



Top Stories

Southwest Airlines Flight Skids Off Runway At Chicago's Midway

A Boeing 737 skidded off the runway at Chicago's Midway Airport Thursday evening; the Southwest Airlines flight 1248 was en route to Midway from Baltimore.

Passenger claims to have bomb, killed by air marshals at Miami International Airport

A United States federal air marshal shot dead on Wednesday an American Airlines passenger named Rigoberto Alpizar on American Airlines Flight 924, a Boeing 757, at Miami International Airport.

Featured story

Asylum seeker hunger strike enters seventh week

A Chinese man in Australian immigration detention is still refusing food, seven weeks after starting his hunger strike

Wikipedia Current Events

- Croatian general Ante Gotovina, rated the third most-wanted war criminal from the Yugoslav wars by the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia, is arrested by Spanish police in Tenerife and extradited to face the tribunal in The Hague.
- Former Prime Minister of the UK Baroness Thatcher has left hospital after being given a clean bill of health by doctors after feeling faint yesterday.

Wikipedia Current Events

- Two Palestinians, believed to be militants, are killed following an Israeli air strike in the Gaza Strip.
- An Israeli soldier dies after being stabbed by a Palestinian at a Checkpoint in the West Bank.
- At least 30 people have died following an attack on a bus in Baghdad.
- Lawyers for convicted murderer and Crips co-founder Stanley "Tookie" Williams meet with Governor of California Arnold Schwarzenegger in a last-ditch plea for clemency.
- President of Iran Mahmoud Ahmadinejad remarks that Israel should be moved to Europe and the "issue will be resolved." He also alleged that the Holocaust did not take place. His remarks were condemned by Israeli, European and US spokesmen.
- The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement adopt a Red Crystal design, allowing Israel to join as a fully-participating member.
- UK Law Lords rule in A v. Secretary of State for the Home Department that evidence which may have been obtained by torture cannot be used against suspects in terrorism cases.

Southwest Airlines Flight Skids Off Runway At Chicago's Midway

A Boeing 737 skidded off the runway at the Chicago Midway Airport on Thursday evening. The

Southwest Airlines flight 1248 was en route to Midway from Baltimore. The aircraft attempted the landing at approximately 7 p.m. local time under heavy snow, and skid off the slippery runway, crashing through a barrier wall surrounding the airport and on to a residential street.

Reports indicate that two vehicles were damaged. One of the vehicles was still lodged under the aircraft when police and fire officials arrived on the scene. At least five people were taken to a local hospital, their injuries are unknown.

Council of Europe planning to use satellite images in prisons probe

The Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE), Europe's leading human rights watchdog group, plans to use satellite images and flight logs as part of its investigation into claims that the United States maintains secret prisons in Europe.

The European Union (EU) has granted PACE access to EU archived satellite images and flight logs to help determine whether aircraft linked with CIA secret detention centers have been using European airspace.

According to Human Rights Watch, a humanitarian rights group based in New York, "CIA airplanes traveling from Afghanistan in 2003 and 2004 made direct flights to remote airfields in Poland and Romania."

Baseball: Nationals get Soriano from Rangers for Wilkerson, Sledge, prospect

The Washington Nationals completed a trade late Wednesday night that sent outfielders Brad Wilkerson and Terrmel Sledge and minor league pitcher Armando Galarraga to the Texas Rangers for All-Star second baseman Alfonso Soriano.

Soriano batted .268 with 36 homers, 104 RBIs and 30 stolen bases last season while earning \$7.5 million. He is a career .280 hitter, with a .320 on-base percentage and an OPS (on-base percentage plus slugging percentage) of .820. Soriano turns 30 in January and his contract ends after the 2006 season.

For the Nationals, Wilkerson batted .248 last year with 11 homeruns and 57 RBIs, but was sidelined for part of the season with a forearm injury. For his career, he is a .256 hitter with a .365 on-base percentage and an .817 OPS. He made just over \$3 million in 2005, and he turns 29 in June of 2006.

Sledge only played 20 games in 2005 because he tore his hamstring, but he is most well-known in Washington for hitting the first homerun in Nationals history.

ESPN is reporting that the Nationals may play Soriano in the outfield because they already have Jose Vidro, a career .300 hitter, at second base. Vidro missed almost half of the 2005 season with leg problems.

