tuesday marks the end of a

battle pitting many combatants in a high-tech dispute over precious

slices of U.S. airwaves. The FCC will vote on a proposal to make a

disputed chunk of radio spectrum available for public use. Google,

Microsoft and others say the spectrum could be used to carry

low-cost, high-speed Internet to and from new wireless gadgets. But

old-guard media say signals sent over those frequencies could

interfere with broadcasts, sporting event transmissions and

wireless microphones at live productions. By Matt Richtel.

(Top display)

ECON-EUROPE (Zaragoza, Spain) -- Like many once-bustling cities

throughout Europe, Zaragoza, Spain, looked -- until recently -- as if

it might escape the effects of the financial crisis that has swept

through the banking systems of Spain and the rest of the Continent.

As the capital of Aragon, Spain's fastest-growing region, inland

Zaragoza kept booming even as the overbuilt Mediterranean coast

came to symbolize how real estate excess wasn't just an American or

British phenomenon. But this region has suddenly been hit by a

downturn, with layoff announcements by big manufacturers like

General Motors and a sudden tightening of credit stunning locals

who grew accustomed to the long boom. By Nelson D. Schwartz.

(Top left)

DEALBOOK (Undated) -- How to resolve the controversy of excessive

executive pay? Now that American taxpayers are shareholders in the

nation's largest banks, there are proposals to curb pay. Some folks

in Washington want to set a cap with an actual dollar amount,

others want regulated "clawbacks" and others have even come up

with a fancy formula to reign in compensation. By Andrew Ross

Sorkin.

(Bottom left)

BANKS-BAILOUT (Washington) -- There was a rare moment of levity

at the Treasury on Friday as the children of government workers

scampered from office to office in Halloween costumes. Minutes

later, the kids were gone and the hallways were retaken by

grim-faced grown-ups -- handing out tricks and treats of a different

sort. The Treasury building is ground zero for the Bush

administration's $700 billion rescue of the financial system -- an

ambitious, increasingly embattled program that passed an early

milestone last week when the government wired the first $125

billion to the nine largest banks in the United States. It is new

and unfamiliar terrain for the group, which is making monumental

decisions -- a form of industrial policy, some critics say -- that

contradict the free market philosophy they espouse. By Mark Landler

and Edmund L. Andrews.

(Bottom middle)

LAYOFFS-BLOGS (San Francisco) -- During past downturns, layoffs

were mostly a private affair. Big companies tended to issue vague

press releases filled with jargon about "downsizing," and

start-ups often gave people the pink slip without telling the world

anything at all. Not anymore. In the age of transparency, the

layoff will be blogged. Blogging about staff cuts is particularly

prevalent in Silicon Valley. By Claire Cain Miller.

(Editors: Budgets and advisories are internal documents not for

publication or redistribution outside of client news organizations.

Unauthorized use of budgets and advisories constitutes a violation

of our contract terms. All clients receive all budgets, but only

full-service clients receive all stories. Please check your level

of service to determine which stories you will receive.)

A horrifying act stood at the center of Toni Morrison's 1987

masterwork, "Beloved": A runaway slave, caught in her effort to

escape, cuts the throat of her baby daughter with a handsaw,

determined to spare the girl the fate she herself has suffered as a

slave. A similarly indelible act stands at the center of Morrison's

remarkable new novella, "A Mercy," a small, plangent gem of a

story that is, at once, a kind of prelude to "Beloved" and a

variation on that earlier book's exploration of the personal costs

of slavery -- a system that moves men and women and children around

"like checkers" and casts a looming shadow over both parental and

romantic love.

Set some 200 years before "Beloved," "A Mercy" conjures up

the beautiful, untamed, lawless world that was America in the 17th

century with the same sort of lyrical, verdant prose that

distinguished that earlier novel. Gone are the didactic language

and schematic architecture that hobbled the author's 1998 novel,

"Paradise"; gone are the cartoonish characters that marred her

2003 novel, "Love." Instead Morrison has rediscovered an urgent,

poetic voice that enables her to move back and forth with immediacy

and ease between the worlds of history and myth, between ordinary

daily life and the realm of fable.

All the central characters in this story are orphans, cast off

by their parents or swept away from their families by acts of God

or nature or human cruelty -- literal or figurative exiles

susceptible to the centrifugal forces of history. There is Jacob,

an Anglo-Dutch trader, whose memories of his own parentless years

on the streets "stealing food and cadging gratuities for errands"

have left him with a "pulse of pity for orphans and strays."

There is his wife, Rebekka, who as a girl of 16 was sent abroad to

America by her father, who, happy to have one less mouth to feed,

readily accepted Jacob's offer of "'reimbursement' for clothing,

expenses and a few supplies" in exchange for a "healthy, chaste

wife willing to travel abroad." And there is Florens, whose mother

sees the kindness in Jacob's heart and begs him to take her young

daughter (as payment for a debt owed by their domineering owner) in

the hopes that the trader will give her a better life and the

possibility of a future as a free woman, not a slave.

But what is "a mercy" to Florens' mother is experienced by the

girl as an act of abandonment, and it will leave her with a hole in

her heart and an abiding need for love and approval. For a time,

Florens finds a sense of belonging on Jacob's farm -- the illusion,

even, of family. Jacob is often away from home doing business, and

Rebekka and Lina, the American Indian slave who helped Jacob get

the farm started, find the daily hardships of frontier life

bringing them together in an alliance of survival that slowly turns

into friendship.

Both are wary of the first waif Jacob brings home: a strange,

daft girl named Sorrow, who was found half-drowned in a river.

Rebekka regards Sorrow as useless around the farm, while Lina, who

has survived the devastation of her own tribe by a plague, sees the

stranger as "bad luck in the flesh" and blames her for the early

deaths of Rebekka's children.

Florens, in contrast, awakens a maternal instinct in Lina, and

she embraces the girl as if she were long-lost kin: "A frightened,

long-necked child who did not speak for weeks but when she did, her

light, singsong voice was lovely to hear. Some how, some way, the

child assuaged the tiny yet eternal yearning for the home Lina once

knew, where everyone had anything, and no one had everything."

Years later Florens falls passionately in love with a visiting

blacksmith, a free black man who has come to work on a fancy gate

for Jacob's new house, and who miraculously cures Sorrow of a

deathly illness. Lina warns her of the perils of giving away her

heart -- "You are one leaf on his tree," she says -- but Florens

insists she is "his tree."

When his work is done, however, the blacksmith leaves without

even troubling to say goodbye, and like so many earlier Morrison

characters, Florens learns the perils of caring too much -- and the

legacy of loss and leaving bequeathed to her by her mother.

As long as Jacob is alive, Morrison writes, "it was easy to

veil the truth: that they were not a family -- not even a

like-minded group." But when he suddenly dies of the pox, and

Rebekka, too, falls gravely ill, Lina, Florens and Sorrow realize

their precarious position.

"Three unmastered women," alone, "belonging to no one, became

wild game for anyone": "Female and illegal, they would be

interlopers, squatters, if they stayed on after Mistress died,

subject to purchase, hire, assault, abduction, exile." Their one

hope is to find the blacksmith and persuade him to return to work

his magic on Rebekka. It is Florens who is sent on this quest, her

passion for the man both a spur and a hazard to her mission.

The main storyteller in this volume is Florens, who, abandoned

by the blacksmith, feels herself "an ice floe cut away from the

riverbank." But her voice is just one in this choral tale -- a tale

that not only emerges as a heartbreaking account of lost innocence

and fractured dreams, but also stands, with "Beloved," as one of

Morrison's most haunting works yet.

PUBLICATION NOTES

'A MERCY'

By Toni Morrison

167 pages. Alfred A. Knopf. $23.95.

This city once dreamed in lofty superlatives --

that it could become a major metropolis, axis of the Intermountain

West and heavyweight hub of the high plains.

But by the late 1800s, Denver, 100 miles south in Colorado, had

won the contest. Gold strikes and good water supplies made the

difference. Cheyenne gradually retreated to its roots as a

wind-blown provincial town, dependent on a Cold War-era missile

base and on Wyoming's tiny state government for jobs.

Now the Denver area's relentless growth, with its satellite

cities and suburbs that march north toward Wyoming, is grabbing

Cheyenne by the lapels.

But maps are political documents, too, and the poll numbers

suggest that the same newcomers who have reshaped the Denver

metropolitan economy may now be leading Colorado, once-dependably

Republican, into the Democratic column by supporting Sen. Barack

Obama for president. Obama is comfortably ahead in most polls in

Colorado going into Tuesday's election. Wyoming, by contrast, with

just over 500,000 people, less than one-tenth of Colorado's

population, is among the most stalwart of Republican states and

shows little sign of budging.

The result is not exactly a collision, but rather a kind of

accordion affect, like the two-headed Pushmi-Pullyu from the Dr.

Dolittle stories. One force is pulling the two states closer as the

juggernaut of urbanization shifts the economic and demographic

landscape; the other is carving out a deeper separation as most of

Wyoming holds firm to its cowboy, go-it-alone ethos.

Change for old Cheyenne, population 55,000, is the one

certainty.

Wyoming's low-rise capital city has long been isolated by virtue

of its founding as a railroad town; it was plunked in the state's

southeast corner not for loveliness or riches but because it was

midway between the Union Pacific's other major depots of the 1860s,

in Omaha and Ogden, Utah. Now, it is braced for impact.

About 16,000 passenger vehicles cross the border everyday, at

least 2,200 of them commuters to jobs on one side of the border or

the other, according to Wyoming state figures. The Wyoming

Legislature, where "mass transit" is seldom heard, took testimony

in October from a state consultant who recommended that the state

start conferring with planners in Denver who are hoping to build a

commuter rail line of 300 miles or more from Wyoming to New Mexico.

"Economics is what we are really after," said State Sen.

Michael Von Flatern, a Republican and co-chairman of the

Transportation, Highways and Military Affairs Committee. "Denver

will be a big megalopolis, and if things move forward on the rail

line, and Colorado does their part, I would want Wyoming to tie

in."

People like John Brazzale, a 47-year-old electrician from

Cheyenne who has worked here and in Denver, say they think the knot

has already been tied. Now it is time for the honeymoon.

"Something's coming," Brazzale said as he rewired lampposts

outside the Union Pacific Depot on a recent morning -- old-fashioned

bulbs out, energy-efficient fluorescent lights in. "Just look at

the hotels that are going up around here. They're not building them

for fun."

Brazzale, who described himself as a union man and a Democrat,

said that he welcomed the change, and that, who knows, in 20 years,

Cheyenne could even become a kind of high-tech wunderkind like

Boulder, a Denver satellite known for its fancy restaurants,

liberals and geeks.

In a hint of that possible future, the National Center for

Atmospheric Research in Boulder, a climate research institute

financed by the National Science Foundation, announced last year

that its next-generation supercomputer center would be built in

Cheyenne. Scheduled to open in 2011, the center will foster

interaction between researchers from Colorado and Wyoming who will

now have reason to meet in Cheyenne.

Still, Ron Willis is among those who think the old political

boundaries will hold, even as things change.

"Colorado is becoming a more Democratic state, but Wyoming will

remain Republican," said Willis, 32, who runs a state-federal

program to help residents weatherize their homes to conserve

energy. "I think the two states will remain separated."

Politics aside, Willis said Wyoming still held a monopoly on

real Western culture and would not surrender the claim to Denver,

regardless of dollar signs.

"Denver has never really been the West," he said, repeating a

commonly heard insult around here that, in rowdier days, might have

sparked a fistfight.

At the Cheyenne Area Convention and Visitors Bureau, the group's

president and chief executive, Darren Rudloff, said he thought a

greater linkage with Denver was inevitable and mostly positive.

The three conjoined metropolitan areas of northeastern Colorado

-- Denver-Aurora, Boulder and Fort Collins-Loveland -- now press

right up to the Wyoming border. Taken together, they are among the

fastest-growing areas in the nation over the last two decades, with

a population increase of about 44 percent, to just under 3 million

people, according to the most recent Census Bureau estimates.

"I don't think there's any business resistance," Rudloff said.

"But there would be, I think, in some quarters, resistance to

losing too much of the Cheyenneness -- there would be some push

back."

On the other hand, Rudloff added, many Wyoming residents have

already written off Cheyenne, believing that the city has fallen

off the map already and into Colorado.

"We're not Colorado and we're not totally Wyoming, according to

some people," he said. "So we're kind of stuck in the middle."

But if geography is destiny, there is perhaps a historical twist

as well. Political and business leaders here say the growth of

metropolitan Denver's population north toward Wyoming, which has no

income tax, sharpens the business allure of Cheyenne as a commuting

destination for more and more Coloradans, making the city a

legitimate contender with Denver for the first time in generations

and stirring those old dreams of greatness.

Laura Adams, an accountant with the state government, said she

welcomed the new economic connections. "It can only help

Cheyenne," Adams said. "A lot of people still don't even know

where it is."

But do not get her started on politics.

Adams, 51, who described herself as a strong supporter of Sen.

John McCain, the Republican presidential nominee, is unhappy with

Colorado's political direction and with the Denver news media,

which often serve Cheyenne as an afterthought. After the Democrats

held their national convention in Denver in August, Adams said, too

many locals fell in love with the party.

"I listen to a radio station that comes from Denver," she

said. "I had to turn it off. I couldn't stand it any more."

I voted a week ago in order to write this column. It is intended to

be a

useful guide. I assume you will clip this article out of the

newspaper,

take it with you into the voting booth - and do exactly the

opposite of

what I did.

For the Senate: Yes, I voted for Jeff Beatty. If not me, then

who? I saw

him on Emily Rooney's TV show a few weeks ago. He claimed to have

commissioned a poll showing that voters preferred him to his

opponent, John

Kerry, if only anyone knew who Jeff Beatty was. Yes, it's

astonishing how

the better-known people just keep getting elected.

I heard a snippet of a Kerry-Beatty debate, the one where

Senator Kerry

claimed not to own any stock. I wouldn't own any stock, either, if

I was

married to Fort Knox.

For the House: I voted for "Bailout" Barney Frank, mainly

because I

hadn't taken the time to learn who opposed him. If I had known that

the

GOP's Earl Sholley was a five-time finisher of the Boston Marathon

and a

member of the Appalachian Mountain Club, I might have supported

him. My

bad.

I do like Barney, though. Each year, he becomes more irascible

and

difficult to deal with. He reminds me of someone I know.

Question 1: I let you down. I'm precisely the kind of

know-nothing crank

who would vote to eliminate the income tax. It was tempting,

especially

considering who was arrayed against it: Every featherbedding,

ethically

compromised labor union in the state, hand in hand with the

self-appointed

"good government" types. Voting "yes" seemed like a brief,

pleasurable,

but ultimately pointless gesture, like yelling at Manny Ramirez on

the TV

set. I have lots of enemies, but the State of Massachusetts isn't

one of

them. I voted no.

Question 2: Sure, Croesus-level currency manipulator and

Question Two

backer George Soros, I'll give you my vote. Not bloody likely!

Doper

politics don't fascinate me, but I'll vote against Soros any time.

I voted

no.

Question 3: I voted no, again. Isn't the idea of banning dog

racing just

classist pap? Why not ban thoroughbred horse racing, with its

creepy

Lysenkoist breeding ideologies and its pitiless jettisoning of

beautiful

horses past their primes? Oh, that's right. Because posh people

approve of

horse racing, and because institutions that matter, such as the

state of

New York (OTB) or ABC and ESPN (The Breeder's Cup) make serious

money off

horse racing.

No one makes serious money off the dogs, not even the track

owners, if

their baying is to be believed. Don't push your PETA politics on

me.

The Presidency: Some background: I hate voting for national

offices here,

because Massachusetts is a one-party state. I would happily go into

grade

schools and urge children not to vote until pulling the lever here

actually

means something. Somehow I don't think the League of Women Voters

is going

to take me up on this offer.

Eight years ago, I voted for Ralph Nader and am proud that I

did. Four

years ago, I sold my vote to my then 17-year-old son, who wished he

had

been able to vote for Kerry. I voted for Kerry on his behalf, and

he agreed

to walk the dog. Maybe twice. Now he's 21, and I am walking the dog

all

alone.

I would have voted for John McCain for president in 2000, but I

didn't get

the chance. But not now. Leftist claptrap notwithstanding,

political

parties have appreciable differences. Forget me; I'm doing fine.

But is the

country better off than it was eight years ago? I don't think so. I

voted

with Chris Buckley and Colin Powell for Obama.

I don't believe I have ever voted for the winner of a

presidential

election, so forewarned is forearmed.

The winner!

As promised, I have chosen the winner of the Sarah Palin-drome

contest. (A

palindrome is a phrase that makes sense read forward and backward -

e.g.,

"Madam, I'm Adam.") Thanks to the music of the blogospheres, I

received

well over a hundred submissions from around the globe. Yet, much

like those

phony "nationwide" job searches, I found the winners close to

home.

First runner-up: "Party boobytrap," which is both brief and

clever.

Second runner-up: "Women veep's peev'n 'em, ow," from

Northeastern

University student Eric Greenberg. The winner of a used copy of

"Huckleberry Finn" - a book that many have tried to ban from our

nation's

libraries - George Lovely of Milton, for "Yo, sure hot, top spot

to her?

U.S. Oy!" Congratulations!

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It's been a long, at times hilarious, two-year race down the

presidential campaign trail. Taking the long view back, here are

some of the most memorable pop-culture moments of the journey.

-- It's 3 a.m. and I'm ready to rule

Hillary Rodham Clinton launches an early negative salvo with a

February 2008 TV ad that wondered aloud, "Who do you want

answering the red phone in the Oval Office at 3 a.m.?" Barack

Obama's campaign fires back with a commercial that answers: Someone

who had the clarity of thought to vote against the Iraq war.

Satirists strike with one of their own, suggesting the only call

Hillary will get at 3 a.m. is from Bill, home after a night of

clubbing and locked out of the White House.

-- Wrap yourself in the flag

What started out as an innocent "crush on Obama" propelled

Amber Lee Ettinger, a.k.a. Obama Girl, to political luminary

status. Don't ask us how or why.

-- Jump back JibJab

The animators finally showed up July 15 with an

equal-opportunity skewering of politics and the candidates. One of

the brightest moments of "Time for Some Campaignin'," a spot-on

parody sung to Bob Dylan's "The Times They Are A'Changin," is the

Disney-esque sequence featuring Obama astride a galloping unicorn

singing "I've got one or two things to say about change, the

change we must change to the change we hold dear. I really like

change, have I made myself clear?"

-- What were they thinking?

The New Yorker magazine proves that Manhattan satire works best,

well, in Manhattan, with an early-summer cover that portrayed

Michelle and Barack Obama as terrorists.

-- "Snowmachine" enters the lexicon of the Lower 48.

-- Playing catch-up

Riffing on the supremely irritating 1999 Budweiser "Wassup"

commercials, where four guys call one another and yell "wassup!"

into the phone, we fast-forward eight years and one of the guys is

sitting in his foreclosed house when he gets called by a guy who is

calling from a pay phone in the desert of Iraq, another has a cast

on his neck and arm but can't pay for pain meds. Wassup? Change!

The ad opines, ordering viewers to vote.

-- Star light, star bright

Sure, we're electing a president and all, but we're also

unofficially choosing our next generation of news personalities.

The brightest star? MSNBC's Rachel Maddow, who regularly wallops

CNN behemoth Larry King in the ratings. Maddow leans left, but it's

her regular, good-natured sparring matches with Pat Buchanan that

suggest a new era in respectful, non-yelling television

partisanship. Honorable mention: No-nonsense Campbell Brown, who

emerged from the shadows of network news to anchor the pre-Anderson

hour on CNN with precision and personality.

-- America inoculated with viral video

YouTube was just a fun way to burn off a few hours at work until

hip-hop artist Will.i.am launched the 4-minute, 30-second clip of

artists singing the speech about hope that Barack Obama gave after

he lost the New Hampshire primary. In the first two weeks it was

posted on YouTube and Obama's campaign Web site, the "Yes We Can"

video drew more than 14 million page views. Can we spread the word

without the filter of a political machine? Why yes, yes we can.

-- We got a gusher here

Joe Sixpack is kicked to the curb by Joe the Plumber, a Holland,

Ohio, tradesman who gotcha'd Obama on the campaign trail about the

Democrat's tax policy and then was adopted as the new everyman by

McCain and Palin, to the point that his name was dropped 13 times

in the first minutes of the final presidential debate.

-- The resurrection of "SNL"

Satirists are re-energized by the nomination of Alaska Gov.

Sarah "Caribou Barbie" Palin for veep, as are members of the

party core, who embrace sexism as a form of endearment in the

political arena and show it by waving signs reading "America's

Hottest Governor" on the convention floor.

-- No one does it better than Fred Armisen, though

Audiences are captivated by new technologies deployed by CNN.

Baiting the hook: John King's magic screen. Setting it: the

hypnotic electronic fever chart that tracked the response of

undecided voters -- in real time -- during the debates.

-- Cultural creatives available in GOP styles too

McCain solos on "Saturday Night Live" the weekend before

Election Day, spoofing opposite Tina Fey, as Palin, as host of a

late-night QVC show. "This past Wednesday, Barack Obama purchased

airtime on three major networks. We, however, can only afford

QVC," he said. Then McCain and Fey pitched a set of commemorative

plates celebrating the 10 town hall meetings McCain wanted with

Obama (blank, because Obama took a pass) and jewelry from the

McCain Fine Gold collection (get it, McCain-Feingold?).

-- They shoulda gone with Bubba

For the past four election cycles Family Circle magazine readers

have picked the new president correctly by voting for one political

family's cookie recipe over another. This year, Cindy McCain's

Oatmeal-Butterscotch Cookies were favored over Michelle Obama's

citrus and almond Shortbread Cookies, 54 percent to 44 percent.

Bill Clinton's fave Oatmeal Cookie recipe got just 2 percent of the

vote before his wife, Hillary, conceded the nomination to Obama.

All of this might have just slipped right into the electronic

dustbin were it not for someone out there noticing that the McCain

recipe is nearly identical to that found on the back of the

butterscotch chip bag.

-- See you in the White House, Paris

McCain needles Obama for allegedly being just a celebrity, like

Paris Hilton. The socialite's McCain-donor parents respond by

withdrawing their support. Hilton, aided by writer Adam McKay

("Talladega Nights," "Anchorman") and producer Chris Henchy

("Entourage"), issues a rebuttal that excoriates "that wrinkly

white-haired guy" and includes a more thoughtful energy policy

than either real candidate had laid out. Oh, and the promise to

paint the White House pink if she's elected. All this and proof

that the best teleprompter reader in the campaign might not be

Obama.

-- He said it with a straight face

During the July 27, 2007, YouTube online primary debates, CNN

anchor Anderson Cooper introduced Billiam the Snowman, an animated

character from Point Hope, Alaska. Billiam, who sounded an awful

lot like "Saturday Night Live's" claymation character Mr. Bill,

noted that he felt that global warming, the single most important

issue to the snowmen of the country, was being neglected. "What,

as president, will you do to ensure my son will live a full and

happy life?" the frosty father asked. Predictably, Ohio Rep.

Dennis Kucinich, the greenest candidate on the panel, nailed the

answer, drawing a link between global warming and the nation's

reliance on coal and petroleum. "We don't have to have our snowmen

melting," he offered.

-- Mirror, mirror

Michelle Obama called out as an "elitist" for suggesting

Americans might use part of their $600 economic stimulus check to

buy earrings, followed by Vanity Fair magazine calling out Cindy

McCain for wearing an outfit (and jewelry) at the GOP convention

valued at $300,000, and, later, McCain/Palin campaign calling

itself out in finance reports that revealed $150,000 spent to

outfit Palin, her husband and five children for the campaign trail.

-- Hurricane Ike

Buzzkill for the GOP convention.

-- Yeah, he's a rock star

At least five times during the primary campaign Obama found

himself calling for the EMTs because swooning fans had fainted in

the audience.

The man is 84 now, and in impressive condition for his years.

Still, he

resembles a gnomish, shrunken version of his younger self - which

is to

say, a vital, if a bit bland, mid-20th-century American male, with

dark

suit, Clark Kent glasses, and an air of having important business

to attend

to.

Senator Ted Stevens of Alaska, who was convicted last week on

seven counts

of corruption, could be the protagonist of an Arthur Miller

tragedy: a

formerly robust, confident American winner laid low by secret

compromises

and long-repressed deceits. And Tuesday could be his denouement.

Having refused to drop out of his race for reelection - despite

requests

from fellow Republicans John McCain and his home-state governor,

Sarah

Palin - Stevens could well end his career in electoral defeat, to

go along

with his criminal convictions.

It's a mighty fall for a man known as Alaska's patriarch, a

former World

War II pilot who went on to play a role in his state's battle to

join the

union, and then represented it in the Senate for 40 years.

In Washington, he will be remembered mostly as a pork-barrel

politician,

delivering billions of dollars in earmarks to his constituents

while

stinting a bit on the larger national issues of the day. But in his

home

state, the man was a giant, and his disgrace commands a measure of

sympathy.

The elderly senator sat ramrod straight in the Washington

courtroom as the

jury delivered its verdict. News reports say he tried to knit his

fingers,

in a gesture of calmness, but had to give up because one of his

hands was

shaking so badly.

Despite the convictions, some of his loyal constituents - who

may yet

return him to the Senate - find the charges against him to be

insubstantial.

There was little dispute that Stevens received hundreds of

thousands of

dollars of renovations to his Alaskan cabin, paid for by Bill

Allen, CEO of

a now-defunct oil-services company called VECO, which had extensive

business on Alaska's North Slope. Stevens failed to mention the

home

renovations and other gifts from Allen - including a gas grill and

a sled

dog - on Senate ethics forms for seven consecutive years.

But he contended that he was unaware of some of the gifts and

thought he

had paid for others. Therefore, he believed the forms were accurate

when he

signed them. And his wife Catherine asserted that she alone had

overseen

the renovations. (Workers, however, testified that Stevens was

present for

some of the work. Plus, the Stevenses didn't even have contracts

with some

of the renovators - Allen arranged everything.)

Lastly, Stevens's defenders have noted that he and Allen were

friends,

suggesting that the gifts were more tokens of affection than

bribery. And

it's clear that Stevens, like many politicians before him, finds it

laughable that prosecutors would feel such gifts could corrupt his

integrity: He would behave the same way in his official capacity

whether

Allen gave him a $6,000 mega-grill or a puppy.

But his case - starting with the longstanding allegiance between

a

politician and a businessman, morphing into a "friendship,"

leading to

pampering and gifts - is practically a prototype of official

Washington

corruption.

The purpose of ethics laws is not to guard against the unjust

enrichment

of senators so much as to protect the public coffers from being

used to

service the kinds of friendships that existed between Stevens and

Allen.

The sad reality is that such relative trifles as gas grills, hot

tubs, and

free rides on corporate jets can create a back-scratch relationship

that

leads to the giveaway of hundreds of times their value in public

largesse.

The one sacrifice made by career politicians like Stevens is to

live with

a salary of $169,000 per year. It's not so tough. But for men and

women who

control billions of dollars, it is often galling to see

less-powerful

people enjoying more luxurious lives. And when those businesspeople

are

eager to cultivate relationships, it's easy for politicians -

particularly

those without rich spouses or family fortunes to fall back on - to

start

accepting a favor here and there.

Whether those little favors lead, in return, to bigger ones in

the form of

government contracts can be difficult to prove in any specific

instance.

But the idea that such tacit exchanges happen fairly frequently,

and often

under the radar, is ridiculously easy to comprehend. So the Senate

wisely

requires disclosures of the type that Stevens failed to make.

It seems like a long fall from being Mr. Alaska to Mr. Pork

Barrel to Mr.

Felon, but it may not be such a great distance after all.

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National

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beyond. He

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EDS: WITH 'HAIR-SIDE'

Every time Palos Verdes Peninsula resident Kate McLaughlin gets

her hair done, her husband has a fit. The way he sees it -- why

waste a couple hundred bucks on a haircut when the economy is down

and millions of Americans are struggling to make ends meet?

But ask McLaughlin, and she'll tell you flat-out: Hair is

non-negotiable.

"You just grin and pay for it like you do your school loan,

mortgage payment and vehicle repair bill," said McLaughlin, a

former newspaper reporter and now a college journalism instructor.

"Hair is a top spending priority in any economy."

But it is expensive.

At most high-end salons in Los Angeles, a cut and color can cost

between $200 and $500. Even at budget-

conscious spots such as Supercuts, highlighting services start

at $75 (add on their $16 haircuts and you're looking at a nearly

$100 service, minimum).

It adds up. According to a British survey conducted by

the hair product company

TRESemme, the average woman spends about $50,000 on her hair in

her lifetime. That's a figure that includes about $160 annually on

shampoos and conditioners, $120 for home styling products and $520

for haircuts -- plus $330 more per year for those who use color.

"There are a thousand other places we can economize -- food,

booze, trips, travel, fuel consumption, clothes, accessories,

Starbucks, nails," McLaughlin said. "Anyone who is skimping on

the locks, in my humble opinion, has her priorities wrong."

Most women agree. At least according to Debi Dumas, chief

colorist at the Jim Wayne Salon in Beverly Hills, who said she

hasn't seen a big change in business -- even with the sputtering

economy.

"You get a lot for what you're spending," said Dumas, who has

tended the tresses of celebrities including Sharon Stone, Candace

Cameron Bure and Mischa Barton. "If you go to buy a new outfit,

you feel good in it the first time you wear it. ... But after

you've worn it one or two times, you don't feel as special in it.

"When you get your hair done, you're going to get four months

out of it."

Melissa Heckscher (310) 540-5511,

Ext. 329; melissa.heckscherdailybreeze.com

An hour-by-hour checklist of what states to watch on Election

Night and how their voting patterns may influence the outcome of

the election.

-- First polls close at 7 p.m.

Look to Virginia. If Obama takes the state, a Republican

stronghold for 44 years, it may indicate North Carolina, Florida

and others are going his way as well. If McCain is holding on to

Virginia, it may suggest two things:

1. the political polls have been wrong.

2. the electoral map may not change, or change as much, as

predicted.

-- 7:30 p.m.

Voting in Ohio, North Carolina and West Virginia ends.

All three of these states were won by President Bush four years

ago. Ohio, with its 20 electoral votes, is the Big Kahuna at this

point, and pundits are now examining and pontificating about exit

polls. (Remember, in 2004 exit polls showed Democrat John Kerry in

the lead. Digest them with caution.)

-- 8:30 p.m.

The polls have closed in 17 more states and 275 electoral votes

are now on the table.

McCain probably needs to hold on to two of three states -- Ohio,

Pennsylvania and Florida -- in order to win. Ohio polls came in an

hour earlier, so look to the other two states now to see where they

are leaning.

If McCain wins two or all three (and in that instance, Obama has

picked up another state such as Virginia) all eyes turn to the

West. Also watch Missouri. It's a swing state and may give you a

preview for results from upcoming states.

(If the networks, cable news and papers online try to call the

race at this point, remember "Al Gore wins Florida" and "Dewey

Defeats Truman.")

-- 9 - 10 p.m.

With a total of 451 electoral votes now up for grabs, this is

likely the make-or-break hour. And the Rocky Mountain West is front

and center. If Obama so far has only picked up states John Kerry

won four years ago, a sweep of Colorado, New Mexico and Nevada

would be the tipping point. (There is no need to wait for

California, Washington and Oregon, whose polls close at 11 p.m.,

because they historically go Democratic).

If McCain has followed in Bush's footsteps, he just needs one of

those three states to win. If he's lost a state like Iowa, then he

would need two of them.

If McCain has won the interior South and most of the Rust Belt,

and Obama has picked up Iowa and a southern state like Virginia,

the battle heads straight to Colorado and Nevada (assuming New

Mexico goes for Obama). The 14 electoral votes would put either

candidate into the White House.

-- 11 p.m.

Idaho, North Dakota, Oregon, California, Hawaii and Washington

close their polls, but those states are not exactly cliffhangers.

-- 1 a.m.

You should be in bed or out either celebrating the victor or

complaining that the country is going down the tubes. But if you're

really interested, Alaska now closes its polls. Now things should

be over. But remember Florida in 2000 and Ohio in 2004.

I was going to say that "House" has finally lost its luster. Why?

For one

thing, overpopulation. Here's a drama series, now in its fifth

season, with

too many regular characters who have nothing to do. Between Dr.

House's old

staff, his new staff, his private detective, doctors Wilson and

Cuddy, and

the patients-of-the-week, the Fox show has become something of a

traffic

jam. When the "House" writers finally devote an episode to the

once-prominent Cameron-Chase romance next Tuesday, it will feel

like

nostalgia night.

I was also going to say that the "House" storylines have grown

increasingly preposterous over the years - and they were cuckoo to

start

with. Sometimes, the medical mysteries and the dramas about the

doctors'

personal lives are so over-the-top, I have to go into a kind of

denial to

get through the hour. I have to work to suspend my wild disbelief

while I'm

watching the insanity unfold - doctors breaking into patients'

homes, House

having his P.I. go through Wilson's garbage, Thirteen getting fired

but not

leaving. But then later on, or during the commercials, I shake my

head and

laugh at the lunacy. OK, Cuddy just drugged House so that Wilson

could

kidnap him and drive him to his father's funeral. Got it.

And yet I would much rather say something completely different

here.

Against all odds, and against all the evidence of sloppy

storytelling and

excessive implausibility, "House" remains one of network TV's

most

dynamic hours. Obviously, Hugh Laurie is outrageously good; he has

created

an awful, brilliant, condescending, needy, childlike, curmudgeonly

character with nary a wrong note over five years. His House already

deserves a spot in the TV character hall of fame, near Archie

Bunker and

Hawkeye Pierce.

But I do find that, despite the occasional bum episode, the

drama that is

built around Laurie is still good, too. Weird, but good. "House"

can't be

approached and judged as a typical medical procedural, even while

it has

that formulaic quality. The show needs to be viewed as a comic

psychodrama

in which all the medical cases reflect aspects of the doctors, and

all the

doctors reflect aspects of House, and House reflects the naked id.

It's a

crazy "House" of mirrors. The crowded cast, the overheated

action, and

all the absurd twists and turns are the show's unique stylization.

"House" may be mainstream TV's boldest-ever psychological farce.

Yes, I have sometimes joined in the chorus of fans who feel that

"House"

is over. But right here, right now, I'm feeling more optimistic.

With

Olivia Wilde's Thirteen getting more compelling, and House and

Cuddy

getting romantic, and bold direction that can turn a prime-time

hour into a

dreamlike fantasia, the show still deserves a chance.

Matthew Gilbert can be reached at gilbert@globe.com. For more

on TV,

visit boston.com/ ae/tv/blog/.

WASHINGTON - Pennsylvania Republicans and an independent group

called the

National Republican Trust have blitzed the television airwaves in

recent

days with ads that link Barack Obama with his controversial former

pastor,

the Reverend Jeremiah A. Wright Jr., in a last-minute effort to

turn voters

against the Democratic presidential nominee.

Both ads show Wright making inflammatory statements such as

"Not God bless

America, God damn America!" and calling the country the "US of

KKKA."

Obama was once close to Wright, considering him a spiritual mentor

and the

man who brought him to embrace Christianity, but Obama broke off

the

relationship in April after Wright continued making controversial

statements. Obama condemned Wright's words as "appalling."

An Obama spokesman said the campaign would not issue a response

to the ads.

John McCain, the Republican presidential nominee, rejected

suggestions by

some aides and even his running mate, Sarah Palin, to make an issue

out of

Wright. McCain reportedly feared such an attack would be perceived

to have

racial overtones.

McCain spokesman Ben Porritt said Monday that the Arizona

senator "has

been clear that our campaign will not use Reverend Wright in

advertising.

Our campaign will win on the issues."

But Porritt said McCain would not try to stop the Pennsylvania

GOP and the

National Republican Trust political action committee from airing

the Wright

ads, saying McCain "is not going to be the traffic cop for every

independent organization, state party, or state-level candidate

that

chooses to use these in advertising."

The National Republican Trust has made enormous advertising buys

to put the

ad on several national television networks in the final days of the

campaign. The group spent $1.2 million on Thursday and $2.5 million

more

on Friday.

Its ad, which was running frequently on CNN Monday, questions

Obama's

judgment and asserts that he never complained about Wright's

statements for

20 years - until he started running for president. "Barack Obama,

too

radical, too risky," the announcer concludes.

The group's leader, Scott Wheeler, said Monday that his group is

running

the ad about Wright because "we thought we would look at what

would affect

most people. I think most people had no idea how close Wright and

Obama

were."

Wheeler said he knew McCain "was going to shy away from it but

I think it

is very important for people to know."

Wheeler, who said he has had no coordination with the McCain

campaign or

the Republican Party, said in a telephone interview that he is a

former

journalist who had written articles critical of former president

Clinton.

The group's website solicits donations with a plea that says, "One

of the

most radical political figures ever to be nominated by a major

party is

just minutes away from becoming President of the United States."

The group

expects to raise $8.5 million this year and spend about $7 million

on

advertisements, including the commercial about Wright.

The ad by the Pennsylvania GOP is running in a state that is

widely

considered one of the most important battlegrounds. Robert Gleason,

Jr.,

the chairman of the state party, said it believed the Wright issue

has not

received enough attention since it was widely publicized in advance

of the

state's April primary that Obama lost.

"When Pennsylvanians vote for a President, they should have a

full picture

of a candidate's character, including the people they chose to

intimately

align themselves with for many years," Gleason said in a

statement. The

Pennsylvania GOP did not return a call seeking further comment.

In a presidential campaign season that had 70 million viewers

turn up for a vice presidential debate and more than 30 million

willingly sit through an infomercial, it's no wonder that cable

outlets not primarily known for their news coverage will be working

election night alongside the traditional news organizations.

Viewers seeking alternatives to the traditional TV-news talking

heads will be able to watch election-night returns today from a

variety of perspectives and even in languages other than English,

with coverage that offers interactivity and even comedy.

Here's a list of what different networks are offering viewers on

the evening in which the longest presidential campaign in history

comes to an end (barring voter fraud and court appeals, that is).

If you want to start off or take a break with something funny,

there's Comedy Central's "Indecision 2008: America's Choice,"

jointly hosted by Jon Stewart and Stephen Colbert, which will offer

an hour of live coverage at 7 p.m. (repeated at 10 p.m.)

As for those serious networks:

ABC (Channel 7): Charles Gibson, Diane Sawyer and George

Stephanopoulous will anchor ABC News' coverage from what will no

doubt be a partylike atmosphere in Times Square beginning at 4 p.m.

today. As with all the major news networks, coverage will continue

to at least 11 p.m. or when a winner has been declared. A special

edition of "Nightline" summarizing the evening will air at 11:35

p.m. if the election has been decided.

NBC (Channel 4): Brian Williams, Tom Brokaw and Ann Curry will

anchor NBC News' coverage beginning at 4 p.m. from Rockefeller

Plaza, rechristened "Election Plaza" for the evening, with flags

charting the results for those gathering in midtown Manhattan.

Chuck Todd and Andrea Mitchell will provide analysis.

Anticipating charges of voting irregularities, NBC has set up a

hotline, 1-866-

OUR-VOTE, for viewers to report any difficulties they encounter

in their precincts.

CBS (Channel 2): Katie Couric will handle anchoring duties solo

beginning at 4 p.m. but will be joined by Bob Schieffer and

political analysts Jeff Greenfield, Dee Dee Myers and Dan Bartlett.

PBS (KCET, Channel 28): "NewsHour" anchor Jim Lehrer will head

up PBS' election coverage, running from 6 p.m. to 9 p.m. or

whenever a winner is declared. KCET will also provide the British

perspective of the election with "BBC World News" coverage of the

election at 11 p.m.

CNN: "Election Night in America," beginning at 3 p.m., will be

anchored by Wolf Blitzer, alongside Campbell Brown and Anderson

Cooper, with John King and that giant iPhone-type device that

crunches the electoral-ballot numbers. CNN promises lots of

high-tech gadgets in its presentation of its coverage.

Fox News Channel: Fox News will also begin its election-night

coverage at 3 p.m., with Brit Hume anchoring and Chris Wallace

providing backup. The network will introduce its brand-new

high-definition studio that evening. On Fox's broadcast network

(Channel 11), Shepard Smith will anchor coverage. Wallace will also

contribute to Smith's reporting.

MSNBC: MSNBC will begin its coverage even earlier, at 2 p.m.

Since Chris Matthews and Keith Olbermann were accused of

partisanship while anchoring the conventions, they'll be consigned

to analyst roles alongside Joe Scarborough and Rachel Maddow, while

David Gregory anchors the coverage. MSNBC will continue its

coverage, with Chris Jansing anchoring from 11 p.m. to 3 a.m.

Telemundo (Channel 52): Telemundo will emphasize issues

concerning the Latino community with "Decisi?n 2008," hosted by

Pedro Sevcec and Mar?a Celeste Arrar s, beginning at 4 p.m.

V-me: "Participa 2008: Elecci?n Presidencial," anchored by

Jorge Gestoso, will also provide coverage in Spanish, beginning at

4 p.m.

Current TV: Viewers will be able to participate in Current's

election-night coverage, titled "Current Diggs the Election -- Your

Election Night Party with Digg, Twitter and Diplo" and beginning

at 4 p.m. Viewers with Twitter.com accounts will be able to

contribute comments that will appear on-air as election returns

come in, and Digg.com headlines will rush across the screen, as

well. Correspondents from Current's pop-culture-and-politics show

"InfoMania" will provide commentary, as well.

BBC America: "U.S. Election Night" will offer the British take

on the election. It will begin at 3 p.m. and be anchored by British

news presenter David Dimbleby with Ted Koppel providing analysis. A

diverse group of pundits, including Ricky Gervais, Christopher

Hitchens, former Bush adviser Karen Hughes, Democratic Sen. Bill

Bradley, U.N. Ambassador John Bolton and Gore Vidal, will provide

commentary.

TV One: "Election Night '08: A Vote for Change" will examine

the election from the African-American perspective. Arthur Fennel

and Jacque Reid will anchor the coverage, which begins at 4 p.m.,

and commentators will include Michael Eric Dyson and Tom Joyner.

TV5Monde USA: America's only French-language cable channel will

offer the French perspective on election results from 2 p.m. to 8

p.m. Phillippe Dessaint will host the evening's coverage.

David Kronke, (818) 713-3638 david.kronkedailynews.com

www.insidesocal.com/tv/

FOR TUESDAY AMs

(SUBS to replace LAYOFFS-BLOGS with AUTO-SALES)

The following stories are on the front page of the Business

Section of the New York Times for Tuesday, Nov. 4. They are

scheduled to move by 9 p.m. ET unless otherwise noted.

For information on stories or for reruns, please call:

888-346-9867 or 212-556-1927. For information on NYT photos and

graphics, call 888-603-1036 or 212-556-4204.

(Lede story)

FCC-RADIO-SPECTRUM (San Francisco) -- Tuesday marks the end of a

battle pitting many combatants in a high-tech dispute over precious

slices of U.S. airwaves. The FCC will vote on a proposal to make a

disputed chunk of radio spectrum available for public use. Google,

Microsoft and others say the spectrum could be used to carry

low-cost, high-speed Internet to and from new wireless gadgets. But

old-guard media say signals sent over those frequencies could

interfere with broadcasts, sporting event transmissions and

wireless microphones at live productions. By Matt Richtel.

(Top display)

ECON-EUROPE (Zaragoza, Spain) -- Like many once-bustling cities

throughout Europe, Zaragoza, Spain, looked -- until recently -- as if

it might escape the effects of the financial crisis that has swept

through the banking systems of Spain and the rest of the Continent.

As the capital of Aragon, Spain's fastest-growing region, inland

Zaragoza kept booming even as the overbuilt Mediterranean coast

came to symbolize how real estate excess wasn't just an American or

British phenomenon. But this region has suddenly been hit by a

downturn, with layoff announcements by big manufacturers like

General Motors and a sudden tightening of credit stunning locals

who grew accustomed to the long boom. By Nelson D. Schwartz.

(Top left)

DEALBOOK (Undated) -- How to resolve the controversy of excessive

executive pay? Now that American taxpayers are shareholders in the

nation's largest banks, there are proposals to curb pay. Some folks

in Washington want to set a cap with an actual dollar amount,

others want regulated "clawbacks" and others have even come up

with a fancy formula to reign in compensation. By Andrew Ross

Sorkin.

(Bottom left)

BANKS-BAILOUT (Washington) -- There was a rare moment of levity

at the Treasury on Friday as the children of government workers

scampered from office to office in Halloween costumes. Minutes

later, the kids were gone and the hallways were retaken by

grim-faced grown-ups -- handing out tricks and treats of a different

sort. The Treasury building is ground zero for the Bush

administration's $700 billion rescue of the financial system -- an

ambitious, increasingly embattled program that passed an early

milestone last week when the government wired the first $125

billion to the nine largest banks in the United States. It is new

and unfamiliar terrain for the group, which is making monumental

decisions -- a form of industrial policy, some critics say -- that

contradict the free market philosophy they espouse. By Mark Landler

and Edmund L. Andrews.

(Bottom middle)

AUTO-SALES (Detroit) -- Vehicle sales in the United States

tumbled to multi-decade lows in October as tightened credit markets

and an economic slowdown kept consumers away from dealerships.

General Motors reported a 45 percent decline in sales, and the Ford

said it sold 30.2 percent fewer cars and trucks. Toyota said its

sales were 23 percent lower, despite offering no-interest financing

and large discounts on many models. Light truck sales fell 34

percent and autos fell 15 percent. By Bill Vlasic and Nick Bunkley.

(Editors: Budgets and advisories are internal documents not for

publication or redistribution outside of client news organizations.

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of our contract terms. All clients receive all budgets, but only

full-service clients receive all stories. Please check your level

of service to determine which stories you will receive.)

There was a rare moment of levity at the Treasury

Department on Friday as the children of government workers

scampered from office to office in Halloween costumes. A few

minutes later, the children were gone and the hallways were retaken

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different sort.

The Treasury building is ground zero for the Bush

administration's $700 billion rescue of the financial system -- an

ambitious, increasingly embattled program that passed an early

milestone last week when the government wired the first $125

billion to the nine largest banks in the United States.

Having been handed vast authority and almost no restrictions in

the bailout law that Congress passed a month ago, a committee of

five little-known government officials, aided by a bare-bones staff

of 40, is picking winners and losers among thousands of banks,

savings and loans, insurers and other institutions.

It is new and unfamiliar terrain for the officials, who are

making monumental decisions -- a form of industrial policy, some

critics say -- that contradict the free market philosophy they

usually espouse. Predictably, the process is stirring alarm from

Capitol Hill to Wall Street.

"People are always going to second-guess what you do," said

David G. Nason, the assistant Treasury secretary for financial

institutions, who designed the program and sits on the investment

committee. "We don't have time to complain; we need to manage our

time so we can make progress."

Other officials said it was premature to condemn the program,

given that the first capital injections were made only last week.

The Treasury's overriding goal, they said, is to stabilize the

nation's financial system after its worst crisis since the 1930s.

Among the problems, critics say, is that despite earlier

promises of transparency, the process is shrouded in secrecy, its

precise goals opaque. Treasury officials have refused to disclose

their criteria for deciding which banks are healthy enough to get

money -- and which are too sick.

And officials have yet to say they even have a broader strategy,

though banking executives are convinced the government wants to

encourage acquisitions of sick banks by healthy ones.

Industry sources said that banks, after filing a two-page

application, are assigned a ranking from 1 to 5 -- with 1 or 2

essentially guaranteeing that they are eligible, and 5 insuring

they are not -- by their regulator. The five officials then make

what can be a life-or-death decision, with a thumbs-down generally

interpreted to mean that a bank was not healthy enough to survive

on its own.

The work is complex, far-reaching and telescoped into an

impossibly tight timetable. And it is being done against the

backdrop of a change of power in Washington, which will throw many

of these people out of their jobs on Inauguration Day.

"There is a real urgency to deploy this money quickly and

effectively," said James H. Lambright, who took a leave three

weeks ago as the president of the Export-Import Bank of the United

States to become the interim chief investment officer of the rescue

effort.

A trim, self-confident former investment banker, Lambright, 38,

is the chairman of a committee of relatively young officials -- all

are in their 30s or 40s -- with backgrounds in law, banking or

regulation. None of them could have expected this kind of

responsibility; Lambright himself was a last-minute substitute

after a previous appointee was kept in his old job.

On Friday evening, Lambright was lugging a six-inch-thick pile

of folders -- plus a pair of BlackBerrys and a cellphone -- as he

prepared for a Sunday afternoon meeting of the committee to select

the next banks to receive capital infusions.

With more than $80 billion left to spend, and hundreds of banks

in line for it, the days, nights and weekends of the overworked,

sleep-deprived Treasury staff members are a blur of meetings and

conference calls, and constant pressure.

"This is a four-ring circus," said Tim Ryan, a former director

of the Office of Thrift Supervision, who helped run the savings and

loan cleanup in the 1980s and 1990s.

Already, critics from Capitol Hill to Wall Street are lashing

out at the program, saying the banks are misusing the capital

infusions by hoarding the money rather than lending it, as the

Treasury Secretary, Henry M. Paulson Jr., urged in order to unclog

the credit markets.

The government, the critics say, is wrongly steering funds to

banks to take over weaker rivals. The rescue program prodded one

such merger last week, when Treasury agreed to inject $7.7 billion

into PNC Financial Services and rejected an application for cash

from National City Corp., an ailing bank in Cleveland. The two

announced a merger the same day that PNC was approved.

"Where we are headed is credit allocation by the federal

government," said William Poole, a former president of the Federal

Reserve Bank of St. Louis. "It really reminds me of the morass we

got into with wage-price controls in the 1970s."

Critics also say that, by not barring banks from paying

dividends or hefty bonuses, the Treasury is leading taxpayers to

think their money is being spent frivolously.

All this comes after Paulson abruptly shifted the focus of the

program to injecting capital rather than buying distressed

mortgage-related assets from the banks. This meant that Congress

had never debated the details of how the government ought to carry

out a recapitalization.

The absence of that debate comes with a price. Treasury

officials have been pressured by industry lobbyists to stretch the

program to include insurance companies, transit agencies and even

automakers.

Indeed, the helter-skelter nature of the program is drawing so

much criticism that even some of the bailout bill's biggest

proponents on Capitol Hill are complaining that its legitimacy is

being thrown into question. "What the Treasury doesn't understand

is the anger in the country about this," said Rep. Barney Frank,

D-Mass., the chairman of the House Financial Services Committee.

Frank, who has scheduled oversight hearings later in November,

warned that he might try to block the Treasury from getting the

second $350 billion approved by Congress.

Inside the Treasury -- where officials shuttle between each

other's offices on the building's southwest corner, facing the

White House and the Washington monument -- the view, not

surprisingly, is different.

"They say the critics have not offered solutions about how to

compel banks to lend money. The Treasury has to walk a fine line,

officials add, since using brute force could lead to the banks

making more bad loans, which is how they got into this mess.

Treasury officials acknowledge their actions might speed a

shakeout in the industry, even if that is not the main motivation.

"The primary goal is not consolidation; the primary goal is to

strengthen the system," said Michele A. Davis, the chief

spokeswoman. "If consolidation strengthens the system, it's a

positive."

Bank executives say that increased lending depends on attracting

more capital from private investors. To do that, it may be

essential for a bank to strengthen its market position by making

acquisitions. Suspending dividends could send investors running for

the exits.

Besides, they add, the bailout law only allows the government to

stop banks from increasing dividends, not banning them outright.

The committee -- which also includes Neel Kashkari, interim head

of the rescue program, and two other assistant secretaries, Anthony

Ryan and Phillip L. Swagel -- acts on a recommendation from the

primary regulator of the financial institution. That could be the

Federal Reserve, the Federal Deposit Insurance Corp., the

Comptroller of the Currency or the Office of Thrift Supervision.

What happens next, when the application and recommendation go to

the Treasury, is largely a mystery. The criteria by which the

Treasury decides which banks get money and which do not are secret.

Nason said the process had to be confidential so that rejected

banks did not suffer damage in the markets. Even to disclose the

selection criteria could quickly destabilize banks perceived to

have the wrong profile, he said.

The committee members study financial statements and sometimes

kick back applications to the regulators for more information. They

also analyze the market in which a bank operates, looking for the

mix of strong and weak banks. As the number of applications

increases, Lambright said he was recruiting a team of banking

analysts to help with the process.

"When we move from a dozen banks to hundreds of banks, we'll

need a system," Lambright said.

He said his work at the Export-Import Bank, where he selected

American exporters to receive trade financing, was good preparation

for this job, even if he will hand out more money in a few weeks at

the Treasury than his bank's entire $60 billion credit portfolio.

Though Treasury officials are loath to require banks to lend,

they do seem to be jawboning. "They must meet their responsibility

to lend, and support the American people and the U.S. economy,"

Ryan told a securities industry conference last week.

Frank said they should do more by requiring banks to show a

dollar-for-dollar relationship between the government funds and

increased lending.

"If they lend out all the money they got from the government,"

he said, "they can do whatever they want with the rest. If they

don't feel this is going to encourage lending, then don't take the

money."

It is the regulators, more than the Treasury Department, who are

doing the coaxing by suggesting, for example, that a desired merger

by a bank would be more likely to win approval if a bank

participated in the capital injection program, industry executives

said.

The Treasury's approach has its defenders, among them a former

senior Treasury official, Edwin M. Truman, who said he believed the

people running the bailout were technocrats trying to shore up the

system, not ideologues.

Donald V. Hammond, a longtime Treasury official who is the

interim chief compliance officer of the program, said that, in any

event, Congress had put in place layers of oversight. Hammond began

his government career working on the bailout of the Chrysler Corp.

"This is more intense," he said.

Five people who were found shot to death in

a homeless encampment near a highway overpass had apparently been

taken by surprise, Long Beach Police Commander Laura Farinelli said

Monday.

"Maybe they were sleeping when someone came upon them," she

said. "There's a lot of freeway traffic noise there and it would

have been hard to hear someone approaching or even gunshots."

Los Angeles County Coroners have released two of the victims'

names, Lorenzo Perez Villicana, 46, and Vanessa Malaepule, 35, both

Long Beach residents. The other victims were two other men and one

woman. All five were found clustered in the bushes, sheltered under

a tarp.

Authorities were tipped off by an anonymous caller from a pay

phone at 8:30 a.m. Sunday morning. The caller offered only vague

information about several dead people near Sante Fe Avenue and

Wardlow Road near the 405 Freeway, said Farinelli.

Farinelli said that none of the five people were related, but

speculated that the encampment had been occupied for a substantial

period because of personal items found there.

Investigators were searching other homeless encampments and

shelters throughout the area for information about the victims and

possible suspects. No arrests have been made.

Farinelli said that such multiple killings were extremely rare

in Long Beach, but Andy Bales of the Los Angeles Union Rescue

Mission said violence against homeless people and between homeless

people is not new.

He cited the case of John Robert McGraham, once a bellman at the

now closed Ambassador Hotel, who was doused with gasoline and

burned alive in Los Angeles three weeks ago. No arrests have been

made in that case either.

"I often have policemen bringing me pictures of homeless people

who have been beaten to death and asking me information about

them," he said. "But whoever did this sounds like they had a car

and they took off from the scene. It appears the people who did

this were not homeless."

Bales was referring to a witness' account published in The Los

Angeles Times which quoted a resident in a nearby apartment complex

who heard a man shouting at someone to get into a car around the

time of the killings.

Farinelli would not confirm on that account.

According to the National Coalition for the Homeless, violence

against homeless people increased between 1999 and 2006, even as

overall violence decreased nationally. The organization reported

142 attacks against homeless people in 2006, compared with about 60

in 1999. Most of the attackers were 25 years old and younger and

about 40 percent were juveniles according to the organization.

Joel John Roberts of People Assisting the Homeless, a Los

Angeles advocacy organization for homeless people, said the

killings were a reminder of the vulnerability of the homeless.. He

said that providing homeless people more police protection was not

as effective as getting Southern California's tens of thousands of

homeless people off of the streets and into housing.

Few places in Europe have prospered in recent

years like this bustling crossroads city of 700,000, halfway

between Barcelona and Madrid.

Factory employees here pulled overtime shifts. Companies hired

temporary workers to satisfy growing consumer demand. A half dozen

new bridges were built across the Ebro river, and office buildings

were filled as fast as they could be thrown up.

The capital of Spain's fastest-growing region, inland Zaragoza

kept booming even as the overbuilt Mediterranean coast came to

symbolize how real estate excess was not just an American ailment.

But just as the cold autumn wind is blowing down from the

Pyrenees, Zaragoza and the surrounding region of Aragon have

suddenly been hit by a sharp economic downturn. And the troubles

here make clear that what had been seen as a crisis confined

largely to finance and real estate is quickly spreading to more

fundamental sectors of the European economy, such as manufacturing.

For the generation of young Spaniards who have known only good

economic times the chill is shocking.

"Maybe older people are not surprised but this is totally new

for me," said Francisco Braulio, 31, who works for Valeo Termico,

a parts makers that supplies the General Motors plant here, the

automaker's largest factory in Europe.

Braulio and his wife, recently married, have put off talk of

having children for now and to save money they are eating meals and

watching movies at home rather than going out.

Zaragoza's fate echoes the pattern now unfolding across Spain

and the rest of Europe.

On Monday, the European Commission said the 15-nation euro zone

appeared to have entered a recession in the third quarter, and

predicted the economy would barely recover next year, growing by

just 0.1 percent.

In Madrid, the government announced an economic stimulus program

after a report Friday that Spain's gross domestic product fell 0.2

percent last summer, the nation's first quarterly economic

contraction in 15 years.

Despite highly publicized interest rate cuts and more than a

trillion euros in loan guarantees and capital injections by

governments from London to Frankfurt, Germany, the situation is

expected to only get worse. European consumer confidence plunged in

October, hitting its lowest point in 15 years.

"It's come very suddenly," said Jose Mendizabal, chief

executive of Pikolin, Spain's biggest mattress maker and one of the

largest private employers in this area. "People are frightened of

spending money."

Pikolin has already eliminated temporary positions, bringing its

work force down to 1,200 from 1,400. But the slowdown has

intensified in recent weeks, with sales now off 15 percent from a

year earlier, and more job cuts are likely if sales do not improve.

Mendizabal said his customers are a barometer of the broader

economy. First-time home buyers are in the market for lots of new

furnishings while homeowners with discretionary income buy when

they feel flush. Now, he said, the former have nearly disappeared

and the latter "are hanging on to their old mattresses."

With consumers pulling back, governments that just finished

bailing out the financial system are now looking to help the

broader business sector. There is little doubt that both the

European Central Bank and the Bank of England will cut rates again

this week.

In Germany, the Continent's biggest economy, Cabinet approval

for a 50 billion euro, or $63.1 billion, plan to help industry and

consumers, which includes a tax credit for first-time auto

purchases, could come as early as Wednesday. Meanwhile, Nicolas

Sarkozy, the French president, has proposed support for job

creation and a government fund to protect local companies with

beaten-down share prices from "foreign predators."The pain did

not hit home in Zaragoza until General Motors announced just a few

weeks ago that it planned to lay off 600 of its 7,000 workers for

up to a year and that it would suspend production for at least two

weeks to work off inventories.

Zaragoza, which at peak capacity is capable of churning out more

than 2,000 subcompacts, small minivans and delivery trucks a day,

was one of seven GM plants in Europe to go on hiatus in October.

As recently as this past spring, demand was still so strong that

Romuald Rytwinski, the director of the plant, had to rely on

overtime to produce enough cars.

The overtime disappeared in the summer, but there was little

warning that auto sales would plunge so abruptly.

Indeed, Europe's entire auto sector is now suffering, with

Daimler cutting its 2008 earnings forecast by 1 billion euros in

late October, while Renault and Fiat have also issued profit

warnings.

"In the past, you could forecast demand for a quarter,"

Rytwinski said. "Then in the summer, for about a month. Now, we're

talking about weeks."

The arrival of GM here 26 years ago was the beginning of

something of an economic miracle for this region, which had been

agricultural traditionally and sparsely populated.

Drawn by Zaragoza's historic location as a crossroads between

Spanish cities, as well as Toulouse in France, GM's arrival spurred

the opening of additional component manufacturers.

The area received another shot in the arm four years ago when

Zaragoza was chosen to host the 2008 International Exposition.

With roughly 1 billion euros provided by the Spanish government

and other sources to build everything from a glistening new bridge

designed by Zaha Hadid to sprawling pavilions and new parkland

along the Ebro river, the future looked bright even as troubles

were growing elsewhere. "People in their 20s and early 30s have

never known anything but prosperity," said Amado Franco, president

of Aragon's biggest savings bank, Ibercaja.

At 62, Franco has watched Zaragoza, along with the rest of

Spain, transformed by prosperity. "People have changed," he said.

"In my generation, we said, 'One city, one wife, one company.' My

children's generation is quite different."

Ibercaja, with its fairly conservative lending practices,

remains one of Spain's strongest savings banks. But Franco is

surprised at how much attitudes toward debt shifted during the

boom.

Aragon was "a very hard land, with very hard people," he said.

But in recent years, he said shaking of the head, people even

"borrowed to go on holiday. That's American."Roque Gistau, the

president of the 2008 Expo, now finds himself trying to fill the

1.8 million square feet of office space constructed for the

exhibition. He claims about 60 percent has been sold, but confessed

it is taking a long time to find buyers for the rest.

"In the last three months, sales have come to a complete

standstill," he said. "A year ago, I was sure we'd sell 100

percent."

With the expansion, joblessness in Zaragoza and the surrounding

Aragon region fell well below Spain's traditionally high

unemployment rate, which now stands at more than 11 percent.

But Alberto Larraz, Aragon's economic minister, said he expected

the local jobless rate to rise from its current 6.2 percent to near

8 percent by the end of the year, with no improvement in 2009.

While younger workers like Braulio say they are pessimistic

about the future, older Spaniards like Gistau say they remain

hopeful that it will be only a matter of time before the good days

return.

Citing an old Spanish proverb, Gistau said, "There is no evil

that lasts for 100 years."

Color is essential to any wardrobe, and this season it's all

about jewel tones.

Just a pop of amethyst, emerald or sapphire can add pizazz to

any ensemble, says Joe Lupo, a celebrity image consultant and

co-author of the forthcoming guide "Life in Color: The Visual

Therapy Guide to the Perfect Palette -- for Your Clothes, Your

Makeup, and You," due Dec. 1.

"If you're unsure about a certain color, try wearing it as an

accessory or a shoe or a wrap or a bag," he says. "We paired an

eggplant-purple Prada bag with chocolate brown because it looked so

chic. But it totally depends on who the person is."

That's where "Life in Color" comes in.

The book reveals how Lupo and his business partner, Jesse Garza,

go about personalizing palettes for their celebrity clientele at

Visual Therapy in New York.

With the help of questionnaires, photographs, color swatches and

celebrity style icons, any woman who reads the book can determine

which colors suit her overall complexion best.

How will she know?

"The person will actually light up," Lupo says. "Whenever a

color is right on you, it completely complements you. It's the same

with clothing as it is with makeup."

The only thing left is to make it work.

Lupo suggests playing with color combinations, such as warm

butter yellow with a deep purple.

"You know what's fun to do? Pair emerald with charcoal gray,

raspberry with chocolate ... navy and black," he says. "These

colors actually complement each other."

For more inspiration, Lupo suggests looking to style icons such

as Cate Blanchett, Gwen Stefani and Nicole Kidman.

Michelle Obama is another favorite.

"She's wearing a lot of color, and she's wearing it really

well," he says. "That's a good example of someone who can't

(afford to) alienate people.

"She needs to look happy and exciting. Her color choices are

supporting the campaign."

Sandra Barrera (818) 713-3728; sandra.barreradailynews.com

"Soccer has a god. That god is Argentine, and his name is Diego

Armando Maradona," proclaims the Web site of the Church of

Maradona, an online fan club of Argentina's unrivaled athletic icon

that claims some 20,000 members.

But this month, Diego Maradona, the country's 48-year-old

sporting titan, will try his hand at an all-too-earthly task:

managing Argentina's men's national team, which has failed to reach

the semifinals of the World Cup since "El Diego" himself starred

for them in 1986 and 1990.

After retiring 11 years ago, Maradona has remained in the

spotlight primarily as the country's leading real-life soap opera

star, waging a series of well-publicized battles with drugs,

obesity, the media and past lovers. Now, the hopes and dreams of 40

million soccer-mad Argentines will rest on the shoulders --

much-slimmed after a stomach-stapling operation in 2005 -- of a man

who, in the words of the local newspaper columnist Horacio Pagani,

will be "the least prepared manager in the history of

international soccer."

Given Argentina's string of disappointing World Cup

performances, the country certainly seems like it could use a

supernatural savior. The team was sent home early by Romania in

1994, the Netherlands in 1998 and Germany in 2006, while in 2002 it

failed to qualify for the knockout stage altogether.

Maradona has, predictably, brushed off concerns about his

readiness, noting that he spent two decades on the national team.

"Soccer hasn't changed," he told Argentine media. "I don't think

anything will surprise me."

But handing him the reins still represents a profound, if not

reckless, leap of faith. His managing resume is thin and checkered:

In 1994-95, he piloted two Argentine teams to just three wins in 23

games, and he was once forced to call the shots from the seats

since a suspension for ephedrine use prevented him from sitting on

the bench. Moreover, his personal track record hardly suggests he

is fit to keep a 23-man team playing in lockstep: As recently as

March 2007, rumors of his death circulated wildly while he was

hospitalized for alcohol-induced hepatitis.

The controversial selection will not become official until

November 4, when the executive committee of Argentina's national

soccer federation is scheduled to meet. But that group serves as

little more than a rubber stamp for the decisions of the

organization's president, Julio Grondona, and his pick of Maradona

is considered a fait accompli.

Grondona, who also serves as a vice president of FIFA, the

game's international governing body, is widely thought to run the

national sport as his personal fiefdom. Over his 29 years in

office, he has regularly been accused of using his influence over

referees, the media, and distribution of revenues to guarantee

obedience from the club presidents who elect him -- and to advance

his numerous related business interests. The courts have ordered

some 50 searches of his offices during his presidency, but few

formal proceedings have ever been filed against him, and he has

never been found guilty of any crime.

The leading candidate for the job, which became available after

the previous manager resigned last month, was Carlos Bianchi. As

the manager of Boca Juniors -- Argentina's most popular club, for

whom Maradona played in 1981-82 and 1995-97 -- Bianchi won four

domestic titles, three continental titles and two intercontinental

titles. But his poor relationship with Grondona appears to have

disqualified him for the post.

Sergio Batista, who coached Argentina's under-23 team to the

Olympic gold medal in Beijing, was also passed over.

Meanwhile, the choice of Maradona is sure to increase the

international profile of the Argentine team, which will likely

increase revenues. Tickets for his debut match, a Nov. 19 date

against Scotland in Glasgow, have sold briskly.

Public opinion, while divided, seems to lean against the choice:

An Internet poll conducted by Clarin, Argentina's largest

newspaper, found that 74 percent of nearly 50,000 voters were

opposed. Purists are particularly appalled, arguing that Maradona's

indubitable star power is no substitute for the years on the bench

accumulated by other candidates, and that his post-retirement

antics put the country's image at risk.

"He was a great player, but nothing more," said Oscar Pereira,

a union employee in the stands at a local league game on Friday

night. "We need someone more serious. You see him running around

with Hugo Chavez talking about Che Guevara."

Moreover, accusations of cronyism against Grondona are flying

more freely than ever. "Whatever money they make off Maradona,

Grondona and his friends will keep it for themselves," said Raul

Gamez, a former president of the Velez Sarsfield club and one of

Grondona's most outspoken critics.

But Maradona's mighty stature among Argentines still leaves many

believing he deserves a shot -- or at the very least, that his

all-too-public campaign for the position forced Grondona's hand.

"We've had a lot of experienced managers, and they haven't

always done well," said Alejandro Fabbri, a broadcaster for the

TyC Sports network. "If Maradona wanted the job, he should get it.

He's the greatest Argentine player ever. At least they won't be

able to say he never got the chance."

To compensate for Maradona's lack of training, Grondona has also

appointed a team of veteran tacticians to support him, led by

Carlos Bilardo, who managed Maradona on Argentina's 1986 World Cup

championship team. With such capable assistants, Maradona's

devotees say, he will be able to focus on providing the players

with his special brand of leadership and inspiration.

"He's the biggest name there is," said Pereira's son, Nahuel,

who accompanied him to the game. "He'll pass on some of his magic

to them."

While Argentines may disagree over the merits of the decision,

they share a concern for Maradona's well-being in his new role --

perhaps one even greater than their worries about the direction of

the team as a whole. Will Maradona the deity survive Maradona the

manager?

"I told him he was too big for this job," Pagani said. "Right

now, everyone loves him. Once he starts making decisions for the

team, he'll be held to account. He's risking his legend. But he

said that he wanted to do it."

Madelyn Dunham, who watched from afar as her

only grandson rapidly ascended the ranks of American politics to

the brink of the presidency, did not live to see whether he was

elected.

Dunham, 86, Sen. Barack Obama's grandmother, died late Sunday

evening in Hawaii after battling cancer, which Obama announced upon

arriving here on Monday for a campaign stop on the eve of Election

Day.

"She has gone home," Obama said, his voice tinged with emotion

as he briefly spoke of her death at a campaign rally here. "She

died peacefully in her sleep with my sister at her side, so there's

great joy instead of tears."

Obama learned of his grandmother's death at 8 a.m. on Monday,

aides said, but carried through with a morning rally in Florida

without making an announcement. A written statement was issued by

the campaign, in Obama's name, before he spoke at a late-afternoon

rally in Charlotte.

Dunham was the final remaining immediate family member who

helped raise Obama during his teenage years in Hawaii. He called

her Toot, his shorthand for "tutu," a Hawaiian term for

grandparent.

Obama broke from the presidential campaign trail in late October

to travel to Honolulu to bid his grandmother farewell. He spent

part of two days with her, as she lay gravely ill in the small

apartment where he lived from age 10 to 18.

While Dunham was too sick to travel to see her grandson on the

campaign trail, Obama and other family members said that she

closely followed his bid for the presidency through cable

television. Yet she became a figure in his campaign, seen through

images in television commercials intended to give him a

biographical anchor.

Dunham, who grew up near August, Kan., moved with her husband,

Stanley Dunham, to Hawaii. In the early stages of his candidacy,

Obama spoke wistfully about his grandparents, whose all-American

biography suddenly was critical to establishing his own American

story. He spoke of how his grandmother worked on B-29s at a Boeing

plant in Wichita.

For Obama, the loss came on the final full day of his

presidential campaign. Sen. John McCain and his wife, Cindy,

offered their condolences on Monday, saying: "Our thoughts and

prayers go out to them as they remember and celebrate the life of

someone who had such a profound impact in their lives."

His grandmother's illness had been weighing on him in recent

weeks, friends said, which is why he insisted on interrupting his

schedule to visit her late last month. While she was gravely ill,

aides said, Obama carried on a limited conversation with her. He

kept the visit to one day, advisers said, partly out of her own

insistence that people not create a fuss.

"She was one of those quiet heroes that we have all across

America," Obama said. "They're not famous. They're names are not

in the newspapers, but each and every day they work hard. They

aren't seeking the limelight. All they try to do is just do the

right thing. In this crowd there are a lot of quiet heroes like

that."

Mike Shanahan isn't the only beleaguered head coach in the

Sunday football league.

His protege, Gary Kubiak, isn't exactly tearing it up in Texas.

John McClain of the Houston Chronicle summed up the Texans' loss

at Minnesota as follows: "Look up roadkill in the dictionary and

you know which team picture you'll find."

That would be the Local 11 in Houston. The Texans have shown

flashes of improvement, if not brilliance, during Kubiak's regime,

but they can't win on the road. To wit: Today marks the one-year

anniversary since their last road victory. It came at, you guessed

it, Oakland. The Raiders struggle to win anywhere.

Counting last season, the Texans' road losing streak stands at

seven. And frankly, they haven't competed very often, losing by an

average of 13 points per. They're 3-1 at home this season, where

they've outscored their opponents by an average score of 30-22. On

the road, the numbers essentially are reversed, 32-19.

Anyone can see that Kubiak has made progress in the two-plus

seasons since he left the Broncos. But the Texans, if they're going

to be legitimate playoff contenders, have to take the next step.

They need to find a way to win on the road. ...

The Giants are 7-1 and feeling no pain. Now the real fun begins.

Seven of their final eight opponents have winning records, with the

Vikings the lone exception at 4-4. The Giants' next four games are

nastier than a negative campaign ad: at Philly, Baltimore, at

Arizona and at Washington. ...

Michael Rosenberg, Detroit Free Press, on the Lions signing

Daunte Culpepper: "It's a good thing (Dan) Orlovsky can't see the

back of his jersey. His name is written in pencil."

Give the Lions one thing. They've been downright competitive in

recent weeks. They scored 23 points in the second quarter at

Chicago, two more than they had scored in any of their previous

four roadies. ...

ESPN's Tom Jackson on the state of the Cowboys with Brad Johnson

under center: "I'm disappointed, certainly, in the way Brad has

played, but more so in the guys who aren't 40." ...

It's November and the Denver Broncos have beaten one team with a

winning record. And that team just had to rally from 21 down to

sneak past the Chiefs. ...

The best acquisition of the offseason? The Jets getting Kris

Jenkins from the Panthers for a third- and fifth-rounder is on the

short list. He had two sacks Sunday after accounting for 2.5 last

season.

More good news for the Jets: After breaking down film of that

Wrangler jeans commercial, I've determined that Brett Favre didn't

throw any picks. ...

Former Bronco Ashley Lelie, when asked by the Contra Costa Times

about the prospect of the Raiders signing Michael Vick after his,

um, issues are cleared up: "You have to sign him if you're the

Raiders. Trust me, I've played against him before. You don't want

him on the other team." ...

The other team? That could be the Chiefs. If/when Vick is

reinstated, they'll have a decision to make. Because their

rebuilding program isn't going anywhere without a legitimate

quarterback. ...

Memo to fantasy leaguers who took a flyer on Edgerrin James: I

feel your pain. Good guy, Edge, but the end appears to be near. He

didn't have a touch Sunday as rookie Tim Hightower gained 109

yards. ...

The Bears' second-string QB now that Kyle Orton is gone for a

month? That would be Colorado State's Caleb Hanie. ...

My kingdom for T.J. "Get Me Spellcheck" Houshmandzadeh to join

the Broncos. The man can flat out fill up a tape recorder. T.J. on

the state of the Bengals before Sunday's win against Jacksonville:

"We're 0-8, but I think we're a good 0-8 team, if that's

possible." ...

Chiefs cornerback Brandon Flowers, when asked by ESPN.com to

name an NFL player he feared: "Brandon Marshall is a defensive

lineman playing wide receiver. He wants to inflict punishment on

you."

Ryanair, the low-cost airline, reported a sharp drop in

first-half profit Monday, citing higher fuel costs and the economic

slowdown.

Higher fuel prices accounted for half of Ryanair's operating

costs in the six months to Sept. 30 -- up from 36 percent a year

earlier. The carrier was also stung by write-offs for a 29 percent

stake in the Irish flag carrier Aer Lingus, whose value has

deteriorated in the last two years, as well as depreciation in the

value of aircraft Ryanair intends to sell.

Earnings in the six-month period fell 77 percent, to 95.3

million euros ($120.8 million) compared with 407.6 million euros in

the period a year earlier.

Revenue rose 16 percent, to 1.81 billion euros, from 1.5 billion

in the year-ago period.

Low-cost and traditional carriers struggled as fuel prices rose

to record levels before receding, while at the same time a global

economic slowdown has lowered demand for air travel.

Ryanair shares climbed Monday after Michael O'Leary, the chief

executive, said that profit would rebound in 2009 if oil prices

remained at around $80 a barrel.

News that the company had little oil price hedging in place also

buoyed the stock, which closed Monday in Dublin at 2.83 euros, up 8

cents. Hedging protects an airline at a time of rising prices, but

can be detrimental when prices decline.

"We have a significant cost advantage over our competitors,

many of whom have hedged fuel next year at significantly higher

levels than current market prices," Ryanair said in a statement.

"This will force competitors to further increase airfares and

widen the price gap between them and Ryanair's lowest fares."

Ryanair underlined its confidence by announcing a new price war

Monday, flooding the market with a million seats at 10 pounds each

on 250 routes.

In response to questions, O'Leary said that establishing a

discount trans-Atlantic airline would depend on the availability of

a fleet of long-distance aircraft -- unlikely over the course of the

next 18 months.

O'Leary last evoked the idea of discount trans-Atlantic service

in April, before oil prices rose.

He envisaged the airline as a sister or associate company to

Ryanair that would offer airfares starting at 10 euros before taxes

and fees.

Airports that could be used in Europe include Stansted outside

London, as well as Dublin, Milan, Frankfurt, Rome and Barcelona,

while destinations could include New York, Dallas, Denver and

cities in Florida, a Ryanair spokeswoman, Pauline McAlester, said.

But she emphasized that the project was still at the "what if"

stage.

Still, industry specialists and executives at other low-cost

airlines are skeptical about the applicability of the low-cost

business model to long-distance routes.

A wave of violence, including an assassination attempt

against a deputy oil minister, swept through Baghdad and

neighboring Diyala province on Monday.

Also on Monday, parliament passed a bill that would grant the

country's embattled minorities fewer guaranteed seats in upcoming

elections than the United Nations had recommended.

The prospects for enactment of the bill, which requires the

approval of Iraq's executive council, are unclear. In September,

parliament passed a law on provincial elections but, in a

controversial action, deleted from it an article dealing with

representation of Iraq's many minorities.

The council, composed of the country's president and two vice

presidents, signed that measure into law early last month but

directed parliament to pass separate legislation on the issue.

In the most lethal attack of the day, 6 people were killed and

20 wounded when two roadside bombs exploded in quick succession in

front of the headquarters of the Ministry of Interior's criminal

investigations unit in Baghdad's central Karada district, according

to an official at the ministry who spoke anonymously because he was

not authorized to speak to the media.

The deadlier bomb was planted in front of the protective

concrete wall ringing the government building. The other was about

70 yards away. Two badly burned bodies lay on the street shortly

after the explosions.

The assassination attempt against the deputy oil minister came

about 30 minutes before the Karada blasts. The official, Saheb

Salman Qutub, was wounded, along with his driver, when a bomb

planted in his car exploded, according to a ministry spokesman,

Asim Jihad.

