

Discovery is go

Delayed shuttle mission launches successfully



Red Huber, Orlando Sentinel / MCT

Space shuttle Discovery, STS-119, astronauts, from left, Koichi Wakata, of Japan, John Phillips, Richard Arnold, Steven Swanson, Joseph Acaba, pilot Tony Antonelli, and Commander Lee Archambault, pose for a photo before boarding the astrovan at the Operations and Check-Out Building at the Kennedy Space Center.

By Robert Block
The Orlando Sentinel

CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla. — It was a long time coming, but space shuttle Discovery finally blasted its crew of seven into a cloudless Sunday evening sky - the first orbiter flight of 2009 to the International Space Station.

Its mission: to provide more electricity to the orbiting lab. A month behind schedule, the mission has been delayed four times by fragile valves inside the shuttle's propulsion system; then a hydrogen gas leak scrubbed Discovery's first launch attempt March 11.

But Sunday there were no signs of leaking gas, no hardware issues. Even Florida's fickle weather

was perfect. The shuttle thundered into a clear sky, trailing a plume of pale vapor that turned bright pink as it caught the last light of the setting sun.

The launch was made possible by NASA engineers who worked overtime Thursday, Friday and Saturday to fix the leak, giving astronauts a near-full mission.

One of four spacewalks was dropped shortening the mission to 13 days to make room for a Russian Soyuz spacecraft bringing new residents to the complex.

Discovery's crew, which includes two school teachers, should reach the international space station Tuesday. They are commanded by Air Force Col. Lee Archambault. The crew consists of pilot Dominic Tony Antonelli, mission specialists: Steve Swanson, John Phillips and Koichi Wakata. Joseph Acaba and Richard Arnold II are the two teachers accompanying them, both are first-time fliers.

They're carrying a 45-foot-long, 31,000 pound truss segment, the last U.S. made piece of major hardware for the space

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Darfur's humanitarian crisis

Sudan's President Omar al-Bashir expelled 13 major relief groups that provide basic services to 4.2 million people in Sudan's Darfur province.

Behind the crisis

2003 Darfur's ethnic African tribes begin revolting against Sudan's Arab-led government

April 2004 African Union (AU) sends about 7,000 soldiers to monitor a cease-fire, which has been violated often

May 2006 Government signs accord with one rebel group; plan backfires, causes fighting between rival rebel factions

May 2007 U.N. resolves to send a hybrid U.N.-AU force of 22,500; Sudan drags its heels

March 2009 Sudan's president expels foreign aid agencies after being indicted for war crimes by an international court

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Source: AP, Reuters, BBC



Crisis' toll
• More than 200,000 killed, 2 million displaced

Expulsion of aid groups could stir up Sudan unrest

By Shashank Bengali
McClatchy Newspapers

NAIROBI, Kenya — The strongest of Darfur's rebel groups warned March 13, that Sudan's expulsion of international relief agencies would risk lives and endanger chances for peace in the troubled region.

"If they insist on expelling NGOs (nongovernmental organizations), we have to bring them to their senses," Djibril Ibrahim, a senior official of the Justice and Equality Movement, told McClatchy Newspapers. "The message has to be clear that they are breaching agreements and they have to be responsible for the consequences."

The statement raised the possibility of further unrest after Sudan's president, Omar al-Bashir, was slapped with an arrest warrant for alleged war crimes in his country's western Darfur region. Bashir responded by ordering 13 major international aid groups and three Sudanese organizations to cease operating immediately, creating a possible humanitarian disaster in a poor, war-torn scrubland in which 4.7 million people depend on outside relief.

United Nations human rights officials condemned the action as a "grievous dereliction" of Sudan's obligation to protect its citizens. Rupert Colville, a spokesman for the U.N. Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, said in Geneva that it was a "deplorable act" and that the office was considering investigating whether the closures constituted a war crime.

Bashir accuses the aid agencies of collaborating with the International Criminal Court, which issued the arrest warrant; the agencies deny the charge.

Since the Netherlands-based court ordered Bashir's arrest Wednesday — the first time it's charged a head of state with war crimes — tensions have risen dramatically in Sudan. Bashir has vowed to defy the warrant.

U.N. relief officials are scrambling to fill major gaps in food delivery, medical care, water provision and other services that could collapse in Darfur if the aid agencies — including branches of Care International, Doctors Without Borders and Save the Children — aren't reinstated.

Bashir's aggressive reaction shattered whatever goodwill his regime generated last month when it signed a statement

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Obama pledges to combat lobbyists

By Rick Montgomery
McClatchy Newspapers

KANSAS CITY, Mo. — At least one bloc of professionals can count on a real economic stimulus this year — and President Barack Obama is promising to beat them down.

They're the people who lobby in Washington. Fighters for pharmaceutical firms. Protectors of petroleum interests. Water-carriers for Wall Street.

"They're the powerful and well-connected interests that have run Washington for far too long,"

intoned the president in a recent radio address.

With government growing and campaign-trail promises poised to take flight, so too will the fortunes of the K Street crowd that Obama pledges to defeat, say groups that monitor them.

"The more government gets involved in the private sector, the more businesses are going to spend hiring these lobbyists to lobby away," said Craig Holman, a lobbyist. He works for the consumer advocacy group Public Citizen.

Never mind recent prohibitions on the wining, dining and golf outings that Capitol Hill's 15,000

registered lobbyists once showered on members of Congress. As a group they just notched their busiest and most lucrative year ever.

In 2008, according to records compiled by the watchdog group Center for Responsive Politics, lobbyists posted a 14 percent jump in earnings. Their clients spent more than \$3 billion to schmooze and host events, grease re-election campaigns, draft legislation, pressure, push-poll and produce public-awareness ads.

Continued on Page 2

Shuttle launch takes crucial parts to space station

Continued from cover

station and the final section of station's backbone structure. Connected to the truss is the last set of solar wings to complete the space station's power system.

Once the unexplained gas leak had been fixed, preparations for the launch were still rocky. Moments leading up the launch it was discovered that a fruit bat had attached itself on the shuttle's external tank before takeoff.

The bat clung to the backside of Discovery's tank, about a quarter to a third of the way from the bottom. Its presence forced NASA to run an engineering analysis on the bat to make sure that the small winged critter did not represent a threat to the shuttle during the launch.

NASA officials said they expected it to fly away on its own when the engines began to rumble to life. They even saw it as a good

omen; the last time a bat was attached to a shuttle was on STS 72 in 1996 and both the bat and the shuttle flew off safely. Coincidentally, that flight was the first for Japanese astronaut and Discovery crew member Wakata, who is now headed to the station for a stint as Japan's first long duration astronaut.

But in a news conference later, Kennedy Space Center launch director Mike Leinbach suggested the bat did not survive its brush with Discovery. In response to a reporter's question, he said: "We are characterizing [the bat] as unexpected debris and he's probably still debris somewhere."

This mission has been dubbed "Full Power" and that's what the astronauts hope to give the space station. Once Discovery reaches the station March 17, the astronauts will start preparations to install the truss and solar panel.

The \$300 million truss segment is the 11th

piece of the station's backbone, which will measure the length of an American football field when complete. The truss segment is nearly identical to its counterpart on the port side of the station, but includes some modifications to hold spare parts and some sensors to measure wear and tear on the station. The two solar wings are made up of two sets of "blankets" which each hold 32,800 solar cells. They each span 115 feet in length and 38 feet across are now folded in boxes to a thickness of about 20 inches.

When unfurled in space like giant shower curtains, they will provide more power to help the station support larger crews of six and conduct more science research. The first six-person crews are scheduled to take up residency on the station in Oct. of this year. But the job of unfurling the solar panels is not easy. Previous sets of solar panels have gotten snagged as they have opened out to their

full length, or have gotten stuck together and refused to unfurl.

In the days waiting for Sunday's launch the astronauts who in charge of the installation watched videos of the space-walkers studied videos of previous efforts to install solar electricity panels on the station.

"It's something we take seriously because these two solar electricity blankets we're going to deploy have been in the box, one for five years, and one for eight years," said astronaut Phillips who will be operating the space station's robotic arm to help space-walkers Arnold and Swanson install the wings.

In addition to getting the wings up and working, the mission's other objectives are to ferry a new part for the processor that turns urine into clean drinking water and to bring home U.S. astronaut Sandra Magnus after four months in space.

— MCT Campus

Sudan crisis could rage on without international aid

Continued from cover

with the Justice and Equality Movement that was seen as a possible foundation for peace talks. The group is the most powerful of Darfur's mishmash of rebels; last year, it got Bashir's attention by advancing 700 miles into Sudan, nearly reaching the capital before government forces stopped it.

Ibrahim, the rebels' chief negotiator at the talks in Doha, Qatar, said that Sudan's removal of aid groups violated a pledge to allow the free flow of humanitarian relief.

"Are they trying to hide something? Do they not want international witnesses?" Ibrahim said by phone from Chad, Sudan's neighbor and a favorite base for Darfur rebels. "The agreement we made in Doha is in jeopardy."

Analysts described the Doha meeting as a bid by Bashir to show that he was committed to resolving the crisis in Darfur despite the impending arrest warrant. Several rebel officials

told McClatchy Newspapers that they remained committed to negotiating, but experts said the indictment made serious peace talks very unlikely in the coming months.

"Doha is finished," said Fouad Hikmat, a Sudan expert with the International Crisis Group, an independent research center that studies conflict prevention. "JEM might continue to negotiate but they will raise the ceiling very, very high. They think the ICC has delegitimized Bashir."

Aid agencies said Friday that their international staff members in Sudan were gathering in the capital, Khartoum, preparing to leave the country.

The New York-based International Rescue Committee said that Sudanese authorities had closed one of its health clinics in the southern Darfur town of Kass, leaving tens of thousands of people in the area without medical care. The rescue committee and three other agencies that provide water in Kass were ordered to leave, leaving some 100,000 people without

clean drinking water once the pumps that the groups installed and managed run out of fuel, probably within weeks, aid officials said.

Doctors Without Borders warned that outbreaks of bacterial meningitis — a possibly fatal disease — would go untreated in two areas from which its teams had been expelled, leaving 121,000 people without crucial vaccinations.

Sudanese authorities said they'd arrange to fill gaps left by the agencies, but Darfur's relief operation is the world's biggest and most complex. Independent experts said the government couldn't hope to match the experience and resources of the aid groups, which have reduced rates of illness and death dramatically over the past several years.

"Morbidity and mortality are going to increase if there's no replacement. It will increase the hardships of vulnerable groups," Hikmat said.

— MCT Campus

Obama takes on lobbyists

Continued from cover

"I know they're gearing up for a fight," Obama said. " ... So am I."

Some observers say his peeved-populist approach could backfire.

It was Obama's presidential campaign, after all, that bested all others last year in donations from health professionals, drugmakers, banks and electric utilities. All now stand in the crosshairs of sweeping reform proposals, and, yes, they can exercise their First Amendment right to lobby your lawmakers.

Obama "has got to manage this carefully," said John Samples of the Cato Institute's Center for Representative Government. "He ran as a thoughtful, post-partisan candidate who wanted to change the tenor and divisiveness of Washington. He could be running the risk of harming that brand."

As if the president hadn't provoked enough industry giants to come out breathing fire and flinging PAC cash, attorney general Eric Holder recently raised the ire of the National Rifle Association — deemed by some as the lobby that out-influences them all. At a news conference, he floated the possible resurrection of the assault-weapons ban that Congress let expire in 2004. He explained that it would undercut drug cartels in Mexico.

"Of course, gun owners are going to be energized" to fire back, said NRA spokesman Andrew Arulanandam — just as they did against former President Bill Clinton, who pushed the ban in 1994. "We'd have to expend resources fighting a battle we all fought 15 years ago."

U.S. Sen. Claire McCaskill and other Democrats questioned whether the gun-rights lobby needed to be stirred up.

"I think it's counterproductive," said Missouri's junior senator. "Everyone around here is pretty hyper-focused on the economy."

Some of the leading lobbies on the health care front say they don't expect the skirmishes to get that nasty.