Schwarzenegger heads back to work after feeling ill, being hospitalized

Arnold Schwarzenegger, Republican governor of California, bodybuilder and famous Hollywood celebrity, was hospitalized this week around midnight local time, at the advice of his doctor. He was taken to the University of California, Davis Medical Center due to a rapid heartbeat and symptoms of the stomach flu.

Hours after being admitted to the hospital, Schwarzenegger was released and has returned to work. Schwarzenegger, who is 58 years of age, underwent surgery in 1997 related to a valve in his heart.

Spokesperson Margita Thompson has stated that, "He was observed for a few hours and released. He's feeling fine this morning and is in the office working." She went on to say that a rapid heart beat is fairly common for the type of heart procedure that he had done in the past.

Australian government paves way for nuclear waste dump in Northern Territory

The Australian Senate has passed legislation to force a national nuclear waste dump on the Northern Territory (NT). Despite opposition from Aboriginal land owners, the NT government, environment groups and Labor the Federal Government can now officially build a nuclear waste repository in the NT after the legislation for the waste dump passed the Senate today. The Radioactive Waste Management Bill was passed with 34 in favour and 29 against.

The two bills override the Northern Territory's objection to the radioactive waste dump after the South Australian government opposed a previous preferred site

near Woomera. According to Federal Labor opposition MP, Warren Snowdon, it is the first time since 1978 that Territory law has been overridden. "It's an absolute disaster and it shows contempt for the Northern Territory community, it shows absolute contempt for land use planning in the Northern Territory," he said.

The Territory Labor Government has been a resolute opponent of the plan, saying a nuclear dump will expose residents to a new security threat.

The Chief Minister of the Northern Territory, Clare Martin, says transporting nuclear waste to the Territory would make it vulnerable to terrorists looking to make a dirty bomb. Ms Martin says experts on the issue have raised concerns about security at a national nuclear waste facility.

She says scientific debate played no part in the Federal Government's decision to build a dump in the Territory and nuclear waste could be a target while it is being moved to the Territory. "You'd have to look at how far around a country you're going to be transporting things like intermediate nuclear level waste," she said.

"And if you're going to put such a nuclear facility in the middle of central Australia you've got to get the waste there by road and that's thousands of kilometres." She says the Commonwealth should not expect any cooperation from her Government.

The Australian Nuclear Science and Technology Organisation's (ANSTO) Craig Pierce says there would be no point trying to use low level waste to make a dirty

bomb because the waste is mostly gloves and labcoats. "It simply would make no sense to get this material and want to blow it up," he said.

"It would have no impact at all. On the intermediate level, that will have a high level of security when it is transported. It won't be transported for very far on road, on land, and it will have an appropriate level of security."

The Australian Conservation Foundation said it expected community anger would escalate, now the bills had passed. "Last year the federal government gave the people of the NT an absolute categorical assurance there would be no dump in the NT," ACF nuclear campaigner Dave Sweeney said. "Today they have broken this promise and bulldozed through bad law in an attempt to gag community concern."

"Under the government's proposal, 130 truckloads of radioactive waste would be driven from Sydney's Lucas Heights reactor, through NSW, to an as-yet unnamed site in the NT in the first year alone, with dumping to continue for decades," he said.

The Australian Greens say the legislation could be manipulated to allow waste from other countries to be stored in the Northern Territory. The party is angry that amendments they proposed were not considered when the bill was passed. Greens Senator Rachel Siewert says the legislation is not strong enough.

"In the bill, there were some provisions to supposedly keep out international waste," she said. "We don't think they go far enough and that they are open to manipulation and interpretation. So what we

were trying to do is absolutely positively ensure that international waste will not be brought into this facility."

The NT Environment Centre's Gary Scott has hinted at civil disobedience similar to that seen during the anti-uranium mining protests at Jabiluka. "I don't think Territorians are going to take this lying down unless that is in front of bulldozers," Mr Scott said.

The Centre's Peter Robertson has emphasised the importance of the waste dump for the federal government to realise its plans for a second nuclear reactor. "If we get the dump, Sydney gets the reactor". Establishing a national waste dump is a precondition for the operating license for the proposed OPAL nuclear reactor which will replace Lucas Heights in Sydney.