The explosion occurred as Qutub was getting into the car at his

home in the northern Baghdad neighborhood of Atafiya to go to work,

Jihad said.

In other violence, a huge car bomb exploded in a parking lot

next to the headquarters of the local government in Baqouba in

Diyala province, killing at least three people and wounding 13,

including eight police officers, according to security and

provincial officials.

Ibrahim Bajlan, who heads the Diyala provincial council, said

the attack was proof that the situation in the province remained

"fragile" and that the government's lauded recent security

operation in Diyala had "only accomplished a fraction of its

goals."

Fourteen other people were wounded in four other bombing attacks

in Baghdad, according to the official of the Interior Ministry.

In the northern city of Mosul, a child was killed and five other

people wounded in a roadside bombing aimed at a police patrol,

security sources said.

The attacks came a day after U.S. and Iraqi military officials

said that overall levels of violence across the country were at

their lowest level since May 2004.

IF BARACK Obama or John McCain wants to bring Americans together

after the

presidential election, there is one proposal that could unite

voters

across

the country. The winner of Tuesday's election should pledge to end

gender

discrimination in health insurance for women.

In a recent report, the National Women's Law Center found that

women -

both young and middle-aged - pay dramatically more in most states

for

individual health insurance than men. Only 12 states offer gender

discrimination protection, only eight offer protections for age and

only

15

offer protections for health status. According to the report,

insurers in

nine states and the District of Columbia can legally reject

applicants who

are survivors of domestic violence. In many states, insurers can

reject

women simply for having undergone caesarean sections in the past.

The severity of the problem differs from state to state and from

age

group

to age group. The report lists nine states where a 25-year-old

woman would

pay from 38 percent to 45 percent more for individual coverage than

men of

the same age. And the report lists 27 states where a 40-year-old

woman

might pay from 37 percent to 48 percent more for coverage.

Refreshingly, the rules are more equitable in most of New

England.

Massachusetts, Maine, New Hampshire, and Vermont all either

prohibit or

significantly limit gender discrimination in the issuance of

individual

policies. The report specifically cited Massachusetts' effort to

decrease

costs and increase the number of plans available by merging

individual and

small group markets into one large pool. Pooling the markets allows

for

spreading risk more broadly and cutting bureaucracy. "This model

could be

adopted by other states, or it could be applied nationally by the

federal

government," the report said.

Three-quarters of the nation's women are largely protected from

gender

discrimination in health insurance, as they get it either from

their

employers or through public programs. Meanwhile, 18 percent of

women have

no insurance at all, and 7 percent have individual plans. Taking

the

gender

gap out of health insurance policies may make them far more

attractive to

the 18 percent without insurance.

Insurers have all kinds of excuses for discriminating against

women. In

The New York Times, a senior vice president of Humana, Thomas

Noland Jr.,

said, "Premiums for our individual health insurance plans reflect

claims

experience - the use of medical services - which varies by gender

and age.

Females use more medical services than males, and this difference

is most

pronounced in young adults."

Noland went on to say, "Bearing children increases other health

risks

later in life, such as urinary incontinence, which may require

treatment

with medication or surgery."

Noland's bland explanation cannot hide the Neanderthal

implications.

Humana's sense of humanity is incontinent. This thinking punishes

women at

least twice, once for simply having children and again for simply

taking

better care of their health by seeing doctors more regularly than

macho

men

who wish away the pain in their chests until the surgeon is cutting

them

open in the operating room.

The president of the National Women's Law Center, Marcia

Greenberger,

said

that there is no justification for this kind of discrimination,

likening

it

to using race as a factor.

The winning presidential candidate should incorporate the

report's

finding

into his healthcare plans. McCain has promised high-quality

coverage to

people "who have the most difficulty on the individual market."

His

$5,000 tax credit to purchase insurance would be worth less to

women in

most of the states. Ending gender discrimination would be crucial

to

making

such a tax credit fair.

For Obama, who said he will require insurers to cover

preexisting

conditions, the report represents an immediate opportunity to show

supporters of Hillary Clinton, who many specialists said had the

best

healthcare plan of all the candidates, that he takes them and

women's

issues in general seriously. Obama says he understands that women

"continue to shoulder substantial economic burdens."

Regardless of who wins Tuesday, unfair health insurance costs

should be

one

of the first burdens the new president lifts off women's shoulders.

Derrick Z. Jackson can be reached at jackson@globe.com.

SENIOR TIBETAN envoys have been in China since Thursday for what

could turn

out to be decisive talks on the future status of Tibet. The Chinese

authorities would be wise to seize this opportunity to negotiate a

mutually

acceptable form of autonomy for Tibet.

If Chinese leaders try to string out a futile dialogue until the

Tibetans'

revered leader, the Dalai Lama, dies, they will be making a grave

mistake.

Younger Tibetans, appalled at being an oppressed minority in their

own

land, cannot be counted on to preserve the Dalai Lama's devotion to

nonviolence. And if China hopes to play a role on the world stage

commensurate with its economic importance, its leadership cannot be

enmeshed in a chronic conflict over Tibet.

After six years of fruitless exchanges with Chinese officials,

the Tibetans

are seeking to determine if Beijing's idea of autonomy for Tibet

can be

compatible with the Tibetan aspiration for an autonomy that

preserves

Tibet's cultural and religious uniqueness within the borders of

China.

Toward that end, the Dalai Lama's representatives intend to base

their

version of autonomy on existing Chinese law. They are hoping for a

substantive exchange of views on the Chinese and Tibetan

interpretations of

that law.

If there is a useful overlapping of those interpretations, it

will give a

positive cast to a strategy meeting that the Dalai Lama has called

for

mid-November in India. If not, the Tibetans will have to reconsider

their

past approach as supplicants to China.

In either case, the next US president will be acting in the

interest of

China as well as the Tibetans if he appoints a senior diplomat to

work

exclusively on resolving the Tibet issue.

Tuesday marks the end of a battle that has

lasted for more than two years, with each side predicting

apocalyptic consequences should it lose.

Not the fight for the presidency -- the one pitting Google

against Dolly Parton.

The titan of Silicon Valley and the queen of country are two of

the many combatants in a high-technology dispute over precious

slices of the nation's airwaves. The issue comes to a head on

Election Day, when the Federal Communications Commission votes on a

proposal to make a disputed chunk of radio spectrum available for

public use.

Google, Microsoft, Hewlett-Packard and other technology

companies say the spectrum could be used by a whole new array of

Internet-connected wireless gadgets. They say freeing it up would

encourage innovation and investment in much the same way that the

spread of Wi-Fi technology has. (This would generate more business

for technology companies.)

But a coalition of old-guard media -- from television networks to

Broadway producers -- is objecting to the proposal, saying it needs

a closer look. The opponents argue that signals sent over those

frequencies could interfere with broadcasts and wireless

microphones at live productions.

The measure appears likely to pass, though its opponents have

mounted a spirited late-stage lobbying effort supported by Sen.

Hillary Rodham Clinton, D-N.Y., and others in Congress. Also

opposed are the professional sports leagues, Las Vegas casinos, a

coalition of rock musicians and, of late, Parton, who is soon to

open a Broadway show called "9 to 5: The Musical."

If the spectrum is set free, Parton says, chaos could reign on

Broadway -- in the form of static and other interference.

"The potential direct negative impact on countless people may

be immeasurable," Parton wrote in a letter last month to the FCC,

urging it not to release the frequencies.

Parton became involved after she was contacted by the Broadway

League, a theater industry trade group that has lobbied the FCC on

the issue and coordinated support from performers. The trade group

said Parton had been more engaged than other performers because she

was also a producer of live shows.

In the digital era, airwaves carrying television, cell phone and

wireless Internet signals are highly valuable. The FCC regulates

the spectrum and auctions off licenses for its use -- in some cases

for billions of dollars -- to private companies. But in this case it

is considering setting aside a free or "unlicensed" section for

public use.

Technology companies argue that if it does so, entrepreneurs and

innovators will create a new generation of devices that transmit

signals farther and more reliably than Wi-Fi, which also relies on

unlicensed spectrum. The technology could also handle cheap

Internet-based phone calls.

"This could lead to Wi-Fi on steroids," said Richard Whitt, a

Washington lobbyist for Google on telecommunications issues. "It

could become a ubiquitous nationwide broadband network."

The battle between the old media and new media companies is a

byproduct of an impending change in the way over-the-air TV signals

are delivered. In February, TV stations will be required to switch

from analog broadcasting to digital, which is less susceptible to

radio interference.

Since 2004, the FCC has been studying whether it might make

better use of some "white spaces," TV frequencies that are not

being used by broadcast channels. These frequencies have

traditionally been left largely empty, because broadcasters send

out such powerful signals that a buffer is needed between channels.

The theory behind the FCC proposal is that hand-held devices and

other gadgets emit such low levels of power that their

transmissions will not overlap or interfere with the digital TV

signals. Also, the proposal's supporters say, devices can be made

smart enough to sense when they might interfere with a broadcast

signal and find another frequency.

The FCC has been studying the potential for interference and

found that most problems can be avoided through tight regulation of

the new devices, said Kevin J. Martin, chairman of the FCC, who

proposed the white space measure.

"We're being very cautious about protecting the broadcasters,

but at the same time making sure the technology allows us to make

greater use of this invaluable resource," Martin said.

He added that he thought some opponents, like the broadcasters,

were fighting the proposal because they were unnerved by the rise

of interactive tools that offered a less passive media experience.

"The empowerment of consumers is threatening," he said.

The five-member commission seems likely to approve the measure,

according to several people who were involved in the agency's

internal discussions but who declined to be named because they were

not authorized to speak to the media.

Beneath the surface of the debate are shifts in politics and

culture. Heavy Internet and computer adoption by consumers has

given the technology lobby more power and prominence. At the same

time, the broadcast industry has lost some of its lobbying sway as

consumer tastes have changed and advertising dollars have flowed to

the Internet.

Still, the National Association of Broadcasters, which

represents 8,300 local and national television stations, is helping

lead the effort to get the FCC to postpone a decision on the

measure.

Without more testing, "this could be a recipe for potentially

massive interference into the television spectrum," said Dennis

Wharton, a spokesman for the broadcasting trade group, arguing that

TV screens could go temporarily dark or that pictures could freeze.

Broadcasters say the signal could even disrupt channels received

over cable.

The interests of TV providers is different from those of

Broadway theaters, which rely on wireless microphones to broadcast

sound to the audience and for communication among crew members.

Gerald Schoenfeld, chairman of the Shubert Organization, a

Broadway production company, said new gadgets that were intended to

use the disputed frequencies could interfere with the 450 wireless

microphones used in New York's theater district. That could lead to

static, he said, or worse -- if, for instance, crew member

communications were hindered, causing an accident such as a falling

set piece.

"There's a danger element attached to this," Schoenfeld said.

"They are fooling with many aspects of American society under the

pretext of helping get Internet access for parties that already

have the greatest amount of Internet usage."

Urging a delay on the vote, Schoenfeld added: "Why this is

being rushed through at this time is mystifying."

The wireless microphone technology used for Broadway shows and

other events uses some of the same frequencies that regulators

would like to open up for wireless data. But under the FCC

proposal, these incumbent users would be given first rights to the

space.

In her letter to the FCC, Parton conceded that she did not

understand all the technicalities of the debate. But based on the

counsel of others, she concluded that the potential problems were

serious: "A dangerous and shortsighted answer to a highly

complicated question." The Broadway League and Parton's

representatives said she was too busy to comment further.

For his part, Eric E. Schmidt, the chief executive of Google,

sent his own letter to the FCC recently.

"We are eight days away from a vote that could transform the

way we connect to the Internet," he wrote. "The time for study

and talk is over. The time for action has arrived."

AND SO it ends. The longest, most expensive, and riveting campaign

in living

memory is finally over. It has been an international cliff-hanger,

with

people in Europe, Africa, and Asia following every little twist and

turn as

avidly as anyone in the United States. For even though they may not

have

the vote, all the world knows the importance of America's choice.

Seldom has there been such an all-encompassing drama. It seems

almost too

theatrical remembering now how the Clintons, so full of confidence

and

entitlement, were brought low by a newcomer of whom most people had

never

heard five years before. And John McCain, his campaign in tatters

and out

of money in New Hampshire, prevailing over the deep{ndash}pocketed

Mitt

Romney, whose positions kept shifting with the political winds.

Books and magazines are full of advice on what our new president

faces in

his first term. Pundits are saying that not since Franklin

Roosevelt, or

perhaps Abraham Lincoln, has the task been so daunting, given the

messes

that President Bush and Dick Cheney are leaving on the White House

floor.

Two unfinished wars, a national debt rising to dangerous levels, an

army

stretched to the breaking point, and an economy in shambles limit

the

ability of a new president to carry out anything new.

Given the political establishment's inertia, the lack of

maneuver room the

new president will have, and the all-but insurmountable

difficulties he

faces, it may be, as a recent New Yorker cartoon suggested, that

real

change can only be found in drink during the "change you can

believe in

hour" at your local bar.

Looking back, the most amazing aspect of the Bush years was not

the

arrogance and imperial over-reach. It was its sheer incompetence.

It was

something unexpected when Bush came to power, given his team: Colin

Powell,

Donald Rumsfeld, and, yes, Dick Cheney. I thought at least they

could get

things done, for better or worse.

But it became clear before their armies reached Baghdad that

this was a

quick, unplanned dash with no follow-through. How agonizingly slow

the

administration was to admit even to an insurgency in Iraq. How slow

it was

to recognize the damage that Hurricane Katrina had inflicted, and

how slow

it was to realize that pushing Reagan-era deregulation too far was

about to

beggar us all.

Although Bush has been keeping such a low profile up to now that

many

could be forgiven for thinking he has already left office, the grim

and

sobering truth is that he has 77 days left in power, enough time to

do a

lot of mischief. The administration is now free of any

responsibility to

the Republican Party or the election. As for the American people,

they were

never considered by this administration to be anything more than an

entity

to be manipulated and lied to in the interest of unrestricted

executive

power.

The danger of an American attack on Iran has now passed. There

would be

stiff resistance from the Pentagon, and the neoconservative hawks

that held

such sway in Bush's first administration are now in eclipse. Bush

and

Cheney might give Israel the green light, however. I was told by a

source

whom I trust that Prime Minister Ehud Olmert of Israel sought a

promise

from Bush that he would bomb Iran before he left office. Such an

attack

would delay, not stop, Iran from building a bomb, and the results

of an

attack, the political fallout in the Middle East and around the

world,

would be the only thing worse than Iran having a bomb.

To bring about real change in the world, the new president will

have to

rethink and reorganize the entire concept of preventive war and the

so-called war on terror. As the author Thomas Powers wrote

recently, what

"no country can do for long ((is)) force strange people in distant

places

to reshape their politics and society more to our liking. The

effort passes

as nation-building at the outset, but in the long run

counterinsurgency

always comes down to the same self-defeating strategy - killing

locals

until they stop trying to make us go away."

H.D.S. Greenway's column appears regularly in the Globe.

EVEN IN the decidedly non-battleground state of Massachusetts,

voter

registration is up this year by 125,000 over 2004. This is

thrilling news

for all who believe civic engagement makes a stronger democracy. We

urge

voters to bring patience and good humor to the polls Tuesday, and

review

our endorsements in key races:

For president and vice president, the Globe strongly endorses

Democrats

Barack Obama and Joseph Biden, because they have the philosophy,

drive, and

experience to heal the country and move it forward.

For the US Senate, John Kerry has earned reelection to a fifth

term, for

his leadership on environmental and foreign policy. In New

Hampshire, we

support Democrat Jeanne Shaheen in her bid for US Senate.

In Congress, four Massachusetts incumbents are facing

challenges, and we

urge votes for Democrats Barney Frank in the Fourth District - a

smart and

steady hand in the current financial crisis - and John F. Tierney

in the

Sixth, Edward J. Markey in the Seventh and John W. Olver in the

First

District.

In the Legislature, we took sides in 10 selected races. In the

Second

Suffolk District in Boston, we endorse Sonia Rosa Chang-Diaz for

state

Senate - now more than ever. In the Middlesex and Worcester

District,

representative James B. Eldridge deserves elevation to a Senate

seat. And

in the Norfolk, Bristol, and Middlesex District, Sara Orozco is a

promising

newcomer.

There are three lively races for open seats in the Massachusetts

House. We

choose Democrats Kate Hogan in the Third Middlesex District

(Hudson, Stow,

Maynard, and Bolton); Jason M. Lewis in the 31st Middlesex District

(Winchester and Stoneham), and Carolyn C. Dykema in the Eighth

Middlesex

District (Holliston and Hopkinton).

Elsewhere in the state we support House minority leader Bradley

H. Jones

Jr. of North Reading for reelection in the 20th Middlesex District,

and

Republican Bradford R. Hill of Ipswich in the Fourth Essex

District. Also

for reelection, we support Barbara A. L'Italien, Democrat of

Andover, in

the 18th Essex District, and Thomas P. Conroy, Democrat of Wayland,

who is

in a rematch for his 13th Middlesex seat.

BALLOT QUESTIONS

Initiative petitions generally use a blunt instrument to decide

complex

public policies, and no instrument is blunter than Question 1, the

reckless

idea to eliminate the state income tax. We urge all Massachusetts

citizens

to vote No on Question 1.

We also urge No on Question 2, the proposal to decriminalize

possession of

marijuana, because we believe law enforcement and community leaders

who say

it is the wrong answer to flaws in the system.

The proposal to ban dog racing in Massachusetts is a closer

call, but we do

not agree that dog racing is inherently cruel, and the evidence of

harm to

the animals is not compelling enough to eliminate the business. We

recommend No on Question 3.

FEW ACTIONS by a new president would draw a clearer distinction

with

President Bush than a pledge on Inauguration Day to close the

Guantanamo

Bay detention center and to adhere to the Geneva Conventions in the

handling of war on terror prisoners.

During the campaign, both John McCain and Barack Obama called

for closing

Guantanamo, which has become a symbol of the Bush administration's

human-rights abuses. McCain proposed a sensible alternative: the

military

prison at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. Even Bush has said he wants to

shutter

the Cuban prison, but he has made no progress toward doing so.

Simply duplicating the legal conditions of Guantanamo on US soil

would do

little to restore America's reputation as a human-rights leader,

however.

The new president must also act quickly to return to prisoners the

rights

denied by Congress in 2006.

That is why it would be so important for the new president to

repledge US

adherence to the Geneva Conventions. Common Article 3 holds that

trials of

both prisoners of war and of captured combatants not granted that

status

must adhere to judicial guarantees "recognized as indispensable by

all

civilized peoples." The Supreme Court has already ruled that

Congress

acted unconstitutionally in stripping prisoners of their habeas

corpus

rights. The 2006 law also permits evidence gained through coercive

methods,

and limits inmates' rights to confront witnesses.

About 255 prisoners remain at Guantanamo of the more than 700

brought

there. Most have returned to their home countries. In the almost

seven

years since the military began sending detainees there, just two

have been

convicted of any criminal offense. Federal criminal courts in the

United

States, on the other hand, have successfully tried and convicted

such major

terrorists as shoe-bomber Richard Reid and the Sept. 11 conspirator

Zacarias Moussaoui, as well as other foreign and domestic

terrorists from

the pre-Sept. 11 era.

Human-rights advocates disagree on whether a new president could

switch

prisoners to federal courts from the military commission tribunals

by

executive order. Some believe he would need Congress to repeal or

drastically amend the 2006 law.

Whatever the case, the new president should make closing

Guantanamo and

shifting its inmates to federal court jurisdiction a priority for

his first

100 days.

Four years ago this month, hundreds of thousands

of people took to the streets of this capital city to take back an

election they saw as stolen. That outpouring, called the Orange

Revolution, brought fresh hopes for freedoms and for a release from

the country's Soviet past that few other former republics had ever

experienced.

The early promise of those days frayed in recent years, but

economically times were good, and the country always seemed to

manage.

But now, confronted by the global financial crisis, the new

Ukraine is facing the single biggest test of its stability, and its

leaders, by most accounts, seem to be at risk of failing.

Prime Minister Yulia V. Tymoshenko and President Viktor A.

Yushchenko, former political allies, are now locked in a bitter

power struggle that has paralyzed the state, leaving it without a

leader at precisely the time it most needs one.

Even as the West bends to help it, with the International

Monetary Fund pledging an emergency $16.5 billion loan last month,

it barely pulled itself together to meet the conditions for the

money. Yushchenko, intent on getting rid of Tymoshenko, is trying

to force early elections for December. To make sure the elections

come off, his party spent most of last week trying to slip a

campaign finance clause into the legislation package that was

required for the loan.

On Monday he relented and signed the crisis legislation into law

without the clause. But his administration continued to insist that

the elections proceed.

"It is a crime to conduct elections in this situation," said

Yulia Mostova, editor in chief of Dzerkalo Tyzhnya, a weekly

newspaper published in Kiev. "The chain of authority in Ukraine is

broken. It's at war with itself."

Ukraine's paralysis raises difficult questions for the West. It

is a country of 46 million in a strategic spot between European

Union countries and Russia, and its stability is crucial to the

region.

Yushchenko has taken a combative approach toward Russia, which

demonstrated a new willingness to settle disputes by force in

Georgia this summer. He has pushed for Ukraine to join NATO, an

agenda that is not particularly popular among Ukrainians, 17

percent of whom are ethnic Russians. And he has vowed not to renew

a contract that allows Russia's Black Sea fleet to dock in a

Ukrainian port. On Saturday, a ban on Russian cable television

programming went into effect.

For Ukrainians, the fears are more about their immediate future.

At one point last week, their currency hit its lowest point since

it was introduced in 1996, and securities that insure Ukrainian

government debt are trading at near-default levels.

But perhaps their greatest disappointment is over their leaders,

whose energies are focused not on ways to lift the country out of

crisis, but instead on what is widely seen as a selfish struggle

over power.

"People feel let down to the point of tears," Mostova said.

"Many feel they've been used. Ukraine had a chance for a

qualitative, civilized jump forward, but it wasn't taken."

Ukraine's economy is particularly vulnerable. About 40 percent

of its foreign currency earnings come from the sale of industrial

metals, which have plunged in price in recent weeks. And while its

government has borrowed responsibly, its banks have not, having

taken billions of dollars in foreign currency loans. With global

credit markets drying up, those loans will be difficult to

refinance. Ukraine's central bank has already had to bail out one,

Prominvestbank, the country's sixth largest.

Despite the turmoil, Yushchenko's main focus in recent weeks has

been on attacking Tymoshenko. He has issued presidential decrees

blocking the majority of her decisions since she became prime

minister for the second time in December. She accused him of

commandeering her plane shortly before she was to take off on a

trip to Russia in October, an allegation he denied. And when a

judge in Kiev ruled that the president's decree to dissolve the

Parliament and call elections was illegal, Yushchenko simply

disbanded the court.

"Yushchenko thinks he is God," said Mikhail Pogrebinsky, a

political analyst at a research and polling center in Kiev, citing

as evidence Yushchenko's visit last week to Istanbul, where he gave

Patriarch Bartholomew I of the Eastern Orthodox Church a specially

minted coin with his image on it, while at home his country's

currency was plummeting. "He thinks his own fate and the fate of

the country are the same thing."

Tymoshenko is also capable of political magic tricks. Last year

she colluded with Yushchenko, withdrawing all her deputies from

Parliament to give him legal justification for dissolving it and

calling new elections.

Neither has ever liked the other. Tymoshenko, a former gas

industry executive whose head is wreathed in a signature blond

plait, is Ukraine's political celebrity.

Yushchenko, a former banker whose own popularity has plunged in

recent years, has lashed out. There are even hints of the political

fight in Yushchenko's infamous poisoning episode, which left his

face pockmarked and ravaged in 2004: A lineup of his political

opponents have been called in for questioning in the case.

Tymoshenko came from Ukraine's business world, where quick wits

and bare knuckles made fortunes in the 1990s, under the corrupt

government of President Leonid D. Kuchma. But her aim appeared to

be less money than power, and she later joined the government. She

and Yushchenko rose up against Kuchma in 2004 with the motto,

"bandits to prisons," but they soon grew beholden to yet another

set of wealthy men.

Oleg O. Zarubinsky, a member of Parliament from an opposition

party, put it bluntly: "Our political parties aren't funded by

membership fees."

Oleksandr S. Donii, a Ukrainian lawmaker who led a popular

student movement against the Soviet regime in 1990, compared

Ukraine's first generation businessmen to divers dizzy with the

bends. "The Ukrainian business elite was born too quickly," he

said. "There were few moral limits. There was no sense of social

responsibility, of sharing with retirees."

The country's current predicament is not entirely the fault of

its leaders. It runs much deeper, into the roots of Ukrainian

society. Communism pitted citizens against one another, leaving

people distrustful and incapable of the collective action that

holds governments accountable in developed countries.

"We trust our brother, son, father, mother and godfather, but

no one else," said Mostova, the editor. "That's our problem."

That is why the Orange Revolution was so important: It seemed to

break that pattern.

"People found their backbones," Mostova said. "They cried in

front of strangers."

But after the protests were over, there was little follow-up. No

committees, associations or new communities. The crowd came

together and then broke apart.

Still, the fact that it happened at all was a big step forward

for Ukraine, which has been independent for only 17 years, and is

now going through a period that Pogrebinsky compares with the

tumultuous late 18th century in the United States, during the

ratification of the Constitution.

The economic crisis, for all its pain, may also be a catalyst.

Financial turmoil has swept out governments in Indonesia, Turkey

and Russia in recent history, and even, many argue, the Soviet

Union. Today's Ukraine may be similarly susceptible.

Tymoshenko seems to realize this. In a television talk show

about the economic crisis on Friday night, she extended a hand to

Yushchenko: "Let's for once not get into these political dogfights

and come together as a national team with a united program, like

the president said," she declared, addressing the other political

leaders seated in the studio. "Be a team in the face of this big

global challenge."

Yushchenko did not return the favor. He accused Tymoshenko's

government of accumulating debts from energy purchases "like fleas

on a dog," and of allowing inflation to rise.

"Who did it?" he railed. "The world crisis? Lies! The crisis

is sitting right here."

Tuesday would just be the beginning, the candidates kept telling

us, the start of a new era in American public life. But for

everyone from pollsters to pundits to a public that's been immersed

in an historic and closely monitored campaign for nearly two years,

election day also represents the end of a long and exhausting story

line. Is the country in for an emotional and psychological letdown

now that the climax finally has arrived?

"This year, more than in a very long time, come the day after

the election it's going to feel like the entire nation has woken up

in a collective political equivalent of Dec. 26," predicts Robert

Thompson, founding director of the Bleier Center for Television and

Popular Culture at Syracuse University. "The presents look more

promising before they're opened. The tree is starting to look a

little funky. Reality sets in."

Thompson argues that because the 2008 campaign has had so many

unprecedented factors, including the first serious runs for the

White House by both an African American and a woman, an economic

crisis that "gave everyone a life-and-death stake in the outcome"

and the heightened proliferation of political satire on "Saturday

Night Live" and elsewhere, the fall-off from this

"extraordinarily resonant and mythic American narrative" could be

especially steep.

Switching metaphors from Christmas to television, Thompson says

the period between election day and the inauguration of a new

president in January might feel like "those times when 'The

Sopranos' was on hiatus.

"This has been the greatest series on television," he says.

"And now it's stopped. But it will pick up again in January. That

should bring back some of the 'pump' and ceremony."

Elissa Epel, an associate professor in the psychiatry department

at the University of California at San Francisco, invokes soap

operas and Shakespearean tragedy to conjure up the aftermath of the

election.

"People have been glued to the news each day," she said in an

e-mail interview, likening the draw of this election season to that

of a daytime TV drama. The end of that, said Epel, could "bring in

nuances of 'letdown."' But she also envisions a more layered

response.

Even as the conclusion of the soap opera might signal "the

beginning of a new era," Epel foresees a possibly demanding shift

of focus. "People will be less plugged into the political pundits

each day. They will start to pay attention to neglected longer-term

issues -- how to survive the recession, how to take of their family

and health better. We may notice we are in one of the most

stressful eras is recent history."

As for McCain, Epel sees "a protagonist who can't see the flaws

in his negative campaigning." Supporters of this modern-day

Shakespearean figure, she said, "will no doubt feel a tremendous

pain after Tuesday's last scene with their sunken hero."

Republican operatives are trying to look beyond today's vote

tallies. "Win or lose, historically," says California Republican

Party Chairman Ron Nehring, "the day after the election,

everything a candidate has built tends to disappear into the ether.

The party is very different. We're open for business and

operating." Nehring ticks off gains in fundraising, precinct

organizing and "permanent infrastructure" over the past couple of

years. "We're already in the 2010 election cycle," he says.

Democrats, meanwhile, are hoping to capitalize on anticipated

wins in both the national and congressional races. Chuck Carpenter,

chairman of the Contra Costa Democratic Party, says he has been

thinking about a post-election letdown and points to a core of Baby

Boom-age women who have been working phone banks in Walnut Creek,

Calif.

"They've become really tight," says Carpenter. "It's more

like a club than a job." While one member plans to catch up on her

neglected business of restoring antiques and another hopes to get

her garden ready for winter, Carpenter expects many to remain

active in the newly formed Contra Costa Democratic Club for Change.

Pollster John Zogby sees no immediate letdown for the country.

Predicting an Obama win, he says, "This election is

transformational. I am suggesting that 2009 will be one of the very

few years of major reform in American history."

Zogby concedes that "a letdown will come eventually.

Expectations are very high for immediate action from the new

administration."

As for a slump in his own seemingly seasonal business, he adds,

"Only 9 per cent of our income is political. We're back to work

for Fortune 500 companies and little pizza parlors. Plus there's a

mayoral election in New York City next year."

Comedy, which has been a major subplot of the '08 campaign,

could come in for its own share of restructuring tomorrow.

"My career's over," moans stand-up comic Will Durst, in mock

lament for a likely Republican defeat. "For those of us who had to

go cold turkey on a lame-duck George Bush, Sarah Palin was like a

dose of methadone. Now what? This time next year, I'll be standing

behind some counter asking if you want a lid on that coffee or

not."

Fellow stand-up comedian Nato Green says the Bush years "have

made it easy to be lazy -- anyone could recycle a redneck joke and

get a laugh." If Obama is elected, he continues, "it's going to

impose more market discipline on comics who want to bring forward a

point of view and perspective. Some people think it will be hard to

make fun of Obama because he's black. I think it's because he's

relatively lucid."

As for the national parodists and pundits who have attracted

viewers in the run-up to this closely watched election, Thompson

says it may take a while to see how they fare in the post-election

period. Tina Fey, whose profile rose with her spot-on mimicry of

Sarah Palin, saw the ratings for her prime-time series "30 Rock"

hit their highest numbers ever with last week's third-season

premiere. Part of that might be due to her Emmy wins in September,

but part of it also has to do with her ability to mimic the Alaska

governor. It remains to be seen if such ratings will hold up a

month from now.

Thompson points out that big news stories can cement a media

career long after the story itself has passed. Greta Van Susteren

was "made" by the O.J. Simpson trial. Wolf Blitzer found his

footing in the first Gulf War. Since many viewers now follow

specific and often opinionated cable personalities like Bill

O'Reilly or Keith Olbermann, those brand names could be immune to

any post-partum let-down cable viewers feel after the votes are

counted.

"Rachel Maddow is now beating Larry King in the ratings,"

Thompson points out. "I don't think she's going to go away."

"A lot of us are waiting to see how it all shakes out," says

Green. "I was raised as a progressive and an activist. But I'm

also a contrarian by nature. My job, it seems, will be to discover

the ways in which Obama makes me boil with rage."

Denver -- The Denver Nuggets have traded All-Star guard Allen

Iverson to the Detroit Pistons for Denver native and fellow guard

Chauncey Billups, as well as forward Antonio McDyess and center

Cheikh Samb, the team announced at a news conference Monday

afternoon.

When asked if the Nuggets are a better team today than

yesterday, coach George Karl said, "I think we will be. He's the

package that fits."

Karl has often cited the need for a top flight point guard in

the NBA and in the past lamented losing Andre Miller in the trade

to Philadelphia for Iverson. The Nuggets acquired Iverson in a

blockbuster trade in December 2006, but he was unable to help get

the team past the first round of the playoffs.

Iverson's agent, Leon Rose, said, "AI had a great run in

Denver. He really enjoyed playing in Denver. This is an opportunity

to go back to the East, to one of the elite teams and a great

opportunity for him to have a chance to go deep into the playoffs.

"He's very excited about the opportunity. I don't want to say

he needs to be rejuvenated, but I think he's very excited and he

will continue to compete at that very high level."

Billups, 32, won NBA Finals MVP honors when he led Detroit to

the crown in 2004. He now returns home to bolster his hometown

team's backcourt.

Mark Warkentien, Nuggets director of basketball operations,

announced that the team had released veteran forward Juwan Howard

to free up a roster spot. It is likely that Howard will be

re-signed, however. Sources close to the Nuggets said the team

plans to buy out McDyess's contract, leaving him free to re-sign

with Detroit. It was necessary for Denver to get McDyess in the

trade to match salaries.

Detroit plans to use young point guard Rodney Stuckey in the

backcourt with the 33-year-old Iverson, who was in the final year

of his contract and making $20.8 million. Billups is in the second

year of a four-year deal worth $46 million.

Billups, 6-foot-3, was a Denver prep league star before reviving

the University of Colorado's program.

Through 11 NBA seasons, Billups has averaged 14.8 points per

game, 5.5 assists and 2.9 rebounds and has made three All-Star

teams.

Billups helped lead the Pistons to six consecutive Eastern

Conference Finals from 2003-08.

McDyess, 6-9, 245, returns to Denver after spending the best

seasons of his career as a Nugget from 1995-97 and 2000-02,

averaging 18.2 points and 9 rebounds.

Samb, 7-1, 245, has not appeared in a game this season. He

averaged 1.8 points in four games with Detroit last year. Samb, 24,

also played 20 games with Fort Wayne of the NBA Development League

during the 2007-08 season, posting averages of 10.4 points and 6.8

rebounds.

He was originally drafted by the Los Angeles Lakers in the

second round (51st overall) of the 2006 NBA draft. His draft rights

were traded to Detroit on June 28, 2006.

At least one broadcast network and one Web site said Monday that

they could foresee signaling to viewers early Tuesday evening which

candidate appeared likely to win the presidency, despite the

unreliability of early exit polls in the last presidential

election.

A senior vice president of CBS News, Paul Friedman, said the

prospects for Barack Obama or John McCain meeting the minimum

threshold of electoral votes could be clear as soon as 8 p.m. --

before polls in even New York and Rhode Island close, let alone

those in Texas and California. At such a moment -- determined from a

combination of polling data and samples of actual votes -- the

network could share its preliminary projection with viewers,

Friedman said.

"We could know Virginia at 7," he said. "We could know

Indiana before 8. We could know Florida at 8. We could know

Pennsylvania at 8. We could know the whole story of the election

with those results. We can't be in this position of hiding our

heads in the sand when the story is obvious."

Similarly, the editor of Slate, David Plotz, said in an e-mail

message that "if Obama is winning heavily," he could see calling

the race "sometime between 8 and 9."

"Our readers are not stupid, and we shouldn't engage in a weird

Kabuki drama that pretends McCain could win California and thus the

presidency," Plotz wrote. "We will call it when a sensible person

-- not a TV news anchor who has to engage in a silly pretense about

West Coast voters -- would call it."

All the networks (and other news organizations with their own

Web sites) were engaging in similar debates on Monday about

striking the following balance: not relying too much on early exit

poll data -- which had suggested, at least early on Election Day in

2004, that John Kerry might be on track to defeat George W. Bush --

while not being so cautious as to be beaten to the punch by a

competitor who announces an emerging result first.

When asked how Katie Couric, who is leading the network's

coverage, might present the network's projection to viewers,

Friedman said he could imagine her saying, for example, "Given

what we know about the results, or the projected results in various

states, it's beginning to look like it will be very difficult for

John McCain to put together enough votes to win this election."

The decision desk director of ABC News, Dan Merkle, said, "I

think at ABC we're going to be more cautious than that, in terms of

telegraphing which way the election is going." Merkle said he was

particularly concerned about how much stock to put in surveys of

voters as they leave the polls, "which are sometimes fine, and

which sometimes have had overstatements on Democratic candidates in

particular."

"We may have some indications from that data," Merkle said.

"That's different than going on the air to report that."

With some national polls suggesting that Obama was heading for a

potential electoral landslide, news organizations were preparing

for a race that could be far less close than those in 2004 or 2000.

The nearest precedent could be 1980, when the networks projected

Ronald Reagan to have defeated Jimmy Carter shortly after the polls

closed in the East. Later, the secretaries of state from

Washington, Oregon and other Western states argued that, as a

result of the networks' early call that year, voter turnout in

California dropped by about 2 percent.

Other experts, though, have argued that any impact by the

networks on turnout was far outweighed by Jimmy Carter's having

made a concession speech shortly after the networks broadcast their

results.

Whatever the networks decide, it seemed clear on Monday that

they would disregard a plea by Rep. John D. Dingell, D-Mich., to

hold off projecting a winner until polls in the last state had

closed. Those would be Alaska's, which are to remain open until 1

a.m. on the East Coast.

"When a candidate gets 270 electoral votes, they're the next

president," said Sheldon Gawiser, director of elections for NBC

News. "If some states are still voting, it's an unfortunate

circumstance, that's what it is. The founding fathers never

expected us to count the votes fast."

In something of a compromise, CNN said it might tell its viewers

that another news organization had called a particular state, but

that it was holding off, and for what reason.

In 2004, early exit poll data that suggesting Kerry was ahead

began circulating within newsrooms -- and leaking out on Web sites,

including Slate's -- early in the afternoon on Election Day. This

year, the consortium of six news organizations gathering the exit

poll data -- NBC, ABC, CBS, Fox, CNN and The Associated Press -- have

agreed to keep the information under quarantine until 5 p.m.

Representatives of those news organizations will begin analyzing

that information at a secret location beginning in late morning,

but will have to surrender all electronic devices at the door; even

restroom visits will be supervised. There were already signs on

Monday that the additional security was paying off.

"We won't call it off exit polls," Plotz said, "in part

because we don't expect to get them leaked to us much before the

first results."

Whoever gets elected president on Tuesday, one hot-button issue

from this long campaign will keep hounding Wall Street: Executive

pay.

Both Barack Obama and John McCain have criticized the six- and

seven-figure paychecks that Wall Street's top brass collected in

recent years while driving their companies -- and the entire

financial system -- into the ground.

Both candidates have said the heads-we-win, tails-you-lose pay

schemes that seem all too common in finance lie at the heart of the

crisis that threatens the whole economy. Even some senior

executives have confessed to me that they agree.

So many people agree that the pay system is broken. It is clear

that rewarding executives for delivering a few quarters of outsize

profits or a share price that keeps rising (until it doesn't) only

encourages those executives to take risks. And managing risks

hasn't exactly been Wall Street's forte lately.

The question is, how should pay be fixed? Now that American

taxpayers are shareholders in the nation's largest banks, a bevy of

plans is making the rounds.

Some in Washington want to cap pay, period. Executive can make

only so much and no more.

Others argue for "claw-backs." That is, they want executives

who got rich while their companies were reporting fat profits to be

forced to give some of the money back. After all, much of the

industry's profits from the boom have been vaporized in the bust.

And still others have even come up with fancy formulas to rein

in pay.

The issue has become such a nail-biter for big banks that some

are even considering curbing pay voluntarily. Top executives hope

such a move, coming in a year when pay is already plummeting, might

quiet the rhetoric.

It won't.

While various plans are being bandied about, one in particular

deserves attention. It comes from Raghuram G. Rajan, a professor of

finance at the Graduate School of Business at the University of

Chicago and former chief economist at the International Monetary

Fund.

Rajan is a longtime critic of executive pay on Wall Street. But

he's not a knee-jerk, all-big-bonuses-are-bad critic. Instead, he's

a pretty thoughtful, pay-for-performance capitalist who has been

studying ways to create the right incentives for the system to

work.

He has a multi-pronged approach that would give banks a choice.

Under the first option, the government would strictly regulate

compensation. Under the second, banks could pay their executives

whatever they like -- provided the banks set aside more capital. In

other words, banks that cling to their free-wheeling ways would

have to pay some sort of price.

For Rajan, this is an either-or proposition. If banks pursue

current compensation policies -- what might be described as the

"no-responsibility" system, given the trouble we're in -- that's

fine.

But if that happens, "the government should levy more capital

requirements against the bank," he said. Requiring banks to have

higher capital requirements would reduce the risk that executives

will make stupid decisions that imperil the firm and, possibly, the

nation's financial health.

How much extra capital? That depends. If banks spread out

executives' pay over, say, four years, giving their executives an

incentive to make smart decisions for the long haul, the banks

would be allowed to set aside a bit less additional capital.

Ditto if they included claw-back provisions and required

executives to reinvest a substantial portion of their income in

their companies so they had some skin in the game.

"We need to make people a little more worried about the

future," Rajan said. The way things are now, executives are

encouraged to take big risks because they get paid based on the

immediate fees generated. They have little incentive to worry about

what might happen to the balance sheet later.

Rajan said he was unimpressed by efforts to pay executives

partially in stock. Owning shares in the entire company doesn't tie

bankers' compensation directly to the decisions they make within

their own units. "Stock compensation doesn't do it because it's

too broad," he said.

More important, Rajan wants executives to be paid over a

four-year period, receiving a fourth of their bonus income every

year. If they make a bad bet, they won't get paid the remaining

amount.

And Rajan thinks bonuses should be based strictly on what he

calls "accounting performance," rather than stock performance,

which he says you can't control. He also wants chief executive pay

to be benchmarked against the performance of rival firms. If a

firms' earnings are worse than their rivals', "why should they get

a bonus?" he asked.

Despite all the criticism that hedge funds get for their

compensation structures -- they charge one fee up front, and take a

big cut of any profits -- Rajan likes part of the hedge-fund model:

what is known as a "high water mark."

When hedge fund managers lose their investors' money, the

managers don't collect any of that fat incentive fee until they

make back the loss. The same rule should be applied to bankers who

destroy shareholder value.

A military panel at the Guantanamo naval base convicted a former

Qaida propaganda chief of terrorism charges on Monday and sentenced

him to life in prison, giving the Bush administration a second

conviction in a war-crimes trial there.

But the conviction of the detainee, Ali Hamza al Bahlul, was a

measured victory for the government, which has been struggling for

seven years to prove the effectiveness of its military commission

system for trying terrorism suspects at the U.S. naval station at

Guantanamo Bay, Cuba.

The guilty verdict had been expected because Bahlul, a Yemeni

who prosecutors said was a close aide to Osama bin Laden, did not

offer any defense. Saying he did not accept the authority of the

tribunal, he insisted that his lawyer remain mute in a weeklong

trial that drew little attention.

The Pentagon's response to the verdict was muted. "Al Bahlul

received a full and fair trial," said a spokesman, Cmdr. Jeffrey

D. Gordon.

The conviction did not appear likely to affect the contentious

debate about the use of military tribunals, said Glenn M. Sulmasy,

a national security law specialist at the Coast Guard Academy.

"This was a victory for the government," Sulmasy said, "but it

may not have positive impact because of the erosion of support and

legitimacy for the commission process."

Bahlul was convicted of conspiracy, solicitation to commit

murder, providing material support for terrorism and other charges.

Prosecutors said he made a recruiting film, "The Destruction of

the American Destroyer USS Cole," which described the 2000 attack

that killed 17 sailors on the ship in the Yemeni port of Aden.

The panel of military officers deliberated for less than an hour

on the sentence Monday afternoon, after announcing its guilty

verdict in the morning. The only other detainee convicted after a

Guantanamo trial, Salim Hamdan, a former driver for bin Laden, is

set to complete his five-month sentence next month, after a

military judge gave him credit for more than five years awaiting

trial.

Last year, an Australian detainee, David Hicks, pleaded guilty

to providing material support for terrorism in exchange for a

nine-month sentence.

Bahlul's trial came after a series of new challenges to the

Pentagon's prosecution efforts. Last week, a military judge

undercut the case against another detainee, Mohammed Jawad, by

barring the use of his confession to an attack on American

soldiers. The judge ruled that it had been obtained through torture

by Afghan officials.

Jawad's case has drawn wide notice because he was a teenager

when he was detained in Afghanistan in 2002. His trial, scheduled

Jan. 5, is the only other war-crimes trial expected before

President Bush leaves office. The trial of Omar Khadr, a Canadian

who was also detained as a teenager, is scheduled for Jan. 26, six

days after the start of a new administration.

Pentagon officials have pressed to get the commission system

moving quickly, filing charges against nearly two dozen detainees

over the last year and expanding the staffs of military lawyers

prosecuting and defending the cases. But some lawyers who work on

the cases say the prosecution appears uncertain because of the

possibility that the next president will close the Guantanamo

detention center and stop the trials.

Even so, Pentagon officials have said they are moving ahead with

the cases and anticipate bringing many of the detainees to trial.

In recent months, several disputes have stalled cases. In

September, a prosecutor, Lt. Col. Darrel Vandeveld of the Army

Reserve, stepped down, asserting flaws in the fairness of the

system. Last month, the Pentagon dropped charges against five

detainees whose cases Vandeveld had handled. The prosecutors said

they planned to file new charges.

The Pentagon official pushing hardest to accelerate the pace of

the cases, Brig. Gen. Thomas W. Hartmann, has himself been at the

center of disputes that have slowed the prosecutions. Several

defense lawyers filed motions seeking his disqualification,

claiming he was too aligned with prosecutors.

Three military judges agreed, disqualifying Hartmann from

participation, and Pentagon officials said that at least two

separate investigations of his conduct were under way. A spokesman

for the general declined to comment.

The history of the tribunals has been rocky since President Bush

ordered military commission trials in November 2001. The plan has

been stalled by court challenges and attacks from numerous military

critics, including a former chief prosecutor.

Vandeveld is the latest former insider to criticize the system

publicly. On Monday, he said from his home in Pennsylvania that he

expected to be called as a witness by lawyers for numerous

detainees. In the meantime, he said, "the commissions are in such

disarray and continue to be in such chaos."

The diplomatic tangle between

Venezuela, Argentina and the United States reached a new pitch on

Monday, when a jury in Miami convicted a wealthy Venezuelan

businessman of acting as an "unregistered agent" of Venezuela on

American soil.

The case, known in Latin America as "Suitecasegate," started

last year with the discovery of a mysterious suitcase filled with

$800,000 in cash at an airport here. But it has erupted into a

long-running scandal that has aggravated tensions between the

United States and its neighbors to the south.

Franklin Duran, the businessman convicted Monday, went on trial

in Miami for conspiring to cover up the origin and destination of

the suitcase: It was a secret contribution, prosecutors said, sent

by Venezuela's government to bolster the campaign of Argentina's

president. Duran faces a maximum of 15 years in prison.

The case has become a symbol of the antagonism between the Bush

administration and President Hugo Chavez of Venezuela, who has used

his nation's oil wealth to spread his influence throughout the

region.

The scandal has also soured America's relations with Argentina

and its president, Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner, whose legitimacy

has been challenged by the revelations of secret campaign donations

from outside her country.

Both Chavez and Kirchner accused the United States of political

motivations in bringing the case last December, a charge officials

in Washington and Miami have repeatedly denied.

Whether intentional or not, the eight-week trial in Miami

revealed an extensive cover-up effort by Venezuelan officials that

reached the highest levels of government, and laid bare a business

culture in Venezuela that involves regular bribes and kickbacks to

high government officials and members of the military.

The trial provided little in the way of evidence that American

national security was somehow threatened by the presence of the

Venezuelans, who spent much of their time on the phone and in South

Florida restaurants trying to convince the man caught with the

suitcase, Guido Alejandro Antonini Wilson, to keep the truth about

the money under wraps.

Still, on Monday American officials sought to portray the

investigation and trial as important to safeguarding national

security.

"When unregistered foreign agents believe that they can operate

on our soil with impunity and disregard for U.S. laws, it

undermines the national security of our country," said Jonathan I.

Solomon, the special agent in charge of the FBI's Miami office.

Duran reacted without emotion as the verdict was read. Edward

Shohat, his lawyer, said he would appeal the jury's decision.

Shohat referred to the trial as a "political circus in which

Franklin Duran is a pawn of the U.S. government." But the lawyer

declined to comment on allegations he made in the trial's early

days: that the case was a politically motivated effort to embarrass

Chavez's government. "There's a lot of concern about that, but I'm

not going into further details," he said.

The scandal surfaced in August, 2007, when an Argentine

policewoman here became suspicious about a suitcase being rolled

through customs by Antonini Wilson. The policewoman ordered him to

open the case. Nearly $800,000, mostly in $50 bills, spilled out.

Argentine officials initially detained him but let him go after

charging him with a simple customs infraction.

An international scandal ensued when word soon began leaking out

that the cash may have been intended for Kirchner, then the leading

candidate to succeed her husband, Nestor Kirchner, as president of

Argentina. By that time Antonini Wilson was long gone, having

hopped a plane back to Miami.

A secret cover-up followed, prosecutors said, directed from

Venezuela and reaching up to Chavez himself, who assigned his

intelligence chief to try to keep Antonini Wilson silent, according

to testimony from witnesses.

Unbeknownst to the governments of Venezuela and Argentina,

Antonini Wilson had gone to the FBI just days after arriving back

in Florida. He subsequently recorded hundreds of hours of

conversations between himself and the Venezuelans.

Three Venezuelans and an Uruguayan were arrested, including

Duran, a longtime friend and business acquaintance of Antonini

Wilson. At secretly recorded meetings in Florida, Duran offered to

deliver up to $2 million in hush money and to make sure Antonini

Wilson's legal troubles in Argentina went away. Another suspect

remains at-large.

Three of the four men who were arrested pleaded guilty to the

same charges Duran was convicted of, and two of them were among the

government's star witnesses.

Carlos Kauffmann, a longtime friend and business partner of

Duran, testified that he and Duran were driven to help the

Venezuelan government by the promise of more lucrative government

deals. He said he and Duran regularly paid kickbacks to Venezuelan

government agencies and state officials that netted the two men

tens of millions of dollars.

"Big-time favors, sir," he testified, when asked what he

expected to get from the Venezuelan government for the effort to

keep Antonini Wilson from talking. "If we needed more contracts

for our companies, we would make sure we were going to receive

them."

Kauffmann also testified that the Argentine and Venezuelan

governments were working together to ensure that an Argentine probe

into the origin of the suitcase was unsuccessful.

"Both governments had agreed to work this problem out,"

Kauffmann said.

When Antonini Wilson took the stand, saying that the suitcase

was not his. The money, witnesses testified, was sent by Petroleos

de Venezuela, the national oil company, which had chartered the

private aircraft. Antonini Wilson also testified that he was told

an additional $4.2 million was on the flight to Argentina, and he

said there had been previous operations to smuggle in political

cash from Venezuela to other countries in the region.

Sharna Fey and Kim Broadbeck have gotten married

three times: In 2004, they married in a daze. In 2005, they married

on an island. And on Monday, when it really counted under the law,

they married in a hurry.

"We're doing this while we still can," said Fey, a 44-year-old

life coach who has been with Broadbeck for 11 years and through two

previous same-sex marriage ceremonies, neither recognized as legal.

"I mean, trust me: We feel married. But this is a legal

response."

They were not alone. With polls showing the outcome of a ballot

measure Tuesday on outlawing same-sex marriage in California a

toss-up, couples were not taking any chances on Monday. They showed

up early here at San Francisco City Hall, donning boutonnieres and

blouses and holding each others' hands -- and their collective

breath.

In West Hollywood, a gay friendly enclave near Los Angeles, John

Duran, a city councilman, said he had performed a whopping 25

ceremonies since Friday, driving all over Los Angeles County to

officiate.

"This is the modern day version of a shotgun wedding," said

Duran. "We're doing as many as we can before tomorrow."

The rush to the altar was in anticipation of Proposition 8,

which would amend the state constitution to define marriage as

between a man and a woman and end nearly five months of legalized

same-sex marriages in the state. The ban, if approved, would take

effect Wednesday.

"We're here in case of what happens tomorrow," said Michael

Levy, who married his partner, Michael Golden, in San Francisco on

Monday, both wearing identical tuxedo jackets, ties, and beards.

"I'm scared. It's really close."

Same-sex couples filled the hallway in front of the county

clerk's office here as weddings started at 9 a.m, with more than

100 ceremonies scheduled throughout the day and scores more already

booked for Election Day.

Clerks in several other California counties reported a surge in

the issuance of marriage licenses, with some offices booked to

capacity. San Francisco expects to have performed more than 1,100

same-sex ceremonies in the two weeks leading up to Election Day.

Elsewhere, newlyweds held ceremonies on beachfronts, backyards,

and living rooms.

"We kind of said Proposition 8 was like our version of getting

knocked up," said Benjamin Pither, 28, who married his high-school

sweetheart, Joseph Greaves, on Sunday at Greaves' parents house in

Santa Rosa, Calif. "We both liked the idea of marriage, but we

wanted to do it in our own time. But when it looked like

Proposition 8 might pass, we realized that we would regret it if we

didn't take the opportunity."

Some couples traveled from afar to make Monday the big day.

Allison and Rose, a couple from Tampa Bay, Fla., said they had come

to San Francisco to marry on the advice of friends who suspect that

Florida will pass its own constitutional ban on same-sex marriage

on Tuesday. The couple, who said they might relocate if Florida

passes its ban, did not want their last names used because fears

that they would be discriminated against at home.

"It isn't like San Francisco," Rose said.

While defeat of the California ballot measure would probably

quell debate -- at least for a time -- over allowing same-sex unions

in the state, it is expected that a victory would lead to a

second-round of legal wrangling: This time, over the validity of

the thousands marriages performed since June, when a state Supreme

Court decision legalizing same-sex marriages took effect.

The California attorney general, Jerry Brown, has indicated that

he would uphold the marriages, but Geoff Kors, the executive

director of Equality California, a gay rights group opposing

Proposition 8, said he expects challenges if they lose.

"It wouldn't surprise me that people trying to eliminate

constitutional rights would try to annul or divorce people that are

married," said Kors, who nonetheless expressed optimism that the

ballot measure would fail.

Supporters of the ban say no rights would be infringed by its

passage, but suggest the California Supreme Court would "have to

deal with the mess that it made" by allowing the marriages in the

first place, said Sonja Eddings Brown, a spokeswoman for Protect

Marriage, the leading group behind Proposition 8.

In the spring, opponents of same-sex marriage had asked the

court to put off the marriages until the results of Tuesday's

election were known, but the request was turned down. "They knew

Proposition 8 was going to be on the ballot and they decided not to

listen to the voice of the people," Brown said.

Each side has poured more than $25 million into the fight over

the ballot measure, making it one of the most expensive measures

ever in a state known for its proclivities for direct democracy.

Airwaves across the state have been blanketed in recent weeks with

increasingly overheated advertisements, with opponents likening the

proposition to the jailing of Japanese citizens during World War

II, and supporters suggesting that same-sex marriage will be taught

to young schoolchildren.

The most recent Field Poll showed a 5 point advantage for

opponents of the measure, but supporters of Proposition 8 say

same-sex marriage bans across the country have been traditionally

understated in the polls.

In 2000, when California voters approved a law defining marriage

as between a man and woman, a Field Poll just before the election

showed that 53 percent of those polled approved the measure. The

final tally in favor of the law was 61 percent.

The 2000 law was overturned in May by the state Supreme Court.

Hundreds of joyous couples were married on balconies and atriums

throughout the city's soaring City Hall when the court's ruling

took effect on June 16, 2008.

The mood was more subdued on Monday, with bureaucracy -- "Next,

please!" -- replacing much of the ebullience of that day. Fey and

Broadbeck, for example, seemed to almost have a touch of

same-sex-marriage fatigue: The couple was among the 4,000 that

married in a happy haze in 2004 in San Francisco after the city's

mayor, Gavin Newsom, suddenly ordered the city clerk to marry

same-sex couples.

All those marriages were later invalidated by the courts. A year

later, the couple married again in Hawaii, but it was an unofficial

ceremony in a state that does not allow same-sex marriage.

So it was that this time around, they had almost forgotten to

tie the knot.

"All summer long we were like 'Oh yeah, we should do that,"'

said Fey. "And then all of the sudden, it was like 'Uh oh."'

Paul Ellis, 51, a retail manager in San Francisco, was at City

Hall on Monday to witness Golden and Levy's wedding. It was his

seventh same-sex marriage in the last five months, he said, most of

them in the tartan kilt that he wore on a muggy Monday in San

Francisco, a wardrobe choice he regretted.

"You wouldn't want to wrap six yards of cloth around your hips

on a day like this," he said.

Ellis had also taken matters in his own hands, getting an online

certification as a marriage officiate and presiding over two

ceremonies for other gay friends -- all ahead of Tuesday's election.

"At this point," he said of the ballot measure's fate, "I

think it's a complete crapshoot."

It would be nice to think that if George Bailey had been around

in September, the U.S. government could have saved itself $700

billion, Iceland could have averted near bankruptcy, and the rest

of the world could have avoided another trillion dollars in

bailouts and the prospect of a deep and long recession.

You recall George: In the person of James Stewart, he stopped a

run on the Bailey Brothers Building &amp;amp; Loan Association that would

have destroyed it in the film "It's a Wonderful Life." His

predicament, with its eerie prefigurement of the present, provokes

a closer look at the crossroads in which culture and finance

intersect.

In the film, the Building &amp;amp; Loan faces what is now called a

"liquidity crisis" -- the association could not possibly cover its

obligations with available cash, let alone guarantee any loans. The

townspeople rush in demanding their life savings. "You're thinking

of this place all wrong," George tells the crowd. "As if I had

the money back in a safe. The money's not here."

That much was obvious. But George goes on, pointing to

individuals. "Your money's in Joe's house," he says to one man.

"Right next to yours," he says to another. "And in the Kennedy

house, and Mrs. Backlin's house, and a hundred others. Why, you're

lending them the money to build, and then, they're going to pay it

back to you as best they can."

You think you are just depositing your money here, he suggests,

but actually we're all helping one another. And if some homeowners

can't meet their payments, "what are you going to do," George

asks, "foreclose on them?"

"We've got to stick together," George says, or the truly evil

banker Henry Potter will gain control of everything. "We've got to

have faith in each other."

And, at least for a while, the pitch works. George's view of the

savings and loan as a form of social welfare institution was

learned at the feet of his father, who built that savings and loan,

telling him, "It's deep in the race for a man to want his own roof

and walls and fireplace. And we're helping him get those things."

The Baileys could almost be early incarnations of Fannie Mae and

Freddie Mac -- government-created companies established to help make

that same dream possible among American citizens. Beginning in the

mid-1990s they were steadily pressured by politicians and the

public to guarantee loans to ever more risky borrowers in the name

of this very ideal.

What really helped that project along, though, was the discovery

on Wall Street that such risky loans could be bundled with others

like some multipack at Costco and resold as highly rated

securities. It is as if George had found a way to go into business

with Potter, answering his scornful challenge "Are you running a

business or a charity ward?" with "Both!"

As it has turned out, of course, both George's charitable dream

in which banks would cuddle with their communities and avoid

foreclosures and Potter's dream of profit-taking maneuverings

unhampered by other considerations collapsed under the unrealistic

weight of their fantasies a few weeks ago. But in the midst of this

crisis something else has been revealed that we ordinarily

associate more with cultural life than with financial enterprise.

In the wake of foreclosures and bank failures, all circulation,

trade, interaction -- the intercourse of economic life -- had nearly

ground to a halt. Even if a bank had money, it was not about to

risk lending it even for short-term use by reputable businesses. It

is as if the entire standard of valuation had been shattered. What

was anything really worth? What was dangerous and what was safe?

Who could be relied on?

So debased had judgment become, and so unpredictable were the

consequences, that the safest thing to do was absolutely nothing.

Liquidity turned solid; credit froze. And this reflected a collapse

not just of business activity but also of trust, or, to use

George's word, of faith.

It might seem strange to think of these enormous disruptions as

reflections of something so elemental: trillions of dollars are now

being expended to re-establish trust? But we can see how this issue

came up in earlier periods of cultural transition.

Consider Shakespeare's "Merchant of Venice." Written at a time

when Elizabethan England was being transformed by European trade

and its own growing international ambitions, the play can even seem

to be about how to create trust in a tumultuous marketplace.

The play lampoons cultural differences in cosmopolitan Venice. A

buffoonish Spaniard, a scimitar-wielding Moroccan, drunken Germans,

a Jewish usurer -- these types are all invoked in the work. But how

are such varied figures to interact in "the trade and profit of

the city"? Only through the presence of a strong central law that

would guarantee trust in the midst of distrust.

Shakespeare, though, does not minimize the difficulties in

creating consistent methods for judging, whether assessing products

or the people who make them. Are the goods what they seem? Are

people? Portia's suitors are forced to choose a gold, silver or

lead casket -- uncertain about which will disclose the true image of

their beloved. Characters confuse lies and truth, ornament and

essence, mercy and ruthlessness. In the midst of all this it is

amazing that any kind of social and economic interchange is

possible. Shakespeare seems to be asserting it is, but with modern

eyes wary of his treatment of Shylock, we wonder.

On the brink of the modern economic world the issues become even

more fraught. Anthony Trollope said that his 1875 novel, "The Way

We Live Now," was "instigated by what I conceived to be the

commercial profligacy of the age." But that profligacy was also a

reflection of a social transformation: the traditional social order

could no longer be counted on.

The hierarchy of English society ceased to be a hierarchy of

worth, financial or otherwise. Lords with enormous estates could be

broke. IOU's could casually be exchanged, backed by nothing but the

vague whiff of respectability and title. The central figure, an

arriviste financier, creates a pyramid scheme in which railroads of

the New World figure prominently. Trollope sees a world of social

dissolution matching the financial dissolution. Appearance bears no

relationship to reality. By the novel's end, Trollope suggests the

only hope for a restoration of trust is a retreat from the new

commercial age.

Trollope was not alone. In Harley Granville-Barker's 1905 play,

"The Voysey Inheritance," the main tradition in a distinguished

family investment firm is the fraudulent bilking of its clients, a

heritage in which trust is hypocritically cultivated.

And now, of course, the issue of trust is elevated to an

unprecedented scale. In 2007, when the failures of this autumn were

scarcely imagined, the investment analyst James Grant predicted

that the habits of the preceding years would lead to an imminent

collapse of credit "over which posterity will shake its head,

muttering, 'What were they thinking?' "

He argued that the ornate nature of the financial "products"

being packaged was part of the problem and in an Op-Ed article in

The New York Times this past January agreed with the global bank

UBS, which called the current mortgage crisis "the biggest failure

of ratings and risk management ever."

What is strange is that we now depend on the state to

re-establish trust by rescuing and even nationalizing financial

institutions, relying on the same authority that gives paper money

its value. But after the events of the last century, can anyone

fully believe that the state should be the ultimate standard for

trust and fiscal faith? And would even a real-life George Bailey be

able to coax us into confidence, let alone belief that good

intentions have power over principles of finance? We are in for

perilous times.

As it turned out, her father had not died. Marian

Hinnant merely wanted to go to the races. And, she was not about to

let the trial of Sen. Ted Stevens get in her way.

On Monday, Hinnant stunned a courtroom when she confessed she

had concocted a story about her father's death to be let off the

jury that would, a day later, convict Stevens of Alaska on ethics

violations.

Hinnant said she had lied to attend the Breeders' Cup at Santa

Anita racetrack in California.

Just hours before the jury delivered the guilty verdict on Oct.

27, a new juror was seated to replace Hinnant. Judge Emmet G.

Sullivan of U.S. District Court was sympathetic when he learned of

Hinnant's apparent loss but he was troubled that she failed to

return phone calls to his chamber and ordered her to appear in

court.

Hinnant, 52, was accompanied Monday by A.J. Kramer, the federal

public defender, who said she had lied about the death. "She used

that as an excuse," Kramer said, according to witnesses. Hinnant

then began rambling about horse breeding and other topics, people

in court said.

Sullivan interrupted her, saying: "I am thoroughly convinced

you would not have been able to deliberate" and dismissed her.

Hinnant's father, Ralph Harold Hinnant, 71, lives in Kenly,

N.C., The Washington Post reported.

Stevens has said that he will appeal the verdict in which he was

found guilty of seven felony counts of failing to disclose gifts

and services.

"It is now even clearer this was an unjust trial and a flawed

verdict," Stevens said Monday, according to The Associated Press.

Outside the court, Hinnant told reporters she believed Stevens

guilty but his actions no different than those of other

politicians.

A momentous week for Washington began quietly on Wall Street, as

stocks barely budged Monday amid downbeat reports on the

construction, manufacturing and auto industries.

Sales at Ford, Chrysler and General Motors fell last month to

their worst levels in 25 years, while business in the manufacturing

sector shrank at the fastest rate in 26 years.

The reports underscored the slowdown of the economy, but did not

present a significantly different view of the business outlook for

the rest of the year.

While stocks fluctuated in a narrow range for most of the day,

they stayed mostly flat as investors appeared wary of wading into

the market ahead of Tuesday's presidential election.

At the close, the Dow Jones industrial average was virtually

unchanged. It declined 5.18 points, to 9,319.83. The fall was

small, but it did break a two-day winning streak for the index. The

broader Standard &amp;amp; Poor's 500-stock index lost 2.45 points, to

966.3, and the Nasdaq composite index jumped 5.38 points, to

1,726.33.

In a report that caught economists by surprise, the

manufacturing index of the Institute for Supply Management fell to

38.9 in October from 43.5 in September, on a scale where readings

below 50 indicate contraction in the industry. It was the lowest

reading since September 1982.

The report is a closely watched bellwether that took a steep

plunge last month, prompting a sell-off in the market. Although the

index dropped again on Monday, the discouraging number registered

as more of the same.

New orders tapered off, inventories rose, and, in a worrying

sign for future growth, export demand fell sharply. Manufacturers

have been dependent on foreign orders for a constant stream of

revenue. With the dollar strengthening against the euro, businesses

fear a sharp drop in foreign orders.

"In the last two months, business activity fell off a cliff,'

Daniel J. Meckstroth, the chief economist of the Manufacturers

Alliance/MAPI, wrote in a note. "Hurricane Ike and the Boeing

strike contributed to the sharp downturn, but the breadth of

production losses across industries shows that there is a more

fundamental explanation: the U.S. economy is deleveraging," he

wrote, using the term for companies reducing debt through layoffs,

asset sales and other cost-cutting.

A separate report from the Commerce Department showed that

construction spending dipped in September by 0.3 percent, after

rising the same amount in August. Commercial spending ticked up

slightly, but residential construction extended its decline, down

27 percent from a year ago. Private companies spent slightly more

than the government.

"We are now deep in the belly of the recession beast," Bernard

Baumohl, managing director of the Economic Outlook Group, wrote in

a note. "It may well be there for the next six months or so."

In another sign of corporate woe, Circuit City, the consumer

electronics retailer, said Monday that it would close 155 stores as

it tries to return to profitability ahead of what many expect to be

a brutal holiday shopping season.

Oil prices fell $3.90, or 5.8 percent, to settle at $63.91 a

barrel in New York trading. Shares of energy companies declined,

with Dow component Chevron losing 1.2 percent.

European markets ended higher. The FTSE 100 index in London

gained 1.5 percent, the CAC 40 in Paris was up 1.2 percent and the

DAX in Frankfurt climbed 0.8 percent. "The direction is

positive," said Nathalie Pelras, head of asset management at

Richelieu Finance in Paris. "But the market is waiting for the

results of the U.S. presidential election before it makes any big

moves."

Stocks looked fairly cheap, Pelras said, and long-term buyers

may find current levels attractive. But in the short term, she

said, investors should be primed for more nasty surprises.

Kohlberg Kravis Roberts, the private equity firm, said on Monday

that it would delay its plans to begin trading on the New York

Stock Exchange, citing poor market conditions. The company had said

in July that it would go public through a complex deal that would

have valued the firm at $12 billion to $15 billion.

Credit markets continued to improve. Borrowing rates among

banks, a key gauge of the flow of credit, dropped again for

overnight and three-month loans, as measured by a rate called

LIBOR. The so-called Ted spread, which measures the size of the

premium paid by banks for three-month loans versus the yield on

safe three-month government notes, dropped as well.

The Treasury's benchmark 10-year bill was up 13/32, at 100

22/32. The yield, which moves in the opposite direction from the

price, was at 3.91 percent, down from 3.96 percent late Friday.

If the Denver Nuggets are playing a chess match, as one team

executive claimed this past summer, they have continued to commit

to a dangerous, aggressive Royal Gambit.

They've sacrificed the queen.

The Nuggets opened with a Camby-to-Clippers play, a bishop

surrendered without even a rook in return. Then they let pawn

Eduardo Najera fall.

"It's not a checkers move; it's a chess move," Mark

Warkentien, the Nuggets vice president of basketball operations,

said at the time. "Chess is a tougher game to understand, and

you've got to wait longer to see the results of the move."

Now, the boldest move of all: Allen Iverson for Chauncey

Billups.

The results of those chess moves will lead to victory or defeat,

but not a draw. I give high praise to The Answer-Mr. Big Shot

exchange.

Honestly, the time had come for A.I., to go, and the time had

come for Denver-native Chauncey to come home. We're ready for

another closeup, C.B.

"I think we'll have the most talented starting five," Rex

Chapman, Nuggets' vice president of player personnel, said Monday

afternoon, without referring to chess or checkers or other board

games. "Carmelo Anthony, Chauncey Billups, J.R. Smith, Kenyon

Martin, Nene."

Except, that might not be the starting five, according to coach

George Karl, who is not a Nuggets vice president, or Boris Spassky.

Karl said after practice that he might start Dahntay Jones at

shooting guard, or use Anthony Carter in the starting lineup with

Billups, and he might keep bringing Smith off the bench, or, or ...

The chess moves aren't finished. Antonio McDyess will not have a

homecoming with Billups. Although the Nuggets kept talking Monday

about McDyess' future with the team, there will be none. His

contract will be bought out, and he probably will re-sign with

Detroit.

Huh? He was included in the deal to make the salary numbers

equitable. In regard to the third guy in the deal, Cheikh Samb, I

thought I must be totally stupid because I had never heard of him,

but neither had most of the Nuggets, and nobody seem to know what

continent he is from. (Africa, it turns out.) The 7-foot-1 center

will not stick with the Nuggets.

Juwan Howard, who was waived on Monday, will be resigned by the

Nuggets.

And who knows what will happen to Chucky Atkins and Steven

Hunter, who have been injured non-contributors. The Nuggets

probably wish Hunter would retire and probably wish they could

trade Atkins.

The Nuggets are still owned by Stan Kroenke, but they belong to

Anthony.

This is now Anthony's team, and he must show he can finally take

control of his career, with an assist (literally) from Billups.

Billups is one of our own, the most famous modern-day basketball

player of Denver roots. He left (twice) as a young man, became the

main man in Detroit and returns as the learned man.

Billups can do for the Denver Nuggets what he did for Denver's

George Washington High School and the University of Colorado -- help

lead them to victories in the postseason. He is a winner.

If you don't like Chauncey's Comeback, you never cared for

Dickensian characters.

Billups provides the Nuggets with upstanding character, class,

leadership, an NBA-championship and Finals MVP background, one of

the best point guards in the game, a player unafraid to take and

make the last big shot ("Mr. Big Shot" is his nickname),

toughness, exceptional defense and tremendous basketball knowledge

and awareness.

It will be said by some (in Detroit and Denver) that Chauncey is

shop-worn, too slow, too old, but they don't understand.

He is too, too good.

I've watched Billups when he was an eighth grader, in the

Colorado state tournament, at his high school graduation, in the

NCAA tournament, when he was with the Nuggets before and in the

2004 NBA Finals (as I sat in a tiki hut bar on a beach). I've

talked with Chauncey when he signed his scholarship with Colorado,

after he was drafted in the first round, at a Denver Broncos

practice this year and during charity events in Denver. Chauncey

belongs with the Nuggets.

Allen Iverson is "The Answer," but Chauncey Billups is the

answer, not the tires the Nuggets kicked, such as Stephon Marbury,

or Jamaal Tinsley or Anthony Carter.

No matter the end game of Royal Gambit, the Nuggets' vice

presidents got this chess move right.

Pundits and pollsters may be trying to take all the fun out of

Election Day. So many have predicted a lopsided victory for Sen.

Barack Obama over Sen. John McCain that you might wonder why even

to bother watching the returns on Tuesday night.

The fact is, there is plenty of mystery -- and there is only one

poll that counts.

Aim to have the popcorn popped and to be on the couch no later

than 7 p.m. Eastern time. That's assuming you have a day job and

have not been glued to the television all day. (Of course, even if

you have a day job, you may have been glued to the Web, in which

case, take a quick break!)

Now, a guide of highlights to watch for on Tuesday:

SETTING THE TABLE: The networks are not supposed to call a state

until all the polls in that state have closed. But there will be

lots of raw data online, so you can go on the Web, check the

returns and try calling the state yourself. Several news sites

include interactive maps so you can play along at home to see how

the candidates might reach 270 electoral votes, the magic number

needed to claim the presidency.

AND THEY'RE OFF: The suspense starts in Indiana. Most polls

close at 6 p.m. and others at 7 p.m. Indiana is a ruby red state

where Obama has been running closely with McCain. Be wary of

results that do not include Gary, a city with a substantial

African-American population. If Obama wins it, Indiana could be the

canary in the coal mine predicting disaster ahead for McCain.

APERITIF: Also at 7 p.m., polls close in Virginia and Georgia,

and polls close in most of Florida and New Hampshire.

All eyes will quickly veer to Virginia, which Obama has labored

to win. If he succeeds in the former capital of the one-time

Confederacy, he will most likely do exceedingly well the rest of

the night. Subtracting Virginia from the Republican column would

give McCain very few routes to 270 electoral votes.

New Hampshire is less predictive. But it would be a bad sign for

McCain if he cannot capture these mavericks, whom he has been

courting for eight years.

ORANGE CRUSH? Florida, a voting experience unto itself. Whoever

wins Florida, the fourth-largest state, gets a big leg up on

winning the presidency. Again, if McCain loses here, his path

narrows. But the race is so close that Florida may not portend much

about the rest of the country. The drama in this state, which has

become synonymous with electoral dysfunction, may be in the new and

creative ways in which voters might be foiled from casting their

ballots.

PALATE CLEANSERS: At 7:30 p.m., polls close in Ohio and North

Carolina. While Ohio is the bigger prize, keep your eyes on North

Carolina (where officials have the option of keeping the polls open

until 8:30 p.m. if there are problems). North Carolina is a red

state that is newly competitive, again thanks to an Obama ground

organization. If North Carolina votes for Obama, the map is likely

to bleed blue for the rest of the night.

As for Ohio, it is not clear whether the adage still applies

that no Republican has won the presidency without carrying Ohio

since Abraham Lincoln. For an indication of how things are going,

check the returns from Stark County, a longtime bellwether.

MAIN COURSE: At 8 p.m., Pennsylvania and Missouri finish voting.

Pennsylvania, of course, is the keystone to McCain's survival

strategy: It is the one big blue state where he has staked his

claim, in anticipation of losing some smaller red states. If he

wins Pennsylvania, it would keep McCain alive and scramble the

picture for Obama. And it would lead to grave pronouncements about

racism and the so-called Bradley effect of whites not being honest

about their preferences to pollsters. Surveys of voters leaving the

polls in the April primary found that 19 percent said that race

played an important role in their decision (as they delivered the

state to Sen. Hillary Rodham Clinton by nine percentage points over

Obama).

Missouri is another red state where the contest looks close. But

it frequently has voting problems that delay the count, so don't

expect right away to add this to one column or the other. When you

do get the results, Missouri is usually with the winner.

GO WEST: Colorado polls close at 9 p.m. This is a toss-up that

has been trending Democratic and is now leaning Obama. If he wins

here, watch for chatter of a Democratic realignment. Early voting

was big here -- an astounding 46 percent of voters cast their

ballots before Election Day.

THE CALL: Conventional wisdom suggests that if Obama wins, he

would do so early, because the polls in so many toss-up states --

Indiana, North Carolina, Ohio and Florida -- close early. Long lines

or problems could delay the count. Watch to see how skittish, or

not, the networks are about calling the states and the final

outcome: CBS has signaled it might project a preliminary winner at

8 p.m., but all news organizations have nightmares about the

debacle in 2000, when most made the wrong calls.

A TWO-SCREEN NIGHT: This is the first presidential election in

which the Web will be a major source of live information. This puts

even more pressure on the networks to remind viewers of their

resources and heft -- and to offer something different. Check out

the holograms on CNN. The networks are offering more bells and

whistles this year, but they are competing with their cable

channels and their own Web sites as well as those of other news

outlets, including nytimes.com.

A note of caution: If a network calls a state, you might be able

to extrapolate something. But if a network does not call a state,

don't read too much into it. It may be that there was something

wrong with the exit polls (anyone remember President John Kerry in

2004?).

NO MORE CHADS: Expect some confusion at the polls. About half of

all voters will cast their ballots differently from the way they

cast them in the last presidential election; most will use paper

ballots rather than those touchy touch-screen machines. Still,

heavy voter participation could delay poll closings and stall the

counting.

TURNOUT: Based on early voting, analysts are predicting (there

they go again) that more people will probably vote this year than

ever, in terms of numbers, and maybe at a higher rate.

The rate to beat in modern times is the 64 percent who voted in

1960. But the real record was set a century ago, when 66 percent

voted in a race that no doubt warms the heart of McCain: 1908 was

the year that William Howard Taft, the Republican, defeated the

golden-tongued Democrat, William Jennings Bryan (and a real

Socialist, Eugene V. Debs).

A momentous week for Washington began quietly on Wall Street, as

stocks barely budged Monday amid downbeat reports on the

construction, manufacturing and auto industries.

Sales at Ford, Chrysler and General Motors fell last month to

their worst levels in 25 years, while business in the manufacturing

sector shrank at the fastest rate in 26 years.

While stocks fluctuated in a narrow range for most of the day,

they stayed mostly flat as investors appeared wary of wading into

the market ahead of Tuesday's presidential election.

At the close, the Dow Jones industrial average was virtually

unchanged. It declined 5.18 points, to 9,319.83. The fall was

small, but it did break a two-day winning streak for the index. The

broader Standard &amp;amp; Poor's 500-stock index lost 2.45 points, to

966.3, and the Nasdaq composite index jumped 5.38 points, to

1,726.33.

