

TIMES-NEWS

Monday, January 5, 2009

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Luna expected to discuss Gooding charter school

By Ben Botkin
Times-News writer

Gooding School District — and the community it serves — went through changes in 2008.

North Valley Academy, a new charter school, opened in Gooding and now has 160 students. For charter school supporters, it provides an education alternative to traditional public schools. But for the school district, North Valley Academy contributed to declining enrollment, as about 10 percent of the district's students bolted for the charter school.

More changes are anticipated for this year. North Valley Academy, currently serving students from kindergarten through eighth grade, will add high school

grades in the fall. The school can accept up to 96 high school students for the fall of 2009, which could lead to further enrollment declines for Gooding School District.

It's under these circumstances that Superintendent of Public Instruction Tom Luna will visit Gooding School District on Tuesday. Luna will take questions in a meeting at 3:15 p.m. at Gooding High School, and the charter school's impact is expected to be among the topics discussed.

"The charter school's high school expansion is now being talked about a great deal in our community," said Heather Williams, superintendent of Gooding School District.

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Myles Nicholas, a sophomore at Westchester Community College in Valhalla, N.Y., passes the ball during a team practice at the College of Southern Idaho gymnasium Saturday afternoon in Twin Falls.

Photos by JUSTIN JACKSON/Times-News

City looking ahead Twin Falls comp plan public hearing scheduled for tonight

By Jared S. Hopkins
Times-News

The future of Twin Falls begins now.

The Twin Falls City Council is scheduled to hold a public hearing tonight on the proposed Comprehensive Plan, a long-term guide for planning through 2030, and could vote on it afterward.

The document, which took more than a year to draft, includes directions for how Twin Falls should look in about 20 years. It includes suggestions, both broadly and in detail, for implementing the goals that involve

plans for schools, municipal services and economic development.

The 6 p.m. public hearing is open to the public at 305 Third Ave. E.

The new comp plan would replace the city's existing one from 1994. Doing so has no direct fiscal impact, but the plan's recommendations could require spending money if they were enacted in the future.

The consulting agency that created the plan estimates the city will have 66,000 residents in 2030. The

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From the subway to the Snake River

New York basketball team competes in Twin Falls

By Damon Hunzeker
Times-News writer

It's refreshing to be associated with something other than potatoes.

When Tyrone Mushatt thinks of Idaho, he imagines Evel Knievel attempting to jump the Snake River Canyon.

Mushatt lives in New York. He's the assistant coach of the Westchester Community College men's basketball team, which lost to the College of Southern Idaho Friday night.

"CSI beat up on us. We tried to make it a game for the fans," Mushatt said during the team's shoot-around Saturday afternoon in the CSI gymnasium. "But I love it here ... When I was a kid, Idaho meant potatoes, potatoes, potatoes. Then I heard about Evel Knievel, and that was it. I had the toys, the dolls and everything."

Westchester Community

College, located in Valhalla, is about an hour's drive from Manhattan. The team has played in Twin Falls four of the past six years, each time visiting the site of Knievel's famous failure in 1974.

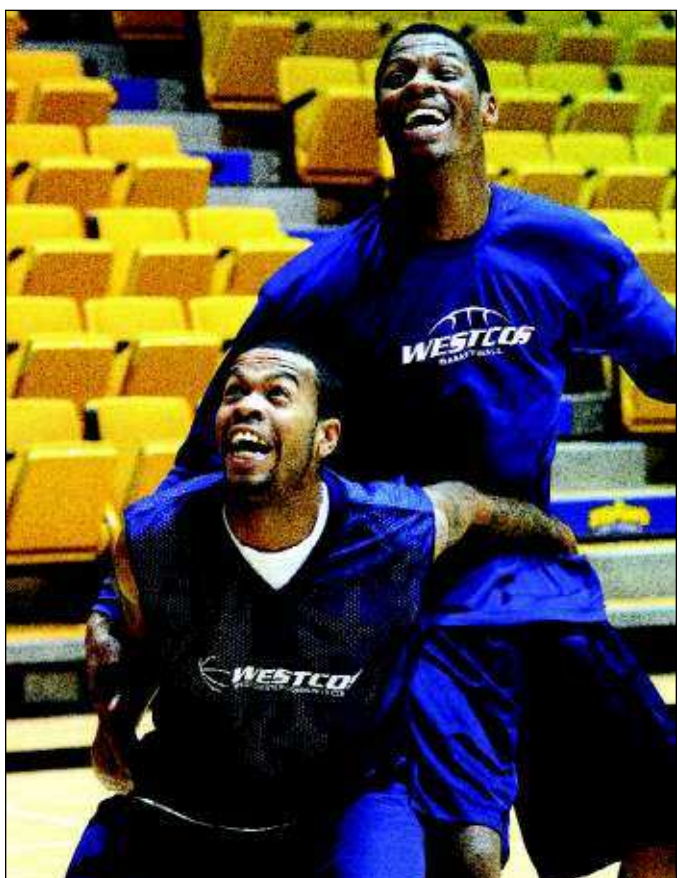
"When you're from New York, Idaho could be another country," he said. "We always want the kids to see a new part of America. If they weren't playing ball, there's no way they'd come to Idaho, so it's good for them to get out here and see that people live the same way all over the country — just a little more laid-back out here."

Jarrid Famous, the team's power forward who was named to the all-tournament team in the James Ray Construction Shoot Out, agreed.

"I'm from the Bronx. It's nice and calm out here, real relaxing," Famous said.

Players and coaches

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Javon Holley, left, and Chris Abney of the Westchester Community College Westcos attempt to box each other out during a practice drill Saturday afternoon at the College of Southern Idaho in Twin Falls. The Westchester Westcos of Valhalla, N.Y., have traveled to CSI for the fourth season to compete.

Richardson withdraws bid to be commerce secretary

By Nedra Pickler
Associated Press writer

WASHINGTON — New Mexico Gov. Bill Richardson on Sunday announced that he was withdrawing his nomination to be President-elect Barack Obama's commerce secretary amid a grand jury investigation into how some of his political donors won a lucrative state contract.

Richardson's withdrawal

was the first disruption of Obama's Cabinet process and the second "pay-to-play" investigation that has touched Obama's transition to the presidency. The president-elect has remained above the fray in both the case of arrested Illinois Gov. Rod Blagojevich and the New Mexico case.

A federal grand jury is

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The law of the leash

Requiring dogs on leashes in T.F. unpopular, but the norm in Idaho

By Jared S. Hopkins
Times-News writer

For almost two years, Tom Young brought his dog to Harry Barry Park in Twin Falls to run around and exercise until Young's son arrived from school.

But last month, Young decided not to bring Zena, a German shepherd. He said a woman who lived near the park threatened to call the police.

Zena was without a leash — which is against the law in Twin Falls just

about everywhere.

Young — who had moved from Boise, where there are a handful of places dogs can go unleashed — was shocked when he was briefed by the Twin Falls County Sheriff's Office, which is contracted by the city of Twin Falls for animal control.

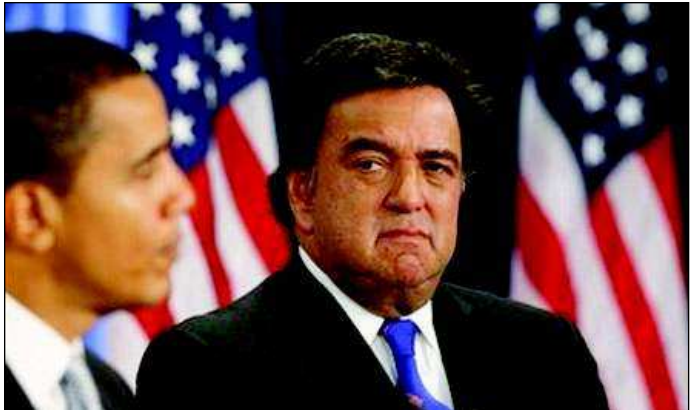
Dogs and domestic animals must always be contained in the city of Twin Falls, including leashed at county parks and city parks,

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Zena, a German Shepherd, with her ball at Harry Barry Park morning in Twin Falls on Saturday.

JUSTIN JACKSON/Times-News



President-elect Barack Obama stands with Commerce Secretary designate, New Mexico Gov. Bill Richardson, at a news conference in Chicago on Dec. 3, 2008.



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Congress faces ambitious agenda

By Shaillagh Murray and Paul Kane
The Washington Post

WASHINGTON — Rarely have lawmakers confronted an agenda as ambitious as the one Congress will face upon convening this week, with an incoming president pushing to stabilize an economy on the brink of long-term recession, to create universal health coverage and to overhaul federal energy policies.

There are already signs that the usual divisions that send so many ambitious bills down to defeat will confront President-elect Barack Obama in his first weeks on the job. Some Republicans are spoiling for an early policy fight that will test Obama's mettle, while a number of Democrats are seeking gains in exchange for supporting his initiatives. Conservative House Democrats are demanding that statutory deficit-reduction language be included in a pending economic-stimulus package that could ultimately cost a trillion dollars. And Senate centrists have warned that the incoming administration's ambitious global warming legislation might be a non-starter.

Over the past 15 years, during which a large majority of current lawmakers were first elected to Congress, partisan feuding has reduced Congress's output to a bare minimum of must-pass measures. Party-line voting peaked during the Bush presidency, while productivity slumped. The Senate held the lowest number of votes in 2008 since any year going back to 1951, according to a recent Congressional Quarterly survey.

With Republicans holding just enough seats to put the brakes on sweeping initiatives in the Senate, the new president's agenda may rest on his ability to deliver on another campaign pledge, to change the way Washington does business by adopting a more pragmatic and inclusive governing style. And as the nation's economic woes deepen, there are early indications that lawmakers may be willing to put aside precedent, as the incoming Obama administration — at least so far — sends the welcome signals to key constituencies.

"I'm encouraged by their talk. But their talk has to be followed up with action," said Rep. Baron Hill, D-Ind., co-chairman of the Blue Dog Coalition, a group of 47 fiscally conservative House Democrats.

Rahm Emanuel, who recently resigned his House seat and will serve as Obama's chief of staff, said that a shift in sentiment is already palpable and that the new administration plans to take full advantage. Lawmakers sense that the need for action is urgent, Emanuel said, and they recognize that Congress's dismal approval ratings would make them easy scapegoats if the gamesmanship continues. "You never allow a serious crisis to go to waste," Emanuel said. "People sense that we're at a different moment in time, and that you have to put aside preconceived notions and partisanship to solve problems."

Committee leaders in both parties worked through the holidays on several major initiatives, including a mammoth overhaul of the health-care system that is moving on a faster track than Obama officials had anticipated, and the stimulus bill lawmakers hope to have ready for Obama to sign soon after his swearing-in.

Republicans will hold at least 41 Senate seats, enough to filibuster if they maintain discipline in their ranks. Soon

after the election, Obama began to reach out to individual GOP members through phone calls and meetings led by Emanuel. Beginning with the stimulus debate in early January, Obama will push for Republicans to be included in major policy negotiations as they unfold, senior Democratic aides said. The goal is to set a precedent with the economic recovery package and store goodwill for subsequent battles.

"We are not going to be hampered by ideology in trying to get this country back on track," Obama said at a post-election National Governors Association meeting in Philadelphia. "If you can show me something you are doing that's working, or if you tell me that this program or this regulation is hampering us from doing smart things that will advance the interests of your state, then you're going to have a ready ear."

Sen. Charles Grassley of Iowa, the ranking Republican on the Finance Committee, is one of many GOP members eager for Congress to act big, for a change. He has spoken by telephone with Obama, a "welcome conversation," as the veteran lawmaker put it. But Grassley also is a realist, saying his party would be wise to re-examine its tactics.

"There's a reality for Republicans that with lesser numbers, we're going to have to pick and choose where we draw the line," Grassley said. "There won't be as many lines drawn as in the past."

As useful as Republican support could prove, Obama also is attempting to become the first Democratic president since the mid-1960s to forge an effective working relationship with a big congressional majority of the same party. The last two Democratic presidents, Jimmy Carter and Bill Clinton, saw their party leaders on Capitol Hill turn against them, leading to electoral disasters for the party in 1980 and in 1994. An energy crisis helped to do in Carter, while a failed health-care proposal contributed to a Republican congressional landslide two years into Clinton's first term.

Obama is trying to address both those issues while managing the largest global financial crisis since the Great Depression, along with the beginning of a U.S. troop withdrawal from Iraq.