Weighing in for the mighty Pharmaceutical Research and Manufacturers of America

— among the top spenders on K Street last year — senior vice president Ken Johnson put it this way:

"As long as discussions avoid a single-payer system, or a government-run system, and the conversation avoids discussion of (drug) price controls ... we believe President Obama has a fighting chance of getting it done."

Even "Harry and Louise" may stay out of sight. The \$21 million ad campaign in 1993 — featuring a couple fretting over their medical options under President Clinton's comprehensive-care proposals — is given credit for swinging opinion against the effort.

Big-business groups mostly agree on the need to make health care more accessible.

"It would be difficult to bring back Harry and Louise without recalling the contentiousness of 1993-94," said Ben Goddard of Washington-based Goddard Claussen, which created the spots. "I'd advise against it."

Many of the Capitol Hill players have changed jobs since then:

Resigning as House speaker-elect in the face of a 1999 sex scandal, Rep. Bob Livingston wound up running a lobbying firm that now earns more than \$40 million a year.

Former Senate Majority Leader Trent Lott of Mississippi last summer strolled the halls of Congress on behalf of Belgian beer giant InBev, seeking to acquire Anheuser-Busch.

Former Congressman Dick Gephardt of Missouri chose to lobby for coal interests.

(Gephardt has his work cut out battling the "green lobby." The number of lobbyists paid to advance climate-change legislation has tripled the last five years.)

A 2005 study by Public Citizen found that 43 percent of the 198 Congress members who had left office since 1998 became registered lobbyists.

On the day he bowed out of Congress in 2005, Louisiana's Billy Tauzin became chief executive of PhRMA, the pharmaceutical trade group. Reported salary: \$2.5 million.

Just two months earlier, he helped steer into law the Medicare Prescription Drug Bill.

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Obama to lift ban on stem-cell research

By Steven Thomma
McClatchy Newspapers

WASHINGTON — President Barack Obama announced Monday that he will allow federal financing of medical research using stem cells from discarded human embryos, the vanguard of a broader effort to end what he calls a Bush-era “war on science.”

“This order is an important step in advancing the cause of science in America,” Obama said in the East Room of the White House.

He said he would not only open the door to this medical research, but also would unleash all forms of science in areas such as the environment from what he believes were limits imposed by the Bush administration rooted in conservative ideology, politics and religion.

“Promoting science isn’t just about providing resources,” Obama said. “It is about letting scientists ... do their jobs, free from manipulation or coercion, and listening to what they tell us, even when it’s inconvenient; especially when it’s inconvenient. It is about ensuring that scientific data is never distorted or concealed to serve a political agenda, and that we make scientific decisions based on facts, not ideology.”

Obama’s order lifted all of President George W. Bush’s restrictions on research into stem cells, which can replicate indefinitely and differentiate into many cell types, and it allows “scientifically worthy human stem-cell research including human embryonic stem-cell research.” He gave the National Institutes of Health 120 days to prepare guidelines on how the research will be financed and conducted.

In addition to signing an executive order allowing financing of stem cell research, Obama signed a memo ordering a “strategy for restoring scientific integrity to government decision making.”

The reversal is the latest in a periodic struggle between science and religion or ideology. It’s one that dates as far back as Galileo’s clashes with the Roman Catholic Church and Darwin’s theory of human evolution, and extends through the struggles over abortion during the past several decades.

“There are moments when religions and science have clashed,” said David Masci, a senior research fellow at the Pew Research Center’s Forum on Religion & Public Life.

“One area where they clash is when science says something that conflicts with religious truths. Evolution is one example. The other is when people feel like science has taken a step too far.”

Those tensions were exacerbated over the past several years, a period when candidate Obama joined a chorus of critics complaining that the Bush administration ignored science on issues such as global warming. “We need to end the Bush administration’s war on science, where ideology trumps scientific inquiry and politics replaces expert opinion,” he said during the campaign.

Among the flash points between science and ideology or religion during the Bush years:

—Republicans rejected calls to limit emissions widely thought to cause global warming.

—Cultural conservatives pushed, without success, to teach intelligent design in public schools, an alternative to evolution.

—Congress intervened in the case of Terri Schiavo, a Florida woman whose parents tried to keep her on life support despite her husband’s wishes and evidence that she was severely brain damaged.

Bush in 2001 banned federal financing of most research using the stem cells from embryos, which some scientists think could lead to cures for such diseases as Parkinson’s and maladies such as spinal cord injuries. He allowed financing of research using only 21 lines of stem cells already created at the time of his order.

The religious community was divided over the research, with the Catholic Church and some evangelical denominations opposing it as an immoral use of human life, while some mainstream Protestant denominations supported it.

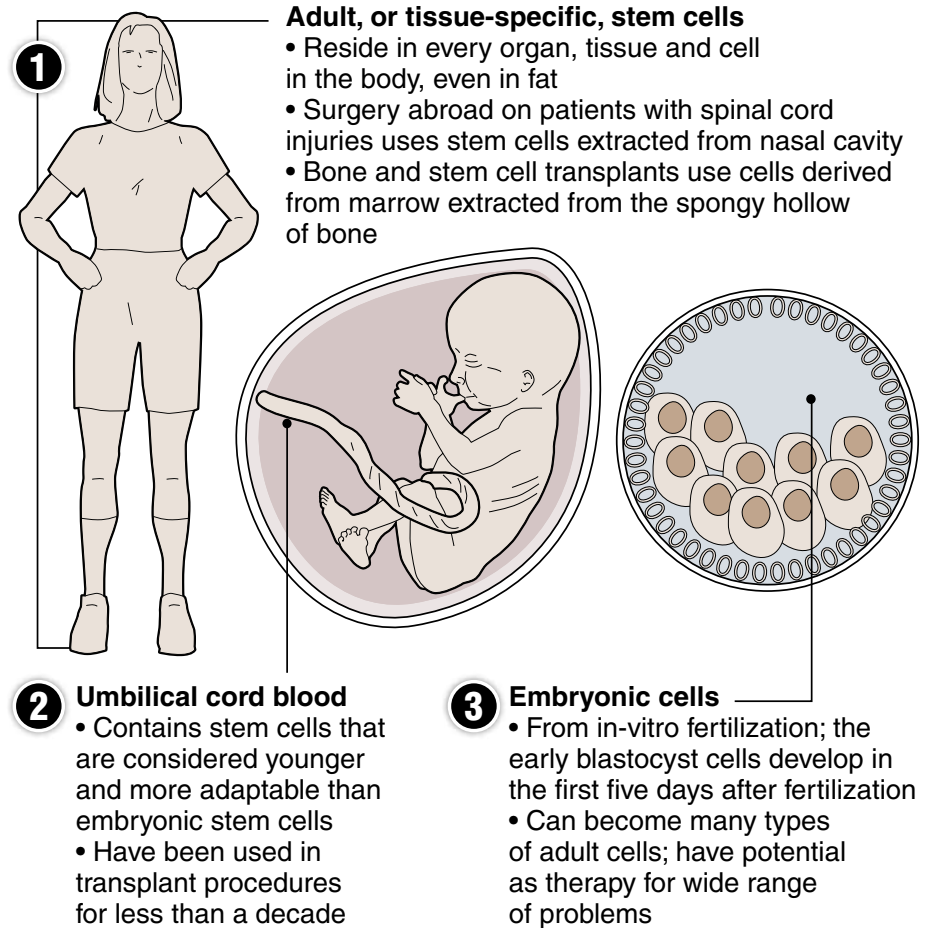
Webster’s dictionary says that “the human organism up to the third month after conception is called an embryo, thereafter a fetus.” Catholic doctrine defines human life as beginning at conception.

Obama called it a “false choice between sound science and moral values” and said that both could coexist.

“As a person of faith, I believe we are called to care for each other and work to ease human suffering,” he said. “I believe we have been given the capacity and will to pursue this

Understanding stem cells

Stem cells are among the body’s most versatile components, reservoirs capable of growing into virtually any other part of the body.



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Source: Free Press research

Graphic: Detroit Free Press, F.S. Fluker, Pat Anstett

research, and the humanity and conscience to do so responsibly.”

He said he would never allow cloning of human embryos for medical research.

Political figures also were divided. Republicans Nancy Reagan and John McCain supported the research. Republicans such as Reps. John Boehner of Ohio and Eric Cantor of Virginia opposed it.

Rep. Tom Price, R-Ga., a physician, said Monday that research using stem cells from adults offered as much promise as those from embryos and that it was Obama, not his critics, who was being driven by the politics of

appealing to his base.

“Successful research does not have to come at the expense of human life,” Price said. “Scientific evidence, not political patronage, demonstrates the ability for researchers to solve our moral dilemma without having President Obama force taxpayers to subsidize research that will destroy human embryos.”

Said Sen. Sam Brownback, R-Kan.: “If an embryo is a life, and I believe strongly that it is life, then no government has the right to sanction their destruction for research purposes.”

—MCT Campus

Obama to talk economic recovery on ‘Tonight Show’

By Christi Parsons and Mark Z. Barabak
The Los Angeles Times

WASHINGTON — In a career studded with historic firsts, President Barack Obama is preparing for yet another: hitting the late-night comedy circuit to pitch his economic recovery plan.

It’s hardly a laughing matter, with the United States in its worst economic shape in decades. But, by taking a seat Thursday night on “The Tonight Show with Jay Leno,” Obama will become the first sitting president to appear in such an unlikely venue.

The appearance will extend Obama’s habit of speaking past the Washington media and ditching the capital for events that distance him from the Beltway status quo; for those keeping account, Obama might be sending a signal by going on the “Tonight Show” and skipping Saturday night’s Gridiron Club dinner.

The dinner is a white-tie highlight of the capital’s social season. But Obama plans to spend the evening with his family, becoming the first president since Grover Cleveland not to show up for the first such dinner of his presidency.

“He’s kind of setting a tone that he’s not going to be restrained by the rules,” said Michael Dimock, associate director of Washington’s nonpartisan Pew Research Center.

There is every possibility that Obama will fall flat on the “Tonight Show,” given the topic. Garth Brooks is the musical guest, and even the most heartbroken girl-done-me-wrong performance might seem carefree by comparison.

But for Obama, the unconventional appearance is a risk worth taking -- and not just because Leno, as the top-ranked host in his time slot, draws 5 million viewers nightly.

The president, who remains popular despite growing questions about his policies, is banking on the chance to broaden his audience beyond cable-news junkies and political elites, appealing to those who don’t already know the intricacies of his budget blueprint and health-care overhaul plan.

“That’s the group he needs to convince that he’s doing a good job and his budget makes sense,” said Darrell West, a Brookings Institution expert on the intersection of politics and celebrity.

Obama undoubtedly will enjoy a more congenial conversation than he would by, say, holding a White House news conference. (Monday, the president blasted American International Group, the insurance giant, for paying millions in bonuses, then let White House press secretary Robert Gibbs face a grilling on why the federal government bailed out AIG knowing those bonuses were in the works.)

Obama has visited Leno before, making his first “Tonight Show” appearance in December 2006, when he was plotting his White House bid. Other successful presidential candidates preceded him, including Richard Nixon and Bill Clinton.

—LATWP News Service

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White House moves to aid small businesses

Obama to seek ‘every single legal avenue’ to block AIG bonuses

By Margaret Talev and Kevin G. Hall
McClatchy Newspapers

WASHINGTON — President Barack Obama said Monday that he will seek “every single legal avenue” to block the payout of \$165 million in bonuses to executives of disgraced insurer American International Group, a company that U.S. taxpayers are bailing out.

Obama unleashed his criticism in the White House East Room, eclipsing an event where he announced \$15 billion in new help for small businesses hurt by the recession.

Before promoting those steps, however, the president went after AIG, blaming its financial woes on executives’ “recklessness and greed,” and asking, “How do they justify this outrage to the taxpayers who are keeping the company afloat?”

It was unclear whether Obama thinks that the government has authority to take back AIG’s bonuses, or instead is primarily seeking to position himself to keep in step with public outrage.

The Financial Products division that did the most damage to the company’s standing was based in London. It sold billions of dollars worth of credit-default swaps, complex insurance-like financial instruments, which ultimately AIG couldn’t fund.