In a report that caught economists by surprise, the

manufacturing index of the Institute for Supply Management fell to

38.9 in October from 43.5 in September, on a scale where readings

below 50 indicate contraction. It was the lowest reading since

September 1982.

New orders tapered off, inventories rose, and, in a worrying

sign for future growth, export demand fell sharply. Manufacturers

have been dependent on foreign orders for a constant stream of

revenue. With the dollar strengthening against the euro, businesses

fear a sharp drop in foreign orders.

A separate report from the Commerce Department showed that

construction spending dipped in September by 0.3 percent, while

residential construction extended its decline, down 27 percent from

a year ago.

In another sign of corporate woe, Circuit City, the consumer

electronics retailer, said Monday that it would close 155 stores as

it tries to return to profitability ahead of what many expect to be

a brutal holiday shopping season.

Oil prices fell $3.90, or 5.8 percent, to settle at $63.91 a

barrel in New York trading. Shares of energy companies declined,

with Dow component Chevron losing 1.2 percent.

European markets ended higher. The FTSE 100 index in London

gained 1.5 percent, the CAC 40 in Paris was up 1.2 percent and the

DAX in Frankfurt climbed 0.8 percent.

The Treasury's benchmark 10-year bill was up 13/32, at 100

22/32. The yield, which moves in the opposite direction from the

price, was at 3.91 percent, down from 3.96 percent late Friday.

Four years ago this month, hundreds of thousands

of people took to the streets of this capital city to take back an

election they saw as stolen. That outpouring, called the Orange

Revolution, brought fresh hopes for freedoms and for a release from

the country's Soviet past that few other former republics had ever

experienced.

The early promise of those days frayed in recent years, but

economically times were good, and the country always seemed to

manage.

But now, confronted by the global financial crisis, the new

Ukraine is facing the single biggest test of its stability, and its

leaders, by most accounts, seem to be at risk of failing.

Prime Minister Yulia V. Tymoshenko and President Viktor A.

Yushchenko, former political allies, are now locked in a power

struggle that has paralyzed the state, leaving it without a leader

at the time it most needs one.

Even as the West bends to help it, with the IMF pledging an

emergency $16.5 billion loan last month, it barely pulled itself

together to meet the conditions for the money. Yushchenko, intent

on getting rid of Tymoshenko, is trying to force early elections

for December.

Ukraine's paralysis raises difficult questions for the West. It

is a country of 46 million in a strategic spot between European

Union countries and Russia, and its stability is crucial to the

region.

Yushchenko has taken a combative approach toward Russia, which

demonstrated a new willingness to settle disputes by force in

Georgia this summer. He has pushed for Ukraine to join NATO, an

agenda that is not popular among Ukrainians, 17 percent of whom are

ethnic Russians. And he has vowed not to renew a contract that

allows Russia's Black Sea fleet to dock in a Ukrainian port.

For Ukrainians, the fears are more about their immediate future.

At one point last week, their currency hit its lowest point since

it was introduced in 1996, and securities that insure Ukrainian

government debt are trading at near-default levels.

But perhaps their greatest disappointment is over their leaders,

whose energies are focused not on ways to lift the country out of

crisis, but instead on what is widely seen as a selfish struggle

over power.

"People feel let down to the point of tears," Mostova said.

"Many feel they've been used. Ukraine had a chance for a

qualitative, civilized jump forward, but it wasn't taken."

Sales of new cars and trucks in the United States

plummeted in October to levels not seen in the auto industry in 25

years.

The stunning fall-off affected all automakers, as shaky consumer

confidence and the inability of many eager shoppers to get loans

because of tight credit drove sales down 31.9 percent during the

month compared with the same period last year.

The grim results -- particularly for General Motors, whose sales

dropped by 45 percent during the month -- raised new concerns about

the chances of survival for Detroit's troubled Big Three.

The auto figures add to the steady march of statistics that

suggest the broader economy is grinding to a slower pace. A measure

of overall manufacturing activity in the United States fell last

month to its lowest level in 26 years, according to data released

Monday. The Commerce Department also said that construction

spending fell for the eighth time in 10 months in September.

For the auto industry, analysts said the annualized sales rate

for the month was the worst recorded since 1983, and few saw any

hope for recovery in the industry before 2010.

The sharp decline will only further burden the Detroit

companies, and may increase pressure in Washington to provide

emergency financial aid to General Motors, Ford and Chrysler.

GM has been burning through an estimated $1 billion in cash each

month since middle of the year, although some analysts believe that

figure has grown substantially with the drastic drop-off in demand

for new vehicles.

"If they can't get any help, whether it's through the

government guaranteeing loans or getting a total bailout, we could

definitely see one of them going bankrupt," said Rebecca Lindland,

an analyst with IHA Global Insight.

GM, which is pursuing a merger with Chrysler, was recently

turned down by the Treasury Department for $10 billion in federal

assistance. All three Detroit automakers are hoping for the release

of $25 billion in low-interest loans from the Energy Department for

the development of more fuel-efficient vehicles.

Sales of new vehicles had been declining throughout the year

because of unstable gas prices, a weak economy and a tightening of

credit by banks and other lenders.

Automakers reported total sales of 838,000 vehicles during

October, the lowest total since January of 1992. However, the

annualized selling rate in that month -- a projection of full-year

sales at the current rate -- was a miserable 10.5 million vehicles,

the worst since February of 1983, according to Ward's Autodata.

Analysts said showroom traffic dried up during the month because

of consumer fears about unemployment, continued declines in housing

prices, and the aftershocks of the Wall Street financial crisis.

"Consumer confidence is the number one reason we are where we

are," said Jesse Toprak, chief market analyst for the

auto-research Web site Edmunds.com.

No automaker was spared from what Mark LaNeve, GM's head of

North American sales, called the "carnage" in the market.

Sales at Ford fell 30.2 percent, and at Chrysler by 34.9

percent. GM's 45 percent drop meant the U.S. market share of the

largest American automaker sank to just 20.1 percent.

The Japanese rivals of Detroit's Big Three hardly fared better,

despite having a greater selection of small, fuel-efficient

passenger cars in their product lineups.

Toyota's sales dropped 23 percent in October, while Honda's

sales plunged 25.2 percent, and Nissan's sales fell by 33 percent.

"One thing that's clear this month is that absolutely no one is

immune," said Lindland. "This is a situation that is really

dire."

GM, which has already lost $18.8 billion in the first six months

of this year, took the hardest hit. After pouring on sales

incentives in August and September, the company pulled back its

cash offers in October -- and paid the price.

GM's car sales were down by 34 percent, and its truck sales by

51 percent. Its total sales were just 170,000 vehicles, the first

time in recent memory that the automaker had sold less than 200,000

cars and trucks in a month, according to Toprak.

LaNeve, GM's sales chief for North America, added, "In my 27

years in the business, I have never seen a month like this."

GM's chairman, Rick Wagoner, has been leading the efforts by

Detroit to get some sort of financial aid package from Washington.

So far, he has been unable to persuade the Bush administration to

provide direct loans to the companies or inject capital into their

auto-finance arms.

There was no immediate comment Monday from Treasury officials on

whether the dismal October sales might free up aid from the $700

billion rescue fund for financial institutions.

GM officials said the October sales rate was, in its estimation,

the worst of the post-World War II era, given the nation's

population growth since the 1940s.

The company's top market analyst, Michael DiGiovanni, said the

lack of financing for automotive lenders is driving sales down to a

"severe recessionary" level. "At this juncture in U.S.

automotive history, it's highly critical for the government and the

banks to help us," he said.

Officials at other automakers said the downturn will probably

continue into next year. "We would not expect that we are at the

bottom yet," said Emily Kolinski Morris, Ford's senior economist.

LaNeve and other auto executives said the companies would

probably start their traditional year-end sales programs much

earlier than usual.

But cash offers to customers will not make up for the lack of

available credit. LaNeve said that about half of GM's 45 percent

sales decline in October could be attributed to people simply

unable to get a car loan.

Even automakers that have been offering big discounts stumbled

badly in October. Toyota, for example, has been providing zero

percent financing on the bulk of its lineup for a month, yet still

saw its sales tumble 23 percent.

"Buyers are in the driver's seat in a market that's awash with

good deals, strong values and new products," said Bob Carter,

general manager of the company's Toyota division.

Another Toyota executive, Irv Miller, said the industry hopes

that Tuesday's presidential election might remove some of the

uncertainty that consumers are feeling about the economy.

"Anything right now that takes any element of uncertainty out

of the marketplace, we think, will be beneficial," said Miller.

Besides a new round of incentives for consumers, the October

results will probably prompt automakers to make more production

cuts and lay off additional factory workers.

Both GM and Ford will release their third-quarter earnings later

this week, and are expected to report huge losses for the quarter.

As part of the announcements, both companies will probably reveal

plans to further reduce production at their North American plants.

But unlike previous cuts, the reductions might not be limited to

gas-guzzling SUV's or slow-selling pickup trucks. There are no

vehicles, according to one Ford executive, that have proven immune

from the slumping demand.

"There are no hot segments," said George Pipas, Ford's market

analyst. "And there really are no hot products."

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A top Iranian minister who admitted to faking his

university degree will face a motion of no confidence on Tuesday on

charges that he tried to bribe members of Parliament not to impeach

him.

Members of Parliament had questioned the qualifications of the

official, Interior Minister Ali Kordan, when President Mahmoud

Ahmadinejad nominated him for the post in August. The previous

minister had been dismissed because of his differences with the

president.

Kordan claimed to have been awarded an honorary doctorate from

Oxford University. But a parliamentary investigation found not only

that Kordan's Ph.D. was a fake, but also that he had neither the

bachelor's nor master's degrees he had claimed from an Iranian

university.

The scandal over his impeachment turned into a crisis on

Wednesday when a government official, Muhammad Abbassi, distributed

$5,000 checks among parliamentary ministers who had signed the

impeachment motion. The weekly news magazine Shahrvand Emrooz

reported that Abbassi gave the checks as a donation for the

legislators' local mosques, but asked them to sign two receipts.

One of those receipts was for a letter to the speaker of Parliament

asking for the impeachment to be dropped. Ali Asghar Zarei, a

legislator close to Ahmadinejad, slapped Abbassi in the face, and

the speaker expelled the official from Parliament. Later, Abbassi

was dismissed by Ahmadinejad, who said he would not bother to

appear in Parliament to defend his minister.

"Who cares even if Kordan's degree is fake?" the Islamic

Republic News Agency quoted Ahmadinejad as asking. "I have already

said that it is just a torn piece of paper because it was only an

honorary degree."

Ahmadinejad said he did not consider the impeachment legal

because Kordan had done nothing wrong. Kordan refused to resign

despite calls by legislators.

Analysts believe that the impeachment would undermine

Ahmadinejad's standing in the coming presidential elections in June

2009.

One member of Parliament, Avaz Heidarpour, wrote a public letter

to the president saying that he could have won millions of votes by

dismissing Kordan and that his support of the minister would

instead cost him those votes, the daily Etemad reported Monday. He

added that 200 of Parliament's 290 members, including many of

Ahmadinejad's supporters, were voting to dismiss Kordan.

Bone fragments found near the wreckage of the plane flown by the

adventurer Steve Fossett in the Sierra Nevada were confirmed to be

his, officials said Monday.

A California forensics laboratory matched DNA found in the bones

to that of Fossett, 63, who took off from a northern Nevada ranch

in a two-seat light plane on Sept. 3, 2007, and never returned.

Hundreds of planes and searchers on foot scoured 17,000 square

miles in the most extensive search for a missing aircraft in

American history for signs of Fossett or the aircraft. Last month,

a hiker in a remote area of the Inyo National Forest in

east-central California came across some of Fossett's belongings,

leading searchers to the crashed plane. The bones that were tested

were about a half-mile from the crash site, said Sheriff John P.

Anderson of Madera County.

"What his family has wanted for over a year now, what his

family has needed, is closure," Anderson said Monday in a

statement.

Fossett's wife, Peggy V. Fossett, issued a statement saying she

was "hopeful that the DNA identification puts a definitive end to

all of the speculation surrounding Steve's death." When neither

Fossett's plane nor his remains turned up for more than a year,

some Nevada officials speculated publicly that the wealthy aviator

might have faked his own death.

"This has been an incredibly difficult time for me, and I am

thankful to everyone who helped bring closure to this tragedy,"

said Peggy Fossett, who had a judge declare her husband legally

dead in February.

The National Transportation Safety Board is investigating the

crash's cause and is expected to release findings next year.

Fossett held numerous world records in land and air travel, and

was best known for being the first person to circumnavigate the

world in a hot-air balloon. His close friend Richard Branson said

Fossett might have been searching the area for dry lake beds in

which to challenge the world's land-speed record, his latest quest.

The Supreme Court agreed Monday to decide whether

people convicted of crimes have a constitutional right to test DNA

evidence that could prove their innocence.

The case pits the value of finality in criminal cases against

the possibility of proving an inmate's innocence long after trials

and appeals are concluded.

In April, the 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals, in San

Francisco, ordered prosecutors in Alaska to turn over DNA evidence

that had been used to convict William G. Osborne of kidnapping and

raping a prostitute. The appeals court said that biological

evidence -- hairs and semen -- could be subjected to more

sophisticated DNA testing than had been used by the prosecution to

implicate Osborne.

Prosecutors in Alaska, in their brief urging the Supreme Court

to hear the case, District Attorney's Office v. Osborne, No. 08-6,

said the appeals court had "created from whole cloth" a

constitutional right of post-conviction access to DNA evidence. The

prosecutors added that the court had made a separate mistake in

allowing a right of access to be pursued even if a conviction was

not being challenged in a pending case.

The federal government and 44 states -- but not Alaska -- have

laws allowing post-conviction DNA testing.

Osborne was convicted in 1994 based in part on DNA evidence that

had been subjected to relatively unsophisticated testing. It

indicated that biological evidence in the case had characteristics

consistent with the profiles of 15 percent of African-American men,

including Osborne. His lawyer decided not to pursue more

discriminating testing, fearing that it might further incriminate

his client.

Osborne was sentenced to 26 years in prison, with five years

suspended. He later confessed to the Alaska Board of Parole but has

since said he did so only in the hope of quicker release.

The Supreme Court has in earlier cases left open the question of

whether people convicted after fair trials may nonetheless file

federal claims based solely on evidence that they are in fact

innocent.

Barry Scheck, a director of the Innocence Project at Cardozo

School of Law, which represents Osborne, said he could not

understand why prosecutors in Alaska have opposed testing.

"The state of Alaska concedes that DNA testing could prove

William Osborne's innocence, while fighting his right to testing,"

Scheck said. "Why would anyone be afraid to learn the truth in

this case? There is no rational reason to deny DNA testing that

could prove innocence or confirm guilt."

Biennials are a virus that has spread across the

globe. Embraced by cities as tourist magnets and branding tools,

they often seem to be stocked by a standard jet set of curators,

artists, collectors and advisers who touch down, in slightly

different configurations, at nearly every stop.

New Orleans has joined the biennial rush with Prospect.1, the

sprawling exhibition that opened across the city over the weekend.

With a roster of nearly 80 artists, this show has an unsurprising

mix of good, bad and phoned-in art. But it is also a testing ground

with little in the way of way of superstars, big curatorial egos

and elaborately produced works, and none of the vast, chilling art

halls endemic in biennials.

It proves that biennials can be just as effective when pulled

off without bells, whistles, big bucks and the usual suspects.

Maybe even more effective, especially if the local cultural soil is

spectacularly fertile, and if there's a citywide need for uplift.

Under these conditions something magical can happen: a merging

of art and city into a shifting, healing kaleidoscope. Sometimes

this occurs in works that are unrelated to New Orleans, like the

glittery wall hangings El Anatsui fashions from the foil of liquor

bottles or Yasumasa Morimura's ranting, riveting video performance

as a series of 20th-century dictators.

Sometimes it occurs in site-specific works, like Nari Ward's

"Diamond Gym," a sculpture of a giant gem filled with

weight-lifting machines on view in the hulk of the historic Battle

Ground Baptist Church, ruined but still standing in the Lower Ninth

Ward.

Dan Cameron, a veteran curator and the founder of Prospect.1,

came to New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina and didn't want to

leave. He seems to have sensed that in the city's rawness a

different kind of biennial was waiting to break free. Because New

Orleans lacked an obvious site for the event or the means to build

one, Cameron has distributed his selections in about 30 locations:

several museums and alternative spaces, as well as public

buildings, old houses and empty lots stripped bare by the

hurricane.

As a result, you are rarely viewing artworks in isolation, but

rather measuring them against their contexts. On one level the show

is a lively competition between so-called site-specific art and

portable art objects whose meanings are expanded by their settings.

On another, it is a tour of the city's rich past, recent trauma and

often struggling arts organizations. And it didn't hurt that

Prospect.1 opened the weekend before the presidential election,

with everybody on pins and needles.

Again and again, New Orleans more than meets the biennial

halfway. Take the humbling, intoxicating beaded costumes of Victor

Harris, called "suits," on view at the New Orleans Museum of Art.

One of several local artists who adds heft to Prospect.1, Harris is

the Big Chief of the Fi-Yi-Yi, a group of Mardi Gras Indians, as

well as a practicing shaman. Profuse with hallucinatory patterns

and colors and evocations of African masks, his suits derail any

closed definition of art or artist, as does seeing him in them, in

action, on video and in photographs.

Made at the rate of one a year and unveiled during Mardi Gras,

the suits are worn whenever the occasion demands that Harris call

forth a spirit he has named Fi-Yi-Yi. The garments leave no doubt

about the high levels of creativity in a city where French, French

Canadian, African and American Indian cultures have mixed for

centuries.

In one of the most haunting matchups of art and site, works by

Rico Gatson, William Kentridge and the duo Bradley McCallum and

Jacqueline Tarry have been installed at the New Orleans African

American Museum, a beautiful Creole house on Governor Nicholls

Street. Working in drawing, photography and animation, the artists

explore often painful moments of racial violence, from World War I

to the civil rights era to the Rolling Stones' Altamont concert.

Some site-specific efforts are simply based on received ideas.

Takashi Horisaki's latex cast of a house wrecked by the storm, on

view at the Hefler Warehouse on Magazine Street, is inhabited less

by the ghosts of Katrina than by Robert Overby and Rachel

Whiteread's casts of domestic architecture.

Sebastian Preece's work is more effective, even if it borders on

urban archaeology. He has taken the concrete slabs and footings

from a house in the Lower Ninth Ward lost to the hurricane, sliced

them up and displayed them, bottom side up, on the water-damaged

lower floor of the Tekrema Center for Art and Culture. Some

resemble topographical maps, others abstract sculptures. On the

undamaged second floor the New York painter Adam Cvijanovic has

painted the walls with lavish, slightly oppressive vistas of

Louisiana swamps, exaggerating the traditions of wallpaper and

mural painting to suggest that nature is ever invasive and always

capable of eradicating any human effort.

Seeing Mark Bradford's enormous "Noah's Ark" provides a

firsthand experience of the eradication in the Lower Ninth Ward,

where nothing remains of many houses except lonely stoops and empty

lots. Made of old pieces of poster-plastered plywood, the ark rises

from one of these lots, forlorn yet indomitable. Its ancient hulk,

with its cacophony of decaying advertisements, seems to ridicule

the overwrought, seemingly marooned houses commissioned by the

actor Brad Pitt that dot the neighborhood.

Sometimes, touring the show, you can see hints of the city's

possible comeback. To reach the big, vampy photos by the French

artists Pierre et Gilles in a building that was a furniture store

before the hurricane, you must walk through a lively exhibition of

work by local artists -- one of several shows piggybacking on

Prospect.1 -- as well as the front desk of a police precinct.

There are some unfortunate miscalculations. The talented

Katharina Grosse has sprayed orange and yellow paint all over the

facade and front yard of a dilapidated house in the Lower Ninth. It

may be intended to symbolize the fire next time, but it seems to

humiliate one of the storm's survivors.

The effect is more organic in a double-screen video by the

Brazilian artist Rosangela Renno, which can be seen in the French

Quarter in a house recently acquired by the Historic New Orleans

Collection, a museum and research society. The video shows older

men and women, black and white, from the New Orleans area

ostensibly discussing Cajun cooking. The real subject is the bonds

and boundaries among the races in New Orleans, as well as a

potential loss of identity should the Cajun language and customs

wither away.

Several works pull back to show the larger picture, reminding us

that the tragedy of Hurricane Katrina is not unique. These include

Marcel Odenbach's video meditation on the Rwandan massacres and

Fiona Tan's on the vulnerable flood plains of the Netherlands; both

works are being screened at the Contemporary Arts Center. At the

New Orleans Center for Creative Arts, a high school, the Bulgarian

artist Nedko Solakov has covered the walls of one classroom with a

tragicomedy, mostly handwritten, suggesting that both Hurricane

Katrina and a deadly flood in Bulgaria resulted from the wrath of

the competing ghosts of two 13th-century Bulgarian kings.

Site-specific in the national, temporal sense is an elaborate,

viciously on-target installation by Stephen G. Rhodes depicting a

messy, deserted campaign headquarters post-election. Strewn with

balloons, voting machines, ballots and doctored videos of the robot

figures that play the American presidents at Disney World, it only

intensified the pins-and-needles atmosphere of the opening weekend.

Prospect.1 will remain on view until Jan. 18, two days before the

new president takes office.

The final full day of campaigning was a blur of rallies, plane

rides and meet-and-greet encounters for the candidates, and at

every step of the way four New York Times reporters were there to

chronicle the hectic final push. The following are dispatches from

Elisabeth Bumiller on the McCain campaign, Jeff Zeleny on the Obama

campaign, John Broder on the Biden campaign, and Julie Bosman on

the Palin campaign.

8:40 a.m.

Sen. Barack Obama leaves his hotel in Jacksonville, Fla., where

he had arrived seven hours before after a late-night flight from

Ohio. As he went to the gym for a morning workout, he did not say

anything at the time, but he had received word around 8 a.m. that

his grandmother, Madelyn Dunham, had died after a battle with

cancer. He later called Dunham "a quiet hero" for her central

role in raising him.

9:30 a.m.

Well, here we are in Tampa, Fla., at Sen. John McCain's first

stop on a seven-state, 20-hour odyssey across America. He is

already running a half hour late. Not a good sign. "Hurry up!

Hurry up!" yell Secret Service agents at reporters scurrying from

the campaign plane into the waiting motorcade.

Within minutes, McCain arrives at his rally at Raymond James

Stadium, the home of the Tampa Bay Buccaneers and a Barack

Obama-sized site with a 65,000-person capacity. McCain is not

actually in the stadium, which sits empty on a warm Florida

morning, but across the street in the parking lot. The crowd here

is small, in the hundreds, but McCain is launching into his stump

speech as if he were addressing the Rose Bowl, although with a bit

of sleep in his voice. He got to his hotel in Coral Gables, the

Biltmore, at 1:30 a.m., after a midnight rally in Miami.

"With this kind of enthusiasm, this kind of intensity, we will

win Florida!" he shouts. He seems to be waking up. Gov. Charlie

Crist of Florida is here, as is Sen. Mel Martinez, also of Florida.

McCain runs through a truncated version of his stump speech.

Obama cannot be trusted to run the country, he will raise your

taxes, kill jobs, and so on.

Wow, now he is already winding up. "Fight for a new direction

for our country!" And "fight to clean up the mess of

corruption!"

He is already done. His speech clocked in at a little more than

13 minutes. This might be a record.

11:03 a.m.

Sen. Claire McCaskill of Missouri steps to the microphone to

introduce Sen. Joe Biden in Lees Summit, Mo., and notes that the

Republican vice-presidential nominee, Gov. Sarah Palin of Alaska,

is also in Missouri this morning, at a rally in Jefferson City.

The crowd boos. McCaskill hushes them. "As Barack Obama says,

'Don't boo. Vote."'

McCaskill then adds, speaking of Biden, "Barack Obama chose the

very best person in the country who could be president of the

United States, and, well, let's just say, John McCain didn't."

11:15 a.m.

For more than three hours, supporters have been filling the

seats of the hall in anticipation of Obama's visit to Veteran's

Memorial Auditorium in Jacksonville, Fla., not far from the banks

of the St. Johns River. Then the candidate arrives.

"I have just one word for you, Florida: Tomorrow," Obama said,

drawing huge bursts of applause. "We are one day away from

changing the United States of America."

With McCain already well into his day, was Obama sleeping in

this morning? No, his aides say.

After arriving at the Hyatt in downtown Jacksonville in the

early morning hours, he emerged from the hotel at 8:40 a.m. -- yes,

that was the Democratic nominee in a ball cap and black sweat pants

-- and took a short ride to a Gold's Gym. For 45 minutes, he worked

out.

When he returned to the hotel at 9:28 a.m., he went into

seclusion. Aides said he had breakfast, made phone calls and met

with a few advisers who were briefing him on his day, which

includes rallies in Jacksonville, in North Carolina and in

Virginia.

Why only three states for Obama, when McCain is racing to seven

over the next 20 hours? First, aides said, the Obama rallies are

held in large arenas, not airport hangars, so they take more time.

And second, they said, the rallies are intended to sign up

supporters to help on Election Day, so it is important to have a

big crowd, rather than just a quick stop for the local cameras.

11:26 a.m.

Yes, Obama is using a teleprompter for his speech in

Jacksonville, but apparently he is not reading it carefully. About

10 minutes into his address, Obama was talking about the television

commercials that Republicans have been showing against him.

"Here in Ohio," Obama began. He paused momentarily, as people

in the crowd shouted at him. Realizing his mistake, he quickly

corrected himself. "Florida!"

"I've been traveling too much," Obama said, before continuing

with his remarks.

11:50 a.m.

Stop No. 2 for McCain, still some 20 minutes behind schedule.

Tennessee's electoral votes are not up for grabs in this reliably

red state, but McCain has descended into Blountsville in this far

northeastern corner to reach into television markets in

southwestern Virginia and a bit of North Carolina, two states he

desperately needs to win.

We are in an airplane hangar and the crowd is roaring and big,

in the thousands. McCain's campaign plane is parked right behind

him as a backdrop for all the television pictures. The day is

gorgeous, sunny and crisp. The loudspeakers are terrible.

"This microphone is brought to you by the Democratic National

Committee," McCain intones, to laughter.

And here he is, Joe the Plumber. Big boos from the crowd as

McCain says, yet again, that Obama wants to "spread the wealth

around." And "he's in the far left lane of American politics."

And he has never taken on the leaders of his own party. And he said

he would sit down unconditionally with dictators. And so on. McCain

is pumped up.

"The Mac is back!" he shouts.

On the plane from Tampa, somebody asked Mark Salter, McCain's

close adviser, how he planned to get through the day. "Crystal

meth," he replied, not missing a beat. "Me, personally, that's

how I'm going to do it."

He was kidding. But he did not even to bother to say he was off

the record.

12:36 p.m.

The Palin entourage just arrived in Jefferson City, right in the

center of Missouri. We are at a rally staged on the steps of the

state Capitol, on a dazzling, sunny 70-degree afternoon. As the

reporters are ushered to their workspace, a few people in the crowd

throw out a few stray heckles. "Come on, reporters, why don't you

do a good job for once!" an elderly woman called out. "Booo,

liberals!" another man shouted.

There is a large crowd here, but nowhere near the estimate of

20,000 people that a campaign staff member just told reporters.

There is little sign of McCain -- most of the signs say "Country

First" or "Reform, Prosperity, Peace." A group of women wearing

T-shirts that say "Sometimes it takes a woman to clean house" are

chanting "Sarah! Sarah!" and the song "Everyday People," by Sly

and the Family Stone," a Palin favorite, is playing.

Sounding hoarse, Palin introduces Hank Williams Jr., who

delivers an off-key rendition of the national anthem and a song

about the "left-wing liberal media," which makes the crowd go

wild.

Palin delivers a 25-minute speech, attacking Obama for his tax

proposals, and making a passing reference to the weather. "The sun

is shining on his plans for where he wants to take America," she

said of Obama. "His whole tax plan is so phony that it's already

starting to unravel."

She pointed out a sign in the crowd: "Like that sign -- not just

drill, baby, drill and mine, baby, mine, but vote, baby, vote!"

1:50 p.m.

Stop No. 3 McCain, in Moon Township, Pa. This is one of the

great datelines. In fact it is very much of this world -- the site

of the Pittsburgh airport and conveniently located in Western

Pennsylvania, home to all those pro-gun, working-class voters that

McCain is trying to call his own. Rep. John P. Murtha, a Democrat

who represents the region, went so far last month as to call it a

"racist area," a remark the McCain campaign rejected.

We are in another airplane hangar, crowd not so big as before.

McCain just started speaking and already he is shouting that it is

time "to fight to get out economy out of the ditch." That's our

cue, time to go. He has got this aerobic speechifying down pat.

Forgot to mention that at the last stop he brought up Tina Fey's

impersonation of his running mate, Palin, on "Saturday Night

Live." McCain was on the show himself on Saturday and met Fey.

"I really believe that Sarah Palin and Tina Fey were separated

at birth, I really do," McCain told the last crowd. "I really

do."

2:30 p.m.

Obama hustled up the stairs to his campaign plane, boarding a

53-minute flight for Charlotte, N.C. Since his rally ended more

than two hours ago, Obama has conducted a series of radio

interviews, including one with Ann Compton of ABC News.

Here are highlights:

Compton: Best moment of campaign?

Obama: "The Iowa caucus night was, was wonderful."

Compton: Was there a worst moment? Or what keeps you up at

night?

Obama: "The night we lost New Hampshire was tough. We had been

10 points up according to the polls going into Election Day and

lost by 2, and that's one of the reasons why we take nothing for

granted in this race and we don't believe those polls."

3:01 p.m.

Biden, ordinarily the most superstitious of politicians, can

smell victory.

"There's something in the air, guys," he told a gaggle of

reporters on his plane shortly before landing in Columbus, Ohio,

for the first of two appearances in the state this afternoon.

You can see the confidence in Biden's smile and his new

accessibility to the reporters who have accompanied him for two

months. He spoke to them for 20 minutes on his plane, the first

time he has done so since early September. He said he had been

avoiding his press pack since one news organization reported some

comments he thought were off the record.

3:55 p.m.

Stop No. 4 for McCain, the Indianapolis airport. The tarmac is

sunny and pleasant; beautiful golden late-afternoon light. But

McCain's presence here on the eve of Election Day means he is still

battling Obama's incursions into this longtime red state. Not great

news for him, but polls show him tied.

Adding to the troubles, there is something wrong with the

speaker system. Again? He repeats his dig about the microphone

being "brought to you courtesy of the Democratic National

Committee."

He is hard to hear, and on top of that, he is beginning to sound

like he has a large frog in his throat. A big portion of McCain's

campaign plane has a spectacular cold, and it sounds like the

candidate has caught it himself.

"He's getting a little scratchy," Salter said. "Only has to

do it three more times today."

4:15 p.m.

Obama steps off his plane in Charlotte without talking to

reporters.

4:30 p.m.

Obama announces through a statement that his grandmother died

about 12 hours earlier. He waited to make the public announcement,

his aides said, to get through a portion of his campaign day.

5 p.m.

Obama tossed a tiny red and blue football into the air as he

made calls to North Carolina voters. On the fifth call, he turned

his back to cameras as he talked about home health care, saying:

"My grandmother was able to stay in a home all the way until

recently."

5:48 p.m. (Mountain Time)

Stop No. 5 for the McCain campaign, Roswell, N.M. We are here in

the supposed land of space aliens on warm a desert night. Another

airport rally, another rendition of the speech.

"We need to win New Mexico tomorrow!" McCain hollers. "Get

your neighbors to the polls. I need your vote!"

Now here is something really different: Out of the blue, McCain

shouts out: "I am pleased to announce that I have received the

alien endorsement!"

This gets a huge laugh. There are two more stops to go.

The 2008 race for the White House that comes to an end on

Tuesday fundamentally upended the way presidential campaigns are

fought in America, a legacy that has almost been lost with all the

attention being paid to the battle between John McCain and Barack

Obama.

It has rewritten the rules on how to reach voters, raise money,

organize supporters, manage the news media, track and mold public

opinion, and wage -- and withstand -- political attacks, including

many carried by blogs that did not exist four years ago. It has

challenged the consensus view of the American electoral

battleground, suggesting that Democrats can at a minimum be

competitive in states and regions that had long been Republican

strongholds.

The size and makeup of the electorate may be changed because of

Democratic efforts to register and turn out new African-American,

Hispanic and young voters. This shift could have long-lasting

ramifications for what both parties do to build enduring

coalitions, especially if intensive and technologically driven

voter turnout programs succeed in getting more people registered

and to the polls.

Efforts by Democrats to win the allegiance of demographic groups

like African-Americans, Hispanics and young people could have

long-lasting ramifications for what both parties do to build

enduring coalitions, especially if intensive and technologically

driven voter turnout programs succeed in getting more people

registered and to the polls.

"I think we'll be analyzing this election for years as a

seminal, transformative race," said Mark McKinnon, a senior

adviser to President Bush's campaigns in 2000 and 2004. "The year

campaigns leveraged the Internet in ways never imagined. The year

we went to warp speed. The year the paradigm got turned upside down

and truly became bottom up instead of top down."

To a considerable extent, Republicans and Democrats say, this is

a result of the way that the Obama campaign sought to understand

and harness the Internet (and other forms of so-called new media)

to organize supporters and to reach voters who no longer rely

primarily on information from newspapers and television. The

platforms ranged from YouTube, which did not exist in 2004, to the

cell phone text messages that the campaign was sending out to

supporters on Monday to remind them to vote.

"We did some very innovative things on the data side, and we

did some Internet," said Sara Taylor, who was the White House

political director during Bush's re-election campaign. "But only

40 percent of the country had broadband back then. You now have

people who don't have home telephones anymore. And Obama has done a

tremendous job of waging a campaign through the new media

challenge. I don't know about you, but I see an Obama Internet ad

every day. And I have for six months."

Even more crucial to the way this campaign has transformed

politics has been Obama's success at using the Internet to build a

huge network of contributors that permitted him to raise enough

money -- after declining to participate in the public financing

system -- to expand the map and compete in traditionally Republican

states.

No matter who wins, Republicans and Democrats say, Obama's

efforts in places like Indiana, North Carolina and Virginia --

organizing and advertising to voters who previously had little

exposure to Democratic ideas and candidates -- will force future

candidates to think differently.

"The great impact that this election will have for the future

is that it killed public financing for all time," said McCain's

chief campaign strategist, Steve Schmidt. "That means the next

Republican presidential campaign, hopefully a re-election for John

McCain, will need to be a billion-dollar affair to challenge what

the Democrats have accomplished with the use of the Internet and

viral marketing to communicate and raise money."

"It was a profound leap forward technologically," Schmidt

added. "Republicans will have to figure out how to compete with

this in order to become competitive again at a national level and

in House and Senate races."

This transformation did not happen this year alone. In 2000,

Bush's campaign, lead by Karl Rove and Ken Mehlman, pioneered the

use of micro-targeting to find and appeal to potential new

supporters. In 2004, the presidential campaign of Howard Dean was

widely credited with being the first to see the potential power of

the Internet to raise money and sign up volunteers, a platform that

Obama tremendously expanded.

"They were Apollo 11, and we were the Wright Brothers," said

Joe Trippi, the manager of Dean's campaign.

Terry Nelson, political director of the Bush campaign in 2004,

said that the evolution was challenging campaign operatives who

worked for every presidential campaign, and would continue in 2012

and beyond.

"We are in the midst of a fundamental transformation of how

campaigns are run," Nelson said. "And it's not over yet."

The changes go beyond what Obama did and reflect a cultural

shift in voters, producing an audience that is at once better

informed, more skeptical and, from reading blogs, sometimes

trafficking in rumors or suspect information. As a result, this new

electorate tends to be more questioning of what they are told by

campaigns and often uses the Web to do their own fact-checking.

"You do focus groups and people say, 'I saw that ad and I went

to this Web site to check it,' " said David Plouffe, the Obama

campaign manager. "They are policing the campaigns."

Schmidt said the speed and diversity of the news cycle had

broken down the traditional way that voters received information

and had given campaigns opportunities, and challenges, in trying to

manage the news.

"The news cycle is hyper-accelerated and driven by new players

on the landscape, like Politico and Huffington Post, which cause

competition for organizations like The AP where there is a high

premium on being first," he said. "This hyper-accelerates a cable

news cycle driven to conflict and drama and trivia."

Among the biggest changes this year is the intense new interest

in politics, reflected in jumps in voter registration numbers,

early voting and attendance at Obama's rallies. To no small extent,

that is a reflection of the unusual interest stirred by his

campaign. Thus, it is hardly clear that a future candidate who

appropriated all the innovations that Obama and his campaign tried

would necessarily have the same success as Obama.

"Without the candidate who excites people," Plouffe said,

"you can have the greatest strategy and machinery and it won't

matter."

Trippi, who worked for one of Obama's rivals in the Democratic

primary campaign, John Edwards, said: "It has all come together

for one guy, Barack Obama. But now that it's happened, it's a

permanent change."

A campaign waged under the specter of war

and financial crisis drew to an anxious finish on Monday as Sens.

Barack Obama and John McCain raced across nine states and asked

voters on both sides to discount polls and predictions on the

closing day of a two-year pursuit of the presidency.

Obama surrendered the race to the judgment of the American

people as he told a booming crowd here, "Now, it's all about who

wants it more, who believes in it more." McCain sought to motivate

Republicans who worried aloud that it could be a bleak election,

declaring, "The Mac is back!"

In the final hours of his second bid for the presidency, McCain

dashed through Republican-leaning states from Florida to Indiana

and New Mexico to Nevada. He stopped in Tennessee, hoping to reach

voters in North Carolina and Virginia, and he swung by

Pennsylvania, the only Democratic state of the day. He was set to

return home for a rally in Arizona in the small hours of the night.

Obama, confident in his standing on Democratic terrain, devoted

his final day of campaigning by trying to push Florida, North

Carolina and Virginia into his column. He pressed ahead after he

awoke to news that his grandmother, the woman chiefly responsible

for his upbringing, had died overnight in Hawaii.

The election eve travels of both men, as well as their running

mates, offered a viewer's guide of the states whose outcomes will

loom large in settling who will become the nation's 44th president

after the polls close on Tuesday.

The candidates' last-minute efforts were amplified by their

muscular ground organizations and unprecedented advertising

barrages across all modes of technology. The Obama campaign tested

its text messaging program to remind voters, particularly young

ones, to go to the polls. The McCain campaign activated its

automated phone system to check in with any voter who has shown an

interest in the Republican ticket.

In their pitches to voters, both candidates struck optimistic

chords, delivering a few gracious words about their opponent and

offering their own pledges to change Washington. Yet neither man

refrained from reprising the piercing criticisms that have become

the soundtrack for the five-month general election fight.

"At the end of this long race, I want to congratulate him on

the tough race that he has fought," Obama said, speaking of McCain

during a morning speech here at Veterans Memorial Auditorium. "He

can point to a few items where he has broke with President Bush,

but when it comes from the central issue of this election, the

plain truth is John McCain has stood with George Bush."

McCain delivered a truncated version of his stump speech at each

stop but grew hoarser as the day progressed. His staff said he

appeared to be catching the bad cold that had waylaid many

passengers in his campaign plane. By late afternoon in Indiana, he

was using throat lozenges to try to get through the rest of the

marathon.

"My friends, you know that I've been fighting for this country

since I was 17 years old and I have the scars to prove it!" he

told a rally in Indianapolis as he battled to prevent Obama from

taking a state that has not backed a Democratic presidential

candidate since 1964.

Four hours later, McCain dropped into the supposed home of space

aliens, Roswell, N.M. "I am pleased to announce that I have

received the alien endorsement," he told the crowd, to an uproar

of laughter.

As the contest headed to its finish, an air of normality

surrounded Obama. There was no rush of friends or advisers on the

plane for the final flights. His demeanor, at least from his public

appearances, seemed the same as it has for months. His schedule of

rallies was no more aggressive, or different, than at any point in

the general election.

Only a few close advisers knew that at 8 a.m. he had received

word from his sister that his 86-year-old grandmother, Madelyn

Dunham, had died. When he arrived at a rally, he spoke briefly

about the woman whom he visited late last month in Honolulu during

a brief suspension of his campaign.

"She has gone home," Obama said, his voice tinged with

emotion. "She died peacefully in her sleep with my sister at her

side, so there's great joy instead of tears."

McCain, as he sprinted through seven states, warned voters at

every stop of the differences between the outlooks and policies of

the Republican and Democratic tickets. He didn't dally, spending 30

minutes at each stop, with his argument boiled down to fit the

frenzied moment.

"Sen. Obama's running to punish the successful," McCain said

at his opening stop in Tampa. "I'm running to make everyone

successful."

At each stop, the drill for McCain was nearly the same: He raced

out of his plane, walked a few steps to an airport hangar, told the

crowd he had to win Florida, Virginia and Pennsylvania and

delivered a truncated version of his speech.

The mood on the McCain campaign plane was upbeat and punchy

throughout the day as McCain's advisers continued to hammer their

belief that the polls were tightening and that McCain's chances of

winning the presidency were difficult but not impossible. "Winning

270 is right in the cards," McCain's campaign manager, Rick Davis,

insisted to reporters around midnight on Sunday, as McCain's plane

headed from New Hampshire to Florida.

McCain drew stirring applause from his crowds -- as well as jeers

directed at the Democratic rival -- when he said Obama wanted to

"spread the wealth around."

"He's in the far left lane of American politics," McCain said.

The barnstorming rallies, the dawn-to-dusk television

commercials and the armies of volunteers flooding those

neighborhoods belied the reality of how America elects its

president: with millions of ballots have already cast though early

voting.

In Ohio, voting lines looped in and out of doors, upstairs and

around corners at the registrar's office in Columbus, with a record

number of voters adding their ballots to those that have been

collected for nearly a month. Early signs point skyward for the

Democrats, who outnumbered Republicans by more than two to one.

In Florida, about 37 percent of registered voters have already

cast their ballots, state officials said, setting the stage for

potentially record-breaking turnout.

In Virginia, where more restrictions are placed on early voting,

the state has processed 465,962 absentee ballots. And more than

300,000 Virginians voted in person by an absentee ballot. That

contrasts with the 2004 total of 222,059 absentee ballots cast.

Worried about the outlook in Virginia, where a Democrat hasn't

won the presidential race in more than four decades, McCain's

campaign sued the state's election board on Monday. They asserted

that the absentee ballots weren't mailed on time to military

members serving overseas.

Obama selected Virginia as the site of his final rally, a sign

Democrats are waging an all-out push for the state that is seen as

a barometer for the fight with McCain. In Virginia and around the

country, both sides are keeping a close eye on the weather

conditions for Election Day.

"I think if it rained mud, it won't make a difference," said

Douglas Wilder, the former governor of Virginia, who was the

state's first black chief executive. "They're coming out, trust

me, they're coming out."

A top Iranian minister who admitted to faking his

university degree will face a motion of no confidence on Tuesday on

charges that he tried to bribe members of Parliament not to impeach

him.

Members of Parliament had questioned the qualifications of the

official, Interior Minister Ali Kordan, when President Mahmoud

Ahmadinejad nominated him for the post in August. The previous

minister had been dismissed because of his differences with the

president.

Kordan claimed to have been awarded an honorary doctorate from

Oxford University. But a parliamentary investigation found not only

that Kordan's Ph.D. was a fake, but also that he had neither the

bachelor's nor master's degrees he had claimed from an Iranian

university.

The scandal over his impeachment turned into a crisis on

Wednesday when a government official, Muhammad Abbassi, distributed

$5,000 checks among parliamentary ministers who had signed the

impeachment motion. The weekly news magazine Shahrvand Emrooz

reported that Abbassi gave the checks as a donation for the

legislators' local mosques, but asked them to sign two receipts.

One of those receipts was for a letter to the speaker of Parliament

asking for the impeachment to be dropped. Ali Asghar Zarei, a

legislator close to Ahmadinejad, slapped Abbassi in the face, and

the speaker expelled the official from Parliament. Later, Abbassi

was dismissed by Ahmadinejad, who said he would not bother to

appear in Parliament to defend his minister.

"Who cares even if Kordan's degree is fake?" the Islamic

Republic News Agency quoted Ahmadinejad as asking. "I have already

said that it is just a torn piece of paper because it was only an

honorary degree."

Ahmadinejad said he did not consider the impeachment legal

because Kordan had done nothing wrong. Kordan refused to resign

despite calls by legislators.

Analysts believe that the impeachment would undermine

Ahmadinejad's standing in the coming presidential elections in June

2009.

This sweltering Amazon outpost is a border

town on the move -- on two motorized wheels, that is.

During the afternoon rush hour, Tabatinga's main avenue is a sea

of scooters and motorcycles. Whole families pile onto a single

scooter, even families of five: husband, wife and three children.

Mothers breastfeed infants while fathers navigate a road nearly

uncluttered by traffic signals.

With more than 15,000 motorbikes and only 47,000 people,

Tabatinga resembles a small version of Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam,

another chaotic place where cars take a distant back seat as the

preferred mode of transportation.

"I have never seen a place with so many motorbikes," said

Sabrina D'Assumpcao, a resident of Rio de Janeiro who was visiting

her husband, a military officer, at the army base here recently.

"It is practically a city run entirely by motorbikes."

Tabatinga owes much of its moto-obsession to its location along

Brazil's extreme western frontier. Nestled alongside Colombia and

just across a narrow river from Peru, the town has evolved in the

last quarter century from a military town into a hub of

cross-border commerce.

The open border with Leticia, Colombia, allows Brazilians to buy

Japanese-made motorbikes there for about $2,000, half of what they

cost in Brazil. Chinese-made models, which are less popular with

residents, can be had for as little as $900 on the river island of

Santa Rosa, in Peru, said Ulianov Mejia, the manager of the Yamaha

motorbike store in Tabatinga.

"Here you can have breakfast in Brazil, lunch in Colombia and

dinner in Peru because it's a triple border," said Mejia, a

Colombian who is married to a Brazilian woman and has been living

here since 2001.

In recent years the relative strength of the Brazilian economy

and its currency, the real, has made it easier for Brazilians to

afford motorbikes. Easy credit terms allow people to pay in up to

24 installments, and most people walk out of a store with a bike

after putting down just 30 percent, Mejia said. For some, it can be

even easier than that.

"If a fisherman from the river doesn't have documents, doesn't

have a checking account, but if I know him, know where he lives,

know his family, I will sell to him without a problem," Mejia

said.

The ease of acquiring a motorbike has helped fuel the growth of

the city, which has doubled in population in the past 20 years,

surging past neighboring Leticia, which has about 35,000 residents

and about 10,000 motorbikes.

"There are families that have six or seven motorbikes," said

Joel Santos de Lima, Tabatinga's mayor. "They are cheap and easy

to buy, and they help keep the economy moving."

For those who cannot afford their own motorbikes, Tabatinga

boasts 500 two-wheeled moto taxis run by four companies. For one

and a half reals, about 70 cents, a moto taxi will take you

anywhere in the city.

The drivers are the model of efficiency and reliability, said

Waldery Nobre Mesquita, a doctor who uses them daily to see

patients. By law the moto taxis are allowed to carry only one

passenger, said Anderson de Souza, Tabatinga's public

transportation coordinator.

But that seems to be where the rules stop and the lawlessness

begins. Tabatinga does not require motorbikes to be registered or

residents to wear helmets. The process of applying for a license

plate and insuring a motorbike is laden with bureaucracy, and costs

about $500, more than most residents can afford, de Souza said.

Since a helmet law is enforced across the Colombian border in

Leticia, drivers stop at the border and pick up a visorless helmet

from stands along the street. Vendors charge 75 cents for the

rented helmets, which must be returned at the border.

In Tabatinga the issue is more complicated. City officials here

worry that the border's reputation for violent drug trafficking

makes anyone who wears a helmet a potential suspect.

"Where you have trafficking, you have death," de Souza said.

"When assassins want to kill, they use helmets so they can't be

identified."

For that reason, Tabatinga informally prohibits the wearing of

helmets on motorbikes, though it is not a written law, he said.

That makes matters even trickier when it rains -- and rain can be

torrential in the Amazon.

Most moto taxi drivers simply don a rain slicker and continue

working, some wearing helmets. Rain is the one time when actual

four-wheeled taxis get a chance to get in the game. But good luck

finding one without calling first.

Trying to cement the area's motorbike culture, a decade ago

Mejia and a friend tried to line up bikes stretching for five

kilometers, just over three miles, from Tabatinga into Leticia. A

representative from the Guinness Book of World Records showed up to

witness the world-record attempt, he said. But in the end the duo

could not pull it off.

"If it had been something organized by the city, with

resources, we could have gotten into the book," Mejia said.

"Outside of Asia no one could beat Tabatinga and Leticia for

having more motorbikes, no one."

Conservative commentators had a lot of fun mocking Sen. Barack

Obama's use of the phrase, "the fierce urgency of now."

Noting that it had originated with the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther

King Jr., Obama made it a cornerstone of his early campaign

speeches.

Conservatives kicked the phrase around like a soccer ball.

"The fierce urgency of now," they would say, giggling. What

does it mean?

Well, if your house is on fire and your family is still inside,

that's an example of the fierce urgency of now.

Something like that is the case in the United States right now

as Americans go to the polls in what is probably the most important

presidential election since World War II. A mind-boggling series of

crises is threatening not just the short-term future but the very

viability of the nation.

The economy is sinking into quicksand. The financial sector,

guardian of the nation's wealth, is leaning on the crutch of a

trillion-dollar taxpayer bailout. The giant auto companies -- for

decades the high-powered, gas-guzzling, exhaust-spewing pride of

American industry -- are on life support.

As the holiday shopping season approaches, the nation is

hemorrhaging jobs, the value of the family home has plunged,

retirement plans are shrinking like ice cubes on a hot stove and

economists are telling us the recession has only just begun.

It's in that atmosphere that voters Tuesday will be choosing

between the crisis-management skills of Obama, who has enlisted Joe

Biden as aide-de-camp, and those of Sen. John McCain, who is riding

to the rescue with Sarah Palin and Joe the Plumber in tow.

As important as this choice has become, the election is just a

small first step. What Americans really have to decide is what kind

of country they want.

Right now the United States is a country in which wealth is

funneled, absurdly, from the bottom to the top. The richest 1

percent of Americans now holds close to 40 percent of all the

wealth in the nation and maintains an iron grip on the levers of

government power.

This is not only unfair, but self-defeating. The United States

cannot thrive with its fabulous wealth concentrated at the top and

the middle class on its knees. (No one even bothers to talk about

the poor anymore.) How to correct this imbalance is one of the

biggest questions facing the country.

The United States is also a country in which blissful ignorance

is celebrated, and intellectual excellence (the key to 21st century

advancement) is not just given short shrift, but is ridiculed.

Paris Hilton and Britney Spears are cultural icons. The average

American watches television a mind-numbing 4 1/2 hours a day.

At the same time, our public school system is plagued with some

of the highest dropout rates in the industrialized world. Math and

science? Forget about it. Too tough for these TV watchers, or too

boring, or whatever.

"When I compare our high schools with what I see when I'm

traveling abroad," said Bill Gates, "I am terrified for our work

force of tomorrow."

The point here is that as we approach the end of the first

decade of the 21st century, the United States is in deep, deep

trouble. Yet instead of looking for creative, 21st-century

solutions to these enormous problems, too many of our so-called

leaders are behaving like clowns, or worse -- spouting garbage in

the pubic sphere that hearkens back to the 1940s and '50s.

Thoughtful, well-educated men and women are denounced as elites,

and thus the enemies of ordinary Americans. Attempts to restore a

semblance of fiscal sanity to a government that has been looted

with an efficiency that would have been envied by the mob, are

derided as subversive -- the work of socialists, Marxists,

Communists.

In 2008!

In North Carolina, Sen. Elizabeth Dole, a conservative

Republican, is in a tough fight for re-election against a

Democratic state senator, Kay Hagan. So Dole ran a television ad

that showed a close-up of Hagan's face while the voice of a

different woman asserts, "There is no God!"

Americans have to decide if they want a country that tolerates

this kind of debased, backward behavior. Or if they want a country

that aspires to true greatness -- a country that stands for more

than the mere rhetoric of equality, freedom, opportunity and

justice.

That decision will require more than casting a vote in one

presidential election. It will require a great deal of reflective

thought and hard work by a committed citizenry. The great promise

of America hinges on a government that works, openly and honestly,

for the broad interests of the American people, as opposed to the

narrow benefit of the favored, wealthy few.

By all means, vote today. But that is just the first step toward

meaningful change.

The 2008 race for the White House that comes to an end on

Tuesday fundamentally upended the way presidential campaigns are

fought in America, a legacy that has almost been lost with all the

attention being paid to the battle between John McCain and Barack

Obama.

It has rewritten the rules on how to reach voters, raise money,

organize supporters, manage the news media, track and mold public

opinion, and wage -- and withstand -- political attacks, including

many carried by blogs that did not exist four years ago. It has

challenged the consensus view of the American electoral

battleground, suggesting that Democrats can at a minimum be

competitive in states and regions that had long been Republican

strongholds.

The size and makeup of the electorate may be changed because of

Democratic efforts to register and turn out new African-American,

Hispanic and young voters. This shift could have long-lasting

ramifications for what both parties do to build enduring

coalitions, especially if intensive and technologically driven

voter turnout programs succeed in getting more people registered

and to the polls.

Efforts by Democrats to win the allegiance of demographic groups

like African-Americans, Hispanics and young people could have

long-lasting ramifications for what both parties do to build

enduring coalitions, especially if intensive and technologically

driven voter turnout programs succeed in getting more people

registered and to the polls.

"I think we'll be analyzing this election for years as a

seminal, transformative race," said Mark McKinnon, an adviser to

President Bush's campaigns in 2000 and 2004. "The year campaigns

leveraged the Internet in ways never imagined. The year we went to

warp speed. The year the paradigm got turned upside down and truly

became bottom up instead of top down."

To a considerable extent, this is a result of the way that the

Obama campaign sought to understand and harness the Internet (and

other forms of so-called new media) to organize supporters and to

reach voters who no longer rely primarily on information from

newspapers and television. The platforms ranged from YouTube, which

did not exist in 2004, to the cell phone text messages that the

campaign was sending out to supporters on Monday to remind them to

vote.

Even more crucial to the way this campaign has transformed

politics has been Obama's success at using the Internet to build a

huge network of contributors that permitted him to raise enough

money -- after declining to participate in the public financing

system -- to expand the map and compete in traditionally Republican

states.

Google, the titan of Silicon Valley and the

queen of country, Dolly Parton, are two of the many combatants in a

high-technology dispute over precious slices of the nation's

airwaves.

The issue comes to a head on Election Day, when the Federal

Communications Commission votes on a proposal to make a disputed

chunk of radio spectrum available for public use.

Google, Microsoft, Hewlett-Packard and other technology

companies say the spectrum could be used by a whole new array of

Internet-connected wireless gadgets. They say freeing it up would

encourage innovation and investment in much the same way that the

spread of Wi-Fi technology has. (This would generate more business

for technology companies.)

But a coalition of old-guard media -- from television networks to

Broadway producers -- is objecting to the proposal, saying it needs

a closer look. The opponents argue that signals sent over those

frequencies could interfere with broadcasts and wireless

microphones at live productions.

The measure appears likely to pass, though its opponents have

mounted a spirited late-stage lobbying effort supported by Sen.

Hillary Rodham Clinton, D-N.Y., and others in Congress. Also

opposed are the professional sports leagues, Las Vegas casinos, a

coalition of rock musicians and, of late, Parton, who produces live

shows.

If the spectrum is set free, Parton says, chaos could reign on

Broadway -- in the form of static and other interference.

Technology companies argue that if soothe spectrum is freed,

entrepreneurs and innovators will create a new generation of

devices that transmit signals farther and more reliably than Wi-Fi,

which also relies on unlicensed spectrum. The technology could also

handle cheap Internet-based phone calls.

The battle between the old media and new media companies is a

byproduct of an impending change in the way over-the-air TV signals

are delivered. In February, TV stations will be required to switch

from analog broadcasting to digital, which is less susceptible to

radio interference.

The theory behind the FCC proposal is that hand-held devices and

other gadgets emit such low levels of power that their

transmissions will not overlap or interfere with the digital TV

signals. Also, the proposal's supporters say, devices can be made

smart enough to sense when they might interfere with a broadcast

signal and find another frequency.

The FCC has been studying the potential for interference and

found that most problems can be avoided through tight regulation of

the new devices, said Kevin J. Martin, chairman of the FCC, who

proposed the white space measure.

The five-member commission seems likely to approve the measure,

according to several people who were involved in the agency's

internal discussions but who declined to be named because they were

not authorized to speak to the media.

It was supposed to be the term's blockbuster

business case, one that might put an end to thousands of

state-court injury suits.

But the argument in the Supreme Court on Monday, in the case of

a Vermont musician who lost her arm after receiving an injection of

an anti-nausea drug, quickly turned into a search for limiting

principles.

The case, Wyeth v. Levine, No. 06-1249, concerns an implied form

of the doctrine of pre-emption, which bars state lawsuits from

people injured by products that met federal safety standards. The

drug law at issue in the case says nothing about pre-emption, and

the question before the court was whether the Food and Drug

Administration's approval of drug labels should knock out state

lawsuits contending that the labels did not contain adequate

warnings.

A broad endorsement of implied pre-emption based on regulators'

actions rather than on statements in laws enacted by Congress could

shut down countless injury suits in cases involving not only drugs

but also motor vehicles, household products, chemicals and

agricultural products.

Several justices appeared open to the idea that pre-emption

could follow from the FDA's approval of a drug label -- but only if

drug companies remained subject to lawsuits if they failed to

disclose new information about potential risks. There was much

discussion of what information should be considered new.

Other justices seemed prepared to allow pre-emption -- but only

if the drug agency had considered the particular risk before

approving the label.

Given the justices' interest in those finer points, the court

seemed unlikely to rule broadly on the larger issues in the case:

whether the agency and other federal regulators set minimum safety

standards that states are free to augment or whether they make

judgments about the optimal balance between risks and benefits that

states must follow.

In February, an eight-justice majority of the court ruled, in

Riegel v. Medtronic, that suits concerning injuries caused by

medical devices were pre-empted by a 1976 federal law. But the

underlying law in Riegel required pre-emption in so many words: in

the jargon, it involved "express pre-emption."

The plaintiff in the case argued on Monday, Diana Levine, lost

her arm after being injected with a Wyeth drug, Phenergan. The drug

is safe, Levine's lawyers said, when administered by intramuscular

injection or by intravenous drip. But they said that efforts to

inject the drug directly into a vein carry enormous risks.

A Vermont clinic used that third method, known as IV push, and

apparently missed the vein. When the drug was exposed to Levine's

arterial blood, it caused swift and irreversible gangrene,

requiring amputation of her arm below the elbow.

Levine settled with the clinic and sued Wyeth, saying the

company should have added a warning telling doctors not to use the

risky method.

Seth P. Waxman, a lawyer for Wyeth, said the company had

provided "ample, lavish warnings" about the risks involved and

left it to medical professionals to make the ultimate judgment

about how to administer the drug.

Justices Samuel A. Alito Jr. and Ruth Bader Ginsburg both

questioned the cost-benefit calculation that allowed the drug to be

administered by IV push.

"On the benefit side of this you don't have a life-saving drug,

you have a drug that relieves nausea," Alito said. "On the risk

side, you have the risk of gangrene."

Justice Antonin Scalia said that what mattered was not whether

the agency's decision was sound but whether it had addressed the

issue at all. "If you're telling me the FDA acted irresponsibly,"

Scalia told Levine's lawyer, David C. Frederick, "then sue the

FDA."

Chief Justice John G. Roberts Jr. tried to boil down Frederick's

argument to a simple test. If the FDA had considered the risks

involved in IV-push administration, Levine would lose; if the FDA

had not considered those risks, Levine would win.

Frederick said Levine would win under that analysis, saying the

FDA had never specifically compared the risks of methods of

intravenous administration.

Waxman said he understood that "members of this court are

concerned about applying a broad, vague or freewheeling analysis."

But Levine's case, he added, is in the "heartland" of implied

pre-emption, given that the jury had awarded damages for Wyeth's

failure to alter the very drug label the FDA had approved.

The diplomatic tangle between

Venezuela, Argentina and the United States reached a new pitch on

Monday, when a jury in Miami convicted a wealthy Venezuelan

businessman of acting as an "unregistered agent" of Venezuela on

American soil.

The case, known in Latin America as "Suitecasegate," started

with the discovery of a mysterious suitcase filled with $800,000 in

cash at an airport here in August 2007. But it has become a

long-running scandal that has aggravated tensions between the

United States and Latin neighbors.

Franklin Duran, convicted Monday, went on trial in Miami for

conspiring to cover up the origin and destination of the suitcase:

It was a secret contribution, prosecutors said, sent by Venezuela

to the campaign of Argentina's president. Duran faces a maximum of

15 years in prison.

The case has become a symbol of the antagonism between the Bush

administration and President Hugo Chavez of Venezuela, who has used

his nation's oil wealth to spread his influence throughout the

region.

The scandal has also soured America's relations with Argentina

and its president, Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner, whose legitimacy

has been challenged by the revelations of secret campaign donations

from outside her country.

The eight-week trial in Miami revealed an extensive cover-up by

Venezuelan officials that reached to Chavez himself, who assigned

his intelligence chief to try to keep silent the man caught with

the suitcase, Guido Alejandro Antonini Wilson, according to

testimony from witnesses.

Unbeknownst to the governments of Venezuela and Argentina,

Antonini Wilson had gone to the FBI just days after arriving back

in Florida. He subsequently recorded hundreds of hours of

conversations between himself and the Venezuelans.

Three Venezuelans and an Uruguayan were arrested, including

Duran, a longtime friend and business acquaintance of Antonini

Wilson. Three of the four men who were arrested pleaded guilty to

the same charges Duran was convicted of, and two of them were among

the government's star witnesses.

As for the $800,000 suitcase, witnesses testified, it was sent

by Petroleos de Venezuela, the national oil company. Antonini

Wilson also testified that he was told an additional $4.2 million

was on the flight to Argentina, and he said there had been previous

operations to smuggle in political cash from Venezuela to other

countries in the region.

An internal review by the American military has

found that a local Afghan police chief and another district leader

helped Taliban militants carry out an attack on July 13 in which

nine U.S. soldiers were killed and a remote American outpost in

eastern Afghanistan was nearly overrun.

Afghan and American forces had started building the makeshift

base just five days before the attack, and villagers repeatedly

warned the American troops in that time that militants were

plotting a strike, the report found. It said that the warnings did

not include details, and that troops never anticipated such a large

and well-coordinated attack.

The assault involved some 200 fighters, nearly three times the

number of the American and Afghan forces defending the site.

As evidence of collusion between the district police chief and

the Taliban, the report cited large stocks of weapons and

ammunition that were found in the police barracks in the adjacent

village of Wanat after the attackers were repelled. The stocks were

more than the local 20-officer force would be likely to need, and

many of the weapons were dirty and appeared to have been used

recently. The police officers were found dressed in "crisp, clean

new uniforms," the report said, and were acting "as if nothing

out of the ordinary had occurred."

The attackers were driven back after a pitched four-hour battle,

in which American artillery, warplanes and attack helicopters were

ultimately called in. Still, the militants fought in ways that

showed imaginative military training, if not sophisticated weapons.

In the midst of the battle, American soldiers were at times

flushed out into the open when they fled what they thought were

grenades, but were in fact rocks thrown by Taliban attackers, the

report said. The day before the attack, the militants began flowing

water through an irrigation ditch feeding an unused field, creating

background noise that masked the sounds of the advancing fighters.

The base and a nearby observation post were held by just 48

American troops and 24 Afghan soldiers. Nine Americans died and 27

were injured, most in the first 20 minutes of the fight. Four

Afghan soldiers were also wounded.

The intensity of the attack was so fierce, the report said, that

American soldiers shot at insurgents as close as 10 yards away,

often until their weapons jammed, and at militants who shimmied up

trees overhanging their positions to shoot at the Americans.

The attack on the outpost, near Wanat, caused the worst single

loss for the American military in Afghanistan since June 2005, and

one of the worst overall since the invasion in late 2001. It

underscored the vulnerability of American forces in Afghanistan, as

well as the continuing problem posed by uncertainties over the

loyalties of their Afghan allies, especially the Afghan police.

The military investigating officer, an Army colonel whose

identity was not disclosed in a redacted copy of the report

provided to The New York Times, recommended that the police chief

and the district governor be replaced, if not arrested.

But the senior American commander in eastern Afghanistan, Maj.

Gen. Jeffrey J. Schloesser, decided after conferring with American

forces that relieved the unit, that the district governor had

probably been acting under duress and had been cooperative with

American troops, according to the general's spokeswoman, Lt. Col.

Rumi Nielson-Green.

Nielson-Green said in a telephone interview on Monday that while

the governor had been absolved, it was unclear whether the police

chief in Wanat was complicit.

A spokesman for Afghan Defense Ministry officials said the

Americans had never discussed these complaints with them.

Hajji Abdul Halim, deputy governor at the time of the Wanat

attack, and now the acting governor of nearby Nuristan province,

said Monday that both officials had been detained briefly and then

released.

"We suspected them after the incident, but the American forces

released the district governor after two days of custody," he said

in a telephone interview.

The report, which was completed on Aug. 13 and declassified in

recent days to allow military officials to brief family members of

those who were killed, did not assign blame to any commanders of

the unit involved -- the 2nd Battalion, 503rd Infantry Regiment,

173rd Airborne Combat Brigade Team -- a unit that was in the final

days of a 15-month deployment when the attack took place.

"The actions by leaders at all levels were based upon sound

military analysis, proper risk mitigation and for the right

reasons," the report said.

It concluded that despite reports earlier in July that 200 to

300 militants had been massing to attack another remote outpost in

the same vicinity, the commanders at Wanat had no reason to expect

such a large frontal assault.

"The enemy normally conducts probing attacks prior to

conducting an all-out, large-scale attack," the report said,

quoting the investigating officer as concluding that it "was

logical" to think that an initial probing attack would involve

only about 20 militants seeking to gauge defenses and the reaction

of American and Afghan forces.

However, the report criticized the "incredible amount of time"

-- 10 months -- it took the NATO military authorities to negotiate

arrangements over the site of the outpost, giving adversaries

plenty of time "to plan coordinated and complex attacks."

Some details of the attack have been described in recent months

by publications including The New York Times, The Army Times and

Vanity Fair. But the 44-page report offers the most extensive

account so far. At the time of the attack, American and Afghan

forces were still building fortifications of sandbags and earthen

barriers around the main outpost and a small observation post about

100 yards away. In some places, those troops were protected only by

strands of concertina wire and a ring of gun-mounted, armored

Humvees, the report said.

The militants apparently detected the vulnerability and moved to

exploit it. On the evening of July 12, the militants slipped into

the village, undetected by the Americans, ordered the villagers to

leave and set up firing positions inside houses and a mosque.

At 4:20 a.m. on July 13, the militants struck with a fusillade

of heavy machine-gun fire and rocket-propelled grenades, destroying

the Americans' most potent weapons: 120-mm mortars and a TOW

missile launcher.

At the same time, the militants blasted the small observation

post 100 yards from the main base with rifle fire and more

grenades. Within 20 minutes, all nine Americans inside were dead or

wounded.

Three times, teams of soldiers from the main base ran a gantlet

of hostile fire to resupply the observation post and carry back the

dead and wounded. Within 30 minutes, American fighter-bombers were

blasting the militant positions, followed by Apache helicopter

gunships.

Just days after the attack, American forces abandoned the

outpost at Wanat, but Nielson-Green said the military continued to

patrol in the region from a larger base four miles away.

"This was a complex attack carried out by militants who clearly

knew the terrain and maintained radio silence," he said.

Gunmen dressed as security guards kidnapped

a French aid worker in central Kabul Monday morning and shot dead

an Afghan bystander who tried to thwart the abduction, police and

witnesses said.

The kidnapping was the latest of a series of incidents spreading

alarm among foreigners in the capital. It was carried out just

after 9 a.m. on a busy street of shops and homes

Last month, a British aid worker with dual South African

nationality, Gayle Williams, 34, was killed in Kabul and the

Taliban said it had executed her for spreading Christianity. There

was no immediate claim if responsibility for Monday's kidnapping

but the Taliban denied involvement.

Two French aid workers were making their way from their

residence to their office when three gunmen armed with assault

rifles tried to seize them, shopkeepers and bystanders said.

One French citizen from a group known as AFRANE, meaning Amitie

Franco-Afghane, or French-Afghan Friendship, escaped when an Afghan

working as a driver in the intelligence service tackled one of the

kidnappers and grabbed his gun.

The gunmen killed the driver, pushed the other aid worker into a

car and drove off, witnesses said.

News reports in Paris said the abducted man was a French citizen

and education expert who had been in Kabul for only a week. He had

been staying with colleagues from AFRANE, which also specializes in

education projects, but worked for a different French

nongovernmental organization.

The news reports identified the kidnapped man as Dany Egreteau,

32, but did not specify the organization he worked for.

The slain man was identified only as Malik, 26. His uncle,

Ghulam Hazrat, 50, said the kidnappers were dressed as security

guards. There has been a string of kidnappings in the capital and

neighboring provinces recently involving both foreigners and

prominent Afghans. Many of them have been blamed by Afghan

officials on criminal gangs seeking ransom.

A relative of the royal family, Homayun Shah, and the son of a

prominent banker were kidnapped in recent weeks but were freed by

the intelligence service, the National Security Directorate.

A report released by the Alaska Personnel

Board on Monday found that Gov. Sarah Palin did not apply improper

pressure to try to dismiss a state trooper who was her former

brother in law and did not violate state ethics laws in the firing

of her state public safety commissioner.

The report contradicts the conclusions last month of a separate

inquiry into the matter overseen by a bipartisan legislative panel.

The panel found that Palin had breached a state ethics act by

pressing to have the trooper, Mike Wooten, fired. It said, however,

that the governor was within her rights to fire the public safety

commissioner, Walt Monegan.

The board's report, based on an investigation led by an

independent counsel hired by the board, Timothy J. Petumenos,

concluded there was no evidence to prove Ms. Palin or any state

employee had acted improperly in Monegan's dismissal.

The report said the legislative inquiry had based its

conclusions on an incorrect interpretation of state ethics laws and

insufficient evidence.

Palin's lawyer, Thomas V. Van Flein, said in a statement, "The

governor is grateful that this investigation has provided a fair

and impartial review of this matter and upholds the governor's

ability to take measures when necessary to ensure that Alaskans

have the best possible team working to serve them."

Monegan has said he believes he was fired because he would not

bend to pressure from Palin, her husband, Todd, and her

subordinates to fire Wooten, who had been through a bitter divorce

with the governor's sister. He has also said that he had received

many complaints about Wooten from Palin, her husband, and several

members of her administration and that he felt clear pressure to

terminate Wooten.

Petumenos said the governor and other state employees had

testified firmly that several conversations Monegan described had

not happened. He said there were no witnesses other than Monegan

who said they heard the conversations.

"They didn't happen at all," Petumenos said.

"Unless someone can be proved to abuse their power," Petumenos

added, "it seems to me they haven't done it."

Monegan said Monday in an interview, "Obviously I'm

disappointed with the outcome and the contradictory nature of this

investigation, compared to the first one.

"It's not only me," he said. "There were senior members of

the department of public safety who got the calls, felt the

pressure and knew exactly what was going on, "I will always feel

that there were conversations and e-mails that were intended to

inappropriately use an official government position to settle a

family matter."

The governor of Alaska appoints the members of the Alaska

Personnel Board, though all three of the board's current members

were appointed by Palin's predecessor. Palin reappointed one member

to a new term, said a spokesman for the governor, Bill McAllister.

"This is obviously the correct outcome," McAllister said. "We

knew all along that Governor Palin did not abuse her power."

John Cyr, the executive director of the Alaska Public Safety

Employees Association, said it was not surprising that a board

appointed by the governor's office would reach the conclusion.

"We all knew that the governor's office was putting pressure

on" the Department of Public Safety "to take action against

Michael Wooten," Cyr said.

In late July, several weeks after Monegan was fired, the state's

bipartisan Legislative Council ordered an inquiry into his. But

tension over the matter increased dramatically in late August, when

Palin was selected as the running mate for Sen. John McCain, the

Republican nominee for president. The inquiry undercut her image as

an ethics reformer.

Palin said in the summer that she would cooperate with the

legislative inquiry but, after she was nominated, she refused to

testify. The McCain-Palin campaign sent lawyers and staff to Alaska

to help with the governor's legal strategy and to make what for

several weeks was an almost daily public relations effort to

portray the legislative inquiry as biased, and run by Democrats who

support Sen. Barack Obama.

In September, Palin took the unusual step of filing an ethics

complaint against herself to the Personnel Board, which she said

was the proper forum for dealing with the matter. The board's

report, conducted by Petumenos, was what was filed on Monday.

The report by Petumenos said it was based on "substantially

more evidence" than the legislative inquiry, including a

three-hour deposition from Palin. The governor refused to testify

for the legislative inquiry.

Petumenos said the legislative inquiry had determined that Palin

violated the scope of state ethics laws by "inaction," because

she supposedly did not stop her staff and husband from pressuring

Monegan. But Petumenos said that the legislative inquiry had not

met requirements for finding a violation because it did not cite

violations under specific sections of the ethics code.

It was supposed to be the term's blockbuster

business case, one that might put an end to thousands of

state-court injury suits.

But the argument in the Supreme Court on Monday, in the case of

a Vermont musician who lost her arm after receiving an injection of

an anti-nausea drug, quickly turned into a search for limiting

principles.

The case, Wyeth v. Levine, No. 06-1249, concerns an implied form

of the doctrine of pre-emption, which bars state lawsuits from

people injured by products that met federal safety standards. The

drug law at issue in the case says nothing about pre-emption, and

the question before the court was whether the Food and Drug

Administration's approval of drug labels should knock out state

lawsuits contending that the labels did not contain adequate

warnings.

A broad endorsement of implied pre-emption based on regulators'

actions rather than on statements in laws enacted by Congress could

shut down countless injury suits in cases involving not only drugs

but also motor vehicles, household products, chemicals and

agricultural products.

Several justices appeared open to the idea that pre-emption

could follow from the FDA's approval of a drug label -- but only if

drug companies remained subject to lawsuits if they failed to

disclose new information about potential risks. There was much

discussion of what information should be considered new.

Other justices seemed prepared to allow pre-emption -- but only

if the drug agency had considered the particular risk before

approving the label.

Given the justices' interest in those finer points, the court

seemed unlikely to rule broadly on the larger issues in the case:

whether the agency and other federal regulators set minimum safety

standards that states are free to augment or whether they make

judgments about the optimal balance between risks and benefits that

states must follow.

The plaintiff in the case argued on Monday, Diana Levine, lost

her arm after being injected with a Wyeth drug, Phenergan. The drug

is safe, Levine's lawyers said, when administered by intramuscular

injection or by intravenous drip. But they said that efforts to

inject the drug directly into a vein carry enormous risks.

A Vermont clinic used that third method, known as IV push, and

apparently missed the vein. When the drug was exposed to Levine's

arterial blood, it caused swift and irreversible gangrene,

requiring amputation of her arm below the elbow.

Levine settled with the clinic and sued Wyeth, saying the

company should have added a warning telling doctors not to use the

risky method.

Seth P. Waxman, a lawyer for Wyeth, said Levine's case, he

added, is in the "heartland" of implied pre-emption, given that

the jury had awarded damages for Wyeth's failure to alter the very

drug label the FDA had approved.

A federal court has blocked the Bush

administration's effort to save money on Medicare by paying for

only the least expensive treatments for particular conditions.

Congress sets Medicare payment rates and never intended to give

officials broad discretion to alter them, the court said in an

important test case last month.

The case, closely followed by Medicare officials and consumer

advocates, involved drugs used to treat chronic obstructive

pulmonary disease.

Judge Henry H. Kennedy Jr. of U.S. District Court here said the

policy of paying for only "the least costly alternative" was not

permitted under the Medicare law.

The administration's position would give the health and human

services secretary "enormous discretion" to determine the amount

paid for every item and service covered by Medicare, without

reference to the detailed formulas set by Congress, Kennedy said.

"This flies in the face of the detailed statutory provisions," he

added.

Over the years, Medicare officials have often tried to adopt

regulations that allow them to consider cost in deciding whether

the program should cover various goods and services. Health care

providers, manufacturers and some patients' advocates have resisted

these efforts, saying that coverage decisions should be made based

on clinical effectiveness and not cost.

"We are disappointed with the ruling and continue to believe

that our policy is supported by the statute," Peter L. Ashkenaz, a

spokesman for the federal Centers for Medicare and Medicaid

Services, said Monday. "We are still considering our options and

next steps."

Congress set forth the touchstone for Medicare coverage in a

1965 law that created the program. The law generally prohibits

payment for items and services that are "not reasonable and

necessary for the diagnosis or treatment of illness or injury, or

to improve the functioning of a malformed body member."

If an item is covered, the payment rate is specified in other

parts of the law.

The Bush administration argued that Medicare officials had the

right to decide whether the expense incurred for a given item, not

just the item itself, was "reasonable and necessary."

Kennedy said this argument "does not make sense" because

Congress went to great lengths to establish payment rates.

YOUR TUBE

2008 was the year that YouTube became a mainstream tool for

political communication.

Most-Watched Obama Video: Sen. Barack Obama's sweeping

exploration of race in America, delivered in March, in the midst of

the Rev. Jeremiah A. Wright Jr. controversy. More than 5.1 million

views, despite its length -- 37 minutes, 39 seconds -- marking

YouTube's emergence as a vehicle for substantive discourse, not

just silly clips.

Most-Watched McCain Video: "He's the biggest celebrity in the

world," this ad for Sen. John McCain said, as it flashed images of

Britney Spears, Paris Hilton and Obama speaking in Berlin. "But is

he ready to lead." Nearly 2.2 million views on YouTube. It is also

responsible for Hilton's response: "I'm, like, totally ready to

lead."

Other big hits:

-- ObamaGirl. Her crush has been celebrated 10.5 million times.

-- The McCain Girls' disco parody, "It's Raining McCain." More

than 2 million views.

-- will.i.am's "Yes, We Can." Obama's words set to music has

been watched almost 11.3 million times.

-- SARAH WHEATON

TRIVIA

Winning the White House is never easy thing, even those who

manage it rarely command the overwhelming support of the American

people.