Robertson pointed out that the issue of waste is creating an international crisis for the nuclear industry, with no storage plans for the more than 250,000 tonnes of high-level radioactive waste currently in existence.

A detailed study of three Defence sites - Fishers Ridge, 43 km south-east of Katherine, Harts Range, 100 km north-east of Alice Springs, and Mount Everard, 27 km north-west of Alice Springs - will be conducted next year, with the facility to be operational by 2011.

Traditional owners of Athenge Alhere - an estate group of the Arrernte Nation - have voiced their dissent to the nuclear dump and say they don't want waste from Sydney's Lucas Heights nuclear reactor brought to their land. "Because the land we take care of, because all our ancestors lived in

this land and hunted on this land as well, so it's mainly because of the animals and the next generation of our kids and their children, so we still say no," traditional owner Benedict Stevens said.

Coalition MPs, including Northern Territory Country Liberal senator Nigel Scullion, secured a number of amendments to the bill. They included the ability of the NT government and indigenous land councils to decide on other site options, a prohibition on the storage of high level and overseas waste and the free storage of the NT's own waste.

The South Australian Government says tenacity staved off a nuclear dump on its land. SA Environment Minister, John Hill, says there could be a federal election before the facility's finally built. "It will take them some time to construct this facility and that gives you some opportunities," he said.

Mr Hill says waste should be stored closer to Lucas Heights in Sydney where it is generated. Radioactive waste is currently stored at over 100 locations across the country, including in hospital basements in major capital cities and at universities.

Update: NT farmers have threatened to take action if a site near their farms is selected for the dump. Fishers Ridge, south of Katherine, is one of three Commonwealth sites earmarked for the facility. Sharon Shaw's farm 12 kilometres from the Fishers Ridge site. "The thing that worries us the most, it's on top of a Tindal Aquifer which really concerns us in the fact that there's many sink holes that turn up

every wet as the ground is always shifting," she said. "Any normal person without an environmental degree or anything would realise that this ground is unstable."

Voluntary student unionism bill passes Australian House of Representatives, enters Senate

The bill on voluntary student unionism, as proposed earlier by the Federal Government education minister Brendan Nelson passed the House of Representatives on December 7 and is now to be debated in the Senate. The Higher Education Support Amendment (Abolition of Compulsory Up-Front Student Union Fees) Bill 2005, commonly known as "voluntary student unionism" or VSU, will have the effect of removing the automatic joining of university students into their respective unions, and the consequent abolition of the payment of union fees. These fees go towards amenities and services provided the student unions. The Federal Australian Labor Party Opposition, which had originally opposed the introduction of VSU, changed its policy in the support of the automatic unionism of students but the retainment of amenity and services fees.

The bill was read a second time on December 6, with Opposition members such as Brendan O'Connor highlighting the perceived Government ideological reasons for the pursuit of this bill, stating that the minister "wants to be seen as an ideological warrior", and also explains the reason for the Opposition's shift in policy -- that "it takes the student political dimension, which seems to be the obsession of the government, out of the equation, and focuses on the services". One Government member, Peter Lindsay, had noted

in response to this, stating that when VSU was introduced in Western Australia "the world did not end, the services continued to be provided...In fact, more services were provided because the student associations had to be responsive to the needs of the students so they could get students, of their own free will, to decide to pay a student association fee".

A heated exchange followed between the next speaker Kelvin Thomson, Lindsay, and the deputy Speaker Robert Baldwin, over a comment "Why should students have to pay for outsiders to use a sporting facility? Why? The member for Wills [Kelvin Thomson] cannot explain that." which Thompson said "provoked" him. Thomson's speech further criticised Brendan Nelson's proposal for a "campus-by-campus ballot", noting "the great deal of opposition everywhere it has been put", the Financial Review description as a plan which "pleases no-one". Alby Schultz, from the Government, had remarked on the "Senate Employment, Workplace Relations and Education Committee inquiry suggested that...some student unions were badly run and gave poor service to the majority of students", and that the money gathered from students "sell[ed] a political agenda which many of the students-and I would say the majority of students-would not subscribe to personally or ideologically", citing examples of the National Union of Students support for the Baxter detention center protest earlier this year.