AIG officials and administration officials, including Larry Summers, the head of the White House National Economic Council, previously indicated that the bonuses appeared to be protected by contract law, especially British law.

AIG is receiving about \$170 billion in taxpayer assistance and is now about 80 percent taxpayer-owned. Federal officials moved to save it in September because they thought its failure would take down the global financial system since AIG insured the assets of so many major financial institutions.

“Under these circumstances, it’s hard to understand how derivative traders at AIG warranted any bonuses, much less \$165 million in extra pay,” Obama said.

Obama said that given the taxpayer assistance AIG is receiving, he would asked Treasury Secretary Timothy Geithner “to use that leverage and pursue every single legal avenue to block these bonuses and make the American taxpayers whole. ... This is not just a matter of dollars and cents, it’s about our fundamental values.”

White House spokesman Robert Gibbs said that Obama inherited the contracts AIG signed last year under former President George W. Bush. “We can’t change everything in the past. We will do all that we can.”

Late Sunday night, AIG released the names of companies on the other end of its swap transactions. Its business partners were mainly major U.S. and

foreign banks, adding to the public’s rising sense of injustice over the bonuses, since taxpayers are now bailing out the banks both through the front door with government loans and the back door via support for AIG.

New York Attorney General Andrew Cuomo also turned up the political heat on AIG on Monday, demanding that it identify all employees receiving the bonuses, their job descriptions, performance records and copies of their work contracts. He issued subpoenas late Monday. In a letter to the company, Cuomo said he wants to determine if the bonuses amount to “fraudulent conveyances” under New York law, and that the contracts might be unenforceable because fraud was involved.

In his comments, Obama used his bully pulpit to push for corporate responsibility. He also was seeking, however, to separate himself from unpopular corporate excesses. A new Pew Center poll released Monday showed that Obama has begun to suffer declining public support because of the economic crisis.

“The president shares the public’s outrage on this,” Gibbs said.

Lawmakers on Capitol Hill sounded off, too.

“At a time when millions of Americans are losing their jobs and trying to make ends meet, it is outrageous that a company that has been bailed out by the taxpayers for its mistakes would turn around and pay its executives such a staggering sum of money,” said Sen. Russ Feingold, D-Wis. Other lawmakers from both parties said much the same.

Added House GOP Leader Rep. John Boehner of Ohio: “The latest revelation about AIG executives receiving millions in bonuses while taxpayers continue to bail out the company with hundreds of billions of dollars is outrageous and the clearest example yet of why an exit strategy is essential. The administration should pursue all means of recovering these bonus payments and present Congress — and, more importantly, taxpayers — an exit plan as soon as possible.”

A House Financial Services subcommittee scheduled a Wednesday hearing on AIG.

The AIG flap overshadowed Obama’s announcement of help for small businesses, which was warmly welcomed.

His latest economic rescue package will waive fees for small business loans, buy up to \$15 billion in securities linked to loans guaranteed by the Small Business Administration, and require monthly reports from large banks and quarterly reports from other banks on small-business lending.

Thomas J. Donohue, the president and chief executive of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, said that “small-business owners who are struggling to gain capital and stay afloat were offered a helping hand by the president today.”

However, William Dunkelberg, the chief economist for the National Federation of Independent Business, the leading small-business trade group, said that only 3 percent of his members cite a lack of financing as a top problem, compared with 37 percent in the recession of the early 1980s.

He said he didn’t think access to finance was nearly as important as halting job losses and igniting a return of consumer confidence.

—MCT Campus

Small business, big employer

The Obama administration is taking further steps to ease credit for U.S. small businesses, which have generated about 70 percent of new jobs over the past decade.

What is a small business?

The U.S. Small Business Administration defines a small business as one having fewer than 500 employees; number of firms, 2006

Total firms, 2006 6 million

A variety of industries are represented; top industries, by number of firms, in thousands, 2006 ...

Construction	792
Retail sales	772
Professional services	726
Health care	605
Hotels, restaurants	467

... and about two-thirds are ‘mom and pop’ shops

1 to 4	2.9 million
5 to 9	1.1 million

The ‘nonemployer’ group

Includes all those who work for themselves, such as consultants, real estate agents, writers, entertainers, freelancers; do not employ other workers

Total, 2006 20.8 million

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Source: U.S. Census Bureau, U.S. Small Business Administration, National Federation of Independent Business (U.S.)
Graphic: Pat Carr



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Young Lama weighs Tibetans' future

Karmaga Lama shares generation's view on Tibet

By Emily Wax
The Washington Post

SIDBHARI, India — For a living Buddha and one of Tibet's next spiritual leaders, the 23-year-old Karmapa Lama hardly conforms to Western notions of a monastic figure. He spends many of his afternoons in his wine-colored robe, head-bobbing to hip-hop music on his iPod or releasing "negative energy," as he calls it, playing war games on his PlayStation.

Frustrated over the pace of Tibet's struggle against Chinese rule, he is known here as the reluctant lama: brooding and outspoken about the plight of his compatriots, many of whom have lived in exile in India for three generations and feel no closer to persuading China to let them have autonomy in their homeland.

"Sometimes I feel like an old man," the Karmapa Lama said from his monastery in Sidbhari, a farming village near the Dalai Lama's exile headquarters in the northern Indian town of Dharmasala. "I'm physically young, but the challenges I have been through have made me an old, experienced man."

That's because the Karmapa Lama — born Ogyen Trinley Dorje — carries a heavy burden: He is Tibetan Buddhism's third most senior figure and is being groomed as one of several potential leaders to forge a fresh path for the next generation of Tibetans in their struggle against China, whose troops entered Tibet in 1950.

The appointment of a successor to the 73-year-old Dalai Lama, who almost single-handedly catapulted Tibet's struggle into the world's consciousness, has become a daunting issue for Tibetans as the spiritual leader ages.

The Dalai Lama, a Nobel Peace laureate, has won over presidents, Hollywood stars and multitudes of soy-and-granola suburbanites with his nonviolent doctrine, down-to-earth spirituality, easy laugh and personal search for compassion and inner happiness.

So far, Tibetans have remained unified largely out of their love and respect for the Dalai Lama. But there is a growing divide

in the community — some want independence from China, and others favor the Dalai Lama's proposal for true autonomy, or his "middle way" approach. Analysts are uncertain whether the Tibetan movement could remain united under a less-venerated leader such as the Karmapa Lama.

"Our generation has so much to take on our shoulders when His Holiness passes. The Dalai Lama has unified the hearts of all Tibetans," said Tenzin Tsundue, a poet and member of the Tibetan Youth Congress, a group that advocates an independent Tibet. "But Karmapa is passionate, he's energetic. He has the respect of the youth. We will really need him."

Tibetan Buddhism holds that the soul of a high-ranking monk, or "living Buddha," is reborn after his death. The resulting "soul boy" can be found through the interpretation of signs, which could include recognition of the deities' personal items.

In the past, Tibetan court-appointed monks have sought the successor to previous Dalai Lamas from among Tibetans. The current Dalai Lama was discovered in 1937 as a 2 year old in a village in Amdo, now part of China's western province of Qinghai.

Monks searching for signs of a lama rebirth chose the Karmapa Lama, then a 7-year-old son of nomads, as the 17th reincarnation in the Kagyu sect, one of four main schools of Tibetan Buddhism.

But his sect is a problem. Previously, all Dalai Lamas have come from the Gelugpa sect. Some analysts say appointing the Karmapa Lama as the next Dalai Lama would be similar to appointing a Methodist as the next pope. Despite that obstacle, there is a movement among Tibetans for him to become an acting leader when the Dalai Lama dies, in part because any replacement would probably be too young to lead immediately.

"After the Dalai Lama, things will be very difficult. We will have lost not just a leader, but our soul," the Karmapa Lama said, his leg nervously bouncing up and down.

In a recent interview with Western journalists, he was vague about his stance on independence vs. autonomy.

"His Holiness has been very successful in laying the foundations for the Tibetan struggle," he said, referring to the Dalai Lama.

"He has done a great job. Now it is time for the next generation to build on this and carry it forward."

Tibetans worry that China could exploit division over the Dalai Lama's successor and that it is already trying to steer the selection process for Tibet's next leader. Last week, Chinese officials said that Beijing must approve the Dalai Lama's successor, according to the state-run New China News Agency.

The Dalai Lama has suggested that his incarnation might be found outside China and could be female. He also said Tibetans themselves could vote on whether to continue the tradition of theocratic rule through reincarnated Dalai Lamas.

A 6-year-old boy anointed by the Dalai Lama in 1995 to succeed the late 10th Panchen Lama, Tibetan Buddhism's second most senior leader, disappeared in China 14 years ago and hasn't been heard from since. Posters of the young, rosy-cheeked boy line the narrow lanes of Dharmasala. Human rights groups have called him "the world's youngest political prisoner."

So far, the Karmapa Lama, who speaks fluent Chinese, is the only spiritual leader recognized by the leaders of Tibet and China. China had once hoped that the Karmapa Lama would be more conciliatory than the Dalai Lama, but that optimism has been tempered in recent years.

"The Chinese government considers the older generation of Tibetans as rubbish. What they are trying to value now is the coming-up generation," the Karmapa Lama said. "We must not consider China and the Chinese as opponents and enemies, but respect them as a source of education. We should learn their language. That's how you become equal."

For now, he is a hero among Tibetan youth in exile, many of whom spend their days in Internet cafes where his photo is posted with the caption "Tibet's Rising Son," competing for space with Pink Floyd concert posters and Free Tibet bumper stickers.

The Karmapa Lama has taken the same path of exile as many of the 200,000 Tibetans living outside their homeland.

In 1999, under increasing pressure to denounce the Dalai Lama, he escaped Chinese-dominated Tibet by jumping from the

second-story window of his monastery.

He trekked for eight days across the freezing Himalayan pass. He was then airlifted by helicopter to India, the Dalai Lama's home in exile. The Dalai Lama himself fled Tibet 50 years ago this month, disguised as a soldier.

The Karmapa Lama, tall, broad-shouldered and restless, is schooled in traditional religious painting. He looks forward to visits with his sister, who lives in town. Once a month he lunches with the Dalai Lama, who often brings him sweets and prayer beads from his world tours. Those who know the Karmapa Lama say he often paces the rooftop, with a view of Dharmasala's wheat fields, tea plantations and snow-brushed mountains.

When he first arrived in India, he was restricted to the top floor of the monastery. Indian intelligence worried that he was a spy for China. But lately he has gained the trust of Indian authorities. Last year he traveled to the United States, where he was introduced by a swooning American female fan as "His Hotness" rather than the traditional salutation, "His Holiness."

In January, the Karmapa Lama was allowed by India to appear at a prayer festival in Bihar, at the spot where Buddha is believed to have attained enlightenment in the 6th century B.C. He drew the largest crowds in decades.

In Dharmasala, half a dozen young devotees recently woke at dawn to attend a prayer service for Tibetans who lost their lives or were arrested during last year's demonstrations in Tibetan areas of China. Amid the yellow light of butter lamps and the sound of throaty Tibetan chants and long brass trumpets, they squeezed into a prayer service led by the Dalai Lama, a leader they still adore. But they were equally eager to see the Karmapa Lama, and what they saw intrigued them.

"The Dalai Lama is always smiling. He has joy in his heart. But Karmapa seems so intense and serious, so worried about the future," said Sonam Lhamo, 29, who bent her ponytailed head in prayer at the Dalai Lama's Tsuglakhang temple, nestled in the Himalayan foothills.

"Karmapa is like our young generation: angry, serious about Tibet, but unsure of what to do."

—LATWP News Service

China tightens grip as Tibet revolt reaches 50 year mark

XINING, China — First came the armed checkpoints. Next, China Mobile sent word to customers in Tibet that text messaging would be interrupted for nearly two months. By Tuesday, police armed with guns containing rubber bullets stopped buses traveling to the capital of a Tibetan prefecture in Qinghai province, checked passengers' bags, questioned monks and berated drivers who carried foreigners.

Many Tibetan areas in China felt under siege last week, as authorities launched a show of force to prevent protests commemorating a failed Tibetan uprising that began 50 years ago on March 10. Residents described a life of increased restrictions, large and small, and admitted to simmering anger and frustration at heavy-handed security following last year's riots in Lhasa, the administrative capital of the Tibet Autonomous Region.