-- No president has managed to garner more than 51 percent of the

popular vote in the past 20 years. In fact, of 15 presidential

elections since World War II, only six winners actually cracked 51

percent -- Dwight D. Eisenhower in both 1952 and 1956, Lyndon B.

Johnson in 1964, Richard M. Nixon in 1972, Ronald Reagan in 1984

and George Bush in 1988.

-- Winning a second term can be even harder. If history is any

judge, whoever wins Tuesday may just be a one-term president. The

United States has just had two two-term presidents in a row, Bill

Clinton and George W. Bush. The last time three presidents in a row

won two terms came nearly 200 years ago when Thomas Jefferson, top,

James Madison, middle, and James Monroe each served eight years.

-- PETER BAKER

THE WINNER IS ...

One way or the other, the next president will stand out. Either

would be only the third sitting senator ever elected president. And

either would be the first president born outside the continental

United States. Here are some other distinctions.

If Sen. John McCain wins, he would be ...

-- The oldest person ever elected president for the first time

-- The first president who served in the Vietnam War

-- The first president from Arizona

-- The second Naval Academy graduate in the White House (after

Jimmy Carter)

-- The first president born in the Panama Canal Zone

If Sen. Barack Obama wins, he would be ...

-- The first black president

-- The first president born in Hawaii

-- The first president elected from Illinois since Ulysses S.

Grant

-- The fourth president in a row with an Ivy League education

-- The first Northern Democrat elected president since Kennedy

-- PETER BAKER

THE FINAL DAY

The day of days was nearly upon voters, and Sens. John McCain

and Barack Obama each sounded hopeful (but not too confident) and

energized (though exhaustion lay behind the smiles) while

hopscotching among swing states on Monday.

-- After 22 months of memorable campaigning there were a few

final memorable lines. Obama, on MTV, criticizing sagging pants:

"Brothers should pull up their pants." And Gov. Sarah Palin

warning voters in Missouri that Democrats would cut defense

spending: "Do they think terrorists have all of a sudden became

the good guys?"

-- Obama flew home to Chicago for Election Day. McCain, though,

made a surprising announcement: He would continue campaigning on

Tuesday in Colorado and New Mexico, after voting in Arizona.

Takeaway: McCain is showing once again that he is a fighter, and

his father and grandfather, both military men, would be proud.

Obama is returning to his two girls and his wife after a long, long

run. His parents and grandmother would be proud, too.

-- PATRICK HEALY

CLOSING ARGUMENTS

"At this point, I've made the arguments. Now it's all about who

wants it more, who believes in it more." -- Sen. Barack Obama, at a

rally in Jacksonville, Fla.

"Will we continue to lead the world's economies or will we be

overtaken? Will the world become safer or more dangerous? Will our

military remain the strongest in the world? Will our children and

grandchildren's futures be greater than ours? My answer to you is

yes. Yes, we will prosper. Yes, we will be safer. Yes, we will pass

on to our children a stronger, better country. But we must be

prepared to act swiftly, boldly, with courage and wisdom. I am an

American and I chose to fight." -- Sen. John McCain, at a rally in

Indianapolis

An internal review by the American military has

found that a local Afghan police chief and another district leader

helped Taliban militants carry out an attack on July 13 in which

nine U.S. soldiers were killed and a remote American outpost in

eastern Afghanistan was nearly overrun.

Afghan and American forces had started building the makeshift

base just five days before the attack, and villagers repeatedly

warned the American troops in that time that militants were

plotting a strike, the report found. It said that the warnings did

not include details, and that troops never anticipated such a large

and well-coordinated attack.

The assault involved some 200 fighters, nearly three times the

number of the American and Afghan forces defending the site.

As evidence of collusion between the district police chief and

the Taliban, the report cited large stocks of weapons and

ammunition that were found in the police barracks in the adjacent

village of Wanat after the attackers were repelled. The stocks were

more than the local 20-officer force would be likely to need, and

many of the weapons were dirty and appeared to have been used

recently. The police officers were found dressed in "crisp, clean

new uniforms," the report said, and were acting "as if nothing

out of the ordinary had occurred."

The attack on the outpost, near Wanat, caused the worst single

loss for the American military in Afghanistan since June 2005, and

one of the worst overall since the invasion in late 2001. It

underscored the vulnerability of American forces in Afghanistan, as

well as the continuing problem posed by uncertainties over the

loyalties of their Afghan allies, especially the Afghan police.

The military investigating officer, an Army colonel whose

identity was not disclosed in a redacted copy of the report

provided to The New York Times, recommended that the police chief

and the district governor be replaced, if not arrested.

But the senior American commander in eastern Afghanistan, Maj.

Gen. Jeffrey J. Schloesser, decided after conferring with American

forces that relieved the unit, that the district governor had

probably been acting under duress and had been cooperative with

American troops, according to the general's spokeswoman, Lt. Col.

Rumi Nielson-Green.

Nielson-Green said in a telephone interview on Monday that while

the governor had been absolved, it was unclear whether the police

chief in Wanat was complicit.

A spokesman for Afghan Defense Ministry officials said the

Americans had never discussed these complaints with them.

TWIA-GROWTH will not move tonight in the New York Times News

Service

file.

The Houston Chronicle

A campaign waged under the specter of war

and financial crisis drew to an anxious finish on Monday as Sens.

Barack Obama and John McCain raced across nine states and asked

voters on both sides to discount polls and predictions on the

closing day of a two-year pursuit of the presidency.

Obama surrendered the race to the judgment of the American

people as he told a booming crowd here, "Now, it's all about who

wants it more, who believes in it more." McCain sought to motivate

Republicans who worried aloud that it could be a bleak election,

declaring, "The Mac is back!"

In the final hours of his second bid for the presidency, McCain

dashed through Republican-leaning states from Florida to Indiana

and New Mexico to Nevada. He stopped in Tennessee, hoping to reach

voters in North Carolina and Virginia, and he swung by

Pennsylvania, the only Democratic state of the day. He was set to

return home for a rally in Arizona in the small hours of the night.

Obama, confident in his standing on Democratic terrain, devoted

his final day of campaigning by trying to push Florida, North

Carolina and Virginia into his column. He pressed ahead after he

awoke to news that his grandmother, the woman chiefly responsible

for his upbringing, had died overnight in Hawaii.

Only a few close advisers knew that at 8 a.m. he had received

word from his sister that his 86-year-old grandmother, Madelyn

Dunham, had died. When he arrived at a rally, he spoke briefly

about the woman whom he visited late last month in Honolulu during

a brief suspension of his campaign.

"She has gone home," Obama said, his voice tinged with

emotion. "She died peacefully in her sleep with my sister at her

side, so there's great joy instead of tears."

The mood on the McCain campaign plane was upbeat as McCain's

advisers continued to insist that the polls were tightening and

that McCain's chances of winning the presidency were difficult but

not impossible. "Winning 270 is right in the cards," McCain's

campaign manager, Rick Davis, told reporters around midnight on

Sunday, as McCain's plane headed from New Hampshire to Florida.

Obama selected Virginia as the site of his final rally, a sign

Democrats are waging an all-out push for the state that is seen as

a barometer for the fight with McCain.

A military panel at the Guantanamo naval base convicted a former

Qaida propaganda chief of terrorism charges on Monday and sentenced

him to life in prison, giving the Bush administration a second

conviction in a war-crimes trial there.

But the conviction of the detainee, Ali Hamza al Bahlul, was a

measured victory for the government, which has been struggling for

seven years to prove the effectiveness of its military commission

system for trying terrorism suspects at the U.S. naval station at

Guantanamo Bay, Cuba.

The guilty verdict had been expected because Bahlul, a Yemeni

who prosecutors said was a close aide to Osama bin Laden, did not

offer any defense. Saying he did not accept the authority of the

tribunal, he insisted that his lawyer remain mute in a weeklong

trial that drew little attention.

The Pentagon's response to the verdict was muted. "Al Bahlul

received a full and fair trial," said a spokesman, Cmdr. Jeffrey

D. Gordon.

Bahlul was convicted of conspiracy, solicitation to commit

murder, providing material support for terrorism and other charges.

Prosecutors said he made a recruiting film, "The Destruction of

the American Destroyer USS Cole," which described the 2000 attack

that killed 17 sailors on the ship in the Yemeni port of Aden.

The panel of military officers deliberated for less than an hour

on the sentence Monday afternoon, after announcing its guilty

verdict in the morning. The only other detainee convicted after a

Guantanamo trial, Salim Hamdan, a former driver for bin Laden, is

set to complete his five-month sentence next month, after a

military judge gave him credit for more than five years awaiting

trial.

Last year, an Australian detainee, David Hicks, pleaded guilty

to providing material support for terrorism in exchange for a

nine-month sentence.

Pentagon officials have pressed to get the commission system

moving quickly, filing charges against nearly two dozen detainees

over the last year and expanding the staffs of military lawyers

prosecuting and defending the cases. But some lawyers who work on

the cases say the prosecution appears uncertain because of the

possibility that the next president will close the Guantanamo

detention center and stop the trials.

In his new position as head of the U.S.

Central Command, Gen. David H. Petraeus met top Pakistani officials

for the first time on Monday and heard one message wherever he

turned: U.S. air strikes against militants in the tribal areas are

unhelpful.

Petraeus, the former commander of U.S. forces in Iraq, arrived

in Pakistan as missile strikes from drone aircraft against the

Taliban and al-Qaida in Pakistan's tribal areas have escalated.

There were two separate missile attacks by U.S. drones on Saturday.

In retaliation, a suicide bomber killed eight Pakistani

paramilitary soldiers in South Waziristan Sunday.

After the meeting with Petraeus, President Asif Ali Zardari of

Pakistan said in a statement, "Continuing drone attacks on our

territory, which result in loss of precious lives and property, are

counterproductive and difficult to explain by a democratically

elected government. It is creating a credibility gap."

There was no comment or public appearances by Petraeus, and it

was not clear how he responded to the complaints. Messages left

with his press aides were not immediately returned.

Petraeus, who has been consulting in recent weeks with a wide

range of people on the efforts by the Pakistani military to quell

the insurgency in the tribal areas and on the deteriorating

situation in Afghanistan, on Friday took over Central Command ,

putting him in overall charge of the American-led military

operations in both Iraq and Afghanistan.

The general's visit came as the Pentagon and the White House are

completing reviews on policies towards Afghanistan, and as Sen.

Barack Obama, the Democratic presidential nominee, has made clear

that Pakistan and Afghanistan would be more of a foreign policy

focus if he were to win the election.

A senior Pakistani military official said the army wanted to

"bring home the point that the missile strikes are

counter-productive, and that this is driving a wedge between the

government and the tribal people."

During a visit on Tuesday to Peshawar, the capital of the

North-West Frontier province, Petreaus planned to meet with Maj.

Gen. Tariq Khan, the new leader of the Frontier Corps, the

paramilitary force that is fighting in Bajaur.

Massachusetts courts are poised to rule on three tax disputes at

the crux

of the Department of Revenue's efforts to reclaim $1 billion from

corporations it has accused of skirting tax laws. The outcome will

have

major ramifications, as a massive budget shortfall is causing

Massachusetts

to cut staff and services.

The rulings, expected within the next several months, will

likely

determine

hundreds of similar corporate tax fights. The underlying issue

revolves

around how companies apportion profits and other business

activities to

entities in other states.

A Massachusetts victory would result in a flood of revenues that

would

offset budget problems. If the state loses, however, refunds of

several

hundred million dollars will exacerbate its financial condition.

The Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court last month heard final

arguments

in cases against Toys Inc., operator of Toys "R" Us, and Capital

One

Financial Corp. And Monday a state Appeals Court heard the state's

case

against TJX Cos.

These are being closely watched around the country, as other

states seek

to curb strategies that companies use to lower tax bills. Some of

the

biggest names in corporate America are fighting Massachusetts on

this

front: Microsoft Corp., Comcast Corp., and Home Depot Inc., among

other

firms.

"These decisions are going to be big news nationwide," said

Donald

Griswold, a Washington, D.C., attorney who has represented MBNA

Corp., the

credit card company owned by Bank of America Corp., in similar

cases

before

supreme courts in Indiana and West Virginia.

Indiana and West Virginia tax authorities won those cases, and

officials

in

other states have also prevailed against Toys "R" Us, prompting

some tax

specialists to predict the Commonwealth will also win.

If it does, revenue Commissioner Navjeet K. Bal predicts

companies with

similar disputes will promptly settle instead of fighting the legal

odds.

"Any time a ruling goes in the department's favor, it helps

with

settlement discussions. There's really no question about that,"

Bal said.

The dispute arose in the 1990s when corporations began employing

aggressive

tactics to save on tax bills. Since then, Massachusetts has sued

hundreds

of companies for back taxes totaling more than $1 billion. Some

firms have

agreed to pay before the cases have been resolved, reserving their

right

to

get their money back if the state loses.

The Toys "R" Us case is the most prominent of such disputes.

The toy

company nearly 20 years ago set up a subsidiary in Delaware, and

gave that

unit ownership of its trademark, Geoffrey the Giraffe. Delaware

does not

tax income on intangible assets such as trademarks.

The company had its stores in Massachusetts and other states pay

royalties

to the Delaware firm for use of the Geoffrey trademark, according

to court

filings. Tax officials said the move effectively transferred

profits that

would be taxable in Massachusetts to a nontax jurisdiction. The

amount now

in dispute is $1.6 million, plus penalties and interest between

1997 and

2001.

The legal battle involves competing interpretations of the

Commerce

Clause

of the US Constitution, which regulates trade across state borders.

Massachusetts and tax officials from other states argue the clause

gives

them authority to collect income taxes when a company's business

activities

are substantially connected to the state.

Lawyers for Toys "R" Us and other companies with similar

disputes

contend in court filings the Constitution only allows states to tax

businesses that are physically present within their borders, an

interpretation that would prevent the Delaware subsidiary from

being taxed

by other states.

That interpretation, however, has failed to persuade courts in

South

Carolina, Louisiana, New York, and Oklahoma, which over the years

have

ruled against Toys "R" Us.

A Toys "R" Us spokesman did not respond to a call seeking

comment. A

spokesman for Microsoft, which has a similar legal fight here, said

it has

complied with state tax laws and will continue to seek a resolution

in

court.

In the Capital One case, the state argues the bank effectively

has a

taxable business presence in Massachusetts because of the thousands

of

credit card transactions it has with card holders and businesses,

even

though it doesn't have a local branch office or other physical

presence

here.

Capital One did not return a phone call seeking comment. In

court

documents, Capital One argued that because it does not have

employees or

property in Massachusetts, it should not pay state taxes under the

Commerce

Clause. And lawyers for other companies said the state is trying to

equate

a transaction on an electronic network with one in a local bank

branch.

"This is about something much more important than tax

dollars," said

Griswold, the attorney who represents MBNA. "It's about the

principle of

federalism and when states are going to be permitted to reach

beyond their

borders to exercise dominion over citizens of another state."

MBNA has a dispute with Massachusetts that mirrors the Capital

One case.

The TJX lawsuit involves an arrangement the company set up in

the early

1990s that treated royalty and interest payments from subsidiaries

as

deductions that lowered its overall tax liability. In the late

1990s,

Massachusetts pressed the retailer to pay more taxes on the grounds

the

deductions were improper.

The contested amount is around $19.6 million. In 2006, the

state's

Appellate Tax Board ruled in the revenue department's favor,

although it

later allowed TJX some of the deductions. A TJX spokeswoman

declined to

comment.

In a similar case, a Comcast spokeswoman said the company

believes it has

complied with tax laws and is working with the state to resolve the

matter,

which involves issues from its acquisition of AT&amp;amp;T Broadband in

2002. A

spokesman for Home Depot also said the company is working with the

state.

This year, the Massachusetts Legislature changed the state's

corporate

tax

law to prevent many of these disputes from arising in the first

place. The

law, known as combined reporting, requires companies to lump income

together from all their business units and apportion a share to

Massachusetts, thus preventing them from shifting profits to

nontaxable

subsidiaries.

Casey Ross can be reached at cross@globe.com.

Nov. 4, 2008, is a historic day because it marks the end of an

economic era, a political era and a generational era all at once.

Economically, it marks the end of the Long Boom, which began in

1983. Politically, it probably marks the end of conservative

dominance, which began in 1980. Generationally, it marks the end of

baby boomer supremacy, which began in 1968. For the past 16 years,

baby boomers, who were formed by the tumult of the 1960s, occupied

the White House. By Tuesday night, if the polls are to be believed,

a member of a new generation will become president-elect.

So today is not only a pivot, but a confluence of pivots.

When historians look back at the era that is now closing, they

will see a time of private achievement and public disappointment.

In the past two decades, the United States has become a much more

interesting place. Companies like Starbucks, Apple, Crate &amp;amp; Barrel,

Microsoft and many others enlivened daily life. Private citizens,

especially young people, repaired the social fabric, dedicated

themselves to community service and lowered crime and teenage

pregnancy.

Yet, at the same time, the public sphere has not flourished.

Despite decades of affluence, long-standing issues like health

care, education, energy and entitlement debt have not been

adequately addressed. The baby boomers, who entered adulthood

promising a lifetime of activism, have been a politically

undistinguished generation. They produced two presidents, neither

of whom lived up to his potential. They remained consumed by the

culture war that divided their generation. They pass their

political supremacy today having squandered the fat years and the

golden opportunities.

Month by month, frustration has mounted. Americans are anxious

about their private lives but absolutely disgusted by public

leaders. So change is demanded.

Republicans nominated an old warrior with a record of making

hard decisions and absorbing the blows that ensue. Many of us

regard him -- and always will -- as one of the heroes of our time.

But the public demand for change was total, and if the polls are

right, voters will elect the man who breaks from the recent past in

almost every way.

Barack Obama is a child of a child of the 1960s. His mother was

born only five years earlier than Hillary Clinton. For people in

Obama's generation, the great disruption had already occurred by

the time they hit adulthood. Theirs is a generation of

consolidation and neo-traditionalism -- a generation of sunscreen

and bicycle helmets, more anxious about parenthood than anything

else.

Obama is not only a member of this temperate generation, but of

its most educated segment. He has lived nearly his entire adult

life within a few miles of one or another of the country's top 10

universities.

His upscale, educated class post-boomer cohort has rallied

behind him with unalloyed fervor. Major college newspapers have

endorsed him at a ratio of 63-1. The upscale educated class -- from

the universities, the media, the law and the financial centers --

has financed his $600 million campaign (which relied on big-dollar

donations even more heavily than George W. Bush's 2004 effort).

This cohort will soon become the ruling class.

And the irony is that they will be confronted by the problem for

which they have the least experience and for which they are the

least prepared: the problem of scarcity.

Raised in prosperity, favored by genetics, these young

meritocrats will have to govern in a period when the demands on the

nation's wealth outstrip the supply. They will grapple with the

growing burdens of an aging society, rising health care costs and

high energy prices. They will have to make up for the trillion or

so dollars the government will spend to avoid a deep recession.

They will have to struggle to keep their promises to cut taxes,

create an energy revolution, pass an expensive health care plan and

all the rest.

As Robert J. Samuelson writes in his forthcoming book, "The

Great Inflation and Its Aftermath," "Already, Americans face far

more claims on their incomes than can be easily met."

In the next few years, the nation's wealth will either stagnate

or shrink. The fiscal squeeze will grow severe. There will be

fiercer struggle over scarce resources, starker divisions along

factional lines. The challenge for the next president will be to

cushion the pain of the coming recession while at the same time

trying to build a solid fiscal foundation so the country can thrive

at some point in the future.

We're probably entering a period, in other words, in which smart

young liberals meet a stone-cold scarcity that they do not seem to

recognize or have a plan for.

In an age of transition, the children are left with the burdens

of their elders.

THE CAUCUS: A FAIR-WEATHER FORECAST

On Election Day, much of America, including most of the

battleground states, will see fair weather that will encourage

voters to go to the polls. According to the National Weather

Service, temperatures are expected be mild for this time of year in

many large urban areas, and precipitation should be minimal.

Weather, of course, can be a factor in voter turnout, especially

for Democrats. Because Democrats tend to be less affluent than

Republicans and to live in larger cities, the theory goes, they not

only depend more on public transportation to get to the polls, but

also vote in precincts that are prone to long lines, and thus are

more vulnerable to bad weather.

A 2004 study of a century's worth of data about weather on

Election Day concluded that when it rained, "the negative effect

on Democratic performance of turnout is significantly increased"

and that "weather accounts for about a 5-point swing in turnout."

Another study, published in 2005, found that every inch of rain

above average on Election Day gives Republicans an additional 2.5

percent of the vote, and every inch of snow above average increases

the Republican vote share by 0.6 percent.

So where are the exceptions to sunny skies? North Carolina and

Virginia, which are heavily contested, are expected to get rain,

and up to 3 or 4 inches in some areas. And the Pacific Northwest

into the Rockies could see significant amounts of rain or snow,

though primarily in uncontested Wyoming (reliably Republican).

Some parts of Colorado, which has emerged as one of the

most-contested states in the campaign, could also be hit by that

storm, but Nevada, another battleground state, is not likely to be

affected.

And in Missouri, where the race is perhaps the tightest in the

country, "it's going to be a beautiful day for voting," said

Brian Cordy, a forecaster at the National Weather Service.

-- LARRY ROHTER

STYLE: NO HIP-HOP LOOK FOR OBAMA

One of the most memorable moments in the 1992 presidential

campaign came on an MTV show when a young woman cheekily asked Bill

Clinton: Boxers or briefs?

It took until the last day of the 2008 campaign for the subject

of undergarments to come up again, and it was an MTV interviewer

who brought it up.

The answer from Sen. Barack Obama: Keep them in your pants.

The subject was raised by Sway Calloway of MTV News, who asked

Obama if he supported ordinances to ban sagging pants, a style

inspired by hip-hop artists.

"Here is my attitude," Obama replied. "I think people passing

a law against people wearing sagging pants is a waste of time. We

should be focused on creating jobs, improving our schools, health

care, dealing with the war in Iraq, and anybody, any public

official, that is worrying about sagging pants probably needs to

spend some time focusing on real problems out there."

But it was clear that Obama was not a fan of the look.

"Brothers should pull up their pants," he said. "You are

walking by your mother, your grandmother; your underwear is

showing. What's wrong with that? Come on."

Obama passed on the boxers-or-briefs question earlier this year

when it was posed by a reporter for US Weekly.

"I don't answer those humiliating questions. But whichever one

it is, I look good in them," he said, according to the magazine.

-- MICHAEL FALCONE

COMICS: FORESHADOWING A POLITICAL FIRST

Before Sen. Barack Obama of Illinois, there was Gov. Tim

Pettigrew of New York, the first black presidential nominee of the

Democratic Party. But that happened in 1976, and in the pages of

"Treasure Chest," a comic book distributed to Catholic school

students around the country.

"It's been on the edge of reality," Berry Reece, author of the

series, said of the current election.

"I frankly had forgotten about this Pettigrew series," Reece

added, until National Public Radio unearthed it earlier this year.

Writing in 1964 of an election 12 years later, Reece, now 76,

initially used the story of Pettigrew and his bid for the

Democratic nod to walk students "through the ABC's of the

nomination process."

The candidate survives an assassination attempt and soldiers

through a debate with Sen. Willard Oilandgas, but his face is

hidden until the last few panels of the final episode.

"What we wanted to do," Reece said, "was get the readers in

deep through this Pettigrew's integrity, his charisma, before we

ever disclosed his race so that they would not prejudge him."

Reece said he was inspired by the political turmoil of the

period, especially in his home state, Mississippi. "It was red

state-blue state to the 15th power," he said.

But his strip has also predicted more recent history. New York,

for example, now has a black governor. And in his debate with Sen.

Oilandgas, Pettigrew must defend himself against charges of

cowardice in Vietnam.

"There was absolutely no way of foreseeing the Swift boat

attack," said Reece, now living in Annapolis, Md.

He says the same of the core plot twist.

"There was absolutely no prescience," said Reece, who

supported Obama in the Maryland primary. "It was just a young

man's dream."

Reece ended the series with a cliffhanger: "Could he win? Well,

it would depend in part on how the boys and girls who were reading

this grew up and voted."

Forty-four years later, the strip will have a conclusion.

-- SARAH WHEATON

The next president is about to inherit an economy in a nose dive

and a

stock market flat on its back. That's painfully bad news for most

of us,

but a big opportunity for him.

Compared with other daunting challenges that will face either

Barack Obama

or John McCain as president, the economy in general and the stock

market in

particular are fixable. Markets are notoriously difficult to

predict, but

they almost always rebound from plunging corrections over time.

Four years

should be plenty.

The current stock market decline is not historic, but it has

been

wrenchingly bad. The Dow Jones industrial average has lost 34.5

percent

since its peak reached in October 2007. All but one of the Dow

average's 30

stocks has lost money this year.

Other presidents who took office with the nation in financial

turmoil

benefitted from the stock market's resilience. Franklin Roosevelt,

Ronald

Reagan, and even Gerald Ford saw a troubled market begin to rebound

in less

than four years.

All three of those presidents faced different specific

challenges but each

inherited stock markets suffering because of serious economic

problems when

they first took office. Roosevelt famously dealt with the Great

Depression

of the 1930s. Reagan took office amid a recession and sky-high

interest

rates of 18 to 20 percent. Ford battled a recession and

double-digit

inflation rates of the mid-1970s.

The nation's economic problems did not disappear by the end of

those terms

and the economy remained downright dire in 1936 after Roosevelt's

first

four years in office. But stock prices had moved sharply higher in

each

case.

The stock market roughly tripled in value during the first

Roosevelt term.

The Ford stock market lost ground at first but eventually climbed

about 20

percent. The Dow Jones industrials earned a total return of 60

percent

during the first Reagan term, which turned out to be the launching

pad for

one of the 20th century's great bull markets despite the crash of

1987.

One safe bet: We will still be looking at real economic problems

at the

end of the coming administration's four-year term. But, stock

prices will

also be significantly higher than today's levels.

History offers a few stock market lessons for the next

president. He can

help, by trying to stimulate the economy and projecting leadership

at a

time when confidence matters more than usual. The next president

could

exercise real power by doing both. But he will also discover the

limits to

his influence over the market.

"The president is not responsible for the stock market," says

Richard

Sylla, a market historian and economics professor at New York

University.

"But if they appear to be in charge and do things to address the

country's

economic ills, people will rally behind them a little bit. It's

almost a

psychological thing. People feel good about a new president

anyway."

Roosevelt certainly projected leadership as a new president, as

did

Reagan. What each actually did - launching the New Deal, cutting

taxes -

also made a difference. But other factors beyond their control were

at

work, too.

The stock market had fallen so dramatically by the time

Roosevelt took

office in 1933, it was almost impossible for it to go lower. In

fact,

stocks had actually bounced off the bottom before he took office.

The

market soared during Roosevelt's first term, but fell hard after he

won

re-election. Call that good political timing all the way around.

Reagan came to office in early 1981 pursuing change his admirers

called a

revolution, but Federal Reserve chairman Paul Volcker was more

important to

the economy and markets. Volcker drove interest rates sky high to

curb

dangerous inflation. The strategy worked and the stock market

advanced, but

the high rates inflicted real pain along the way. Sylla says Reagan

advisers worried about the political fallout and initially urged

the

president to blame everything on Volcker, which he declined to do.

Volcker

is remembered for bold action, but Reagan also benefitted from the

stock

market boost.

The Ford presidency is such a strange historical period it's

hard to know

what to make of the stock market's relationship to the White House

in those

years. After taking office in the summer of 1974, Ford labored to

right the

economy, campaigning to "Whip Inflation Now," but never seemed

completely

effective.

Ultimately all three benefited from timing, too. The ups and

downs of

business are just as important to the stock market as decisions

made in the

White House. Policies are important, but timing helps.

"An administration can make some difference at the margin with

policies," says John Carey, a veteran portfolio manager at Pioneer

Investments in Boston. "But I think it's the business cycle that

drives

the market over long periods of time."

Timing may have helped the stock market of Bill Clinton, who

arrived in

and departed from Washington under ideal economic circumstances.

And

perhaps timing hurt President Bush, whose terms spanned the

technology

stock bust, the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, and now this

latest

financial collapse that can be blamed on so many culpable parties.

Today, financial institutions are under stress around the world.

Companies, consumers, and even municipalities find it harder to

borrow

money. Unemployment is rising and economists worry about a serious

recession.

Facing all that, Obama or McCain will also exercise a limited

power over

the direction of the stock market. But their timing couldn't be

better.

Steven Syre is a Globe columnist. He can be reached at

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Business software maker Egenera Inc. notified employees Monday it

will

eliminate 87 jobs worldwide, including 30 to 35 at its Marlborough

headquarters, in the latest sign that Massachusetts technology

companies

are bracing for a worsening economic downturn.

Egenera said it will trim its sales force about 40 percent by

shifting

its model to rely on hardware vendors like computer maker Dell Inc.

to

market Egenera's software to businesses. Until now, the company has

sold

software directly to business customers in the United States.

"We're prepared for a fairly dramatic economic slowdown," said

Mike

Thompson, Egenera president and chief executive. "We've seen signs

of a

slowdown in the past year, so we dialed back our expenses. Now when

we talk

to our customers around the globe, we're seeing the slowdown almost

across

the board."

Egenera sells "virtualization" software, technology that

enables one

networking machine in a corporate data center to behave as many,

running

different operating systems at the same time. Its customers include

hundreds of financial, healthcare, manufacturing, service, and

retail

businesses in the United States and worldwide. But in the third

quarter,

ended Sept. 30, all of its domestic orders came from federal

agencies, as

businesses scaled back on information technology spending, Thompson

said.

Other Massachusetts technology companies, which had hoped to

escape the

fallout from an economic crisis originating in the housing and

financial

sectors, also have begun cutting payrolls. California-based THQ

Inc.

Monday said it is closing Helixe, a Burlington software studio that

makes

games for the Nintendo DS handheld videogame system, eliminating 30

jobs.

Plexus Corp., a maker of printed circuit boards, told the

state's

Executive Office of Labor and Workforce Development last month it

will be

closing a plant in Ayer between now and Jan. 31, idling 170

workers. ACT

Electronics Inc. indicated it would close a Hudson electronic

assembly

plant on Nov. 28, shedding 27 jobs, according to a published

report.

Tewksbury's Avid Technology Inc., a maker of video editing

software,

recently said it's laying off 54 workers in Massachusetts and 20 in

New

Hampshire. And at least three dozen Verizon Communications

engineers in

Massachusetts and Rhode Island will lose their jobs this month as

part of a

broader retrenchment at the telecom company.

The uncertain environment is making companies anxious about

keeping costs

in line with projected sales, analysts said.

"There is a discontinuity taking place where the normal market

behavior

ceases to exist," said Roger L. Kay, president of research firm

Endpoint

Technologies Associates in Wayland. "Some of it is just caution,

not

wanting to have a lot of expenses if volume declines. All the fixed

costs

come under scrutiny, from inventories to payrolls."

Egenera, backed by venture capital, was founded in March 2000 by

Vern

Brownell, a former chief technology officer at the Goldman Sachs &amp;amp;

Co.

investment bank. While it initially focused on selling blade

servers,

computing machines that carried more processing power in less rack

space,

it has gradually transitioned in recent years to virtualization

software, a

new technology that enhances the efficiency and flexibility of

computer

servers, storage, and networking gear.

While the company previously had marketed its software overseas

through

partners like Digital China and the Fujitsu Siemens joint venture,

it had

sold directly to end users in the United States. By switching to an

indirect sales channel, Egenera can reduce its sales force,

Thompson said.

The company will retain some of its direct sales people to continue

serving

existing customers, he said.

Thompson said Egenera hopes to eventually go public in an

initial public

offering, but he conceded the IPO market is frozen for now as fear

dominates financial markets. "There's no IPO market today," he

said. "So

we're going to weather the storm until there is one."

Globe staff reporters Hiawatha Bray, Todd Wallack, and Erin

Ailworth

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Australia was widely expected to cut interest rates on Tuesday

and South Korea announced a $10.9 billion stimulus package on

Monday, the latest in a string of steps by governments seeking to

prop up growth and cushion the impact of the financial crisis.

The Spanish government, meanwhile, unveiled on Monday a program

to allow out-of-work homeowners to defer mortgage payments.

Other countries with a troubled housing market, including the

United States, are debating steps to help people stave off

foreclosure, but have yet to enact any direct measures.

Spain is grappling with an economy that is slipping into

recession and has the highest unemployment rate in the European

Union.

Prime Minister Jose Luis Rodriguez Zapatero told a news

conference in Madrid that the package would also include incentives

for employers to hire the jobless.

Under the mortgage relief program, unemployed homeowners and

some retirees could postpone payment of half their monthly bill for

two years starting in January -- as long as the amount deferred each

month was no more than 500 euros, or about $635. The offer would

apply to mortgages of up to 170,000 euros and could affect about

half a million people, Zapatero said.

The Spanish government will underwrite the deferred payments,

which may be spread over 10 years, Zapatero said.

Spain had been a European leader in terms of job creation in the

last decade, as well as in home building. But the economy has

ground to a halt as the property bubble deflated and the global

credit crisis hit home.

In an effort to persuade businesses to hire those now receiving

benefits, Zapatero said the government would pay companies 1,500

euros a year for each job given to an unemployed worker supporting

a family. He also said bonuses would be introduced for companies

hiring people working in research and development and renewable

energy.

South Korea, which has been hit hard by reduced demand from the

United States and Europe, and where the financial crisis has left

banks struggling to pay billions of dollars in short-term loans,

has announced a series of emergency measures in recent weeks.

The latest, announced Monday by President Lee Myung-bak,

included an additional 11 trillion won ($8.7 billion) in government

spending and 3 trillion won in tax cuts. These are aimed mainly at

the real estate and construction industries.

The package is intended to bolster growth next year by an

additional percentage point to around 4 percent, and was announced

as fresh data showed export growth in October had slowed to its

lowest pace in 13 months.

Weak economic data in Australia were also expected to prompt

that country's central bank to reduce its key rate by another half

a percentage point to 5.5 percent on Tuesday. The cut would be the

third since Sept. 3, and bring the total in rate cuts to 1.75

percentage points.

The moves have been intended to prop up the Australian economy,

which is highly dependent on raw materials production and has

suffered from falling prices for iron ore and copper in recent

months. Data released Monday showed retail sales fell 1.1 percent

in September, much more than had been expected, while house prices

fell 1.8 percent during the third quarter.

China, which last week joined a flurry of interest rate cuts in

the United States and elsewhere, over the weekend announced it was

loosening limits on bank lending. Signs in China also indicate that

growth is slowing.

CHARLOTTE, N.C. - Senators Barack Obama and John McCain worked

furiously

Monday to sway late-deciding voters on the final full day of their

historic

battle for the White House, capping a campaign in which the

candidates

fought conventional skirmishes on deeply unconventional political

terrain.

Obama and McCain closed out the final sprint of the marathon

with

intensive pushes across a half-dozen states likely to determine

Tuesday's

election. McCain raced defensively through a series of states

President

Bush won in 2004. Obama, sobered by his 86-year-old grandmother's

death

early Monday, finished with three rallies in Republican bastions -

Florida,

North Carolina, and Virginia - that reflected his push to expand

the

Democrat map.

Continuing the sharp attacks right to the finish line, the two

candidates

delivered arguments Monday that were more urgent versions of the

highly

partisan messages they have been hitting hard for weeks: Obama, the

Democratic nominee, asserted that Republicans are siding with Wall

Street

barons and Fortune 500 companies over middle-class families, while

McCain,

the GOP nominee, warned that Democrats' spending plans would send

America

into another depression.

"Tax and spend, tax and spend," McCain said at an airport

hangar in

Blountville, Tenn., a stop targeting media markets in southwest

Virginia

and northwest North Carolina. "That's what they're all about, my

friends."

Twice in one speech, he accused Obama of being in the "far-left

lane of

American politics," and at each stop took aim at Democratic

congressional

leaders, including Representative Barney Frank of Newton, Mass., as

readily as he pointed at the nominee himself.

"Watch out, they're even talking about taxing your 401(k)

contributions,"

McCain said at Pittsburgh International Airport. "I'm going to

protect

people's retirement, not tax it. I'm going to protect Social

Security. I'm

going to protect Medicare."

Even as Obama told voters it was time to move beyond the "old

arguments"

between Republicans and Democrats that have generated so much

Washington

gridlock, the Illinois senator, drawing on the central plank of his

candidacy, sought to paint McCain as an out-of-touch Republican who

cared

more about the wealthy than he did average workers.

At his first rally, in front of more than 9,000 people at

Jacksonville's

Veterans Memorial Arena, Obama hammered McCain anew for saying, in

the same

setting on Sept. 15, that "the fundamentals of our economy are

strong."

"That day, more than 5,000 jobs were lost, more than 7,000

homes were

foreclosed on," said Obama, whose stump speech was repeatedly

interrupted

by chants of "O-BA-MA" and "Yes we can!"

"The day before, former Fed Chairman Alan Greenspan said we

were in a

'once in a century' crisis," he continued. "Florida, you and I

know that

not only was John McCain fundamentally wrong, it sums up the fact

that he's

out of touch."

When boos filled the arena, Obama used a rejoinder he has

employed at

nearly every rally over the past week: "You don't need to boo. You

just

need to vote."

The back-and-forth over taxes and the economy is one of several

familiar

disputes that McCain and Obama - both of whom portray themselves as

politicians unburdened by the usual left-right divides - have

sparred over

throughout their campaign. The candidates have veered little from

their

party lines on trade (McCain embraces it, Obama wants more

protections for

American workers); on healthcare (McCain favors a market approach,

Obama

calls for more government involvement); and on foreign policy

(McCain talks

tough, Obama emphasizes diplomacy).

But if their policy clashes resemble those in past elections,

their

battlefield most certainly does not. In any other recent

presidential

contest, it would be impossible to imagine a Democratic candidate

spending

the eve of the election in North Carolina, which last voted for a

Democratic presidential candidate 32 years ago, and Virginia, which

last

did so 44 years ago. But polls suggest Obama has a shot at winning

both

states, and he hoped a final exclamation point might make the

difference.

Monday evening, Obama revved up about 25,000 supporters on the

campus of

the University of North Carolina-Charlotte who braved pouring rain

to hear

his last-minute appeals.

"I know it's a little drizzly and you've been standing here

getting wet,"

he said.

"That's all right - you worth it!" a woman screamed back.

"When we started 21 months ago," Obama continued, "I didn't

know how it

would turn out. And no matter what happens ... I'm going to feel

good about

how it's turned out, because all of you have created this

incredible

campaign."

Of the 20 events Obama held in the final full week of

campaigning, just one

- a rally outside Philadelphia a week ago - was in a state that

Democrat

John F. Kerry won in 2004. The rest were in the traditional

battlegrounds

of Florida and Ohio, but also newly competitive Colorado, Indiana,

Missouri, Nevada, North Carolina, and Virginia.

The capstone of Obama's almost two years of campaigning was a

late-night

rally in Manassas, Va., outside Washington, D.C., in Prince William

County,

which Bush won by seven percentage points in 2004.

McCain, who has followed a lighter schedule than Obama,

approached the

last tour of his nearly 18-month campaign as a chance to catch up

with a

grueling seven-state swing Monday. He asserted confidence about his

chances

Tuesday in the face of what polls suggest are long odds. "There's

just one

day left until we take America in a new direction," McCain told a

raucous,

salsa-paced midnight rally in Miami alongside actor Kelsey Grammer

and

Kansas Senator Sam Brownback.

From there, he launched a 20-hour fly-around covering a range of

political

terrain - from Tampa, a booming coastal metropolis rich in suburban

independents to Prescott, the old territorial capital of his native

Arizona, a state that has become competitive in the campaign's

closing

weeks.

Fueled by coffee and fried chicken, McCain grew both hoarse and

punchier as

his long day went on. "Joe Lieberman and Joe the plumber are the

best!"

he exulted at one point.

With the exception of Pennsylvania, all the states where McCain

campaigned

Monday voted for Bush in 2004. He is expected to visit another,

Colorado,

while voters are at the polls Tuesday.

Obama will spend Election Night in Chicago, but plans a quick

side trip

to the Indianapolis area to greet voters midday. His campaign is

expressing

confidence in its turnout operation.

More than 29 million people in 30 states already voted as of

Monday,

Democrats had submitted 1 million more ballots than Republicans,

and heavy

early voting by Democrats in several swing states suggests that

Obama goes

into Tuesday with an edge, according to an Associated Press

analysis.

In a radio interview Monday, Obama said he was calm, befitting a

candidate

ahead in the polls. "I feel pretty peaceful, I gotta say," he

said on the

"Russ Parr Morning Show." "Because my attitude is if we've done

everything we can do, then it's up to the people to decide. And the

question is going to be who wants it more. And I hope that our

supporters

want it bad, because I think the country needs it."

Scott Helman reported from the Obama campaign and can be reached

at

shelman@globe.com; Sasha Issenberg reported from the McCain

campaign and

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Commerzbank on Monday became the first commercial lender

in Germany to accept government cash, while several other European

banks reported poor earnings, an indication of the continuing

weakness in the sector.

Commerzbank, based in Frankfurt, said it would avail itself of

8.2 billion euros, or $10.5 billion, from Germany's financial

markets stabilization fund to strengthen its capital base.

In Paris, the French bank Societe Generale said its

third-quarter profit slid 84 percent from a year earlier, to 183

million euros, as revenue fell 5 percent, to 5.1 billion euros,

well below market expectations. Societe Generale announced a $7.2

billion loss in January that it pinned on a junior futures trader,

Jerome Kerviel. It wrote off 1.4 billion euros in the latest

quarter.

Markets worldwide were buffeted in the third quarter, when the

investment bank, Lehman Brothers, collapsed and the insurance

giant, American International Group, received a bailout. Interbank

lending largely ground to a halt in the quarter.

Commerzbank's chief executive, Martin Blessing, said the

government's aid would be in the form of "silent participation" --

meaning there would be little dilution to shareholders' interest.

The bank will pay no dividend in 2009 or 2010, and will limit

Blessing's pay to 500,000 euros ($632,000) a year.

Commerzbank also posted a third-quarter net loss of 285 million

euros, compared with year-earlier profit of 339 million euros, and

wrote down 952 million euros in investments.

Last week, Hypo Real Estate, a mortgage lender, said it would

seek 500 billion euros from the government and BayernLB, a regional

state-owned lender, said it would seek 5.4 billion euros. Deutsche

Bank, the biggest German lender, reiterated Sunday that it had no

plans to seek government funds.

In Edinburgh, HBOS, the British mortgage lender that is selling

itself to Lloyds TSB with government help, said Monday that its

losses grew sharply in the first nine months. It said it had booked

impairment charges of 1.7 billion pounds, or $2.8 billion, for

soured loans in its corporate division, and had lost 1.8 billion

pounds on its treasury portfolio. It said further losses of 150

million pounds were likely in relation to losses on Icelandic bank

investments.

Shares of Commerzbank rose 1.6 percent in Frankfurt afternoon

trading, while Societe Generale rose 0.2 percent in Paris. In

London, shares of HBOS rose 3.2 percent, and Lloyds TSB fell 2.2

percent.

LAWRENCE, Mass. - In high school, Sean Cahalane would urge on

the football

team so fervently that the players took to calling him "Coach

Sean." At

Market Basket in Andover, where he bagged groceries, customers

would ask

after him by name. Around his Lawrence neighborhood, the affable

20-year-old mowed lawns, tended gardens, and played with the local

children.

But late Sunday night, the young, developmentally disabled man

who was

always so eager to help others was the one in desperate need as a

fire

engulfed his house. Neighbors watched in horror as he leaned out of

his

second-story bedroom window and screamed, while his parents stood

below.

"They kept screaming, 'Jump, Sean, jump!"' said Paul

Watterson, a family

friend.

His mother, 51-year-old Linda Cahalane, rushed back in to save

her son. But

both were killed, apparently overwhelmed by the smoke.

The mother's sacrifice amazed her family, but didn't surprise

them.

"That's who she was," said her 22-year-old stepgrandson,

sobbing. "Her

family was number one."

Monday, Sean's father, Russell Cahalane, a retired dispatcher

for the

Andover police and fire departments, gathered with his large family

at a

neighbor's home on Leeds Terrace, two houses from the scene. He was

too

distraught to speak, according to his family.

"I don't even know what to think right now," said his stepson,

Jeremy

Custeau, as he stood outside.

The deaths shook this small street where almost everyone seemed

to know the

Cahalanes, an outgoing family who held a pool party every summer

for

relatives, friends, and neighbors.

Sean Cahalane, who dreamed of starting a landscaping business,

taught

neighborhood children to swim, holding their hands and helping them

kick

their way from one end of the pool to the other as his mother

served

enormous plates of food, friends said.

"She loved nothing better than to have her family around her,"

Watterson

said, "and have a huge, huge meal."

The fire started just before midnight Sunday, officials said,

after a short

circuit in the electric baseboard heating unit sparked flames in

the

kitchen.

Sean and Linda Cahalane were sleeping as Russell worked in his

office, said

Watterson, who spoke with Russell Cahalane Monday morning. Russell

Cahalane

heard a noise, went to the hallway to investigate, and saw smoke,

Watterson said.

He and Linda ran outside, but quickly realized that Sean was

still inside.

They saw him leaning out the window and Russell screamed at him

to keep his

head outside and breathe fresh air. Sean was about 15 feet from the

ground

and, at 6 feet, 5 inches, probably could have jumped without

hurting

himself seriously, Watterson said.

But he apparently panicked.

Russell Cahalane rushed to find a ladder. That's when his wife

went back

in, said neighbor Susan Ngatha, who called 911.

When Russell Cahalane returned, he ran inside to rescue his

family, but the

fire and smoke were too intense and he got only as far as the front

stairs,

Watterson said. He called out to his wife and at first she

answered, said

Michelle Mooney, Custeau's fiancee.

Then "all of a sudden, she stopped yelling back at him,"

Mooney said.

Firefighters found the two near Sean's bedroom, unconscious.

They did not

seem to have any burns, said Police Chief John J. Romero.

Emergency officials administered cardiopulmonary resuscitation,

but it was

too late. Russell Cahalane was inconsolable, said Ngatha.

"Even now, it still hasn't sunk in," she said.

Monday, friends and relatives recalled Linda Cahalane as a

nurturing mother

of three who insisted that Sean stay in regular classes. She loved

watching videos with him, Mooney said: "They were big fans of any

new

movie that came out."

Sean Cahalane, who graduated from Whittier Regional Vocational

Technical

High School in 2007, was self-sufficient and independent. In high

school,

he was not coordinated enough to play sports, but he loved being

around

athletes and became the football team's equipment manager, setting

up cones

for practice drills and fixing broken helmets. In return, the

players would

drive him to the team's Friday night spaghetti dinners.

"He meant so much to the kids," said the school's athletic

director,

Kevin Bradley in a statement released by the school. "They are all

crying.

He never played a down but he touched every one of their lives."

After graduation, Sean Cahalane took a few marketing classes at

Northern

Essex Community College, but had a hard time keeping up and worked

for a

while instead, Mooney said.

He could not drive because he was prone to seizures, so he would

bike or

walk the 2 miles to Market Basket.

He would help women with children lug groceries to their cars,

and would go

out of his way to lift heavy objects so that others would not have

to, said

Ronald Savage, a store manager.

Though he towered over most people, he was incredibly disarming,

said

Watterson.

"Every time I would see him at Market Basket, he would walk

away from

whatever he was doing and give me a huge hug," Watterson said.

"I'd get a

face full of chest ... He was a gentle giant."

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Google and Yahoo have offered to significantly

narrow the scope of a planned advertising partnership in a

last-minute effort to win the approval of the Justice Department,

which is scrutinizing the deal for its effect on competition, a

person briefed on the revised plan said on Monday.

The advertising deal calls for Google to place ads next to some

Web search results on Yahoo, lifting Yahoo's revenue. Under the

revised terms, the deal would be shortened to two years, from as

many as 10, said the person, who agreed to speak only on condition

of anonymity because the discussions remained confidential.

In addition, the amount that Yahoo could earn from ads placed by

Google would be capped at 25 percent of Yahoo's search advertising

revenue, the person said. Previously, Yahoo had the discretion to

decide how much of its search ads to turn over to Google.

Google and Yahoo submitted the new proposal to the Justice

Department over the weekend. It is not clear whether the

limitations will be enough to satisfy antitrust investigators, who

have raised objections to the planned partnership.

Representatives for Yahoo and Google declined to comment on the

new proposal, but said that discussions with the Justice Department

were continuing. Gina Talamona, a department spokeswoman, said the

matter was pending but declined to comment further.

The proposed limits on the partnership, if accepted by

regulators, would most likely reduce the financial benefits of the

deal for Yahoo, which has been struggling to accelerate its growth

in the wake of failed merger talks with Microsoft. The company has

said it hopes to receive $250 million to $450 million in additional

operating cash flow from the agreement in its first year.

For Google, a more limited deal would also be a setback, but

would most likely be worth pursuing if it averted a showdown with

regulators over the company's growing power. Groups representing

some of the nation largest advertisers, who are Google's most

important customers, have said that the deal could reduce

competition, lead to higher prices and strengthen its dominance of

the search advertising market.

One critic of the deal said that the revisions would do nothing

to make the agreement more palatable to advertisers. "If a deal

can't survive long-term scrutiny, what's the benefit of allowing it

for the short term?" said Robert D. Liodice, president of the

Association of National Advertisers, which has urged the Justice

Department to oppose the deal.

The companies have said that the deal would actually be good for

competition, and that they do not control ad prices, which are set

through auctions.

A cap on the percentage of revenue that Yahoo could earn would

ensure that it would not use the deal to slowly exit the search

advertising market -- a situation that some advertisers said was

likely and that would give Google a virtual monopoly on the largest

and most profitable portion of the online advertising business.

The new proposal came as the discussions between the companies

and the Justice Department appeared to have run their course. A

resolution -- either a decision by the department to file a suit to

block the deal, a decision by the companies to walk away from it or

a last-minute agreement -- was expected this week. Google and Yahoo

announced their planned partnership in June. They agreed to delay

it until early October to give regulators time to review it. Since

then, the companies have postponed the start of the deal

repeatedly.

News of the revised proposal was first reported on the Web site

of The Wall Street Journal.

He is an enormously popular, can-do-no-wrong player in the eyes

of his

constituents, who have anointed him as the ultimate counterculture

player -

suit? necktie? tie shoes? you crazy? - but Allen Iverson is just a

basketball commodity to the basketball establishment, and now he

has been

traded for a second time in less than two years.

"The Answer" is what his adoring public calls him. Well,

today's

question is, "Can you win a championship with Allen Iverson as

your best

player?"

Thus far, the answer is no, and AI is now 33. This means he is

a) past his

physical peak and b) set in his ways. There is a chance I'm wrong

about the

first one, but there isn't much doubt about the second one.

Iverson has been traded from the Denver Nuggets to the Detroit

Pistons, a

team that needs a change of something. Call it change of pace, call

it what

you wish, but it was evident by their play against the Celtics in

the 2008

playoffs that the window for that core group had closed. A team

that had

the talent and knowledge to win multiple championships was going to

hold

itself to just one title for reasons the rest of us will never

know.

What is shocking about this transaction is the sobering thought

that the

Pistons have cold-bloodedly acquired him with a larger idea in

mind. Can

Allen Iverson deal with the idea that he has not really been

brought to

Auburn Hills to help the Pistons win an NBA championship, that he

is, in

addition to being an experienced player of note, that most

desirable of NBA

items, an expiring contract?

Oh, the indignity.

But that is the immediate assumption the experts are making.

Detroit

general manager Joe Dumars has acquired Allen Iverson as much for

his

contract as his skill. Iverson's $21,937,500 contract is up at the

end of

the season. Rasheed Wallace's $14 million deal will likewise soon

be

history. Dumars is positioning himself for the luscious free agent

crop of

2010 that will include LeBron James, Dwyane Wade, Chris Bosh, Amare

Stoudamire, Ray Allen, Tyson Chandler, Manu Ginobili, Richard

Jefferson,

Joe Johnson, Tracy McGrady, Yao Ming, Steve Nash, Dirk Nowitzki,

and

Michael Redd.

Wow.

This is Year 13 for AI, which hardly seems possible, does it? It

seems

like yesterday that Carmelo Travieso and Edgar Padilla were

schooling

Iverson and Victor Page in the 1996 NCAA Eastern Regionals down

there in

Atlanta. That was a glorious day for UMass, but we all knew Iverson

was

headed for NBA fame and glory, regardless of what took place in the

Georgia

Dome that Sunday afternoon.

But how will history treat Allen Iverson?

The barebones are that he is a Rookie of the Year (1996-97), a

three-time

first-team All-NBA player, a three-time scoring leader, a

three-time steals

leader, and an MVP (2000-01). He got to the NBA Finals once, in

2001

against the Lakers, and his 76ers were simply beaten by a better

team. He

is a two-time All-Star Game MVP (2001, 2005), with a high of 35.

Pretty good for 6 feet 1 inch (if that), huh?

Yes, it is. Allen Iverson is one of the most intriguing players

in the

history of the NBA. There have been little guys equally quick and

there

have been little guys (Nate Archibald, for example) who could match

his

ability to both score and pass. But the thing he will be remembered

for is

his sheer physical toughness.

The only players his size I know of who have ever approached

Iverson's

fearlessness and ability to play in pain were K.C. Jones and Norm

Van Lier,

and neither was anywhere near the total ballplayer Allen Iverson

has been.

Neither K.C. nor Stormin' could have led this league in scoring

even if

they had been allowed to count all their pregame layups.

All of us who love basketball have been thrilled by Allen

Iverson's

extraordinary tenacity and virtuosity. But the eternal issue with

all

extraordinary virtuosos in this game, whether they be 7-foot

scoring-machine centers such as Wilt Chamberlain and Kareem

Abdul-Jabbar,

midsize do-it-alls such as Michael Jordan (OK, specifically Michael

Jordan), or small multiskilled guards such as Archibald, Isiah

Thomas, or

Allen Iverson, is how to blend that dominating talent with the

other four

people in order to best help a team win basketball games and,

eventually,

championships.

It is basketball's great conundrum. A man can indeed have too

much talent.

In Iverson's case, the entire package includes a very specific

personal

background that has shaped him into a very rigid adult. He embraces

a

culture that very often irritates the basketball establishment. It

permeates everything he does, from the way he dresses to the way he

plays

the game. And being 6-1 is a major problem. The 6-1 player who can

affect

basketball in the long run the way the great centers and the great

midsize

players such as Bird, Magic, and Michael did has not yet been born.

As

talented as Allen Iverson is, there is only so much a 6-1 guy can

do.

I'm not sure Allen Iverson will ever be at peace with that

concept.

The fact that he has not won a championship since high school is

not his

fault. It is a testament to the game of basketball. Pure point

guards

fitting a specific team need in a given point in time help teams

win

championships. This is what Oscar Robertson and Tiny Archibald did

for the

1971 Bucks and 1981 Celtics, respectively. They were each very

toned-down

versions of their career-peak physical selves when they won their

rings.

But Allen Iverson has yet to make that transition.

Could he? Theoretically, yes. If he did so, could he make

Detroit a

champion? I'm not sure the Pistons are that close, but for the sake

of

argument, let's say yes, again theoretically. Does he have any idea

what

I'm talking about? I doubt it.

I bet Joe Dumars doubts it, too. But he's going to enjoy Allen

Iverson's

expiring contract.

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The mood in the Patriots' locker room following their

hard-fought and

hard-luck 18-15 loss to the Indianapolis Colts Sunday night was

understandably funereal. It would be human nature to dwell on what

could

have been/should have been against the Colts, but the Patriots

don't have

time to wallow in pigskin self-pity.

With next to no contributions from their projected starting

backfield of

quarterback Tom Brady and running back Laurence Maroney, both of

whom are

done for the season, the Patriots sit at 5-3 halfway through the

season,

locked in a three-way tie with the Buffalo Bills and New York Jets

for

first place in the AFC East.

This Sunday's crucial game at home against the Bills kicks off a

stretch of

three straight division games for the Patriots. After the Bills,

New

England plays the Jets on a Thursday night, Nov. 13, at Gillette

Stadium

and then travels to Miami to face the Dolphins Nov. 23. Those games

will go

a long way in deciding whether the Patriots can win a sixth

straight AFC

East title.

Any anger over playing perfect stall ball on offense and

limiting Peyton

Manning and the Colts to 18 points on defense but still losing has

to be

left in the locker room at Lucas Oil Stadium, or the Patriots will

be left

behind in the AFC East.

"You got to take it for what it is - we're still 5-3," said

cornerback

Ellis Hobbs following Sunday night's loss. "We go from here. We

continue

to play. We've got an eight-game season. We have some division

games coming

up.

"It hurts right now, but it's just like a win. I take it for

what it is

today. Then tomorrow it's out of my system."

The Patriots have dominated the AFC East since 2001, winning

five straight

titles and six of seven. Their 36-10 record (.783 winning

percentage) in

divisional play since 2001 is the best in the NFL.

But this year is different.

The balance of power in the division shifted the moment Chiefs

safety

Bernard Pollard plowed into Brady's left knee in the season opener.

While

the Bills, Jets, and Patriots are tied for the lead, Miami, which

already

has beaten the Patriots this season, is just a game back at 4-4.

"I think all three of those are good football teams," said

coach Bill

Belichick. "We certainly knew about the Jets and Miami, that

wasn't any

surprise. The way that Buffalo has been built with the job that

((coach))

Dick ((Jauron)) has done there and getting a lot of young talented

players

on their team and how explosive they are in the return game, on

special

teams and offensively with ((Lee)) Evans, all the ((other))

receivers, and

((Marshawn)) Lynch ((at running back)). Defensively, their speed

and

quickness up front with some talented guys in the secondary it

doesn't

surprise me that they have won five games, no."

The Bills may present the greatest challenge to the Patriots'

AFC East

supremacy. They are well-coached by Jauron. They have an explosive

wide

receiver in Evans, who is averaging 19.4 yards per catch, a

talented

running back in Lynch, and a quality quarterback in Trent Edwards,

who in

his second season out of Stanford has cemented himself as one of

the game's

good young QBs.

As if the Bills needed any added motivation, they have lost two

straight

games after a 5-1 start, both losses coming in the division.

Working in the Patriots' favor is that the Bills could be

without safety

Donte' Whitner, who suffered a separated right shoulder Sunday

against the

Jets, and defensive end Aaron Schobel, a pass-rushing Patriots

tormentor

who has a torn tendon in his left foot and has missed the last

three games.

Belichick knows the task his team faces.

"I have kind of kept an eye on Buffalo," said Belichick.

"They have

played a lot of teams that we have played, so we have seen them to

some

degree. But now is really when we start zeroing in on them."

That's good because the rest of the division teams are zeroing

in on the

Patriots, and they don't care what happened against the Colts.

That means the Patriots must take Kevin Faulk's failed 2-point

conversion

rush, David Thomas's untimely unnecessary roughness penalty, and

all the

other what-ifs from Sunday's loss and toss them out of their minds.

Indianapolis is over, but the drive for a division title is in

full gear.

"After a loss like this, you can feel bad, but at the same time

we still

have a lot of football left the second half of the season, so we'll

see

each other Wednesday and get back to work," said wide receiver

Randy Moss.

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Sharna Fey and Kim Broadbeck have gotten married

three times: In 2004, they married in a daze. In 2005, they married

on an island. And on Monday, when it really counted under the law,

they married in a hurry.

"We're doing this while we still can," said Fey, a 44-year-old

life coach who has been with Broadbeck for 11 years and through two

previous same-sex marriage ceremonies, neither recognized as legal.

"I mean, trust me: We feel married. But this is a legal

response."

They were not alone. With polls showing the outcome of a ballot

measure Tuesday on outlawing same-sex marriage in California a

toss-up, couples were not taking any chances on Monday. They showed

up early here at San Francisco City Hall, donning boutonnieres and

blouses and holding each others' hands -- and their collective

breath.

In West Hollywood, a gay friendly enclave near Los Angeles, John

Duran, a city councilman, said he had performed a whopping 25

ceremonies since Friday, driving all over Los Angeles County to

officiate.

"This is the modern day version of a shotgun wedding," said

Duran. "We're doing as many as we can before tomorrow."

The rush to the altar was in anticipation of Proposition 8,

which would amend the state constitution to define marriage as

between a man and a woman and end nearly five months of legalized

same-sex marriages in the state. The ban, if approved, would take

effect Wednesday.

"We're here in case of what happens tomorrow," said Michael

Levy, who married his partner, Michael Golden, in San Francisco on

Monday, both wearing identical tuxedo jackets, ties, and beards.

"I'm scared. It's really close."

While defeat of the California ballot measure would probably

quell debate -- at least for a time -- over allowing same-sex unions

in the state, it is expected that a victory would lead to a

second-round of legal wrangling: This time, over the validity of

the thousands marriages performed since June, when a state Supreme

Court decision legalizing same-sex marriages took effect.

The California attorney general, Jerry Brown, has indicated that

he would uphold the marriages, but Geoff Kors, the executive

director of Equality California, a gay rights group opposing

Proposition 8, said he expects challenges if they lose.

"It wouldn't surprise me that people trying to eliminate

constitutional rights would try to annul or divorce people that are

married," said Kors, who nonetheless expressed optimism that the

ballot measure would fail.

It ought to be a seminal moment: As a

new president takes office in Washington, the Czech Republic

assumes the rotating presidency of the European Union, the first

former Soviet bloc country to lead the group of 470 million

Europeans, and during one of the worst economic conflagrations in a

century.

But instead of welcoming the opportunity for this country of 10

million to shepherd the world's biggest trading bloc, the fiery

Czech president, Vaclav Klaus, has invoked the Munich agreement of

1938, when the European powers helped to carve up Czechoslovakia.

He said in late October that the Czech presidency would be

"insignificant" since Europe, now as then, was controlled by

France, Germany, Italy and Britain. Czech politicians, he warned,

should not think they could change anything.

Like their Central European neighbors, Czechs have spent

centuries straddling the continent's East-West divide, pushed and

pulled between Russia and Germany or Austria. The prospect, come

Jan. 1, of six months at the helm of the European Union at a

sensitive point in history seems to have brought out national

neuroses from the past.

The center-right government of Prime Minister Mirek Topolanek is

teetering badly after huge losses in recent regional elections,

prompting alarm that the European Union could be led by a

rudderless nation.

Meanwhile, with Russia having flexed a new set of muscles over

Georgia, some European diplomats question whether this nation is up

to taming its former master.

Some in France, current holder of the presidency, are so alarmed

that officials there have suggested bypassing the Czech Republic

and extending the French presidency into next year.

Clearly piqued, the Czech foreign minister, Karel Schwarzenberg,

a pipe-smoking prince, joked that if France did not step aside,

then he would have to challenge Nicolas Sarkozy, its president, to

a duel. "The French and Mr. Sarkozy do not want to part with being

the president of Europe," Schwarzenberg said during an interview.

On Friday, Sarkozy offered a belated pledge of support.

The diplomatic wrangling has echoes of 2003, when former

communist countries, including the Czech Republic, supported the

U.S.-led war in Iraq, prompting Jacques Chirac, then president of

France, to remark that they needed to learn to "shut up." Europe

is more united now, but a new divide nevertheless threatens to

emerge, predicated in part on divergent approaches to steering

economic policy during perilous financial times.

Under the Czechs, some fear a renewed battle over which economic

model should dominate the European Union: the social market economy

favored by its newest members, or the state-controlled economy

increasingly championed by France.

While Sarkozy has earned praise for helping to engineer a speedy

bailout of European banks, Prague remains deeply wary of state

intervention.

Klaus, an economist by training, recently equated Sarkozy's

methods to "old Socialism," while Topolanek, the prime minister,

has argued that state support for collapsing banks runs counter to

the European Union's free market principles.

The Czech Republic's refusal to embrace the euro, even as its

poorer cousin Slovakia moves to adopt it in January, has prompted

some observers to argue that a country outside the euro zone is not

well-suited to guide the bloc during a global recession.

Tomas Sedlacek, chief economist at CSOB, the largest Czech bank,

contended that the Czech Republic would not be the most empathetic

leader since the government had pumped cash into faltering Czech

banks in the late 1990s, which was now shielding them from the

liquidity crisis.

"In a group where everyone has a headache, you don't want to

follow the one guy who says his head feels fine," he said.

But Schwarzenberg, the foreign minister, argued that the Czech

Republic was not immune to the financial crisis, because of deep

integration with the euro zone. More than three-quarters of Czech

exports go to the European Union, while the manufacturing sector in

the country is suffering.

As for the contention that the Czechs might be ill equipped to

guide policy toward the Kremlin, Schwarzenberg argued that 40 years

under Soviet domination had not gone unnoticed.

"We have some experience with the Russians," he said wryly.

Czech ambivalence toward the European Union stems in part from

instinctive distrust for Europe and loyalty to the United States,

conditioned during decades of invasion and occupation.

Jan Hamacek, a Social Democrat who heads the foreign affairs

committee in Parliament, said Czechs remembered that Americans had

rescued them, and the rest of Europe, three times in the 20th

century -- in World Wars I and II and during the Cold War.

Many younger Czechs say they are drawn to American values and

culture.

Tomas Jirsa, 25, chief of staff for the mayor of Prague and an

avowed conservative, said that while he worshiped Ronald Reagan,

flexible labor markets, maximum personal freedom and the United

States, his French counterparts were in thrall of protectionism,

higher taxes, jobs for life and irrational anti-Americanism.

"Because of what we experienced with communism, we like the

Anglo-Saxon model of libertarianism and freedom," he said.

"History shows that America deals with problems, while Europeans

are passive."

Madelyn Dunham, who watched from afar as her

only grandson rapidly ascended the ranks of American politics to

the brink of the presidency, did not live to see whether he was

elected.

Dunham, 86, Sen. Barack Obama's grandmother, died late Sunday

evening in Hawaii after battling cancer, which Obama announced upon

arriving here on Monday for a campaign stop on the eve of Election

Day.

"She has gone home," Obama said, his voice tinged with emotion

as he briefly spoke of her death at a campaign rally here. "She

died peacefully in her sleep with my sister at her side, so there's

great joy instead of tears."

Obama learned of his grandmother's death at 8 a.m. on Monday,

aides said, but carried through with a morning rally in Florida

without making an announcement. A written statement was issued by

the campaign, in Obama's name, before he spoke at a late-afternoon

rally in Charlotte.

Dunham was the final remaining immediate family member who

helped raise Obama during his teenage years in Hawaii. He called

her Toot, his shorthand for "tutu," a Hawaiian term for

grandparent.

Obama broke from the presidential campaign trail in late October

to travel to Honolulu to bid his grandmother farewell. He spent

part of two days with her, as she lay gravely ill in the small

apartment where he lived from age 10 to 18.

While Dunham was too sick to travel to see her grandson on the

campaign trail, Obama and other family members said that she

closely followed his bid for the presidency through cable

television. Yet she became a figure in his campaign, seen through

images in television commercials intended to give him a

biographical anchor.

For Obama, the loss came on the final full day of his

presidential campaign. Sen. John McCain and his wife, Cindy,

offered their condolences on Monday, saying: "Our thoughts and

prayers go out to them as they remember and celebrate the life of

someone who had such a profound impact in their lives."

His grandmother's illness had been weighing on him in recent

weeks, friends said, which is why he insisted on interrupting his

schedule to visit her late last month. While she was gravely ill,

aides said, Obama carried on a limited conversation with her. He

kept the visit to one day, advisers said, partly out of her own

insistence that people not create a fuss.

Australia was widely expected to cut interest rates on Tuesday

and South Korea announced a $10.9 billion stimulus package on

Monday, the latest in a string of steps by governments seeking to

prop up growth and cushion the impact of the financial crisis.

The Spanish government, meanwhile, unveiled on Monday a program

to allow out-of-work homeowners to defer mortgage payments.

Other countries with a troubled housing market, including the

United States, are debating steps to help people stave off

foreclosure, but have yet to enact any direct measures.

Spain is grappling with an economy that is slipping into

recession and has the highest unemployment rate in the European

Union.

Prime Minister Jose Luis Rodriguez Zapatero told a news

conference in Madrid that the package would also include incentives

for employers to hire the jobless.

Under the mortgage relief program, unemployed homeowners and

some retirees could postpone payment of half their monthly bill for

two years starting in January -- as long as the amount deferred each

month was no more than 500 euros, or about $635.

Spain had been a European leader in terms of job creation in the

last decade, as well as in home building. But the economy has

ground to a halt as the property bubble deflated and the global

credit crisis hit home.

South Korea, which has been hit hard by reduced demand from the

United States and Europe, and where the financial crisis has left

banks struggling to pay billions of dollars in short-term loans,

has announced a series of emergency measures in recent weeks.

The latest, announced Monday by President Lee Myung-bak,

included an additional 11 trillion won ($8.7 billion) in government

spending and 3 trillion won in tax cuts. These are aimed mainly at

the real estate and construction industries.

The package is intended to bolster growth next year by an

additional percentage point to around 4 percent, and was announced

as fresh data showed export growth in October had slowed to its

lowest pace in 13 months.

Weak economic data in Australia were also expected to prompt

that country's central bank to reduce its key rate by another half

a percentage point to 5.5 percent on Tuesday. The cut would be the

third since Sept. 3, and bring the total in rate cuts to 1.75

percentage points.

Business travelers of all political affiliations reported an

unusual amount of political conversation in the last few months --

some of it rather pointed -- from airplane seatmates, fellow guests,

diners and even associates.

"It's almost like they're looking for a reaction," said Barry

Goldberg, an executive coach who regularly flies for work. He said

that he had had numerous conversations -- not always pleasant -- with

fellow travelers who wanted to talk politics.

On a flight from Atlanta to New York in mid-August, Goldberg

said his seatmate addressed him as he read a copy of The Financial

Times. "The opening salvo was, 'Oh, that pink paper. What's the

matter -- you can't read an American paper?"' Goldberg recalled,

the reference being to the paper's salmon-colored newsprint.

He said he replied that he worked frequently in Europe and tried

to keep up on global economic affairs. "After the safety

announcements, he said, 'You're one of those people who's going to

vote for Obama, right? You're probably one of those people who

thinks we ought to talk to Iran,"' Goldberg said, adding that he

told the man he did not want to talk about politics and opened his

laptop, to no avail.

"This guy didn't give it up," he said.

While encounters with strangers may be awkward, it is far more

fraught to have such an exchange with a colleague or superior while

on the road. Lindsay Griffiths, an administrative staff member for

a legal association, found that out at her organization's annual

meeting in June, when one lawyer took umbrage with her stance on

the Iraq war as they were gathered with a group at the hotel bar.

"He was pointing his finger in my face. He really thought the

higher he raised his voice the more likely I was to go over to his

side." The lawyer's wife eventually stepped in and changed the

subject, and Griffiths excused herself.

Some business travelers said they went out of their way to avoid

these confrontations, going so far as to hurry through a meal in a

restaurant or cut short their time at the hotel spa.

But then there is Laurie Riedman, owner of a marketing firm, who

said she had been stopped four times over the course of a single

cross-country journey in September by travelers who remarked that

she looked like Sarah Palin, the Republican vice presidential

nominee.

"It was bizarre to me. I happen to be an Obama supporter and I

think people thought they were giving me a huge compliment," she

said. Riedman said the resemblance was superficial. She has brown

hair with bangs and rectangular glasses, and on that day happened

to be wearing a suit with her hair in an updo.

For Bryce Gruber, being visibly pregnant attracted comments and

admonishments from fellow travelers on both the right and the left.

On a recent flight from New York to Fort Lauderdale, Fla., her

seatmate, who identified herself as a doctor, told Gruber it was

her responsibility to vote for Barack Obama if she cared about the

health of her unborn child. "It was an early morning flight," she

said. "I just wanted to get out of the conversation."

On a car trip to a meeting in Philadelphia, Gruber said she was

stopped at a highway rest area by another traveler. "The guy next

to me saw I had Florida plates on my car and said, 'Oh, you must be

a McCain fan,' and then he started praising me."

While few are willing to admit that they argue politics with

strangers on the road, Jennifer Kushell conceded that she had

started a few spirited discussions. "I've been a lot more

aggressive in my comments than I think I've ever been in the

past," she said.

As the president of a networking and career counseling Web site

for college students, a job that involves flying about 100,000

miles a year, she teaches that politics is a topic to be avoided

while in professional company. "To admit I'm talking about this

kills me because it's against my policy," she said.

Although not the brunt of hostility, Noah Cole said he had found

himself in an uncomfortable situation on a flight on United in

October. When the flight attendant came to take drink orders, Cole

noticed that the attendant had an Obama sticker on his uniform.

The sticker was also noticed by his seatmate, who challenged the

attendant and asked why he was supporting him. When the attendant

demurred and left to get the beverages, Cole said his seatmate

turned to him next. "The guy looked at me and said, 'He must be

gay and that's why he's supporting Obama.' I didn't know how to

respond."

He said he had considered himself a good judge of his fellow

travelers beforehand. "But now, unless it's an outward sign like a

button, I've learned not to assume anything."

Christopher Federico, director of the Center for the Study of

Political Psychology at the University of Minnesota, said that the

anonymity of travel might lead some to think of themselves in terms

of the groups they support -- including political parties -- instead

of as individuals. "There's a lot of research to suggest that

people behave in unique ways when there is anonymity," he said.

When people are traveling, said Pier M. Forni, author of "The

Civility Solution: What to Do When People Are Rude" (St. Martin's

Press, 2008) and director of the Civility Initiative at Johns

Hopkins University, "We're in a sort of suspended life, and maybe

that makes us feel that the rules of decent engagement are

suspended as well."

The wait for a publicly traded Kohlberg Kravis Roberts just grew

a little longer.

The company, a private equity firm, said on Monday that it was

delaying the purchase of a publicly listed affiliate until next

year, amid the turmoil troubling the markets. Kohlberg executives

said the rescheduling was a result of complications arising from

the merger, which would combine the firm with the affiliate, KKR

Private Equity Investors, which is traded on the Euronext exchange

in Amsterdam, Netherlands.

"The investment thesis for the transaction is solid," George

R. Roberts, a founder of Kohlberg, said on a call with analysts on

Monday. "We remain committed to completing the transaction."

The news was the latest bump in Kohlberg's quest to start

trading in the public markets, a process started at the height of

the private equity boom in July 2007. First, the firm sought an

initial offering, following in the footsteps of Fortress Investment

Group and the Blackstone Group. With the credit squeeze, though,

Kohlberg and its peers have suffered as they have been cut off from

deal-making, the source of their previously lavish profits.

Last July, Kohlberg said it would go public by acquiring the 88

percent of KKR Private Equity Investors that it did not already own

and by relisting 21 percent of the combined company's shares on the

New York Stock Exchange. Unlike in the Blackstone or Fortress

offerings, none of Kohlberg's top executives will cash out through

the deal.

The affiliate's earnings shed some light on how Kohlberg's

companies are performing, an unusual amount of disclosure for

buyout firms, which are often secretive. The fund, which invests in

Kohlberg's private equity funds as well as several companies owned

by the buyout firm, said its assets' value fell 15.3 percent, to

$3.87 billion, in the third quarter. The total return for Private

Equity Investors for the year through Sept. 30 was negative 22.6

percent, slightly worse than the Standard &amp;amp; Poor's 500-stock index

or the Dow Jones industrial average have performed over the same

period.

While Private Equity Investors said the value of some

investments, like its stake in the hospital operator HCA, owned by

Kohlberg, rose, most of its other holdings declined. Its investment

in bonds of Sun Microsystems, for example, fell about 11 percent

from the second quarter, to $511 million. Other stakes, mostly in

European companies, declined in part because of fluctuations in

foreign exchange rates.

Analysts have grown increasingly concerned that companies owned

by buyout firms, which on average carry higher debt burdens, may

struggle more than their peers as the economy worsens. But on the

conference call, Kohlberg executives said that three-quarters of

the firm's portfolio companies were performing well. Furthermore,

the firm's representatives said that many of the companies had

flexible terms on their debt repayment.

Private Equity Investors also said that the value of its

investment in Kohlberg's private equity funds fell. With the

exception of its stake in the KKR Asian Fund, the unit had drops in

the values of its five other investments in its parent's buyout

funds.

Shares in Private Equity Investors closed at 4.25 euros on

Monday, having fallen nearly 77 percent this year.

Los Angeles -- U.S. auto sales plunged 32percent in October, to

their lowest annual rate in a quarter-century, as sagging consumer

confidence and tight credit paralyzed the market.

Consumers ignored zero-percent financing and other incentives

designed to lure them into showrooms just as 2009 models began to

arrive.

"This market is extremely tough. I've never seen it this

difficult," said 55-year dealership veteran Bert Boeckmann,

president of Galpin Motors and owner of the biggest-volume Ford

dealership in the world.

The nation's dealers sold 838,156 new cars, trucks and SUVs last

month, according to Ward's AutoInfoBank and Autodata Corp. That's

the lowest sales total since January 1991, also a period of

economic turmoil.

And if October's pace continues through the end of the year,

dealers will have sold 10.6 million new vehicles in 2008. That's

the weakest since February 1983, and well under the rate of 16

million last year.

"Last year was nothing to write home about," said Boeckmann,

whose dealerships encompass nine nameplates. "Today with all the

(economic) uncertainty we have ... it is not a good buyer's

climate."

General Motors Corp. took the biggest hit in October -- a

decline of 45 percent from the previous year. Chrysler LLC, which

is negotiating to be purchased by GM as a way for both companies to

survive, saw a 35 percent decline. Sales at Ford Motor Co. dropped

30 percent.

Japanese companies also saw double-digit declines in sales: 23

percent at Toyota Motor Corp; 25 percent at Honda Motor Co; and 33

percent at Nissan Motor Co.

The domestic vehicle sales market has been contracting for three

years but October's drop was dramatic, said a statement by Mark

LaNeve, vice president of GM North America Vehicle Sales, Service

and Marketing.

He attributed the weak numbers to tightened credit standards

that are dramatically impacting the entire U.S. economy and eroding

consumer confidence.

"These are extraordinary times for the U.S. economy, for

consumers and for an auto industry that is running at deep

recessionary levels relative to 1999-2006," LaNeve said.

Zain Haroon, general sales manager at Hamer Toyota, said he's

trying to stay positive despite a 30 percent drop in business at

his Mission Hills dealership.

"The buyers are out there," he said. "There are just not as

many."