But the economic downturn will represent the first test of Obama's relationship with congressional Democrats, potentially pitting him against the party's formidable wing of fiscal conservatives.

Leaders from both chambers sat down to work out details in meetings at the Capitol beginning in mid-December. With House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif., staking an early position in favor of a \$500 billion recovery plan, Obama's advisers spread the word that their plan would probably approach \$850 billion.

These numbers sent sticker shock through the Blue Dog caucus, which has crusaded for federal deficit reduction and which represents a large enough force to block just about anything, particularly if Republicans hang together in opposition.

After discussions with Emanuel and other top Obama advisers, Hill said the caucus's leaders decided to "set aside our strong feelings about deficit reduction" to support the plan, but with certain conditions. The group wants to insert statutory language in federal law instituting pay-as-you-go rules, which require spending cuts or tax increases to offset new federal programs.



President-elect Barack Obama arrives at Andrews Air Force Base, Md., on Sunday. Obama flew for the first time on one of the Air Force planes used to ferry presidents and other top government officials. Any plane from the fleet is Air Force One only if the president is aboard.

Obama arrives in Washington area

The Associated Press

ANDREWS AIR FORCE BASE — President-elect Barack Obama landed in the Washington area Sunday evening, setting up the final march toward his Jan. 20 inauguration.

Obama landed hours after his pick for commerce secretary, New Mexico Gov. Bill Richardson, took his name out of the running amid a federal grand jury investigation into government contracts. Obama also faces other challenges in the coming days, including meetings with congressional leaders Monday to promote an economic plan.

But as he prepared to leave his hometown of Chicago, he preferred to keep talk personal.

"I've got to tell you, I choked up a little bit leaving my house today," Obama told reporters aboard a government 757 plane typically used by vice presidents and

first ladies. It was his first trip on a government aircraft since winning election Nov. 4, aides said.

Obama said pictures of his daughter, 10-year-old Malia, and her friends triggered the emotion.

"Malia's friend had dropped off an album of the two of them. They've been friends since preschool. I just looked through the pages, the house was empty. It was a little tough," Obama said.

Asked if he was looking forward to arriving in Washington, Obama smiled and said yes, "although living in a hotel for two weeks? We did that for two years."

The president-elect is staying at the Hay-Adams Hotel across from the White House. His wife and two young daughters made the same trip from Chicago on Saturday.

Obama has a busy week ahead of him. On Monday, after his girls leave for their first day of classes at the pri-

vate Sidwell Friends School, he has a meeting planned with Democratic and Republican leaders about a proposed economic plan. On Wednesday, he is scheduled to attend lunch at the White House with former presidents.

He also has some high-profile members of his administration to name, including a director of national intelligence and a CIA director. He has to also find a replacement for Richardson, a top-tier Hispanic politician who added diversity to his inner circle.

"It is a measure of his willingness to put the nation first that he has removed himself as a candidate for the Cabinet in order to avoid any delay in filling this important economic post at this critical time," Obama said in a statement Sunday.

Confirmation hearings for other members of his Cabinet are scheduled in the

coming days.

The Obamas plan to take up residence at the Hay-Adams until the White House's guest quarters at Blair House, across Pennsylvania Avenue, are available Jan. 15.

The Obamas moved early so their daughters — 7-year-old Sasha and Malia — could start on time at the private Sidwell Friends School, an aide said. Other political children to attend the school have included Al Gore III and Chelsea Clinton.

Opened in 1928, the Hay-Adams Hotel sits across Lafayette Square from the White House, Obama's eventual work place and home. Its name comes from two historical figures who lived on the site: John Hay, the private assistant to President Abraham Lincoln and later secretary of state, and Henry Adams, an author and descendant of Presidents John Adams and John Quincy Adams.

Burr drama plays out as Senate set to begin work

By Rupa Shenoy
Associated Press writer

CHICAGO — Just days before a high-stakes showdown in the nation's capital, the man selected to take President-elect Barack Obama's vacated U.S. Senate seat sought spiritual and political sustenance on Sunday at a South Side Chicago church.

Warm words of support and prayers for Roland Burris contrasted with the frigid reactions from Senate leaders, many of whom say his appointment by embattled Illinois Gov. Rod Blagojevich is so badly stained that Burris shouldn't be seated when the new Congress convenes this week.

Burris took the stage at New Covenant Church on Sunday evening to a crescendo of drums, organ music and applause from hundreds of supporters, including black leaders and ministers.

"The appointment is legal," he said, thanking those gath-

ered at the prayer service. "That is all there is. I don't know what all the confusion is about."

Before the service, Burris supporter U.S. Rep. Bobby Rush and about 60 ministers condemned Senate Democratic leaders for rejecting Burris.

Rush, a Chicago Democrat, called the U.S. Senate "the last bastion of plantation politics."

But Chicago Tribune columnist Clarence Page wrote Sunday that he resents the notion that "the black community (has) become the last refuge for scalawags like Blagojevich" and he thinks he's not alone, based on Secretary of State Jesse White's refusal to certify Burris' appointment. White, like Page, is African American.

The Senate's top two Democrats defended their right to deny the seat to Burris, while refusing to rule out a deal as Congress and its new members begin

work this week.

Democrats say Burris' appointment is tainted because it was made by Blagojevich, who is accused by federal authorities of offering to sell the vacancy to the highest bidder. Burris, a former state attorney general, says the appointment is legal and the governor had the authority to do it. He has threatened to sue Senate Democrats if they refuse to swear him in as the chamber's only black member.

"Anything can happen," said Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid, D-Nev. But he described the chances of Burris joining the Senate as "very difficult."

The second-ranking Democrat, Illinois Sen. Dick

Durbin, acknowledged that his governor has the state constitutional authority to fill the vacancy. "The Senate of the United States has the U.S. constitutional responsibility to decide if Mr. Burris was chosen in a proper manner and that is what we're going to do," Durbin said.

Rush called on Durbin to meet with African-American leaders, calling the Illinois senator "cavalier and one-sided."

To Reid, "there's clearly legal authority for us to do whatever we want to. This goes back for generations." He declared his concern about "a cloud over anyone that comes from the state of Illinois being appointed by Blagojevich."

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5 takeaways help Ravens beat Dolphins 27-9

By Steven Wine
Associated Press writer

MIAMI — The Baltimore Ravens had Chad Pennington spinning, ducking, on his heels and on his back. When he did manage to get a pass away, they were often there to snatch it.

The Ravens came up with four interceptions, including one returned 64 yards for a touchdown by Ed Reed, and won 27-9 Sunday to spoil the Miami Dolphins' first playoff game in seven seasons.

Baltimore stuffed Miami's ground attack and negated the Wildcat, but most of all the Ravens harried Pennington into uncharacteristic mistakes. After throwing only seven interceptions during the regular season, he had four during a 22-minute flurry midway through the game.

"We heard all week that they don't turn the ball over," linebacker Ray Lewis said. "But we force turnovers."

With a rookie coach in John Harbaugh and a rookie quarterback in Joe Flacco, wild-card entrant Baltimore (12-5) won for the 10th time in 12 games and will play Saturday at AFC South champion Tennessee.

"We're going to Tennessee," Reed said. "Be there."

The playoff victory was the first for the Ravens since they beat Miami in a first-round game in January 2002. The result put the brakes on this season's remarkable resurgence by the Dolphins (11-6), who won the AFC East after going 1-15 in 2007.

"It has been a special year; that's why it hurts so much," Pennington said. "You want to keep it going and see how far you can take it."

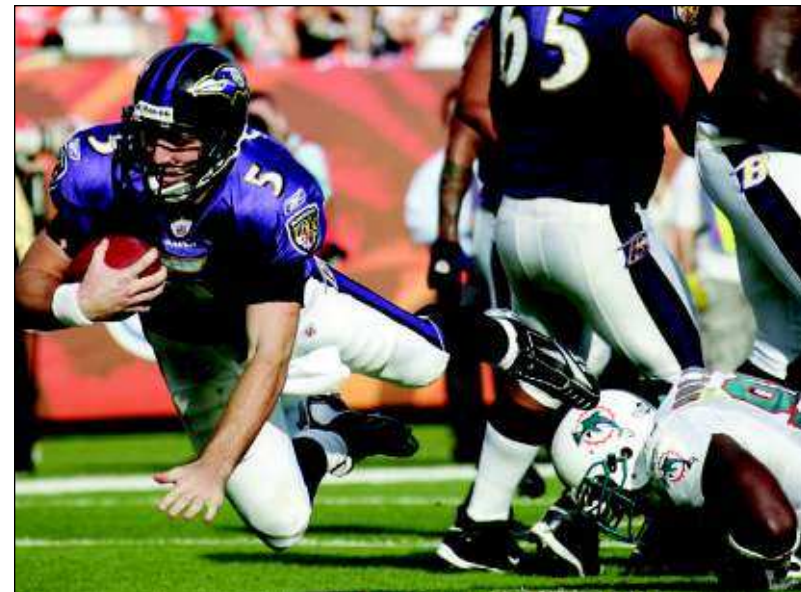
A soft schedule contributed to Miami's turnaround, and there was nothing soft about the Ravens. They forced repeated mistakes by a team that tied an NFL record with only 13 turnovers during the regular season.

Reed had two interceptions, and Jim Leonhard and Fabian Washington made one apiece. Terrell Suggs recovered a fumble by Patrick Cobbs early in the second half at the Miami 19, and four plays later Le'Ron McClain scored on an 8-yard run for a 20-3 lead.

Pennington, playing his first game since being chosen the NFL Comeback Player of the Year, was sacked three times and faced constant pressure.

"It always starts up front," Ravens defensive tackle Trevor Pryce said. "We had some favorable matchups, and we took advantage of them. It's quite simple."

Baltimore's secondary also had Miami overmatched. Pennington, who finished 25-for-38 for 252 yards, said the Ravens made good plays on three of the interceptions, and he regretted throwing only one.



AP photo

Baltimore Ravens quarterback Joe Flacco (5) scores a second-half touchdown after Miami Dolphins defensive end Vonnie Holliday, lower right, missed the tackle during their Sunday, NFL playoff game in Miami. The Ravens won 27-9.

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BACK IN THE PICTURE

Eagles fly past Vikings with 26-14 playoff victory, now face New York



AP photo

Philadelphia Eagles wide receiver DeSean Jackson (10) leaves behind a group of Minnesota Vikings on a 62-yard punt return during the first quarter Sunday.

By Dave Campbell
Associated Press writer

MINNEAPOLIS — All but forgotten as a post-season contender just one month earlier, Andy Reid, Donovan McNabb and the Philadelphia Eagles have a playoff win.

Next up: the Super Bowl champions.

Brian Westbrook caught a short pass out of the backfield and zigzagged through the Minnesota defense for a devastating 71-yard touchdown midway through the fourth quarter, and the Eagles spoiled the Vikings' first home playoff game in eight years with a 26-14 victory Sunday.

Asante Samuel's 44-yard interception return of Tarvaris Jackson's errant pass in the second quarter set a tone for the kind of game most Vikings fans feared from the unpolished quarterback.

Reid improved his playoff coaching record to 9-6, including at least one win each time the Eagles have qualified in his 10 years. He bested his buddy and former offensive coordinator Brad Childress in this one, and they spoke for several moments on the field after the game.

Philadelphia will play next Sunday in New Jersey against the top-seeded Giants, sending Arizona to play Carolina in the other NFC semifinal on Saturday.

Jackson, who lost his job in September but got it back when Gus Frerotte was hurt, went 15-for-35 for 164 yards. Adrian Peterson's two touchdown runs weren't nearly enough for NFC North champion Minnesota, which will head to yet another offseason with burning questions about the quarterbacks.

Westbrook couldn't find any room to run, even with two starters (Ray Edwards and Pat Williams) missing on Minnesota's offensive line. But McNabb, who went 23-for-34 for 300 yards, kept the offense from derailing. He tossed a ball toward his always-reliable running back at just the right time with the Eagles clinging to a two-point lead after a scoreless third quarter.

Westbrook received a slew of strong blocks as he slalomed downfield for the clinching TD.

Stability at quarterback almost certainly would have given the Vikings another win or two, and perhaps a first-round bye. And despite a drastically better December, Jackson showed he's still quite raw and in need of a lot more experience.

His one big mistake really hurt, an underthrown out route to Sidney Rice that Samuel read perfectly and picked off for a 44-yard return and a 16-7 lead.

McNabb wasn't perfect. He lost a fumble in the third quarter and took an 8-yard sack to push the Eagles out of David Akers' field goal range. But the Vikings didn't capitalize on the turnover and left plenty of receivers open in the middle of the field — particularly Jason Avant and tight end Brent Celek — for McNabb to target.

