




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.

Australian Senate agrees to "urgent" ban on tertiary-sector mandatory student unions

The controversial "voluntary student unionism" bill has been passed by the Australian Senate after an unexpected urgency motion. This follows similar "urgent" motions in recent weeks gagging debate on major, controversial changes to Australian law in industrial relations and in law-enforcement.

Wikipedia Current Events

- The Bush administration summons Canadian ambassador Frank McKenna, and is expected to formally lodge a complaint after Prime Minister Paul Martin's criticism on December 7 of the United States at the Montreal conference on climate change. U.S.-Canada relations are already a major issue in the upcoming Canadian federal election.
- Reports emerge of an alleged massacre of protesting farmers and fisherman in Dongzhou, Guangdong, China by police forces. The protesters are believed to be upset with government plans to build a new power plant in the area and infill part of the bay. The death toll, pegged at 20, is the worst act of violence by Chinese security forces since the Tiananmen Square massacre in 1989. The town is reportedly still sealed off by government forces.

Virginia dangerous dog law bill ready for Assembly debate

The key legislative provisions of a new dangerous dog bill could mean felony criminal charges and higher home-owner insurance premiums for Virginia dog owners whose pet is deemed dangerous. A Spotsylvania County committee, called the Dangerous Dog Task Force, hammered out the basics of the bill that county Senator R. Edward Houck will introduce to the General Assembly in January.

Within the bill:

- a first-time incident by a dog would result in a felony charge to the owner, with an increase in the severity of the penalty for subsequent offenses (the penalty ranges from 1 to 10 years in prison)
- a dog deemed dangerous must be registered with the state on the Virginia Dangerous Dog Registry (published by the state to the web) and owners must carry insurance liability protection for the animal up to \$300,000
- dangerous dogs cannot be sold, adopted or transferred , except to animal control
- no dog deemed dangerous can be transferred into the state

The dog would be legally defined as dangerous if it has bitten or attacked a person or companion animal. In the case of an attack on a companion animal, the injuries to the animal are such that it had

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.

South Carolina says final goodbyes to former Governor Campbell

Former Republican governor Carroll Campbell will lie in state today on the second floor of the Statehouse in Columbia, SC. He suffered from a fatal heart attack on Wednesday. He was 65. He was a native of Greenville. There will be a funeral at Trinity Episcopal Church in Columbia at 10:30 a.m. local time on Saturday, and there will be an additional funeral service and burial at All Saints Episcopal Church in Pawleys Island.

Wikipedia Current Events

- The Groups for the 2006 FIFA World Cup to be held in Germany are finalized.

to be euthanized. Currently, the Virginia state penal code contains no guidelines in the case of injury or death due to a dog attack.

"We're not talking about a little situation where somebody's pet chases a kid down the street with a bike and maybe jumps up and causes a very slight little scratch or a little nick or something," Senator Houck said Tuesday. "We're talking about where people are seriously disfigured and maimed.

"This journey has just begun, this is going to be a long way," Senator Houck cautioned, since the proposals before the General Assembly could face many changes, or outright rejection.

Task force committee member Maureen Hill-Hauch said to the issue of dog owners being held accountable for their animal's actions, "This will send a clear and convincing message to irresponsible dog owners."

The legislation, called the Dorothy Sullivan Memorial Bill, is named in memory of the 82-year-old Spotsylvania woman who was mauled to death by 3 neighborhood Pit Bulls while she was walking her own dog in her front yard. The owner of the attacking dogs, Deanna Large, 38, has been charged with a felony of involuntary manslaughter. The trial is scheduled to begin December 20.

Australian Senate agrees to "urgent" ban on tertiary-sector mandatory student unions

The controversial voluntary student unionism bills that have been proposed earlier in the year by education minister in the Australian House of

Representatives has been passed by the Australian Senate December 9, without amendment, after an unexpected urgency motion that afternoon. The voluntary student unionism bills aim to stop the compulsory joining of university students into the student union and the consequential abolition of payment of the union fees, which often go to amenities and services provided to university students. Many students, associations, and vice-chancellors of universities are opposed to the legislation, with rallies and days of action taking place earlier this year. In the process, Senator Steve Fielding of the Family First Party held the key vote who expressed his late decision to support the passage of the VSU legislation.