Haroon also said falling gas prices may be enticing buyers to

again consider buying pickup trucks and SUVs. Of the 69 vehicles

Hamer sold this weekend, 11 were Toyota Tacoma and Tundra trucks.

"We're going to see more and more buyers looking for trucks and

SUVs," Haroon said. "It's going to happen. That's just the kind

of cycle we go through."

Haroon and other dealers said they're also working to sell used

vehicles and 2008 models to make way for the 2009 models that are

unveiled each fall.

Despite the slow October sales, industry executives said, most

dealers have adjusted orders to keep inventory levels manageable.

Manufacturers, in turn, have been slowing production.

For example, North American automakers assembled 16 percent

fewer vehicles in the third quarter, with Detroit's Big Three

cutting production by 23 percent.

George Pipas, Ford's top sales analyst, said dealers factor

economic conditions into their new-car orders.

"Things are quite slow now, but things were slowing down

earlier this year," he said. "It wasn't like the economy was

motoring along on all cylinders."

Tom Valasek, director of marketing for Rusnak Auto Group, said

the Pasadena-based company sells about 1,000 vehicles a month and

is doing OK despite the tough economy.

"We are staying ahead of the curve and growing our business,"

he said.

In fact, Rusnak, which sells luxury brands at 12 dealerships

across Southern California, is completing a 220,000-square-foot,

six-level BMW dealership at the Thousand Oaks Auto Mall that is

slated to open next month.

"I also think it helps we are located in (upscale) areas like

Pasadena and Westlake (Village). They are very strong areas to do

business," he said.

A former alderman who led an insurrection in the 1980s

against this city's first black mayor pleaded guilty on Monday in

federal court to conspiracy in a real-estate kickback scheme.

The former alderman, Edward R. Vrdolyak, said he was guilty of

agreeing to share a $1.5 million kickback from a real-estate deal

with Stuart Levine, a businessman who was on the board of the

medical school selling the property and used his influence to favor

Vrdolyak's buyer.

Levine was also the key government witness in the corruption

trial of Antoin Rezko, a Chicago real-estate developer who was

convicted on 16 counts that included fraud, money-laundering and

bribery.

"The notion in Chicago that there are certain people who cannot

or will not be held accountable took a serious hit today," Patrick

J. Fitzgerald, the U.S. attorney for the Northern District of

Illinois, said after court.

Vrdolyak, nicknamed Fast Eddie, is best known here for helping

to lead a group of white alderman -- the Vrdolyak 29 -- against Mayor

Harold Washington, who was black. During a racially charged chapter

of Chicago history known as the Council Wars, Vrdolyak and his 28

allies used their majority on the 50-member City Council to block

Washington's proposals and appointments until a federal judge

ordered special elections for alderman in seven wards that were

remapped to reflect the city's black and Latino communities.

A lawyer known for his shrewd dealmaking and tough persona,

Vrdolyak also served as a ward committeeman and chairman of the

Cook County Democratic Party before surprising many by switching to

the Republican Party in 1987.

In 1989, days before the Republican mayoral primary, Vrdolyak

announced himself as a write-in candidate, and he won. Mayor

Richard M. Daley, who is still in office, defeated him in the

general election. Vrdolyak went on to work as a radio talk-show

host.

"He'll be remembered as a colorful character in a certain epoch

in Chicago's history," said Dick Simpson, a professor of political

science at the University of Illinois at Chicago, referring to the

racial divisiveness and corruption that have characterized politics

here. "And hopefully we will have a different history in the

future."

Prosecutors recommended that Vrdolyak serve 41 months. His

lawyer, Michael Monico, said he would ask for less.

"The fact that this brings closure to this case," Monico said,

"is very meaningful to the family."

Vrdolyak was not available for comment; he apparently left court

through a back exit.

At times, he slouched in his chair, crossing his

arms, then uncrossing them. His eyes darted around the room,

sometimes settling on the clock. He fidgeted.

The body language was not difficult to read: Mayor Michael R.

Bloomberg was uncomfortable.

"To hell with your agenda," thundered David Tieu, a

21-year-old deliveryman from Brooklyn, as the mayor sat about 15

feet away, staring at him.

Patrice Senior, a nurse from Brooklyn, accused Bloomberg of

"plantation politics." And Patti Hagan, a writer, decried his

"strong-armed knuckle-busting" tactics.

Custom at City Hall has long allowed anyone to appear at a bill

signing and offer an opinion on the legislation being enacted. Most

such ceremonies are sleepy affairs that attract a handful of

political gadflies.

But on Monday, this tidy ritual was turned on its head. For four

uninterrupted hours, scores of New Yorkers walked up to a

microphone, looked at Bloomberg and rendered a blunt verdict on the

legislation that would allow him to seek a third term.

It was a singular moment in the Bloomberg era of government. For

much of his tenure, the mayor has been showered with accolades and

surrounded by friendly crowds that have treated him like a head of

state.

But during the bill signing, a man unaccustomed to direct,

public criticism endured a heavy -- and very harsh -- dose of it from

those he governs.

Dozens of speakers accused the mayor of arrogantly disregarding

the will of New York voters, who overwhelmingly endorsed the

current eight-year term limits in two referendums in the 1990s.

There were many voices of support, too -- from average New

Yorkers, elected officials and union heads -- and Bloomberg appeared

relieved when they spoke of his proven leadership and financial

resume.

"You have everything well oiled, and I would like you to sign

this so the people of New York City have a choice to keep you in

office," said Jill Whitaker, a personal assistant in Manhattan.

Patrick J. Egan, an assistant professor of politics at New York

University, called the legislation extending term limits to 12

years "a great step for democracy in New York City."

In all, 137 people spoke -- 68 against the legislation and 65 for

it, according to a tally by The New York Times. Four people did not

make their preferences known. (One man simply brandished a copy of

his resume and asked the billionaire mayor for a job "with a

six-figure salary.")

But it was the opponents who brought the most passion -- and raw

anger -- to the stately setting. Many put their opposition in

intensely personal terms, saying that a mayor whom they admired --

and had voted for -- had let them down by seeking to circumvent

voters.

"You have exploited the power of your office to overturn the

express will of the people," said Judi Polson of the Upper West

Side. Despite calling herself a Bloomberg supporter, Polson, a

former Wall Street executive, vowed to vote against the mayor in

the next race. "He has lost my vote," she told a reporter on her

way out.

Another Bloomberg admirer, Michael Rosen, told Bloomberg he had

voted for him twice, but then pleaded with the mayor not to sign

the legislation.

"Please don't make me and countless other parents explain to

our children that good men craving power pushed aside the people's

voice," he said.

Those seeking to derail the legislation, which the City Council

approved on Oct. 23, appealed to the mayor's sense of pride,

arguing that his legacy would be tarnished by a push to ease term

limits without returning to the voters who created them.

"Just ask yourself: How would you like to be remembered in the

history books?" said Andre Calvert, 23, from Brooklyn. "Do you

really want to be remembered as a mayor who, along with 29 City

Council members, overturned the will of the people?"

When it was their turn, however, many who favored the

legislation said that voters would have a chance to speak out on

term limits at the polls next year, when Bloomberg seeks

re-election. Most of them cited the fragile economy as a reason for

letting Bloomberg, a former Wall Street executive, remain in

office.

The crowd at the bill signing dwarfed any in modern memory, with

the line of those signed up to testify zigzagging across the marble

rotunda at City Hall by 9 a.m.

George Arzt, a veteran political consultant who has attended

dozens of City Hall bill signings over the last 40 years, said that

"there have been controversial items that come up, but nothing in

this realm -- not even close."

There were lighter moments, as when Jimmy McMillan, representing

a political group called the Rent Is Too Damn High Party, turned

his back to Bloomberg as he addressed the mayor, saying the mayor

had turned his back on the people.

"I have no desire to look at you," McMillan said.

When McMillan called Bloomberg "a nice guy, a rich guy, a

good-looking man," the mayor suppressed a smile.

But mostly, as the parade of speakers stretched into its third

hour, Bloomberg sat stone-faced, behind a thick wooden table. Even

those who angrily opposed the legislation commended his endurance.

"Thanks for sitting here," said John Jiler, a 62-year-old

writer from Lower Manhattan. "This must not be easy to you."

But in the next breath, Jiler tore into the mayor. With the

presidential election nearing, he said, his two children, ages 9

and 11, were "so enthralled with the idea that one person can make

their voice heard throughout the whole planet."

"But unfortunately now," he said, "I have to give them lesson

No. 2, which is that every so often, a Caesar comes along and tries

to muffle that voice."

The tradition of allowing the public to speak before a bill is

signed dates back at least as far as the 19th century, and

occasionally has been known to sway a mayor. Once, after hearing

hours of fiery testimony in 1897, Mayor William L. Strong vetoed a

bill regulating sidewalk street vendors.

About a half-dozen members of the New York City Council sat next

to the mayor during the ceremony. But as the testimony dragged on,

several struggled to pay attention, with one tapping away on his

BlackBerry and another appearing to listen to messages on his cell

phone.

When the testimony was over, around 2 p.m., it was Bloomberg's

turn to speak. Still sitting behind the table, with the room half

empty, he said that "I thought long and hard" about the issue.

After long opposing any attempt to tweak term limits -- he once

called the idea "disgraceful" -- the mayor said he had decided to

reverse himself.

"You know that I have, over a period of time, fundamentally

changed my opinion in terms of how long somebody could be in

office," Bloomberg said.

"Nobody is irreplaceable," he said. "But I do think that if

you take a look at the real world, at how long it takes to do

things," he added, and finished the thought, "I do think that

three terms makes more sense than two."

With that, the left-handed Bloomberg picked up a black and gold

pen and, with a flick of his wrist, rewrote New York City's term

limits law.

TALLAHASSEE As many as

5-million Floridians could cast ballots today as the nation's

biggest battleground state renders its judgment in what polls show

is a very close presidential race in Florida.

Polls are open from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. in all 67 counties. The

weather forecast is for partly cloudy skies in most of the state

with temperatures in the 70s or low 80s.

All voters are required to bring identification to the polls

that show a photo and a signature, such as a driver's license.

Voters who don't have such a single form of ID can bring two

separate pieces to satisfy the requirement.

More than 4.3-million people already have voted early or by

absentee ballot, but it could be a very long night for counting

results.

Turnout is expected to eclipse the 83 percent that voted in the

1992 presidential race. Ballots in some counties stretch three and

four pages long. And today marks the largest group of voters using

the new optical scan machines all at the same time.

Plus, as many as 10,556 voters could be snared in the state's

controversial "no match" voter verification law. That could

require them to cast provisional ballots today because the

information they provided on a voter registration form does not

match information in state databases.

The result is lines at polling places and election supervisors

predict voting could continue well past 7 p.m. By law, anyone

standing in line when polls close must be allowed to cast a vote,

no matter how long it takes.

"There will be lines," said Orange County Supervisor of

Elections Bill Cowles in Orlando. "It's important to remember how

voters vote: They vote on their way to work or on their way home

from work, and a lot of them vote on their lunch hour."

In addition to choosing the next president of the United States,

Florida will cast votes for Congress, the state Legislature, a slew

of county and city contests and six proposed amendments to the

state Constitution.

In the Tampa Bay area today, some polls will be very crowded,

and not just with voters.

The Justice Department has assigned observers to polls in

Hillsborough, Duval and Seminole counties to ensure compliance with

federal voting rights laws. The Government Accountability Office,

an arm of Congress, will send teams to Pinellas and Hillsborough to

ensure voting access for elderly voters or voters with

disabilities.

The Obama and McCain campaigns have dispatched thousands of

lawyers to act as poll watchers and to assist voters with any

problems.

The two political parties squared off briefly in a Tallahassee

courtroom Monday and a judge declined to rule on a Democratic Party

lawsuit against the Republican Party. The GOP filed sworn

affidavits saying it has no plans to challenge any voter's

eligibility based upon a mailing sent to many Democratic voters.

The nearly 4.3-million ballots already cast amount to about 38

percent of the 11.2-million registered voters in Florida.

At that pace, Secretary of State Kurt Browning said, voter

turnout could meet or exceed the current Florida record of 83

percent, set in 1992.

"Be patient and be prepared," Browning advised. "Lines are

not necessarily a sign of something bad or something gone wrong.

Lines are a sign of a healthy democracy."

Browning said he had spoken with Gov. Charlie Crist's staff and

urged that if there is any "whimper" of talk about extending

polling hours that "we really need to make sure it's the right

thing to do."

For the first time, the state won't release any election results

until 8 p.m. That is being done to accommodate voters in much of

the Panhandle, which is on Central time, meaning the polls close an

hour later than the Florida peninsula.

"My job as the secretary," Browning said, "is to ensure a

fair, honest, accurate election, and that's what we're going to

deliver for Florida."

Although rain is expected this morning in Los

Angeles, election officials anticipate a record turnout in this

historic election and have deployed extra poll workers and printed

additional ballots to handle the crush of voters.

"I think the motivation and interest in this election is at an

all-time high, and I think people will find their way to the polls

to vote," Registrar-Recorder Dean Logan said. "Hopefully, the

rain will hold off and we won't have people out in the elements

waiting to vote."

The National Weather Service is predicting a 60 percent chance

of rain in parts of Los Angeles County this morning, clearing by

the afternoon.

An election watchdog group is concerned there won't be enough

ballots for all the voters and a "looming crisis" is brewing, but

Logan said his office will deliver extra ballots to 75 to 100

precincts and has made contingency plans in case ballots do run

out.

"We believe there will be sufficient quantifies of ballots in

those precincts where voter registration totals have gone up

significantly," Logan said.

Over the weekend, Election Protection advocates sent a letter to

Logan, asking him to print enough precinct-marked ballots to

guarantee a ballot for every one of the county's record 4.3 million

registered voters.

The advocates made the request after learning that some precinct

inspectors only received 800 ballots in precincts with rosters of

1,500 voters, a result of Logan reportedly only ordering enough

ballots for 80 percent of the registered voter pool, with the

inactive voters purged from the pool, according to Work the Vote

Los Angeles.

In the event of a ballot shortage, the county has contingency

plans to deliver extra ballots to the polls and use emergency

ballots.

When the supply of regular ballots runs out, poll workers can

use the yellow emergency ballots, which are transcribed onto

regular ballots after the election, said Sheri Myers of Work the

Vote.

"We may be looking at races and propositions that are held up

for days because so many emergency ballots are used in the

county," Myers said.

The advocates are especially concerned about the potential

impact of the purported ballot shortage on the race between Los

Angeles City Councilman Bernard Parks and state Sen. Mark

Ridley-Thomas, who are battling for the 2nd District seat held by

retiring county Supervisor Yvonne B. Burke.

The polls are open 7 a.m. to 8 p.m. Logan urged people to

consider voting at times other than early morning and late

afternoon. Shorter waits are expected from 9 a.m. to 11 a.m. and

from 1 p.m. to 4 p.m.

In an effort to make voting easier, the city of Los Angeles is

also relaxing parking restrictions and meter requirements within

one block of every polling place.

In anticipation of heavy turnout, Logan's office has increased

the number of poll booths and poll workers in each of the 4,394

polling locations. Logan's office has recruited and trained more

than 26,000 poll workers to help voters, with a minimum of seven

polling booths at each location.

Conducting the election is expected to cost the county at least

$32 million, up from $24 million in 2004.

As you might expect for the most-televised, most-streamed,

most-blogged, most-Twittered presidential campaign in history,

there is an explosion of media outlets where you can get

information on how today's election will conclude.

In the end, determining where folks will likely grab news

depends mostly on who they are. So here are a few suggestions on

where to find timely election updates, depending on how you like

your news.

Old school network TV addict: If it's not news until Brian,

Charlie or Katie say it is, look here.

ABC, CBS, NBC and Fox all plan continuous election coverage

after their evening newscasts end at 7 p.m. (local affiliates plan

brief updates on area races and late-night newscasts). ABC brings

Charlie Gibson, Diane Sawyer and George Stephanopoulos; NBC offers

Brian Williams, Tom Brokaw, Chuck Todd and Ann Curry; CBS presents

Katie Couric, Bob Schieffer and Jeff Greenfield; and Fox borrows

Shepard Smith from Fox News Channel.

Cable news gluttons: When too much just isn't enough.

CNN's coverage starts at 6 p.m., ostensibly led by Wolf Blitzer,

Campbell Brown and Anderson Cooper. But fans will really focus on

John King's towering "magic wall" touch screen and a new, 3-D,

6-foot-long virtual replica of the U.S. Capitol. MSNBC starts at 5

p.m. with David Gregory and all the channel's other anchor stars.

Fox News Channel begins at 6 p.m. with Brit Hume covering his final

election. Fox Business Network also starts at 6 p.m. with anchor

Neil Cavuto, while CNBC kicks off at 7 p.m. And if flipping is too

much trouble, DIRECTV's Election Mix channel offers displays from

eight different channels at once.

Nerdy political wonk: These folks need data delivered old

school.

PBS starts at 9 p.m. with just-the-facts anchor Jim Lehrer, a

panel of historians and columnists. National Public Radio

broadcasts for eight hours starting at 7 p.m. with Michele Norris

and Robert Seigel and the work of 100 journalists around the

country (WUSF-FM 89.7 will carry NPR from 8 p.m. to 1 a.m.).

C-SPAN's coverage starts at 7 p.m., featuring long, unfiltered

broadcasts of acceptance and concession speeches across the

country.

Internationalists: Wonder what this madness looks like from the

outside looking in? Or in a different language?

The British Broadcasting Corp. starts at 6 p.m., featuring

former ABC anchor Ted Koppel, comic Ricky Gervais and columnist

Christopher Hitchens. Al Jazeera English offers 12 hours of

reporting from 11 locations across the United States. Spanish

language networks Univision and Telemundo both start continuous

coverage at 7 p.m.

Jokesters and club kids: Jon Stewart and Stephen Colbert

headline Comedy Central's live election special Indecision 2008:

America's Choice at 10 p.m. Current TV offers a report co-sponsored

by Digg and Twitter, with performances from a live DJ.

People of color and the folks who love them: Black-focused TV

One starts its coverage at 7 p.m., featuring author Michael Eric

Dyson, radio personality Tom Joyner and CNN pundit Roland Martin.

Black Entertainment Television offers results coverage starting at

8 p.m.

Nerdy wonks with a BlackBerry: ABCNews.com presents four live

streams of coverage. CBSNews.com is teamed with CNET.com for a 2

a.m. webcast. NPR.org teams with PBS.org for an interactive

election map and webcasts. PBS and YouTube also feature videos on

voting uploaded by the public (www.youtube.com/videoyour

vote). Twitter's election updates come from a team of

"twittering" contributors (election.

twitter.com). MSNBC.com offers its own interactive map and a

debate video player. And closer to home, tampabay.com will cover

voting through its own Twitter feed, and will feature an

interactive electoral map, plus up-to-the-minute coverage of local

and state races.

The wait for a publicly traded Kohlberg Kravis Roberts just grew

a little longer.

The company, a private equity firm, said on Monday that it was

delaying the purchase of a publicly listed affiliate until next

year, amid the turmoil troubling the markets. Kohlberg executives

said the rescheduling was a result of complications arising from

the merger, which would combine the firm with the affiliate, KKR

Private Equity Investors, which is traded on the Euronext exchange

in Amsterdam, Netherlands.

"The investment thesis for the transaction is solid," George

R. Roberts, a founder of Kohlberg, said on a call with analysts on

Monday. "We remain committed to completing the transaction."

The news was the latest bump in Kohlberg's quest to start

trading in the public markets, a process started at the height of

the private equity boom in July 2007. First, the firm sought an

initial offering, following in the footsteps of Fortress Investment

Group and the Blackstone Group. With the credit squeeze, though,

Kohlberg and its peers have suffered as they have been cut off from

deal-making, the source of their previously lavish profits.

Last July, Kohlberg said it would go public by acquiring the 88

percent of KKR Private Equity Investors that it did not already own

and by relisting 21 percent of the combined company's shares on the

New York Stock Exchange. Unlike in the Blackstone or Fortress

offerings, none of Kohlberg's top executives will cash out through

the deal.

The affiliate's earnings shed some light on how Kohlberg's

companies are performing, an unusual amount of disclosure for

buyout firms, which are often secretive. The fund, which invests in

Kohlberg's private equity funds as well as several companies owned

by the buyout firm, said its assets' value fell 15.3 percent, to

$3.87 billion, in the third quarter. The total return for Private

Equity Investors for the year through Sept. 30 was negative 22.6

percent, slightly worse than the Standard &amp;amp; Poor's 500-stock index

or the Dow Jones industrial average have performed over the same

period.

While Private Equity Investors said the value of some

investments, like its stake in the hospital operator HCA, owned by

Kohlberg, rose, most of its other holdings declined. Its investment

in bonds of Sun Microsystems, for example, fell about 11 percent

from the second quarter, to $511 million. Other stakes, mostly in

European companies, declined in part because of fluctuations in

foreign exchange rates.

After nearly two years of roller-coaster campaigning, a billion

dollars in campaign spending, and the most diverse slate of major

candidates ever, this historic presidential election comes to a

close today.

Polls open in Florida at 7 a.m. and close at 7 p.m.

Given the importance of Florida's 27 electoral votes, Sens. John

McCain and Barack Obama both hit the state Monday for one last

pitch.

"We will win Florida, and we will win this race. There is one

day left until we take America in a new direction, my friends. We

need your help and we will win," McCain told nearly 1,200

supporters outside Raymond James Stadium in Tampa on Monday

morning. "The pundits may not know it and the Democrats may not

know it, but the Mac is back. We're going to win this election."

Obama drew more than 7,000 to a rally in Jacksonville, a

Republican stronghold that also holds searing symbolism for

Democrats who remember tens of thousands of African-American votes

invalidated in the 2000 election.

"Don't believe for a second this election is over," the

Illinois senator said. "Don't think for a minute that power will

concede anything for a minute without a fight. This is going to be

close here in Florida. We have to work like our future depends on

it in the next 24 hours, because it does. This is about who wants

it more."

The candidates, their spouses and their running mates roared

through more than a dozen battleground states, their paths

underscoring the challenge facing McCain. Of the seven states where

he campaigned, only Pennsylvania went Democratic four years ago.

Obama campaigned in Florida, North Carolina and Virginia, each

of which Bush won in 2004. Until this year, North Carolina and

Virginia had been safe Republican states.

In Tampa, McCain was joined on stage by Gov. Charlie Crist and

Sens. Mel Martinez and Joe Lieberman, and was introduced by former

Tampa Bay Buccaneers fullback Mike Alstott.

"We can trust John McCain to put his country first because

that's what he's always done," said Alstott, a registered

Republican.

The Arizona senator hammered Obama as unready and sure to raise

taxes.

"Sen. Obama is running to be redistributionist in chief. I am

running to be commander in chief," said McCain, periodically

interrupted by chants of "Nobama!" and "USA!"

The crowd size was not a great sign for McCain, however. On the

Sunday before the 2004 election, President Bush drew nearly 15,000

to a rally across the street.

On Monday night at a rally for Obama, comedian George Lopez

joked to a crowd of about 300 at the Cuban Club in Ybor City that

he had thought Obama was going to pick him as a running mate, while

poking fun at McCain running mate Sarah Palin.

"I'm well qualified, I told Obama. I can see Mexico from my

front porch," Lopez joked.

The crowd cheered loudly and waved signs saying "Hispanics for

Obama. Turn Florida Blue."

Through Sunday, 358,000 more Democrats than Republicans had cast

ballots in Florida, but Buzz Jacobs, McCain's Florida campaign

manager, said he is confident the early vote results are stronger

for McCain than many people assume.

"I expect it to be a very long night Tuesday. I think it's

going to be a razor-thin victory for us," Jacobs said.

Obama appeared at the Jacksonville Veterans Memorial Arena, the

same site where McCain in September declared "the fundamentals of

our economy are strong." On Monday, Obama focused on the economy

and his promise that no one earning less than $250,000 a year will

see their taxes rise.

"That includes 98 percent of small businesses. And 99.9 percent

of plumbers," Obama said to laughter.

The grueling schedule is apparently taking a toll, with Obama at

one point referring to being in Ohio rather than Florida.

Steve Schale, Obama's Florida campaign manager, said he feels

confident.

"We're where we want to be in terms of turning out voters and

talking to undecideds," Schale said. "The hardest thing right now

is this next 36-hour period. We've put our game in place, but now

it's up to voters."

Times staff writer Elisabeth Dyer contributed to this report.

Adam C. Smith can be reached at asmithsptimes.com or

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As results start pouring in tonight, a handful of states will

tell you where this election is going. It takes 270 electoral votes

to win. Here's what to watch (all times Eastern Standard).

Polls close at 7 p.m.

Virginia: Sen. John McCain spent precious last-minute time in

Newport News, as sure a sign as any that his campaign believes

polls that show Sen. Barack Obama leading. If this Republican

redoubt flips from red to blue for the first time since 1964, it's

a sign that McCain is in for a long night.

Georgia: Heavy turnout among African-Americans could put this

rock-solid Republican state in play. McCain leads in polls, but

it's still a tossup. If McCain wins, he's meeting expectations; if

Obama wins, this election could be over early.

Indiana: McCain is scarcely ahead in a state that has a perfect

GOP voting record since 1964. Obama made inroads as a favorite son

of neighboring Illinois and a win here would be a startling turn

against the GOP.

Polls close at 7:30 p.m.

Ohio: Along with Florida and Pennsylvania, it's one of three

traditional battleground states. Polls show Obama leading, but

McCain is running hard and Ohio is not quite as predisposed to

Democrats as Pennsylvania.

Polls close at 8 p.m.

Florida: Most of the state's polls close at 7 p.m., but the

Panhandle time zones are an hour later. It's quite simple: The

electoral math doesn't work for McCain without having Florida in

his column. If Obama manages to hold on to his lead in the polls

(which has been slipping) and captures the state, McCain would have

to score an unlikely set of upsets to recover.

Pennsylvania: This rich prize has tilted toward Democrats in

recent elections and favors Obama strongly in the polls. McCain has

not given up, though, and an upset win here could signal that

McCain is drawing blue-collar voters who are important in other key

states like Missouri.

Missouri: McCain is leading slightly in this swing state that

has voted with the winner every time since 1964. It has been a

historic bellwether, but the new map that has so many traditionally

Republican states in play means a victory here may be less

important than it has been.

Polls close at 8:30 p.m.

North Carolina: Polls show a tie, but implications of an Obama

victory here would be significant. Like Virginia, this Southern

state is one McCain was expected to win.

Polls close at 9 p.m.

Colorado: Democrats held their convention in Denver to

capitalize on a trend that had been showing up in recent elections.

Now Obama is favored to win the state that has gone with a Democrat

only one other time since 1964. If so, it could be the first sign

that the GOP hold on the West is cracking.

Montana: Not many votes here, but this state shares Colorado's

history of choosing Republicans (except Bill Clinton in 1992).

President Bush carried this state by huge margins both times.

Arizona: McCain leads in his home state but not by much. It's

considered a tossup. If Obama snatches this one, McCain would be in

a bad, bad spot in terms of electoral votes and embarrassed on top

of it.

Polls close at 10 p.m.

Nevada: In the last battleground state before the solidly

Democratic West Coast, Obama leads by an average of 6 points. This

state has mostly been Republican, but it did support Clinton both

times.

A wealthy Venezuelan businessman was found guilty in federal

court in Miami on Monday of acting as an illegal foreign agent sent

to the United States to cover up his government's role in a

political scandal involving a cash-stuffed suitcase smuggled into

Argentina.

During the eight-week trial prosecutors argued that Key Biscayne

resident Franklin Duran, 41, was working for Venezuela's

intelligence service when he sought to cover up the secret donation

of oil money from the Venezuelan government of Hugo Chavez to the

campaign of Argentina's president, Cristina Fernandez.

The U.S government was initially accused of politicizing the

case in an effort to embarrass Chavez, a vocal leftist critic of

the Bush administration.

Opponents of Chavez say the case provides valuable insight into

his government's illegal use of income from the country's

state-owned oil company, Petroleos de Venezuela, or PDVSA, to help

political allies.

The charges relate to an incident in August 2007 when Duran's

friend and business partner, Guido Antonini, 46, also of Key

Biscayne, was stopped by a customs agent in Argentina after

arriving on a private jet chartered by PDVSA. He was briefly

detained after almost $800,000 in cash was found in his luggage.

Duran and four other defendants were later accused of arranging

a series of meetings in the Miami area to get Antonini to lie about

the origin of the cash. Unbeknownst to the defendants, Antonini

wore an FBI recording device at meetings.

Venezuelan and Argentina officials have angrily denied the money

was a political contribution, though they have failed to explain

why the cash was on the plane. While the trial did not provide

proof that the money was intended for Argentina's president,

prosecutors put on a strong case linking Duran to several top

Chavez officials.

Prosecutors were aided by three of the defendants who pleaded

guilty and testified against Duran. One of them, Duran's business

partner, Carlos Kauffmann, told jurors that the Venezuelan

intelligence service sought their help to silence Antonini in

return for government favors. Kauffmann admitted that he and Duran

had over the years made tens of millions of dollars on public

contracts after paying kickbacks to government officials.

"There is no mystery as to what happened in this case,"

Assistant U.S. Attorney John Shipley said in his closing arguments.

Duran "came here on a mission, a mission to hide the source of the

money," he said.

Duran attorney Ed Shohat argued in court that Duran was simply

trying to help his friend while protecting his own legitimate oil

business. He denounced the case as "a political circus," and

vowed to appeal the verdict.

Duran faces a maximum of 15 years in prison at his sentencing

Jan. 12.

It is probably not a great idea for a hotel to alienate a

business traveler like Richard Glassman. Not when times are good,

and especially not now, when the hotel business is hurting.

But a Hilton hotel in Washington, D.C., did just that recently,

and then the problem was compounded -- according to both Glassman

and Hilton -- when someone at the company's loyalty program, Hilton

HHonors, dropped the ball.

Glassman, a partner in a prominent Memphis law firm, was a

frequent Hilton customer until late September, when his scheduled

two-night stay at the Hilton Washington Hotel went astray after he

tried to change his arrival date to Sept. 27 from Sept. 26.

Glassman said he was prompted to e-mail me after reading a

column I wrote a few weeks ago about being hit with a $414.29

penalty when I called to cancel a two-night stay at the St. Regis,

a Starwood hotel in Aspen, Colo.

According to Glassman's account, which Hilton did not dispute, a

hotel clerk told him he could not check in on Sept. 27 because a

large group was checking in that day. "There won't be anyone on

the desk to accommodate you," he says he was told.

"I said, 'Let me make sure I understand this. You're saying

that no matter what time I get there, even if I get there at 10

p.m., you have the room but you won't have any desk people

available to check me in?"'

Correct, the clerk said.

Glassman decided the clerk was joking. "I know a couple of guys

in Hilton corporate, so I said to her, 'Wait, they put an asterisk

next to my name in the computer and told you to do this, right?"'

he recalled.

"Excuse me?" the woman replied.

Getting the old offensive, bureaucratic "Excuse me," a reply

to which there is no known rejoinder, Glassman instead called

Hilton HHonors. But he got nowhere. "They advised me that they had

no control over specific properties," he said.

What Glassman did next was cancel all of his existing Hilton

reservations -- and those of his 21-member law firm as well. And

then he e-mailed me.

At Hilton's headquarters in Beverly Hills, Calif., Adam Burke, a

senior vice president who manages Hilton HHonors Worldwide, had an

immediate reaction when he heard all of this a few days ago.

"Gaskets were blown," Burke said, using the passive voice but

making it clear that he was the one who blew a gasket.

Just what a worldwide hotel loyalty program needs -- an unhappy

loyal guest who stays frequently at luxury brands.

"My short answer," Burke told me, "is that I am concerned.

Obviously, I would like to make sure we get customer service right

100 percent of the time. It seems like we could have handled this

better."

Burke said that he regarded the matter as a "training

opportunity" for those down the chain of command who had

mishandled Glassman's reservation and their supervisors.

By the way, I belong to Hilton HHonors, among other hotel

loyalty programs, and so does my wife, who also travels on

business. We're both happy customers.

But it takes only one big foul-up to change that. All right, two

in the Glassman case. With hotel profits under siege, this is not

the time to be making your most loyal customers unhappy. Glassman

says, for example, that he travels about once a week on business.

"It's never more important to get it right than in a down

cycle," Burke said. "Every time we've seen that cycle in the last

20 years, the HHonors members were our core market that sustained

the business."

Glassman is a tough customer who values loyalty but thinks it

works both ways. He and his wife recently canceled reservations to

stay at Hilton hotels on a trip to Syracuse. He says he isn't

looking for amelioration from Hilton.

A Hilton HHonors representative called him on Monday to

apologize and assure him the problem would be addressed, he said.

He wasn't moved.

"They said they will miss me."

A report released on Monday by a state board

found that Gov. Sarah Palin did not apply improper pressure to try

to dismiss a state trooper who was her former brother-in-law and

did not violate state ethics laws in the firing of her public

safety commissioner.

The report by the Alaska Personnel Board contradicts the

conclusions last month of a separate inquiry into the matter

overseen by a bipartisan legislative panel. The earlier inquiry

found that Palin had breached a state ethics act by pressing to

have the trooper, Mike Wooten, fired. The panel said, however, that

the governor was within her rights to fire the public safety

commissioner, Walt Monegan.

The personnel board's report, based on an investigation led by

an independent counsel, Timothy J. Petumenos, concluded that there

was no evidence to prove Palin or any state employee had acted

improperly in Monegan's dismissal.

The report said the legislative inquiry had based its

conclusions on an incorrect interpretation of state ethics laws and

on insufficient evidence. The lawmakers who ordered the first

inquiry stood by their report on Monday.

In a statement about the new report, Palin's lawyer, Thomas V.

Van Flein, said, "The governor is grateful that this investigation

has provided a fair and impartial review of this matter and upholds

the governor's ability to take measures when necessary to ensure

that Alaskans have the best possible team working to serve them."

Monegan has said he believes he was fired because he would not

bend to pressure from Palin, her husband, Todd, and her

subordinates to fire Wooten, who had been through a bitter divorce

with the governor's sister. He said that he had received many

complaints about Wooten from the Palins and several members of the

administration and that he felt they wanted him to dismiss Wooten,

who is still on the force.

Petumenos said the governor and other state employees had

testified firmly that several conversations Monegan described had

not happened. No witnesses confirmed Monegan's account of the

discussions, he said.

"They didn't happen at all," Petumenos said.

"Unless someone can be proved to abuse their power," Petumenos

added, "it seems to me they haven't done it."

Monegan said Monday in an interview: "The conversations

absolutely did take place. I've been a police officer for some 35

years. Aren't I supposed to tell the truth? And in this case I did,

under oath to both investigators."

"It's not only me," Monegan said. "There were senior members

of the department of public safety who got the calls, felt the

pressure and knew exactly what was going on. I will always feel

that there were conversations and e-mails that were intended to

inappropriately use an official government position to settle a

family matter."

He added, "Obviously I'm disappointed with the outcome and the

contradictory nature of this investigation, compared to the first

one."

The governor of Alaska appoints the members of the Alaska

Personnel Board, though all three of the board's current members

were appointed by Palin's predecessor. Palin reappointed one member

to a new term, said a spokesman for the governor, Bill McAllister.

"This is obviously the correct outcome," McAllister said. "We

knew all along that Governor Palin did not abuse her power."

John Cyr, the executive director of the Alaska Public Safety

Employees Association, said it was not surprising that a board

appointed by the governor's office would reach the conclusion.

"We all knew that the governor's office was putting pressure

on" the Department of Public Safety "to take action against

Michael Wooten," Cyr said.

In late July, several weeks after Monegan was fired, the state's

bipartisan Legislative Council ordered an inquiry into his

dismissal. The controversy undercut Palin's image as a reformer,

but it did not become prominent nationally until late August, when

she was chosen as the running mate for Sen. John McCain, the

Republican presidential nominee.

Palin had said earlier in the summer that she would cooperate

with the legislative inquiry but, after she was nominated, she

refused to testify. The McCain-Palin campaign said the inquiry had

become politically driven and sent lawyers and staff to Alaska to

help with the governor's legal strategy and to hold "Palin truth

squad" news conferences almost daily.

In September, Palin took the unusual step of filing an ethics

complaint against herself to the Personnel Board, which she said

was the proper forum for dealing with the matter. The board's

report said it was based on "substantially more evidence" than

the legislative inquiry, including a three-hour deposition from

Palin.

Petumenos said the legislative inquiry had determined that Palin

violated the scope of state ethics laws by "inaction," because

she supposedly did not stop her staff and husband from pressuring

Monegan. But Petumenos said the legislative inquiry had not met

requirements for finding a violation because it did not cite

violations under specific sections of the ethics code.

In the legislative report, the investigator, Stephen E.

Branchflower, a former prosecutor in Anchorage, said that Palin had

herself applied pressure to get Wooten dismissed and also let her

husband and subordinates press for his firing. The report concluded

that she violated the Alaska Executive Branch Ethics Act.

State Sen. Kim Elton, a Democrat who is the chairman of the

Legislative Council, said of the Personnel Board's findings: "I'm

surprised. I think the ethics act is very clear and that Mr.

Branchflower strung together a series of events that made it clear

there was not only smoke but fire."

The Drug Enforcement Administration has paid more

than $3.3 million to four confidential informants in an

investigation that led to the arrest of a man prosecutors called an

international arms dealer, according to court documents.

The man, Monzer al-Kassar, and a co-defendant, Luis Felipe

Moreno Godoy, are scheduled to go on trial this week in U.S.

District Court in Manhattan. They are charged in a conspiracy to

sell weapons to rebels in Colombia who wanted to kill Americans

there. Opening statements are scheduled Wednesday.

A third defendant, Tareq Mousa al-Ghazi, was also to stand

trial, but he had a heart attack and required emergency surgery,

said his lawyer, Marc A. Agnifilo. The judge, Jed S. Rakoff,

ordered his case to be separated and said he would be tried later.

The three men have been charged with conspiring to support

terrorism and to kill Americans. They have pleaded not guilty.

It is not uncommon for the government to pay informants for

their services and expenses.

Defense lawyers typically seek to use such information to attack

the credibility of an informant who testifies as a government

witness, arguing that with a financial incentive to help build a

case, the informant cannot be trusted. Prosecutors, on the other

hand, may point out that such payments are necessary because

informants work at great risk and can incur unusual travel and

living expenses while participating in an undercover operation.

There is little question, though, that such payments add to the

intrigue of such cases.

In the Kassar investigation, the government used informants to

help conduct a sting operation that began a few years ago, with

informants posing as players in a deal to sell weapons to the

Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, or FARC.

The four informants received payments of $1.457 million;

$955,000; $775,000; and $174,000, according to a defense lawyer's

statement in court, based on information supplied by the

government.

It was not clear how many years the payments covered, but they

appeared to date back long before the beginning of the Kassar case.

Prosecutors said, for example, that one informant received payments

over an approximately 20-year tenure as a confidential source.

Times Business Columnist

It was only a few years ago that locally ignored Jimmy Wales

worked in a windowless office suite near the BayWalk entertainment

center in downtown St. Petersburg.

Now he's often seen touring the world offering insights

(enjoying lucrative speaker fees) on the future of the Internet and

gathering applause as a visionary.

Funny what founding Wikipedia the largest and always-updating

encyclopedia in the history of the English language does for a

resume.

Just when the Tampa Bay technology community was trying to cozy

up to Wales and call him one of their own success stories, he

snubbed Florida's culture as too pro-business and too anti-geek. In

2006, he sped west to hang in Silicon Valley.

Wales took the Wikimedia Foundation, the nonprofit that runs

Wikipedia, with him. Now he's working on Wikia, the for-profit

company he founded to be a Wikipedia-inspired, human-powered search

engine. That puts Wales, 42, in competition with Google a matchup

that makes David and Goliath look evenhanded.

Lately, Wales has proved less the oracle and more the Cassandra.

In remarks reported in London, he sounds more like an economist,

warning that Internet and technology companies will suffer a

"serious downturn" that could leave some major household names

foundering. The search engine Yahoo, especially, is vulnerable,

Wales said.

Yahoo last month said it will cut at least 1,500 jobs. Wales

told his overseas audience that Yahoo CEO Jerry Yang must regret

turning down a $44.6-billion takeover bid from Microsoft in May.

Since then the shares have fallen from $28 to $12.75. That's about

a tenth of their peak value in early 2000.

Not that Wales' ventures are untouched. Silicon Valley blog

Valleywag reported Wikia had laid off 30 percent of its staff.

Wikia responded, saying it was less than 10 percent.

None of this has diminished the Wales aura. Trend tracker

Silicon.com published its "Agenda Setters" ranking of the 50 most

influential people driving the tech industry. Wales, who had fallen

off the list last year, ranks fourth this year .

"Wikipedia continues to grow, evolve and cement its position as

a Web 2.0 reference work in daily use a glowing report card for

what collective intelligence can achieve," said one Agenda Setters

panelist.

The judges also praised Wales for inspiring new ways of

collaborating.

Some collaborating, it seems, is better than others.

In another London interview, Wales warns that a person's growing

"digital footprint" the ability to be identified by use of the

Internet or cell phone, for example could become a liability.

"That's something most people don't think much about because,

frankly, no one cares what most people are doing," he said. But as

computing power increases, "we need to really think about what are

the political controls we need in place to prevent governments from

abusing that kind of information."

Bravo. Meet the geek gaining some political perspective.

Not bad for a St. Pete expatriate.

Robert Trigaux can be reached

at trigauxsptimes.com.

Read more insights at blogs.

tampabay.com/venture.

TAMPA

For $6.99, there's a Peruvian quinoa salad or a vegan black bean

burger on organic bread. The stuffed pepper laced with tofu and

barley goes for $7.49. A pound of edamame caviar salad fetches

$7.49.

But Publix deli fried chicken was banished in favor of a baked

alternative that seems healthier until you learn the crispy

coating is soaked in buttermilk.

Publix GreenWise Market is nothing like the 1,000 traditional

stores run by the nation's fourth-largest supermarket chain.

The Lakeland company's first bay area take on a natural/organic

supermarket opens Thursday in Hyde Park at Armenia Avenue and W

Azeele Street. It's the third of the chain's experimental GreenWise

chain after Boca Raton and Palm Beach Gardens and the first built

from the ground up. Two more will take over former Albertsons

locations in Tallahassee and Winter Park. A hybrid will be branded

as a Publix in Naples.

The curious should bring an appetite. And extra cash. That's

unless they can withstand the temptations of over-the-top displays,

flashy exhibition cooking and tantalizing scents of an array of

freshly prepared foods made to be eaten at a 45-seat patio or more

likely taken home and microwaved for five minutes.

"This store is all about the shopping experience and the

food," said Shannon Patten, Publix spokeswoman.

Publix pulled out all the stops. There's an open-flame broiler

and wood-fired pizza oven. The men's room has waterless urinals and

an LED message board on the mirror flashing the date and time.

Stainless-steel elevators and escalators ferry carts and shoppers

to the roof-top garage.

All that restaurant-quality food requires seven trained chefs

and a staff of 190 50 more than a traditional Publix a third

larger.

Each employee has a pager so there aren't any PA interruptions

for "cleanup on Aisle 6." Lottery tickets and Western Union

services, Publix decided, don't fit the theme, either.

While GreenWise stocks top-selling basics like Cheese-Its and

Colgate, the brown shelf tags for natural/organic foods dominate.

If this seems a bad time to unveil a supermarket stuffed with

premium-priced organics, natural foods and top-of-the-line gourmet

fare, welcome to the club. After all, studies show that most

Americans hold the line on food spending as a percentage of their

income even in this time of soaring prices. Whether those committed

to foods made without artificial color, preservatives, pesticides

or antibiotics stick to their guns as the economy and their

discretionary income goes south remains to be seen. Already, sales

and profit at chains like Whole Foods Natural Markets have softened

dramatically.

GreenWise Market, however, is Publix's competitive answer to

Whole Foods and others like Fresh Market that moved into its home

state to skim the cream in top-income neighborhoods.

That's why the GreenWise food court and bakery is twice the size

of what's found in Whole Foods. The prices are a tad lower. And the

high-end selection goes higher. For instance, free-range chicken is

only the starting point in a meat department that leaps above Whole

Foods to 20 styles of fresh sausage, USDA prime beef and

$64-a-pound Kobe steaks.

Initially, Publix toed the purist line, offering only natural

and organics. But it found at the first store that organic fans

have indulgences, too. So Coke and Pepsi appeared.

Appealing to all tastes sticks out in a wine section stocked

with both $800 Bordeaux and Franzia in a box. The top-selling wine

at the Palm Beach Gardens store: $21 Evolution.

Publix runs GreenWise stores separately with their own

advertising, coupons and products that cannot be special-ordered

from other Publix stores.

And for dieters wondering just what's in those tasty

restaurant-quality meals, Publix is working up nutritional labels.

Mark Albright can be reached

at albrightsptimes.com

or (727) 893-8252.

GreenWise Markets

Where they are: Boca Raton, Palm Beach Gardens

Where they will be: Tampa (opens Thursday),

Tallahassee, Winter Park

Times columnist

Happy Election Day. You are happy, aren't you? This is the

beginning of the rest of the year. After today we can move on to

more important things, such as the Bowl Championship Series and

planning for Thanksgiving.

The term "Election Day," of course, is getting to be a little

outdated, given that almost four in 10 Floridians already have

voted. If this trend keeps up we might want to rename it as

"Count-the-Vote Day."

That assumes, of course, that the vote actually gets counted

today. There is no reason it shouldn't, not by now, not in Florida.

Anybody who messes up an election in Florida ought to be kicked out

of the state.

If there has to be a screw-up, let it be somewhere else. Let

some other state's ballots go missing, its machines cough up

negative numbers, its computers declare a victory for Grover

Cleveland. Let the assembled media of the world descend upon

Albuquerque or Des Moines.

But preferably, let it happen nowhere at all. We're due for a

nice, clean, undisputed election. Please.

Here in Florida, there's still a certain amount of drama over

whether John McCain will take the state against Barack Obama. But

mercifully, we will not decide the presidential race by ourselves,

no matter who wins.

We are blessed, otherwise, with a lack of statewide races no

governor, no U.S. senator, no members of the Cabinet. All we have

statewide are a few amendments to the Constitution, and some

routine renewals for Supreme Court justices (none has ever been

kicked out, and there is no reason for it to happen this year

either.)

Of the amendments, only one, Amendment 2, on banning same-sex

marriage, has gotten much attention. It seems close to reaching the

60 percent needed to pass.

It wouldn't be stunning to see some or even all of the other

amendments fall short of 60 percent, which shows the importance of

that higher standard. The idea of requiring 60 percent was to make

it harder for Floridians to amend their Constitution willy-nilly,

and it seems to be working (even if the rule was, itself, passed in

2006 by fewer than 60 percent of the voters).

Besides the presidential race, the big national story is how

many seats the Democrats pick up in Congress. But here in Florida,

there is no corresponding drama concerning our state Legislature.

That body is safely in the hands of Republicans, and even if there

is an upset here or there, the overall control is extremely

unlikely to change.

As far as drama, then, we are left to look for individual local

upsets, and this year is a little unpredictable, given the national

Obama tide. Again, it wouldn't be shocking to see a stray

legislator, county commissioner, school board incumbent or

elections supervisor booted.

You might think this is a crazy statement, but it seems that, on

the local level, this year's election has been less negative

overall. Heck, I haven't heard a single candidate accused of

supporting child molesters, like we had around here last time.

I'd like to think that with early voting, which lessens the

impact of last-minute attacks, the rise of fact-checking, and a

general wising up of voters at least, some of them that stupid

mudslinging has lost some of it's punch. I'd like to think that.

In any case, Happy Count-the-Vote Day. Have fun watching the

returns tonight, and I'll see you on the other side.

GAINESVILLE Florida OL Ronnie Wilson was suspended from the

team because of his reported involvement in a fight in Gainesville,

hours after a victory at Arkansas on Oct. 4.

A sworn complaint has been filed against Wilson, charging him

with one count of assault and one count of battery (both

misdemeanors), in an incident that happened about 3:30 a.m. Oct. 5.

According to a Gainesville Police Department incident report,

Wilson became involved in a "verbal altercation over a female at a

birthday party," which was at the Lexington Crossing apartments in

Gainesville. Wilson is accused of hitting a man with a closed fist

while at the party.

Wilson then followed the man outside and confronted him in a

breezeway near the apartment where the incident began, the report

says. Wilson tried to punch the same person again but instead hit a

second woman as she tried to step in between them; she suffered a

broken wrist. Wilson then tried to hit a third person who came to

help the others. According to the report, the third person said he

"was in fear for his safety due to the size of the defendant."

Wilson, listed as 6 feet 3 and 309 pounds on the UF roster, was

identified in a photo lineup by the three people involved, the

report says. A fourth person, who was not involved in the fight,

identified him.

Wilson, a reserve on the 2006 national championship team, was

suspended all of 2007 after firing an assault rifle into the air

during a fight in which he said he had been followed from a

nightclub and feared for his safety. He was placed on probation for

two years and given 100 hours of community service. Court records

indicate the probation was terminated in April after a judge ruled

he had fulfilled his obligations.

After paying for his classes in the spring and summer semesters,

Wilson was allowed to rejoin the team in August, but coach Urban

Meyer said there was little room for error with him.

Meyer has acknowledged that Wilson is not practicing with the

team, but his status is uncertain.

Epps out for season: DT Troy Epps will miss the rest of the

season after surgery to repair a torn knee ligament. Epps, a junior

college transfer who played in five games, tore his right ACL in

practice two weeks ago. He had surgery late last week. Epps came to

UF in January after two years at Coffeyville Junior College in

Kansas.

Haden honored: Sophomore CB Joe Haden was named SEC defensive

player of the week. He was the Gators' leading tackler with 10

(seven solo), had a pass deflection and returned an interception 88

yards early in the third quarter to set up a touchdown in a victory

over Georgia.

Kickoff in limbo: Television networks have been granted the

six-day selection option for the Nov. 15 games, so kickoff time for

South Carolina at Florida won't be decided until after this

weekend's games. UF's options: 3:30 p.m. on CBS, 7:45 on ESPN or

12:30 on Ch. 38.

Moody's return: Emmanuel Moody had a short, but effective,

performance against Georgia. The USC transfer has battled an ankle

injury for several games. He had seven carries for 71 yards late in

the game and ran toward the locker room after Sunday night's

practice signs the ankle is feeling better.

"I know he's talented," Meyer said. "I just want to see

energy and toughness. The score was 49 to whatever it was

(Saturday) and he's jumping up and down. He's what we thought he

would be. He'll have more impact now. He's just been hurt. You saw

it was coming last week and then you saw it in the game and you saw

it Sunday at practice."

Antonya English can be reached at englishsptimes.com.

After being pressured by an audit and

women's-rights groups to clear a backlog of 7,000 rape kits in

their crime lab, LAPD officials said Monday that they have begun

prioritizing the kits to catch rapists who haven't been identified

and might still be on the loose.

The department hopes to have the cases categorized for analysis

within the next two months, Deputy Chief Charlie Beck told the City

Council's Public Safety Committee.

"We have a number of cases sitting there where the rapist has

been identified but, for some reason, is not being prosecuted,"

Beck said. "It could be a case where officials say there is a

problem with consent (by the victim) or other factors that make it

a weak case. Or, it could be the person was prosecuted and the DNA

was never processed."

Beck said there is no way to determine how many of the

backlogged cases fall into that category.

Last week, the council approved nearly $1 million to hire 16

criminalist scientists and contract with private firms after a

critical audit from Controller Laura Chick about the backlog and

the threat it means to victims.

Beck, who heads the Detective Division and has been given

authority over the lab, has created a task force to look at the

backlog as well as problems within the division in how it handles

other material, including fingerprints.

"It is not a simple case of just looking at the evidence and

making a decision," Beck said. "What we have to do is first

determine if there is enough DNA to process, and that in itself

could take several days to determine."

Beck said he also is working with the private contractors to

determine how much he will be able to use them.

"Our goal, after all this, is to be able to process all the

cases ourselves with no backlog," Beck said.

Also, he said he wants to make sure that when the LAPD sends out

the DNA kits, it will be worth it. Each kit costs about $1,000 to

process.

"If we have DNA, we do want to process the kits, even if there

was a conviction, so we have the evidence on file," Beck said.

Councilman Jack Weiss, who chairs the Public Safety Committee,

agreed, noting that rape is a crime where there are repeat

offenders who often commit other crimes.

The Police Department on Monday reassigned to desk

duty four officers who are under scrutiny over charges by a man who

said he was sodomized with a piece of police equipment during a

scuffle in a Brooklyn subway station, a police spokesman said.

The decision to place the officers on modified assignment

requires them to surrender their guns and shields, and suggests a

change in the position of the department, which had insisted that

it saw no evidence of misconduct by the officers.

Officers are often modified in anticipation of possible

disciplinary action.

The reported assault is said to have occurred Oct. 15, and a

review of the encounter by the department's Internal Affairs Bureau

over the following week failed to find wrongdoing by the officers,

who are from the 71st Precinct.

But the investigation has continued, under the auspices of the

Brooklyn district attorney, and new evidence and witnesses --

including a fifth officer, assigned to the transit police -- have

emerged. The outlines of the transit officer's account of what took

place in the encounter was relayed last week to investigators, and

his lawyer, Paul P. Martin, met with prosecutors on Monday, Martin

said.

The police and prosecutors have not released much information

about their continuing investigation. They did search a locker in

the 71st Precinct station house on Monday, one official said, but

the results of the search were unclear.

One law enforcement official who did not want to be identified

because he was not authorized to discuss the investigation said the

action against the four officers -- Alex Cruz, Noel Jugraj, Richard

Kern and Andrew Morales -- stemmed from information from the transit

officer, who was present during the alleged assault, but who,

according to his lawyer, is being treated as a witness rather than

as a target of the investigation.

No action has been taken against that officer, who has not been

identified.

Stuart London, the lawyer for Cruz, declined comment; the

lawyers for the three other officers did not return telephone

messages.

On Monday afternoon, a police spokesman declined comment, citing

a grand jury investigation by the Brooklyn district attorney,

Charles J. Hynes. Later in the evening, the spokesman, Paul J.

Browne, confirmed that the action had been taken against the

officers.

In the encounter being investigated, the officers chased a

24-year-old man they said they believed was smoking marijuana into

the Prospect Park subway station. Lawyers for the man, Michael

Mineo, a 24-year-old body piercer at a tattoo parlor, said that the

officers tackled Mineo and that three held him down while a fourth

sodomized him with a piece of equipment.

No drugs were found, and the police let him go with a disorderly

conduct summons. Mineo ended up in a hospital with injuries,

including a tear to his rectum that one law enforcement official

said was both external and internal.

The police initially cast doubt on Mineo's account, saying in a

statement that the "assertion that he was sodomized is not

supported by independent civilian witnesses on the scene." More

recently, though, the police commissioner, Raymond W. Kelly, has

said he welcomed the grand jury investigation by Hynes.

In placing the officers on modified duty, the department would

not necessarily be suggesting that it accepted Mineo's account of

brutality.

But the change would suggest that the department now suspects

some level of misconduct on the part of the officers, either in

connection with the encounter or some other matter.

The law enforcement official pointed out that after the officers

subdued Mineo, they checked whether there were any outstanding

warrants against him, finding one stemming from charges in

Pennsylvania. But despite the outstanding warrant, his attempt to

flee, his resistance -- according to the police account -- and their

belief that he swallowed a marijuana cigarette, they did not arrest

him, instead issuing him the summons, the most lenient action they

could take against him.

In addition, the summons itself was defective, with a return

date in January 2008, which effectively gave Mineo a free pass on

returning to court.

Martin, the lawyer for the transit officer, declined to provide

his client's name, but said he would meet with Hynes' prosecutors

again this week. He added that there has been no determination as

to whether his client will testify before the grand jury.

"My client is a New York City police officer and he has certain

duties and responsibilities that go with his uniform and the oath

he took, and he intends to fulfill his obligations," Martin said.

WASHINGTON - President John McCain: It could happen.

True, the math looks pretty daunting for the Arizona senator as

voters head

to the polls. On paper, it seems improbable, with Democrat Barack

Obama

leading in every major national poll, as well as in numerous

battleground

states expected to determine the winner.

But impossible? There have been greater comebacks. The Red Sox

recovered

from a three-game deficit in 2004 to win four games straight

against the

Yankees, as Sox star pitcher Curt Schilling, a McCain supporter,

noted in

Peterborough, N.H., on Sunday as he stumped with the GOP nominee.

And while Obama has run a relatively error-free campaign,

political

specialists say, "almost perfect" doesn't guarantee the big

prize.

"The Patriots lost the Super Bowl," noted Frank Donatelli,

deputy

director of the Republican National Committee, referring to the

team's loss

to the New York Giants in February after a perfect season. As for

the

polls, alternately revered and dreaded by the campaigns, Donatelli

is

skeptical.

"Everywhere I've gone, there is just tremendous enthusiasm"

for McCain,

Donatelli said Monday in between visits to Virginia, Pennsylvania,

Missouri, and Ohio. "These polls that show a huge disparity

between

Republican and Democratic ((turnout)) are just not going to pan

out," he

said.

Analysts have handicapped the race for Obama, predicting he will

win all

of the states Democrat John Kerry took in 2004, plus a combination

of

victories in Iowa, New Mexico, Colorado - and possibly Virginia and

Nevada

- that would put Obama over the 270 electoral majority mark. Obama

is also

competitive in Florida, North Carolina, and Ohio, and even once

reliably-GOP states like Montana and Georgia are in play. The

battle for

Missouri is a dead heat.

Still, the races in the battleground states are still quite

close, with

Obama's numerical edge well within the margin of error. Further,

McCain has

edged up in a couple of polls in North Carolina, Ohio and

Pennsylvania,

giving Republicans hope for a major upset.

"Nothing's over until it's over. While polls in a lot of these

key swing

states show Obama with slim-to-modest leads, there is always the

possibility of late movement in public opinion," said Michael

Dimmock,

associate director of the Pew Research Center.

McCain would almost certainly have to win Pennsylvania and its

21 electoral

votes to beat Obama, they said. "There's a mathematical way to do

it, but

it's an inside straight at best," Lee Miringoff, director of the

Marist

Institute for Public Opinion, said in assessing McCain's challenge.

It's possible to come up with arithmetic that would leave the

Electoral

College vote tied at 269 to 269. In that case, the decision would

go to

Congress, with the House choosing the president (each state's

delegation

would get one vote) and the Senate choosing the vice president.

The votes would be taken in the next Congress, and since

Democrats are

expected to expand their majorities in both chambers, Obama and

Senator Joe

Biden would probably be sent to the White House, said Judith Best,

a

political science professor at the State University of New York

College at

Cortland. But the likelihood of that happening is extremely small,

she

said.

Of course, the Buffalo Bills were losing by 32 points into the

third

quarter against the Houston Oilers in the 1993 AFC Wild Card

playoff game,

only to come back and beat the Oilers 41-38, eventually advancing

to the

Super Bowl.

Are all those sports comeback scenarios warming the hopes of

McCain

supporters? "We remember those games because quite likely, it will

never

happen again," said Andrew Smith, director of the University of

New

Hampshire Survey Center.

CLEVELAND - All through the morning yesterday, the line of voters

waiting to

cast early ballots stretched almost two city blocks around the

Cuyahoga

County Board of Elections building in what could be a preview of

scenes

across the country today of very high turnout for this historic

presidential election.

One prominent forecaster said he believes the turnout percentage

could be

the highest in a century, and election watchers say that could

create

problems for election officials worried about technology breakdowns

and

flawed voter lists.

Because of catastrophic problems in the 2000 and 2004

presidential

contests, an army of citizen watchdogs has sprung up across the

country.

They will monitor Election Day activities, with Republican

partisans more

likely to be looking for evidence of voting fraud and Democratic

sympathizers looking to blow the whistle on efforts to intimidate

or

mislead voters.

The crush of voters descending on about 113,000 polling places

nationwide

on a single day puts great stress on the local officials who

conduct

elections, and they face some new issues this year.

"Just as voting machines were the big problem of 2000 and

provisional

ballots were a big problem in 2004, the issue of voter registration

could

be the problem this year," said Daniel Tokaji, a professor at the

Ohio

State University school of law. Partly, he said, it's because of

the

massive voter registration effort for this election, and the

requirement

under federal law for officials to verify new registrations with

centralized databases such as state motor vehicle departments or

the

federal Social Security Administration.

The issue has produced litigation in Ohio, Colorado, and

Wisconsin and

raised the possibility that voters who do not come up as a perfect

match

could be forced at polling places to mark so-called provisional

ballots,

which would be examined after Election Day and might never be

counted. In

Ohio, where there were widespread voting problems in 2004, there

were more

provisional ballots cast than President Bush's election-night

margin of

victory over Democrat John F. Kerry.

"On Election Day, we start shooting with real ballots, and now

we're on to

the next step of these databases and will find out if these

matching

efforts and these lists required in the ((Help America Vote Act of

2002))

really work," said Doug Chapin, an election specialist at the

nonpartisan

Pew Center on the States in Washington. "The real test is what to

do with

these mismatches and what the effect will be on a day when you have

100-plus million people voting."

"I've been very vocal about the fact that a state should not

strike

someone from the voter list just because a computer identifies a

match or

doesn't identify a match," said Rosemary Rodriguez, chairwoman of

the

federal Election Assistance Commission, an advisory body that was

created

under the HAVA law six years ago. "We've advised the states that

everything should be reviewed by a human to find out, for example,

if there

are obvious reasons there is not a match."

A prominent turnout forecaster, professor Michael McDonald of

George Mason

University in Virginia, said that surges in registration and heavy

early

voting could produce the highest voter turnout percentage in a

century,

since the election of 1908. McDonald, who studies early voting

patterns,

projects 40 million Americans, about 30 percent of all voters who

will vote

in this election, will have cast ballots before the polls open

today -

either by mail-in absentee ballots or in-person early voting.

While that does not always translate into higher turnout,

McDonald believes

it will this year, in part, because of the extraordinarily high

percentage

of votes being cast by African-Americans, because Democrat Barack

Obama

could become the first black president in history.

McDonald projects that 64 percent of eligible voters will cast

ballots this

year, exceeding the most recent high of 63.8 percent in 1960, the

John F.

Kennedy-Richard M. Nixon contest. Four years ago, turnout was 60.1

percent

of eligible voters. Prior to 1960, the previous high was 65.7

percent in

1908, McDonald said. In that election, before women could vote,

William

Howard Taft defeated William Jennings Bryan.

With about 213 million Americans eligible to vote this year, a

64 percent

turnout would mean about 136 million votes cast in the presidential

race,

compared with a 60 percent turnout of eligible voters in 2004 and

123

million votes cast that year, according to McDonald's United States

Elections Project website.

Four years ago, Ohio was plagued by voting and tabulation

problems that

gained national notoriety after the Buckeye State tipped the

Electoral

College to reelect Bush.

Cuyahoga County, the most populous in the perennial battleground

state, has

been a frequent trouble spot, with a history of mismanaged

elections that

included virtually every possible problem. But the county is

striving to

avoid errors and a reprise of past electoral embarrassments that

included

equipment errors, slow voting that resulted in court-ordered

extensions of

voting hours, and allegations of voter registration fraud.

The Cleveland area is one of many across the nation that has had

to sort

through stacks of bogus registration applications collected by the

Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now (ACORN),

activities

that have precipitated criminal investigations in about a dozen

states. To

date, the Cuyahoga election board has referred a dozen

ACORN-related cases

to the county prosecutor's office, Mike West, a board spokesman

said.

The Republican Party has called it a massive fraud and

aggressively

publicized the cases, and both sides have assembled teams of

lawyers in

every state to respond to problems at the polls. In Ohio alone,

Obama's

campaign has 5,000 lawyers standing by today.

Cuyahoga's stepped-up review methods were on display when the

four-member

panel met yesterday and grilled a former resident of a Cleveland

suburb,

now working as a Toledo television reporter, about discrepancies in

her

voting record. Her early vote cast in Cuyahoga County was nullified

after

it was discovered she had also registered and applied for an

absentee

ballot in Lucas County where Toledo is located. The board

concluded,

however, the case did not warrant referral to the prosecutor's

office.

The county, like many voting jurisdictions, has changed its

voting

technology this year to a paper-based system that uses an optical

scanner

to count ballot markings. But this is its third voting system in

four years

for Cuyahoga after discarding flawed punch-card paper ballots used

in the

2004 presidential election and a balky touch-screen system used in

2006.

The board heard a report from its new director, Jane Platten,

about the

status of several thousand questionable ballots already flagged

during

early voting and the other preparations for today's voting,

including

having 18 employees present from the vendor that provided the new

voting

system.

DANA POINT, Calif. - Theo Epstein may have been one of the last

to arrive

at baseball's general managers' meetings Monday, but it wasn't

because he

was slacking off.

Epstein spent the day watching Clay Buchholz in an Arizona Fall

League

game, then showed up at the St. Regis Hotel, where his No. 1

priority will

be the Red Sox' catching situation.

Toward that end, he will meet with agent Scott Boras over the

next couple

of days to discuss where the team stands in re-signing team captain

Jason

Varitek.

Epstein spoke on a lot of topics upon his arrival, one of which

was the

multiyear extension he reached with the Sox - a deal that had been

reported

on for months but without his stamp.

"That's done," he said. "It was taken care of a while back."

Esptein would not reveal the length or financial terms of the

deal but

talked about his reasons for staying on with the Sox.

"When you sit back and think about being a general manager,

this is

exactly the type of organization you'd want to work for," he said.

"Great

fans, great ownership, and a tremendous foundation of our scouting

and

player development, which if we don't screw it up will lead to

long-term

success.

"We're all in this game to work with good people and to try and

win a

World Series."

Epstein wants to leave the meetings with a good sense of whether

he can

re-sign Varitek. A couple of executives speculated that there might

be a

new team with interest in Varitek: the Dodgers.

There is a Boston connection in owner Frank McCourt, and the

Dodgers could

play Russell Martin at third some of the time. Another possibility

is the

Tigers, who need a catcher to calm down their pitching staff,

though they

may not be able to afford Varitek.

Epstein said he wasn't opposed to moving quickly on a Varitek

decision and

hoped to exchange information with Boras that could expedite the

process.

But he also feels the Sox are positioned well with depth where they

could

go out and make a deal for a catcher if they had to.

Epstein said that Mike Timlin wants to pitch next season, but it

won't be

in Boston. Epstein found it remarkable that Timlin spent six

seasons with

the Red Sox.

Epstein also said he's informed Sean Casey that the team would

address

more pressing needs, which likely means Casey won't be returning.

The Sox also appear to be far down the list of Jake Peavy's

preferences

for relocation. The Padres are trying to deal him, and San Diego GM

Kevin

Towers has been working hard trying to put together a package with

the

Braves.

Peavy, who has a no-trade clause, has indicated that he wants to

stay in

the National League, and while he hasn't ruled out Boston, it would

be far

down the list after NL teams such as Atlanta, Houston, Los Angeles,

and

Chicago.

Epstein said he would be open to exploring avenues for more

starting

pitching, but he didn't sound like someone who was going all out

for a CC

Sabathia or A.J. Burnett.

"If it makes sense to us, we'd try to add another starter," he

said. "In

an ideal world, sure, the more the merrier. We try to create

redundancy at

all of our positions. We have some volume now. That can change in a

hurry

with a key injury.

"Finding value with top free agents is sometimes hard to do.

Our

expectations are realistic about the chances of landing a guy like

that."

Epstein also indicated the Sox are in position to speak to their

arbitration-eligible players like Dustin Pedroia, Jonathan

Papelbon, and

Kevin Youkilis about long-term deals.

"I'd prefer not to get into the who, what, and where, but

that's one of

the subjects that's on the table," Epstein said.

Epstein has never gone to arbitration as a GM in Boston, always

settling

with his players. With teams more budget-conscious because of the

downturn

in the economy, arbitration may become a more important exercise in

the

coming years. The Sox have potential whoppers in Papelbon and

Youkilis.

Last season, Phillies first baseman Ryan Howard won a $10

million

arbitration case, the largest one to date, while Angels closer

Frankie

Rodriguez lost a bid for $12.5 million and settled for $10 million.

Both Papelbon, who made $775,000 last season, and Youkilis, who

earned $3

million, could see their numbers rise near those levels.

Until now, the Sox have not been inclined to work out long-term

deals with

those players, but that thinking could change this offseason. The

Sox gave

Youkilis a raise from $424,000 in 2007 to $3 million in 2008.

Papelbon suffered a subluxation of his right shoulder in

September 2006

and since then has been on a strict program that outlines when he's

able to

pitch and for how long. The Sox went away from that program over

the final

month of last season and Papelbon did admit to feeling "beat up"

by the

end of the playoffs,

The Sox seem to be OK with their budget even with the economic

downturn.

Chairman Tom Werner, who showed up Monday, said of the team

payroll, which

was $133 million-plus in 2008, "We'll do whatever we can to be

competitive

in the tough AL East. We'll examine all options to get better,

given how

good Tampa Bay has become and will be and with the Yankees also

likely to

rebuild and be very strong."

Warner acknowledged that a few Sox sponsorships are up and they

have to

renew some business deals, and said he didn't know how the economy

would

affect that. But it doesn't sound as if the Sox will cut any

corners in

building their team.

Nick Cafardo can be reached at cafardo@globe.com

Amid fears of an art-market meltdown, an

international crowd of dealers, collectors and voyeurs packed

Sotheby's on Monday night for the start of the important fall

auction season. While many were expecting a funeral, the results

were spotty: a relief to those who thought the appetite for art was

all but dead, but hardly the success story of seasons past.

Millions of dollars worth of Impressionist and modern art by

masters like Degas and Picasso, Matisse and Modigliani went for far

less than the expectations. But Sotheby's worked hard to make sure

its biggest-ticket items and biggest financial risks were covered.

Early in the evening, one of the few truly high prices in an

otherwise tepid evening went for Kazimir Malevich's "Suprematist

Composition," a 1916 abstract canvas of bold blocks and rods of

colors. It brought $60 million, a record price for the artist at

auction. But "Suprematist Composition" was bound to sell no

matter what. Sotheby's announced several weeks ago that it had

lined up what it called an "irrevocable bid." That meant a buyer

had contractually agreed to purchase the painting for an

undisclosed sum. On Monday night, there was only one bid, which was

taken on the telephone by Roberta Louckx, a New York-based

Sotheby's representative who is known to work with Russians.

It was one of 45 works that sold on Monday night. Twenty-five

others failed to sell, mostly without a bid. The evening totaled

$223.8 million, below its estimate of $337 million to $475 million.

(Final prices include the commission paid to Sotheby's: 25

percent of the first $20,000, 20 percent of the next $20,000 to

$500,000 and 12 percent of the rest. Estimates do not reflect

commissions.)

Most of the works that did sell went for prices far below their

estimates, which were set in the summer before the financial

crisis. Sotheby's spent the past few weeks convincing consigners to

lower their expectations. On those works that the auction house had

given a guarantee -- an undisclosed sum promised to a seller

regardless of a sale's outcome -- it was clear that Sotheby's was

prepared to sell something and lose money rather than risk having

to flog it later.

Market jitters have been the talk of the art world for a while

now, but aside from dealers' grumbling about how bad business has

become, there had been few concrete indications until last week.

That's when a 1909 Picasso that was estimated at more than $30

million was abruptly withdrawn from the Monday auction. The

sellers, heirs of the Surrealist painter Enrico Donati, who died in

April, said they were pulling the work "for private reasons," but

others said it was because of fears that the painting would be seen

later as secondhand goods if it failed to sell.

In rosier times the painting would have been snapped up by one

of the newly rich from the former Soviet Union, Asia or the Middle

East who have been fueling the market in the last few years. But as

the wealth of these collectors has diminished, the appetite for

paying millions of dollars for art has seemed to diminish as well.

Sotheby's said the buyers on Monday were predominantly Americans,

although it was clear that Russians also took home several works.

Many in the audience were watching to see what new levels would

be set. "People were nervous," said Susan Seidel, a Manhattan

dealer, after the sale. "The mood seemed very tentative."

A Degas gouache, "Dancer in Repose," that was being sold by

the financier Henry Kravis and his wife, Marie-Josee Kravis, was

sought by two telephone bidders. From around 1879, it depicts a

dancer sitting on a bench massaging her foot. The Kravises bought

the work at Sotheby's in London in 1999 for $27.9 million, and in

the summer the auction house gave the Kravises a guarantee that

experts said was more than $40 million. On Monday Yasuaki Ishizaka,

head of Sotheby's Tokyo, took the winning bid by phone: $33

million, or $37 million including Sotheby's fees.

One of the evening's brightest spots was when "Vampire," an

1894 Munch canvas of a man locked in a tortured embrace, came on

the block. Four bidders tried for the painting, and it brought $34

million ($38.1 million with Sotheby's commission).

The evening did see some big casualties. "Seated Man (Leaning

on a Cane)," a 1918 painting by Modigliani that the Nahmad family,

dealers with galleries in New York and London, bought at Christie's

in London in 1996 for $3.2 million, was estimated at $18 million to

$25 million. There wasn't a bid in sight, and Tobias Meyer, the

evening's auctioneer, gave up trying to sell the work at $15.5

million.

The Nahmads weren't the only disappointed dealers selling works

on Monday night. Another was William Acquavella, a Manhattan dealer

who purchased Giacometti's "Diego's Head," a 1958 painting, at

Christie's just three years ago for $1.1 million. On Monday it was

estimated to bring $6 million to $8 million. But again, not a hand

went in the air. Sotheby's had given Acquavella a guarantee that

was said to be about $6 million, making it an expensive mistake for

the auction house.

A year ago a group of paintings by the Russian artist Boris

Dmitrievich Grigoriev being sold by the Berkshire Museum in

Pittsfield, Mass., would have been snapped up. But on Monday the

results were mixed. Among the best was "Pipe Players," a 1924

painting that depicts a pair of peasant musicians. One telephone

bidder wanted the painting, and it sold for $2.8 million ($3.2

million including Sotheby's commission), well under its $4 million

to $6 million estimate. But "Shepherd of the Hills," another

Grigoriev, this one from 1920, brought $3.2 million ($3.7 million

with commission). It was the only work fetching more than its high

estimate, in this case $3.5 million.

The volunteers came armed for work, with shovels, a

jackhammer and mugs of warm coffee in hand on a brisk fall Sunday

morning.

Nearly two dozen came to break a sweat, get a little dirty and

revel in the feel of a neighborhood brought together through hard

work.

"We were just strangers before, and this made us neighbors,"

said Doug Harper, a sociology professor, still a bit surprised that

something as simple as planting crab apple trees, hydrangea bushes

and day lilies could have such a profound impact.

Their task this day in the middle-class neighborhood of South

Squirrel Hills was the same as at two previous community planting

days: to expand and beautify an unofficial 2-acre park on

city-owned land along Fernwald Road. Not long ago, it was a

weed-choked illegal dump, full of engine blocks, car seats,

55-gallon drums and leftover concrete.

"Our hope was that if maybe it didn't look like a garbage dump,

maybe people wouldn't treat it like one," said Dr. John Caldwell,

an anesthesiologist who is praised by neighbors for doing much of

the day-to-day upkeep and planning for the site.

Officials in Pittsburgh hope that this kind of self-motivated

activism, which sprang up without city prompting and with minimal

official support, can become infectious, leading to beautification

of a growing number of vacant, abandoned lots.

"I wish I saw more work like that around the city by

residents," said Guy Costa, the city's public works director.

"From what it looked like before, it's amazing what they've

done."

But after the neighbors began improving the park, they realized

they might have a problem on their hands.

"We worried that maybe we had done our job too well and might

attract attention," said Paul Peffer, a financial adviser, who is

teasingly called "the mayor" by his neighbors for starting the

project about eight years ago. "You know, some developer might

come along and think, 'Hey, I could build there."'

Peffer began contacting city officials to see if they could have

the lot designated a greenway to protect their work.

"Everyone seemed to agree with the idea immediately," he said.

"But we still don't have a designation. You'd think the city would

jump on the idea."

What happened, city officials now say, is that the idea ran into

legal complications.

Because the land had been taken over by the city for delinquent

taxes, officials had to clear up titles and create a new

subdivision that could be designated a greenway -- a process that

has taken far longer than anyone would have liked, although the

city says it can be completed by early next year.

"We'll get it done," said William B. Waddell, real estate

coordinator for the city's Department of Finance. "We already

recognize this as an area that will become a greenway area. If

anyone was to come and try to buy it from us, we'd say, 'Sorry,

it's for a greenway."'

The city has thousands of reasons to support ad hoc projects

like this one.

Pittsburgh continues to lose population. It is down more than

20,000 residents this decade, to roughly 312,000. That is less than

half the size it was at its peak in 1950, when it had 676,000

people.

In a spiral familiar to many former industrial cities, homes

went vacant and fell into tax delinquency as people left. The city

then took ownership, and, over time, tore many buildings down as

they deteriorated, swelling the number of vacant lots.

The city controls 24,000 vacant lots. Currently, there are 6,000

abandoned buildings, 1,400 of them officially condemned.

But with city finances strained -- its budget was put under state

control four years ago -- it was all Mayor Luke Ravenstahl could do

to double the demolition budget to $4 million this year to tear

down 600 more buildings.

And, like his predecessors -- Mayor Tom Murphy had a program in

the 1990s called Project Picket Fence that largely failed --

Ravenstahl has a program to encourage residents to maintain vacant

lots.

Called the Green Up program, it has already found residents

committed to maintaining 60 similar lots.

"It's a challenge, there's no question," said Joanna Doven,

spokeswoman for Ravenstahl. "There's a lot of vacant land in the

city. But we're looking at this land as an asset now, not just a

problem."

Gov. Sarah Palin, 44, is in excellent health and

has had no major medical problems, according to a two-page,

seven-paragraph letter by her doctor released late Monday night.

The letter is the first information the Palin campaign has

provided about her medical history. The release of medical records

is common practice for presidential and vice presidential

candidates, but earlier this month, Palin, the Republican nominee

for vice president, declined to provide any health information or

be interviewed about her medical history.

She retreated from that position on Oct. 22 in an interview with

Brian Williams of NBC News. "If that will allow some curiosity

seekers, perhaps, to have one more thing that they can either check

the box off, that they can find something to criticize, perhaps, or

to rest them assured over, fine," Palin said.

A spokeswoman for Palin had said the medical information would

be released a week ago, but the campaign failed to do so.

The McCain-Palin campaign e-mailed the statement to the news

media while Palin and her traveling press corps were on a flight

from Colorado Springs, Colo., to Reno, Nev., en route to her fifth

campaign event of the day.