Though he was benched briefly in November, before the Eagles won four of their last five games to sneak into the playoffs, McNabb set a franchise record for yards passing this year and helped Philly make the postseason for the seventh time in nine years. There were some bad games, but he's still in the league's upper crust of quarterbacks.

After Akers made a 51-yard field goal — he went 4-for-4 for the afternoon — to finish the first quarter, the Vikings drove 78 yards for the lead. On third-and-2 at the Philadelphia 40, Peterson zoomed through the line untouched and beat Quintin Demps to the corner of the end zone for his first playoff touchdown.

AP Coach of the year: Mike Smith

By Barry Wilner
Associated Press writer

NEW YORK — Mike Smith and Tony Sparano performed so brilliantly as rookie head coaches it was almost impossible to separate them.

Atlanta's Smith edged Miami's Sparano by one vote Sunday for The Associated Press 2008 NFL Coach of the Year award.

Both coaches oversaw sensational turnarounds, leading their teams from last-place finishes in 2007 to playoff berths this year. Their achievements were reflected by the closeness of the balloting, with Smith getting 23½ votes and Sparano 22½ from a nationwide panel of 50 sports writers and broadcasters who cover the NFL.

After improving from 4-12 to 11-5 and making the NFC playoffs as a wild card, the Falcons fell 30-24 at Arizona on Saturday night. That should not detract from a memorable season that bodes well for the football future in Atlanta.

"I'm honored individually, but more so for our coaching staff and our players," Smith said. "I think we have tried to establish that we'd be very systematic in how we did things, that we were going to have a plan."

"We laid that plan out from the very beginning how we were going to practice, how we were going to travel, how we were going to meet, how we were going to communicate, and I think the guys really appreciated definitely how we presented the plan in the framework for us to start the season."

Smith helped guide quarterback Matt Ryan to the AP Offensive Rookie of the Year award. Smith also had a first-time starter at running back, Michael Turner, who rushed for 1,699 yards and 17 touchdowns.

That certainly helped as Smith had to deal with a makeover of the Falcons organization and its image following the incarceration of quarterback Michael Vick for dogfighting and the resignation after 13 games last season by coach Bobby Petrino. He left Jacksonville, where he was the defensive coordinator, to take on one of the biggest rebuilding challenges in sports.



Smith

Longhorns, Buckeyes ready for Fiesta Bowl

By Andrew Bagnato
Associated Press writer

GLENDALE, Ariz. — Texas coach Mack Brown has a theory about bowl games.

"If the teams are fairly even, the team that wants to be there the most and has the edge and is more motivated usually wins," Brown said.

If third-ranked Texas had a choice, it would be in Miami preparing to face Florida for the BCS title. But the Longhorns still have plenty of motivation against No. 10 Ohio State in the Fiesta Bowl tonight.

Snubbed in their bid for a slot in the Bowl Championship Series title game, the Longhorns (11-1) will try to take their frustrations out on the Buckeyes (10-2), who have made their fifth bowl trip to Arizona since 2002.

"Really, what's going through our minds is, 'Let's just put on a show, basically,'" Texas defensive end Brian Orakpo said.

The Longhorns finished in a three-way tie atop the rugged Big 12

South and thought their 10-point victory over Oklahoma should have put them in the Big 12 title game. But Oklahoma was declared the division winner on a BCS standings tiebreaker, and the Sooners ripped Missouri in the Big 12 playoff to earn a trip to the national title game.

The Longhorns still have a shot at a national title, but it's slender. Either Oklahoma or Florida will claim the BCS national title. But the 65 pollsters who vote in The Associated Press Top 25 are free to select the Longhorns No. 1.

Six AP voters have the Longhorns atop their ballots, and that number could swell if the top-ranked Gators lose and their 50 first-place votes go up for grabs. Some voters might choose Texas because it beat Oklahoma.

It's a long shot, but it's the only

shot Texas has. The Longhorns will have no shot if they don't take care of the Buckeyes.

"I don't know what needs to happen," Texas tailback Chris Ogbonnaya said. "Right now, our focus is Ohio State and really that is all that matters. We can't talk about being in the national championship picture without having a victory against them."

The Buckeyes haven't been in the national title discussion since a 35-3 walloping at USC on Sept. 13. But the Big Ten co-champs say they have plenty of motivation, and, like Texas, it springs from a bad experience in the BCS.

After absorbing lopsided losses to Florida and LSU in the last two BCS title games, the Buckeyes have grown tired of hearing that they are a product of a soft conference and don't belong among the national elite.

"It would be nice to win that big game," linebacker James Laurinaitis said. "We will be remembered about how this game



EDITORIAL

Don't give Idaho Power the blank check it wants

You can't blame a \$3.6 billion utility for trying. Idaho Power would very much like its money in advance, and Gov. C.L. "Butch" Otter thinks the Idaho Public Utilities Commission should allow it.

Otter's energy czar, Paul Kjellander, aims to ask the Legislature, which convenes on Jan. 12, to let regulated utilities lock in rules to determine what customers eventually must pay for major projects long before they are completed.

Our view:
"Preapproved ratemaking" for Idaho Power? You've got to be kidding.

"Preapproved ratemaking" will reassure credit analysts and lenders that utilities such as Idaho Power and PacifiCorp will successfully recover the cost of investments such as Gateway West, a 1,200-mile, more than \$2 billion power line through Wyoming, Idaho and Oregon scheduled for completion by 2012, Kjellander said.

The state's largest utility is battling the utilities commission, which is responsible for maintaining fair rates, over its request for a nearly 10 percent rate increase based on claims that it invested \$578 million on infrastructure in the last three years. The commission's staff has recommended 1.44 percent. A decision is due in February.

With credit tighter than in decades, Kjellander says the change could speed financing and reduce interest rates, ultimately cutting costs for business and residential customers.

We're not convinced, and neither is Albion's Jim Kempton, one of three PUC commissioners.

"This is not something that should be willingly surrendered by the commission in an attempt to assist a transmission or power utility in enhancing its Wall Street credit rating," Kempton wrote in an e-mail to Kjellander that was obtained by AP through a public records request. "The commission is in unanimous agreement on this point."

As usual, Kempton is right. He's especially concerned about a provision that would tie the hands of the regulatory agency in future ratemaking proceedings on a specific project.

Commissioners maintain they've already taken steps to help utilities recover investment costs more quickly, including the Idaho Power rate case.

Opposition also was expressed by Industrial Customers of Idaho Power, a group representing agricultural conglomerate J.R. Simplot, Micron Technology Inc. and other large electricity users.

You can bet those folks have made their views clear to legislators, so why is Idaho Power flogging this dead horse?

Because it has an ally in Kjellander, a former PUC commissioner who's concerned about the state's future electrical transmission needs.

And because the utility's credit rating is suffering. Moody's Investors Service and Standard & Poor's have lowered Idaho Power's credit ratings over the last eight years to levels just above those that typically denote speculative, or "junk" debt.

That's unfortunate, but that's one of the prices regulated utilities pay.

"It restricts the PUC from review of new investment by investor-owned utilities once that investment is on line. This would hamstring the commission from doing its job," Peter Richardson, ICIP's lawyer, said.

"If a plant becomes obsolete because of technology improvements or if it is imprudently built, the commission should be able to remove it from rate base and not require ratepayers to continue to pay for mistakes or obsolescence," he added.

In our view, Idaho Power should recoup its expenses the old-fashioned way — after it's spent the money.

GOP must make a stand for small gov't

Is it time for conservatives to give up our fight against Big Government? Some people think so. Mike Huckabee, the Baptist preacher and former Arkansas governor and presidential candidate, complained in May to the Huffington Post that the greatest threat to the Republican Party is "this new brand of libertarianism" that says "look, we want to cut taxes and eliminate government." That, Huckabee said, is "not an American message. It doesn't fly. People aren't going to buy that, because that's not the way we are as a people."

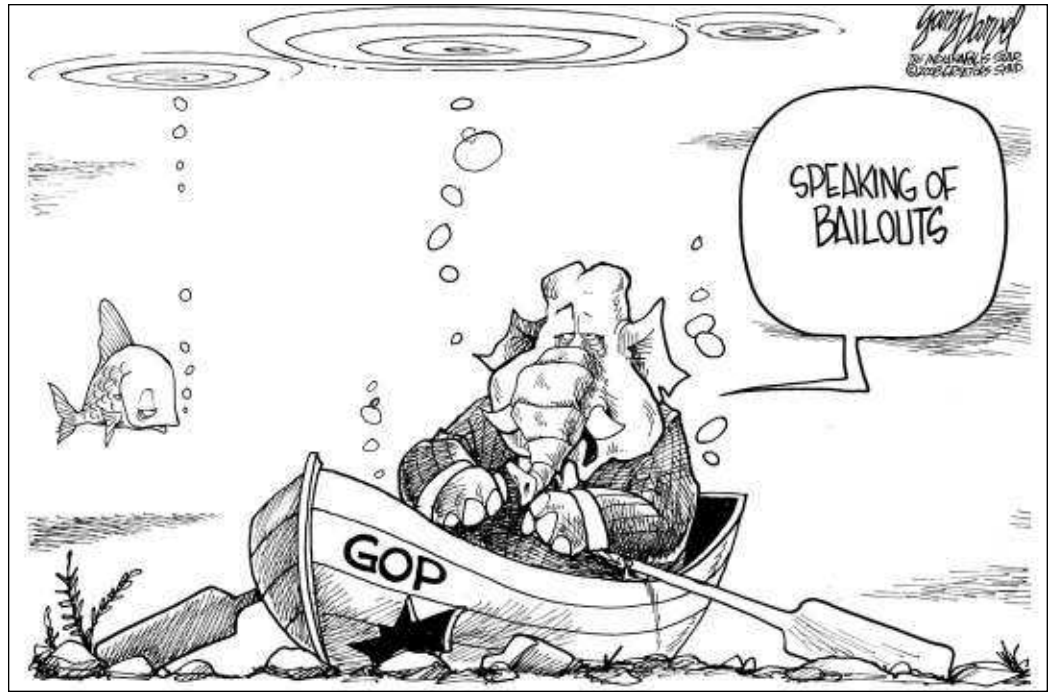


RICHARD A. VIGUERIE

And former George W. Bush speechwriter Michael Gerson, in a May column in *The Washington Post*, attacked small-government conservatives for believing that "no social priority is ... more urgent than balancing the budget" or that "the state's only valid purpose is to uphold markets and protect individual liberty." He argued that small-government conservatism in that form cannot succeed politically or as policy; that it would be relegated to "the realm of rejected ideologies: untainted, uncomplicated and ignored."

In the wake of the 2008 election debacle, the attack has continued.

In a December column in *The New York Times*, William Kristol, editor of the *Weekly Standard* — one of the nation's top conservative publications — called on conservatives to come to grips with the reality of Big Government. Big Government is inevitable, Kristol suggested; we should accept it and move on. After all, he wrote, "talk of small



government may be music to conservative ears, but it's not to the public as a whole."

Five Republicans have won the presidency since 1932, Kristol noted, and of those five, "only Reagan was even close to being a small-government conservative. ... And Reagan's record as governor and president wasn't a particularly government-slashing one."

Those of us who remain committed to small-government conservatism are, in Kristol's view, turning ourselves into cannon fodder. "I can't help but admire some of my fellow conservatives' loyalty to the small-government cause," he wrote. "It reminds me of the nobility of Tennyson's Light Brigade, as it charges into battle: 'Theirs but to do and die.'"

If, for conservatives, accepting the inevitability of Big Government constitutes pragmatism, it's an oxymoronic form of pragmatism — one that doesn't work.

How did the GOP fare under those Republican presidents that Kristol cited? Dwight Eisenhower left the GOP so weak in Congress that Democrats were able to establish a seemingly permanent majority. President George H.W. Bush got less than 38 percent of the vote in

his race for reelection. Richard Nixon and George W. Bush were party-smashing disasters comparable to Herbert Hoover. Only Ronald Reagan succeeded as both president and party builder.

It is true that Reagan sometimes compromised. But he never gave up on his core principles.

In 1975, when liberalism was on the march around the world, Reagan called for the rebirth of the GOP as a party "raising a banner of no pale pastels, but bold colors which make it unmistakably clear where we stand on all of the issues troubling the people." A few months later, he declared that "I believe the very heart and soul of conservatism is libertarianism" — that is, the belief in small government.