The VSU legislation was earlier anticipated to be debated at the next sitting -- that is, next year -- but appeared on the notice paper today in case the Senate had time to discuss the bill, however, at approximately 1.40pm an urgency motion was moved on a number of bills, including the voluntary student unionism (VSU) legislation which entered the Senate yesterday. The urgency motion allots time on the second reading to extend to 4.30pm and remaining stages of the bill to 5.00pm. The Senate is currently was to adjourn at 3.30pm today, but this was extended to approximately 5.15-5.30pm.

The guillotine was controversial and criticised by non-Government senators, who drew on the perceived three and a half hour "filibuster" from Government members over non-controversial bills earlier today, where all parties were in agreement, and over perceived trivial bills such as a bill on the European Bank in Mongolia.

Earlier Senator Penny Wong of the Australian Labor Party suggested that back-room dealings were taking place to get key Australian National Party senator Barnaby Joyce on-side. Senator Joyce had expressed concerns over the VSU bills contrary to the Nationals support on the bill, and had proposed to amend the bill. The other key senator Steve Fielding has expressed that he has said that an amenities fee is appropriate if set "at the right level". Senator Hill has "made no apology" about putting forward the Government program, and said that he would "do his best to implement the Government program".

A division on the urgency motion followed, which was passed from Government Senate majority.

In the second reading, Senator Wong had said that the Government had treated the Senate chamber like "an extension of their own party room", and that the Government were "drunk on power". She went on to speculate whether the Nationals had "rolled over" in regards to Senator Joyce, or whether the Australian Liberal Party party (the other counterpart in the Liberal/National Government coalition) had done a deal with Senator Fielding, and drew attention to the potential effects of abolishing the fees. Senator Natasha Stott-Despoja from the Australian Democrats has expressed her opposition to the bill and the policy, terming the day "Freaky Friday" and went on to say "Democracy, in this place, is dead" due to the earlier events of the day, as non-Government senators did not know about possible deals that were made or the details of the amendment.

Senator Ron Boswell, leader of the

Nationals, expressed his support of the abolition of the fees, and the procurement of a package of funding of 80 million dollars towards funding academic and non-union related services, which he said satisfied the National's policy stance on the issue, and warned implicitly against crossing the floor. Family First Senator Fielding has said that the argument can "run both ways" in his speech, and said he had a "great deal of trouble" making up his mind on the issue, but said that Family First will be voting for the bill. Senator Kerry Nettle, the next speaker, was incensed at this, and termed Senator Fielding "Senator Sellout" but was asked to withdraw that remark. She went on to state amongst her remarks that Fielding has "sold out" students.

Senator Joyce, the final speaker, has expressed his opposition to compulsory unionism, and has said he will put his amendment to abolish compulsory unionism but described his amendment which will ensure alternative funding for services (but not described whether it will be compulsory fees) at parity with funding received today. Some senators who wished to speak but could not due to time constraints had their speeches incorporated into Hansard by leave.

Committee

In committee, Senator Eric Abetz has stated the Government will be opposing the amendments proposed by Senator Wong, stating it "erodes the principle" of the legislation, saying it is "taxation without representation". Senator Wong responded by saying that Abetz "didn't have the bottle" to speak to the amendments, and noted the lack

of details in the funding package proposed by Senator Boswell. Senator Bob Brown of the Australian Greens drew attention to Senator Fielding's stance, calling him a "failure" in regards to his Victorian state, criticising his position on the bill and his absence from the chamber, and praised Senator Joyce's commitment to his earlier word. Senator Stott-Despoja stated her support for the ALP amendments, but these failed due to Government numbers.

Senator Joyce's amendments were then put (as the time cutoff passed) which led to a division, and in the division he crossed the floor on the amendments, which the Opposition supported. Senator Joyce's amendments however were defeated 29 to 31 -- Fielding's choice was key in this vote. Senator Joyce however voted with the Government to have the bills stand as printed.

On the third reading, which support signifies final passage of the bill, the vote was 29 to 27, so the legislation did pass. Joyce crossed the floor again on this stage. The bill must re-enter the House of Representatives again for concurrence, which had already risen the day earlier, and sits again February 2006, next year.

Iranian president says move Israel to Europe

The President of Iran, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, who recently called for Israel to be "wiped off the map," says the Jewish state should be moved to Europe and questioned whether the Holocaust actually took place. In an interview with Iran's Arabic channel 'Al-Alam', Ahmadinejad said that if Germany and Austria feel responsible for the massacre

of Jews during World War II, they should host a state of Israel on their own soil.

