

U.S. DIGEST U.S. DIGEST

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Body

WASHINGTON

Senate backers of trade deal predict victory

Senate supporters of the Central American Free Trade Agreement -- a market-opening deal with six Latin American nations --predicted victory Wednesday after it was endorsed by a crucial committee.

President George W. Bush and his top trade officials have lobbied hard for the deal, known as CAFTA, but it has drawn tenacious opposition from lawmakers who believe their states would be hurt. A Senate vote could come as early as today.

The greater hurdle will come when the House takes up the measure next month. House Democrats who object to what they say are weak labor rights provisions in the agreement will be joined in opposition by Republicans with ties to groups and companies that contend they will be hurt by CAFTA.

WASHINGTON

Airspace violation prompts evacuations

President George W. Bush was hurried from his residence to a safer location Wednesday evening, and people were evacuated from the White House and **U.S.** Capitol when a private plane ventured into restricted airspace. It was the second such incident in a little more than a month.

The all-clear came within minutes when two fighter jets intercepted the small twin-engine propeller-driven plane eight miles northeast of the Capitol and escorted it to Winchester, Va., where it landed without incident.

SAN FRANCISCO

High court lets stand domestic-partner law

The California Supreme Court on Wednesday let stand a new law granting registered domestic partners many of the same rights and protections available to married couples.

Without comment, the justices unanimously declined to review lower-court rulings that said the law does not conflict with a voter-approved measure against gay marriage. Justice Janice Rogers Brown, who leaves today to join the **U.S.** Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia, did not vote.

The domestic-partner measure -- signed into law in 2003 by then-Gov. Gray Davis -- grants registered couples virtually every spousal right available under state law except the ability to file a joint tax return.

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WASHINGTON

Civil rights-era crime unit is proposed

Sens. Jim Talent and Chris Dodd called Wednesday for the creation of a new Justice Department office to investigate unsolved civil rights-era murders.

Talent, R-Mo., and Dodd, D-Conn., said a special investigative criminal unit was necessary to study unsolved murders, such as the 1955 fatal beating and shooting of 14-year-old Emmett Till. Their measure would authorize up to \$5 million per year for the new unit.

Prosecutors are already reopening such cases. Law enforcement officials exhumed Till's body in May as part of a renewed effort to investigate his death. And last week, Edgar Ray Killen was convicted for the 1964 slayings of three civil rights workers.

FRESNO, Calif.

Jury recommends death for father of 9 slain

A jury decided Wednesday that Marcus Wesson, the domineering patriarch of a large clan he bred through incest, should get the death penalty for the murders of nine of his children.

Wesson, 58, was convicted earlier this month, more than a year after the bodies were found in a pile at his home at the end of a police standoff.

All the victims -- ages 1 to 25 -- had been shot once in the eye. Wesson had fathered some of them with his own daughters and nieces. Prosecutors said he had the children killed for fear authorities were about to take the youngsters away.

Notes

A QUICK READ

Graphic

PHOTO

PHOTO by THE ASSOCIATED PRESS - Plebes at the U.S. Naval Academy in Annapolis, Md., read "Reef Points," a book that covers midshipman slang, the academy's mission and its history, as they wait to be fitted for shoes on induction day Wednesday.

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Person: JANICE R BROWN (79%); GEORGE W BUSH (72%); CHRISTOPHER DODD (58%)

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