Reagan's stated beliefs made him the object of ridicule among those who considered themselves intellectuals, but he stuck to his guns. And then, in 1980, when the failures of Big Government were evident to all Americans, the people turned for leadership to the presidential candidate who had been right all along.

Over the past eight years, President Bush sought to tame Big Government and turn it to conservative ends.

The administration experimented with the belief that Republicans and conservatives would do better by rejecting small-government conservatism and accepting Big Government. For generations, Democrats had bribed people to vote for them with one Big Government program after another, so Republicans did the same (No Child Left Behind, the Medicare prescription drug benefit, endless deficits and, finally, the bailouts). The results of the experiment are now in: House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, Majority Leader Harry Reid, President-elect Barack Obama.

If we give up our most cherished principle to attain political office, what do we gain? Who will trust us? Who will turn to us when, once again, Big Government collapses in failure?

When our country is at stake, some of us come to grips with reality. And some of us change reality.

Richard Viguerie is the author of "Conservatives Betrayed: How George W. Bush and Other Big Government Republicans Hijacked the Conservative Cause." He wrote this commentary for the Los Angeles Times.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Maybe hypothermia hindered Aragon's thinking

Nobody in their right mind would act this way. I think the only explanation that makes sense is that Aragon may have been somewhat hypothermic himself when he sent them off and stayed that way for a while. The truck was probably an old one, he had gotten out and worked on it for a while, then sent the kids off.

I was deranged by hypothermia once. God only knows what idiot thing might have made sense to me to tell kids if they were with me then. I decided to take off my jacket and strip down to my shorts, then sit on top of a rock for a while to do what those Tibetans supposedly do drying blankets while naked on the ice. It made complete sense in my deranged state.

I was in my early 20s and I eventually decided to go home and made it. I had stopped shivering hours

Tell us what you think

ON PAPER: The *Times-News* welcomes letters from readers on subjects of public interest. Letters may be brought to our Twin Falls office; mailed to P.O. Box 548, Twin Falls, ID 83303; faxed to (208) 734-5538; or e-mailed to letters@magicvalley.com.

before, and when I got in the shower, at first I thought something was wrong that the cold and hot water had been reversed. I couldn't tell them apart, both felt burning hot. I had enough sense to realize that the steaming stuff was hotter. So I got into the full-on-cold shower slowly because it felt like my skin was scalding off. Eventually, I could turn on hot water until I was warm again. I went through a shivering phase as I warmed up. When I was warm, I said to myself, "What were you doing?!" But it all made sense in my hypothermic state.

I could easily see doing something like sending kids off and thinking nothing of it. I don't know if that contributed to why it happened,

but it may have. Aside from that, I wonder if punishing the son and his mother by taking away the father is helpful to anyone now. Aragon supports his son, who will do it now? Children of convicts already clog the courts. Each convict costs around \$150,000 per year, and is Aragon going to do this again?

BRIAN HANLEY
Davis, Calif.

Gas drive-off ticket unfair

Two people drive up to a local gas station. One comes into the store speaking Russian. The clerk hasn't a clue what he's talking about. Another clerk going off shift speaks Russian and tells her that he will stay in the store and pay when the person

outside is through pumping gas. At first, the clerk says no but gives in when more customers come in.

Alas, the Russian leaves without paying. The clerk calls the police with plate numbers.

When I went back in after I finished my route to ask if the bad guys were caught, the clerk tells me, "I don't know, but Officer Stephensen of the Twin Falls Police gave me a \$300 ticket to be paid by the 16th or go to jail." I'm sure she will also be responsible for the \$25 in gas that the bad guys took.

Now I know it's the law for the \$300 fine, but I also know the clerk is a single mother working two jobs to feed her family. So I ask, where is the justice?

Lesson learned: Don't call the police, just pay for the gas.

JOE O'DONNELL
Hazelton
(Editor's note: Joe O'Donnell is a Times-News carrier.)

TIMES-NEWS

Brad Hurd . . . publisher Steve Crump . . . Opinion editor

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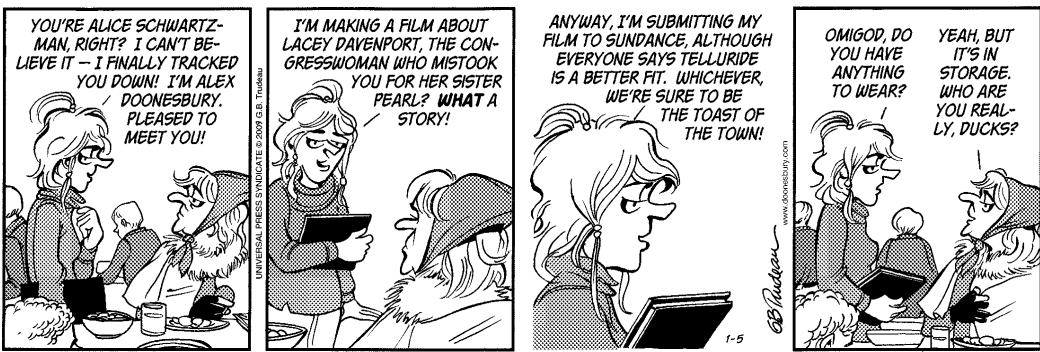
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Voice your opinion with local bloggers: Progressive Voice, Conservative Corner and In the Middle. On the opinion page at Magicvalley.com.

THE LIGHTER SIDE OF POLITICS

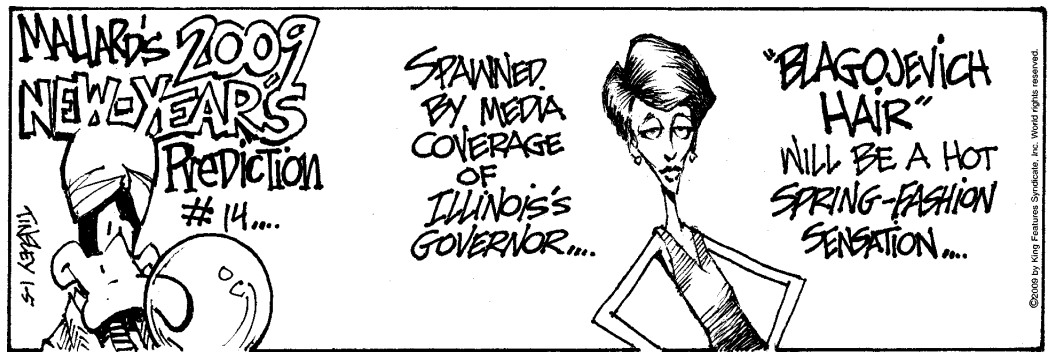
Doonesbury

By Garry Trudeau



Mallard Fillmore

By Bruce Tinsley



Israeli troops and tanks slice deep into Gaza Strip

The Associated Press

GAZA CITY, Gaza Strip — Thousands of Israeli troops backed by tanks and helicopter gunships surrounded Gaza's largest city and fought militants at close range Sunday, the first full day of an overwhelming ground offensive in the coastal territory.

Israel said it has inflicted a heavy blow against Hamas as it expands a weeklong offensive meant to stop rocket fire on southern Israel. But spiraling civilian casualties among Palestinians fueled an international outcry, even as the U.N. Security Council statement Saturday night calling for an immediate cease-fire.

Israel's ground forces moved in after nightfall Saturday following hours of intense, fiery artillery shelling

to clear the way, and Hamas warned that its fighters would turn Gaza into an Israeli "graveyard."

Palestinians reported clashes early Monday in eastern Gaza near the border with Israel. Hamas militants fired rocket-propelled grenades and mortars at advancing Israeli tanks. Explosions could be heard in Gaza City as aircraft attacked buildings. There was no immediate word about casualties.

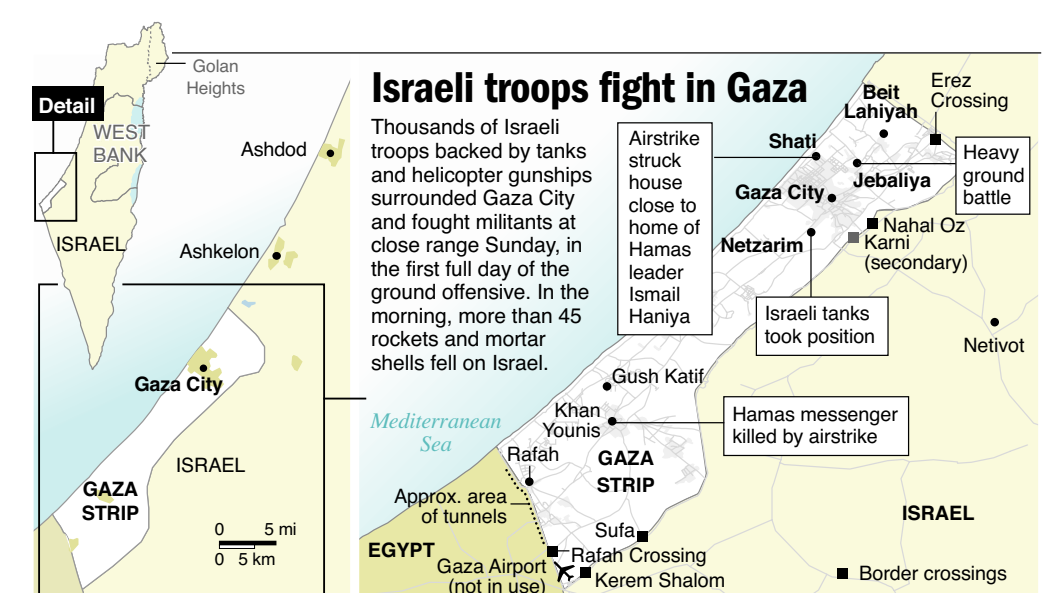
On Sunday, Israeli soldiers fought primarily in open areas in the launching zones used by Gaza's militants to send rockets raining down on Israeli cities. As the troops in three brigade-size formations moved in, residents of those Israeli cities began cautiously emerging from bomb shelters in hopes that the rocket fire would taper off.

Backing up the troops, mobile artillery units fired shells that exploded in veils of white smoke over Gaza's urban skyline. Tanks pushed south of Gaza City as deep as the abandoned settlement of Netzarim, which Israel left along with other communities when it pulled out of Gaza in 2005.

That effectively cut off Gaza City, the territory's largest population center with some 400,000 residents, from the rest of Gaza to the south.

Israel's military chief said Hamas fighters were trying to draw soldiers deeper into Gaza's sprawling, densely packed urban areas, where the military said militants were shielding themselves behind civilians.

"You entered like rats," Hamas spokesman Ismail Radwan told Israeli soldiers



SOURCE: ESRI

in a statement on Hamas' Al Aqsa TV. "Gaza will be a graveyard for you, God willing," he said.

Israeli troops fight in Gaza

Thousands of Israeli troops backed by tanks and helicopter gunships surrounded Gaza City and fought militants at close range Sunday, in the first full day of the ground offensive. In the morning, more than 45 rockets and mortar shells fell on Israel.

An airstrike struck a house close to the home of Hamas leader Ismail Haniya. Israeli tanks took position. A Hamas messenger was killed by an airstrike. Heavy ground battle was reported near Beit Lahiyah, Gaza City, and Netzarim.

WORLD BRIEFS

IRAQ Female bomber kills 38 in Baghdad

BAGHDAD — A woman hiding among Iranian pilgrims with a bomb strapped under her black robe killed more than three dozen people on Sunday outside a Baghdad mosque during ceremonies commemorating the death of one of Shiite Islam's most revered saints.

The suicide attack, the most recent in a series that has killed more than 60 people in less than a week, was the latest to mar the transfer of many security responsibilities from the U.S. military to Iraqi forces.

Iraqi security forces have deployed thousands of troops in Baghdad and in the Shiite holy city of Karbala, just south of the capital, to safeguard against attacks during the ceremonies. Attacks by al-Qaida in Iraq, Sunni insurgents and even a Shiite cult have killed hundreds of people in recent years.

The attack in Baghdad's northern Shiite neighborhood of Kazimiyah, which also wounded at least 72 people, comes two days after a suicide bomber slipped into a luncheon at a tribal leader's home south of Baghdad and killed at least 23 people. More than a dozen other people have died in other attacks since New Year's Day.

The Iraqi military held parades to mark the anniversary of its founding 88 years ago and to celebrate a security agreement with the United States that went into effect on Jan. 1. The agreement replaced a U.N. mandate that allowed the U.S. and other foreign troops to operate in Iraq.