"This morning, a group of armed police passed my shop," said Ajijia, owner of a business that sells traditional Tibetan paintings near Longwu Monastery. "A Tibetan passerby tried to take a photo with his cellphone but the police waved their sticks and threatened him, telling him not to take their picture."

Like other shopkeepers, Ajijia said she lost money after local officials asked them to close their stores earlier. "The government has doubts about Tibetan people. We do nothing wrong, so why do they treat us like this? Yesterday, a monk told me that seeing the police

made him so angry that his heart almost jumps out of his throat. I have the same feeling," she said, patting her chest with her hand.

Behind Longwu Monastery, police with shields blocked mountain paths on Wednesday, preventing monks from burning an aromatic plant on the hillsides.

"If we want to go anywhere outside the town, we are asked to check our ID cards. If you forget your ID, the police will call the monastery to make sure that we aren't lying," said a young monk named Jinmei. "Before, they didn't check."

But Jinmei, who listens to Indian pop music and spends his time typing pages from a Tibetan medicine book into a computer, said he was grateful that his life was not completely disrupted. "I am satisfied because they allow us to read our sutras and go out. I don't know anything about politics and how others feel, but I cannot say that what happened last year is a bad thing," he said, referring to the protests.

Last March, initially peaceful protests commemorating the original 1959 uprising turned into deadly rioting. Monks complained they were not allowed to read their sutras, or Buddhist scriptures.

China says at least 19 people died in the initial uprising, most of them Han Chinese

Continued on Page 7

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Same-sex classrooms have stunning results

By Valerie Schremp Hahn
St. Louis Post-Dispatch

ST. LOUIS, Mo. — As they worked, they channeled their inner Hannah Montanas: “It’s the best of both worlds,” their little voices sang. Next door, in Sylvia Bronner’s class, the group of only boys teetered on stools at their tables, if they sat at all. They blurted possible answers in a raucous numbers guessing game. “A billion?” Bronner responded to one boy’s guess. “It needs to be lower than a billion.”

An experiment in single-sex classrooms started two years ago at Carman Trails School in the Parkway School District in the St. Louis area is winning over parents, students and teachers. And even though the school doesn’t have test data to prove its success, the program is growing.

Last year, the school limited the same-sex classrooms to first grade. This year, it started them in second grade. And just last week, after meeting with enthusiastic parents, the teachers and principal Chris Raeker decided to offer the option in third grade.

Private schools in St. Louis have offered single-sex education for decades. But more public schools are giving it a try and liking the results. A charter school in St. Louis, the Imagine Academy of Academic Successes, and the high school and middle schools in East St. Louis are among the 500 or so public schools across the nation to try single-sex classrooms.

The U.S. Department of Education noted in 2005 that the jury was still out on the effectiveness of same-gender classrooms, due to “a dearth of quality studies” on the topic. But a lack of data hasn’t slowed the popularity of the approach, which has been triggered by recent research that suggests the brains of boys and girls develop differently at young ages.

Raeker turned to single-sex classrooms while trying to figure out why younger boys were getting lower test scores and getting sent to the office more frequently. The boys were also going to the nurse’s office more often, not coming to school as often and not participating in clubs as much as girls.

School leaders sought advice from Leonard Sax, founder of the National Association for Single Sex Public Education. When the group started in 2002, it counted 11 public schools that offered single-sex classes. Today, it counts at least 518.

Groups like the American Civil Liberties



J. B. Forbes/St. Louis Post-Dispatch/MCT

Female students at Carman Trails Elementary School in Missouri. An experiment in single-sex classrooms is winning over parents, students and teachers.

Union and the National Organization for Women have spoken out against separating boys and girls in schools, saying such classrooms are illegal and discriminatory. Others say the approach promotes gender stereotypes and fails to prepare students for a world where both sexes work together.

Sax said there are advantages to continuing to offer single-sex classes to students as they get older. As girls mature, he said, some show less interest in subjects like computer science, though fourth-grade girls actually outperform fourth-grade boys in math.

As boys get older, for some it becomes “cool” to not like school and to disrespect the teacher, Sax said. “It’s great to start in the younger years, as Carman Trails has done, so you can create a different culture where boys think it’s cool to be smart,” he said.

According to Sax, in first and second grades, the gender differences are apparent. For boys this age, it’s not easy to sit down and be quiet like a typical teacher might ask of them. Which is why the boys move around from activity to activity, stand at their desks or teeter on stools, and love to compete and take on challenges.

“Now, I want to see if I can trick you,” second-grade teacher Diandra Maguire recently told her class of boys during an activity on telling time. Such tactics won’t necessarily work for girls, the school’s teachers say. Girls’ second-grade teacher Cindy Rudman dares not tell her class she is going to “trick” them. “I know five that would be in tears,” she said.

The teachers present the same information to the boys and girls, but present it differently. Advocates of single-gender instruction say boys seem to learn better if they are presented a concept first, then allowed to experience it before coming back as a group to discuss it. Girls, they say, learn better if they talk about the concept first and then attack an activity on their own.

Supporters of single-gender instruction also point to research suggesting that girls underestimate their own abilities, while boys have unrealistically high expectations of what they can accomplish.

“I definitely see a self-confidence thing,” said Alicia Wall, the first-grade teacher. “The girls are ready to learn and ready to work. In other classes, they’re afraid to say something

They’re afraid to be wrong.” While Carman Trails has no empirical data to show that single-gender classes are improving student performance, the school is confident it’s on the right track.

School leaders say students in the same-sex classrooms are enthusiastic. The boys are becoming better writers, which is something boys that age aren’t particularly strong at, says principal Raeker. Next year, they will tackle some research, have some standardized state test scores to look at in third grade and will hopefully see results, Raeker says.

For now, they bask in success stories of individuals like Lucas Reeder.

Lucas, 7, is in the all-boys first-grade class and was diagnosed with attention deficit disorder. His reading and writing have improved, and he loves being able to move around the classroom. “We don’t get calls saying ‘he’s been having problems concentrating’ anymore,” says his father, Michael Reeder. “I constantly get compliments from the people at school about what a sweet little boy he is. And it’s nice to see that he’s thriving in his environment.”

—MCT Campus

Schools take part in environmental campaign

By John A. Gavin
The Record (Hackensack N.J.)

HACKENSACK, N.J.—Educational institutions across the country are participating in a national campaign to save the environment.

The initiatives are part of the national Lexus Eco Challenge, co-sponsored by the automobile manufacturer and children’s book publisher Scholastic Inc., to inspire students to make a difference in the environment today, one community at a time.

As part of the campaign, students at Immaculate Heart Academy High School in Washington Township, N.J., have waged a campaign not to use plastic, created a Web site, and planned to lobby their local congressman about their concerns.

“It provides a forum to follow across the whole curriculum,” said Christina Morin, an Immaculate Heart math teacher and adviser. “We’re fostering relations across all age groups.”

Some schools have used the program to coincide with district curriculum, allowing students to utilize their research skills and community outreach, reinforcing what they learn about science, math, social studies and language arts.



John Gavin, The Record / MCT

As a part of their participation in the new Lexus Eco Challenge, students at Immaculate Heart Academy in New Jersey, have started a drive to encourage people in their community to use less plastic.

The 2-year-old philanthropic program has three challenges—land, water and air/climate—divided between high school and middle schools. When it has finished, it will have awarded \$1 million in grants, prizes and scholarships.

Two schools in each category will win

\$50,000, 14 will win \$35,000, and 48 will receive \$10,000.

“We believe that children have the potential and desire to make a difference,” said Nancy Lubbel, a spokeswoman for Lexus in Torrance, Calif., and the program’s organizer. “We wanted to design a

program to test their skills.”

Nationwide, 500 schools and about 5,000 students are registered, she said.

In the program, teams are organized in schools, where they set goals and present their strategy to the larger student body.

“We put everything together,” said Eman Elgouz, 12, one of six student leaders in Oakland, N.J. “We made sheets for the students to sign. ... I’ve learned so much like, when I leave the computer, I should turn it off.”

The Englewood, N.J., program, in which students cleaned a pond that had been hidden by trees and shrubs for years, created a sense of community, teacher Judy Aronson said.

At Immaculate Heart Academy, where students are urging businesses and residents to use corn starch products instead of plastic, garnering more than 400 signatures on a petition, youngsters have bought into the challenge.

“We want to let the legislators know about the Clean Air Act,” said Krista Kaspar, 16, of Parsippany, N.J., who, along with others, has researched lobbying. “They have a major impact on society. They could tell (Congress) to improve this issue.”

—MCT Campus

Sexcetera: He gave her an STD

By Steve and Mia
Philadelphia Daily News

Q: My boyfriend and I have been together for a year and a half. About six or eight months ago he started changing. Before that, he had a very big sexual appetite, a slight romantic side and showed interest in me.

Now, he's very distant and I am the pursuer. When I confront him about whether he has been cheating, he is very hostile. I've seen text messages and found them inappropriate for friends.

After the last incident and the denial and bullying, I got checked at a clinic and - surprise - I have "trich." I told him and his reaction was, "How did that happen?" Then he claimed he never touched anyone else. I explained that only one of us has the means and opportunity.

What is sad is it has been four days since the call from the clinic, and he has said nothing, not "I'm sorry," not "We need to talk," not "You cheated on me."

I'm not sure how to deal with it; I have never had an STD. I have taken my medication, but I'm not sure what he has done. If he did not cheat, he would be angry, wouldn't he? If he did cheat, wouldn't he 'fess up?

Steve: Well, no, not if he doesn't take responsibility for his actions, and you let him get away with it. First, however, he needs to take medication.

Trichomoniasis often produces no symptoms in men, which means he

could re-infect you. Then you need a frank talk about your relationship. If he can't promise that he won't cheat again, you must leave.

Mia: I wouldn't even wait for a promise, I'd just leave. This guy isn't treating you well. He gave you an STD and now he's ignoring you. Sounds like a loser to me. You deserve someone with a big romantic side.

Q: My wife is about to have a baby and will take about three months off from work after the birth.

But when she goes back to work, she wants her widowed mother to move in with us and take care of the baby.

I like my mother-in-law, but I don't want her in the house full-time. My wife thinks this is a great plan. What should I do?