The letter, dated Nov. 3, is from Dr. Cathy Baldwin-Johnson, who

works at the Providence Health and Services Alaska clinic in

Anchorage.

Palin, Baldwin-Johnson wrote, has been a patient at the clinic

since 1991. She said Palin's visits "have been related to routine

women's health care and pregnancy."

Palin gave birth to her five children in 1989, 1990, 1994, 2000

and 2008. Regarding the birth of her fifth child, Trig,

Baldwin-Johnson said Palin had "no risk factors other than her

age."

Baldwin-Johnson also wrote that in 1992, Palin had a breast

biopsy for a lesion that turned out to be benign. According to the

letter, Palin is on no routine prescription medications and has no

drug allergies. She is said to work out regularly and to be

physically fit.

"Governor Palin is in excellent health and has no known health

problems that would interfere with her ability to carry out the

duties and obligations of the vice president of the United States

of America," Baldwin-Johnson wrote.

Colorado Springs, Colo. -- Republican vice presidential nominee

Sarah Palin delivered a patriotic speech to an electrified crowd of

about 3,600 on Monday, in the breathless final hours of stumping in

the presidential election.

Exhilarating her base in this Republican stronghold, Palin took

Democratic presidential nominee Barack Obama to task on his

definition of middle class, his commitment to defense spending and

his pledge to preserve the Second Amendment.

Palin, who arrived on stage with her husband, Todd, and country

musician Hank Williams Jr., said Obama wasn't a moderate Democrat

but represented the "far left wing of the party preparing to take

over your federal government."

"Consider the monopoly of unchecked power," she said,

referring to a Democratic-controlled Congress. She said an Obama

victory would bring "a one-party rule of Obama, Pelosi and Reid."

The last day of campaigning brought good news for the Alaska

governor. A report prepared by an independent counsel for the

Alaska Personnel Board cleared her of ethics violations in the

firing of her public safety commissioner.

A state legislative investigation recently said that Palin

abused her office by allowing her husband and staffers to pressure

the public safety commissioner to fire a state trooper who had gone

through a bitter divorce from Palin's sister.

But the report released Monday said, "There is no probable

cause to believe that the governor, or any other state official,

violated the Alaska Executive Ethics Act in connection with these

matters," The Associated Press reported.

Palin's 30-minute speech in an airport hangar was one of many

campaign stops across the country on both sides Monday.

Many Palin supporters, who carried signs that said, "Read my

Lipstick" and "Super Sarah," said they were casting their

ballots for Palin more than for presidential candidate John McCain.

At one point during her speech, when people began chanting,

"USA, USA," Palin began a chant that said, "John McCain, John

McCain."

"She's the one, she's the one we're voting for," said Penny

Herrmann, a 57-year-old Colorado Springs resident who attended the

rally with her 25-year-old daughter, Ashlee.

Palin called Obama's tax plan "phony" and said that he has

flip-flopped in recent weeks on the definition of middle class.

Obama's campaign released a statement responding to her speech,

saying no family making less than $250,000 would see a tax increase

under his plan. For families making less than $200,000, it said,

there would be a tax cut.

Palin said she believed in Ronald Reagan's brand of politics.

"We believe in the forward movement of your freedom and not the

constant expansion of government," she said. "That freedom

includes the free rights and liberties of the Second Amendment

too."

Thousands of miles of ocean have separated the

families of Ni Na Phung -- a Vietnamese teen who was severely

burned in a savage attack last year -- and Viet Ha, who left the

Southeast Asian country years ago to start a new life in the U.S.

But long before building up his printing business in Chatsworth,

Ha shared a bond with Phung's mother and father: All three did

backbreaking work in the Vietnamese rice fields.

When Ha read in the Daily News that Ni Na would need a place to

stay for a year while doctors at the Grossman Burn Center at

Sherman Oaks Hospital work to give her a new face and smile, he

immediately wanted to help.

"I took the article home to my wife," recalled Ha, who lives

with his family in Oak Park, northwest of Calabasas. "She cried.

We talked to our children about Ni Na and it didn't take long

before we made the call to the Children's Burn Foundation."

Of the eight Valley families who offered their homes for Phung,

18, and her mother for a year, the Ha family was selected as the

best fit.

While Phung's father continues to work in the rice fields

outside Da Nang, a port city in central Vietnam, her mother will

accompany her daughter throughout her stay.

Last week, after months of planning and waiting, Phung and her

mother landed at LAX after a 17-hour trip. For more than an hour,

Ha, his wife, Kim Nguyen, and two of their three children, Victor

and Kevin, waited excitedly at the Tom Bradley International

Terminal.

"I'm starting to get nervous," Ha, 48, said as the buildup to

seeing Phung intensified. "It's exciting."

They tightly gripped their signs, several bouquets of red roses

and a new navy blue blanket. They waited while hundreds of

jet-lagged passengers exited the terminal -- but there was no sign

of Phung, whose trip was sponsored by the Children's Burn

Foundation in Sherman Oaks.

Seventy minutes later, after clearing customs, Phung emerged in

a wheelchair, her mother by her side. The once-pretty young woman's

face was covered with a light blue and pink hat and scarf, with

only her brown eyes visible. Her host family embraced her warmly,

speaking her language and reassuring her that everything was going

to be fine.

Phung's arrival in Southern California follows a long journey of

excruciating pain after she was severely burned and disfigured over

70 percent of her body.

In March 2007, she attended a party in her hometown with

friends. A neighborhood acquaintance, who had been in a motorcycle

accident that doctors said left him mentally unstable, was also

there and asked her out on a date. She declined.

That rejection changed Phung's life forever. The young man, who

is now serving a 16-year prison sentence, later entered her home

and poured gasoline over her body while she lay asleep. Then he lit

her on fire.

When Phung awakened, her screams could be heard throughout her

neighborhood. Overcome by pain, she fainted while being taken by

ambulance to Da Nang General Hospital, where she would begin

treatment for mostly third-degree burns.

Phung's injuries were so severe that her chin and neck seared

together. She also lost all the fingers on one hand and was burned

over most of her body, which has caused ongoing pain and stiffness

that has gotten worse in the months since the incident.

"I just want to make sure that Ni Na and her mother are

comfortable and feel good here," Viet Ha said. "I called them

before the trip, and Ni Na sounded good. I asked them what kind of

food they wanted, and they said, 'Rice."'

Phung's trip to the United States began several months ago after

the Children's Burn Foundation used its resources to search for the

right host family. They needed to find a family that could have

Phung and her mother stay for about a year and provide meals and

transportation to and from medical appointments.

After Phung's story appeared in the Daily News earlier this

year, several families contacted the foundation. On Sept. 1, Ha was

taking a walk in his Oak Park neighborhood when he saw a newspaper

on the ground. He picked it up and read Phung's story.

Since then, Ha and his family have been eager to host the burn

survivor. Ni Na's mother and father for years have each earned less

than $2 a day working in the rice fields, and her mother had to

quit her job to take care of her daughter.

Viet Ha, who also worked in rice fields as a child in his native

Vietnam, felt that hosting the pair was the right thing to do,

especially since he knows firsthand what it's like to leave Vietnam

unfamiliar with life in the United States. Ha left Vietnam alone in

his late teens, but his brothers later joined him.

"I came here with nothing," said Ha, who worked his way up in

the printing business and now owns Victor's Contract Printing,

which he named after his son. "Everything that's happened in my

life happened almost by accident and a lot of hard work. I knew we

were the right family for Ni Na."

In her first week, Phung, who has refused to look at herself in

a mirror since she was burned, has settled into her new two-story,

five-bedroom home -- a mansion compared with her tiny house in Da

Nang.

"I'm OK," Phung said during her first night in her new home,

while her mother looked on in their new bedroom.

Phung's main doctor, Alexander Majidian, expects her first

surgery to take place in the next few weeks. He hopes to start

working on her neck -- she is having trouble chewing and swallowing

-- and give her steroid injections to help her burned skin heal.

"One of the greatest challenges for Ni Na is developing her

confidence," said Majidian, who describes the young girl as shy

but enthusiastic.

As for Ha and his family, their commitment is important, they

said, because they have been fortunate enough to have good lives in

this country, which once seemed so foreign.

"We couldn't sleep for days before she arrived," Ha said. "I

know she'll get better, and we don't want her to go home until

she's fully recovered."

The fallout from Sunday's 26-17 loss to the Miami Dolphins

continued Monday when the Denver Broncos placed running backs

Michael Pittman and Andre Hall on the injured-reserve list.

The move left the Broncos with just two active tailbacks, Selvin

Young and rookie Ryan Torain, only three days before playing at

Cleveland on Thursday night.

Young has been inactive for the past three games while

recovering from a groin injury. Torain made his NFL debut against

the Dolphins after spending the past three months rehabilitating a

dislocated elbow.

"It's crazy," Torain said. "I got healthy just in time."

Pittman, the starter in the past three games, aggravated a

stinger in his neck during the Miami game and was in too much pain

to play in the second half. Hall, who also has had wrist and ankle

injuries this season, broke a bone in his left hand late in the

game.

The long-term prognosis isn't quite as dire for linebacker D.J.

Williams, who injured the medial collateral ligament in his left

knee in the fourth quarter. He is expected to miss at least a month

but will try to return this season.

"I think he's going to fight through," said linebacker Jamie

Winborn, who spoke with Williams on Monday morning. "He's going to

come through it, and hopefully he can come through it earlier than

expected."

Still, Williams' injury is a major blow to a defense already

without star cornerback Champ Bailey and linebacker Boss Bailey,

both of whom were hurt during the loss to New England on Oct. 20.

"Obviously we're very concerned," coach Mike Shanahan said of

the rash of injuries.

Of the litany of miserable sights Sunday afternoon at Invesco

Field at Mile High -- Jay Cutler's three interceptions, an offensive

pass interference call on Brandon Marshall, Miami running back

Ronnie Brown picking up 18 yards on a third-down screen -- perhaps

nothing was scarier to the Broncos than the sight of Williams

hobbling on one leg and a pair of crutches in the locker room after

the game.

Williams was injured in the fourth quarter while trying to

defend that Miami screen to Brown, perhaps the game's key play.

Williams made the tackle that stopped Brown 1 yard short of the

first down, but he remained seated on the grass, surrounded by

trainers and teammates for several minutes before being helped to

the sideline.

It surely was an unfamiliar feeling for Williams and an unusual

sight for his teammates and coaches. Williams has been one of the

team's most durable defenders and has played in every game for

Denver since the Broncos drafted him in the first round in 2004. He

has started at least 14 games in each of his first four seasons.

"D.J. is our warrior, you know?" linebacker Louis Green said.

"I never expected D.J. to get hurt."

Green and rookie Wesley Woodyard played in Williams' absence in

the fourth quarter, and coaches might now reshuffle their

linebackers.

Winborn replaced Boss Bailey on the strong side after Bailey was

placed on the injured-reserve list after the loss to New England.

Wilborn also filled in for Bailey there in the preseason and the

season opener. But Winborn is naturally a weakside linebacker, and

he started the season as Williams' backup there.

Green is most comfortable on the strong side, while Woodyard,

like Williams, is best on the weak side.

"I can play either/or, so it doesn't matter," Winborn said.

"It just depends on how they want to shuffle us around."

Will the last star player left on the Denver Nuggets' bench

please inform coach George Karl he is running out of excuses why

his underachieving team cannot win in the NBA playoffs?

Under the duress of player discontent and basketball budget

restrictions, it is nothing short of remarkable Denver was able to

trade Allen Iverson and get hometown hero Chauncey Billups in

return.

Love him or loathe him, A.I. had to go.

Nuggets forward Carmelo Anthony acknowledged Monday that his

partnership with Iverson was no more successful at winning a

championship than letting baseball superstar Alex Rodriguez move in

with Derek Jeter at the House that Ruth Built.

Nevertheless, saying goodbye was difficult. "I'm going to miss

(A.I.), not only as a friend, but as a basketball player," Anthony

said.

The need for this breakup, however, was as obvious as the bad

vibe in the dressing room on Iverson's last game in a Nuggets

uniform. Everybody knew this probably was his final season in

Denver. But why did the team pull the plug on the A.I. experiment

so abruptly?

To understand, maybe you had to witness the weird, discomforting

scene late Saturday night after a disheartening loss to the Los

Angeles Lakers.

Iverson, normally the most upbeat personality on the team in

victory or defeat, dressed silently in a corner stall, like a sad

child sent to timeout.

But down the hall, a close friend of the 33-year-old point guard

spoke angrily on A.I.'s behalf and got in the face of a Nuggets

executive to issue a heated complaint about the declining number of

shots available to one of the most prolific scorers in NBA history.

A Nuggets bench that Karl had promised he would rule with an

iron fist was showing signs of rebellion after only three

regular-season games. The scowl on the face of center Nene,

incredulous at being ignored in the post by teammates after scoring

22 points in a victory only 24 hours earlier, was laced with

disappointment.

"I was definitely upset," Nene said. "And (Lakers forward)

Pau Gasol even told me, 'Man, these guys don't pass the ball to

you.' "

Trying hard to look the picture of maturity as he pulled a

loosely knotted tie over his new corporate haircut, Anthony calmly

explained his own failures in the home opener, but as he stood amid

teammates, the Denver captain was oblivious to the headline news

that would soon shake the ballclub from the core for the second

time since the summer trade of center Marcus Camby.

While rumors of an imminent blockbuster between Denver and

Detroit began leaking over the weekend to such an extent that

players throughout the league were swapping texts and opinions

about the Iverson-for-Billups trade, Nuggets management kept its

young franchise star out of the loop, never mentioning it to

Anthony until the deal was as good as done.

"I didn't hear anything about the trade until I came in

(Monday) morning. I think that's the most shocking part," Anthony

said. "I'm pretty sure that had I known, there would have been a

lot more talk."

The extreme makeover of the Nuggets to a defensive-minded,

basketball-sharing troop of Boy Scouts seemed doomed to flop as a

result of less than 100 percent acceptance from natural-born

gunners, a clash of egos in the locker room and the failure to make

Anthony, their young franchise player, a full partner in the plan's

execution when the going got tough.

So now it is left to Billups to lead players he doesn't know and

make Karl's idea to reinvent himself actually work.

The trade was advertised as a 3-for-1 swap, with our old pal

Antonio McDyess and African import Cheikh Samb joining Billups in

Denver. But do not be distracted by the riff or raff. McDyess left

town in 2002 feeling betrayed, and he ain't coming back.

Anthony vowed he would make a sales call to McDyess, asking the

sensitive 34-year-old forward to "come play on my team." That's

nice. But hearing his pledge, I teased Melo, offering to bet 25

cents that the next time Dice played in Denver, it would be wearing

a visiting uniform, because the Nuggets are going to buy out

McDyess' contract and let him re-enter the free-agent market.

Billups can play "D" and hit the 3. Billups will drop so many

dimes on Nene that he will soon wear a $1 million smile. Billups

figures to age more gracefully than Iverson, whose lack of

preparation for this season had become a point of contention in

discussions behind closed doors with Nuggets brass.

Maybe best of all, Billups can remove some of the coaching

decisions from Karl's hands.

Why? Karl noted his directorship of players on the floor drops

from 80 percent to 50 percent involvement with the benefit of a

true point guard to run the show.

"His instinctive basketball has leadership in it," Karl said

of Billups. "I think the perimeter defense won't have as many

holes, as many leaks, as we've had in the past. And I think he is

tough. I look at Chauncey, and I see kind of a bulldog."

But here's the rub: If the Nuggets again fail to win a playoff

series for first time since 1994, who is going to take the blame?

Iverson is gone. Karl stays.

Camby got shown the door. Karl got another chance.

Denver cuts payroll. Karl keeps collecting a big, fat check.

Are we sure the Nuggets have solved their No. 1 problem?

Mark Kiszla is a sports columnist for The Denver Post.

For the last five years, the Detroit Pistons

were reliably good, occasionally great and as stable as any team in

the NBA. But stability eventually lost its luster, and on Monday

the Pistons opted instead for spontaneous thrills.

In a risky bid to become title contenders again, the Pistons

acquired Allen Iverson from Denver and sent two mainstays, Chauncey

Billups and Antonio McDyess, to the Nuggets. Denver also acquired

the young center Cheikh Samb in the deal.

"We have been extremely successful for a long time," said Joe

Dumars, the Pistons' president. "But I also think along with that

comes a little bit of predictability."

Iverson, Dumars said, will give the Pistons "a different

dimension."

With a team-first, no-superstar approach, the Pistons won the

championship in 2004 and returned to the finals in 2005. Their 284

victories in the past five seasons ranked third in the league. But

their core group had aged, and the Pistons were overtaken by

superstar-driven teams in Miami, Cleveland and Boston.

After Detroit lost to the Celtics in the Eastern Conference

finals last spring, Dumars vowed to reshuffle the roster.

The summer came and went without a deal, but he got the call he

was waiting for last Thursday. The Nuggets were willing to deal

Iverson. After a weekend of negotiations, the teams struck a deal

at about 1:45 a.m. on Monday.

"Some of these deals you have to strike when they're

presented," Dumars said.

In Iverson, the Pistons acquired an explosive scorer, albeit one

on the downside of his career at 33 and with a checkered

reputation. A nine-time All-Star, he has averaged 27.7 points in a

13-year career. He was the league's most valuable player in 2001,

when he led the Philadelphia 76ers to the finals.

Billups, 32, was one of four remaining starters from the

Pistons' 2004 title team, and their second-leading scorer for the

last five years. Detroit let Ben Wallace leave as a free agent in

2006.

Richard Hamilton, Tayshaun Price and Rasheed Wallace are the

starters left from a unit that was once considered the league's

best. Rodney Stuckey started in Billups' place at point guard

against the Charlotte Bobcats on Monday night, but he will soon

hand the reins -- and possibly his No. 3 jersey -- to Iverson.

The Pistons plan to introduce Iverson at a news conference

Tuesday and expect him to make his debut Wednesday in Toronto.

The deal left the Detroit players shell-shocked.

"Do we like the trade?" Wallace asked. "Maybe not. Ain't no

telling."

Hamilton, Billups' backcourt partner for six years, left without

speaking to reporters. Prince sounded almost distraught.

"When you've had six straight years with somebody, you've got

that bond and connection," Prince said. "And now all of a sudden

it's gone."

There are reports that McDyess may seek a contract buyout or

retire rather than play for the Nuggets. If he is waived, he could

potentially re-sign with the Pistons after a mandated 30-day

waiting period.

Billups, a Denver native who played at the University of

Colorado, will be asked to bring leadership to a young,

sometimes-volatile locker room. Billups played two seasons for the

Nuggets early in his career.

The trade has multiple benefits for Detroit. Iverson's $21.9

million deal expires after this season. Wallace, who is making

$13.7 million, is also a free agent next summer. If the Iverson

experiment works, Dumars can re-sign them both and the Pistons

could remain a contender for a few years. If not, Dumars can let

them go and become a major player in free agency in 2010, when

LeBron James, Chris Bosh and Dwyane Wade, among others, could be

available.

Dumars called the cap flexibility a secondary consideration,

"because we wouldn't have made the trade for a player any less

than Iverson."

Beneath a clock counting down the minutes

remaining in practice and possibly in his Knicks career, Stephon

Marbury idled as his team, for now, scrimmaged.

He sat, face resting on chin, hardly visible to onlookers or to

the Knicks' president, Donnie Walsh, from his sideline seat.

He was out of sight, but hardly out of mind. He was inactive

Sunday for a second straight game as the Knicks lost, 94-86, to the

Milwaukee Bucks, but he was perhaps active in his own negotiations

to solve a festering situation.

Marbury, a past source of contention and controversy, is no

longer visible, no longer part of the Knicks' plans, and he and

Walsh met Monday in an attempt to find a resolution.

Marbury is owed $21.9 million in the final year of his contract,

and he has said that he will not accept anything less than his full

contract in a buyout. On Monday, he reiterated his refusal to

retain an agent.

That steadfastness could make negotiations more complicated for

Knicks management because no one is directly advising Marbury in

his dealings with Walsh and, at some point perhaps, James Dolan,

the chairman of Madison Square Garden.

"Why do I need an agent?" Marbury said. "I'm not waived so I

can't speculate on that right now. I don't need an agent and I

wouldn't get an agent. An agent isn't going to tell me, Mr. Walsh

or Mr. Dolan what to do. They're just going to do the same thing

that I'm going to do. And that's talk."

Walsh said he had spoken with Marbury and Knicks coach Mike

D'Antoni. He refused to put a timetable on a solution, but added

that he expected to do so soon.

"I've been talking to these guys for days and I'm going to keep

talking to them, and hopefully this thing can get resolved," Walsh

said. "We'll get it resolved, but there's no white smoke coming

out from the gym or anything like that."

Meanwhile, Billy Hunter, the executive director of the National

Basketball Players Association, told Bloomberg News that the union

might try to intervene in the stalemate on Marbury's behalf to

"see if there's some kind of mutually beneficial position that the

parties can arrive at."

Hunter added: "Maybe there's somebody willing to trade for him.

Maybe you can do a buyout. It depends on the parties."

With the focus on Marbury, D'Antoni noted Monday that the Knicks

had other problems, including the listlessness displayed in

consecutive defeats after their season-opening win over the Miami

Heat.

"We're going to get through this," he said. "And don't be

jumping off the bandwagon too quick because that's not the smart

thing to do right now, but we're going to get through this."

A confused-looking Richard Nixon asked, "Sock it to me?"

(emphasis on the "me," not the "sock") on "Rowan &amp;amp; Martin's

Laugh-In" during the 1968 presidential campaign, flinging open the

door for candidates to troll for votes in nontraditional ways.

So, two years after Sen. Barack Obama played a Halloween guest

(wearing an Obama mask) at the Clintons' costume party on

"Saturday Night Live" -- and a few days after Sen. John McCain

hosted a faux QVC sale of campaign gewgaws, also on "SNL" -- it is

a natural evolution of the electoral process that the two

presidential candidates would star on election eve at halftime of

ESPN's "Monday Night Football."

No late-night rallies could place them in front of as many

supporters as the 12 million or so who were expected to watch the

Steelers-Redskins game.

The surprise wasn't that Obama and McCain accepted ESPN's

request (they also taped interviews with Jim Gray for CBS

Radio/Westwood One's "Monday Night" pregame and postgame shows).

The surprise was that it took this long to so explicitly mix

football and the presidential race on "Monday Night," which has

been alive through 10 elections.

"Maybe in the past, there was a desire to keep the election

separate and not turn 'Monday Night' political," said Norby

Williamson, an executive vice president of ESPN, which is in its

first presidential election cycle with "Monday Night."

Two members of ABC Sports' former "Monday Night" team said

that in their time it would have been the place of ABC News to do

presidential interviews.

"ABC News obviously would have had first dibs on presidential

politics," said Fred Gaudelli, the former producer, who now

produces NBC's "Sunday Night Football" games.

Al Michaels, who called ABC's games from 1986 to 2005 before

heading to NBC, said, "ABC News had election eve specials, and I'm

sure they would have wanted to ride herd on something like this."

Williamson said that ABC News was supportive of ESPN's

months-long pursuit of the Obama and McCain interviews and offered

to promote them on "World News Tonight."

McCain and Obama were not in the ESPN booth, unlike the

celebrities the network paraded in front of viewers in 2006 and

2007 before realizing that the game was more important than

Christian Slater.

Instead, Chris Berman, working from ESPN's studios in Bristol,

Conn., interviewed Obama first Monday afternoon, from Jacksonville,

Fla.

Berman spoke next with McCain, who was in Indianapolis.

The order that they ran, at about 10:10 p.m. Eastern, was

determined during a coin flip by Kordell Stewart, the former

Steeler who is an ESPN analyst.

"He said, 'Heads, Obama; tails, McCain,' " Williamson said. It

came up heads.

The interviews were cut into three-minute segments separated by

a 30-second commercial. Berman did not give either man a Bermanian

nickname, so there was no need to worry about its presidential

respectability.

ESPN, of course, promoted the interviews thusly: "Obama!

McCain! Boomer!" Imagine a 1960 equivalent, CBS-style: "Kennedy!

Nixon! Uncle Walter!"

McCain played ESPN's game, using a Berman phrase to answer the

question about what he wanted people to think about him as they

voted.

"He. Could. Go. All. The. Way to the White House," McCain

said, moving Berman to abandon the sober demeanor he had adopted.

Both candidates talked about high school coaches, one who taught

Obama that "this isn't about you, it's about the team," and one

who guided McCain to appreciate literature and to "do the

honorable thing even when nobody's looking."

Obama said he advocated a college football playoff (he told

Gray, jokingly, that it would be "one of my legislative

priorities"); McCain wants to take "significant action" against

performance-enhancing drugs.

This was not Obama's first appearance on "Monday Night." He

was the star of its opening segment two years ago before a Chicago

Bears-St. Louis Rams game, when he was still teasing the public

about a run for the White House. He spoke somberly to the camera

about critical questions facing America, as if ready to announce

his candidacy. "I am ready," he said, putting a Bears cap on his

head, "for the Bears to go all the way, baby." Then he loudly

hummed the first four notes of the "Monday Night" theme.

Only one man who has become president, Ronald Reagan, visited

the "Monday Night" booth. Reagan was the governor of California

in 1973 when he was spotted in the back of ABC's booth talking

football fundamentals to John Lennon, an incongruous sight to any

sensate human aware of the men's politics. Grasping the moment,

Howard Cosell told Frank Gifford to talk to Reagan, and, "I'll

take the Beatle."

An internal review by the American military has

found that a local Afghan police chief and another district leader

helped Taliban militants carry out an attack on July 13 in which

nine U.S. soldiers were killed and a remote American outpost in

eastern Afghanistan was nearly overrun.

Afghan and American forces had started building the makeshift

base just five days before the attack, and villagers repeatedly

warned the American troops in that time that militants were

plotting a strike, the report found. It said that the warnings did

not include details, and that troops never anticipated such a large

and well-coordinated attack.

The assault involved some 200 fighters, nearly three times the

number of the American and Afghan forces defending the site.

As evidence of collusion between the district police chief and

the Taliban, the report cited large stocks of weapons and

ammunition that were found in the police barracks in the adjacent

village of Wanat after the attackers were repelled. The stocks were

more than the local 20-officer force would be likely to need, and

many of the weapons were dirty and appeared to have been used

recently. The police officers were found dressed in "crisp, clean

new uniforms," the report said, and were acting "as if nothing

out of the ordinary had occurred."

The attackers were driven back after a pitched four-hour battle,

in which American artillery, warplanes and attack helicopters were

ultimately called in. Still, the militants fought in ways that

showed imaginative military training, if not sophisticated weapons.

In the midst of the battle, American soldiers were at times

flushed out into the open when they fled what they thought were

grenades, but were in fact rocks thrown by Taliban attackers, the

report said. The day before the attack, the militants began flowing

water through an irrigation ditch feeding an unused field, creating

background noise that masked the sounds of the advancing fighters.

The base and a nearby observation post were held by just 48

American troops and 24 Afghan soldiers. Nine Americans died and 27

were injured, most in the first 20 minutes of the fight. Four

Afghan soldiers were also wounded.

The intensity of the attack was so fierce, the report said, that

American soldiers shot at insurgents as close as about 15 yards

away, often until their weapons jammed, and at militants who

shimmied up trees overhanging their positions to shoot at the

Americans.

The attack on the outpost, near Wanat, caused the worst single

loss for the American military in Afghanistan since June 2005, and

one of the worst overall since the invasion in late 2001. It

underscored the vulnerability of American forces in Afghanistan, as

well as the continuing problem posed by uncertainties over the

loyalties of their Afghan allies, especially the Afghan police.

The military investigating officer, an Army colonel whose

identity was not disclosed in a redacted copy of the report

provided to The New York Times, recommended that the police chief

and the district governor be replaced, if not arrested.

But the senior American commander in eastern Afghanistan, Maj.

Gen. Jeffrey J. Schloesser, decided after conferring with American

forces that relieved the unit, that the district governor had

probably been acting under duress and had been cooperative with

American troops, according to the general's spokeswoman, Lt. Col.

Rumi Nielson-Green.

Nielson-Green said in a telephone interview on Monday that while

the governor had been absolved, it was unclear whether the police

chief in Wanat was complicit.

A spokesman for Afghan Defense Ministry officials said the

Americans had never discussed these complaints with them.

Hajji Abdul Halim, deputy governor at the time of the Wanat

attack, and now the acting governor of nearby Nuristan province,

said Monday that both officials had been detained briefly and then

released.

"We suspected them after the incident, but the American forces

released the district governor after two days of custody," he said

in a telephone interview.

The report, which was completed on Aug. 13 and declassified in

recent days to allow military officials to brief family members of

those who were killed, did not assign blame to any commanders of

the unit involved -- the 2nd Battalion, 503rd Infantry Regiment,

173rd Airborne Brigade Combat Team -- a unit that was in the final

days of a 15-month deployment when the attack took place.

"The actions by leaders at all levels were based upon sound

military analysis, proper risk mitigation and for the right

reasons," the report said.

It concluded that despite reports earlier in July that 200 to

300 militants had been massing to attack another remote outpost in

the same vicinity, the commanders at Wanat had no reason to expect

such a large frontal assault.

"The enemy normally conducts probing attacks prior to

conducting an all-out, large-scale attack," the report said,

quoting the investigating officer as concluding that it "was

logical" to think that an initial probing attack would involve

only about 20 militants seeking to gauge defenses and the reaction

of American and Afghan forces.

However, the report criticized the "incredible amount of time"

-- 10 months -- it took the NATO military authorities to negotiate

arrangements over the site of the outpost, giving adversaries

plenty of time "to plan coordinated and complex attacks."

Some details of the attack have been described in recent months

by publications including The New York Times, The Army Times and

Vanity Fair. But the 44-page report offers the most extensive

account so far. At the time of the attack, American and Afghan

forces were still building fortifications of sandbags and earthen

barriers around the main outpost and a small observation post about

100 yards away. In some places, those troops were protected only by

strands of concertina wire and a ring of gun-mounted, armored

Humvees, the report said.

The militants apparently detected the vulnerability and moved to

exploit it. On the evening of July 12, the militants slipped into

the village, undetected by the Americans, ordered the villagers to

leave and set up firing positions inside houses and a mosque.

At 4:20 a.m. on July 13, the militants struck with a fusillade

of heavy machine-gun fire and rocket-propelled grenades, destroying

the Americans' most potent weapons: 120-mm mortars and a TOW

missile launcher.

At the same time, the militants blasted the observation post

with rifle fire and more grenades. Within 20 minutes, all nine

Americans inside were dead or wounded.

Three times, teams of soldiers from the main base ran a gantlet

of hostile fire to resupply the observation post and carry back the

dead and wounded. Within 30 minutes, American fighter-bombers were

blasting the militant positions, followed by Apache helicopter

gunships.

Just days after the attack, American forces abandoned the

outpost at Wanat, but Nielson-Green said the military continued to

patrol in the region from a larger base four miles away.

"This was a complex attack carried out by militants who clearly

knew the terrain and maintained radio silence," he said.

Election Day will bring an end to the negative political

advertising that has inundated the country. But it will not mean an

end to negative advertising.

That is because marketers of consumer products, borrowing a page

from the electoral playbook, are becoming more willing to run

aggressive ads in which brands attack their competitors by name. A

major reason for the growing popularity of such ads is the

faltering economy, on the theory that when times are hard, you

should hit your opponent harder.

"It's very tactical, it's very short-term, but today marketers

are thinking short-term," said David Melancon, the chief executive

of the Ito Partnership, a brand identity consulting company in New

York.

The spin doctors on Madison Avenue describe the tactic as

"comparative advertising" rather than going negative. But the

intent is the same as in politics: build yourself up by tearing

your rival down.

"We wanted consumers to know our coffee is better-tasting than

the perceived coffee leader's," said Frances Allen, brand

marketing officer at the Dunkin' Donuts division of Dunkin' Brands

in Canton, Mass. Her reference was to a campaign that began on Oct.

20, centered on a taste test in which the respondents said they

preferred the coffee served at Dunkin' Donuts to the coffee sold by

Starbucks.

Even the name of the Web site created for the campaign is

combative: dunkinbeatstarbucks.com. Visitors to the site can send

friends e-cards bearing statements like "Friends don't let friends

drink Starbucks" and similarly puckish greetings.

"All we're trying to do is a little bit of disruptive

marketing," Allen said. The campaign promoting the taste test is

created by Hill, Holliday, Connors, Cosmopulos in Boston, part of

the Interpublic Group of Companies.

Other examples of negative product pitches include a

long-running campaign from Apple that mercilessly mocks the PC

operating systems sold by Microsoft; a campaign from the Fox

Business Channel cable network, which derides Jim Cramer of CNBC;

ads for Burger King that take on other fast-food chains like

McDonald's and Wendy's; and a campaign for a new variety of

Campbell's soup, Select Harvest, that berates Progresso for selling

soups with ingredients like monosodium glutamate.

"We're pleased with what we're seeing" since the Select

Harvest campaign began, said John Faulkner, a spokesman for

Campbell Soup Co. in Camden, N.J. "The early interest from

consumers has been terrific."

The campaign, created by BBDO Worldwide in New York, part of the

Omnicom Group, includes print ads that show a variety of Progresso

chicken noodle soup under the headline "Made with MSG" next to a

similar variety of Select Harvest under the headline "Made with

TLC."

Some negative ads, like the Select Harvest campaign, generate

response ads from the targets in which they defend themselves or

even counterattack. The point and counterpoint takes on a

tit-for-tat quality reminiscent of a presidential campaign -- or a

playground fight.

"We take our brand equity very seriously," said Mark Addicks,

senior vice president and chief marketing officer at General Mills

in Minneapolis, the parent of Progresso, which has replied to the

attack ads from Campbell with two sets of ads.

One set is focused on how Progresso plans to remove monosodium

glutamate from its recipes. The other set describes a taste test

between the varieties of Progresso and Select Harvest chicken

noodle soups that are featured in the Select Harvest campaign.

Progresso, needless to say, comes out ahead this time.

Both sets of Progresso ads are created by Saatchi &amp;amp; Saatchi in

New York, part of the Publicis Groupe.

After more than two years of pounding from Apple, with a

campaign that portrays the PC as geeky and the Macintosh as cool,

Microsoft Corp. responded in September with $300 million worth of

ads that embrace the Apple phrase "I'm a PC." The Microsoft

riposte, by Crispin Porter &amp;amp; Bogusky in Miami and Boulder, Colo.,

part of MDC Partners, seeks to turn the Apple negatives into

positives.

"They've made a caricature out of the PC," said David Webster,

general manager for brand marketing at Microsoft in Redmond, Wash.

"If they want to have a conversation about the fake PC, we want to

have a conversation about the real PC."

"When they start making claims about our products, that's

frustrating," he added. "But you don't start advertising

campaigns out of frustration."

Campaigns that take such a tack run the risk of being perceived

as overly negative, a judgment that can hurt a brand as much as it

can a political candidate.

A report called the Consumer Pulse Check, released last month by

Mullen in Wenham, Mass., another agency owned by Interpublic, found

that shoppers "are tired of feeling downbeat" and "want brands

that make them feel good."

In other words, brands that attack other brands run the risk of

tarnishing their images. "If I define my brand by my competitor's

brand, I had better get out some information about my brand at the

same time," Melancon at Ito Partnership said, or the campaign can

be deemed unfair or pejorative.

One way to avoid that is by leavening a negative ad with humor.

"It was very much a question of how do you do this without

turning people off," said Tim Cawley, a senior vice president and

group creative director at Hill, Holliday who worked on the Dunkin'

Donuts campaign.

The answer, he said, was to present a scientist who improbably

follows coffee drinkers to their work places to administer the

taste test so they "can cram it into their busy day."

Of course, to a marketer being attacked by name by a competitor,

ads softened with humor are still no laughing matter.

"At this time, given what the country is going through, people

are looking for great experiences and good value," said a

spokesman for Starbucks in Seattle, Vivek Varma.

"Lots of companies run comparative campaigns, but the effective

ones need to be credible and authentic," he added. "If the data

is wrong or your tone is off, or if you are pitching a message out

of touch with what consumers generally regard, you may be creating

opportunity for your intended competitor."

In other words, an ad from Dunkin' Donuts that challenges

Starbucks in a way consumers consider inappropriate could redound

to the benefit of Starbucks.

To followers of political advertising -- particularly

presidential ads in 2008 -- that may be a suggestion to wake up and

smell the coffee.

Mainland China's top negotiator on Taiwan matters

began negotiating in Taipei on Tuesday over transportation and

economic issues with his Taiwanese counterpart, signaling a further

warming of relations between the governments.

The Chinese official, Chen Yunlin, is the highest ranking

mainland official to visit the island since the end of the civil

war in 1949. His delegation and Taiwanese officials are engaging in

five days of talks intended to reach agreements on flights,

shipping and related matters.

Chen, the chief of the Association for Relations Across the

Taiwan Strait, landed at the Taipei airport on Monday and went to

the historic Grand Hotel, where he made a few remarks to a crowd of

reporters. "The step is not easy and is a crystallization of the

joint efforts of many compatriots across the strait," Chen said,

according to Xinhua, mainland China's state-run news agency.

He had dinner with Chiang Pin-kung, the chairman of the Straits

Exchange Foundation, the main negotiator for Taiwan, and on Tuesday

morning their formal talks began.

Negotiators for their governments met in June in Beijing after a

long hiatus and signed a deal to start regular weekend charter

flights between mainland and Taiwanese cities. The meeting took

place shortly after the inauguration of President Ma Ying-jeou of

Taiwan, who was elected in March after promising to improve the

economy and relations with the mainland.

But Ma's popularity has sagged in recent months. Taiwan's

economic performance has been lackluster, and many Taiwanese

citizens say Ma and his party, the Kuomintang, are moving Taiwan

into mainland China's orbit too quickly.

Protests against Ma's China policies by the Democratic

Progressive Party, the main opposition party, have been fierce. On

Oct. 21, protests took place when Zhang Mingqing, the vice chairman

of the mainland's negotiating body, toured Taiwan. Zhang was shoved

to the ground by a local politician while visiting the Confucius

Temple in the southern city of Tainan, an opposition party

stronghold.

During Chen's visit, the government is deploying 10,000 security

officers, according to the Kuomintang's news agency.

The Chinese Communist Party sees Taiwan as a rebel province that

must be brought back into the fold. Taiwan split from China in

1949, when the Kuomintang sought refuge on the island after losing

the Chinese civil war. Many Taiwanese prefer to maintain the

current status quo of de facto independence, and some, especially

members of the Democratic Progressive Party, advocate formal

independence.

Chen, the mainland negotiator, and Chiang are expected to sign

agreements that increase the charter flight schedule to every other

day and open maritime shipping lanes. They are also expected to

discuss economic cooperation as a way to fight the global financial

crisis.

"It is imperative that the two sides join to help each other to

cope," Chen said Monday, according to Xinhua.

Chen has also said the mainland is again offering to give two

pandas to Taiwan, a move that the Beijing government first made in

2005 that was rejected by Taiwan's last president. Ma has indicated

that he would accept the pandas.

There is rampant speculation in both China and Taiwan over

whether Chen and Ma will meet. If so, this is the big question:

Will Chen address Ma as zongtong, or president, thus acknowledging

that Ma holds a title that in international affairs is usually

accorded only to the head of a sovereign nation?

Some 90 years before Lincoln freed the slaves, Lord Dunmore, last

royal governor of Virginia, issued his own emancipation

proclamation--with a catch: Bear arms with us against the upstart

colonists, he pledged, and England will grant you freedom.

As a result, hundreds of slaves risked hardship and death to join

Lord Dunmore's Royal Ethiopian Regiment. Although some found

freedom, the "Liberty to Slaves" slogan emblazoned on their

uniforms lost its luster amid their miserable, pox-ridden existence

off the coast of Virginia.

From this obscure slice of revolutionary history, M.T. "Tobin"

Anderson has crafted a meaty and provocative conclusion to his

monumental two-part novel, "The Astonishing Life of Octavian

Nothing, Traitor to the Nation."

The first installment, "The Pox Party," won the 2006 National

Book Award. The second part, "Kingdom of the Waves" (Candlewick,

$22.99), continues a coming-of-age story that mines the paradoxes

of our national birth. Its exploration of racial identity and

destiny feels especially timely in this historic election season.

"It just seemed to me," said Anderson, who grew up steeped in

revolutionary mythology, "that this was the most astounding kind

of American story."

Totalling nearly 1,000 pages, the two-part novel is hugely

ambitious, and not just because of its scope.

Stylistically, it's a tribute to the ornate syntax and elevated

phrasing of 18th-century prose, replete with phrases such as

"reason enthroned in the pillowed seraglio of the brain."

Remarkably, it's written for teens--and it's a prime example of a

trend toward greater heft in Young Adult literature, once a

wasteland of frothy fare.

John Green, the only writer to have been recognized twice by the

American Library Association's Printz committee, professes awe for

Anderson.

"I think he is America's greatest young novelist--for any

audience," Green said. "There hasn't been anyone like Tobin,

ever."

For his part, Anderson said, "I just felt very committed to this

idea of being part of this movement for true literature for teens,

as opposed to simply books written for teens. I just felt it would

be very cool to do this thing that pulled no punches."

If "Octavian" poses a challenge for young readers, writing it was

a labor of Hercules for Anderson, whose earlier titles--including

"Burger Wuss," "Feed" and "Whales on Stilts!"--had more of a

pop-culture sensibility.

The research demands were so taxing, Anderson left his teaching job

at Vermont College to immerse himself in Octavian's universe.

"For the 5 1/2 years it took me to write the thing," he said, "I

tried to only read 18th-century texts, or books about the 18th

century or books they would have read in the 18th century. So that

means, like, Greek and Latin things, which, I should add"--he

laughed--"I read in translation."

Anderson said it was critical to wear Octavian's antiquarian

language like a second skin because "in order to get inside the

mindset of a period, I feel like you have to also enter into its

language.

Anderson, who turns 40 on Election Day, is the son of an Episcopal

priest (his mother) and a computer-company manager. His

breakthrough novel was shaped by his childhood in Stow, Mass., a

Boston-area town with a rich Revolutionary War legacy.

"The first battles of the Revolution were fought by men from the

town where I grew up," he said. "When I was a kid, my parents

would take me to all these re-enactments. It always seemed to me

that the history didn't feel distant to us there. Instead, it

seemed very intimate."

Anderson said he couldn't help but wonder which side he would have

joined--the Patriots or the Loyalists--had he lived during that

era, with no sense of the outcome.

"We can look at the Revolution in hindsight," he said, "and

everything seems very clearly laid out and very pure of motive.

"Instead, if you start to say, 'What was it like to be in the

midst of that massive, national uncertainty and all of those moral

questions swirling around,' then to me that becomes an interesting

story."

Anderson thickened the broth with elements of two intriguing

historic events. "Volume I: The Pox Party" explores Octavian's

privileged childhood at the Novanglian College of Lucidity near

Boston, where he receives a classical education and believes

himself a prince. Only in adolescence does Octavian realize the

gothic horror of his situation: He has been the subject of an

"insane Enlightenment experiment" to gauge the capabilities of

the African race.

Such an experiment did, in fact, take place at Anderson's alma

mater, Cambridge University, where the Duke of Montague oversaw the

education of a Jamaican youth named Francis Williams to test, as

one historian wrote, whether "a Negroe might not be found as

capable of literature as a white person." Williams ended up a

classical poet.

"It just seemed to me," Anderson said, "that this was a very

creepy, powerful image."

In "Volume II: Kingdom on the Waves," Anderson places Octavian

in Lord Dunmore's Royal Ethiopian Regiment--a perfect setup to

explore the paradox of white Patriots demanding liberty even as

they enslaved blacks. (We also learn that Lord Dunmore, moved by

expediency, was no hero.)

"The story of Lord Dunmore's Royal Ethiopian Regiment is one

that's almost never discussed, by anyone," Anderson said. "Here

you have these people struggling to define themselves and so

excited by the idea of liberty--because they, of course, had so

much more to lose in the cause of liberty than their white

counterparts. I thought, 'This is an amazing story, if I could only

tell it."'

With the U.S. possibly electing its first black president, it's

impossible to read "Octavian" without wondering what it says

about our progress as a nation.

Anderson said that, while a Barack Obama victory could change

unconscious perceptions about African-Americans--which would be

"tremendously wonderful"--nothing can undo the past.

It's more important, he said, to consider what we're doing today

that future generations will judge as "monstrous and

hypocritical." Our impact on the environment and the debt we're

leaving our children give him pause.

He predicts historians will say, "At this stage in history,

Americans had a huge investment in ignoring the effects of how they

lived their daily lives."

Depending on whom you speak with -- and believe -- the Knicks are

either turning the page or beginning a new chapter of absurdity.

My vote is for absurdity. It centers once again on Stephon

Marbury, the veteran point guard with whom the organization appears

to be locked in a fatal embrace. The new coach, Mike D'Antoni, has

sent a clear message that Marbury will not be part of the team's

present or future.

Donnie Walsh, the team's president of basketball operations,

hinted Monday that while the Knicks are pining to get rid of

Marbury, he -- if not his coach -- is entertaining the idea of

playing him.

Granted, in this drama of spy and counter spy, who knows the

truth? The Knicks want to get value for Marbury and know they can't

do it if he's sitting on the bench in street clothes. It's in the

Knicks' interest to tout Marbury's attributes -- how he came to camp

in the best shape of his life and even agreed to play off the

bench.

"I think he can play in this style," Walsh, referring to

D'Antoni's frenetic offense, said Monday after watching practice.

"I think that what Mike is trying to do is play younger guys, but

on the way to that I think Stephon can be helpful. That's what I've

got to find out."

The scene at practice was bizarre. As the Knicks scrimmaged and

D'Antoni coached, Marbury, in full practice attire, leaned against

the basket support, watching intently. Walsh sat on a folding chair

about 20 yards away. I wondered if this scene seemed as bizarre to

Walsh as it did to the rest of us?

"Let me put it this way," he said. "This is an unusual

situation. I have to talk to Steph. I don't want to see him just

sitting there. He's a player. I think we have to have some

direction as to how he's going to be played. That's how I feel."

In fact, Walsh suggested he was surprised by the current events

that have Marbury in limbo as a seemingly permanent fixture on the

team's inactive list.

"Steph was playing, coming off the bench," Walsh recalled.

"He said he was fine coming off the bench. And then all of a

sudden, the first game he didn't play, then that chant and

everything was in there."

He was referring to the "We Want Steph" chorus on opening

night at Madison Square Garden and again on Sunday.

"Then the next game I think it was a mutual agreement between

Steph and Mike that it was becoming a distraction with so much

attention, so he went on the inactive list," Walsh said. "Quite

honestly, I did not expect this. I'm not thinking it's going to

continue. Then all of a sudden here I am."

Is there still a grudge between D'Antoni and Marbury from their

time together in Phoenix?

"I don't get that feeling from Mike," Walsh said. "I don't

get the feeling that Mike doesn't think Stephon can't really play.

I think it's more or less, let's go with some young guys, see how

they can go and right now, I think he's trying to make up his mind

what's he's going to do."

Everyone -- including Marbury -- realizes that his Knicks career

is over. On the surface, the stalemate revolves around the $21.9

million that the Knicks owe on the final year of his contract.

Marbury, who operates without an agent, refuses to entertain a

buyout that would pay him a penny less.

Nothing crazy about that, especially for the Knicks, who eat bad

contracts like jelly beans.

Walsh said he did not consider making such an offer.

"I wouldn't go to him with that, because I wouldn't take it,"

Walsh said. "I never did go to him, ever. I wouldn't do that in

this situation."

The source of the conundrum is that while D'Antoni wants to get

rid of the vestiges of the previous management, Walsh wants value

for Marbury who, at 31, is still the team's most talented player.

Walsh doesn't simply want to waive Marbury without getting so much

as a jump shot out of the deal.

The stalemate is so bizarre that the NBA Players Association

offered Monday to intervene and possibly assist Marbury in any

negotiations.

"Quite honestly, I've never done that before," Walsh said.

"I've never just said -- particularly to a very talented player,

'Oh, OK -- goodbye."'

Marbury can still play; his talent has been the siren song for a

multitude of coaches at virtually every level. So if the Knicks

decided to put Marbury in uniform for a day or a week or a month,

what would Walsh have him do?

"Play," he said. "Just play. He knows how to play this style,

too, because he's played it. Honestly, since I've been here, he

seems to have been doing that. As far as what I've seen, he's

played hard, he came off the bench, said he'd be all right doing

that. I know what I'm seeing."

For good measure, Walsh said there was no rift between him and

D'Antoni. They're on the same page.

"I back my coach," Walsh said. "And I believe in my coach.

Right now, I'm just trying to see if we can make a workable

situation out of this, and I think we can. I'm going to continue to

try."

The Knicks are home for two of their next three games.

Please. Let's end this scene. In fact, let's end the entire

play.

A judge in Houston heard arguments Monday on the

legality of the defamation case brought by Roger Clemens against

his former trainer, Brian McNamee. At issue is whether McNamee was

immune from such actions, and, if he was not, whether the case

should be tried in Texas.

U.S. District Court Judge Keith Ellison, who has been

considering these points for several months, called the hearing to

discuss with the lawyers their motions for and against dismissing

the case. The judge said he was "agonizing over these claims" and

realized the repercussions of his decision would be felt beyond his

courtroom.

McNamee's lawyer, Richard Emery, argued that under terms of an

immunity agreement, his client was compelled by the Department of

Justice and the Federal Bureau of Investigation to disclose to

former Sen. George J. Mitchell that he had injected Clemens with

performance-enhancing drugs.

"FBI agents requested that he meet with Mitchell and tell him

the same things he had told them," Emery said. "He did that under

clear threat of further proceedings against him."

Mitchell was commissioned by Major League Baseball to

investigate the use of performance-enhancing substances in the

sport. He released a widely distributed report last December in

which Clemens was identified, along with numerous other current and

former players, as having used steroids and human growth hormone, a

charge Clemens denies.

Lara Hollingsworth of Houston, an associate of Clemens' lawyer,

Rusty Hardin, countered that the "mere presence of the FBI in the

room" when McNamee met with Mitchell was not enough to "confer

immunity."

Of Mitchell, she said, "We are talking about a private

individual doing a private investigation for a private client."

Moreover, she said there was no indication that McNamee's testimony

"furthered the government's cause" in prosecuting drug users,

which would be the basis for granting immunity.

During the proceedings, which neither McNamee nor Clemens

attended, both legal teams also quarreled over jurisdiction. Emery

said Texas was not the appropriate venue because McNamee "was not

conscious of Texas" when he made his claims but "was talking of

matters that took place in Toronto, Florida and New York."

Restating language in briefs already filed with the court,

Hollingsworth said Texas was "where Roger Clemens built his

reputation and where his continuing business interests are and

where he will feel the most harm."

Ellison did not indicate when he might rule on whether the case

can proceed to the discovery phase, during which Emery has promised

to subpoena women with whom Clemens has reportedly had affairs.

Outside the courtroom, Emery noted that he had paid his own way

to Houston and described McNamee as "broke and trying to eke out a

living in Queens to support his family."

Serena Williams found herself far from the United States and

Tuesday's presidential election, preparing for her opening match in

the WTA Tour's season-ending championships in Doha, Qatar, which

begin Tuesday.

Williams said that, as a Jehovah's Witness, she does not vote,

but that did not mean she had no stake in the outcome on Nov. 4. As

a prominent African-American, she said she was moved by the

possibility of an African-American like Barack Obama becoming

president.

"I don't really get involved in political affairs because of

the way I was brought up and being a Jehovah's Witness, but it's

exciting to see someone like Barack Obama have a chance to lead one

of the world's biggest nations," she said in an interview before

leaving the United States for Qatar. "And it's just interesting.

Think 40 years ago or 30 years ago, all the things that were going

on, the persecution we had to go through. And it's good. It makes

my heart smile."

Williams said she had not yet had the chance to meet Obama. "It

would have been nice," she said.

Briefly back at No. 1 in September after her U.S. Open victory,

Williams quickly surrendered that position to Jelena Jankovic. She

dropped to No. 3 after playing one singles match in the last eight

weeks.

"Well, obviously I do want to be the best, and I do want to be

No. 1," Williams said. "And quite frankly, everyone thinks I am

anyway. So you know I never correct them. I just let them believe

what really should be."

Williams is 2-1 this year against Jankovic, who has yet to win a

Grand Slam singles title. "She's been playing very consistently

all year, and she plays every week, so I guess in this tour if you

play every week you have a chance of being No. 1," Williams said.

"My goal is to win Slams. I'd much rather have a Grand Slam this

year than the No. 1 ranking."

No one will accuse Williams or her sister Venus of playing too

many tournaments. But at least Serena, 27, and Venus, 28, are still

playing, unlike retired rivals like Martina Hingis, Justine Henin

and Kim Clijsters.

And in this egalitarian season when, in the wake of Henin's

surprising retirement, four women played catch with the top

ranking, Williams had the best record in big events. She reached

the quarterfinals at the Australian Open, the final at Wimbledon

and won in New York after winning an Olympic gold medal in doubles

with Venus in Beijing.

It was not quite 2002, when she dominated the game. But this was

a reassuring, relatively consistent performance from Williams, who

was ranked outside the top 100 in 2006 and wondering if her fragile

left knee would let her rise again.

Williams' 43 victories this season are the second-highest total

of her career after 2002. And she still has the season-ending

championships, which bring together the world's top eight players

and are in Doha for the first time.

"That was my goal, to be more consistent, to play more

tournaments," she said. "I love playing tennis and love the

competition and love being out there. My goal at the beginning of

the year was just to be happy every time I go out there and just

play, and that was what I pretty much did this whole year."

The one exception was the French Open, in which she labored to

keep the ball in the court and was upset in the third round by

Katarina Srebotnik.

"Coming up to Paris, I think everyone expected me to win, as

well as myself, and I just crashed and burned," she said. "I was

so disappointed after. I don't even think I can describe in words

how disappointed I was."

Asked for the emotional highlight of her season, Williams did

not hesitate, and the answer was not winning the U.S. Open, where

she leaped and then staggered around the court in delight.

"Definitely the Olympics, definitely hands down," she said. "I

just was looking at my gold medal yesterday. It's so cool, and

nothing beats that. I can always win a Grand Slam. I guess not

everyone can say that."

BRANDON With three straight victories, and four in five games,

things are looking up for the Lightning. To find the power play,

though, you have to look down.

Tampa Bay entered Monday tied with Florida for last in the

league at 11.4 percent (5-for-44).

"We have to keep working on it and keep practicing it," coach

Barry Melrose said at the Ice Sports Forum. "The good news is

we're winning without it. If it ever starts cooking, it'll be good

news for us."

It is difficult to pinpoint the problem. Both power-play units

move the puck fairly well and generate opportunities to shoot,

though shots aren't always getting to the net.

Take Saturday's 1:46 five-on-three against the Senators in which

Melrose counted "five quality chances." Only one shot,

officially, was counted as on goal.

Installing RW Marty St. Louis as the quarterback has helped

boost puck movement and generate chances. Putting rookie C Steven

Stamkos on the first unit, part of a four-forward strategy, has

provided flair and a presence in front of the net.

But Melrose said he wants St. Louis to be "selfish" and use

his big shot more from the point. He also wants Vinny Lecavalier to

pass a bit more, perhaps down low to Vinny Prospal, or carry the

puck to the net instead of relying on the one-timer.

Not that the one-timer is a bad play, Melrose said, "But not

every time. It's not there every time. For every time I've seen it

work, it's been intercepted or blocked or missed the net. It's

definitely part of the weaponry, but we'd like to have other

things.

"If Vinny takes it to the net, the defensive guys will come

down and that will open up St. Louis or (Paul) Ranger on the back

door. We just have to have more variety on the power play."

IT'S NOT ENOUGH: That is what St. Louis said about his one goal

and 21 shots in 10 games.

"I'm a shooter," St. Louis said. "I'm trying to get myself

into position where I can shoot the puck more. Sometimes it's

hard."

It was hard against Ottawa, as he had no shots. More to his

liking was Thursday's four-shot, three-post effort against the

Sabres.

"I'd like to get that kind of game more often than one out of

every 10," he said. "I need to get those games every two or three

games."

Considering St. Louis averaged one shot through five games and

is now up to 2.1, he grudgingly conceded, "It's an improvement.

But I still need to improve. Two shots a game is not enough for me,

like one goal after 10 games is not enough."

QUICK DRAW: C Chris Gratton entered Monday third in the league

with a 63.6 winning percentage on faceoffs. He credits a stiffer

stick shaft that lets him lean harder on the blade and into an

opponent.

"A bigger guy, using a stiffer shaft, you can attack the

opponent with more power," he said.

MASK AUCTIONS: Bids can be made on G Mike Smith's Saw V mask

until 11:30 tonight, after which Olaf Kolzig's mask will be

available. See collectsaw.com, click on auctions and go to the

masks (bidding reached $3,150 by Monday night). Proceeds from

Smith's mask go to the Lightning Foundation, from Kolzig's to

Athletes Against Autism.

ODDS AND ENDS: Melrose said RW Radim Vrbata (groin) is about

"95 percent." F Ryan Craig on Saturday's game, his first,

because of injuries, since Nov. 10: "It's good to feel part of the

team. When you're injured, even if you're here, you don't feel part

of the team." Devils G Martin Brodeur (elbow) might not play

Wednesday against Tampa Bay.

Damian Cristodero can be reached at cristoderosptimes.com.

TAMPA This is how dire the Bucs' running back situation is

becoming: Jon Gruden hopes to get a lift from a player with a

reconstructed right knee who hasn't taken a hit on the field in

more than 13 months.

The return of Cadillac Williams, possible after the bye week,

was merely a feel-good story until the run of injuries at running

back.

Starting tailback Earnest Graham was forced to leave Sunday's

30-27 overtime win at Kansas City with a knee injury but finished

the game. Backup Warrick Dunn didn't even make the trip because of

a pinched nerve in his back. Fullback B.J. Askew has missed six

games with a hamstring strain.

No wonder Gruden took the unprecedented step of giving players

seven days off from practice.

"It's going to help us," Gruden said of the bye week.

"Obviously our running back situation in particular is very

concerning to us. Both fullbacks, both halfbacks. Carnell Williams

will get a chance to work in this week a little bit more, and we'll

determine his progress next week. But we've got a number of guys

that are nicked up and guys that we need back. Hopefully this week

will help us."

Graham, the Bucs' leading rusher with 560 yards and four

touchdowns, has taken hits as a ballcarrier and at fullback. He has

filled in for Askew and Byron Storer, who was placed on injured

reserve after tearing his right ACL against Carolina.

"I think he got hurt early in the game," Gruden said of

Graham. "He went to the locker room; trainers looked at him.

Courageously, he came out and played in the second half. It's a

tough time of year, midseason, for a running back in the NFL. These

guys are all sore and beat up.

"Have we asked a lot of Earnest? Maybe too much at times, yes,

yes we have, but that's what you do with your best players. We got

to lean on our guy and he's our only healthy, versatile back going

into the game, so that was our plan (Sunday). Unfortunately, we

fell behind and we obviously had to get into a little bit of a

throw-it mentality late in the game."

Graham rushed 19 times for 62 yards and threw his first NFL

touchdown against the Chiefs. And he lost two fumbles. With Dunn

inactive, the Bucs did not make much use of Michael Bennett, who

had two carries for 1 yard.

But the Bucs got some help from Clifton Smith, the undrafted

rookie free agent from Fresno State who had a 97-yard kickoff

return. While Graham was undergoing tests, Smith pitched in with

three carries for 17 yards and caught one pass (though he also lost

a fumble).

"He really helped us not only in the kicking game but from

scrimmage," Gruden said. "Earnest went out in the first half and

missed a few possessions, came back and gritted it out. But in

those final couple drives, you saw a lot of Clifton Smith, as a

runner and a receiver, picking up the blitz, knowing what to do.

"You look at him, he's not a tall guy, but he's a very thick,

quick, shifty, elusive back. And he's a natural he understands the

game and he shows great poise as a player. "

As for Williams, Gruden hopes to use practice squad players to

provide contact during individual workouts this week. The Bucs have

until next week to activate Williams or put him on injured reserve.

"(Williams) is not, I am sure, real thrilled about enjoying his

bye week like some of the other guys, but we will have him in pads

(today) and Wednesday," Gruden said. "He has a great look in his

eye. He is very confident, I think, in his knee and what he has put

into this.

"We will see what Earnest and Warrick's health status is and we

will make that decision next week, but there is a possibility that

(Williams) can help us, and that would be really exciting ."

Rick Stroud can be reached at stroudsptimes.com.

TAMPA Based on WR Antonio Bryant's play this season, it has

long been established that acquiring him in the offseason was among

the slickest moves the Bucs have made in some time.

But with each passing week, the decision looks even better.

Bryant had his third 100-yard game of the season (115 yards,

eight catches) Sunday and has positioned himself among the league

leaders at his position.

And to think, Bryant is still in his first season with the Bucs

and spent 2007 away from football. Could he be just warming up?

"I felt really comfortable," Bryant said. "Everything is

starting to be like second nature, like I've been here before."

The closest he has been to this a featured receiver making huge

plays was his 1,009-yard season for the Browns in 2005.

Going into Monday's Redskins-Steelers game, Bryant was tied for

ninth in the NFL in receptions (45) and 13th in yards (566). What's

more important are his big plays. Against the Bears on Sept. 21,

his 38-yard catch in overtime positioned the Bucs for the winning

field goal. And against the Chiefs on Sunday, his 24-yard TD

reception helped force overtime, where the Bucs eventually won.

"He was a superstar," coach Jon Gruden said. "Two-handed

catches, an unbelievable catch on the touchdown after the catch as

a blocker. He was a great receiver on the tape that I looked at."

Gruden's No. 1: Gruden became the franchise's coaching wins

leader Sunday with his 57th (postseason included), nudging ahead of

Tony Dungy.

"I am appreciative for the opportunity to be here as long as I

have," Gruden said. "I thank (owners) the Glazers for hanging in

there with me. There's been a couple of tough years. There's been

some exciting times, but I really respect and appreciate their

confidence."

Gruden is halfway through his seventh season in Tampa Bay, a bit

longer than Dungy, who spent six seasons with the team.

Numbers game: QB Jeff Garcia had one of his best statistical

days against the Chiefs. His 339 passing yards were his most since

a 344-yard performance Dec. 14, 2003. His yardage total Sunday was

his fifth highest.

Rumor mill: Rumblings surfaced about Gruden being a possible

successor to coach Phil Fulmer at the University of Tennessee,

which said Monday it will part ways with Fulmer after the season.

Gruden who with GM Bruce Allen signed a three-year contract

extension before the season is not thought to be a serious

candidate.

The plight of American small-business owners has become

a theme in the presidential election. But if small-business owners

in the United States think they have it bad, they should talk to

John Banwell.

Banwell owns a cleaning business in Weymouth, a seaside town in

southern England. He recently contacted his bank to renew his

20,000 pound overdraft -- a $31,800 short-term line of credit -- only

to learn the interest rate had almost doubled.

Banwell tried to tell the manager of his HSBC Bank branch that

he needed the money to pay his four employees and his bills while

he waited for customers to pay him. He received a written apology,

saying there was nothing the bank could do about his rate, which

had risen to 7 percent above prime.

Banwell was able to borrow the money from a friend instead, but

that did not solve his long-term problem: How to keep his business

alive as credit tightens in the middle of an economic downturn.

"Fuel and material costs have gone up and we'll have to increase

our prices, but I'm afraid it may erode sales," Banwell said.

"Money definitely should be made available where needed."

The economic downturn is making life tougher for businesses of

all sizes. But Britain, famously called "a nation of

shopkeepers," has a special place in its heart for small business.

And Banwell's experience is at the heart of a battle that has

erupted between representatives of small businesses and the

government over how much help small firms should receive as the

country enters its first recession in 17 years.

Backed by a strong business lobby, the opposition Conservative

Party and the nation's two biggest tabloid newspapers, small

businesses are demanding cheaper credit and tax breaks after a

multibillion-pound government bank bailout failed to immediately

free up credit.

Though small businesses account for more than half of Britain's

gross domestic product and employ more than 13 million, their plea

is controversial. They face, arguably, the same problems of higher

borrowing costs and declining consumer spending that afflict larger

rivals.

Some analysts said smaller businesses were more vulnerable to a

downturn because they depended more on financing. "A large company

has more options to raise money," said Philip Shaw, chief

economist at Investec Securities in London. But others said smaller

firms were actually at an advantage because they were more flexible

and could adapt better to slowing demand.

That may be true, but small businesses say they are feeling the

pinch as banks introduce charges for processing overdraft

applications, increase their fees for managing accounts or request

additional collateral for loans, according to the British Chambers

of Commerce.

The changes are a result of higher interbank lending rates, a

deteriorating economic outlook and the banks' more conservative

attitude toward risk.

The British government tried to free up credit by making its

bailout of Royal Bank of Scotland, Lloyds TSB and HBOS this month

dependent on the banks' returning to "2007 levels" of lending to

small businesses.

The chancellor of the Exchequer, Alistair Darling, met with

executives of other major British banks last week to persuade them

to reduce borrowing costs for smaller businesses. Instead of

freeing up lending, the entreaties led to criticism by some

investors that the government was repeating the mistake it made

during the boom: encouraging borrowing.

"Businesses are anticipating banks will be supportive,

reflecting the support they have received themselves," Neill

Thomas, head of debt advisory at KPMG in London, said. But "the

reality for companies is the tap remains blocked. We expect only a

trickle of liquidity to return to debt markets in the period

through to Christmas."

That would be bad news for many of Britain's 4.7 million small

businesses, and it would infuriate those that helped turn small

businesses from net borrowers to net depositors over the last 17

years. Smaller companies now keep 1.48 billion pounds with their

banks, making them one of the biggest group of depositors.

One of them is William N. Mullings, who runs a small jewelry

store in London founded by his family in 1798. He is upset that the

government bailed out the banks, which are now still reluctant to

lend. "If you are running a business, any business, you should be

able to do so without the help of the government," Mullings said.

Higher borrowing costs are not the only problem for smaller

businesses. They also struggle as customers increasingly fall

behind with payments, sometimes up to several months. Late payments

can be a matter of life and death for smaller businesses.

The issue has started to threaten the Labor Party's

traditionally cozy relationship with small business and has moved

small businesses into the center of a lively political debate about

economic competence between Britain's two major parties.

The government is keen to be seen as a supporter of small

businesses because they are perceived as "struggling, small and

hard-working," said Robert A. Blackburn, professor of

small-business studies at Kingston University in London. "There

are a lot of votes in small businesses and there is a realization

that this is quite a powerful group of people," said Blackburn.

It is also widely believed that it will be small businesses that

will lead Britain out of recession. "People running Britain's

small businesses are the lifeblood of our economy," the

government's secretary for business, Peter Mandelson, said.

The popularity of Prime Minister Gordon Brown has already taken

a hit because many voters blame him for creating the

borrowing-and-spending boom during his time as chancellor of the

Exchequer that is now pushing the economy into recession.

The government pledged to pay its own bills to smaller

businesses in no more than 10 days but David Cameron, the leader of

the opposition Conservative Party, called for more drastic steps.

In a letter to The Sun newspaper, Cameron suggested that small

businesses be allowed to delay their value-added tax payments to

the authorities, and be given a cut in some tax rates, to help them

cope with "the economic downturn made in Britain and designed by

Gordon Brown."

Demands by the Federation of Small Businesses went even further,

including a 1 billion pound rescue fund for small businesses backed

by the European Investment Bank, and a policy of publicly naming

customers who pay late.

At his cleaning shop in the south of England, Banwell seemed to

take a pragmatic approach: "I have no problem with having to

tighten the belt and don't think banks should be forced to lend

more -- they are businesses too -- but the belt-tightening needs to

be evenly spread."

The Mets are seeking bullpen help in every

shape and form possible. The third-place Yankees want starting

pitching, and probably a good deal of it. So it was of little

surprise that both of those needs helped create a little bit of

buzz as this week's gathering of general managers got under way in

the posh setting of the St. Regis Hotel, a place fancy enough to

let player agents fantasize about big free-agent contracts even if

the national economy is a mess.

First came the Mets. In a short interview with reporters in the

hotel lobby, the agent for the left-handed closer Brian Fuentes

said that the Mets were indeed one of the teams interested in

signing the 33-year-old Fuentes. The agent, Rick Thurman, said that

one of his partners at the Beverly Hills Sports Council had already

been in contact with Mets General Manager Omar Minaya and that both

sides were expected to meet in person later on Monday.

"I think he would be great in New York, he really thrives under

the pressure," Thurman said of Fuentes, who had a 2.73 earned run

average for Colorado this past season, with 30 saves in 34 chances.

Minaya left little doubt about what he would look to do this

off-season. "Our problem at the end of the year when we lost Billy

was that we weren't able to hold the games," he said, referring to

the injury to closer Billy Wagner. "Our offense certainly wasn't

the problem."

As is usually the case, just about every team in baseball is in

need of bullpen help. Thurman said he planned on speaking with

representatives of the Los Angeles Angels, the Cleveland Indians

and the Detroit Tigers, among others, about signing Fuentes.

Still, Fuentes is likely to be considerably less expensive than

the top closer on the market, Francisco Rodriguez, who may be

looking for a contract that will pay him as much as $75 million

over five years. In 2008, Rodriguez, 26, had a major league-record

62 saves, and a 2.24 ERA.

"If you look at his numbers this year, compared to K-Rod's

numbers, they are very similar in some areas and better in

others," Thurman said of Fuentes while using Rodriguez's nickname.

"He's definitely a better value."

So the spinning had begun, with a full winter still ahead.

Meanwhile, Yankees General Manager Brian Cashman met with a

small group of reporters in his hotel suite. In a scene unlikely to

be duplicated in the new Yankee Stadium, Cashman took off his

sandals, sat on the floor with his legs crossed and discussed what

he believed was the team's most pressing need: starting pitchers.

"I just know we need starting pitching and it's not going to just

be one," Cashman said. "We won't be one and done; it will be

multiple."

Cashman said that right now he was counting on only Chien-Ming

Wang and Joba Chamberlain to be in the team's rotation next season.

Wang and Chamberlain are coming off injuries, and Chamberlain will

probably have his innings limited next season because he did not

pitch all that many in 2008. There is still a chance that Mike

Mussina, coming off his first 20-victory season at age 39, will

decide to put off retirement and pitch at least one more year in

the Bronx. Andy Pettitte, a free agent like Mussina, appears

interested in returning.

But even if Pettitte and Mussina come back, the Yankees will

need at least one more pitcher. At the top of their list is C.C.

Sabathia, the left-hander who pitched the Milwaukee Brewers into

the postseason but is now likely to head elsewhere, possibly for a

contract in the $150 million range. The Brewers made a formal offer

to Sabathia on Saturday but are considered a long shot to sign him

because they are a small-market and the Yankees and perhaps others

are certain to outbid them.

Cashman also said that Johnny Damon would probably be the team's

starting left fielder and leadoff hitter next season. Who will play

center is still a question.

"But the priority is starting pitching," Cashman said.

On the day after the New York City Marathon, the

roadway in Central Park was still a special place, almost a shrine,

to the millions of feet that have padded through.

Moving gingerly but proudly, runners dressed in comfortable

clothing returned to the park Monday to have their pictures taken

in front of the finish line they had crossed a day earlier. I heard

Japanese, Italian, Spanish, French, the international sound of the

marathon. Noisy drills were being used to take apart the temporary

steel bleachers that are erected for that one afternoon a year.

The runners holding up their medals had no reason to know that

two of the 37,899 runners who passed this way sometime Sunday

afternoon had died shortly afterward.

"Two of our athletes did not return home," Mary Wittenberg,

the race director and president of the New York Road Runners,

announced, visibly moved, at the day-after news conference. The

Road Runners, the race organizer, would not disclose the names of

the runners, out of deference to their families, but Wittenberg's

shaken presence told everybody that there had been a death in the

Road Runners' family, too.

"I was talking to a doctor last night," Wittenberg said later

in a private interview. "She said that every person is given a

card," suggesting a gift card with an unknown quantity in it.

Wittenberg, who won the Marine Corps Marathon in 1987 and a year

later ran in the U.S. Olympic marathon trials, said that runners

could work up to marathon length or just run shorter distances, and

that running was good for the health of almost everybody who runs.

"But everyone's life is a significant loss," she added.

Many, many others will apply to run next year, as the marathon

continues to test just how far it can grow. When it began in 1970,

it was a quaint little race around Central Park, turning the 127

runners into virtual hamsters on a wheel, but since 1976 it has

taken in the five boroughs.

To a nonrunner, the marathon does not seem appreciably different

over the past quarter-century -- out to Staten Island in the

darkness, a tour of the boroughs, a finish in Central Park.

The biggest difference, Wittenberg said, is the $18.2 million

raised for charity this year, with more expected in the next few

weeks. In the old days, the marathon had not evolved to charitable

causes.

The current size of the race is already putting stress on the

crowded streets of the old city. The mass of runners went off in

three waves this year for the first time. Wittenberg said the Road

Runners would study the results, but she admitted that the club did

not think it had stopped expanding.

Wittenberg added that parts of the course could not stand a

greater bulge of runners: for example, the right turn by the

Brooklyn Academy of Music, around the eighth mile. The organizers

do not want their runners picked off, like basketball players

running into a tile pillar in some old church basement gym. In a

time of abrupt change, the marathon needs its landmarks.

Next year there will be new baseball stadiums in the Bronx and

Queens -- maybe good business, maybe not, depending on whose taxes

are being used, and whose parkland is being gobbled up, and what

happens to the wonderful corporations now being subsidized by you

and me. But changing the route of a race is trickier.

The Tour de France changes its course every year, putting stages

in municipalities willing to pay for the traveling circus. Next

year, for the very first time, the Tour will send cyclists up a

formidable mountain on the final Saturday, the last day of real

competition. Could the marathon do the same thing by arranging a

run out to Coney Island one year, a detour to Van Cortlandt Park

the next? It's hard to imagine the city rejiggering its logistics

and informing spectators, who now head for the barricades out of

habit.

What about separate days for men and women? The city could never

shut down twice or produce the same enthusiasm twice in a year, and

the weather could shift from brilliant to miserable. The marathon

needs to be an equal-opportunity spectacle.

Wittenberg knows that. Asked how big the marathon could become,

she tossed out the number 45,000, depending on staggered waves, as

long as the runners did not step on one another's toes in the

chutes.

The race should always end in the park, near the statue of its

founding father, Fred Lebow, which is moved every year from its

regular spot on the East Side. On Monday, Lebow's statue was still

over on the West Side, with bouquets of flowers resting on its

pedestal. Fred would smirk at the flowers. He never said he was a

saint, not the way he was doling out appearance money to attract

top runners, but he was a visionary.

The marathon seems to have passed into other capable hands. It

won't be long before they put the bleachers back in the park.

John W. Ripley, a highly decorated former colonel who entered

Marine Corps lore when he single-handedly blunted a major North

Vietnamese offensive during the Vietnam War by blowing up a

strategically placed bridge, died Oct. 28 at his home in Annapolis,

Md. He was 69.

The cause has not been determined, his son Stephen said.

Ripley, who at the time was a captain and a military adviser to

a South Vietnamese Marine unit, blew up the southern end of the

Dong Ha Bridge over the Cua Viet River on Easter Sunday, April 2,

1972. On the north side of the bridge, which was several miles

south of the demilitarized zone, some 20,000 North Vietnamese

troops and 200 tanks were poised to sweep into Quang Tri province,

which was sparsely defended.

Going back and forth for three hours while under fire, Ripley

swung hand over hand along the steel I-beams beneath the bridge,

securing himself between girders and placing crates holding a total

of 500 pounds of TNT in a diagonal line from one side of the

structure to the other. The I-beam wings were just wide enough to

form pathways along which he could slide the boxes.

When the boxes were in place on the bridge, Ripley attached

blasting caps to detonate the TNT, then connected them with a

timed-fuse cord that eventually extended hundreds of feet.

"He had to bite down on the blasting caps to attach them to the

fuses," John Grider Miller, author of "The Bridge at Dong Ha,"

said on Monday. "If he bit too low on the blasting cap, it could

come loose; if he bit too high, it could blow his head apart."

Ripley bit safely, and the timed-fuse cord gave him about half

an hour to clamber off the bridge. Moments later, his work paid off

with a shock wave that tossed him into the air but otherwise left

him unharmed.

By placing the crates diagonally along the bridge, Miller said,

Ripley had created "a twisting motion that ripped the bridge apart

from its moorings so it couldn't fall back in place, but collapsed

into the river."

There were about 600 South Vietnamese marines near the south end

of the bridge. "South Vietnam would have been in big trouble,"

said Fred Schultz, senior editor of Naval History Magazine, a

publication of the United States Naval Institute. "The force

numbers defending on that side could not have held against that

North Vietnamese force."

The destruction of the bridge created a bottleneck for the North

Vietnamese, allowing U.S. bombers to blunt what became known as the

Easter offensive.

Ripley was awarded the Navy Cross for his actions at the bridge.

He served two tours in Vietnam and remained on active duty until

1992, eventually rising to colonel. Among other decorations, he

received the Silver Star, two Bronze Stars and a Purple Heart.

John Walter Ripley was born on June 29, 1939, and grew up in

Radford, Va., the son of Bud and Verna Holt Ripley. He enlisted in

the Marines out of high school in 1956, and a year later received

approval from the secretary of the Navy to attend a preparatory

school leading to his appointment to the Naval Academy, from which

he graduated in 1962.

Besides his son Stephen, Ripley is survived by his wife of 44

years, the former Moline Blaylock; a sister, Susan Goodykoontz; two

other sons, Thomas and John; a daughter, Mary Ripley; and eight

grandchildren.

"Colonel Ripley is well known in Marine circles," Schultz

said, "but he's the most revered war hero no one's ever heard

of."

"This was 1972," he added, "and people didn't pay too much

attention to war heroes at that time."

Welcome back, Rex Grossman. All of Chicago shivers at the

thought, but the Bears will probably be without quarterback Kyle

Orton for at least a month with a high ankle sprain.

It is hard to think of Orton in the same desperate way that

Dallas fans think of Tony Romo, but Orton has evolved, for lack of

a better alternative, into the Bears' franchise quarterback. And he

had been especially hot in recent weeks.

Grossman rallied the Bears from a 10-point deficit to beat the

Lions on Sunday. His weakness, however, is legendary: Bad

interceptions.