NEW YORK Traders get back to work in first full week of 2009

Wall Street will open for trading Monday at a two-month high as investors have grown more optimistic that the worst of the market's rout might be over. But, analysts contend, the real test is still to come.

There will be no shortage of economic data and potential corporate news as traders get back to work after the holidays. The real hope is that the market can build upon Friday's rally, when the Dow Jones industrial average snapped a four-week losing streak and closed above 9,000 for the first time since Nov. 5.

The past month has shown that the negative sentiment about things like corporate earnings and still-sluggish credit markets have already been factored into the market. Analysts say the next few weeks will determine if investors are comfortable enough to return to the market — with their fears of missing out on a rally outweighing concerns of a renewed downturn.

"There's now an estimated \$8.9 trillion sitting on the sidelines in cash and money markets," said Stephen Leeb, president of New York-based Leeb Capital Management.

— The Associated Press

AESTHETICS OR SECURITY?

Critics say Newark barbed wire ban helps criminals

By David Porter
Associated Press writer

NEWARK, N.J. — Some business owners in this crime-plagued city say recent enforcement of a decades-old ordinance prohibiting some types of barbed wire and razor wire is making Newark more attractive — to thieves.

Burglaries are up 17 percent from 2007 through November in Newark, which has a young, charismatic mayor who has vowed to help the city rebound from decades of official inaction, incompetence and outright criminality.

The city is aggressively courting new investment and development, but people who have been ordered to downgrade their fences say officials are worried more about aesthetics than security.

John DeSantis, owner of a lot used by an auto repair business in Newark's West Ward, says his property has been the site of more than a dozen burglaries since the summer, when the city forced him to remove razor wire on top of the 7-foot-tall fence that surrounds the lot. "The bottom line was, they said, 'It doesn't look good and we want to create a new image for the city of Newark,'" DeSantis said.

The order was backed up by a previously little-used 1966 ordinance that states: "No barbed wire fence or other fence or wall having barbed or sharp projections facing outward, or otherwise endangering the traveling public, shall be permitted adjacent to or along the line of any street or

public place."

The Rev. C.H. Thomas of the Church of Christ, which sits across the street from DeSantis' lot, told The Star-Ledger of Newark that thieves have broken into several cars in the church's lot since barbed wire was removed from a fence over the summer at the city's behest.

In some respects, the dispute is a microcosm of the changes under way in New Jersey's largest city, viewed, as always, through the prism of crime.

Newark is a city struggling to forge ahead as it grapples with its past, with neighborhoods in which new housing is sprinkled across a landscape teeming with aging or abandoned properties.

Crime remains the broad brush that colors percep-

tions of the city: Despite a steep drop in homicides in the last year, robberies and aggravated assaults rose along with burglaries in 2008.

DeSantis said he was surprised when a city official told him that the ordinance was being enforced to prevent passers-by or anyone climbing the fence from being injured by the barbed wire.

"I said that maybe if a few of these thieves were injured the word would get around that 'Hey, we can't do this anymore,'" he said.

Melvin Waldrop, director of the city's department of neighborhood and recreational services, which oversees code enforcement, did not respond to a request for comment, but his office said 132 properties were cited for violating the 1966 ordinance in the city last year. It was not known how many of the property owners had removed the wire from their

fences as a result.

Mayor Cory A. Booker said, through a spokeswoman: "We understand the concerns of local business owners and will continue to work with property owners to resolve this matter. The city will be reviewing the ordinance to come up with a solution that addresses all concerns."

For now, enforcement of the ordinance appears to be spotty.

Around the corner from DeSantis' property, barbed wire topped a fence around a vacant lot behind the Yes Lord Ministry, and two auto repair shops within a few blocks also had barbed wire or razor wire atop their fences.

Joe Nyamekye, who runs Joe's Collision Center on Central Avenue, said a city representative told him a few months ago he might have to remove the barbed wire and razor wire that tops the fence surrounding his lot. He said he hadn't heard anything since then.



AP photo

A car lot surrounded by fence topped with barbed wire and razor wire is seen in Newark, N.J., Dec. 31, 2008. The city has ordered the removal of barbed wire and razor wire from the top of fences in the area.

Illinois governor's allies vanish as impeachment vote nears

By Christopher Will
Associated Press writer

SPRINGFIELD, Ill. — Illinois Gov. Rod Blagojevich doesn't have many friends these days, particularly among the lawmakers who will decide whether to throw him out of office.

The vote to begin impeachment proceedings was unanimous. Former allies have fallen silent since his Dec. 9 arrest on federal corruption charges. Mem-

bers of a special impeachment committee are uniformly negative in their comments and questions.

"Isn't anyone here going to stand up for the governor?" Blagojevich attorney Ed Genson asked the committee last week.

The response was silence. Blagojevich even has trouble finding support closer to home. His circle of aides and informal advisers has fallen apart due to arrests, resignations and the pressure of a

federal investigation that dates back six years. His chief legislative ally is retiring next month.

There have been few details about what Blagojevich is doing behind closed doors at his Chicago office, other than signing a few bills and attempting to maintain an air of "business as usual." His spokesman has said the governor is meeting with aides and staff about Illinois' \$2 billion-plus budget gap, but no one has

provided details or stepped forward to confirm Blagojevich is even talking with anyone.

He spends the rest of time at home, save for a few visits to Genson's office.

Blagojevich's woeful situation leaves him immensely vulnerable to impeachment in the House and then conviction in the Senate.

Lawmakers can vote against him for any reason they want. They don't have to follow rules of evidence or

consider reasonable doubt. They could vote to throw him out of office simply because they don't consider him fit to be governor.

That's an easier vote to make if no one will stand up and defend him.

His closest ally in the House, state Rep. Jay Hoffman, a fellow Democrat from Collinsville, said nothing to support Blagojevich when the House voted to establish an impeachment committee.

Thailand police to charge club owner over deadly fire

BANGKOK, Thailand (AP) — The owner of a Thai nightclub where at least 62 revelers perished in a New Year's Eve fire will face criminal charges over the blaze, which was likely sparked by a countdown fireworks display on the stage of the jammed nightspot, police said Sunday.

Wisuth Setsawat, a Thai-Chinese businessman, broke down in tears as he offered apologies to relatives of the victims Sunday before being questioned by police over the disaster at his Santika Club.

The fire raced through the two-story building with victims succumbing to the blaze, smoke inhalation and injuries from a stampede as hundreds of revelers tried to escape through a single main door.

Police Gen. Jongrak Jutanont said Sunday that Wisuth would be charged with carelessness leading to the deaths of others. He has already been charged with allowing in an underage customer, a 17-year-old high school student who was among the dead.

"More investigations will follow to pinpoint everyone who is responsible for this," the police officer told reporters, adding that more than 100 witnesses have already been interviewed.

Earlier, police said 13 people were to be questioned including Wisuth, managers of his White and Brothers Co., and staffers of a company hired to put on the countdown fireworks display on the stage of the Santika Club, which Jongrak said probably sparked the blaze.

The death toll rose by one to 62 on Sunday with 31 others in critical condition having sustained burns over 70 percent of their bodies, according to Narenthorn Emergency Center.

INSIDE: To do for you, B2 | Gym membership fees, B2 | Comics, B4 | Classified, B5-10 | Weather, B10

The new

Twin Falls facility undergoes transformation



Above: Trevor Ferguson, 13, works on his abs and his aim as he tosses balls at a target Tuesday afternoon at the YMCA on Elizabeth Boulevard.

YMCA



Right: New equipment for a new year: *Times-News* reporter Melissa Davlin tries out a new machine in the circuit training room at the Twin Falls YMCA.

By Melissa Davlin
Times-News writer

Looking for a way to kick off your new year? Gary Ettenger, CEO of YMCA of Twin Falls, hopes you'll give the new Elizabeth Boulevard Y a shot.

On Dec. 29, the facility reopened after closing for a remodeling. The changes, including a new fitness circuit and state-of-the-art exercise equipment, provide a new way to work out for Magic Valley.

Ettenger joined the Twin Falls YMCA team in July after working with the national association for 25 years. Immediately, he and the board of directors got to work planning for the remodeling.

The facility invested \$200,000 from its own funds, but the improvements are worth closer to \$400,000, Ettenger said. Some of the equipment was donated or sold to the YMCA at cost, while community members volunteered to paint the 50-year-old walls.

The changes are the first of a four-phase plan to improve the Twin Falls YMCA. Phase 2 will focus on the Canyon Rim YMCA, and plans for phases 3 and 4 will materialize in the next couple of years, Ettenger said. He expects a membership increase of 1,000 following last weekend's grand opening.

Some of the changes are subtle. New coats of paint cover the walls, and children have a larger room to play in after Ettenger traded his spacious office with the cramped nursery. Others are more drastic — a new QuickFit Circuit greets visitors in the waiting area, and the old workout room is nearly unrecognizable with new equipment.

"It's so cool," said board chairman Mike Preece.

I reviewed the changes right after the YMCA reopened its doors last week and liked what I saw. But Ettenger and Preece don't need my seal of approval — they are already getting great feedback from Y members.

"I can't believe all the smiles," Preece said.

The circuit

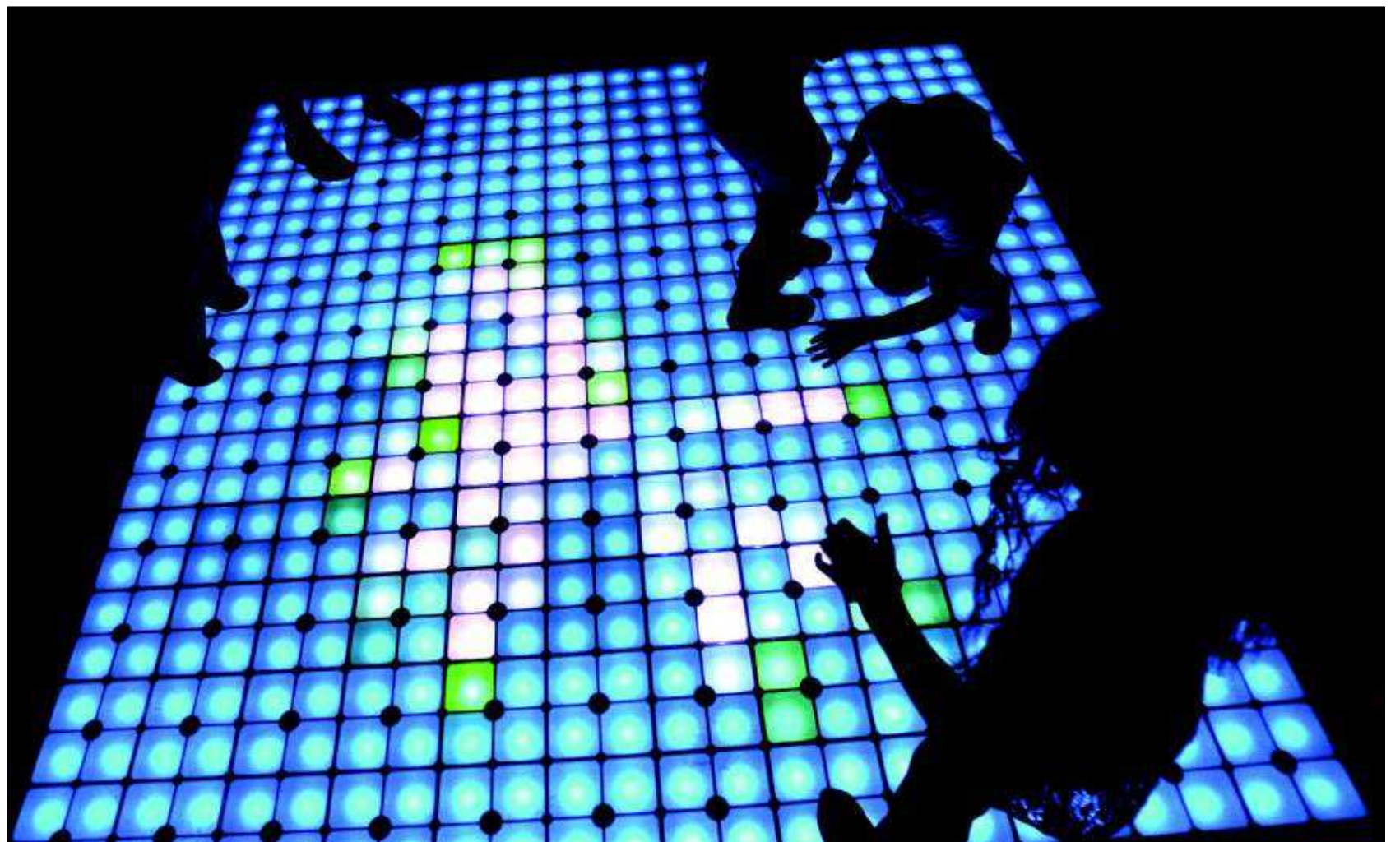
Circuit training is an ideal way for professionals and other adults with minimum workout time to get in 30 minutes of exercise a day. Varied exercises ensure participants work all parts of their bodies, so forget making excuses for skipping the aerobic part of your routine.