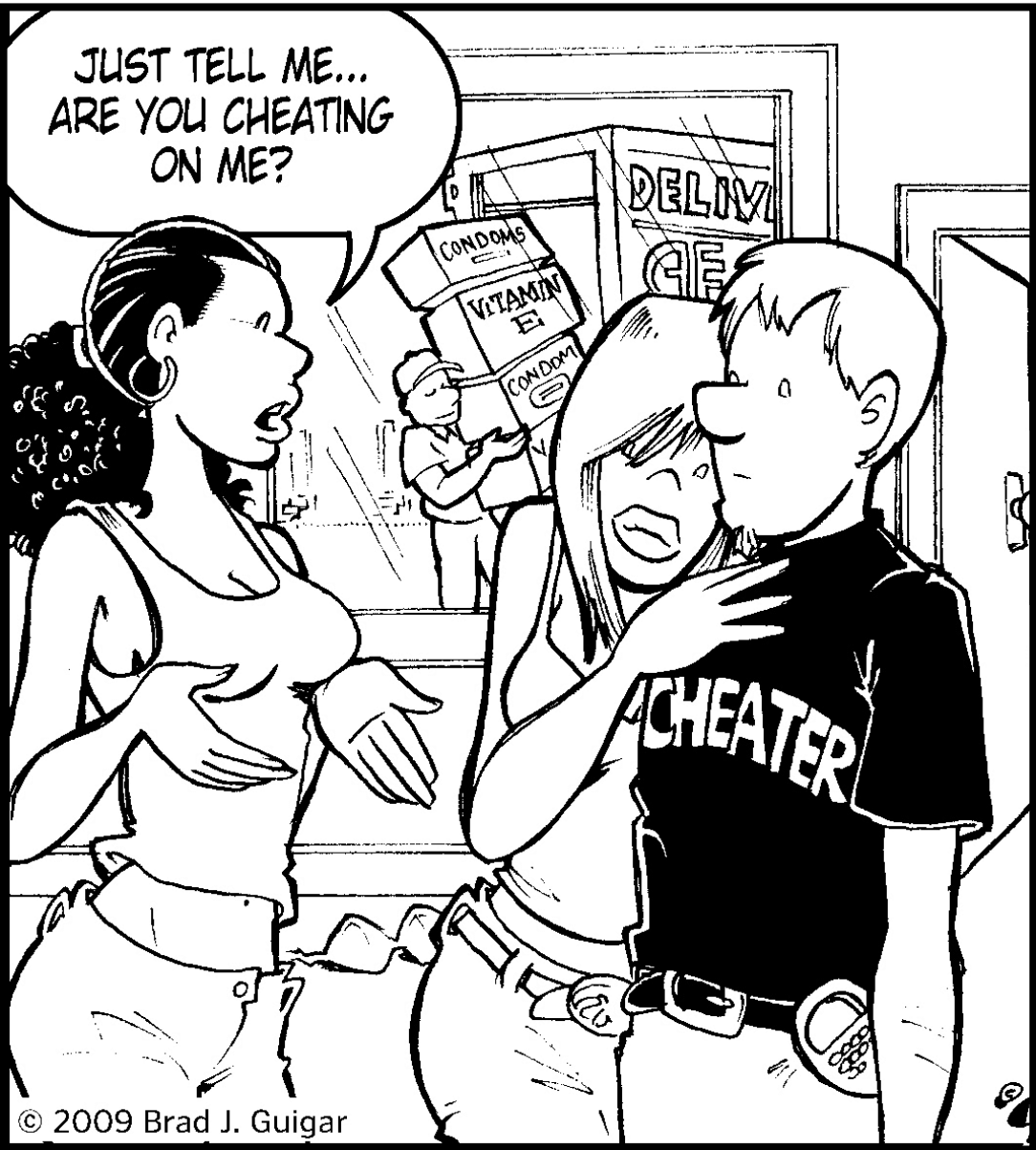
Mia: Don't make any decisions until after the baby is born. But at some point you'll have to tell your wife the truth.

Say you'd love to have mom-in-law visit and help out, but you think it may be a strain on your marriage to have her full-time.

Steve: I like my mom-in-law too, but if she moved in, I'd have to live in my car. If she lives far away, maybe you can work out a way for her to move to your town without actually moving into your house.

It's great to have family close by to help with a newborn, but when an in-law moves in, it can have serious impact on the quality of your marriage.

— MCT Campus



Brad J. Guigar, Philadelphia Daily News / MCT Campus

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Our Voice

Safety incentives halt gun violence

The economy is stagnant. People, all over the country, are losing their jobs. Inflation is running rampant.

Naturally, because of the ills of our nation, crime is on the rise; and no more so than here at home.

The FBI recently released the 2008 crime statistics for Central Florida. Orlando practically set the curve with violent crime. In 2007, the FBI reported 22 murders, whereas in 2008, that number more than doubled to 49.

This year? We're well on our way with 10, according to the latest tally in January.

The question posed to us today, is one of safety; safety for our citizens and most especially, our officers in the field.

What needs to be done in order to stem the tide of rising violence in Orlando? The Valencia Voice offers a simple solution to this quandary: better benefits, better pay, and more help for our law enforcement officers.

It may seem like wishful thinking, but what our officers need is help and support from community officials.

Their pay should be increased, there should be more officers per capita, and the volume of officers should be concentrated on the troubled areas of Orlando.

Of course, that's not to say that less violent crime areas should be neglected, but there can be no denying the need for certain troubled neighborhoods and communities to have an increased presence of enforcement.

However, this isn't the only aspect of the story. The amount of registered gun owners is up by 30 percent since last year, according to FL state officials.

Obviously in lieu of a sagging economy, and rising crime stats. This raises an interesting quandary. Imagine a world

where, in the right hands, a gun could shift the course of history.

During the tragic events at the Columbine High school in Littleton Colorado, what if one of the teachers were licensed and trained to handle a firearm?

Would the same amount of innocent students have died, or might more have been saved before the bloodshed climaxed to the breaking point.

The Virginia Tech shooting: A professor with the permission to bear a firearm could have stopped the mayhem before it reached the level it did.

Granted, a nation full of cowboys is not the goal, but our second amendment should be protected, even with certain regulations (no assault rifles, obviously).

The answer to the vigilante scare is continued education; teaching responsible gun ownership.

Before you can use a gun, you must first learn to respect it and educate yourself on how to handle it properly. However, these are all standards when applying for ownership of a firearm.

Back to our men and women in blue, the proposal should be, as such, that an officer of Orlando should be entitled to a more comprehensive benefits and pay package, giving better incentive for them to risk their lives in troubled spots of Orlando.

This problem is obviously not something that is going to solve itself overnight.

With the help of local officials, strengthened community support, gun ownership education, and comprehensive assistance at the state level, the City Beautiful can once again claim celebrity for its wonderful tourist attractions, and not by how many people were unfortunately killed within its perimeters.

“Given the unprecedented advances for women, it is the best of times to be a teenage girl. But it is also the worst of times”

VALENCIA VOICE

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Mike Fisher / MCT Campus

Your Voice

Obama revisits past-era weapon plan restrictions

By Kenny Wagner
kwagner@valenciavoices.com

President Obama, yes I can become President Clinton. The assault weapons ban recently proposed by the Obama administration is another policy in a string of legislation and initiatives that harkens back to the Clinton administration.

Healthcare reform, balancing of the federal budget, tax cuts to the middle class and now the ban of sale on assault weapons.

This makes President Obama look more like an agent of the Clintons than an agent of change.

But let's look at his weapons ban at face value.

While looking like a champion of Constitutional rights and bipartisanship, Barack Obama has made it a point to defy one of the most influential, albeit one of the most controversial interest groups today, the NRA.

While he may not have meant to take such an approach, he has undeniably done just that--slapping the face of conservatives and 2nd amendment rights groups.

This is not the change most were looking for, certainly a reversal of policy to the Clinton administration was not the among the interests of the people.

While banning the sale of assault weapons may be a good idea and a good way to curb violence, it is not in the best interests of the President to bog

Obama wants to see change, but only on his own terms and by tested means via past administrations... That is certainly not change.

down his political machine with such a controversial issue.

He is effectively trying to please Congressional Democrats while alienating Republicans, which would be a good idea if most of the litigation he put forth were true bipartisan efforts with plenty of Republican initiatives thrown in to make the GOP happy.

However that is not the case, he does not need to please his party in this fashion. At least not right away.

The main argument, beneath the politics is that this will help to get rid of guns on the street and this may be true.

It certainly worked for Bill Clinton.

However, it is obvious that this challenges a Constitutional right that many enjoy if not practice.

Banning weapons available to the populous in anyway threatens all our fundamental rights.

President Obama may not want to limit other Constitutional rights, but then again what's stopping him—that would definitely be a change.

So the question becomes, why now, why this, and why Obama?

The answer is, Obama wants to see change, but only on his own terms and by tested means via past administrations. He is trying to reverse the policies of the Bush administration, not necessarily anything else. That is certainly not change.

Your Voice

Gun laws don't mean peace

By Adam Fishman
afishman@valenciavoices.com

The second amendment gives Americans the right to bear arms. With rising crime rates across the United States, regulations are placed on who can possess a weapon in order to try and keep crime statistics in check. Are these regulations enough to where they don't impose upon every American's second amendment rights? Some states do not have bans on any weapons, such as Virginia, while certain jurisdictions in New York have bans on assault weapons. All states require a background check, and some have a waiting period, such as Florida (three days), while others are instant. If you already have a concealed weapons permit in Florida issued prior to November 30, 1998, than you do not need to have a background check. This classifies as a "permit exception," but some states require you to have a background check no matter what permit you already possess.

Would stricter universal gun laws really stop a person determined to obtain a gun? A perpetrator of the law will do whatever it takes to get a weapon. Tougher gun regulations might deter them or make it a little bit

Would stricter universal gun laws really stop a person determined to obtain a gun? A perpetrator will do whatever it takes to get a weapon.

harder, but ultimately the individual will find a way to obtain what they want. Unfortunately, tougher regulations will not solve the problem of suicides or murders. Stricter laws will only prolong the inevitable. In a recent Rasmussen Reports survey, 47% of adult Americans saw no need for tougher gun control laws, while 43% said America does need more legal restrictions. 35% of all Americans say stricter gun control laws will reduce violent crimes, while 25% say it will lead to an increase. Nearly one-third of Americans say crime has increased in their communities in the past year; 72% of those impacted say the increase in crime is because of the poor economy, a striking statistic.

In order to lower crime rates, the responsibility lies within each citizen who owns a gun legally. Owning a gun for home or self protection is one thing, but using a weapon to break the law will not be tolerated. If we can eliminate crimes used by legal weapons, it will lower the crime rate, and likely have a positive effect on our communities. More information about Rasmussen Reports can be found at www.rasmussen-reports.com.

Do you believe in the right to bear arms?

Responsible people don't use guns

By **Shaneece Dixon**
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For this week's poll question, our staff decided to focus on gun violence and the constitutional right to bear arms.

Obviously what makes this topic so controversial is the fact that because people are allowed to carry firearms or any type of weapon, so long as they are licensed, it is difficult to decipher what purpose the weapon is being used for.

If people have the constitutional right to carry firearms for means of protection, should we go as far as to look up medical records of said individuals in order to see if they are deemed mentally capable of bearing such a responsibility?

After all, if you look at our poll results, a common word that you'll see in the responses is 'responsible'. If this is the general consensus for any individual to carry a firearm, then what is the standard of responsibility? What actions or background deem a person to be responsible?

Are people who sell guns looking at the purchaser's personal file to see if they are responsible? Because when I think of responsible, I think of things such as paying your bills on time, walking your dog like you're supposed to, going to class everyday, showing up to work on time, etc.

The truth is, by use of the standards stated above, there are responsible individuals out there that have committed crimes by use of a firearm or other said weapon. Cho Seung-Hui, the notorious Virginia Tech shooter, appeared to be a quiet, responsible individual.

People that seem responsible can still abuse their right to bear arms by inflicting upon another person's unalienable rights.

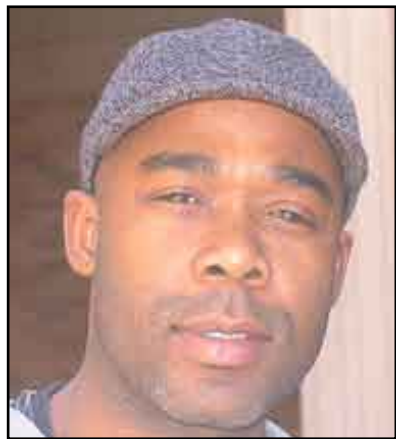
Most mass murderers and other criminals can look responsible, but the question really is if those particular individuals should be approved to use them. To prevent anyone from abusing this right would mean having to take away this right completely.



"No. I don't see a means for it unless you live in a tough neighborhood."
— **Vanessa Arroyo**



"Yes for protection purposes. If people lost the right to bear arms, you'd probably get robbed."
— **Carlos Virquez**



"Yes, I believe people have the right to bear arms because it's in the First Amendment. If you want to carry weapons, you should be able to."
— **Carlito Bazelaïs**



"Yes for protection purposes. You have to be responsible."
— **Erica Torres**



"No. Especially in Florida because the crime rate is so high. If you don't use it responsibly you shouldn't have it. You should let the proper authorities take care of any personal disputes."
— **Alka Patel**



Yes. Because it's safer if responsible people possess weapons. Irresponsible people will still try to get weapons illegally.
— **Ryan Weiler**



"Yes so we can keep the government in check if we have to start another revolution."
— **Pat Mount**



"Yes, but with regulations. You must be responsible, and there should be more courses needed to obtain certification."
— **Amanda DaGiau**

Shaneece Dixon / Valencia Voice

North Carolina legislature fights bullying

By **Lynn Bonner**
McClatchy Newspapers

RALEIGH, N.C.—A fight is brewing in the North Carolina legislature over protecting school children from bullies.