Further Government and Opposition members continued the debate until 9 pm in the evening of December 6, where debate was adjourned for the day.

On December 7 the Leader of the House Tony Abbott moved a guillotine on this debate, where either at 12 noon or at the conclusion of the second reading debate, whichever comes first, the question should be put, and one hour be allotted for consideration in detail and conclusion of other stages of the bill. Deputy Leader of the Opposition Jenny Macklin in response called the movement of the bill "unadulterated ideology...from this power-drunk government". In the second reading debate, Brendan Nelson provided summary remarks after the two preceding speakers, stating that "that students should be free to choose what services they will purchase with their money and what organisations they will join", and that the compulsory payment "is a flat tax. The students from the poorest families pay exactly the same as those from the wealthiest, and we think that this is one of the few anachronisms which remain to be addressed".

In the consideration in detail stage, an amendment proposed by the independent Tony Windsor aimed to confine the use of fees for academic and recreational purposes only, which failed as there were fewer than five in support for the amendment. Opposition amendments were moved by Macklin after that to achieve the Oppositions views on VSU, but a Government member Sophie Panopoulos termed the amendments "a fraud" and "taxation without representation". The Opposition amendments failed due to Government numbers.

The bill subsequently passed the House of Representatives 78 to 58, and the Senate December 7 received the bill on the same day,

and due to standing orders, will be debated at the next period of sittings, which will be early next year.

Opposition motions in Australian House of Representatives attempts to bring Government to account on last sitting day of year

On the last sitting day of the year in Federal Parliament, the Opposition opened with three successive motions to attempt to bring the Government to account over the major issues that the Government has faced over the last fortnight.

The motions to suspend standing orders was first put by Wayne Swan (the shadow Treasurer) dealt with the Treasurer Peter Costello, calling on him to release documents and information regarding Robert Gerard; the following two put by Kevin Rudd (the shadow Foreign Minister) and (the member for Corio) dealt with the Government's involvement in the Australian Wheat Board inadvertently paying money to a front business of Saddam Hussein.

The Government with their House majority moved that these speakers and their necessary seconds be no longer heard (the 'gag'), and voted down the motions.

Business Brief for December 8, 2005

New York Stock Exchange to merge with Archipelago Holdings

The 213 year old New York Stock Exchange voted to merge with Archipelago Holdings Inc. The merger will change the NYSE from a non-profit organization into a for-profit publicly traded company.

About 90 percent of the 1,366 members of the NYSE's board voted, with 95 percent voting in favor of the merger. The new company will be named NYSE Group Inc. with the symbol NYX.

Mexican illegal immigrants had jobs in home country

Most of the estimated 6.3 million Mexican illegal immigrants who have crossed the U.S.-Mexican border had jobs back in Mexico according to a survey by the Pew Hispanic Center. "Thus, failure to find work at home does not seem to be the primary reason that the estimated 6.3 million undocumented migrants from Mexico have come to the U.S. Policies aimed at reducing migration pressures by improving economic conditions in Mexico may also need to address factors such as wages, job quality, long-term prospects, and perceptions of opportunity," the survey authors wrote. The Center surveyed 4,836 Mexicans showing that only 5 percent who had been in the United States for two years or less were jobless in Mexico. The survey was conducted in Spanish at Mexican consulates in 7 US cities over 7 months. The survey reported that new crossovers are less likely to work on a farm. Most modern crossovers work in construction, hospitals, and manufacturing.

Today in History

1897 - Stage actress, journalist and leading suffragette Marguerite Durand founded the feminist newspaper *La Fronde*.

1905 - Legislation on the separation of church and state in France was adopted, causing civil disobedience by French Catholics.

1946 - The Doctors' Trial, the trial for crimes committed in Nazi human experimentation during World War II, began in

Nuremberg, Germany.
1958 - The John Birch Society was founded to fight the perceived threat of communism in the United States.

1960 - Coronation Street, the longest-running television soap opera in the United Kingdom, was first broadcast on ITV.
December 09 is Independence Day in Tanzania (1961)

Quote of the Day

"We take men for what they are worth — and that is why we hate the government of man by man, and that we work with all our might — perhaps not strong enough — to put an end to it." ~ Peter Kropotkin

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