"Everyone from the out-of-shape to athletes can benefit," Preece said. The circuit is easily customizable. If you're in shape, push yourself through the exercises. If not, feel free to lighten the weight load and take rests between the stations.

The circuit is standard, with four aerobic stations and eight easy-to-use strength stations. Participants have 100 seconds at each station. At the end of the 100 seconds, they have 25 seconds to switch stations and adjust the equipment.

My take: I have to admit my bias. I'm a huge fan of circuit workouts, probably because I have a short attention span and get bored with more than three minutes at a time of any given exercise.

As far as circuits go, this is nice. The 100 seconds is long enough to feel the burn, but short enough to keep your attention. On a few of



Photos by MEAGAN THOMPSON/Times-News

Lights out! The Lightspace Play Floor glows in the dark as children dart across the surface trying to avoid lights and sensors that will put them out of the game in virtual dodgeball. The exercise equipment is one of many new additions to the YMCA on Twin Falls' Elizabeth Boulevard.

Twin Falls YMCA membership

It's \$400 annually or \$40 monthly for families, plus a \$25 joiners fee; and \$270 annually or \$30 monthly for single adults, plus the \$25 joiners fee. Prices don't include tax. Membership allows access at the Elizabeth Boulevard facility, the Canyon Rim facility and the Y/City Pool, as well as classes. Information: 733-4384.

the weight machines, though, I struggled to make it more than a minute.

That's OK, though. Ettenger said many people can do only one rep of eight or 10, then just relax for the rest of the time. Only elite athletes can manage lifting weights for the whole minute and a half. It's comforting to know that I'm not alone in my wimpiness.

The main exercise room

When getting ready for your workout, stop by the facility's new warm-up room. The room is painted in relaxing blue tones and has mats on the floor to make stretching a little more appealing.

In the core room across the hall, the Ab Solo is designed to strengthen core muscles with a combination of sit-ups and medicine balls. While sitting up, the participant grabs a medicine ball that weighs as much as 7 pounds. He leans back with the medicine ball at his chest, then throws it into a basket. It's like a carnival game, except the prize is six-pack abs instead of a stuffed animal.

In the main workout room, new equipment dots the floor. Cybex weight equipment is smoother and



Times-News reporter Melissa Davlin works out in the circuit training room at the newly remodeled Twin Falls YMCA.



Magicvalley.com

WATCH: A video story showing new attractions at the YMCA on Twin Falls' Elizabeth Boulevard.

simpler to operate than the YMCA's old machines, Preece said.

One of the most exciting changes is the addition of new cardio equipment. Runners, bikers and walkers can plug headphones into their equipment and listen in on one of four television shows. The Espresso Bikes come in standard and recumbent and are fitted with screens that simulate biking courses. The rider has control over the

gears, and the computer controls the tension depending on the course's grade. The bikes even have a dragon-chasing game in which the rider pedals after the reptilian monsters on their bikes, which Preece demonstrated.

"Gotta lead him a little bit," Preece added as he chased down a dragon. "Ah, got him."

My take: What a fantastic improvement on the old Y.

I've spent many an hour on treadmills and ellipticals at the gym, staring blankly at the wall and counting the seconds until my workout is over. With the televisions and games, however, YMCA patrons will have another reason to work out.

I'm excited about the new stretching room. I'm a big fan of warming up before working out, but I always feel silly bending over and reaching for my toes on the middle of the gym floor. I'll be much more comfortable with the privacy — and the padded floor.

Please see **YMCA**, Page B2

To do for You

Free fitness activities for customers

Jerome Recreation District will host Customer Appreciation Week from 5 a.m. to 9 p.m. this week at the recreation district, 2032 S. Lincoln.

Activities include: today, free day pass for senior citizens and children to use the gymnasium, walking track and weight-lifting equipment; Tuesday, free healthy snacks and refreshments; Wednesday, "bring a friend" free day to use the gymnasium, walking track and weight-lifting equipment; Thursday, free fitness classes;

and Friday, all-day free drawings and giveaways. Information: 324-3389.

Fitness challenge

"Commit to Fit Business Challenge" will be offered at 7 p.m. Mondays, today through March 23, at the Jerome Recreation District, 2032 S. Lincoln.

The 12-week challenge includes one free fitness class a week, personalized workouts and weekly weigh-ins.

Cost is \$20 a person (no limit on number of members per business). Individuals

who are not associated with a business are also welcome. Information and to register: 324-3389.

Bariatric support

Bariatric Support Group meeting for patients who have undergone bariatric surgery, 7 p.m. today, at St. Luke's Magic Valley Medical Center's Education Center, 588 Addison Ave. W. in Twin Falls. Information: 381-4504.

'Baby and Me'

St. Benedicts Family Medical Center's "Baby and Me" classes, from 11 a.m. to noon Tuesdays, at Jerome Public Library, 100 First Ave. E.

The session is for parents of children from infancy through toddler years.

Free; 324-6133.

About C-sections

Cesarean childbirth class, from 6:30 to 9 p.m. Thursday, in the lobby at St.

Luke's downtown campus, 660 Shoshone St. E. in Twin Falls.

Topics: Cesarean deliveries, non-conforming labors, pain management and hospital procedures. Wear comfortable clothing; bring two pillows and, if possible, a support person.

Free. Preregistration required: 732-3148.

Weight management for diabetes

"Adult Weight Management for Diabetes and Diabetes Prevention," for adults 18 and older, will be held from 7 to 8:30 p.m. Thursdays, this week through March 12, in the Genoa Building (Renaissance Office Plaza), 726 N. College Road in Twin Falls.

Topics: nutrition and activity strategies to help with weight loss, and diabetes control and prevention.

Cost is \$100, payable at the first class. Preregistration required: 736-6218 or heathersh@mvrnc.org.

Tobacco cessation

American Cancer Society's "Fresh Start" program to help adults quit using tobacco products; six-class session from 6:30 to 7:30 p.m. Mondays and Thursdays, Jan. 12-29, in the Sunflower Room at St. Luke's Education Center, 588 Addison Ave. W. in Twin Falls.

"Fresh Start" builds skills to help reduce and eventually end tobacco use: communicate better, handle stress, make decisions, set goals, eat healthy and exercise.

The program is sponsored by South Central Public Health District and St. Luke's Magic Valley Medical Center.

Free. Preregistration required: Jeanette Charters, 308-5613, or Susie Beem, 737-5946.

Stroke prevention

Life Line Screening will offer ultrasound tests at two locations to help people identify their risk of stroke, vascular diseases or osteoporosis.

Appointments will begin at 9 a.m.:

- Jan. 24, Best Western Sawtooth Inn Hotel & Suites, 2653 S. Lincoln Ave. in Jerome.

- Jan. 26, Toponis Club, 413 Main St. in Gooding.

The screenings help identify blocked arteries and irregular heart rhythm, abdominal aortic aneurysms and hardening of the arteries in the legs. A bone density screening to assess osteoporosis risk is appropriate for both men and women.

Cost: \$159 for a wellness and heart rhythm package. All five screenings take about 60 to 90 minutes to complete.

Preregistration required. Appointments: 1-877-237-1287.

"To do for you" is a listing of health-related activities, events and education. Submit information by Thursday for publication in the following Monday's Healthy & Fit section. E-mail notices to ramona@magic-valley.com.

Slim gyms: Health clubs cut fees for January boost

By Megan K. Scott
Associated Press writer

NEW YORK — January is for fitness centers what December is for retailers: a bad month makes for a bad year.

And with people spending less and less likely to overindulge this year, some in the fitness business are working harder to make sure they don't find themselves on the ropes.

"We're all kind of holding our breath," says Ben Quist, co-owner of Form & Fitness in Grafton, Wis. He said while his club hasn't seen a decline in memberships, he is a little nervous. A third of the club's annual revenue is from new memberships in January, he said.

"You never take anything for granted," Quist said. "These next three months, I need to take in a handsome chunk of our revenue."

Historically, January is the single biggest month for new membership enrollment at health clubs, according to the International Health, Racquet & Sportsclub Association. Many fitness centers introduce some of their best deals, hoping to entice new members and lock them into a year-long or even longer contract.

The number of gym memberships dropped 3 percent to 41.5 million between 2006 and 2007, according to the association. At the same time, the number of fitness centers is increasing.

There were 29,636 commercial fitness centers in 2007, up from 29,357 in 2006, according to the association. And in most big metropolitan markets, every commercial fitness facility has 10 to 25 competitive fitness operations within its prime target area, the association reports.

Health club memberships tend to skew towards those earning \$50,000 or more, who are not the hardest hit by the economy, according to David Lockwood, director of research at Mintel.

But almost all consumers are cutting spending across the board, and for people with lower incomes, a gym is very likely a first cut, he said.

"We have to assume that the 'New Years' Resolve people' who join clubs en masse



A member of the Curves club works out in Hollis, Maine, in 2004. With people spending less and less likely to overindulge this year, some in the fitness business are working harder to make sure they don't find themselves on the ropes.



The door of a Curves fitness club in Brunswick, Maine. In part because of the economy, Curves International deepened its discount for new members, according to spokeswoman Kathy Carr.

in January and others who do so for winter months will be fewer in number this year because of the economy," Lockwood said in an e-mail.

In part because of the economy, Curves International deepened its discount for new members, according to spokeswoman Kathy Carr. The original deal

"You never take anything for granted. These next three months, I need to take in a handsome chunk of our revenue."

— Ben Quist, co-owner of Form & Fitness

was 30 percent off and the first 30 days free.

Now, members who sign up between Jan. 1 and March 6 get 50 percent off the initiation fee, in addition to the first 30 days for free, said Carr.

But because people have little time to work out these days, lowering membership costs may not be enough, says Cedric Bryant, chief science officer for American Council on Exercise. He said people are also looking for time-efficient workouts, such as boot camp classes.

Sylvia Camacho, 53, a college administrator in Remsenburg, N.Y., said one reason she canceled her membership to The Firm Fitness in November was because she never used it.

"I started thinking about the time and money that it cost be a member and me not making it there," she says. "I figured it would be a

good thing to knock off my budget."

None of this is to say that fitness centers are obsolete, says Dr. Pamela Peeke, senior medical correspondent for the Discovery Health National Body Challenge.

Mintel has found that people who join health clubs like the community atmosphere and are quite loyal — even if they stray from time to time, said Lockwood.

"You can't talk to that person in the DVD," Peeke says. "It's nice to have another human being who walks up to you while you're lifting weights or is in that class for yoga."

But she said health clubs will have to get creative.

Her suggestions: free lectures on stress management, workouts that focus on relaxation, discounts on massages, babysitting, monthly membership options and of course, a slash in prices.

YMCA

Continued from page B1

I didn't exactly forget I was working out while pedaling after the dragons on the Espresso bike, but that's probably because I play too many video games to be fooled by a shiny screen. Even though I knew I was out of breath and sweating, I still loved it. I even want to go back and beat Preece's score of 1,000 points in five minutes. As long as I'm getting my cardio, it's OK to be competitive, right?

The XR-Zone

How do you push your kids to get off the couch and get moving? Why not entice them with video games?

It might seem counterproductive, but wait until you see the YMCA's new XR-Zone.

The new fitness room is geared for children under age 17. Adults can use the equipment, too, but from 4 to 8 p.m., the room is kids-only.

On Tuesday, a half-dozen children crowded onto the Lightspace Play Floor, a lit exercise floor equipped with sensors. Other children waited for the Makoto Sports Arena, a set of three towers with sensors and lights. When a sensor lights up, the children hit it with padded sticks, keeping them on their toes.

None of them seemed to miss the sedentary activities of home.

"Obesity is such a problem in kids now," Ettenger said. According to Kidshealth.org, one in three children is considered overweight or obese.

With the new equipment in the XR-Room, though, these youngsters have a fighting chance against the obesity epidemic. And the room isn't complete yet. A Dance Dance Revolution, two Ab Solos (with lighter medicine balls) and an exercise video game that's similar to a Nintendo Wii will round out the children's facility.