Supporters of an anti-bullying proposal on Wednesday introduced a bill that would require school districts to adopt policies protecting students from violence and harassment.

The bill lists about a dozen characteristics that make students targets for bullies, including sexual orientation and "gender identity or expression."

A similar proposal got hung up last year

on the issue of identifying gay students as potential bullying targets. The House passed a bill that included them, but the Senate balked after social conservatives who opposed the measure flooded their offices with phone calls and e-mails.

The bill's sponsors introduced a list of supporters Wednesday that included the state PTA, the state Pediatric Society

and the N.C. Council of Churches. State Rep. Rick Glazier, a Fayetteville Democrat, said there will be more people pushing for the measure this year.

"There's been a change in the understanding of the country," Glazier said. "Every child is a child of God."

Kate Mabe, a high school junior from Winston-Salem, N.C., talked about having to transfer after

students at her first high school found out she was gay.

"Not a lot of people will stand up for me or anyone like me in my schools," she said.

Bill Brooks, president of the conservative N.C. Family Policy Council, said Wednesday there was no need to list bullying targets, and that the bill would be better without vague, undefined terms.

Bullies should be disciplined, no matter whom they target, Brooks said.

The State Board of Education already has a policy against bullying, but some legislators say it is not strong enough.

— *MCT Campus*

"Not a lot of people will stand up for me or anyone like me in my schools."
— **Kate Mabe, a high school junior from Winston-Salem, N.C.**

Designer makes rare store visit

By Candice Shih
The Orange County Register

SANTA ANA, Calif. — Christian Louboutin's shoes are often a cause for — or a result of — celebration.

Attorney Roya Haririan of Villa Park, Calif., bought a light gold pair for her wedding ceremony in May. Art critic and curator Alexx Shaw of Los Angeles wheedled her father into getting the \$6,295 Marie Antoinette shoes in pink for her upcoming 25th birthday.

The two women were among hundreds who lined up Tuesday to meet Christian

Louboutin at his South Coast Plaza boutique in Orange County, Calif.

Before meeting his fans to sign autographs, the French designer talked with me about his background, inspiration and point of view.

Q. You're here today to officially launch your Marie Antoinette shoe. Why did you decide to bring it here?

A. I wanted to bring something that nobody had seen in America. The Marie Antoinette shoe was just going to be finished when I was coming. It was a good moment to bring a queen of France.

Q. Where do you find your inspiration?

A. It actually depends. It can come from any conversation. Life is like that. You know, you see a movie.

You never knew about the movie. For instance, I saw "Doubt," and I thought that it was an incredible movie. And definitely "Doubt" is so pure in a way. It's a totally inspiring movie.

Q. I saw that Amy Adams, who was in "Doubt," was wearing your shoes at the Oscars.

A. I had to meet Amy Adams. And I was very excited. I had not even seen "Doubt." She's so wonderful in the movie. But I came later than expected. I had a crazy schedule. So did she. We'll do it next time.

Q. Did you see others wearing your shoes at the Oscars?

A. I saw different people. I did not take care of this personally. I saw Meryl Streep. She was in the hotel just before we went to the ceremony.

Q. Do you have a favorite pair of all the ones you've designed?

A. I don't have one favorite pair. I would say my favorite pair is the one I have in my brain that is not yet finished. It's the next one.

It's just like people, just like friends. It's difficult to say this is my best friend. It's a bit complicated. The same thing with my shoes.

Some I like because of the design, some I like because it reminds me of a specific period. Some I like because it makes me think of a specific souvenir.

Some have been very challenging, like Marie Antoinette. It's the first time I worked with (embroiderer) Jean-Francois Lesage. It's a very nice shoe for me, in terms of the design maybe, but also in terms of the whole process of the thing.

It's attached to someone who is an old friend of mine, for 20 years now, and we had never worked together.

Q. Do you think about the outfits that women are wearing with your shoes?

A. It depends. Some people you work in collaboration with. If you already have a dress, it needs to be in accordance. But that's very easy. I do 16 shows per season, meaning 16 different designers.

Q. Is there a celebrity or muse you think wears your shoes the best?

A. I can't say that of one person because when you're designing for women in general, it's very difficult to shrink in one woman the essence of women.

I have four sisters. I was the youngest, still the youngest. I remember complaining to my mother, "I don't have four sisters, I have 400 witches in the house."

One person is already a lot of different characters according to the day or the mood, boyfriend or no boyfriend, diet or no diet. One person is already a hundred persons.

And also, I like to be surprised by people in a way. Sometimes I'm doing shoes and I see them on women, and I did not expect them to be worn that way.

And it's nice. I'm definitely not a dictator. I'm just thinking of the shoe, concentrating on that. It belongs to them, not to me.

Q. Do you pay attention to the physiology of the foot?

A. Yes, of course. I'm a bit of a doctor.

Q. A podiatrist?

A. No, not really. I wouldn't go that far. With the height of the heel I'm doing, I would not say that. Suffering to be beautiful doesn't work. It gives you bad faces, which doesn't work.

What I like is if women look at my shoes and she finds it beautiful. She's not thinking, "Oh my God, how comfortable it is."

But of course there is inside work to be done. But it doesn't need to be explained.

Q. Can you explain the unusual video of feet and shoes in your store?

A. I did not do the video. This girl who's a friend of mine, I asked her to do a window in Paris. And she said, "I'm going to do an installation with videos."

It looked great and it was very funny because people were glued looking at the video.

We decided together to have videos but it's all below the knees because there is a lot of expression in the language, the body language, from the knee to the foot.

I told her it's enough to explain a story through feet.

Q. What does your typical day look like?

A. It's changing. If I have a random day, it's divided into three places. It could be Paris, because I have my office there and it's my hometown.

And it's also Italy, where I spend a lot of time in the factories. And also Egypt where I spend a lot of time designing.

Q. What's next for you?

A. I'm going to go to Moscow for the opening of the exhibition that I did with David Lynch called "Fetish." I've done shoes that are totally fetish shoes, they aren't meant to walk at all. I asked David to photograph them.

— MCT Campus



Cindy Yamanaka, Orange County Register / MCT Campus

French shoe designer Christian Louboutin autographed his shoes for local fans at South Coast Plaza in Costa Mesa, California.



Cindy Yamanaka, Orange County Register / MCT Campus

Left, Nina Shaffer of Orange, Calif., gets a closer look at the new \$6,295 Marie Antoinette shoe. Right, Louboutin signs a pair of shoes for customer during his appearance in Costa Mesa, California.

New clothing line aimed for yoga practitioners

By Amy Martinez
The Seattle Times

SEATTLE — For a noncompetitive activity, yoga is getting awfully cutthroat.

This month, Bellevue, Wash.-based Eddie Bauer became the latest clothing company to introduce a new yoga line for women, hoping to grab a slice of the estimated \$5.7 billion that Americans spend annually on yoga classes and products.

Chief Executive Neil Fiske, who took over Eddie Bauer in summer 2007, said from the outset that he wanted to remake the company into a serious active wear brand.

The new yoga line, which promises stretchable, breathable fabrics, is “just one piece” of that strategy, he said.

“I think the casual-wear market is more crowded than the active wear market, and the active wear market is growing faster than the casual market,” Fiske said.

“The key for us is being focused on what we offer, and what we offer is high-performance yoga wear that’s respected by yoga practitioners.”

Eddie Bauer sells four styles of women’s yoga pants for between \$49.50 and \$64.50, tank tops for \$29.50 to \$44.50, and jackets for \$59.50 or \$64.50.

MIDRANGE PRODUCTS

Those prices put Eddie Bauer above Old Navy and Target but below Lucy Activewear and lululemon athletica — yoga specialists that offer some clues about which way the market is headed in a down economy.

Greensboro, N.C.-based VF, which owns Lucy Activewear, said last week its contemporary brands turned negative in the third quarter and were among the hardest hit in the fourth quarter, posting a year-over-year sales decline of about 5 percent.

Lucy comprises VF’s contemporary segment along with denim brand 7 For All Mankind.

“We remain enthusiastic about the Lucy



John Lok, Seattle Times / MCT Campus

Eddie Bauer’s line is aimed toward the middle of the yoga active wear market. It’s makers hope to stand their ground in the sporty market.

brand, but we recognize that the current economic environment is making our turn-around efforts more difficult,” Mike Egeck, president of VF’s contemporary brands, told analysts in a conference call.

Those efforts include remodeling stores and giving products more “technical benefits.”

Vancouver, B.C.-based lululemon athletica had been posting double-digit gains in sales at stores open at least a year until last fall, when quarterly same-store sales growth slowed to 4 percent.

Lululemon subsequently cut its profit forecast for fiscal 2008, citing the tough economy and weak Canadian dollar.

Its prices include \$98 for reversible flare-leg pants and \$52 for tank tops with “anti-stink” elastic.

San Francisco Bay area retail consultant Jeff Green said the upscale yoga-apparel brands are hurt by an overall decline in discretionary spending. “Women will spend money on their families, their children, but

not on themselves right now,” he said.

A WORKOUT LOOK

Green, who advised Lucy during a period of rapid store expansion from 2004 to 2008, said he suspects that Eddie Bauer is trying to appeal to “time-stressed women” who like to project an image of working out, whether or not they actually do.

It’s a natural fit for Eddie Bauer, he said, but the competition is stiff.

Others selling yoga clothes include J.Crew, Title Nine and Victoria’s Secret.

“A lot of discounters like T.J. Maxx and Target are starting to get into this niche, and they may be more successful given their mass and value appeal,” Green said, referring to the recession. “Eddie Bauer is getting into it a little late.”

T.J. Maxx and Marshalls sell yoga pants starting at \$16.99, and tops for between \$9.99 and \$29.99.

Sonya Cosentini, a spokeswoman for Framingham, Mass.-based TJX Cos., which operates T.J. Maxx and Marshalls stores, said

women aren’t buying the clothes to do just yoga — but “also other things like run errands or lounge around the house.”

“It’s all about comfort and finding dual uses for things in your wardrobe,” she said.

STARTING FROM PARKAS

Founded in 1920, Eddie Bauer rose to fame making down parkas for World War II pilots and outfitting major mountaineering expeditions.

Its focus shifted to selling casual clothes for women after the Spiegel Group bought it in 1988. Fifteen years later, Spiegel filed for bankruptcy protection, and Eddie Bauer emerged as an independent company in 2005.

Eddie Bauer lost money in 2006, 2007 and the first nine months of 2008.

Describing the fourth-quarter retail environment as “brutal,” the company plans to cut up to \$15 million from its operating cost structure this year, after eliminating as much as \$50 million last year.

Nearly 150 jobs at its downtown Bellevue headquarters have been cut, and its stock is down to less than \$1 on the Nasdaq.

The new yoga line, which is sold on the company’s Web site and at 275 stores in the United States and Canada, aims to give customers a new reason to shop, Fiske said.

“If you keep doing the same things in a recession, you’re destined to go down with the market,” he said.

“We’re hoping to offer customers something new that’s a great value and a relevant part of their lifestyle.”

Jennifer Black, a Lake Oswego, Ore., retail consultant who describes herself as a physically fit baby boomer, said she’s checked out Eddie Bauer’s yoga line and likes it.

“The fabrics are really nice, and they hold you in,” she said.

“For someone who wants that lululemon look but doesn’t want to spend that kind of money, it’s a good compromise.”

—MCT Campus



John Lok, Seattle Times / MCT Campus

The Mesh Yoga Tank and Perfect Pant are both part of Eddie Bauer’s new line of yoga clothing and gear, which promises stretchable, breathable fabrics. Casual clothes for women have been a focus for the company since the late 1980s.

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Warner Bros. / MCT Campus

Nite Owl II (Patrick Wilson) fights off a rioting prisoner as Silk Spectre II (Malin Akerman, right) lends a hand in Warner Bros. Pictures', Paramount Pictures' and Legendary Pictures' action adventure "Watchmen."