In the 2006 season, when he started every game and the Bears

went to the Super Bowl on the back of their defense, Grossman threw

20 interceptions against 23 touchdown passes. For old-time's sake,

he threw one Sunday, too. Enter this weekend's opponent, the

Tennessee Titans, who are 8-0 thanks to a spectacular defense that

has 22 sacks and is tied for the league lead with 13 interceptions.

Good luck with that, Rex.

After the Titans, it's a three-week journey that includes stops

in Green Bay and Minnesota. The Bears are in first place in the

mediocre NFC North. Grossman will have to be much better than the

Cowboys' backups -- and better than earlier versions of himself -- to

keep the Bears from slipping fast.

It helps that he now has the rookie running back Matt Forte

behind him. Forte is the league's seventh-leading rusher, with 641

yards. He had 101 yards in the second half Sunday, when the Bears

needed him most.

Maybe the Bears can copy the formula the Titans have used with

Kerry Collins, who has demonstrated the value of a competent backup

(pay attention, Cowboys): Pound opponents with defense and a

running game, and make the quarterback win games only when

necessary.

CLEVELAND QUARTERBACK QUANDARY

We may soon get a look at the ultimate backup quarterback

quandary -- or is it a starting quarterback quandary? The Browns

were 37-27 losers on Sunday to the Ravens and their rookie

quarterback Joe Flacco. Cleveland coach Romeo Crennel said Monday

that a change was coming.

"We didn't do enough in the passing game," Crennel said.

That has been a theme this year for quarterback Derek Anderson,

whose completion rate is below 50 percent and who was foiled by a

confounding Braylon Edwards drop -- confounding because Edwards

didn't talk to the news media to explain what happened -- and a

Terrell Suggs interception that was returned for a touchdown. Last

year, Anderson was the NFL's Cinderella story at quarterback as the

Browns made a playoff push. But he faded late in the season.

Cleveland's defense is largely to blame for Sunday's collapse --

37 points to the Ravens?

On Monday, Crennel said Anderson was his quarterback "as of

right now." By Monday night, Anderson wasn't his quarterback,

after all. The former first-round pick Brady Quinn will start

Thursday against the Broncos.

But it's clear this is not the Browns' year. The Steelers and

the Ravens are ahead of them and figure to battle for the AFC North

the rest of the way, and it will soon be time to see if they have

the right quarterback in waiting.

DYSFUNCTION JUNCTION

A scene in the Cowboys' locker room just about summed up one of

their biggest problems. After Dallas' 35-14 loss to the Giants on

Sunday, reporters approached receiver Terrell Owens, who had

fumbled.

"There's no question I'm a capable receiver," he said,

according to The Fort Worth Star-Telegram. What he did not have to

say was that he did not think the current Cowboys quarterbacks were

quite as capable, and certainly not capable enough to get the wide

receivers the ball. Brad Johnson and Brooks Bollinger have been

dreadful; the Cowboys have had only three passes of more than 20

yards in the past two games.

The team's owner, Jerry Jones, spent most of his postgame

session with reporters trying to explain why the Cowboys, who spent

more than $80 million in bonuses this year, thought they could

exist with no safety net behind Romo. But it was not Romo or

Johnson or Bollinger who was stripped of the ball. And it certainly

was not one of them waving Giants running back Brandon Jacobs

through the defense.

But really, while Owens thought he was talking about his talent,

he was actually revealing something about the Cowboys' foundation.

Isn't one of the syrupy cliches of sports that teams win together

and lose together? Nobody should have expected that from a Cowboys

team that was assembled, appropriately considering they are new

business partners, from the outdated playbook of the early 1990s

Yankees: overpay for big names and watch the team descend into a

quagmire of personal interest.

Earlier this season, Owens complained about not being thrown to

enough, and that was after the Cowboys' first loss. Romo, by the

way, was the quarterback.

Coach Wade Phillips seems likely to survive the bye week, a

traditionally dangerous time for coaches of troubled teams, because

the Cowboys have few options. What would they do, turn the team

over to Jason Garrett, who was the offense's boy wonder back in the

good old days of September? Instead, Phillips will probably be gone

after this season if the Cowboys do not reach the playoffs and make

a run.

Dallas is a spectacularly talented team with possibly the best

roster in the game. But no team has ever needed its bye week more.

They will probably get Romo, running back Felix Jones and maybe

cornerback Terence Newman back in two weeks. That will certainly

help, but the Cowboys lost two games with Romo. The Cowboys need to

win five of their last seven just to get to 10 victories, and even

Jerry Jones, an eternal optimist who assembled this dysfunctional

group, admitted he would gladly take a playoff spot right now. He

knows how fragile his team is.

But maybe team chemistry is finally taking hold. After all, the

latest big name to join the roster, receiver Roy Williams, told

reporters he was "fine" after the game, the same word Owens used.

"It's frustrating for me, because I'm on the sidelines," Williams

said. "You can't do nothing on the sidelines." He added: "I'm on

the sideline waiting. I feel like I'm in high school."

Sounds as if he's fitting right in.

Maybe it is best for Debby Ledford to get this out of her twin

sons' way so early in their careers, so early in the season.

There will be tugging emotions for Ledford -- and a conflicting

wardrobe -- when the New Jersey Nets host the Phoenix Suns on

Tuesday night. In the first meeting of what could biannually cycle

itself for the next decade or so, Ledford's sons, the 7-foot

centers Brook and Robin Lopez, will be on opposing NBA teams.

Does she clap her hands if one scores over the other? Or does

she simply sit on them, waiting for a less biased time to cheer?

Even she is not quite sure.

"I don't know," said Ledford, who will be wearing a Nets shirt

and a Suns hat to the Izod Center. "I haven't had to deal with

that yet. This is going to be a first for me, too. I'll just enjoy

it and cheer for everybody."

A genetic rivalry now makes its professional debut. Brook and

Robin first teamed together as first graders playing on a

second-grade team, then at San Joaquin Memorial High School in

Fresno, Calif., and later at Stanford University.

When an opponent beat one to the basket, the other loomed at his

side. Together, Brook and Robin learned both their strengths and

weakness from each other.

"They started that rivalry in the driveway," Ledford said.

"But a driveway rivalry is one thing. Opposite teams in the NBA is

another."

They prepared for the separation the way they had for everything

in their lives: scrimmaging against each other, before the draft in

their native Fresno.

Early one-on-one duels produced a sibling rivalry, which in turn

produced sibling bickering from the 20-year-olds.

"Whoever lost ended up breaking a broom or something like

that," Brook said. "A lot of stuff got kicked, thrown around,

depending on who would win."

Ledford said: "The beautiful thing is they've gotten along

probably 98 percent of the time. The other 2 percent is when

they're in the driveway and one blocks the other's shot."

Brook and Robin declared early for the draft, forgoing two

seasons of collegiate eligibility. They were each taken in the

first round, and their straight-lined paths finally diverged.

"We really only text each other when we actually need

something; it's never to see how things are going," Brook said

with a chuckle.

It is a little bit more than that. The twins' affinity for the

fine arts and Disney has been well documented, and when they do

catch up, it is rarely about basketball.

They plan to collaborate on books, with Brook writing and Robin

illustrating. So, whenever one spots inspiration, he either texts

or posts a Facebook message to his brother, like a quote from "The

Simpsons" Robin recently typed onto Brook's Facebook page.

They will become the fifth set of twins to play in the NBA, a

rare occurrence throughout the league, but not necessarily in East

Rutherford, N.J. Jason Collins, who spent parts of seven seasons

with the Nets before his trade to the Memphis Grizzlies last

season, regularly dueled his twin brother, Jarron, of the Utah

Jazz. They also attended Stanford.

Brook said he was caught up in a whirlwind of adjustment and had

not given much thought to Tuesday's matchup. But as the season

progresses, he will probably pine for his brother more and more,

his teammate Jarvis Hayes said.

Hayes played alongside his brother, Jonas, at Western Carolina

University and the University of Georgia before Jarvis headed to

the NBA and Jonas to coaching. He is an assistant at Belmont Abbey

College in North Carolina.

"Twenty-one or 22 years to that point, we had been inseparable,

so my rookie year was probably the toughest to cope with because I

was away from him for the first time," Jarvis said. "I ask Brook

every now and then if he's talked to Robin, but it's kind of the

beginning now. Right now, it's the fast course, trying to learn

everything. As the season goes along, it'll get to a point where

they'll want to talk to each other more."

Ledford dispatched an older brother with each twin to help them

adjust to the professional life. Alexander, who played at Santa

Clara University and the University of Washington, is with Robin in

Phoenix. Christopher accompanied Brook to New Jersey.

There is little time to enjoy anything but basketball. A city

dripping in culture and arts is only a river away for Brook,

tantamount to holding candy to the face of a child. But he has yet

to explore New York City in depth. A planned trip to see "The

Little Mermaid" on Broadway was postponed after Vince Carter

called for a team bowling outing.

Brook was a mildly disappointed, but he is on a youthful Nets

team, garnering meaningful minutes in the first few games. Robin

starts his career as Shaquille O'Neal's backup, the heir apparent

to the man known as the Big Aristotle as he slowly makes his exit.

That can mean erratic or no court time, but a lot of lessons

provided by O'Neal.

"That's only going to make you better," Robin said of the

daily bumps and bruises provided by O'Neal. "It's an invaluable

experience."

Even if Robin does not get off the bench Tuesday night, it will

be a little surreal. For so long, through so many games, the

tight-knit brothers stood side by side. In many ways, they still

do.

"It's going to be weird," Brook said. "I hope one of us

doesn't embarrass the other too bad. We'll see what happens."

Terence D. Tolbert, the state director in Nevada for Sen. Barack

Obama's presidential campaign and an aide to New York City schools

chancellor Joel I. Klein, died on Sunday in North Las Vegas. He was

44.

The cause was a heart attack, Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg said in

a statement. A friend, Basil A. Smikle Jr., said Tolbert was

stricken while driving alone on Sunday night near the Obama

campaign offices in North Las Vegas.

Since 2006, Tolbert had been the New York City Education

Department's chief lobbyist in Albany and Washington. He had been

poised to take a leading role in Bloomberg's coming fight to

persuade New York lawmakers to reauthorize the law giving the mayor

control of the city's public schools. The law expires at the end of

June.

Tolbert had been on leave since August working for the Obama

campaign. In 2003-4, he was the New York state director for John

Edwards' presidential campaign, and in 2004, he was the Nevada

state director of America Coming Together, a Democratic advocacy

group.

Tolbert also worked on Bloomberg's re-election effort in 2005,

serving as a liaison to the city's patchwork of ethnic, religious

and cultural groups, and for eight years was chief of staff to

Assemblyman Keith L.T. Wright, a Harlem Democrat.

Tolbert, a graduate of Hunter College, was born and raised in

Harlem, where he lived with his wife, Freida Foster-Tolbert. In

addition to his wife, he is survived by his mother, Carolyn.

The hugs came first, then the humility.

Tayshaun Prince leaned down with one arm and pulled Larry Brown

close. Rasheed Wallace followed, with a joyous shriek -- "L-Beezie!

What's up, man?" -- and a full, two-arm embrace. Richard Hamilton

was next. Smile, squeeze, repeat.

Brown looked like a bride in a receiving line Monday morning

when the Detroit Pistons (his former team) walked onto the

basketball court, moments after the Charlotte Bobcats (his current

team) had exited. Brown soaked up the affection, then added a dash

of wry perspective: "It's probably that they're happy to have me

leave."

He was smiling, but not necessarily joking. With Brown, the

feelings are always a mixed bag, sprinkled with neuroses and

conflicting impulses. He is personally loyal and professionally

peripatetic, a brilliant teacher who exhausts his charges, a highly

respected coach who almost appeared unemployable.

Now Brown is back where his dizzying odyssey began, nearly four

decades and 11 jobs ago. He seems content, energized and happy to,

in Brown parlance, "smell the gym" again, after two years in the

NBA wilderness. But the turbulent past is never far from his gaze.

Brown crossed paths with the Pistons on Monday, a team he split

with acrimoniously in 2005, just 13 months after taking them to the

championship. He returns to Madison Square Garden on Wednesday for

a much more fraught reunion with the Knicks. The boos and taunts

will surely outnumber the hugs.

It has been two and a half years since Brown feuded with Stephon

Marbury, lost a power struggle with Isiah Thomas and was fired, for

cause, by James L. Dolan, the Garden chairman, after a 23-59

season.

The ending was farcical and sad, with Brown attending dozens of

draft workouts even after his imminent firing had been widely

reported. He spent a month in awkward limbo. Prohibited from

speaking to the news media at the Knicks' training center, Brown

held impromptu roadside interviews with reporters and morosely

declared himself a "dead man walking."

The scars have not entirely healed, for Brown or the franchise.

Thomas was fired as coach and president last spring. Marbury, who

clashed with Brown and Thomas, has been demoted to the inactive

list by the new coach, Mike D'Antoni. The optimism of a new era has

been doused by reminders of the past -- by Thomas' reported overdose

on sleeping pills and Marbury's exile.

Now Brown is walking back into the breach, although with no

sense of vindication.

"I don't get any satisfaction out of seeing anybody

struggling," Brown said softly after the Bobcats' morning

shootaround.

"Look, I mean, I'm gone. And when Mr. Dolan made that decision,

I'm moving on with my life. I don't blame anybody, and I hope that

never came out that I blamed anybody about what happened. I was the

coach. But my challenge is to do better with Charlotte."

The Knicks did more than fire Brown in June 2006. Dolan publicly

lashed Brown for every perceived misstep and every violation of

company policy. Dolan said that Brown pushed to acquire Jalen Rose

and Steve Francis, then turned on them. He accused Brown of trying

to orchestrate trades behind Thomas' back. The list of offenses was

so long that Dolan had to read from prepared notes.

The Knicks withheld the $41 million left on Brown's contract,

but eventually paid him $18.5 million in a settlement brokered by

Commissioner David Stern.

In interviews over the last two years, Brown has repeatedly said

that he "did a bad job" with the Knicks. But he has never

answered Dolan's charges publicly, and he said he did not intend

to.

"It doesn't do any good," he said. "Again, I was given an

unbelievable opportunity; it didn't work out. I know why it didn't

work out. But it's going to always be a personal thing."

He added, "Any time anybody tells you you're a failure, it

hurts."

Any animus toward the Garden is offset by Brown's deep affection

for Donnie Walsh, the new Knicks president. Walsh began his NBA

career on Brown's coaching staff in Denver, and he later hired

Brown to coach the Indiana Pacers. Oddly enough, Brown encouraged

Walsh, a fellow New Yorker, to take the Knicks job.

"I said if you only have to answer to Mr. Dolan and you have a

relationship with him, I can't think of a job better in the

league," Brown said. "The guy will do anything he can to give you

the resources to win."

Brown offered his earnest hope that Walsh and D'Antoni can

succeed where he failed.

"You remember when I said at my press conference how important

it was for the league to have a good team in New York? I wanted to

help that," Brown said. "If you ever do a good job as a coach in

New York, you help our sport."

Failing in New York brings its own unique consequences. Brown

spent two years without a whistle, the longest such break in a

36-year Hall of Fame career. He was thrown a lifeline by his

friends with the 76ers, who gave him a consulting job and time to

ponder his options.

"I'd have gone crazy if I didn't have any involvement," said

Brown, a notorious gym rat.

He spent a lot of time at Villanova games and toured the country

meeting with coaches he likes and admires -- Ben Howland at UCLA,

Bill Self at Kansas, Roy Williams at North Carolina, his alma

mater.

"I spent two years learning," Brown said. "I never got to

watch other people coach. It was wonderful."

Brown said he was a better man and a better coach for having

survived the Knicks experience. He will have to be to have any

chance of winning in Charlotte.

The Bobcats have never won more than 33 games in their four-year

existence. They are among the youngest teams in the league. Two of

their most recent lottery picks, Adam Morrison and Sean May, have

been derailed by injuries. Their bench is thin, but the Bobcats

have high hopes for point guard D.J. Augustin, whom they drafted

with the ninth pick in June.

"Oh, it's a huge challenge," Brown said. "I don't think it

will happen overnight."

As homecomings go, this one seems to hold more promise, or at

least less drama. In New York, Brown was promoted as a franchise

savior, although the odds were always against him succeeding. In

Charlotte, the expectations and pressure are lower, the environment

friendlier and less frantic.

Brown's mother, who will turn 104 soon, lives nearby. So do his

two daughters and five grandchildren. His brother Herb is back on

his staff, along with Dave Hanners and Phil Ford, who were also on

the bench in New York. He is working for a fellow Tar Heel, Michael

Jordan. His mentor Dean Smith lives two hours away and attended

Bobcats training camp.

If this is the last stop on Brown's magical mystery tour, and at

age 68 he insists it is, the gratification will come from simple

achievements, and mostly just from being back on the bench.

"I've always appreciated having a job like this," he said,

"but you appreciate it much more when you're not actually doing

it."

The battle for control of New York's state Senate entered its

final hours on Monday with no clear outlook and both major parties

dispatching high-profile names to the campaign trail in a

last-minute rally for votes.

Roughly half a dozen seats remained closely contested, leaving

the final makeup of the Senate -- where Republicans hold 31 seats

and Democrats hold 29 (there are two vacancies) -- extremely

difficult to predict.

Democrats have enlisted former President Bill Clinton, Sens.

Hillary Rodham Clinton and Charles E. Schumer, and Attorney General

Andrew M. Cuomo to make appearances and to record automated phone

calls in a slew of races in western New York and Queens, and on

Long Island.

Gov. David A. Paterson has defied earlier speculation that he

would play a fairly limited role in the Senate elections, moving

aggressively to help his Democratic colleagues toward victories

that would give the party unified control of state government for

the first time since 1935.

After weeks of intense fund-raising, Paterson has garnered more

than $3 million for Democratic campaigns, after setting a target of

$2 million in September. He has made a last-minute rush of

appearances, too, angering Senate Republicans, who had expected him

to be less visible on the campaign trail.

Paterson appeared in Buffalo on Saturday with Sen. William T.

Stachowski and Joe Mesi, a former boxer who is campaigning for an

open seat in the city's suburbs. On Sunday, Paterson stumped on

Long Island with Brian X. Foley and Kristen McElroy. Foley is

challenging Sen. Caesar Trunzo, a Suffolk County Republican, while

McElroy is trying to unseat Sen. Kemp Hannon, a Nassau County

Republican.

McElroy's bid is widely considered a long shot, but Democrats

are hoping that a strong showing by Sen. Barack Obama in the

presidential contest will contribute to a last-minute defeat of

Hannon, whose district has a large population of black voters and

Democrats.

Republicans have enlisted Michael R. Bloomberg, the New York

City mayor and a top ally. Bloomberg campaigned for Sen. Serphin R.

Maltese of Queens on Friday and has recorded automated calls for

several Republican candidates, including Liz Feld, who is

challenging Sen. Suzi Oppenheimer in Westchester.

While officials of both parties expressed confidence that they

would wake up on Wednesday with a majority, neither side would

offer a public prediction of how many seats it expected to win or

lose, reflecting the uncertainty of the campaigns.

Both Clintons have recorded phone calls for Joseph P. Addabbo

Jr., the New York City councilman who is challenging Maltese in

what is perhaps the most hotly contested race of the campaign.

The fight for the Senate has been made all the more unclear by

the shifting allegiances of two incumbent Democrats and two

Democrats expected to win seats on Tuesday, who announced last week

that they would form an independent caucus that might side with

either party in a leadership battle between Dean G. Skelos, the

Republican Senate majority leader, and Malcolm A. Smith, the

minority leader.

One of the four planning the new caucus, Sen. Ruben Diaz Sr., a

Bronx Democrat, said on Monday that he would not vote for any

leader who would allow a vote on legislation to legalize same-sex

marriage in New York, something Smith supports.

"I would not vote for anyone that would push for gay

marriage," Diaz said.

But Smith appears to have headed off -- for now -- a leadership

challenge from his deputy, Jeffrey D. Klein of the Bronx, an avid

fundraiser who has made little secret of his ambitions. Klein said

that when Democrats gather for a scheduled meeting in Albany on

Wednesday, he will be offering Smith his full support.

"I intend to support Malcolm Smith as majority leader, and

hopefully I'll be the deputy," Klein said. "I hope he'll give me

the opportunity to nominate him as the next majority leader."

GREGORY PECK FILM COLLECTION

These days we seem to prefer an informal, buddy-buddy

relationship with our movie stars. But there was a time when a more

decorous, paternal authority was in fashion, the sort of authority

that Gregory Peck projected over the course of his long career.

Peck's gift for combining emotional distance and moral

compassion is best represented by his most famous role, the

transcendently decent small-town lawyer Atticus Finch in "To Kill

a Mockingbird," Robert Mulligan's 1962 adaptation of Harper Lee's

novel. Peck's Oscar-winning performance is naturally the

centerpiece of "The Gregory Peck Film Collection," a handsomely

produced boxed set from Universal Studios Home Entertainment.

The set also contains Peck's more vigorously protective

paterfamilias in J. Lee Thompson's 1962 "Cape Fear," as well as

four films new to DVD: Raoul Walsh's "World in His Arms" (1952),

David Miller's "Captain Newman, M.D." (1963), Edward Dmytryk's

"Mirage" (1965) and Stanley Donen's "Arabesque" (1966).

Like John Wayne, his ideological opposite, Peck became a star

during World War II, thanks partly to the shortage of leading men,

many of the more established actors having been called into

service. As a father of four, Wayne had a family exemption; Peck

was passed over because of a bad back, injured during studio

dancing lessons led by Martha Graham.

And yet, and in very different ways, Wayne and Peck came to

embody the figure of the American fighting man, Wayne as an active

combatant and Peck -- in a series of films that included "Twelve

O'Clock High" (1949) and "The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit"

(1956) -- as the sadly matured returning vet. Even in films that

weren't related to war, the crisis of Peck's character was often

that of the former man of action now hemmed in by family

responsibilities and social restraints.

By the 1960s, when Peck was working consistently at Universal,

he had acquired a sort of elder-statesman status. He often played a

middle-aged hero whose greatest accomplishments might be behind

him, but who is still capable of rising to the occasion. The most

famous example is the Southern district attorney in "Cape Fear"

who goes to extreme measures to protect his family from a roving

psychopath (Robert Mitchum) he once sent to prison.

"Captain Newman, M.D." is a more or less explicit attempt to

extend the franchise of "To Kill a Mockingbird," with Peck as an

Army psychiatrist in World War II, tending with warmth and humor to

the broken minds of soldiers sent back from the front. It is an

ideal role for him, but the film is flatly directed and episodic.

The supporting characters are presented as simple psychological

riddles -- a guilt-ridden flier (Bobby Darin), a schizophrenic

colonel (Eddie Albert) and so on -- that Captain Newman solves with

a single, penetrating insight.

Far more interesting is "Mirage," a cleverly plotted

black-and-white thriller written by Peter Stone, whose screenplay

for "Charade" had just proved a big hit for Cary Grant, Audrey

Hepburn and the director Stanley Donen. The more somber "Mirage"

blends Peck's gray flannel persona with elements of his amnesia

victim in Alfred Hitchcock's "Spellbound" (1945).

Here he is a corporate functionary who finds, after an

electrical blackout in his Manhattan office tower, that he has no

real idea of who he is or how he has spent the last two years. As

in "Charade," none of the characters are quite who they seem to

be, and the solution to the mystery, revealed in small increments,

calls on cold war paranoia in ways that evoke "The Manchurian

Candidate."

Stone, under the pseudonym Pierre Marton, also contributed to

the screenplay of "Arabesque," a sardonic thriller directed in

high style by Donen as a direct follow-up to "Charade." But this

time Peck is miscast in a role -- an academic specialist in

hieroglyphics drawn into Middle Eastern intrigue -- that seems

tailor-made for Grant's playfulness and self-mockery, two qualities

not among Peck's professional attributes.

In the most memorable sequence a fully clothed Peck finds

himself in a shower stall with the villain's treacherous mistress

(Sophia Loren) and must keep his eyes and mind off Loren's

spectacular nudity or risk revealing his presence. Where erotic

agony is required, Peck can summon only a sense of embarrassment.

The revelation of the Universal set is an eye-popping

Technicolor restoration of "The World in His Arms," one of two

films (the other is Warner Brothers' "Captain Horatio

Hornblower") in which Peck collaborated with the great action

director Raoul Walsh.

Walsh, who someday will be granted the place he deserves

alongside John Ford and Howard Hawks, often told stories of

adventurer heroes with wild ambitions and unfettered appetites,

figures who found their most satisfying incarnation in Errol Flynn.

At first Peck hardly seems to fit the mold -- for one thing, he

can't throw a convincing stage punch, a basic requirement for the

Walshian hero -- but he seems to expand in stature as "The World in

His Arms" progresses. Walsh brings out the natural athlete in the

6-foot-3 Peck, who had been on the rowing team at the University of

California, Berkeley, good preparation, perhaps, for this seagoing

swashbuckler about a seal-hunting captain in 1850 who romances a

Russian princess (Ann Blyth) while dreaming of a way to buy Alaska

from the czar.

"We go!" is the rallying cry of Peck's big-boned Aleutian

sidekick (Bill Radovich), and it might as well be Walsh's motto as

well: "The World in His Arms," like most of his films, overflows

with movement and vitality. With his use of background action and

off-screen space, Walsh constantly suggests that the drama in the

foreground is only a fraction of a much wider world in continuous

tumult, a world that extends beyond the boundaries of the story, of

which it may not even be aware. For a moment Gregory Peck was part

of this world; inevitably, his sober, responsible temperament drew

him elsewhere.

(The Gregory Peck Film Collection, Universal Studios Home

Entertainment, $59.98, unrated)

OTHER NEW RELEASES

'GET SMART'

Steve Carell steps into Don Adams's telephone shoes as the

bumbling secret agent Maxwell Smart; Anne Hathaway is his

unflappable partner. "The movie is far from terrible: it's amusing

in spots," Manohla Dargis wrote in The New York Times in June.

Available in single-disc ($28.98), double-disc ($34.99) and Blu-ray

($35.99) editions (Warner Home Video, PG-13). Also being released

is a gift box containing all 138 original episodes on 25 discs.

(HBO Home Video, $199.95, unrated)

'KUNG FU PANDA'

A lovably pudgy panda with the voice of Jack Black stars in this

computer-animated burlesque of Chinese martial arts movies, which

is to be released on Sunday. John Stevenson and Mark Osborne

directed. Writing in The Times in June, Manohla Dargis said it was

"so consistently diverting and visually arresting that it succeeds

in transcending its storybook cliches." (Dreamworks Animation,

standard definition, $29.99; Blu-ray, $39.99, PG)

'TRANSSIBERIAN'

Woody Harrelson and Emily Mortimer are an American couple who

find they have earned the mysterious enmity of a Russian policeman

(Ben Kingsley). Brad Anderson directed this Hitchcockian thriller.

"It skillfully manipulates familiar tropes: innocents abroad;

ominous, glowering foreigners; conspiracy and duplicity; erotic

intrigue," Stephen Holden wrote in The Times in July. (First Look,

standard definition, $28.98; Blu-ray, $34.98, R)

'THE WILD WILD WEST: The Complete Series'

Another monster gift box: all four seasons of the late-'60s spy

spoof/western (hey, it was the late '60s), as well as the reunion

specials, on 27 discs. Robert Conrad and Ross Martin star.

(Paramount, $129.98, not rated)

'A CHRISTMAS STORY'

Warner Home Video takes another dip with an "Ultimate

Collector's Edition" of this perennially popular Christmas comedy,

packaged in a cookie tin. Extras include a set of cookie cutters, a

cookbook and an apron. "There are a number of small, unexpectedly

funny moments in 'A Christmas Story,' but you have to possess the

stamina of a pearl diver to find them," Vincent Canby wrote in The

Times in 1983. (Standard definition, $39.98; Blu-ray, $49.99, PG)

"W.," Oliver Stone's biopic about the outgoing

American president, has just opened here. So has a French film

about Coluche, the country's most popular postwar comedian, Michel

Colucci, who became a kind of anarchic candidate for president in

1981, an opponent of anti-immigrant sentiment, a champion of the

poor.

The French movie hardly bothers with politics, dwelling on

Coluche's love life instead. Cultural gulfs can sometimes reveal

themselves in these small details. France, it turns out, remains,

even all these years later, not insignificantly caught up in the

cinema spawned by the Occupation, offering diversion, self-flattery

and escapist fiction about itself.

Serious-minded Americans traditionally love to idealize the

French movie industry, but as French cinephiles tend to see it,

it's their own filmmakers, unlike those in the United States, who

shy away from tackling head-on tough issues like contemporary

French politics, scandals and unrest. Contrarians will note "La

Haine" ("The Hate"), a much-talked-about movie anticipating the

violence that exploded three years ago in some of France's poor

immigrant suburbs. But "La Haine" was released in the mid-1990s.

Meanwhile, never mind poor box office results, the United States

keeps churning out ambitious pictures with big stars or directors,

like "In the Valley of Elah," "Lions for Lambs," "Rendition,"

"Redacted" and "Body of Lies," questioning American policy in

the Middle East or otherwise seizing on the headlines. France

hasn't made a significant movie yet about the 2005 riots.

The country has censored politically charged films, including

Jean-Luc Godard's "Petit Soldat" (made in 1960 but not released

until 1963), a rare French picture about the Algerian war of

independence. "The Battle of Algiers," the greatest film about

that war, was an Italian-Algerian production, not a French one,

directed by an Italian. It was banned for many years after its

release in 1966.

The closest thing to a French "Apocalypse Now" or "Platoon"

about Algeria is "L'Ennemi Intime," made last year, close to half

a century after the war ended. As for a French version of "W.,"

any film skewering a sitting French president "would be nearly

impossible to make here," said Caroline Benjo, echoing what other

French filmmakers contend.

They cite a mix of politics, stylistic habits perpetuating the

national "brand," financing and a collective anxiety about

postwar French identity. The problem, you might say, goes back to

de Gaulle's selling the country on the idea that it won World War

II, along with the culture of denial that that mindset promoted.

Benjo is a producer of "Entre les Murs" ("Within the Walls,"

marketed in English as "The Class"), which won the Palme d'Or at

Cannes this year. A drama about schoolchildren from a multiethnic

neighborhood of Paris, it has so far done well at the French box

office. Like the promiscuously awarded "La Graine et le Mulet"

(opening next month in the United States as "The Secret of the

Grain"), directed by Abdellatif Kechiche, which is about a

community of immigrants in a seaside town in the south of France,

"Entre les Murs" is "l'exception culturelle."

That phrase ordinarily connotes not "exception to the rule"

but the exceptional status of culture here. Money for French films

comes partly from a percentage of ticket sales for American

blockbusters, and from French television networks, which by law

must underwrite films.

This means that French movies now at the multiplex, like

"Faubourg 36," a nostalgic music hall story about bygone France,

or "Le Crime Est Notre Affaire," a nostalgic mystery based on an

Agatha Christie story, are effectively supported by French revenues

from American films like "Blood Diamond," "Charlie Wilson's

War," "Syriana" and other news-hungry, Hollywood vehicles of

precisely the sort that France doesn't make.

Public television is government-run, of course, and the

country's most popular network, TF1, happens to be owned by Martin

Bouygues, a close associate of the president, Nicolas Sarkozy.

"Naturally television executives try to influence content,"

Jean-Michel Frodon, the editor of Cahiers du Cinema, noted the

other day.

That said, France likes to boast, for good reason, that with

more than 220 films made here a year, the country's movie industry

lags behind only those of India and the United States. Among these

220 movies, a modest number of high-quality documentaries or

fictional dramas detailing poverty or immigrant life here are

released, but they're generally "small films made in the

shadows," Frodon said.

As Antoine de Baecque, a film historian, put it, "French cinema

since Nouvelle Vague deals with reality in a certain way." He was

talking the other afternoon about the French New Wave of the late

1950s and '60s, led by Francois Truffaut and Godard. "We like to

fracture, distort and romanticize -- to see trauma but obliquely,

abstractly. In this sense French cinema is the opposite of American

cinema. It values style over realism, the small form over the

epic."

De Baecque chalked this approach up to a French "inferiority

complex, a feeling that since World War II, France, despite what we

like to tell ourselves, is downgraded from the front rank of

history, which creates melancholy, a malaise," he said. "The

romantic comedies, the sentimental affairs, they are fictions that

remove us from real life and are precisely the kind of movies that

emerged out of the Occupation."

The most popular film ever made in France was released this

year, "Bienvenue Chez Les Ch'tis" ("Welcome to the Land of the

Sh'tis"), a harmless comedy about a postal employee from the South

forced to work in the North. Largely unnoted by the French,

admirably or out of avoidance, was that the two main stars of the

movie, imitating regional clich?s, both happened to be Frenchmen of

North African descent.

On the other hand, newspapers were full of stories the other

week about the burning of cars belonging to Luc Besson's film crew.

In Montfermeil, a poor town outside Paris, Besson has been shooting

a big-budget American-style thriller with John Travolta. But it's

not about the riots in that neighborhood in 2005.

For that, French people these days must turn to programs like

"La Commune," a dark television drama that ran this year on Canal

Plus. Its inspiration was not French cinema but American cable

series like "The Wire" on HBO. "La Commune," glowingly received

by French critics, was canceled when the network decided its

audience wasn't large enough; never mind that other shows on Canal

Plus with similar audiences were renewed.

Abdel Raouf Dafri, the show's writer, an excitable 44-year-old

even without the heavily sugared espressos he gulped one recent

morning, shook his head in disgust. "The real-life characters in

the series were blacks and Arabs, traditional conservative Muslims,

leaders after the white policeman in the neighborhood had given

up," he said, "and France doesn't like to look in the mirror

except to see itself as the most beautiful nation. Some people

thought the series was too violent, but I said look at American

series. The French response to that was, 'Yes, but it's the U.S.,'

as if there's no violence here."

Dafri lately wrote the screenplay for "Mesrine," which just

opened to good reviews that noted its Americanness. About a

real-life French gangster of the 1960s and '70s, Jacques Mesrine,

who became a kind of populist outlaw, a French Pretty Boy Floyd,

the movie has a definite political undercurrent. Dafri said he

looked to Francis Ford Coppola and Martin Scorsese, to Showtime and

"Prison Break," "24" and "The Sopranos."

"In the United States," he said, "you know how to make films

and television series that are intelligent and political and don't

forget the entertainment factor. In France we just want to be

intellectual." He nearly leaped out of his seat saying that last

word.

Emmanuel Dauce, a producer of "La Commune," who was joining

Dafri for morning coffee, nodded. "We still have an old left that

thinks it's vulgar and politically dubious to make commercial

movies," he said. "We invented the dramatic series, with Zola and

Balzac and Hugo, but it's as if we forgot what we started."

Back at the offices of Haut et Court, the production company for

"Entre les Murs," Benjo agreed, while also bemoaning

screenwriting, which accounts here for far less of a film's budget

on average than in Hollywood.

"We prefer to euphemize, to think small in our movies," she

said. She returned to the legacy of the New Wave, saying it has

been misunderstood. New Wave filmmakers were against long-winded

scripts, but not against well-written ones.

"Look at the French films that sell on the international

market, and you'll also see they aren't always the best ones, but

they're the ones that fit the expectations of French cinema," her

colleague, Carole Scotta, another producer of "Entre les Murs,"

added. "We're prisoners of these expectations."

"And yes, we just don't want to see ourselves as we really

are," she said. "It took a long time for politicians here to

admit France bore responsibility for the years of collaboration

during World War II, and still Sarkozy likes to say we were a

nation of resistance. The most successful films in this country

reflect our collective projection of France as we wish it to be. We

prefer to live in a dream."

The other evening Parisians mobbed the Pathe multiplex on the

Place de Clichy. Many lined up to catch Woody Allen's "Vicky

Cristina Barcelona," a virtual French romantic comedy made by an

American in Spain. When the last ticket for it was sold, the couple

next in line just shrugged.

They went instead to "Cliente," a French comedy about a

middle-aged female television anchor who pays for sex with a

younger man.

It's been doing nicely at the box office.

Three of four visiting teams in the first round of the MLS

playoffs did what most teams strive and struggle to do -- get a draw

on the road.

In two of the three tie games, late goals tied the score. The

only winner, Real Salt Lake, takes a one-goal lead to California

after Yura Movsisyan scored in the 90th minute on a backheel to

beat Chivas USA, 1-0. The four home-and-home total-goals series now

shift to the cities of the higher-seeded clubs.

The Red Bulls backed into the playoffs, and they could be back

out as soon as Sunday. Playing their final home game of the 2008

season (both conference championship games are single elimination),

the Red Bulls used a makeshift lineup to hold the two-time

defending champion Houston Dynamo scoreless until the 85th minute

last Saturday. Now, with the aggregate score tied, 1-1, the Red

Bulls will take their league-worst road record (1-8-6) to Texas for

Sunday's return match against the Dynamo, the team with the best

home record (10-1-4). The Red Bulls franchise has won only one

playoff series (against Dallas in 2000) in its 13-year history.

Columbus, the team with the second-most goals (50) and the

league's best record (17-7-6), played Kansas City with a man

advantage for the final 15 minutes but did not secure the equalizer

until Steven Lenhart scored off a scramble in added time.

Attracting fans on relative short notice for playoff series has

proved difficult for MLS clubs so far in the first round. After MLS

games averaged 16,460 overall in 2008, the four opening games drew:

5,221 for Chicago at New England; 10,385 for Columbus at Kansas

City; 11,578 for Houston at the Red Bulls; and 14,719 for Chivas

USA at Real Salt Lake.

YANKS ABROAD

Jozy Altidore's appearance for Villarreal was short and to the

point on Saturday at San Mames, Athletic Bilbao's stadium in the

Basque region of Spain.

Altidore, the American striker who will turn 19 on Thursday,

stepped on the field in the 90th minute and made an immediate

beeline for the goal. He took a short diagonal pass from Santi

Cazorla to score his first goal in a Liga match.

Altidore, however, is not on Villarreal's roster for its

Champions League match against Aalborg of Denmark on Wednesday

night. But he could play more in league action because of recent

injuries to Guillermo Franco and Kahveci Nihat.

In England, Fulham midfielder Clint Dempsey entered a match

against Everton and goalkeeper Tim Howard in the 88th minute.

Dempsey has played little under Fulham's new manager, Roy Hodgson,

and is likely to be moved during January's transfer period.

In Germany, midfielder Michael Bradley and Borussia

Moenchenglabach recorded their eighth loss in the past 11 games.

The club is in 17th place in the 18-team Bundesliga. ... Neven

Subotic, a native of Yugoslavia who has represented the United

States in several international youth tournaments, had an assist as

Borussia Dortmund rallied for a 1-1 tie with Bochum.

In France, defender Carlos Bocanegra played the full 90 as

Rennes recorded its fourth shutout of the Ligue 1 season.

ENGLAND

It was a long afternoon Sunday for the referee Stuart Atwell,

25. Atwell worked a contentious League Championship match, an East

Midlands derby between Derby County and Nottingham Forest that

ended in a 1-1 tie (on a goal and an own goal by Derby's Emanuel

Villa).

Derby, an English club with American owners that was relegated

from the Premier League after last season, played the final 15

minutes with a man advantage. As the match went into five minutes

of time added by Atwell, Derby's Miles Addison headed the ball past

goalkeeper Lee Camp. But Atwell disallowed the goal, blowing the

whistle instead on a Forest defender who had handled the ball in

the penalty area.

Derby was awarded a penalty kick. Forest's Camp, who grew up as

a Derby fan, then turned away Nacer Barazite's effort at the near

post.

It did not end there. With time running out, Addison again

apparently scored on a header off a cross from Barazite, but Atwell

waved off the goal after seeing a push in the area.

NOTES

-- The U.S. under-17 women's national team scored three

unanswered goals Sunday to defeat Paraguay, 3-1, in Hamilton, New

Zealand. A victory or a draw against France in Auckland on

Wednesday will send the Americans to the quarterfinals of the FIFA

U17 Women's World Cup.

-- ESPN360.com, the broadband service of ESPN that is available

from more than 25 affiliated Internet service providers, has added

coverage of the Australian A-League and, in a deal with Setanta,

coverage of England's Football League (League Championship, League

1 and League 2) and the Carling Cup.

The New York Times' Election Day Choices:

PRESIDENT AND VICE PRESIDENT

Barack Obama and Joseph Biden (D)

NEW YORK STATE

Poll hours: 6 a.m. to 9 p.m.

House of Representatives

13th District (Staten Island and parts of Brooklyn):

Michael McMahon (D) State Senate

3rd District (parts of Suffolk County): Brian Foley (D)

11th District (parts of Queens): James Gennaro (D)

15th District (parts of Queens): Joseph Addabbo (D)

CONNECTICUT

Poll hours: 6 a.m. to 8 p.m.

House of Representatives

2nd District (Eastern Connecticut): Joseph Courtney (D)

4th District (Southwestern Connecticut): Christopher Shays (R)

5th District (Northwestern Connecticut): Chris Murphy (D)

NEW JERSEY

Poll hours: 6 a.m. to 8 p.m.

U.S. Senate

Frank Lautenberg (D)

House of Representatives

3rd District (parts of Burlington, Ocean, Camden): John Adler

(D)

5th District (Warren, parts of Sussex, Passaic, Bergen): Dennis

Shulman (D)

7th District (parts of Hunterdon, Union, Middlesex, Somerset):

Leonard Lance (R)

THE COURT AND 'FLEETING EXPLETIVES'

The Supreme Court hears arguments on Tuesday in an important

free-speech case. In 2004, the Federal Communications Commission

broke with long-held policy and began imposing fines on

broadcasters for carrying an occasional vulgarity -- sometimes a

single word, uttered in a live broadcast. The new policy, which a

federal appeals court struck down last year, has had a chilling

effect on important speech.

The FCC has turned itself into a censorship board that imposes

fines based on its own highly subjective standards. It declared

that a Golden Globes award show, in which the singer Bono uttered

one vulgar word, was indecent. It fined a small public television

station in California for airing Martin Scorsese's documentary

"The Blues," which contains musicians using some earthy language.

The commission has decided that other programming with similar

language is not indecent.

This regime is a serious threat to free expression and

constitutionally protected speech. Just as troubling, broadcasters

are engaging in self-censorship -- refraining from airing speech

that should be protected out of fear of facing FCC fines based on

vague rules.

The New York-based 2nd U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals held that

the FCC's "fleeting expletives" policy is arbitrary and

capricious -- and therefore invalid. The FCC's decision to abandon

its more lenient policy was not properly reasoned, the court ruled.

The 2nd Circuit's decision is correct, and the Supreme Court

should affirm it. However, there also are important constitutional

law issues at stake, which the appeals court did not reach. The FCC

is penalizing broadcasters for airing speech protected by the First

Amendment. The vague standards it has adopted do not meet

constitutional muster.

We hope the next president will appoint commissioners with a

greater respect for the First Amendment. Until that happens, the

Supreme Court must ensure that the FCC does not trample on

free-speech rights.

SO LITTLE TIME, SO MUCH DAMAGE

While Americans eagerly vote for the next president, here's a

sobering reminder: As of Tuesday, George W. Bush still has 77 days

left in the White House -- and he's not wasting a minute.

President Bush's aides have been scrambling to change rules and

regulations on the environment, civil liberties and abortion rights

among others -- few for the good. Most presidents put on a

last-minute policy stamp, but in Bush's case it is more like a

wrecking ball. We fear it could take months, or years, for the next

president to identify and then undo all of the damage.

Here is a look -- by no means comprehensive -- at some of Bush's

recent parting gifts and those we fear are yet to come:

CIVIL LIBERTIES:

We don't know all of the ways that the administration has

violated Americans' rights in the name of fighting terrorism. Last

month, Attorney General Michael Mukasey rushed out new guidelines

for the FBI that permit agents to use chillingly intrusive

techniques to collect information on Americans even where there is

no evidence of wrongdoing.

Agents will be allowed to use informants to infiltrate lawful

groups, engage in prolonged physical surveillance and lie about

their identity while questioning a subject's neighbors, relatives,

co-workers and friends. The changes also give the FBI -- which has a

long history of spying on civil rights groups and others -- expanded

latitude to use these techniques on people identified by racial,

ethnic and religious background.

The administration showed further disdain for Americans' privacy

rights and for Congress' power by making clear that it will ignore

a provision in the legislation that established the Department of

Homeland Security. The law requires the department's privacy

officer to account annually for any activity that could affect

Americans' privacy -- and clearly stipulates that the report cannot

be edited by any other officials at the department or the White

House.

The Justice Department's Office of Legal Counsel has released a

memo asserting that the law "does not prohibit" officials from

homeland security or the White House from reviewing the report. The

memo then argues that since the law allows the officials to review

the report, it would be unconstitutional to stop them from changing

it. George Orwell couldn't have done better.

THE ENVIRONMENT

The administration has been especially busy weakening

regulations that promote clean air and clean water and protect

endangered species.

Bush, or more to the point Vice President Dick Cheney, came to

office determined to dismantle Bill Clinton's environmental legacy,

undo decades of environmental law and keep their friends in

industry happy. They have had less success than we feared, but only

because of the determined opposition of environmental groups,

courageous members of Congress and protests from citizens. But the

White House keeps trying.

Bush's secretary of the interior, Dirk Kempthorne, has recently

carved out significant exceptions to regulations requiring expert

scientific review of any federal project that might harm endangered

or threatened species (one consequence will be to relieve the

agency of the need to assess the impact of global warming on

at-risk species). The department also is rushing to remove the gray

wolf from the endangered species list -- again. The wolves were

re-listed after a federal judge ruled the government had not lived

up to its own recovery plan.

In coming weeks, we expect the Environmental Protection Agency

to issue a final rule that would weaken a program created by the

Clean Air Act, which requires utilities to install modern pollution

controls when they upgrade their plants to produce more power. The

agency is also expected to issue a final rule that would make it

easier for coal-fired power plants to locate near national parks in

defiance of longstanding congressional mandates to protect air

quality in areas of special natural or recreational value.

Interior is also awaiting EPA's concurrence on a proposal that

would make it easier for mining companies to dump toxic mine wastes

in valleys and streams.

And while no rules changes are at issue, the interior department

also has been rushing to open up millions of acres of pristine

federal land to oil-and-gas exploration. We fear that in coming

weeks, Kempthorne will open up even more acreage to the commercial

development of oil shale, a hugely expensive and environmentally

risky process that even the oil companies seem in no hurry to

begin. He should not.

ABORTION RIGHTS

Soon after the election, Michael Leavitt, the secretary of

health and human services, is expected to issue new regulations

aimed at further limiting women's access to abortion,

contraceptives and information about their reproductive health care

options.

Existing law allows doctors and nurses to refuse to participate

in an abortion. These changes would extend the so-called right to

refuse to a wide range of health care workers and activities

including abortion referrals, unbiased counseling and provision of

birth control pills or emergency contraception, even for rape

victims.

The administration has taken other disturbing steps in recent

weeks. In late September, the IRS restored tax breaks for banks

that take big losses on bad loans inherited through acquisitions.

Now we learn that JPMorgan Chase and others are planning to use

their bailout funds for mergers and acquisitions, transactions that

will be greatly enhanced by the new tax subsidy.

One last-minute change Bush won't be making: He apparently has

decided not to shut down the prison in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba -- the

most shameful symbol of this administration's disdain for the rule

of law.

Bush has said it should be closed, and his secretary of state,

Condoleezza Rice, and his secretary of defense, Robert Gates,

pushed for it. Proposals were prepared, including a plan for

sending the real bad guys to other countries for trial. But Cheney

objected, and the president has refused even to review the memos.

He will hand this mess off to his successor.

We suppose there is some good news in all of this. While Bush

leaves office on Jan. 20, 2009, he has only until Nov. 20 of this

year to issue "economically significant" rule changes and until

Dec. 20 to issue other changes. Anything after that is merely a

draft and can be easily withdrawn by the next president.

Unfortunately, the White House is well aware of those deadlines.

EDITORS:

Good morning. The New York Times News Service has reopened for

the day.

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News; The St. Petersburg Times, and the New York Times Regional

Newspapers.

Tuesday, Nov. 4, 2008

Editors:

The Iranian Parliament voted to dismiss a top

minister on Tuesday, in a setback for President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad

eight months before he faces presidential elections.

The Parliament dismissed the official, Ali Kordan, the interior

minister, after he admitted to faking his university degree and

tried to bribe members of Parliament not to impeach him.

The dismissal underlines the assertiveness of the Parliament at

a time Ahmadinejad is struggling to cope with a growing economic

crisis. Inflation is running at 30 percent and falling oil prices

in a country that has the second largest known oil reserves in the

world are undermining the budget.

Analysts said the vote confirmed the division between

conservative forces in Iranian politics ahead of the presidential

vote in June next year when Ahmadinejad faces re-election.

Out of 247 present at the vote in Parliament, 188 members voted

to dismiss Kordan while only 45 legislators voted against his

dismissal. Fourteen members abstained.

The dismissal means that Ahmadinejad must now submit his whole

Cabinet to a vote of confidence before Parliament.

According to the rules of the country's constitution, if 10

Cabinet members are dismissed, all members must face a confidence

vote, and in the past three years Ahmadinejad had already dismissed

nine Cabinet members because they disagreed with his policies.

No president has faced a confidence vote on the entire Cabinet.

Members of Parliament had questioned the qualifications of

Kordan when Ahmadinejad nominated him for the post in August. The

previous minister had been dismissed because of his differences

with the president.

Kordan claimed to have been awarded an honorary doctorate from

Oxford University. But a parliamentary investigation found not only

that Kordan's Ph.D. was a fake, but also that he had neither the

bachelor's nor master's degrees from an Iranian university he had

claimed.

The scandal over his impeachment turned into a crisis on

Wednesday when a government official, Muhammad Abbassi, distributed

$5,000 checks among parliamentary ministers who had signed the

impeachment motion.

The weekly news magazine Shahrvand Emrooz reported that Abbassi

gave the checks as a donation for the legislators' local mosques

but asked them to sign two receipts.

One of those receipts was for a letter to the speaker of

Parliament asking for the impeachment to be dropped. Ali Asghar

Zarei, a legislator close to Ahmadinejad, slapped Abbassi in the

face, and the speaker expelled the official from Parliament. Later,

Abbassi was dismissed by Ahmadinejad, who said he would not bother

to appear in Parliament to defend his minister.

"Who cares even if Mr. Kordan's degree is fake?" the Islamic

Republic News Agency quoted Ahmadinejad as asking. "I have already

said that it is just a torn piece of paper because it was only an

honorary degree."

Ahmadinejad had said he did not consider the impeachment legal

because Kordan had done nothing wrong.

One member of Parliament, Avaz Heidarpour, wrote a public letter

to the president saying that he could have won millions of votes by

dismissing Kordan and that his support of the minister would

instead cost him those votes, the daily newspaper Etemad reported

Monday.

The powerful post of speaker of Parliament is held by a rival to

Ahmadinejad, Ali Larijani, a conservative and an ardent advocate of

Iran's nuclear program. He was also close to Kordan but was also

seen as someone who is more pragmatic than Ahmadinejad in his

approach and perhaps willing to engage in diplomacy with the West.

The Swiss banking giant UBS reported a third-quarter net

profit on Tuesday but warned that the outlook for the rest of the

year was gloomy.

The bank, which is struggling to restore its business and

reputation after it was caught up in the collapse of the mortgage

market, reported a net profit of 296 million Swiss francs ($252

million), compared with a year-earlier loss of 858 million francs.

Operating income fell 38 percent to 5.6 billion francs.

The bank also predicted that the "difficult" conditions seen

in October would continue to weigh on its business, and said it

would continue to cut operating expenses where possible.

UBS' reputation as one of the world's most conservative banks

was left in tatters after its bets on the mortgage securities

market in the United States went spectacularly wrong. It has now

written down nearly $49 billion since the start of the credit

crisis, including $4.4 billion in the latest quarter. Losses and

write-downs by banks worldwide are approaching $700 billion since

the start of last year.

The results were in line with expectations, as the bank had

given investors an update on Oct. 16. On that day, the Swiss

government announced a deal to inject 6 billion francs into UBS, a

move that will give it a 9 percent stake in the bank.

The government also agreed to help move up to $60 billion of

illiquid securities and other assets from UBS's balance sheet to a

separate fund. UBS said the deal to clean up its balance sheet

"caps future potential losses from these assets" and greatly

reduced the amount of risk it carried. The bank said it now had a

Tier-1 capital ratio, a measure of financial strength, of 10.8

percent, in line with its European peers.

UBS actually posted on Tuesday an operating loss of 480 million

francs, but it said its results had been improved by a gain of 2.2

billion francs it booked on its own debt, as well as a tax credit

of 913 million francs. It noted that the value of its debt has

risen the bailout was announced, so it could end up having to book

a loss on that item in the fourth quarter.

The bank said clients continued to desert its wealth management

business in the third quarter, with net outflows of 49.3 billion

francs. Clients of its global asset management business withdrew a

net 34.4 billion francs. But it said there had been some

improvement in the businesses since the government bailout was

announced. Shares of UBS have fallen about 60 percent this year. On

Tuesday, they fell 4.3 percent in early Zurich trading.

Chinese and Taiwanese officials signed agreements on

Tuesday expanding charter flights, maritime shipping and

cooperation on food safety issues, bringing their governments

closer together as both struggle to overcome economic slowdowns.

The agreements were finalized on the second day of a planned

five-day visit to Taiwan by a mainland delegation led by Chen

Yunlin, the head of the Association for Relations Across the Taiwan

Strait, the main negotiating body for China in matters related to

Taiwan.

Chen is the most senior Chinese Communist Party official to

visit Taiwan since 1949, when the Kuomintang lost the Chinese civil

war and occupied Taiwan while in retreat. The mainland Chinese

government considers Taiwan a rebel province that must be restored

to China. Many Taiwanese prefer to maintain the status quo while

others lobby strongly to move toward formal independence.

Taiwan's economic growth has lagged behind China's in recent

years, spurring the Taiwanese last March to elect Ma Ying-jeou, a

long-time Kuomintang politician, as president. Ma ran on a platform

of improving the economy through closer ties with the mainland. The

presidential election and an earlier parliamentary election were

seen as referendums on the policies of Chen Shui-bian, the former

president whose family members are accused of corruption and whose

party, the Democratic Progressive Party, leans toward Taiwanese

independence.

The agreements reached on Tuesday were a result of the attempts

made by Ma's government at engagement with the mainland. In June,

just after he was inaugurated, Ma sent a delegation to Beijing to

sign an agreement establishing a regular weekend schedule of

charter flights between China and Taiwan.

Ma's popularity has plummeted in recent months, partly based on

criticism that he is giving away too much to China, but he pushed

forward with a second round of talks.

The new transportation agreement raises to 108 from 36 the

number of weekly round-trip charter flights, according to a summary

of the agreement posted on a Web site run by the Taiwanese

government. The flights are expected to run daily, with 21 cities

on the mainland and eight in Taiwan receiving service.

The planes will also fly in a direct line between cities over a

route north of Taiwan. Charter flights between China and Taiwan

currently take a longer route through Hong Kong airspace because of

security concerns.

Under the new routing, direct flights between Taipei and Beijing

will take two hours, and flights between Taipei and Shanghai will

take 80 minutes.

China and Taiwan will add direct cargo charter flights as well,

with 60 scheduled per month.

The two governments will also open direct shipping channels for

passengers and cargo. China will open a total of 63 ports (48

seaports and 15 riverports), and Taiwan will open 11. To avoid

political sensitivities, ships will not fly national flags.

The two governments also agreed to expand free exchange of

information regarding food safety issues. If any product is

considered faulty or dangerous, a government will recall it and

halt its shipment, according to the agreement.

Discussion of the issue arose because mainland China has been

grappling with its biggest food safety crisis in years. In

September, Chinese dairy products were discovered to have been

contaminated with melamine, a toxic chemical used in plastics that

has been regularly and illegally added to dairy products and animal

feed to falsify a high protein count. At least four infants have

died and 53,000 children have fallen ill from kidney complications

resulting from melamine. Suspect Chinese foods have been recalled

around the world, including in Taiwan.

China and Taiwan also agreed to start direct mail service.

"With the four agreements, direct transport and mail services

that compatriots on both sides have been longing for over the past

30 years have become a reality, and will provide more convenient

channels for cross-straits economic exchanges," Chen said on

Tuesday, according to Xinhua, the official state news agency of

mainland China.

Chen met on Monday and Tuesday with his Taiwanese counterpart,

Chiang Pin-kung, head of the Straits Exchange Foundation. After the

agreements were signed on Tuesday, the two appeared together and

held up large books containing the signatures.

Chen's arrival on Monday was marked by a handful of protests.

Democratic Progressive Party supporters have loudly denounced

Chen's visit, and one of his mainland colleagues was knocked to the

ground by a Taiwanese politician while on a recent visit to the

Confucius temple in the southern city of Tainan, where the party

has strong support. The south of Taiwan has a committed

pro-independence leaning.

Chen also said Tuesday that the mainland will give Taiwan two

pandas as gifts before the year's end. In exchange, Chen will

accept two rare animals from Taiwan: an endangered goat and a

spotted deer.

Cox News Service

DAVIE, Fla. - While his teammates enjoyed the day off, Dolphins

receiver Greg Camarillo put in a few minutes' work, conducting a

news conference at training camp, where the first question was:

When was the last time he conducted a news conference?

The self-deprecating Camarillo flashed a

you've-got-to-be-kidding-me grin while taking an unfamiliar place

behind the lectern. Mindful that Camarillo has 43 receptions,

someone asked if this is his best season in football, to which

Camarillo pretended to assess matters carefully before reminding

everyone he had roughly 46 catches at Stanford in his career.

"So, yes," he concluded, evoking more laughter.

The upbeat mood came thanks to a 26-17 victory at Denver on

Sunday that left Miami 4-4 and in the thick of playoff contention.

If that's a stunning statement following a 1-15 disaster last year,

so be it. The Dolphins had trotted out the perfect player to

personify how, in half a season, the team has made obsolete so many

expectations it might have had in preseason.

Camarillo's goal in July? "To make the team," he said Monday.

He quickly added that he has revised that goal, in much the same

way the entire team has under first-year coach Tony Sparano.

"There's nothing to compare, really," said Camarillo, who

provided the lone highlight last year by scoring the overtime

touchdown against Baltimore that averted a winless season. "It's a

completely different team, completely different mentally. You can

kind of see that late in the game.

"Last year we would have found a way to lose the game, as

opposed to this year, we find a way to win games. That's what good

teams do."

A turning point, Camarillo said, might have occurred a couple of

weeks ago, when Sparano asked some players to address the group,

including tight end Anthony Fasano, who used a word that until then

seemed taboo.

"He said, 'Why don't we talk about the playoffs? It's something

that's not spoken about. Guys have it as a goal, but we don't

really talk about it much in the locker room."'

They do now.

"We need to expect it," Camarillo said. "We need to reach for

it."

Which is exactly what Sparano wants to hear.

Rather than having to prop up players' psyches after moral

victories that are real-life losses, as was the case last year for

coach Cam Cameron, Sparano finds himself in a critic's role,

pointing out shortcomings. This week, he found that job pretty

tough.

"We're supposed to look at these wins and talk about how we can

do better," Sparano said. "On the defensive side of the ball, I

thought that yesterday, it was hard to find some things that

weren't really good."

Although the offense sputtered at times, it produced a 15-play,

80-yard touchdown drive in crunch time, much like Camarillo

recorded one of the most productive receiving days in Dolphins

history.

A man who originally wanted to just protect his job finds

himself No. 11 in the NFL in number of receptions - ahead of Randy

Moss, Lee Evans and Terrell Owens - and No. 28 in receiving yards

with 483 - just behind Wes Welker but ahead of Braylon Edwards,

Plaxico Burress and, yes, Terrell Owens.

Sparano said the time for him to learn what Camarillo can do is

past.

"I have a pretty clear understanding of what Camarillo is all

about," Sparano said. "He's a hard guy not to like."

Equally important, the coaches have an understanding of the

receivers as a whole. Ted Ginn had 175 yards in receptions a week

ago against Buffalo, but with Denver rotating a safety to

double-cover Ginn, the Dolphins had no problem leaning on

Camarillo.

"No disrespect to any of my players - I love them all - but

there's no star in that group," Sparano said. "They all know that

they have a role and from Day 1 we've said that we're trying to

define those roles. I think we've done that."

Imperfections, of course, remain. Sparano said the run-blocking

was often ineffective Sunday, the team settled for field goals when

it could have scored touchdowns, and third-and-long situations

remain troublesome.

But if anything symbolizes an evolving attitude, it might be a

bruise one of the Dolphins placed on Sparano in the mayhem of a

successful fourth-down conversion on the decisive drive.

"I did get a couple of slaps and smacks," Sparano said. "I

got a big bruise on my arm."

Hal Habib writes for The Palm Beach Post. E-mail: hal UNDERSCORE

habib AT pbpost.com.

Cox News Service

DEAR DR. LeCRONE: My sister regularly practices amateur psychology

on her friends and family, and she claims that I am overusing my

defense mechanisms. I'm not about to give her the satisfaction of

asking her what she means. Can you please tell me what she may be

accusing me of or is she just making up psychobabble?

-- A reader in New York

DEAR READER: Obviously, I can't be sure without asking her, but

my best guess follows:

Defense mechanisms are strategies or manners in which we behave

or think to protect or "defend" ourselves from painful thoughts

or feelings.

We all use them periodically in an attempt to deal with the

world around us. Utilizing these defenses appropriately can be

useful and helpful. However, all too often, their usefulness is

extended beyond the boundaries of good mental health.

Let's look at three of these defense mechanisms in their more

unhealthy forms:

--?Rationalization is a defense mechanism that involves

explaining an unacceptable behavior or feeling in a rational or

logical manner that avoids the true explanation for the behavior.

Making excuses to justify behavior includes such examples as

"My children behave the way they do because this is the standard

that society now promotes and accepts"; "I don't exercise because

doing so is not possible with my busy schedule, and I am always so

sore the next day I can't get out of bed"; and "I have fallen in

love with another person because I never really loved my husband."

-- Denial is a commonly used defense mechanism that can lead to

real problems. These include avoiding the truth, acknowledging only

part of a bigger situation or leaving out important information.

Examples are "Just because I am overdrawn at the bank and over

my credit limit on credit cards doesn't mean I can't manage my

money"; and "I haven't been depressed all of these years -- my

moods are simply a reflection of my situation."

--?Intellectualization is used in an attempt to avoid reality

and psychological pain by taking a very abstract view of the

situation: "My problems are so complex that only Einstein's theory

of relativity can explain them"; or "I deal with my problems by

studying the lives of successful individuals and how they deal with

their problems."

I hope this discussion helps you. If readers find this

information useful, please tell me and I will discuss other defense

mechanisms in future columns.

Hap LeCrone is a Waco, Texas, clinical psychologist. If you have

questions or topics you would like him to discuss, write to him at

4555 Lake Shore Drive, Waco 76710 or e-mail him at hlecrone AT

aol.com. Be sure to check out his blog at wacotrib.com/hap. And for

an archive of his columns, visit www.haplecrone.com. This article

appeared in the Waco Tribune-Herald.

Fifteen people were killed and dozens wounded by

bombings in Baghdad on Tuesday, according to the police and

hospital officials, part of an uptick in violence after a

relatively quiet few weeks here.

In al-Mashtal, a predominantly Shiite neighborhood in eastern

Baghdad, an improvised explosive device hidden in a fishmonger's

stall killed seven and wounded 18 when it exploded early Tuesday

afternoon.

A police colonel, who spoke on condition of anonymity because he

was not authorized to speak to reporters, said that the explosion

was caused by a so-called "sticky IED," a small bomb with an

adhesive backing that can be unobtrusively attached to the

underside of a car, or even a table.

"I warned this fish seller only yesterday that his stand on the

side of the street was not safe because anyone passing by could set

an IED to blow him up, along with his customers," the police

colonel said. "He didn't listen, and the poor guy lost his life in

today's blast."

In al-Qahera, in northeastern Baghdad, another improvised

explosive device killed four and injured eight.

Abu Rajaa, a shopkeeper who witnessed the blast, said that it

was caused by a sticky explosive device attached to a pickup truck

parked in front of his shop.

"Suddenly the pickup exploded, and two of the people who were

in it were killed immediately," Abu Rajaa said. "Several others

were injured, and I took care of one of them until the ambulances

arrived."

Another bombing in Baghdad singled out the convoy of Ahmed

al-Barak, a Shiite government official who leads a commission on

property disputes. Barak was unharmed, but a passerby was killed

and five of his bodyguards and several bystanders were wounded.

Also Tuesday, Iraqi customs police in Najaf province announced

the discovery of a large bag full of C4 explosives, wires and

detonators -- enough materials to make half a dozen suicide vests,

organized into individual do-it-yourself kits -- near the Saudi

border on Sunday night.

Saadon al-Jaberi, a spokesman for the customs police in Iraq's

central region, said that the bag was found after Iraqi customs

police received intelligence reports that terrorists were trying to

enter Iraq from Saudi Arabia.

"On Sunday night, customs police were conducting patrols in an

area called Rahba, near Iraq's border with Saudi Arabia," Mr.

Jaberi said in a phone interview. "They saw a pickup truck heading

toward Iraqi territory. When the police noticed the truck, it

departed, leaving a bag."

"It was a large duffel bag with a long zipper," Jaberi said,

and it turned out to be full of highly explosive material. "It was

unclear whether the men in the pickup intended to actually enter

Iraq, or whether they were simply waiting for someone to come so

that they could hand the bag off to him."

The American military did not comment, and it was not possible

to independently verify the findings of the Najaf customs police.

The Indonesian police have stepped up

security ahead of the expected executions this week of three

Islamic militants convicted in the 2002 Bali bombings.

On Tuesday, the police were investigating bomb threats made

against the American and Australian embassies. The threats, sent to

the police by text message, warned that the embassies would be

attacked if the executions were carried out. A police spokesman

said both embassies remained open.

Fearing retaliatory attacks, security at major hotels, shopping

centers and embassies in the capital has increased. The police also

said parties planned for Wednesday celebrating the outcome of the

American presidential election would have added security.

Authorities on the resort island of Bali were checking all

vehicles at every point of entry. Outside the prison in West Java

where the three men are being held, the police have erected barbed

wire barricades. No one, including lawyers for the three, has been

allowed to travel to the prison in recent days, which is set on a

small offshore island.

"The situation so far is stable," said Sulistiyo Ishak, a

spokesman for the national police. "But there is definitely the

possibility that the executions could lead certain groups to try

and take revenge. What we are doing is to be much more aware of our

surroundings and to try and anticipate anything that could be a

threat."

The three men, Iman Samudra, Ali Ghufron and his younger

brother, Amrozi, have exhausted their appeals. The attorney general

has said the executions, by firing squad, would likely take place

early this month.

The men, members of Jemaah Islamiyah, a regional terror network

associated with al-Qaida, were convicted of building, transporting

and placing the three bombs that killed 202 people, mostly foreign

tourists.

In signed statements dated Oct. 22 and 23 and published on an

Islamist Web site under the headline "Not one drop of a Muslim's

blood comes for free," the men called on Muslims to "pick up the

sword" and continue to fight for Islam.

Lawyers for the three men filed last-minute appeals to delay the

executions, but were quickly rebuffed by the Indonesian courts,

which said they had no more legal options and that the executions

would proceed.

The lawyers, however, said previous appeals were never seriously

considered and complained that the authorities had made it

difficult for them to meet with their clients.

"We don't believe their case has been properly tried," said

Achmad Michdan, one of the lawyers. "We believe all proper legal

procedures should be followed before the execution takes place."

One of Osama bin Laden's sons, who made

headlines last year when he married a British woman, is seeking

asylum in Spain, the government said Tuesday.

Omar Osama bin Laden, 27, arrived at Madrid's Barajas

International Airport on Monday on a flight from Cairo bound for

Casablanca, Morocco, a spokeswoman for the Interior Ministry said.

The spokeswoman said that bin Laden was traveling on a Saudi

passport and was being held at the airport in a special center for

asylum seekers. Under Spanish law, the government has 72 hours to

decide whether to allow him to stay, she said.

If he is granted provisional asylum, bin Laden may remain in

Spain while his case is reviewed. If his petition is denied, he has

one day to file an appeal.

It was not immediately clear on what grounds bin Laden, a

self-declared pacifist who is the son of the al-Qaida founder and

his first wife, Najwa Ghanem, was basing his asylum claim.

Bin Laden, who wears his hair in long braids and shares his

infamous father's arched brows, caused a media storm in Britain

last year when he married Jane Felix-Browne, then 51, who took the

Muslim name Zaina Mohamed al-Sabah.

She met bin Laden during a trip to Egypt in April last year and

married him in September, according to news reports at the time.

Bin Laden was refused a visa by the British Embassy in Cairo in

April because of what the authorities perceived to be his loyalty

to his father, which would "cause considerable public concern" in

Britain, according to The Associated Press. He was said in those

reports to have gone into exile with his father in Sudan and

Afghanistan, but returned to Saudi Arabia before the Sept. 11

attacks.

One of 19 children fathered by Osama bin Laben, Omar is the

fourth-eldest son, according to several news reports. "I am proud

of my name, but if you have a name like mine you will find people

run away from you, are afraid of you," he told CNN last January,

urging his father to "find another way."

Britons have been especially sensitive about al-Qaida since four

suicide bombers killed 52 people on the London transit system on

July 7, 2005. In a video recording made before the attacks, one of

the bombers, Mohammad Sidique Khan, declared loyalty to "our

beloved sheik, Osama bin Laden."

JUST 100 DAYS FROM DIGITAL TV ERA, MANY VIEWERS STILL UNPREPARED Moving in Washington and financial categories for release Sunday, Nov. 9. Chart material follows text. Cox News Service

WASHINGTON -- "Hey, the TV's not working!"

Just 100 days from Sunday, TV viewers in millions of U.S.

households may be startled to discover that most television

stations have turned off their analog broadcast signals, leaving

older TV sets blank unless they're tethered to cable, satellite

dishes or digital converter boxes.

Broadcasters and government officials are trying to warn

Americans about the dawning of the digital TV age on Feb. 17, but

critics say those efforts may be inadequate for many of the 13.4

million households without pay TV.

"It would appear there will be a lot of people whose TV sets

will go blank," said Mark Cooper, research director of the

Consumer Federation of America.

Other confused viewers may end up spending far more money than

necessary to cope with analog TV tuners that no longer can receive

broadcast signals. Unfortunately, "a lot of people will spend more

money than they actually need to, because cable advertising is

pushing them to get $600-a-year cable service when people could

solve the problem with a $50 box," Cooper said.

Supporters of the digital age say that all TV viewers will start

getting better pictures and sound, as well as more programming

choices. Moreover, by abandoning analog signals, broadcasters will

create more radio spectrum to be used for public safety

communications and advanced wireless services.

Cooper said the government has made the right decision, because

emergency responders really do need more communications

capabilities. "It was time to move on," he said.

Now, the government is working hard to get the word out to the

estimated 12 percent of households whose only access to TV is via a

home antenna and whose older sets aren't equipped with a digital

tuner to handle the new signals.

For those viewers, the choice is to subscribe to a pay TV

service, buy a new set, or buy a converter box to make their

present set digital-ready.

The federal government is providing $40 coupons to reduce the

cost of the converter boxes. The coupons typically push down the

price of a box to about $20 or even less at major chains such as

Wal-Mart, Sears and Best Buy.

At a Senate Commerce Committee hearing into the DTV transition

in September, Federal Communications Commission Chairman Kevin

Martin said the people most in need of help are "senior citizens,

non-English speakers and minorities, people with disabilities,

low-income consumers, and those living in rural or tribal areas."

Committee chairman Daniel Inouye, D-Hawaii, urged the FCC and

the National Telecommunications and Information Administration

(NTIA) to work harder to make sure the new White House and Congress

do not immediately face a "communications crisis. We have too many

crises facing us at the moment."

Martin said FCC officials are now better prepared because of a

test run they began Sept. 8 in Wilmington, N.C. Local broadcasters

there turned off their analog signals and now send only digital

signals to the area's 400,000 viewers.

The test generally has been viewed as a success. Retailers had

enough converter boxes on hand, and local broadcasters tried hard

to educate viewers. Still, officials found that many older people

needed help hooking up their converter boxes, adjusting their

antennas or scanning channels, and some viewers could not afford

the boxes even with the subsidy coupons.

To reach the poor and elderly before their TVs go blank on Feb.

17, government needs the "commitment of the local community,

including local industry, governmental and nongovernmental

organizations," Martin said.

For months, NTIA has been mailing out converter-box coupons.

Still, consumer groups fear NTIA could be swamped by a surge in

coupon requests as the conversion approaches.

Even after every viewer has cable, a converter or a new TV,

there still will be problems.

Many people may find they have fallen off the so-called

"digital cliff." People who receive a weak analog signal still

can view programming, even if it's less than perfectly clear. But

with digital tuners, when a signal gets too weak, it "drops off a

cliff" and disappears entirely.

According to the DTV Transition Coalition, if your TV was built

before 1998, you can assume it lacks a built-in digital tuner. If

it was built after 2004, it likely does have a digital tuner,

though that's not a sure thing.

The coalition says the best way to determine whether your TV set

has a built-in digital tuner is to check the owner's manual or the

manufacturer's Web site.

The coalition also says owners can look for an input connection

labeled "digital input" or "ATSC" (for Advanced Television

Systems Committee, which developed the DTV format).

Don't feel reassured just because you own a newer set that was

advertised as "HD-ready" or "HDTV monitor." Such sets may lack

the internal tuner needed to receive digital broadcasts, even

though they can display digital and high-definition signals once a

converter box or cable connection has converted the signals from

analog.

GETTING READY FOR DIGITAL BROADCASTS

Owners of analog TV sets have three ways to go after Feb. 17:

-- Keep the old TV set and hook it to a converter box

-- Subscribe to cable, satellite or another pay service

-- Buy a modern television with a built-in digital tuner.

To help pay for the converter box, the government is providing

each household with up to two $40 coupons. There are several ways

to apply for a coupon:

-- Visit the site https://www.dtv2009.gov

-- Call 1-888-DTV-2009

-- Write to the Coupon Program, P.O. BOX 2000, Portland, Ore.

97208-2000

Marilyn Geewax's e-mail address is mgeewaxcoxnews.com

Britt Barkley and his wife, Suzanne, have a deal.

If he vacuums the downstairs, she vacuums the upstairs in their

nearly 4,000-square-foot home.

She mows and he edges, a major job given their huge, tree-dotted

yard. She cooks and he cleans up after dinner. He does the laundry.

She helps put it away.

"I actually have girlfriends who are jealous because he helps

me so much," says Suzanne, whose tanned legs and arms attest to

her love of yard work.

Granted, Britt might be doing a tad more now that he's retired

and around the house after 26 years in military service. But he's

always been willing to share the load in their six-year

relationship, says Suzanne, who works out of the house reselling

computer systems.

You might think couples like the Barkleys are an anomaly --

statistics show

American wives do the majority of the work when it comes to

housecleaning, child care and related chores.

But the tectonic plates that undergird the American home front

are shifting. More and more men are entering the domestic domain,

experts say. The resulting egalitarian-style marriages point to a

new way of life where dusting, burping and sauteing will no longer

be considered mainly X-chromosome endeavors.

Britt, a square-jawed retired Air Force officer with a buzz cut,

credits his enlightened attitude to a hardscrabble upbringing in

which all his siblings were expected to carry their weight. His

mother worked during the day and his father, a musician, worked at

night.

"So I grew up seeing a male figure sweeping and cleaning and

cooking," says Britt, who like his wife is in his mid-40s. "He

did the breakfast, he did the lunch."

And the military "engrains in you from Day One that you will

take care of everything, fold your own clothes and more," he adds.

During the years after his unhappy first marriage -- that wife

didn't help around the house at all -- Britt lived alone and

maintained his own household.

So when he and Suzanne got hitched, both were used to fulfilling

their own domestic duties.

To be sure, unions in which the menfolk lend a hand in the

kitchen and laundry room have been around forever. But studies show

the divide that separates who does what around the house

gender-wise is slowly coming down.

Increasingly, you can find couples such as Eric and Tracy

Wernli, whose tag-team approach to parenting means the job of

nurturing their 5-year-old son Blake gets spread around evenly.

"I get (Blake) up in the morning, get him dressed and fed,"

says Eric, 36, a middle school assistant principal. "(Tracy)

brushes his hair and teeth and takes him to school. I usually cook

and she cleans the dishes.

"Laundry we share. It's always been this way. My wife has a job

just like me, so there's no reason she should be pulling more of

the load. It's only fair that I help out."

Tracy, 38, a school district special education coordinator, says

alternating who gives Blake a bath and reads him a bedtime story

means she and her spouse of eight years each get to spend quality

time with their son. And it relays to Blake that parenting is an

equal-opportunity affair.

"We didn't want Blake to think (nurturing) was just Mommy's

job," Tracy says. She and Eric sat down early in their marriage

and hashed out their current equitable arrangement.

"We did a lot of talking," Tracy says. "I'm a very neat,

organized and structured person, and Eric is a little more

lackadaisical. I told him we needed to come up with something so

that I'm not bitching so much. And he really followed through. He's

amazing. It's not always perfect, but we really work at making

things even."

Stephanie Coontz of the Council on Contemporary Families points

to a number of surveys that reflect the shifts in the American

landscape. From 1997 to

2003, the gender gap in hours devoted to housework fell by more

than 70 percent, she says.

The '90s saw big increases in the number of hours men spent in

cooking and child care. In 1992, only 2 percent of households

evinced "cooking equality" between men and women; by 2002 it was

up to was 12 percent.

This was especially true, she says, in homes where the women

worked full time, but the increase in men's domestic involvement

has spilled over into traditional households where the wife stays

home.

"We've seen real changes," says Coontz, who largely attributes

the rise in men helping out to the influx of women into the work

force. "We've all had to sit down and think through these kinds of

issues in a way no previous generation bothered to do."

Are egalitarian marriages truly happier? Francine M. Deutsch,

professor of psychology at Mount Holyoke College and author of

"Halving It All: How Equally Shared Parenting Works," says

gauging marital happiness is tricky: Most people are loathe to

report they're unhappy. But when she asked wives how often they

become angry, women in traditional marriages report a significantly

higher level of anger.

"But the most unhappy people in the entire sample were the

women who were working fulltime and doing 75 percent of the work at

home," she says. Their husbands were unhappy, too, she adds. So

much for Superwoman.