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Does your health coverage need a checkup?

It seems hard to believe, but health benefits have only been around in the United States since the 1940s. While few people would suggest that going without them is wise, there are fewer and fewer people who can actually afford the increasing costs associated with medical coverage.

Spiraling costs have set off a flurry of reform-minded initiatives across the country in both the public and private sectors. Many states are working to reform their current systems and move toward a universal system.

Employers are contracting with major insurance carriers to offer cost-effective health care solutions to their workforce-or reevaluating their current level of coverage. The most common, and generally least expensive, medical care option is group insurance.

Your options may expand pursuant to new legislation, but the fact remains that health insurance is an important part of your overall physical and financial well-being. Whether you are a small business owner, a full- or part-time employee of an organization, or a self-insuring contractor, you may want to consult with a financial professional about your options. Choosing an incorrect plan for your situation may have an unwelcome impact on your bottom line.

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Get over your lip balm addiction

By Julia Feldmeier
Special to The Washington Post

Let's make a list of the important things you need before walking out the door: Wallet: Check. Cellphone: Check. Keys: Check. Lip balm? You slap your back pocket. Nope. Rummage through your bag. Nada. Search the bedside table. Negative.

This is a problem. A huge, paralyzing problem. You are a lip balm addict, after all. And you are not alone.

Countless Facebook groups are dedicated to the "crackstick" in all its varieties: ChapStick, Blistex, Burt's Bees, Carmex. Any lip lubricant that comes in a tube or a tub. There are online quizzes that measure how addicted you are to ChapStick. (Question: When you are wearing only a bathing suit, do you have ChapStick on you at all times?) And there is a self-help Web site, Lip Balm Anonymous (www.lipbalm-anonymous.com), dedicat-

ed to helping lip balm addicts.

The thing is, lip balm isn't addictive. Not really. Nothing in these products drives you to be physiologically dependent on them. Nevertheless, there are steps you can take to reduce your compulsion to apply the stuff:

- **Use petroleum-based** rather than wax-based products. "A wax-based product is not necessarily causing a problem, but it's not very good at treating a problem," says Todd Perkins, a Washington dermatologist. Instead, Perkins recommends Aquaphor, Vaseline or any petroleum-based products, which help trap



moisture in the lips.

- **Don't lick your lips.** As the weather grows colder and the air drier, we tend to lick our lips. The saliva then evaporates, leaving our lips drier and more irritated than before, Perkins says.

- **Be mindful of the sun.** Lips burn, too, and there's more at stake than simple irritation. Lips are more prone than skin to developing serious cancers, and Perkins says skin cancer spreads more quickly on the

lips than it does anywhere else. Remember to apply sunblock to both lips. (The lower lip burns more severely.)

Finally, think about whether it's the product or the behavior. Lip balm may not cause a physiological dependence, but as an addictive behavior, it's no less relevant if it leads you to make lifestyle changes, says Carl Lejuez, director of the Center for Addictions, Personality and Emotion Research at the University of Maryland.

So, if you're arriving late to meetings because you were searching for your ChapStick, or not enjoying a movie because you forgot your Burt's Bees, you may want to do something about it. Lejuez recommends replacing the lip balm habit with another one. Every time you're compelled to apply lip balm, reach instead for, say, your water bottle. Most of us don't drink enough water anyway, and the hydration will only help your lips.



Quick Study

By Linda Searing
Special to The Washington Post

The topic: asthma

Breathing exercises may lessen symptoms

THE QUESTION

Might breathing exercises help control the symptoms of asthma?

THIS STUDY

It randomly assigned 183 adults with mild to moderate asthma to participate in three half-hour sessions to learn better breathing techniques and exercises aimed at reducing the severity of symptoms, or to attend three half-hour educational sessions on asthma. Those who learned breathing exercises were asked to practice them 10 minutes or more a day. Six months later, both groups showed improvements, but the exercise group reported a higher quality of life and less anxiety or depression and scored better on lung function tests. No real difference between the groups was found in their use of inhalers.

WHO MAY BE AFFECTED?

People with mild to moderate asthma.

CAVEATS

The study did not describe the exercises in detail. Part of the reported improvement among study participants was based on their answers on questionnaires.

FIND THIS STUDY

It's in the Dec. 3 online issue of Thorax.

LEARN MORE

Learn about asthma at www.cdc.gov and www.aaaai.org/patients.

The research described in Quick Study comes from credible, peer-reviewed journals. Nonetheless, conclusive evidence about a treatment's effectiveness is rarely found in a single study. Anyone considering changing or beginning treatment of any kind should consult a physician.

A sickly response to employers' wellness programs

By Diane Levick
The Hartford Courant

Workers can pick from a cornucopia of health and wellness programs their employers eagerly offer, hoping to rein in their ever-growing insurance costs.

But few employees are joining them — even the well-known weight loss and stop-smoking programs — and employers' disappointment is starting to show.

Only 4 percent of smoking employees participated in their employers' smoking cessation programs in 2007, and just 5 percent of overweight employees joined workplace weight control programs, a Hewitt Associates survey shows.

Disease management programs, which health insurers promote for people with asth-

ma, diabetes, cardiac problems and other conditions, attracted only 10 percent of the employees who were eligible, according to Hewitt, a human resources consulting company.

The reasons for low participation are varied, and the answer is not to drop the programs, said Kathleen Mahieu, a health and productivity solutions consultant in Hewitt's Norwalk office.

"I'm not convinced they don't work," Mahieu said. Smoking and weight loss programs "are typically focused on individuals who are ready to make a change," she said. "Well, there's a whole bunch of folks out there who smoke who aren't ready for that yet."

So employers need to tailor communication about the programs to a wider range of employees, using more

dynamic multimedia methods, to move them from thinking about change to taking action, Mahieu said.

The survey found 54 percent of the 248 large and mid-size employers surveyed offer smoking cessation programs, but only 47 percent of them reported they're satisfied or highly satisfied with the programs. Similarly, only 41 percent of employers offering weight management programs are satisfied. That's probably because employers are disappointed with the low employee turnout and because they have no measure of what return they're getting on their investment in the programs, Mahieu said. The cost of the programs, though, is minimal — about \$12 a year per person for smoking cessation, she noted.

"If you just impact one indi-

vidual to quit smoking, you've saved your investment," she said.

When it comes to disease-management programs, nearly three-quarters of surveyed employers offer them, but only 10 percent of eligible employees participated. Often employees are automatically enrolled unless they opt out. They might opt out, for instance, because they don't perceive much benefit, question employers' motives or view the concept as intrusive.

Hewitt found higher employee uptake of other employer-sponsored health and wellness programs. Thirty percent of eligible employees got flu shots offered by employers, 34 percent went through screenings such as blood pressure and cholesterol, and 30 percent filled out health risk questionnaires.

Whatever moves you

By Vicky Hallett
Special to The Washington Post

Q. I've been so good for so long. Over five months of working out and dieting, I've shed nearly 60 pounds (with about 25 more to go), but I'm getting pretty fed up. My workout time cuts into the rest of my life. It's becoming clear that, with travel and locker-room time, I have to

set aside two hours a day, five days a week, to get to my goal. The temptation to take "breaks" is strong. Any advice?

A. I bet you think I'm going to spring into the think-how-awesome-you'll-look-in-those-jeans or the add-extra-years-to-your-life pep talks. But I suspect you're looking for some motivation beyond vanity or health. Try this: It'll

keep you sane.

That's what time management expert Ruth Klein says: "The more we exercise, the better mood we create." That in turn makes it easier to handle stresses and makes you a more creative, productive worker.

Now is the ideal time to take Klein's advice on sprinkling active breaks, like short walks, quickie routines with resistance bands and exercise DVDs, throughout your day.

Incorporate enough of those things, and you can even take a vacation from the gym without feeling guilty.

Combine your gym trips with the aspects of your life that you feel you're neglecting. While you're getting your cardio fix, prep for book club by listening to the next title on CD. Rather than meeting pals for coffee, persuade them to go to yoga with you.

By Lindsey Minnema
The Washington Post

Does concern for the economy have you tossing and turning? Stress can have a big impact on how well you sleep. To help you reclaim some of those zzz's, try these suggestions from the New York University Sleep Institute:

- **Adjust your environment** by darkening the room, adding some white noise (soothing sounds such as the ocean, rain or crickets) or blocking out noise entirely with earplugs.
- **Do a little yoga** before bed to relax and gain balance.
- **Lie in bed** and breathe slowly, allowing your abdomen and chest muscles to relax.
- **Imagine a pleasant scene** and focus on the details. Create a pleasant history about it.



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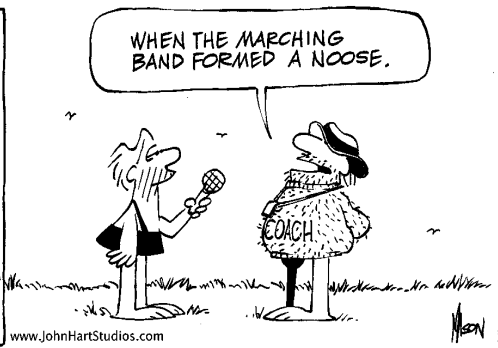
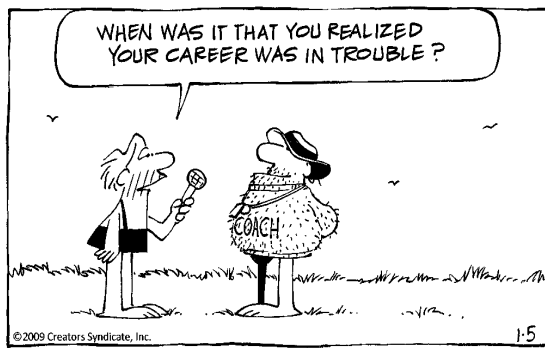
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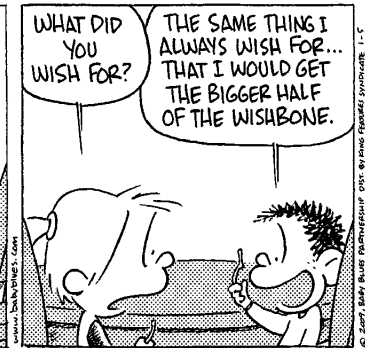
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By Johnny Hart



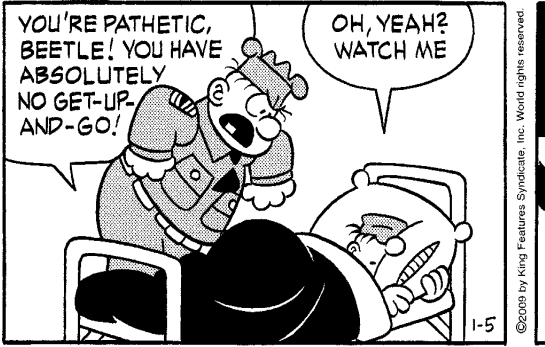
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By Rick Kirkman & Jerry Scott