'Watchmen' falls short of comic

By Frank Tobin
ftobin@valenciavoices.com

The superhero movie genre, now with the posthumous supporting actor win for Heath Ledger's Joker, has become a prestigious extension for the most ardently ingenious talents in the industry; filmmakers with a keen eye for the dramatic, and a mind for limitless creativity (Chris Nolan, Sam Raimi, and now Zack Snyder).

"No. Not even in the face of Armageddon. Never compromise." While Rorschach's (Jackie Earle Haley) proclamation may be possible to uphold as a superhero, the refusal to compromise on behalf of the filmmaker in the process of literary adaptation is impossible.

As film theorist André Bazin wrote, "Faithfulness to form, literary or otherwise, is illusory: what matters is the equivalence in meaning of the forms." In other words, Bazin is arguing that each medium has its own modes of representation, thus the struggle for formal fidelity is a lost cause and that the main objective is that the adaptation should capture the original work's essence.

Will die-hard fans be disappointed? No doubt, but quite unjustly. Even with director Zack Snyder's compromised ending, which ultimately can be interpreted as being more devastating than the climax concocted by the original graphic novel's artists Moore and Gibbons (although the film lacks a sequence on par with the opening pages of the comic's twelfth volume), Snyder's ambitious attempt is the best that could be done in a feature film.

For those of you unfamiliar with the story, "Watchmen" takes place on an alternate time-line beginning in late 1985.

The United States won the war in Vietnam, Richard Nixon has been elected to an unprecedented third presidential term, and the only man standing between nuclear war between the U.S. and U.S.S.R. is "Dr. Manhattan" (Billy Crudup), a human nuclear bomb who stands on the American side as a nuclear deterrent. The film, like the comic, begins with the murder of Eddie Blake (Jeffrey Dean Morgan), a retired superhero formally known as "The Comedian."

While clues point to robbery, the sociopath Rorschach believes that the death of

"The Comedian" could be the beginning of a plot to eliminate former costumed heroes.

Hoping to foil such a conspiracy, Rorschach warns his former partners in crime fighting: Manhattan and his lover, the beautiful Silk Spectre (Malin Ackerman), the Batman-esquire Nite Owl (Patrick Wilson), and the smartest man in the world, Ozymandias (Matthew Goode).

Collectively dubbed the Watchmen, the group initially disregards Rorschach's theory. That is until Dr. Manhattan is forced off Earth, making the possibility of nuclear war a near certainty.

For the most part, Snyder's direction is precise. His graphical style captures Gibbon's graphics and layout perfect... right down to the book's fearful symmetry.

The framing and camera movements mirror those of the book, a treat for avid fans of the book and Gibbon's art. Moreover, Snyder's work with the actors is quite accomplished. Jackie Earle Haley continues his streak of embodying sociopaths perfectly. Patrick Wilson captures the sadness and longing for a greater goal in life, something all retired heroes must face.

The film is not without its flaws.

For the most part, the film and Snyder do a fantastic job of drawing out the background of the individual characters and the pasts of masked heroes in general very well (particularly during the film's opening ten minutes and the beautifully executed credit sequence).

However, the one character who seems to receive the short end of the narrative-stick is Nite Owl. Snyder establishes his background, but not to the degree that the others benefit from.

In addition, Malin Ackerman's performance, while being far from bad, seemed to be the weakest out of the leads.

However, her character is the most clichéd in the book, so perhaps Ackerman just did not have that much to work with.

Snyder has made an adaptation that is as faithful and accessible as possible, a compromise that is ultimately successful.

Snyder, to borrow from Bazin's model, not only captures the essence of Moore and Gibbon's novel but also demonstrates a "visual imagination" that creates the impression of Gibbon's layout and graphical style.

'Miss March' makes for hilarious surprise

By Cassie Weinz
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Remember the old lesson, never judge a book by its cover? Well, the lesson still stands today and can even be applied to movies as I, myself, discovered this past weekend.

Premiering in the many theaters around the country this past weekend was that of 'Miss March,' a film that was poorly advertised and that few had even heard about. What I had anticipated to be a boring and pointless venture, turned out to be the exact opposite. 'Miss March' turned out to be surprisingly funny and entertaining.

How many high school students can say that they awoke from a coma four years later only to flip through the pages of a Playboy magazine and discover a full page spread of

their long time high school sweetheart?

Well, that is precisely what happened to Zach Cregger's character Eugene Bell who is the typical clean cut, all American boy that conducts seminars teaching children about abstinence with his girlfriend, Cindi Whitehall, played by Raquel Alessi. Eugene feels very strongly about he and his girlfriend saving their selves for marriage despite the constant nagging and teasing from his best friend, Tucker Cleigh, played by Trevor Moore, who is obsessed with developing a long list of sexual partners.

Yes, Eugene seems like a very determined guy being that he and Cindi are in love and have been dating for the majority of high school. So after all that, nothing could change his mind about abstinence right? Wrong.

Cindi decides that she and Eugene are

ready and therefore pressuring him into having sex with her the night of their prom.

Eugene, terrified about the risks that go along with having intercourse, begins to have second thoughts. But leave it to a best friend to who should be there when you need advice to get you trashed right before the biggest, most memorable moment of your life.

Yes, it's Tucker to the rescue with a bottle of whisky and a couple shot glasses. Needless to say, this can only end badly and it does, with Eugene in a hospital bed.

If you knew next to nothing about the side effects to a coma before seeing this movie, I guarantee you will walk out well informed. Upon awaking, Eugene suffers from a common condition known as Atrophied, which basically means that he has to learn to walk all over again. He has also lost control of his

bowl movements which makes way for some pretty graphic but funny scenes. Confused and disturbed by Cindi's decision to become a Playboy bunny, Tucker decides to take, or rather kidnap, Eugene from the hospital to pay a visit to Cindi at the Playboy mansion to get some answers.

Their road trip is definitely one for the history books as the two get themselves into some pretty hilarious situations.

'Miss March,' was indeed a surprise and is a film that should be given a chance. Sure, it won't make it to the vault as one of the greatest American classics in movie history but is worth the money to catch a few laughs. Take it from someone who was skeptical, 'Miss March,' is worth seeing. To not find this movie to be enjoyable could only be the result of a broken funny bone.

'Dead Rising' joins gory classics

By Frank Tobin
ftobin@valenciavoices.com

You arrive at a small-town Colorado suburb, via a helicopter, camera-in-hand, ready to capture the carnage taking place. The streets are littered with death; rioting breaks out at every corner.

You catch a glimpse of a crowd of people, they're huddled around something. As you zoom in closer you see the madness unfold: the crowd is FEASTING on a human being...

The chopper finally lands at its destination: the downtown mall. And when you open the doors, you uncover the horrible truth: this town is overrun with ZOMBIES.

Surrounded and scared, you need to defend yourself; you reach over to grab something, anything, to fight off the hordes.

The zombies are closing in, blood-death in their eyes, salivating at the thought of fresh brains to eat.

When you finally do grab something, you whip it around to take them head-on...

only to discover you picked up a STUFFED ANIMAL.

Too late, time to rock; this will be the most vicious stuffed animal this side of a cracked out Sesame Street puppet. And lo and behold, it actually works. Zombies are annihilated by your teddy-bear onslaught.

And this is only a fraction of the fun you'll have with "Dead Rising: Chop Till You Drop," for the Nintendo Wii.

Created by Capcom, this port of a 2006 XBOX 360 exclusive comes equipped with new waggle controls, and a far superior aiming system, thanks to the Wii's unique remote-based pointer setup.

Utilizing the "Resident Evil 4: Wii Edition" gameplay engine, any fan of popping off the heads of the undead will immediately find their place among the pantheon of zombie slayers.

The comparisons between the 360 original and this new Wii iteration are noticeable enough, but don't detract from the overall experience. A simple analogy might be in order:

Let's try a similar zombie situation- "Dawn of the Dead," which do you prefer?

The original, George Romero classic or the 'modernized' 2004 remake? Some people preferred the remake more than the 1978 romp, but the original is the better of the two.

Does the remake capture the "magic" of the original?

Does it still have slow, dim-witted zombies (no), stabs at American consumerism (not as much), or even the mentality that humanity is the bigger enemy in an apocalyptic setting (again, not as much)? Not really, but it's still a fun movie.

Substitute the two movies in question for their subsequent gaming counterparts and you begin to see where one game ends and the other begins.

They're both great in their own way, while still bringing something to the table that their opposite lacks.

In this case, the original 'Rising' has 300 zombies onscreen at once, whereas the Wii can only carry a dozen (which pop-up right

before your very eyes directly after you kill them).

However, the shooting mechanics in the Wii are far superior to the original, and if you've ever watched the aforementioned classic zombie killing pieces of cinematic history, you'd know that to kill a zombie you have to shoot it in the head... not beat it to death with Teddy Ruckspin (another huge cookie for any of you kids who gets that reference).

Gameplay, as has been said since the dawn of time, will always trump graphics in terms of gaming importance. The 360 version looked better, but was not as fun as this version.

If you played the original, you owe it to yourself to give the Wii one a go... if only for the chance to score headshot after headshot on the walking dead.

And in the end, isn't that what gaming is all about?

That was rhetorical: of course that's what gaming is all about. Another cookie for you.

New battle over used video games

By Mike Musgrove
The Washington Post

WASHINGTON — My mail carrier recently brought me nearly new copies of "Gears of War 2" and the latest "Call of Duty," a couple of video game blockbusters released this past holiday season.

These two hit titles could have costed me \$120 retail, but through a used-game trading service called Goozex, I only forked over about ten bucks worth for postage and fees as I mailed away a few old game titles from my personal collection to some other Goozex members who had requested them, just as I'd requested those two action games via the service. Video game makers argue that their entertainment form gives its customers more bang per buck than any other medium. I squeezed about 100 hours of entertainment out of the recent hit "Fallout 3," for example, and still didn't manage to complete every storyline packed on the game's disc. But at \$60 a pop for a new title, this doesn't always feel like an inexpensive way to past time. Some of this medium's biggest fans are young and don't have deep pockets.

It's not surprising that the used video game market has become a big business unto itself. GameStop, the dominant player in this market, recorded \$2 billion in used-game sales last year. That's compared with a total new-game software market in the United States of \$11.7 billion.

GameStop has ruled this market for years without much competition — as much as I



Screen shot of the Web home page of College Park, Md.-based Goozex. A video game-trading service, Goozex facilitated 160,000 transactions last year.

like Goozex, it's a tiny player in comparison. But others are moving in. When Amazon announced Thursday that it would be entering this fray, allowing customers to send in their old games for credit, GameStop's share price dropped 14 percent by the end of the

day. Toys "R" Us also recently launched a test program for selling used games at a few of its stores in New York.

With the profit margins GameStop enjoys from its used-game business, other retailers understandably would try to break into this space. A popular, brand-new game like "Halo Wars," released last week, typically costs \$60. If you sell it back to GameStop once you're finished or bored with it, you likely will get \$35 of store credit toward your next purchase. The store will typically then put your used game on the shelf at \$55.

For retailers, those kinds of profits are "nirvana," said Evan Wilson, an industry analyst with Pacific Crest. "It's nearly impossible to get those margins at retail."

As GameStop has grown, Wilson said, the game industry's attitude about the retailer has changed.

A few years ago, it was generally assumed that used-game trade-ins gave kids a bit of spending capital that went toward the purchase of new products. As the economy has soured, however, the retail chain that is one of the industry's biggest customers is also starting to look like its biggest competitor. Publishers don't make money off the sale of a used title, after all.

Seems to be a touchy issue. GameStop did not return calls or e-mails for comment last week. The game publisher Electronic Arts declined to comment on the relationship between its business interests and those of GameStop. The Washington-based

video game industry trade group, the Entertainment Software Association, also declined to comment.

Eventually, the game industry hopes to distribute its wares digitally — a move that could either cut retailers like GameStop out of the loop or simply provide gamers with more incentive to hold on to their old game discs.

One of the biggest releases so far this year has been a downloadable expansion to the most recent Grand Theft Auto title. Called The Lost and Damned, the \$20 add-on gives players access to several hours of fresh content.

It's one of the most positively reviewed releases of the year so far — but you can't play it if you sold your copy of the game disc last year after finishing it.