Wayne Brown, at 60, would seem to come from a generation

immersed in traditional gender roles, but he carries his weight

around the house so his wife, Debbie, 49, can work at a tennis

ranch and go to community college to become an ultrasound

technician. He works out of his home shop rebuilding police SWAT

vehicles and takes time to vacuum, sweep, mop and do the laundry.

"It's a mistake that a wife should have to do everything," he

says. "Why should the guy sit on his butt?"

People like to read numbers in the newspaper.

True sports fans, for example, gobble up the box scores and

other statistics that we refer to as "agate" lists -- named for

the tiny type just 1-14 of an inch high (though why it's named

after a volcanic rock, I can't say).

So let's take a look at some of the numbers swirling about our

newsroom last week -- statistics that reveal the depth of the

economic meltdown, the course of the presidential race and the

performance of our own industry. They're revealing.

-- 72: Percentage of Albany-area residents who read the Times

Union newspaper or our Web site every month, according to new data

from Scarborough Research. That puts us in the top 10 newspapers

nationally for readership growth.

Ah, you say, but I read that newspapers' daily circulation is

dropping. Well, yes: People don't interact with news sources the

way they used to. They're not watching the evening newscasts,

listening to radio reports or picking up the paper every day, but

more people are checking our Web site several times a day. That

helps account for the varying numbers.

Around the country, in fact, publishers are intentionally

trimming that daily circulation number by focusing on their core

markets rather than outlying areas and on the days of the week when

people read more. What's dropping is known as "vanity

circulation," and in its place is an effort to get papers into the

hands of real news consumers (the demographic our advertisers most

want to reach, too).

-- 0.25 and 1.11: Percentage of increase in Times Union

circulation over the last six months on Sunday and Saturday,

respectively, according to data released by the Audit Bureau of

Circulation. That underscores the migration to late-in-the-week

readership. It's the fifth straight half-year reporting period in

which this newspaper has reported growing circulation -- a streak

matched by only one other newspaper in the country. Don't tell me

there's not a great future for print journalism in this market.

-- $121 billion, $56 billion: The first number is the total New

York state budget. The second is what Gov. David Paterson says the

state actually has to spend, once you pull out direct aid to

localities and spending mandated by the federal government.

In an editorial board meeting here, Paterson discussed

projections that the state will run $1.5 billion short of revenue

in the current fiscal year and face a deficit of $12.5 billion in

the fiscal year that begins next April 1. In weighing the depth of

the state fiscal crisis created by the economic meltdown, then, the

$14 billion in cuts confronting Paterson and legislators needs to

be compared against not the total state budget, but the smaller

figure our lawmakers actually can control. So Paterson wants

Washington to come up with a second stimulus package, this one

aimed at hard-hit states.

-- $86.9 billion: That's how much less money New York got from

the federal government last year than we sent to Washington in

taxes. No wonder Paterson says more of it should be sent back now.

The financial crisis has hit the state that is home to Wall Street

harder than anywhere else. The three states that get the biggest

payback from the feds: South Carolina (whose governor

unsurprisingly opposes federal aid to troubled states), Arizona and

Alaska.

Look at that list and figure which of the national tickets is

less likely to side with Paterson in this debate.

-- Roughly 0: Percentage of cable TV pundits and newspaper

columnists who will admit they believed the polls showing Barack

Obama ahead if John McCain wins on Tuesday.

(Rex Smith is editor of the Times Union. Share your thoughts at

http://blogs.timesunion.com/editors. )

Cox News Service

ATLANTA -- Just when you thought it was fine to relax with a glass

of well-earned wine and nibble on a few whole-grain crackers,

nutrition researchers are here to ask, "Did you have enough

protein today?"

OK, we know you're not into body-building competitions, but get

a load of this midlife reality check: You could be losing muscle

mass and strength - a condition called sarcopenia - if you don't

consume enough high-quality protein on a daily basis.

"We're seeing sarcopenia, which commonly occurs in the elderly,

in younger subjects in their early to mid-50s," said Susan

Hewlings, a registered dietitian and assistant professor at Stetson

University in Florida who specializes in protein metabolism.

Hewlings and other researchers presenting at the 2008 American

Dietetic Association's annual Food and Nutrition Conference shed

new light on the connection between what we eat and the health of

our aging muscles. Bottom line: Research shows that to prevent and

treat lost muscle mass you must consume 1.5 grams of protein for

every kilogram of body weight per day. That translates to about 90

grams of protein a day for a normal weight man and would be less if

you're a tiny gal.

Breakfast, lunch, dinner

But here's where the real specific advice kicks in: You should

be including sources of high-quality protein such as eggs, milk and

meats and balancing your protein intake throughout the day.

"Typically, people eat less protein at breakfast, a little more

at lunch and then eat a lot at dinner," Hewlings said. "To

optimize protein synthesis and prevent sarcopenia, it needs to be

more evenly distributed." There goes that diet plan to starve all

day and splurge on a big steak for dinner. Your muscles are hungry

for amino acids found in protein foods all day long.

In fact, Robert Wolfe, professor of geriatrics at the University

of Arkansas for Medical Sciences in Little Rock, warns that "When

there are periods of the day when no amino acids are being absorbed

from the gut, muscle serves as the only significant reservoir of

protein."

That means your body starts robbing the muscles of stored

protein to keep organs and other tissues humming along. So make

sure you're eating protein-containing foods every day and including

protein in each meal. And that includes snacks. Something as simple

as fresh apple slices topped with peanut butter is a good choice.

Hewlings emphasized that protein alone can't do the job of

preserving and building muscles as we age. "I call exercise the

'poor man's plastic surgery,"' she said. "And note that physical

activity boosts lean body mass only if you've got enough protein in

your diet."

Keep fat intake down

Since foods are often a combination of the three macronutrients

(protein, carbohydrates and fat), choose protein-containing foods

wisely with other health concerns in mind. For instance, a 6-ounce

broiled porterhouse steak is a great source of complete protein -

38 grams - but contains 44 grams of fat. The same amount of salmon

gives you 34 grams of protein and 18 grams of fat, and it's the

kind of fat that's good for you. For a complete list of protein

foods to include in a healthy diet, go to www.mypyramid.gov.

Carolyn O'Neil is a registered dietitian and co-author of "The

Dish on Eating Healthy and Being Fabulous!" E-mail: carolyn AT

carolynoneil.com. This article appeared in The Atlanta

Journal-Constitution.

Remains of a World War II tail gunner missing

for 64 years have been positively identified as Martin Troy, whose

B-24H Liberator bomber was shot down by a German Messerschmitt on

June 30, 1944.

The bomber crashed in a swampy area in Hungary.

The 32-year-old Troy, a staff sergeant from Norwalk, was the

only member of the 10-person crew not accounted for. He was the

tail gunner on the B-24 named "Miss Fortune," which was shot down

as it returned to Italy after a mission in Germany.

Troy's body was found near Nemesvita, Hungary, beside Lake

Balaton, after an August 2007 excavation by the U.S. military's

Joint POW/MIA Accounting Command teams. DNA tests were performed on

Troy's sister, 90-year-old Julia Caravutto, and her son, William

Wilcox.

Troy will be buried Nov. 20 with full military honors at

Arlington National Cemetery outside Washington, D.C.

"It's very good; we've been waiting a long time for this,"

said Troy's nephew, Benjamin Sugden of Stratford, Conn. "It's

really a relief."

Troy and his wife Grace, who died in 1964, did not have any

children. Troy was one of five children in his family.

"There are families that have been waiting decades, especially

those like this case that have been waiting from World War II, and

this brings an overwhelming sense of closure," said Capt. Mary

Olsen, a public affairs officer for the Pentagon's POW/MIA offices

in Arlington, Va.

Olsen said nearly 100 such identifications occur each year.

"Many families were just sent telegrams saying 'your family

member is missing in action,"' she said, "but now we can give

them that closure."

Beverly Beckham: Shoes to die for - but not to walk in

They were incredibly impractical but absolutely beautiful

things, black

suede, foldover shoe boots with stiletto heels. They were fun. They

were

fashionable. And they were on sale.

Plus I had a coupon.

They were not what I needed, not what I was looking for, and not

anything I

could actually walk in. But I loved them and when the salesman

asked if I

would like to try them on, I said yes.

I stood. I posed. I strutted in front of a mirror. They were the

most

frivolous shoes ever. They were exactly what not to wear in the

inclement

Northeast. They were too high and an accident waiting to happen.

Yet they were exactly what I wanted.

What is it about stilettos anyway? They're like young men with a

package of

Lucky Strikes sticking out of a rolled-up T-shirt sleeve. No matter

your

age, they get your attention.

My grandmother Kay was in her 70s and still couldn't pass a

display of high

heels without swooning and sitting down to try on a pair. Her

closet was

full of leopard and patent leather she couldn't walk in. She sat in

them

though. She put them on to read a book or a magazine. She put her

feet

high on a hassock, looked up over her glasses now and then and

smiled. She

said fancy shoes made her feel fancy.

I am not like my grandmother. I don't buy shoes just to sit in.

But I don't

buy them to walk in, either. I buy them when I need them - blue

satin to

match a blue satin dress - or when they're on sale. Cocoa brown

Italian

leather boots set on a stacked wooden heel? Fake glass ballroom

slippers

that look just like Cinderella's? Purple Mary-Jane style patent

leather

sandals with crisscross straps?

All bargains.

OK, bargains I never wore because the boots were too big, the

slippers too

small, and, though the sandals were just right, who wears bright

purple?

But I made these bad decisions a long time ago. I was young. I was

immature. I am mature now.

So last week I went in search of practical shoes, shoes for

traipsing

through airports, shoes for ice and snow, shoes I wouldn't kick off

in

movie theaters and dark restaurants, shoes that didn't pinch or

squeeze or

send stabbing pains through my sole.

And I found them right away in assorted colors in a mall

specialty store,

dozens of shoes with arch supports and stretchable leather and

adjustable

straps and thick, walking-friendly heels.

They were everything I needed: comfortable, practical, and

durable. But

they were not pretty. They were not pretty at all.

I suppose it's possible to plunk down hard cash for a pair of

ugly shoes.

My mother did; for years, she paid for corrective shoes for me. But

the

second I was the one buying my shoes, it was all about looks.

Forget how

they feel.

But I had seen the light, and I was through with that mindset.

I chose black leather pumps with a roomy toe and comfortable

heel. They

fit. They were cushioned. I could walk in them.

But I put them down and walked away, down the escalator, back to

the

incredibly impractical but absolutely beautiful black suede boots

with

stiletto heels.

In the end I didn't buy them, either. I just drooled over them a

little

longer. I bought black clogs that aren't heels but have a little

height and

are so comfortable I forget to take them off.

My grandmother wouldn't wear them. But I can walk in them. And

really,

isn't that what shoes are for?

Beverly Beckham can be reached at bevbeckham@aol.com.

Walt Disney World in Orlando, Fla., has a special rate of $59

for rooms at

some of its value resorts. The offer is good most nights Sunday

through

Thursday now through Nov. 22, then Nov. 29-Dec. 6 and Dec. 14-23.

Bookings

must be made by Dec. 7.

Visit disneyworld.com and click on Tickets &amp;amp; Reservations and

then Special

Offers, or call 407-939-7606 and mention booking code DMK.

Captiva dangles a discount

'Tween Waters Inn of Captiva Island is offering 30 percent off

standard

rates with its USA30% Take Off Sale &amp;amp; Save promotion, available

through

April 2 on stays three nights or longer. The price is valid for

waterview

rooms, studios, or one-bedroom suites. The resort also has a Before

the

Holidays sale Nov. 30-Dec. 18, with discounts from 30-50 percent.

Nightly

rates start at about $175.

Call 800-223-5865 and specify which discount you want. The

website is

tweenwaters.com.

What price romance?

The Naples Beach Hotel &amp;amp; Golf Club is wooing lovers with a

two-night

Sunset Romantic Getaway package for two that includes deluxe

accommodations, a breakfast buffet and dinner for two daily,

reserved beach

chairs and a cabana, one hour of tennis, afternoon tea and cookies,

a

bottle of champagne, and complimentary access to the spa and

fitness

center. The package begins at $810 per couple through Dec. 21; from

$1,110

Dec. 22-April 13; from $850 April 14-May 25; and from $650 May

26-Oct. 1.

Visit naplesbeachhotel.com or call 800-237-7600.

Hey, big spender

If you're an art aficionado and don't mind spending $825 a

night, then a

Regent Bal Harbour four-night package may be for you. From Art

Basel to Art

Butler, available Dec. 1-8, features accommodations at the Bal

Harbour

resort plus daily transfers to Miami's Art Deco district, two

tickets to

the annual Art Basel Miami Beach exhibition, dinner for two with

wine

pairings, a Swiss continental breakfast each morning, and a private

tour of

the resort's $4 million art collection given by its own art butler

or, if

you want, a self-guided tour.

Call 800-545-4000. The website is regentbalharbour.com.

RICHARD P. CARPENTER

Most prices quoted are for double occupancy, minus taxes and

fees. Offers

are subject to availability. Richard P. Carpenter can be reached at

carpenter@globe.com.

NOV. 7- JAN. 25

NEW YORK

"William Eggleston: Democratic Camera, Photographs and Video,

1961-2008":

The Whitney Museum of American Art has organized this first career

retrospective of the photographer's work. It's hard to overstate

the impact

Eggleston has had on American photography. His 1976 exhibition at

New

York's Museum of Modern Art, "William Eggleston's Guide," was a

landmark.

It's best remembered for demonstrating the suitability of color in

art

photography. (The Whitney show includes examples of Eggleston's

early work

in black and white.) "Guide" was also important for showing a new

vision

of the American South, one in which suburban ranch houses mattered

more

than magnolia-scented mansions or sharecropper shacks. Finally,

Eggleston

brought a loving, unemphatic attention to bear on seemingly banal

objects -

a child's tricycle being the most famous example - and showed how

visually

memorable the unheroic could be. Although Eggleston has taken his

best-known work in and around Memphis, the Whitney show includes

examples

of his photographs from other places, most notably, his series on

Los

Alamos, N.M. Also of note is the retrospective's inclusion of the

photographer's legendary long-form video from the early '70s,

"Stranded in

Canton." 945 Madison Ave., 212-570-3600, whitney.org.

THROUGH JAN. 4

BASEL, SWITZERLAND

"The Magic of Things: Still-Life Painting, 1500-1800": The

still life was

accorded little respect as a genre until relatively recently. This

choice

exhibition at the Kunstmuseum Basel of 90 paintings from the

Renaissance,

Baroque, and Enlightenment by artists from Germany and the

Netherlands

makes one wonder why. Rubens and Chardin are among painters with

works

featured. St. Alban-Graben 16, 011-41-61-206-62-62,

kunstmuseumbasel.ch.

THROUGH JAN. 5

PARIS

"Mantegna (1431-1506)": The Louvre has mounted this

comprehensive

retrospective of Andrea Mantegna, one of the pivotal figures in

Renaissance

painting. The 190 works on display include not just paintings but

also

engravings, manuscripts, and sculptures. The aim is to show

Mantegna's

achievement in the larger context of 15th-century humanism. 34-36

quai de

Louvre, 011-33-1-40-20-53-17, louvre.fr.

THROUGH JAN. 11

ST. LOUIS

"Action/Abstraction: Pollock, de Kooning, and American Art,

1940-1976":

It has been more than 20 years since an important retrospective of

the

Abstract Expressionist school of painting. This Saint Louis Art

Museum

exhibition features 50 notable works. Artists represented include

Jackson

Pollock, Willem de Kooning, Philip Guston, Lee Krasner, and

Clyfford Still.

Particular attention is paid to the Abstract Expressionists' impact

on such

younger artists as Helen Frankenthaler, Jasper Johns, and Frank

Stella. 1

Fine Arts Dr., 314-721-0072, slam.org.

THROUGH JAN. 25

MILAN

"Georges Seurat, Paul Signac and the Neoimpressionists": The

masters of

Pointillism, the technique of painting with small dabs of primary

color to

form a larger image, were Seurat and Signac. Pointillism might be

seen as

part of a larger evolution of the Impressionist movement,

Neoimpressionism.

This exhibition at the Palazzo Reale also features work by Camille

and

Lucien Pissarro, Henry van de Velde, and Jan Toorop. Piazza Duomo

12,

011-39-02-875672, -02-54919, ineoimpressionisti.it.

THROUGH FEB. 15

BILBAO, SPAIN

"Cy Twombly": To celebrate the 80th birthday of the American

artist,

Guggenheim Bilbao has put together this retrospective along with

London's

Tate Modern (the exhibition was there last summer). Twombly is best

known,

perhaps, for how his works have straddled painting and drawing.

Discrete

examples of both forms are represented, as well as works that blur

the line

between the two. Also on display are sculptures by Twombly. Avenida

Abandoibarra 2, 011-34-94-435-90-00, www.guggenheim-bilbao.es.

PLAN AHEAD

FEB. 26-MAY 17

PHILADELPHIA

"C?zanne and Beyond": Paul C?zanne was the hinge between 19th-

and

20th-century art. This Philadelphia Museum of Art exhibition

features 40

paintings and 20 watercolors by the modern master (1839-1906),

along with

work by 17 later artists influenced by him. They range from Picasso

and

Matisse to Jasper Johns and the photographer Jeff Wall. 26th Street

and

Benjamin Franklin Parkway, 215-763-8100, philamuseum.org.

MARK FEENEY

Events are sometimes canceled, rescheduled, or sold out; call or

check

online to confirm. Mark Feeney can be reached at

mfeeney@globe.com.

Cox News Service

ATLANTA -- Michael Jenkins wasn't a fun matchup for DeAngelo Hall

on Sunday in Oakland for a lot of reasons.

Not only did Jenkins beat his old Falcons teammate and friend

for a 37-yard touchdown in a 24-0 rout, he wasn't one to bite on

much jibber-jabber, either.

Jenkins said their only real exchange came on their first play

from scrimmage together after the touchdown, when Hall gave him a

"OK, you got one."

"I just smiled," Jenkins said.

Jenkins plays it pretty straight, especially for an NFL wide

receiver - no muss or fuss. At times that means he can blend into

his surroundings a little, including the shadow of emerging star

receiver Roddy White.

But time after time this season Jenkins has stepped out into the

spotlight with big plays - from Matt Ryan's first pass as an NFL

quarterback, which Jenkins turned into a 62-yard touchdown against

Detroit, to his last-second catch to set up the game-winning field

goal against Chicago.

Jenkins was back at it Sunday with the second two-touchdown game

of his career, and first since Sept. 30 of last year against

Houston. He also caught a 27-yarder from Ryan on a corner route.

"I think Michael has done a nice job when he has had

opportunities for balls to come his way," Falcons coach Mike Smith

said. "The defense dictates that. If Matt throws it in his

direction, he's made the play the majority of the time. He's made

some real big plays."

Falcons wide receivers coach Terry Robiskie had his own theory

about Jenkins' day Sunday in which both of his catches went for

touchdowns.

"I think that had a little bit of a buddy, a friend-friend

rival to it," Robiskie said. "He got fired up matched up against

his buddy. I guess he figured he had to outdo him."

That was part of the fun, Jenkins concedes. And he's just

continuing to develop in this offense, trying to take advantage of

the attention going White's way.

White is leading the Falcons with 48 catches, 733 yards and five

touchdowns receiving. Jenkins is second in receiving yards (323)

and touchdowns (three). He's third in receptions (18) behind

Jerious Norwood.

Jenkins' 17.9 yards per catch leads the Falcons.

White is fourth in the NFL with those 733 receiving yards.

"That's the big thing about Roddy having the year he's

having," Robiskie said. "Now all of a sudden we can get in a

situation where they've got to double Roddy, they've got to put

their best guy on Roddy. If Mike ends up with the lesser guy, the

third corner, he's got to win. That's his role. That's what we

expect of him."

As it turns out, Robiskie has quite a few expectations of

Jenkins, and he's not afraid to share them.

"I won't tell you anything that I haven't told him, but every

day of our lives with him, we've got to keep working on being

physical, physical and physical," Robiskie said. "Being able to

fight and beat and get after the other guys. Like I tell him, he's

too much of a pretty boy. Mike's too busy right now trying to be a

model. I think that's what his goal in life is, to catch a couple

touchdowns and then put his face up on the billboard. I think he's

hoping some modeling agency picks up on that."

A little harsh? Maybe. But it sounds like Robiskie doesn't treat

Jenkins any differently than he would - and does - his own son.

Robiskie's son Brian is a star receiver at Ohio State, where

Jenkins started for three years. He gets plenty of teasing, too.

"I tell Mike and my son, they're like twins, them pretty boys

from Ohio State," Robiskie said. "They got to get their hair cut

and put some lotion on before the game."

Jenkins laughed when told about that last comment. He'd heard it

before.

He knows Robiskie wants him to be physical at the line of

scrimmage and in the run game. And Jenkins seems comfortable in a

role as a receiver in a run-dominated attack.

"We're going to run the football," Jenkins said. "When we do

that it opens up the passing game downfield. It's making the most

of every ball that comes your way. Bring in every catch."

Carroll Rogers writes for The Atlanta Journal-Constitution.

E-mail: crogers AT ajc.com. Staff writer D. Orlando Ledbetter

contributed to this article.

MASSIVE WAVES A MYSTERY AT MAINE HARBOR A graphic is being sent to NYTNS Photo Service subscribers. Non-subscribers can make individual purchases by calling 212-556-4204 or 888-603-1036. Dockworker Marcy Ingall saw a giant wave in the distance last

Tuesday

(10/28) afternoon and stopped in her tracks. It was an hour before

low tide

in Maine's Boothbay Harbor, yet without warning, the muddy harbor

floor

suddenly filled with rushing, swirling water.

In 15 minutes, the water rose 12 feet, then receded. And then it

happened

again. It occurred three times, she said, each time ripping apart

docks and

splitting wooden pilings.

"It was bizarre," said Ingall, a lifelong resident of the

area.

"Everybody was like, 'Oh my God, is this the end?"' It was not

the

apocalypse, but it was a rare phenomenon, one that has baffled

researchers.

The National Weather Service said ocean levels rapidly rose in

Boothbay,

Southport, and Bristol in a matter of minutes around 3 p.m. on Oct.

28 to

the surprise of ocean watchers. Exactly what caused the rogue waves

remains

unknown.

"The cause of it is a mystery," said National Weather Service

meteorologist John Jensenius, who first reported the waves from a

field

office in Gray, Maine. "But it's not mysterious that it

happened."

Specialists have posed a variety of possible explanations,

saying the waves

could have been caused by a powerful storm squall or the slumping

of

mountains of sediment from a steep canyon in the ocean - a sort of

mini

tsunami. The last time such rogue waves appeared in Maine was at

Bass

Harbor in 1926.

Jensenius said the occurrence is so unusual, that specialists

don't have a

name for the phenomenon.

"That's part of our problem," he said.

A similar occurrence in Florida more than 15 years ago continues

to baffle

researchers. A series of 12- to 15-foot waves hit Daytona Beach on

July 3,

1992, injuring more than 20 people and lifting and tossing dozens

of cars.

Jeff List, an oceanographer at the US Geological Survey at Woods

Hole said

he and other researchers studied the occurrence, but no one has

been able

to pinpoint the cause. And he said similarly enormous waves

appeared once

on the Great Lakes.

Could such a wave or waves enter Boston Harbor, or even engulf

the

Massachusetts coast?

"It seems a little unlikely one could hit Boston," List said.

"But then

again, these things are always surprises when they occur."

A squall line surge, which occurs when fast-moving storm winds

sweep over

water that is traveling the same speed, can create such a wave.

(The speed

of waves is directly related to wind speed and the depth of the

ocean at

any given point.)

List and other specialists said such an occurrence is

exceedingly rare, but

when it occurs, "you get this interaction that causes a large

bulge of

water to rise up."

Jensenius said that might have been a factor last week, when a

major storm

front brought rain to most of the East Coast, particularly southern

New

England. But he said that does not solve the mystery, adding that

he had

not ruled out a massive "land slump" underwater. Such slumps can

create

waves that may be classified as tsunamis, although no where near

the size

and scale of the tsunami that occurred in the Indian Ocean in 2004.

Those

fast-moving and deadly waves were caused by a massive earthquake.

Tsunami-like waves may not be as rare on the East Coast as most

people

think. Jensenius referenced a 2002 article in the International

Journal of

the Tsunami Society that called the threat of tsunami and

tsunami-like

waves generated in the Atlantic Ocean "very real despite a general

impression to the contrary."

The article said such waves appear "in most cases to be the

result of

slumping or landsliding associated with earthquakes or with wave

action

associated with strong storms."

Explosive decompression of underwater methane could also be a

factor.

Jensenius said he is trying to gather information on the waves

that hit

Boothbay Harbor, adding that he has asked local businesses such as

banks

whether the event might have been recorded on security videos.

"It could be this or it could be that, but as a science, it is

very

difficult to tie it down," he said of the waves.

List also said the waves could have been triggered by the same

conditions

that cause a tsunami, including a breaking glacier. Rogue waves can

result

from a tsunami traveling through the ocean that breaks "down into

numerous

waves."

According to the National Weather Service, no earthquakes or

seismic

activity were reported in the area when the Boothbay waves

appeared. List

noted that there was no seismic reading when the Daytona waves

struck.

Tom Lippmann, an oceanographer in the Marine Sciences Department

at the

University of New Hampshire, said he also suspected that the Maine

wave was

a squall line surge. The National Weather Service incorrectly

called it a

tide surge, he said.

"Tides in the Gulf of Maine are essentially driven by celestial

bodies'

pull on the earth's water," he said. "They're very well predicted

and

very well known."

Residents and business owners in Boothbay said they were glad

the

phenomenon didn't happen at high tide, when it might have caused

massive

flooding and more extensive damage. Janice Newell, who lives nearby

in Head

of the Harbor, told the local newspaper the rushing water "was of

biblical

proportion."

"There were three large whirlpools in the inner harbor, up to

within a

foot of my neighbor's wall," she told the Boothbay Register. "It

was

beautiful, but it was scary."

Elena Smith, a waitress and part-owner of McSeagull's restaurant

overlooking the harbor, said the late-afternoon lunch crowd sat

speechless

as the waters rose and receded. She was stunned to see the normally

safe

and placid harbor suddenly run like rapids. Some residents reported

seeing

massive whirlpools of water that disappeared, leaving clam shells

and

seaweed in vortex patterns on the harbor floor.

"It felt like somebody took the plug out somewhere" in the

ocean, Smith

said. "It felt like there must have been water missing in the

ocean

someplace."

Megan Woolhouse can be reached at mwoolhouse@globe.com.

"DEMOCRATICAL PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE Joe Biden blasted John

McCain over

the weekend for voting against raising the minimum wage," said an

item

last month at the Dallas Morning News website.

Since the posting was time-stamped 5 a.m., that "Democratical"

may well

have been a slip of the sleep-deprived brain, the writer's fingers

stretching for the next word - "presidential" - before he had

finished

the first.

It's not the first time in recent history the typo has seen the

light of

day. There's an example in a 2004 commentary at the Chattanoogan's

website:

"Like Barack Obama said in his Democratical National Convention

address

'we are one people.' " And in 1992, the Atlanta Constitution seems

to have

endorsed "Democratical Presidential Nominee Bill Clinton."

A few decades earlier, though, that Democratical wouldn't have

raised an

eyebrow. David K. Barnhart, who posted the Dallas Morning News

citation at

linguistlist.org, the American Dialect Society's discussion list,

noted

that the Oxford English Dictionary has examples of the adjective

from the

mid-16th to the mid-18th century, as an everyday variant of

democratic. A

1589 religious tract, for example, says the English church "is

Monarchical

in regard of our head, Christ; Aristocratical in the Eldership; and

Democratical in the people."

And America proved just as hospitable to the long form of the

adjective.

"Aristotle, and other Grecian political writers, recognized but

three

species of government: the Monarchical, the Aristocratical and the

Democratical," wrote a contributor to the American Whig Review in

1847.

With the adjective already in circulation, it's only natural

that the

Democratic Party's members and sympathizers would now and then be

called

democratical, as in an 1856 essay on political loyalty in The

National Era:

"We leave to democratical newspaper-writers 'to go through thick

and thin

for The Party.' "

Unlike today's "Democrat Party," Democratical doesn't seem to

have been a

term of abuse. In 1873, The Nation mentioned "the extreme

democratical

party." In 1908, the Newark (Ohio) Advocate reported that "the

Democratical Congressional convention of the seventeenth district

opened

auspiciously." (That could, of course, be the same sort of slip as

"Democratical presidential.") In 1924, the Mexia Daily News, in

Texas,

complained that "fundamentalists call the liberal anti-Christ and

old

fogey Republican calls the Democratical and the Progressive red."

But democratical gradually faded away. When, exactly, it began

to sound odd

is hard to say: Reporting that a local worthy had "resigned from

the

Democratical committee" might have been standard usage at the

Statesville,

N.C., Standard in 1947. But when, in 1960, the Chicago Tribune

called

Kennedy "the Democratical presidential nominee," the adjective

was more

likely a typist's anticipatory slip, as it is today.

Democratical wasn't the only alternative name for the party

during its

early years. As the 19th century wore on, it was often called

simply, and

warmly, "the Democracy" (with or without a capital letter). The

OED

quotes the New York Herald in 1848: "The election of 1840 was

carried by

false charges against the American democracy." At the Democratic

National

Convention of 1852, several state delegations used the name for

their

party: "The Democracy of Pennsylvania hold principles higher than

all

other considerations."

Even in the 20th century, "the Democracy" persisted for a

while. Linguist

Geoff Nunberg, in an essay broadcast on "Fresh Air," quoted

William

Jennings Bryan addressing a party gathering in Boston in 1902: "I

recognize . . . how much fidelity it requires to plead for

Democracy in New

England."

But by then, the nickname was nearing the end of its run.

Ambrose Bierce

sneered at it in his 1909 usage handbook - "One could as properly

call the

Christian Church 'the Christianity' " - but he was beating a

nearly dead

horse. The opposition was about to launch its own nickname, the one

we

still hear today in President Bush's references to "the Democrat

Party."

Nunberg traced the usage to 1923, when the Republican speaker of

the New

York assembly called the opposition "the Democrat party": Hoover

used it

as well, in 1932, in his campaign against Franklin Roosevelt. There

are

earlier instances of the phrase, noted Nunberg, but "it seems to

have been

regarded more as a rusticism than as a partisan dig. In 1908, a wag

used it

in a poem accusing William Jennings Bryan of being a

flip-flopper":

"Nothin' at all to say, William; nothin' at all to say;

There ain't no Democrat Party, so go on and have your way."

Democrats today are still annoyed by "Democrat Party,"

especially those

who remember it as a favorite epithet of Senator Joseph McCarthy.

But slurs

don't always work as intended, and the Republican overuse of

"Democrat

Party" may actually be neutralizing its sting. Pronounced with a

Texas

twang, especially, it's beginning to sound lke a rusticism all over

again -

just as countrified and toothless as it was 100 years ago.

Here are the stories New York Times editors are considering for

the Page 1 of Wednesday, Nov. 5. The N.Y. Times News Service night

supervisor is Mitch Keller; phone: (888) 346-9867; e-mail:

mikell@nytimes.com.

POLITICS

(Will move in "p" news file.)

(EDS: A separate ELN-BUDGET has moved. For all campaign-related

photos and graphics, search nytimages.com for the key word ELN08.)

ELN-RDP (Undated) -- Ledeall on the presidential race and other

key results. By Adam Nagourney.

With photos.

ELN-CONGRESS (Undated) -- The results of Senate and House races.

By Carl Hulse and David M. Herszenhorn.

With graphic.

ELN-BLACKS-VOTE-JOURNEY (Albany, Ga.) -- For those who withstood

jailings and beatings and threats to their livelihoods during the

civil rights protests of the 1960s, all because they wanted to

vote, the short drive to the polls on Tuesday culminated a lifelong

journey from a time that is at once unrecognizable and eerily

familiar here in southwest Georgia. As they exited the voting

booths, some in wheelchairs, others with canes, these foot soldiers

of the civil rights movement could not suppress either their

jubilation or their astonishment at having voted for an

African-American for president of the United States. By Kevin Sack.

Editors: Previously skedded as ELN-BLACKS-VOTE.

INTERNATIONAL

(Will move in "i" news file.)

COLOMBIA-ARMY-RESIGN (Caracas, Venezuela) -- Colombia's top army

commander resigned on Tuesday after an inquiry tied scores of his

officers to the disappearance of a group of young men whose bodies

were later dumped in mass graves and falsely reported as combat

deaths in the prolonged war with rebel forces. The commander, Gen.

Mario Montoya, stepped down days after President Alvaro Uribe

purged 27 officers from his army and the United Nations urged

Colombia to stop security forces from killing civilians to inflate

statistics in the rebel conflict. (Summary from wires.) By Simon

Romero.

IRAN-POLITICS-SCANDAL (Tehran, Iran) -- The Iranian parliament

voted overwhelmingly Tuesday to dismiss a top government minister,

another setback for President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad eight months

before he faces re-election. Parliament dismissed Interior Minister

Ali Kordan on charges of dishonesty and lying about a fake

doctorate degree he said he had received from Oxford University.

The vote was 188-45, with 14 abstentions. Analysts said the vote

underlined the assertiveness of the parliament amid a growing

economic crisis. By Nazila Fathi.

Editors: An early lede has moved.

FINANCIAL

(Will move in "f"' news file.)

ECON-RISK (Undated) -- Today's economic turmoil, it seems, is an

implicit indictment of the arcane field of financial engineering --

a blend of mathematics, statistics and computing. For its

practitioners designed not only the exotic, mortgage-backed

securities that proved so troublesome, but also the mathematical

models of risk that suggested these securities were safe. What

happened? The models, according to finance experts and economists,

did fail to keep pace with the explosive growth in complex

securities, the resulting intricate web of risk and the dimensions

of the danger. But the larger failure, they say, was human -- in how

the risk models were applied, misunderstood and managed. By Steve

Lohr.

Editors: This story was previously skedded as ECON-CRISIS-SOROS.

ETHANOL-BANKRUPT (Undated) -- Last week, VeraSun, one of the

nation's largest ethanol producers, announced that it had filed for

bankruptcy protection after its bets on the price of corn turned

out to be wrong -- and costly. Several other small producers have

filed for bankruptcy this year, and construction plans for a number

of Midwestern ethanol plants have been postponed or shelved. Shares

in the handful of other public ethanol companies have mostly been

slumping all year -- Aventine Renewable Energy and Pacific Ethanol

trade around $2 and $1 respectively. By Kate Galbraith.

CULTURE

(Will move in "e" news file.)

BROADWAY-ECON (New York) -- The second-act rendition of "Let's

Hang On," in "Jersey Boys," might be Broadway's anthem at the

moment. Nearly every show saw its audience shrink last week, with

14 of them experiencing more than a 10 percent drop in ticket

sales. So musicals and plays are trying to hang on until the

holidays bring an influx of cheer-seeking visitors to New York,

looking to be entertained. After the new year, they will try to

hang on again, through January and February, traditionally two of

the industry's slowest months. By Patricia Cohen.

With photo.

Editors: This story was previously skedded as

BROADWAY-SHORT-RUN.

DINING

(Will move in "d" news file.)

YELP-RESTAURANT-REVIEWS (Undated) -- You too can be a restaurant

critic. And not just an anonymous Zagateer, dutifully filling in

forms. You can have fans. You can get the glory of personal thanks

from chefs you've deified, or the smug satisfaction of hate mail

from those you've savaged. You can hobnob with sous-chefs at food

events. If your soul is for sale, you can cadge free drinks or

meals. As a bonus, you might even get a sex life -- and if so

inclined, you can discuss it in detail, online, with fellow

foodies. Where oh where, you ask, is this magic matchbook cover?

How do I apply for this once-in-a-lifetime offer? It's simple. Just

sign up at Yelp.com and review away. By Donald G. McNeil Jr.

With photos NYT34-36.

ECUADOR-CHOCOLATE (Undated) -- A group of Ecuadoran Indians have

become the first cacao growers to become chocolate makers. By Jill

Santopietro.

With photos NYT28-29.

SPORTS

(Will move in "s" news file.)

FBH-GA-2ND-CHANCE (Moultrie, Ga.) -- Inhabitants of this rural

hamlet in southwest Georgia overwhelmingly identify themselves as

Christians. They ascribe to the notion of forgiveness. More so,

Moultrians like to believe a man should be judged not on his past,

but what he brings to the here and now. "This," Bob Jones said,

"is a community of second chances." Jones, principal of Colquitt

County High, and two fellow educators persuaded a divided school

board last winter to forgive, if not forget, the transgressions of

the country's most prominent high school football coach and hire

him to rescue the bear-market Packers program. Rush Propst is the

man who was given that second chance. By Mike Tierney.

(Editors: Budgets and advisories are internal documents not for

publication or redistribution outside of client news organizations.

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of our contract terms. All clients receive all budgets, but only

full-service clients receive all stories. Please check your level

of service to determine which stories you will receive.)

Spring blooms in the white of winter: You can make it happen,

and here's how.

If you haven't gotten to plant your spring bulbs yet, keep a few

out. If you've planted them, by all means go buy a few more;

they're starting to hit the sale racks. The easiest to force are

daffodils, narcissus, tulips, hyacinths or crocus.

The best ones to force are the earlier-season varieties; the

later the variety, the taller it typically tends to grow. When you

are forcing bulbs indoors, taller often means top-heavy, or tipping

over.

The whole idea is to fool the bulb into thinking it has actually

spent its required number of days in the frozen garden. Plan on

this part taking a good 13 to 18 weeks, depending on the species.

During this time, the bulbs will be developing their root system,

so you won't see much, if any, green top growth.

Once the recommended cold period has been reached, you can bring

the bulbs indoors. The warmth will trick the bulb into thinking

spring has sprung, and within the first week, you will begin to see

green. Within 10 to 14 more days, you should have color.

So how exactly does all this happen? For starters, get the

calendar out and count backward from the date you'd like to have

the bulbs in bloom.

For example, hyacinths require a minimum of 13 weeks of cold

treatment, then two more weeks or so of warmth before they bloom.

So figure on 15 weeks from planting time.

Next step: Pick a pot with drainage holes, and fill it about

2/3 full with a potting mix. Steer clear of potting soil, as it

tends not to provide ample drainage. Set the bulb pointed end up,

basal end down and flat side facing toward the rim of the pot so

the first leaf that grows will grow out over the rim of the pot. It

just looks nicer this way.

Then cover with soil just over the bulb tip. Water well. If

planting numerous pots, be sure to tag each pot with the name of

the bulbs and the date planted.

Move the pots to a spot that won't freeze but where the

temperature will hover around 35 degrees. Some ideas are a garage,

old refrigerator or unheated basement. I've had good luck under the

stairs of our Bilco door; it's below ground and mouse-proof.

Once they're in the cold treatment, do not water until the

calendar says it's OK to bring them indoors. If you are planting

multiple pots of the same bulbs and would like to extend the bloom

period, stagger moving them in by intervals of 5 to 7 days. When

the time arrives, bring them indoors and place them in a bright

location. Don't put them directly in a south -- or west -- facing

window, though; the heat on a sunny day can become too intense.

Tulips and paperwhite Narcissus, sadly, are best tossed after

they've bloomed. The others can be saved and planted in the garden

come spring.

They won't re-bloom the same spring, but should within 1-2

years.

Once daffodils, narcissus, hyacinths and crocus have bloomed,

cut the flower stalk off, leaving only the leaves, and let the

foliage die naturally. Keep watered as you would any other

houseplant to prevent drying out, and wait until the soil outdoors

thaws. Then plant so they can take advantage of the upcoming

growing season to replenish their stored food supply for next

spring's bloom. Mix in some bonemeal both spring and fall.

As mentioned, each species requires its own cooling period.

Here's a list of the most commonly forced bulbs:

Crocus: 15 weeks

Daffodils and Narcissus: 17 weeks

Grape hyacinths: 14 weeks

Hyacinths: 13 weeks

Tulips: 18 weeks

Paperwhite Narcissus: 0 weeks

Yes, you read it right; Paperwhites do not require pre-cooling

and will bloom about 3-5 weeks after planting. Unless you already

have planted these, the chances for a Thanksgiving bloom are slim,

but timing for Christmas is on schedule.

Paperwhites are typically planted in a container filled with

small stones or bark chips and water. Gently wiggle the bulbs into

the stones -- keeping only the roots, not the entire bulb, in

contact with water -- and place in bright light. You can plant the

other bulbs in stones rather than potting mix and then force

according to the chart, but as with the Paperwhites, discard after

bloom.

Potted bulbs make great homemade Christmas gifts. Just add

directions as to how to finish the forcing steps and a picture of

what they will look like.

Here's to some colorful, snowy winter days.

(Nancy O'Donnell owns Perennial Graphics Nursery in

Schaighticoke, N.Y. Contact her by e-mail at

dodonnell@nycap.rr.com. Gardener's Notebook can be found online

at http://timesunion.com/life.)

Ask chef Jos? Andr?s to describe the flavor of Spain, and he

erupts in an impromptu ode to his homeland:

"Spanish food will taste like the beautiful smell of the

seaside when the water is heating the rocks and you have this

perfume of sea salt. Spain will taste like that," says the

restaurateur and host of PBS's "Made in Spain."

But he's just getting started.

"I could even argue that Spain would smell, not like heavy

smoke, but the smell and taste of the forest with the humidity and

a touch of smoke in the air," Andr?s muses as he shops the Penn

Quarter farmers market in Washington, D.C., for his restaurant,

Minibar.

"And, I would say it smells of history, like beautiful old

cookbooks."

Despite its integral role in the early history of the New World

(remember the NiÃ±a, the Pinta and the Santa Maria?), Spain, for

many Americans, might as well be an undiscovered country.

Andr?s aims to change that. He currently shares the PBS schedule

with Mario Batali, best-known for his Italian-themed restaurants,

books and television shows. Batali's "Spain ... On the Road

Again," pairs him with Oscar winner Gwyneth Paltrow, New York

Times writer Mark Bittman and Spanish actress Claudia Bassols as

they gallivant around the Iberian Peninsula, drinking, eating and

looking beautiful (the women, anyway).

Although they both celebrate the foods of the Iberian Peninsula,

the shows differ in tone.

The Batali-Paltrow show feels a little like hanging out with the

popular kids in high school, except the bus is a Mercedes Benz and

the cafeteria is a Galician vineyard.

Lest the viewer think this is a beautifully filmed exercise in

vanity, both Batali and Paltrow lived in Spain as teenagers and

their return road trip is a homecoming of sorts. Their delight,

along with Bittman's role as resident gruÃ±on (grouch) and Bassols'

gusto tempers the feeling that the viewer has intruded on an

exclusive vacation.

It's tempting to set up a rivalry between the two shows, but

neither host will bite. In fact, Batali celebrated his birthday at

Andr?s' six-seat Minibar recently. "Jos? has the passion and the

ability to translate to the home cook in his show," says Batali by

cell phone from an airport (on his way to play golf with Tiger

Woods -- seriously). "Both of them are going to succeed."

Andr?s the Spaniard agrees, but makes it clear that he got there

first.

"My show started airing in February," says Andr?s, who spent

nearly three years shooting his show, which is in its second season

now. "We were in different seasons waiting for saffron to open,

waiting for the tuna to come or for the harvest of olive oil.

Probably for a cooking show we were very ambitious."

Ambition and a sincere desire to share his native cuisine has

propelled Andr?s' career since he crossed the Atlantic 19 years ago

to work in New York after a stint with the famed innovator Ferran

Adri? at elBulli in northeastern Spain.

With a successful television career in Spain, five restaurants

in Washington, D.C., and The Bazaar in the new SLS Hotel opening in

Beverly Hills, Calif., this month, Andr?s still has a sense of

mission about his work.

"My wife said, 'You can go to Spain and be a TV boy or go to

America and use TV to spread your message.' It's the ultimate way

to tell the story of my country through cooking, and not only in

the kitchen. It's about how powerful Spanish gastronomy is, town by

town, product by product. What I wanted to do was to plant the

seeds and make people want to know more."

Both shows aim to pique viewers' interest in traveling to Spain,

as they are sponsored in part by the Spanish tourism office. And

they're sure to stimulate interest in exploring Spanish flavors

here at home.

Something about the landscape inspires the poet in Batali too.

"Things that grow together go together," he says as he grills

rosemary- and lavender-seasoned lamb chops over grapevine clippings

at Valdub?n Vineyard in one episode. "Everything about this whole

dinner is from 250 yards from here. That is poetry on the planet."

Batali, best-known for his Italian repertoire, says Spanish food

shares the region's cultural and geographic roots. "It's similar

in its Mediterranean-ness to Italian, Greek and southern French

food. They just rely on rice more than pasta. Spanish food has a

smokier flavor. Olives and olive oil. Almost more of the soil,

that's what distinguishes it from Italy."

Basque Tuna Stew Marmitako

This dish got its start over a tiny burner on a fishing boat. It

features the beautiful bonito tuna caught in the north of Spain

plus one or two ingredients that could survive a sailing trip. From

"Made in Spain," by Jos? Andr?s, makes 4 to 6 servings.

Ingredients

1 pound boneless, skinless bonito or yellowfin tuna fillets

2 medium green bell peppers

1/2 cup Spanish extra-virgin olive oil, plus more for drizzling.

2 slices day-old bread, preferably country-style

1 pound plum tomatoes (5 to 6, fresh or canned)

3 cups thinly sliced onions (about 2 large onions)

2 tablespoons minced garlic

1 pound russet potatoes, boiled, peeled and chopped

1/2 cup dry white wine

1/4 cup brandy

1 small guindilla chile pepper, seeded and coarsely chopped (or

your favorite dried, small, hot chile pepper)

2 teaspoons sweet Piment?n (Spanish smoked paprika)

Sea salt, to taste

3 cups water

Chopped flat-leaf parsley, for garnish

Directions

Cut the tuna into 1-inch cubes; place on a plate, cover with

plastic wrap and refrigerate.

Roast the bell peppers under the broiler, turning then as they

brown. Transfer to a bowl, cover with plastic wrap, and steam for

10 minutes. When cool enough to handle, peel peppers, discard skin

and remove seeds. Slice into 2-inch strips and set aside.

In a small saucepan, heat 1/4 cup olive oil over medium heat.

Fry bread until golden, 2-3 minutes on each side. Transfer to a

paper towel-lined plate to drain.

Slice the tomatoes in half. Place a large-holed grater over a

large mixing bowl. Rub the cut surface of the tomatoes over the

grater until all of the flesh has been grated into pulp. Discard

the skins.

In a 12-quart stockpot, heat the remaining 1/4 cup olive oil

over medium-low heat. Add onions, garlic and roasted bell pepper

strips; cook, stirring occasionally, about 20 minutes, until onions

are golden brown. Add potatoes and cook 3 minutes, then add wine

and brandy; cook 2 to 3 minutes. Stir in tomato pulp, guindilla

pepper and smoked paprika, cook 10 minutes. Fold in fried bread and

cook for 2 minutes. Add 3 cups water; cover and cook for 15

minutes, gently shaking the pot occasionally to prevent the

potatoes from sticking.

Meanwhile, season the chilled tuna cubes with about 1 teaspoon

salt, add tuna to pot, stirring to combine. Cover and cook for 3

minutes. The tuna should be juicy inside and barely cooked through.

Remove pot from heat and adjust seasoning. Garnish each serving

with chopped parsley and a drizzle of olive oil.

Scallops With AlbariÃ±o Wine

From "Made in Spain." Jos? Andr?s recommends Taylor brand bay

scallops, but if you can't find them, look for dry-packed, not

wet-packed, scallops. Serves 4.

Ingredients

2 tablespoons Spanish extra-virgin olive oil, plus more for

drizzling

1 cup diced onion

2 garlic cloves, minced

1/4 cup albariÃ±o wine, plus 2 teaspoons

1 tablespoon finely chopped jam?n Serrano (dry-cured Spanish

ham)

2 teaspoons chopped fresh flat-leaf parsley

Sea salt to taste

8 scallops in their shells

3 tablespoons fresh bread crumbs

Directions

Heat the olive oil in a medium saut? pan over low heat, add the

onions and cook until golden brown, about 30 minutes. Stir in the

garlic and cook for another 2 minutes, then add 1/4 cup of the wine

and simmer until the wine has evaporated and the onions have

caramelized to a deep golden brown. Set aside to cool, then stir in

the ham and 1 teaspoon of parsley and season to taste with salt.

Preheat the broiler. Pry open the scallop shells by running a

paring knife through the scallop muscle to separate it from the

shell. Be careful not to break the shells. Remove and discard the

dark stomach. Using your finger, pull away and discard the tough

adductor muscle, which wraps partially around the scallop. Remove

the scallops and set aside. Wash and dry the bottom shells. Discard

the top shells.

Arrange the scallop shells on a baking sheet. Put 1 teaspoon of

the onion-ham mixture in each shell and sprinkle with salt. Divide

the scallops among the shells, sprinkle them with the remaining

wine. Cover with bread crumbs. Drizzle with olive oil and broil

until the scallops are cooked, about 2 minutes. Sprinkle with

remaining parsley and serve.

Red Wine Sangr?a

From "Made in Spain," by Jos? Andr?s. Serves 4.

Ingredients

1 bottle of fruity red wine, such as a garnacha

5 tablespoons brandy

1/4 cup Cointreau or other top-quality orange-flavored liqueur

1/4 cup vodka

1 splash ruby port

1 orange, peeled and sliced

2 Granny Smith apples, cored and diced

1 cinnamon stick

1 strip of lemon zest

1/4 cup fresh orange juice

1 splash of soda water

Directions

Combine the wine, brandy, Cointreau, vodka, port, orange,

apples, cinnamon stick and lemon zest in a bowl and refrigerate for

at least 4 hours. Pour the mixture into a pitcher filled halfway

with ice. Add the orange juice and soda water, stir and serve. Give

each glass some ice and fruit.

Minted Lamb Meatballs with Almond Sherry Sauce

Denver chef Kevin Marquet serves these Moorish meatballs at his

restaurant, The Ninth Door, and contributed this recipe to "Spain

and the World Table." Serves 8.

Ingredients

MEATBALLS

1 baguette, cubed and dried

1/3 cup dry sherry

3 1/2 pounds ground lamb

3 eggs, beaten

3 tablespoons minced garlic, about 5-6 cloves

1 cup minced (about 1 medium) onion

2 1/2 tablespoons chopped fresh mint

2 teaspoons salt

1 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper

1/2 cup flour

2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil

ALMOND SHERRY SAUCE

2 tablespoons minced garlic, about 3 cloves

2 1/3 cups diced yellow onions

1 1/3 cups dry sherry

1 1/3 cups lamb stock

1 1/3 cups toasted almonds

1 tablespoon lemon zest

3 tablespoons lemon juice

1/3 cup extra-virgin olive oil

1/3 cup chopped fresh mint

6 tablespoons butter, cut into chunks

Directions

Soak bread briefly in sherry until liquid is absorbed, then

pulse in a food processor fitted with the steel blade for about 1

minute, or until mixture is processed into fine crumbs. Transfer to

a large bowl and combine with lamb, eggs, garlic, onion, mint, salt

and pepper.

Form lamb mixture into 1 1/2-inch meatballs. Dust with flour.

Heat 1 tablespoon oil in a large skillet over medium-high heat. Add

meatballs in batches and brown on all sides, about 5 minutes.

Transfer to a shallow baking dish.

Sauce: In large pot, combine garlic, onions, sherry and lamb

stock. Bring to a boil; remove from heat. Pour sauce over meatballs

and bake at 350 degrees for 30 minutes. Pour off sauce into a pan

and reserve. Keep meatballs warm.

In a food processor, combine almonds, lemon zest and juice,

olive oil and mint. Process to blend and make a paste. Whisk paste

into reserved sauce. Heat through over medium-high for about 2

minutes, and whisk in butter to finish sauce. Add meatballs and

serve.

Tortilla EspaÃ±ola

Tortilla espaÃ±ola is essentially the national dish of Spain. You

can eat it as a tapa, for breakfast, in a bocadillo (sandwich), or

for dinner with salad and a bit of jam?n. From "Spain ... On the

Road Again" by Mario Batali, serves 4 to 6 as a tapa or appetizer.

Ingredients

1/4 cup extra-virgin olive oil

1 1/4 pounds waxy potatoes, peeled and thinly sliced

1 medium onion, thinly sliced

Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper

8 extra-large eggs

Directions

Heat the oil in a large cast-iron skillet or nonstick pan over

medium-high until very hot but not smoking. Add the potatoes and

onion, season with salt and pepper, reduce the heat to medium and

cook, stirring occasionally and adjusting the heat if necessary so

that the vegetables do not brown, until the potatoes are tender

when pierced with the tip of a paring knife, 15 to 20 minutes.

Beat the eggs with salt and pepper to taste in a large bowl.

Combine the potatoes with the eggs in the bowl; add to the skillet,

spreading the potatoes evenly in the pan, and cook for about 1

minute, just to set the bottom of the egg mixture. Reduce the heat

to medium-low and cook for 20 minutes, or until quite set.

Carefully flip the tortilla over (invert it onto a plate if you

must, then slide it back into the pan, bottom side up) and cook for

5 minutes longer, until set. Flip out onto a clean plate and allow

to rest for 5 minutes. Serve warm or at room temperature.

Caldo Gallego

Adapted from "Spain ... On The Road Again," by Mario Batali,

serves 4-6.

Ingredients

1/4 pound thickly sliced pancetta or slab bacon, cut into

1/2-inch dice

2 baking potatoes, peeled and cut into 1/2-inch dice

2 turnips, peeled and cut into 1/2-inch dice

1 large onion, cut into 1/2-inch dice

1 14-ounce can white beans, drained and rinsed

1/4 pound Spanish chorizo, casings removed and sliced 1/4-inch

thick

1/2 pound turnip greens (or other dark leafy green, such as kale

or spinach), stemmed and coarsely chopped

Directions

In a large soup pot, cook the pancetta or bacon over medium heat

until most of the fat is rendered, 8-10 minutes.

In the meantime, peel and dice the potato, turnip and onion. Add

them to the pot along with enough water to cover, and simmer for

about 20 minutes until almost soft but not falling apart.

Add the beans, chorizo and greens, and continue simmering until

the greens are tender. Season to taste with salt and pepper. Serve

with crusty bread.

Lincoln's Darkest Year: The War in 1862

By William Marvel

Houghton Mifflin, $30

At the start of the Civil War's second year, Union states were

confident the war would end at any moment. Union armies were

massing around Richmond, Va., the Confederate capital, and were in

a much better position to cut supply lines to rebel armies than

vice versa.

By the end of 1862, the Confederate army under Robert E. Lee not

only had advanced close to Washington, creating alarm over the

possible loss of the nation's capital, but the Union was having

serious trouble finding new military recruits. The war's end was

nowhere in sight.

Historian William Marvel, winner of the Lincoln Prize and the

Douglas Southall Freeman Award, devotes his newest Civil War volume

to this swing in momentum.

"Lincoln's Darkest Year" is the second in Marvel's planned

four-volume Civil

War tome, the first being "Mr. Lincoln Goes to War."

Marvel has gathered exhaustive supplies of new source materials

upon which to build his series of books: newspaper accounts,

government documents, letters and diaries from all corners of the

Union and the South.

The result, especially in "Lincoln's Darkest Year," is a

cataloging of this material. The information is interesting, but

there's too much of it with few guideposts to shape the Civil War

story of 1862 into a cohesive story.

The book seems aimed at other historians more than to the

general reader.

Marvel is a fine researcher and craftsman, but he is no David

McCullough. Anyone who read McCullough's fine "1776," about the

start of the American

Revolution, can appreciate good storytelling. McCullough knows

how to use strong characters and actions to guide readers to an

advanced understanding of everything at stake in wartime.

That aspect is missing in "Lincoln's Darkest Year." Even

Lincoln comes off as a stick figure as he weighs whether to issue

the Emancipation Proclamation while trying to determine which

generals to trust and whether to intervene in military matters.

Union generals, especially Gen. George McClellan, with his

constant indecision in the field, frustrated Lincoln, but there's

little sense of the drama that must have played out in the White

House.

Marvel delivers much new material, especially about the

recruitment of Union soldiers and the sad plight of military

horses, but he doesn't connect those to the overall story.

The battles of Antietam and Fredericksburg, both resulting in

massive casualties, are described in detail. The reader ought to be

able to hear the roar of the battle and see men falling to cannon

and rifle fire, but Marvel, concentrating on maneuvers, misses the

drama.

(David Hendricks is an Express-News business columnist. E-mail:

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The English chef Simon Hopkinson wears his crown

lightly. After being anointed author of the "most useful cookbook

of all time" in 2005 for his work "Roast Chicken and Other

Stories" by a panel of his British food-world peers, he might have

cracked under the pressure: retired from the field, succumbed to

crippling writer's block or indulged in some scandalous behavior,

like endorsing a line of frozen entrees.

Instead, he sleeps like a baby, eats like a lord and has written

an even juicier sequel, just published in the United States,

"Second Helpings of Roast Chicken" (Hyperion).

"'Useful' is certainly the title I would have wanted to win,"

he said with satisfaction last week.

Cookbooks can be transporting, instructive, enthralling and

comforting, but useful ones are surprisingly rare -- most produce

one or two reliable dishes at best. Both "Roast Chicken" books,

however, seem to exert a magnetic force that drags even burned-out

cooks to try recipe after recipe.

Divided into chapters by main ingredient -- Cream, Chocolate,

Peas, Steak -- the books are characterized by Hopkinson's sensible

advice and unerring food sense. "I go to the market and see people

scooping up carrots labeled organic," he said, peeling furiously

during a recent cooking session in Manhattan. "But they're just

old, all soft and limp. Organic nothing, you don't want those

carrots."

Hopkinson first became famous as the opening chef for Bibendum,

a top restaurant in Britain's culinary awakening of the 1990s, and

one of the first to serve refined versions of English, rather than

Continental, food. (When the restaurant opened in 1987, his

inclusion of the prosaic fish and chips on the menu caused "an

absolute sensation," said Rowley Leigh, chef at Le Cafe Anglais in

London.)

April Bloomfield, the chef at the Spotted Pig in the West

Village, cooked under him at Bibendum. "Simon was really convinced

that you should cook things that you love, not things that are

fancy or that customers expect to see on the menu of a certain kind

of restaurant," she said. "Everything he made, he made

perfectly."

For the record, Hopkinson denies being a perfectionist. "What

is all the sieving and straining for?" he asked during a

discussion of cream soups. "All this striving after perfection,

and to what end?" However, he is driven nearly mad by carelessly

peeled potatoes, badly washed lettuce and what he views as mindless

innovation. "Why on earth would anyone put cumin in mint sauce for

lamb, or a Caesar dressing on bibb lettuce?" he asked, wincing in

genuine pain. "There's no reason for it."

Hopkinson began cooking professionally at the age of 16, not out

of financial necessity or on a whim but, he says, because his

parents simply couldn't keep him out of the kitchen any longer.

Like many chefs, he seems to have total food recall, remembering

almost every dish to come out of his mother's kitchen in the 1960s:

well-made British classics and French "party food," with some

daring Provencal experiments when the writer Elizabeth David began

to nudge the cool, dairy-loving British palate to explore the

garlic-rich environment of the Mediterranean.

He began his career in a firmly French kitchen in the firmly

British town of Birtle, opened his own (French) restaurant in Wales

in 1975, one month before his 21st birthday, and in 1983 opened the

French restaurant in London, Hilaire, that began to make his

reputation for grace and precision.

Unlike many British chefs, "I never felt the need to work in

France," he said. "My country needed me."

He was born in 1954, into a nation renowned as a gastronomic

wasteland of overcooked vegetables, insipid sauces and baby-food

textures. But Hopkinson is a sentimental cook, nostalgic even for

much-reviled "school food."

"The mince at my school wasn't half bad, you know," he said.

Not to be confused with mincemeat, mince is a kind of English

sloppy Joe without the bun. In Hopkinson's hands, ground beef is

cooked down with onions, carrots, mushrooms, tomatoes and spices

into a savory, tangy, delicious slop.

Like many chefs who now describe their food as "Modern

British," Hopkinson has had to dig deep to find truly British

recipes.

"Simon will make apple hat with a suet crust, a pretty dull and

stodgy dish in most hands," Leigh said. "And he will make it

exquisitely." His St. Clement's cream, a fragrant, lightly set

orange-lemon custard, evolved from British milk possets (the

fruits' acid thickens the cream, eliminating any need for eggs or

cornstarch to make it set).

Chapters on Brains, Butter and Dripping, Suet, Kidneys, and

Custard reflect his conviction that traditional British cooking,

before being mucked up by ignorant enthusiasms for extra virgin

olive oil and chili peppers, could hold its head high among world

cuisines.

Hopkinson has loosened up since the first "Roast Chicken"

book, and now digs his fangs into lazy home cooks, show-off

restaurant chefs and know-it-all food writers with equal energy.

"Something seems ever so slightly wrong in the state of the

home kitchen, just now," he writes. "We watch endless cooking

shows but prefer, finally, to spend lots of money on prepared

supermarket meals while idly turning the pages of (spotlessly

clean) cookbooks until the microwave pings." (Ouch.)

He admits to some similar habits, for example with his own

celebrated caramel ice cream recipe. "I haven't made mine since

Haagen-Dazs came out with their dulce de leche," he said.

"They've achieved perfection; why bother?"

SAVORY MINCE

Adapted from "Second Helpings of Roast Chicken"

by Simon Hopkinson (Hyperion, 2008)

Time: 1 1/2 hours

7 ounces pancetta or other unsmoked bacon, coarsely chopped (if

unavailable, use 4 ounces regular bacon)

1 pound ground beef, preferably chuck (at least 8 percent fat)

7 ounces onions, chopped

7 ounces carrots, chopped

7 ounces mushrooms, chopped

1/2 teaspoon dried thyme

1/2 teaspoon dried oregano

1 1/2 teaspoons tomato paste

1 14-ounce can chopped tomatoes

3/4 cup beef broth

1 tablespoon ketchup

1 1/2 teaspoons Lea &amp;amp; Perrins Worcestershire sauce

Salt and pepper

Mashed potatoes and green peas, for serving.

1. In a heavy-bottomed pot, briskly fry pancetta and ground

beef, stirring occasionally, until fat is rendered and meat is

golden brown, about 10 minutes. Using a slotted spoon, lift out

meat and pour off all but about 3 tablespoons of fat.

2. Raise heat to high; add onions, carrots and mushrooms. Cook,

stirring often, until soft and golden, about 10 minutes; do not

brown. Add herbs and tomato paste and cook until paste loses its

bright red color and becomes dark, about 5 minutes.

3. Return meat to pot and add tomatoes, broth, ketchup,

Worcestershire sauce and a sprinkling of salt and pepper. Cook,

covered, simmering gently, about 1 hour. Stir occasionally and

taste for salt, pepper and ketchup, adding more as needed. Final

consistency should be thick and rich, with an appetizing sheen.

Serve with mashed potatoes and green peas.

Yield: 4 to 6 servings.

ST. CLEMENT'S CREAM

Adapted from "Second Helpings of Roast Chicken"

by Simon Hopkinson (Hyperion, 2008)

Time: 1 hour, plus at least 5 hours' chilling

4 large, juicy oranges

2 1/2 lemons

2 cups plus 2 tablespoons heavy cream

1/3 cup sugar

1/2 teaspoon unflavored gelatin

1 tablespoon Grand Marnier or other orange liqueur (optional).

1. Squeeze juice from 2 oranges into a small pan: discard peels.

Simmer juice over low heat until syrupy and reduced by

three-quarters.

2. Zest 1 of the remaining oranges. Zest 2 lemons, then squeeze

and reserve juice. Discard lemon peels.

3. Put orange and lemon zest, cream and sugar in a large pan

(the cream will expand when it boils, so pan must be large). Turn

heat to medium high and boil 2 minutes. Turn off heat and whisk in

lemon juice and reserved orange syrup. Infuse 15 minutes. Strain

into a bowl or pitcher, then divide among 6 ramekins. (Use ramekins

large enough to accommodate about 1/4 inch orange jelly on top.)

Arrange ramekins in a pan and refrigerate at least 4 hours or

overnight.

4. Put gelatin in a medium bowl, add 1 tablespoon cold water,

and stir. Set aside to soften. Squeeze both remaining oranges; you

need about 1/2 cup juice. Put orange juice in small pan and add

juice of remaining 1/2 lemon. Bring just to a boil. Strain through

a fine sieve or cheesecloth into the bowl with the gelatin. Whisk

until smooth. Whisk in Grand Marnier, if using, and set aside to

cool to room temperature. (Do not refrigerate.)

5. When gelatin mixture is cool, remove ramekins from

refrigerator. Divide gelatin mixture among ramekins: it will float

on top of cream. Refrigerate at least 1 hour, or up to 6 hours.

Serve cold.

Yield: 6 servings.

On an island in the Napo River in Ecuador's Amazonian rain

forest, in a tin-roofed hut on stilts, live some of the world's

most unusual chocolate entrepreneurs.

Cesar and Magdalena Dahua grow cacao, along with pineapples,

vanilla, avocados, cassava, coffee, oranges and plantains. As they

hack off the football-shaped fruit of the cacao trees, their three

youngest daughters run barefoot nearby. The girls stop to suck the

sticky white pulp that envelops the cacao beans in the pods. It

tastes like Sour Patch candies.

For Quechua people like the Dahuas, cacao has always been a

treat -- the pulp a tart candy and the purple bean, when ground to a

paste and mixed with hot water and a little sugar, a rustic hot

chocolate.

But mostly, the beans were a commodity, sold for about 20 cents

a pound to men who would bring them to the port of Guayaquil. From

there they would be shipped around the world to be turned into

mass-produced chocolate. Every once in a while the Quechua might

even taste it.

But the Quechua grew tired of making such a meager living from

so highly valued a product. With the help of volunteers they

eliminated the middlemen and created their own chocolate. Now

Kallari bars (pronounced kai-YAH-ri) -- named for the cooperative

they formed -- are being sold throughout the United States. People

in the chocolate industry said they knew of no other cacao farmers

who were making and marketing their own chocolate.

The cooperative uses an unusual blend of cacaos that grow on the

Quechua land -- fruity Cacao Amazonico, nutty Criollo, Forastero

Amazonico, Tipo Trinitario and, most important, a rare variety that

flourishes around their homes, Cacao Nacional.

"They have a certain smell and taste that is herbal, flowery

but also savory, like black pepper," Tomas Keme, a Swiss chocolate

expert who consults for Kallari, said of the Cacao Nacional beans.

"It's the same taste I find in a Californian cabernet."

The chocolate is smooth, rich and straightforward. The

2.47-ounce bars, in 75 and 85 percent cacao, sell for as much as

$5.99 at Whole Foods.

To become chocolate-makers, the Quechua first had to decide to

be more than just farmers. But they didn't have the knowledge or

experience.

"We wanted change," said Carlos Pozo, Kallari's marketing

director, "but we didn't have the capital or anyone who would

trust us."

Then in 1997 they met Judy Logback, a lanky Kansan with wild

blond hair who was volunteering for a foundation promoting

biodiversity in Ecuador.

"I didn't show up with a plan," Logback said. "I asked them

what they wanted." Pozo and others said they wanted to sell

directly at markets and learn how to grow better, more desirable

cacao. They wanted to find a way to survive and thrive as they

faced pressure from companies that sought to log their hardwood

trees, drill on their land for oil and mine for gold.

Logback first helped them take their beans more than 250 miles

to Guayaquil.

"We received threats that the intermediaries would rob or

hijack our trucks," Pozo said. "In the first years, Kallari was

so united that the intermediaries realized they could not break

through this union."

They watched their profits from cacao more than double as they

got 48 cents a pound in Guayaquil.

Four years later, they established Kallari, which in Quechua

means both "to begin" and "the early times." The name seemed

fitting, Pozo said: "In the present, we are valuing our past."

With Logback's help, the cooperative now includes about 850

families.

"Judy really sacrificed a lot for us," said Elias Alvarado,

Kallari's director of production and natural resources. "The

people in the communities really love her for what she has done."

As their confidence grew, they decided to sell their cacao

directly to big league chocolate-makers. They e-mailed makers in

North America, attracting the interest of Robert Steinberg, a

founder of Scharffen Berger chocolate in Berkeley, Calif. But

Steinberg said that before he could use the beans they needed to be

properly fermented, a process that brings out fruit and floral

flavors and reduces astringency.

Logback hired Jorge Ruiz, who had worked for a cacao cooperative

on the coast, to teach the Quechua fermentation. Before his

arrival, the Quechua had only fermented their beans inadvertently,

when they piled them up before drying. Ruiz taught them to create

fermentation boxes and to monitor temperatures.

In October 2004, Steinberg made a chocolate bar with Kallari

beans and helped them present it at the Terra Madre conference of

the Slow Food group in Turin, Italy. Later that year they met

officials from the Swiss chocolate company Felchlin, who agreed to

pay them 94 cents a pound for their beans.

Inspired by their success, Logback and Pozo told Kallari elders

that they should start making chocolate.

"They all thought we were crazy," Pozo said. "We don't know

anything about this market, what kind of people would buy it, how

to make it."

Chocolate-making has always been less common in cacao-producing

countries than it has been in Europe, where the technology to

create chocolate bars was developed and where such a luxury could

be more easily afforded.

With a formula from Steinberg, who died in September, and heavy

bushels of cacao, they traveled 12 hours by bus to a shabby

community-owned factory in the Andean hill town of Salinas de

Guaranda. There they made the first Kallari bars.

"I was confused a bit by what I believed to be chocolate,"

said Alvarado, who had eaten only cheap commercial milk chocolate

before he tried the Kallari bars. "Now I realize after all these

years that I was eating something that wasn't really chocolate."

By tasting it, they could understand their role in the finished

product. They improved their farming practices and bean

fermentation. Over 500 families received organic status, which was

not difficult, since most never had the money for fertilizers or

other chemicals.

It was difficult, though, to perfect their chocolate production

at such a crude facility. In the spring of 2007, Stephen McDonnell,

the founder and chief executive of the Applegate Farms organic food

company, and his wife, Jill, met Kallari members through their

daughter Nora, who visited the Napo region with her seventh-grade

class.

With Kallari's permission and $250,000, McDonnell established

the Kallari Chocolate Co., which lists him as the owner for

liability and insurance reasons. All of the profits, though, go

back to the Kallari cooperative.

McDonnell hired Keme to teach the collective about bean quality

and techniques of Swiss chocolate-making. He also hired a larger,

more efficient chocolate factory in Quito, the capital of Ecuador,

to produce the bars based on standards set by Keme and Pozo. (The

chocolate made in Salinas, less refined and slightly acidic, is

sold in some health food stores as Kallari's Sacha Bar.) McDonnell

asked the farmers to focus on their farming and to master the

fermentation of their beans, which the company now buys from

Kallari for as much as $1.95 a pound, an astronomical price for the

average cacao farmer cooperative.

(Paradoxically, Kallari does not have Fair Trade certification,

since it would cost 10 cents per pound of beans and it seemed

unfair for Kallari to pay a fee for its own beans.)

McDonnell has taken a chance, but he says he is not concerned.

"The Kallari people have pride in their farms," he said, "and

are transferring that pride into their bar."

Plans for their own chocolate factory are in the works,

McDonnell hopes that within three to five years a board of Kallari

directors can assume most of his duties.

Kallari farmers also hope to diversify to continue living

sustainably off their land. They are planting balsa trees, which

grow rapidly, to sell to windmill-makers, and they want to promote

agritourism.

"There was a dream that seemed impossible," Pozo said. "Now

we believe there are so many possibilities open to us."

Author Allia Zobel Nolan hopes her latest book can serve as a

tool for parents, caretakers and educators who are looking for a

way to talk with children about diversity.

"Since the world is such a diverse place, and small children

get to mix with others who aren't like they are at a very young

age, I think it's important for parents to have dialogues with

their children explaining that people come in all shapes and sizes,

colors and nationalities," she says, adding, "and that's a good

thing and that it would be pretty boring if we all looked and acted

the same."

Nolan released "One Special Me: A Book Celebrating How God Made

Us Special" last month to coincide with National Diversity Month,

but she says the book covers an issue that has a long shelf life.

"Learning to appreciate diversity helps us in all phases of

life. If we go through life thinking that because something is

different, it's bad, we aren't letting ourselves experience the

exciting, interesting and intriguing expansiveness of the world.

But if we take the attitude that differences are what makes the

world a special place, that being different doesn't make anything

better or worse ... it just makes it different ... we'd all get

along a better."

She says she also believes that kind of attitude would encourage

people to seek more diverse experiences and knock down barriers

that never had to exist in the first place.

Zobel Nolan, who has written more than 150 books, was a senior

editor in the religious books department of Reader's Digest

Children's Publishing, in Pleasantville, N.Y. She says she left

that job in April 2007 to concentrate on other writing projects.

"One Special Me" is an interactive book, providing young

readers with plenty to do beyond read, such as pull at flip-up

flaps and spin wheels. Zobel Nolan also included an "I'm

Special," ribbon that children can wear.

She is hopeful "One Special Me," with illustrations by Pauline

Siewert, will teach younger children to be tolerant and accepting

of themselves and others.

"I want them to learn that's it's OK for them to be who they

are ... the way God made them -- special -- whether it's short or

tall, plump or thin, whether they have red hair and freckles, or

curly hair in corn rows."

She says she also hopes the book provides the lesson, or at

least provokes discussion that it also is OK for others to be who

they are. By highlighting that no two people are alike, she says

differences would be celebrated, rather than mocked. Children and

adults would embrace the diversity, she says, rather than shy away

from it.

"I think kids feel pressure to 'fit in,' to be like everyone

else. Personally, I think that does a child a disservice because we

don't want to raise a generation of clones ... we want our children

to be themselves ... to establish their own identities and

personalities. We want them to be the best person they can be,

whatever that is, not a bad imitation of someone else."

Supreme Court justices spent an hour Tuesday

discussing dirty words without uttering a single one or revealing

any clues about whether they would back a government crackdown on

broadcasters who aired the expletives.

At issue is the validity of the Federal Communications

Commission's 2004 decision to stop tolerating the one-time,

fleeting use of dirty words on air and instead begin punishing

broadcasters who don't bleep the expletives during live shows.

The FCC adopted its policy to consider fines beginning at

$325,000 for what the broadcast industry and the commission call

"fleeting expletives" after celebrities cursed during the live

broadcasts of 2003 Golden Globes Awards ceremony and the 2002 and

2003 Billboard Music Awards.

During one of the broadcasts, singer Bono said on-air that it

was "really f---ing brilliant" to get an award. During another

show, celebrity Nicole Richie said it was "not so f---ing simple .

. . to get cow s--- out of a Prada purse."

Fox Television Stations and other broadcasters successfully

challenged the new policy before the U.S. Court of Appeals for the

2nd Circuit, which ruled last year that the FCC's change had been

"arbitrary and capricious" and therefore violated federal law.

The FCC appealed to the high court.

During oral arguments Tuesday, lawyers and justices inside the

Supreme Court repeatedly relied on the euphemisms of "the S-word"

and "the F-word," but carefully avoided their colorful originals.

The expletives have "shocking value," noted Chief Justice John

Roberts. The words are "associated with sexual or excretory

activity," he said. "That's what gives (them) force."

Associate Justice Antonin Scalia complained about a

"coarsening" of society and said Fox and other broadcasters had

something "to do with that."

Other justices signaled they were more comfortable with the

occasional swear word. Sometimes they can be used in a way that is

"really hilarious, very, very funny," and "you can't help but

laugh," noted Justice John Paul Stevens.

Associate Justice Stephen Breyer observed that "you deal with a

cross-section of humanity" at sporting events and on televised

awards shows, "and my experience is some parts of that

cross-section swear."

The case also involves the First Amendment's right to free

speech -- and the constitutionality of the FCC's power to police the

airwaves.

The court has invalidated government indecency regulations for

cable television and the Internet, limiting the FCC's power to the

public airwaves.

Referring to the First Amendment application to the FCC case,

Associate Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg said it was "the big

elephant in the room." One possible outcome in the appeal is that

the justices would send the case back to a lower court to consider

the broader constitutional question of whether FCC regulation runs

afoul of the First Amendment.

U.S. Solicitor General Gregory Garre urged the justices to

support the commission, saying its decision to go after fleeting

expletives was "reasoned" and "rational."

Garre warned that if unchecked and unregulated, networks would

be "free to use expletives . . . 24 hours a day," and that could

lead to "Big Bird dropping the F-bomb on 'Sesame Street.' "

"Americans who want to get indecent programming can go to cable

TV (and) can go to the Internet," Garre said. Broadcast television

is "the one place where Americans can turn on the TV at 8 o'clock

and watch their dinner and not be expected to be bombarded with

indecent language, either in an isolated basis or a repeated

basis."

Carter Phillips, the attorney representing Fox, said that unlike

other government actions, the FCC "isn't regulating the price of

oil in a pipeline."

"At the end of the day," he said, "you are regulating the

content of speech" -- and the FCC's decisions to pursue fleeting

expletives have a "chilling effect" on broadcasters.

Although some broadcasters briefly delay live sporting events

and awards shows so they have time to bleep out any vulgarities,

Phillips said the cost of tape-delay systems -- and the employees

needed to man them -- may be prohibitive for smaller stations.

Rather than risk airing an expletive and getting penalized by the

FCC, smaller stations may opt against broadcasting local sporting

events or political debates altogether, Phillips said.

In determining whether to punish broadcasters, the five-member

FCC considers the context surrounding indecencies and evaluates

whether that violates prevailing community standards.

Ginsburg complained that the context-based decisions can be

capricious. She cited the FCC's decision not to rap broadcasters

for airing the war movie "Saving Private Ryan," despite

expletives in the film.

"There seems to be no rhyme or reason when the commission says

that one of these words is okay and when it says it isn't."

A decision in the case is expected by July.

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Chat

New Conversation

🤓 Explain a complex thing

Explain Artificial Intelligence so that I can explain it to my six-year-old child.

🧠 Get suggestions and create new ideas

Please give me the best 10 travel ideas around the world

💭 Translate, summarize, fix grammar and more…

Translate "I love you" French

GPT-4o Mini

Hello, how can I help you today?

GPT-4o Mini

coin image

10

Upgrade

Ask me anything...

Make a Review & Earn Credit ❤

Chat

Ask

Search

Write

Image

ChatPDF

Vision

Full Page

Invite & Earn