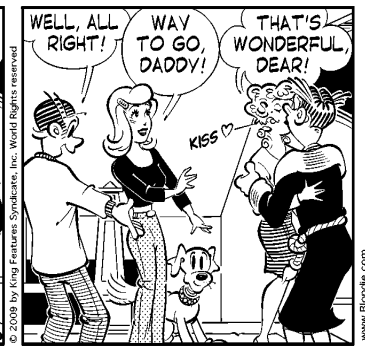
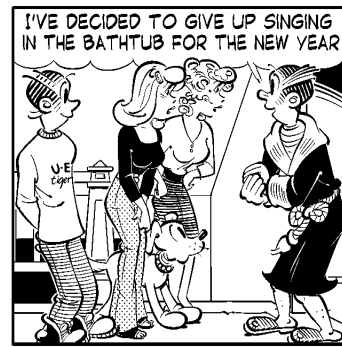
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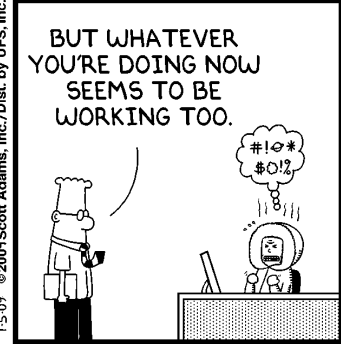
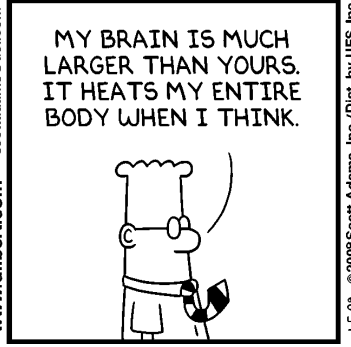
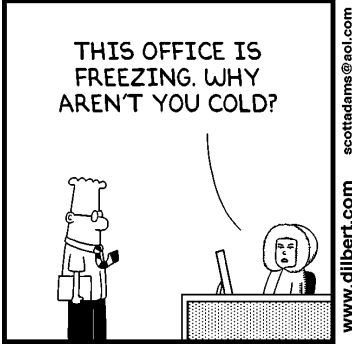
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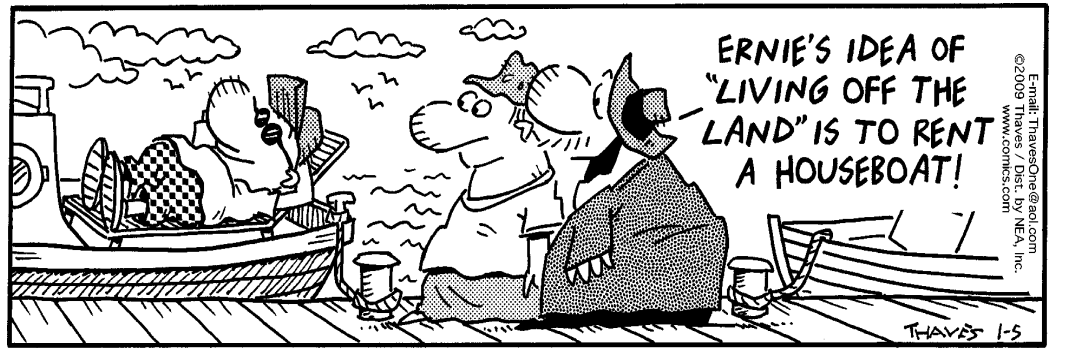
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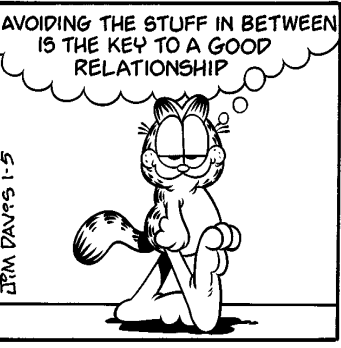
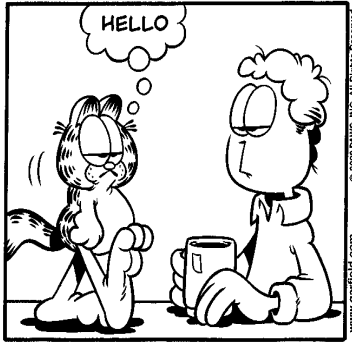
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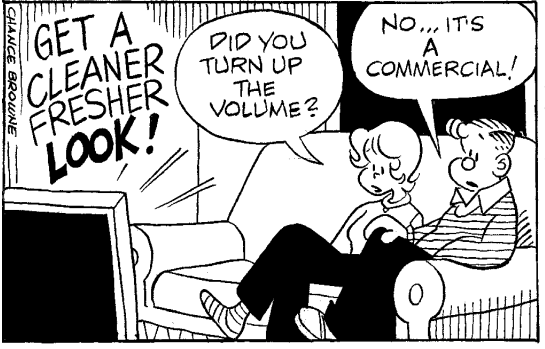
Hagar the Horrible

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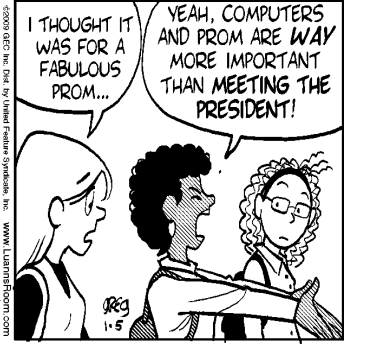
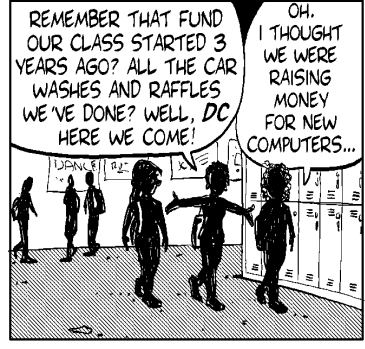
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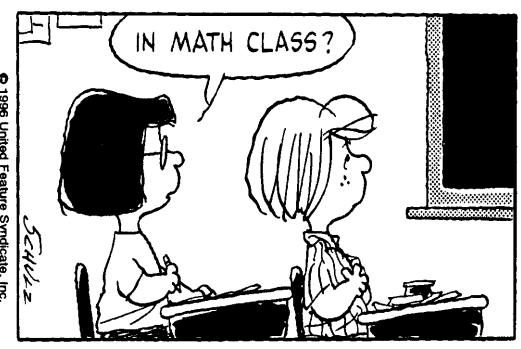
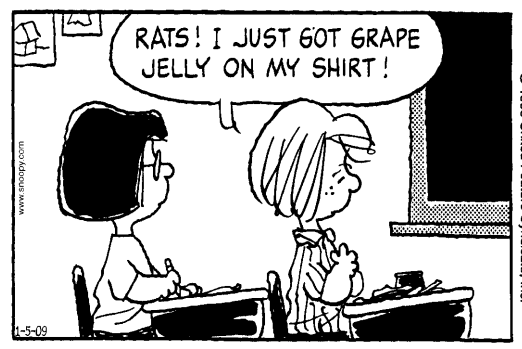
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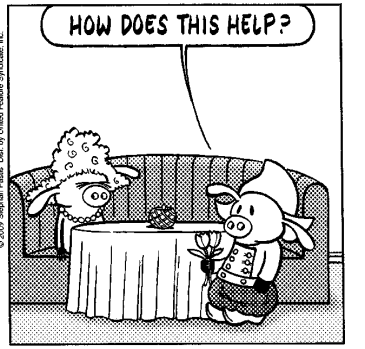
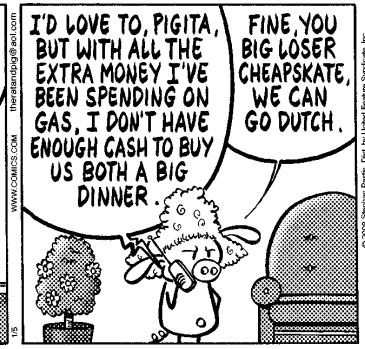
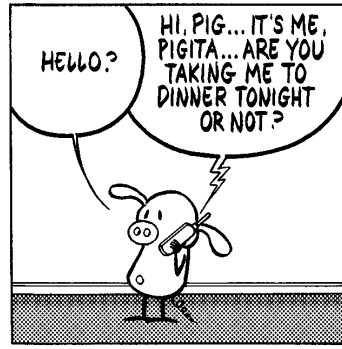
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By Stephan Pastis



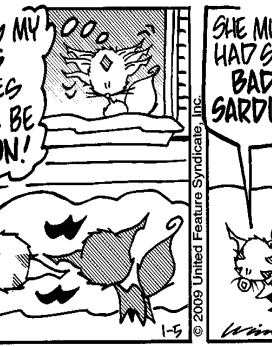
Pickles

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Rose is Rose

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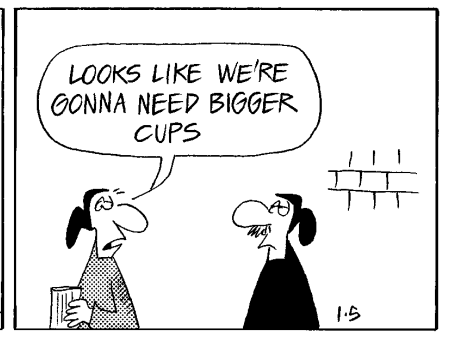
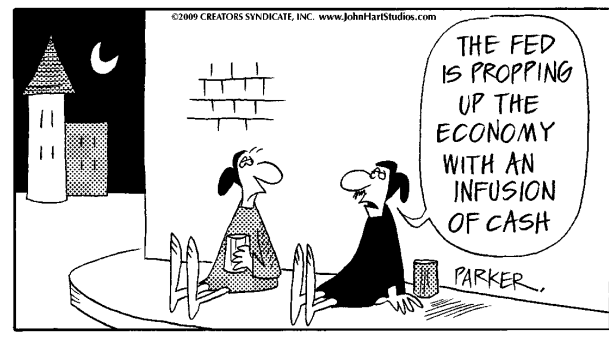
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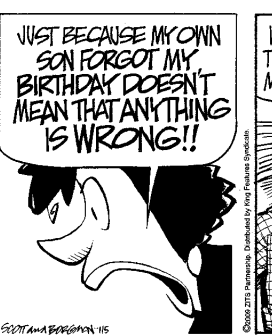
The Wizard of Id

By Brant Parker & Johnny Hart



Zits

By Jim Borgman and Jerry Scott



TWIN FALLS FORECAST

Today: Cloudy with a chance of snow. Light accumulations look likely. Highs 30 to 35.
Tonight: Snow chances decrease. Maybe a dusting or so additional. Lows 25 to 30.
Tomorrow: Not as cold. Cloudy with a chance of rain and snow. Highs 40 to 45.

BURLEY/RUPERT FORECAST

Today: Cloudy with a chance of snow. Light accumulations look likely. Highs near 30.
Tonight: Snow chances decrease. Maybe a dusting or so additional. Lows 20 to 25.
Tomorrow: Not as cold. Cloudy with a chance of rain and snow. Highs 35 to 40.

IDAHO'S FORECAST

Map of Idaho showing weather forecasts for various regions including Boise, Northern Utah, and other areas. Includes a legend for weather symbols.

TWIN FALLS FIVE-DAY FORECAST

Table showing 5-day forecast for Twin Falls, including Today, Tonight, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday with icons and temperature ranges.

ALMANAC - TWIN FALLS

Almanac section containing Temperature, Precipitation, Humidity, Barometric Pressure, Sunrise and Sunset, Moon Phases, and U.V. Index.

REGIONAL FORECAST

Regional forecast table listing cities like Boise, Burley, and others with their respective weather conditions and temperatures.

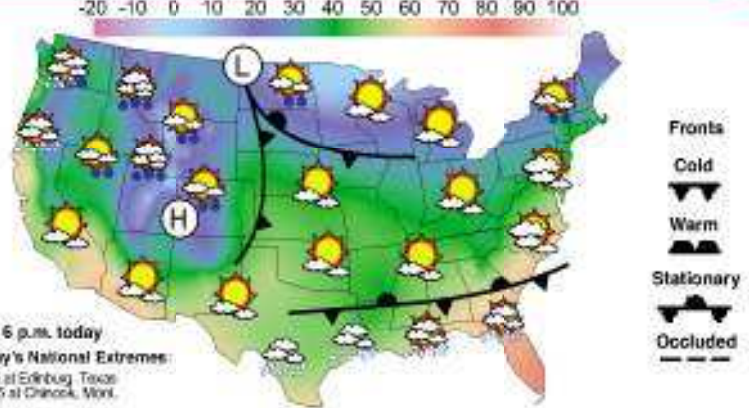
NATIONAL FORECAST

National forecast table listing major cities across the US with their weather conditions.

WORLD FORECAST

World forecast table listing various international cities with their weather conditions.

TODAY'S NATIONAL MAP



Advertisement for 'meineke car care center' located at 169 Addison Avenue West, phone 735-8296.

CANADIAN FORECAST

Canadian forecast table listing cities like Calgary, Edmonton, and Vancouver with their weather conditions.

Large advertisement for 'Smalley Motors' featuring various car models like Ford Explorer, Nissan Xterra, and Chevrolet Equinox with prices and contact info.

Advertisement for 'Assist AUTO BROKERAGE' listing various car models like Buick LeSabre, Chevy Malibu, and Ford Focus with prices and contact info.

Advertisement for 'Thrifty Car Sales' listing various car models like Chevy Malibu, Dodge Stratus, and Honda Accord with prices and contact info.

Sudoku Answers:

A 9x9 grid containing the numerical answers to a Sudoku puzzle.

Advertisement for 'Wheels' and 'Assist' car sales, featuring various car models like Pontiac G6, Toyota Camry, and VW Jetta with prices and contact info.

Advertisement for 'Classified Private Party Ads' with contact information for 733-0931 ext. 2.

Advertisement for 'WHO can help YOU sell your car?' and 'Import And Sports Cars' with contact info.