In these penny-pinching times, it seems logical enough that more cost-conscious customers would consider turning to used games offered at GameStop or through services like Goozex.

While Goozex launched a few years ago aimed at hardcore gamers, co-founder Mark Nebesky says a fast-growing segment of its membership is parents getting games for their kids.

Though relatively small, the suburban College Park, Md.-based Goozex is growing quickly. The start-up makes a buck off each trade, and users conducted 160,000 trades in 2008, up 300 percent from the year before.

— LATWP News Service





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Tips to transform NCAA games

Making the game better than ever

By Dick Jerardi
Philadelphia Daily News

PHILADELPHIA — It is that time of the basketball season when I get aggravated with too much of what I see and hear.

There is much I like about the game. At the end of each February, I am reminded of all that I don't like. Some of it, sadly, never changes.

This list could be endless, but I am just going over the most obvious things I could do without:

—Mike Krzyzewski's disbelieving smirk when more than one call per half goes against his team. His act was old a decade ago. It is still old. Just coach your team, please . . .

—Floppers. If officials would start calling technical fouls on these bad actors, some of this nonsense could be stopped. If the rules committee won't do the obvious and adopt the NBA circle in front of the hoop, enforce the existing rules. The fake offensive foul is the biggest problem in the sport. It is getting worse. Slow down tapes of these calls and you will see the vast majority of collisions are the result of a defender still moving into an offensive player's path trying to draw contact, often after the offensive player has left his feet . . .

—Three Atlantic 10 games in Philly starting at the same time, with none on television. I know people who would pay to go to three games in a day, if given the chance.

Without ascribing blame or going over the details that fans couldn't care less about, the league really needs to do something about its television contract. Two years ago, hardly any games involving La Salle, Temple and Saint Joseph's were on in the market. Last year, it was better. This year, it is worse. Solve this problem. You are losing fans and you don't have enough to lose any.

NOT EXACTLY

ESPN's Jay Bilas, a really good analyst with an obvious and ongoing big-conference bias, actually said the following last Saturday about the established fact that many teams from BCS conferences won't play teams from lesser conferences that they consider a threat: "This business about nobody will play us is a lie."

I have talked to too many coaches from teams outside the Big Six to know Jay's statement is not accurate, especially if it is an absolute statement. Ask Saint Joseph's coach Phil Martelli how many



Georgetown guard Austin Freeman (15) dunks during second half action against Louisville at the Verizon Center in Washington, D.C., Monday, February 23, 2009.

times he got his calls returned from the big boys in the early 2000s.

Xavier and Gonzaga have separated themselves from their brethren, like Temple did under John Chaney and Massachusetts did under John Calipari.

They can get the games against the big boys. But they are the exceptions. Richmond and teams like that, especially if they look like they might be good, are not getting their calls returned.

Bilas really seemed angry when he spoke. I am not exactly sure what to make of his point or why he seemed so upset.

If his point was that this is a bad year for teams outside the Big Six, I would agree. If he were saying this generally is an even playing field, I would disagree. It is not. And it never has been.

THE FISHER FACTOR

Villanova sophomore Corey Fisher has become impossible to guard in the open court. He gets to the rim and finishes against everybody.

I have no idea how he gets the ball in the basket sometimes, but it is obvious he knows what he is doing because the ball almost always ends up in the basket.

Fisher is the instant offense off the bench that any coach would love to have. He is the real X-factor as Villanova gears up for the Big East Tournament and NCAA Tournament. There is nobody harder to guard than a dribbler coming right at you. Right now, there is nobody anywhere doing that much better than Corey Fisher.

TALES FROM INDY

When I was in Indianapolis two weeks ago

for the mock selections at NCAA headquarters, I learned even more about the process. I also had the good fortune of listening to the wit and wisdom of Greg Shaheen, who has a fancy title that essentially translates to "he runs the NCAA Tournament."

He told a story about one particular coach calling to complain about his seed. After a few hours, that coach, now a former coach, said: "At least, I understand the process."

"Ironically enough, he communicated his displeasure via cellphone," Shaheen said.

Now, I wonder who that coach could be?

Shaheen also said that after the Selection Show, the NCAA runs "the largest short-term charter and planning process in North America."

All travel plans for 65 teams are made in 24 hours.

Committee chairman Mike Slive, the SEC commissioner, told me, "I was really hoping they would win the tournament."

"They" would be last season's Davidson team. Slive was referring to the Southern Conference Tournament. He really did not want to have to make an at-large call on Davidson with all those close nonconference losses. Davidson won the Southern and we all know how its NCAA story played out.

THIS AND THAT

—Two teams (Gonzaga, Memphis) are unbeaten in conference play.

—Three teams (DePaul, Air Force, Southeast Missouri State) are winless in conference play.

—St. Joe's is just 6-6 in the Palestra. Would they be better in the Fieldhouse? "I don't have any idea," Phil Martelli said Sunday after his team lost to UMass. "I haven't spent any time thinking about it. This is our home court. We've got to play here. You'll never hear me complain about playing in the Palestra."

Seeing UMass coach Derek Kellogg on Sunday reminded me that he never lost a game at the Palestra as a player. Now, he is 1-0 as a head coach. UMass was 8-0 in A-10 quarterfinal and semifinal games at the Palestra before winning four straight championship games on campus, one at Curry Hicks Cage and three at Mullins Center.

In Kellogg's four seasons, UMass was 111-24. The season after he left, UMass made the Final Four. That was a rather nice run.

"The acoustics in this place are fantastic for a college game," Kellogg said of the Palestra. "If it wasn't for the recruiting and you needed these plush locker rooms and arenas, this is the type of environment you want for a college game."

It still is, but I understand his point. It is sad, but true. Glitz has won out over tradition. But in this town, we really don't do glitz.

—MCT Campus

New standards make tournament 20 wins is not the magic number

By Myron P. Medcalf
Star Tribune (Minneapolis)

MINNEAPOLIS — Gophers men's basketball coach Tubby Smith talked about the urgency his team faces in its final three games following Sunday's victory over Northwestern. That game was a personal milestone for Smith, giving him 16 consecutive 20-win seasons.

But winning 20 games means less today than it did in years past. Once considered a magic number for landing an NCAA tournament bid, an upset or two in conference tournaments can significantly reduce the importance of that victory total.

Although coaches often say they are not focused on what their teams have to do to shore up an invite to March Madness, they know better.

Michigan's John Beilein said any more losses could be devastating for his squad, while Smith said he is not thinking about a magic number for

his team to get in, but he knows the Gophers have work to do.

"It used to be if you got to 20 wins, you had a good chance to get into (the NCAA tournament), but not anymore," Smith said during Monday's Big Ten media teleconference. "Expansion of conferences, the addition of schools, it kind of makes it a little bit tougher."

And then you want to be at least above .500 in your conference play if you're going to get to the NCAAs. ... But it's good to get the 20th win, and we know that we've got to get a few more as we go along here."

Few doubt that Michigan State (21-5, 11-3 Big Ten), Purdue (21-6, 10-4) and Illinois (22-6, 10-5) can do anything to disrupt their status as virtual locks for the NCAA tournament. Minnesota (20-7, 8-7), Wisconsin (17-10, 8-7), Penn State (19-8, 8-6), Michigan (17-11, 7-8) and Ohio State (17-7, 7-7) have more complicated situations that will require strong finishes to receive



Minnesota coach Tubby Smith communicates with his team during second half action against Michigan State.

an invitation.

The Big Ten has had more parity this season than in recent years. No one knows better than Beilein, whose Wolverines beat two top-five opponents, Duke and UCLA, in the nonconference schedule but are below .500 in league play.

The Wolverines beat the Gophers at home on Thursday but lost in overtime at Iowa on Sun-

day.

"Every player at our level, they're not stupid," Beilein said. "They know you can't keep losing. But is there a magic number to win? No. ... If you keep losing and losing, then you're not on that bubble and then you've got to win that (conference) tournament."

—MCT Campus

Team USA lacks passion

By Ken Davidoff
Newsday

MIAMI — What we’ve re-learned these past couple of days, taking in the World Baseball Classic here at Dolphin Stadium, is that virtually no one cares about Team USA; Not even Team USA.

Perhaps that’s a mite strong. Not so much, however, when you compare the passion surrounding and within Team USA to that of its competitors.

A pathetically near-empty ballpark watched Team USA survive Sunday night, as the home team pulled out a 9-3 victory over the mighty, now eliminated honk-ballers from the Netherlands. The same Netherlands team that had eliminated somewhat-favorites Dominican Republic in the first round of the WOrld Baseball Classic Tournament. The U.S. gang will play again on Tuesday, taking on the loser of Monday night’s Puerto Rico-Venezuela tilt, and by all means Davey Johnson’s group can still win the championship.

But what Johnson displayed Saturday night, in the team’s mercy-rule, 11-1 loss to Puerto Rico - and reiterated Sunday, before the game - was Team USA’s mixed priorities. It’s a conflict to be applauded if you’re a fan of Major League Baseball. Less so if you hold a vested interest in building up the World Baseball Classic.

Johnson himself provided the perfect example: He started Brian McCann in Saturday night’s debacle, and then he noticed that McCann was 3-for-6 lifetime, with a home run, against Sunday night’s Netherlands starting pitcher Rick VandenHurk. Rather than play that matchup, however, Johnson felt that a) he couldn’t abuse McCann by playing him two straight nights and b) on the flip side, he couldn’t let his other catcher, Chris Iannetta, rust away

by sitting two straight nights. So Iannetta started.

“I told (McCann), I’m sticking with my game plan,” Johnson said. “I said, ‘If this was a World Series, I’d probably DH you and catch two catchers. But then I’m short-changing some other guys.’”

Compare that to the actions of Team Venezuela manager Luis Sojo, the former Yankees beloved veteran, who went to Francisco Rodriguez for a four-out save in Saturday’s 3-1 victory over the Netherlands. Or Puerto Rico’s Jose Oquendo, who used his bullpen aggressively Saturday night to protect a six-run lead.

And then there are the WBC rules. The darn rules that, for the second straight time, even though they have been completely revamped, seem to be taking Team USA by surprise.

Three years ago, following a first-round loss to Team Canada, the Team USA players expressed shock when reporters told them that they might be eliminated before they even played another game, due to the parameters dictated by run differential (the U.S. wound up surviving that scare). And Saturday night, when Puerto Rico scored a “walkoff” victory by extending their lead to 11-1 in the bottom of the seventh, activating the mercy rule, many players didn’t know the game had ended until the Puerto Rican players stormed the field.

Johnson could’ve managed that final inning with more urgency, when the Puerto Ricans had a 9-1 lead, men on second and third, one out and righty Mike Aviles up against lefty Matt Thornton. He chose not to do so.

“I told (pitching coach) Marcel (Lachemann), I’m not gonna manage this to keep the 10-run rule out,” Johnson said. “I’m not gonna go bring a right-hander in to pitch to one hitter to stay out of the 10-



Robert Duyos / Sun Sentinel / MCT
Jimmy Rollins, left, celebrates a two-run homer in the World Baseball Classic.

run rule, and use that pitcher there and then use another one for the eighth inning, and then use another one maybe today. So it wasn’t that I was giving up hope. I had all the confidence in the world.”

“In the course of the season, I probably would’ve made a change. Changed the matchups in the seventh inning. I usually don’t manage to keep it that close when I’m down eight runs.”

Yet the stakes in this tournament are supposedly huge, and a loss Sunday night gave Team USA zero room for error in its subsequent two games. Would any other team essentially concede a game in this double-elimination format, no matter the deficit? Would any other team possess such an ignorance of the basic rules?

No, it all goes back to Team USA’s different perspective on the WBC. There’s nothing wrong with the Americans’ approach. Except when they, and the tournament’s organizers try to present themselves as something they aren’t.

One fact will remain, however, and that is the sincere fact that the United States squad is now only one loss away from elimination in this year’s competition, which would be an improvement over the last competition’s finish, but would still leave many americans with a very bitter taste in their mouths. What could make this worse, is that the USA team is supposed to be rolling over their competition. With another loss ending the WBC for the USA, a potential matchup with the Puerto Rican team may spell the end for the USA.

—MCT Campus



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