"Some European countries insist on saying that during World War II, Hitler burned millions of Jews and put them in concentration camps," Ahmadinejad said. "Any historian, commentator or scientist who doubts that is taken to prison or gets condemned. Although we don't accept this claim [of the holocaust], if we suppose it is true ...".

He followed this by a statement quoted as "Let's give some land to the Zionists in Europe or in Germany or Austria," according to USA Today, or, according to Reuters and Rediff, "If the Europeans are honest they should give some of their provinces in Europe -- like in Germany, Austria or other countries -- to the Zionists and the Zionists can establish their state in Europe. You offer part of Europe and we will support it."

Israel condemned Ahmadinejad's statements as "outrageous and even racist," saying the comments defy international law which recognises Israel's right to exist and assumed a denial of Holocaust. The United States described the comments as "appalling and reprehensible."

President Ahmadinejad's remarks Thursday were made at a summit of Muslim nations in Islam's holy city of Mecca. The summit condemned terrorism and extremism, stressing the themes of moderation and tolerance. Speaking at a news conference on the summit sidelines, he said most Jews in Israel "have no roots in Palestine, but they are holding the destiny of Palestine in their hands and allow themselves to kill the

Palestinian people."

Ahmadinejad raised a similar storm in October calling Israel a "disgraceful blot" to be "wiped off the map." Ahmadinejad, who was elected in June with the backing of Iran's hard-line clerics, stuck by his comments, and his government organized a series of large anti-Israel demonstrations.

The President's comments have ignited global criticism. His rhetoric, combined with Israel's belief that Tehran's nuclear activities are aimed at producing nuclear warheads, have increased tension between Israel and Iran.

Israel Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's adviser Ra'anan Gissin said, "just to remind Mr. Ahmadinejad, we've been here long before his ancestors. Therefore, we have a birthright to be here in the land of our forefathers and to live here. Thank God we have the capability to deter and to prevent such a statement from becoming a reality,"

Israeli Foreign Minister Silvan Shalom said the statement should be a wake up call to all of us around the world. "We should do everything we can in order to stop him, and to stop the Iranian effort to develop a nuclear bomb."

United Nations (UN) Secretary-General Kofi Annan urged all UN States to combat such denial, and to "educate their populations about the well established historical facts of the Holocaust, in which one third of the Jewish people were murdered, along with countless members of other minorities."

White House press secretary Scott McClellan said the comment "further underscores our concerns

about the regime in Iran. It's all the more reason why it's so important that the regime not have the ability to develop nuclear weapons." Rabbi David Saperstein, head of the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism, called the comments a "repugnant distortion of history."

Tension between Israel and Iran began before the 1979 Islamic Revolution when the Israelis joined the United States in siding with the Shah before he was deposed.

The Iranian blogger Babak Seradjeh reacted to Ahmadinejad's comments by stating, "I wondered why Mr. Ahmanedinejad doesn't provide the Palestinians with a piece of Iran. ... Such evil remarks in blatant disregard of documented history is nothing new of course coming from the kind of people that Mr. Ahmadinejad represents. Denying the Holocaust, calling to wipe a country off the map, or to move it, are all the stuff of my generation's childhood, in school, on the radio and on TV, in the bold and thick slogans on the walls, the streamlined propaganda that aimed to penetrate all the space it could find in our brains."

Today in History

1508 - The Papal States, France, Aragon and the Holy Roman Empire formed the League of Cambrai, an alliance against the Republic of Venice.

1868 - The first traffic lights were installed outside the Houses of Parliament in London.

1898 - The signing of the Treaty of Paris ended the Spanish-American War. Spain recognised the independence of Cuba and sold Guam, the Philippines and Puerto Rico to the United States for US\$20 million.

1901 - The first Nobel Prizes were

awarded, on the anniversary of the 1896 death of their founder, Swedish chemist and industrialist Alfred Nobel.

1936 - Edward VIII signed his instrument of abdication, becoming the only British monarch to voluntarily relinquish the throne.

December 10 is Constitution Day in Thailand (1932); Human Rights Day (1948).

Quote of the Day

Tell all the Truth but tell it slant —
Success in Circuit lies
Too bright for our infirm Delight
The Truth's superb surprise
As Lightning to the Children eased
With explanation kind
The Truth must dazzle gradually
Or every man be blind —
~ Emily Dickinson ~

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