



Top Stories

President Bush delivers 2006 State of the Union Address



United States President George W. Bush delivered his sixth State of the Union Address on Tuesday.

Scientists shocked at Great Barrier Reef bleaching

Scientists say Australia's hot summer has had a devastating effect on Queensland's Great Barrier Reef. Coral reef specialists are comparing the severity of the damage to the worst case ever recorded in 2002.



Wikipedia Current Events

- Governor of West Virginia Joe Manchin asks for a halt in coal mining following two more coal mining deaths in the state that saw fourteen people die in coal mining disasters in January.
- The controversy surrounding the Muhammad cartoons escalates as newspapers in Germany, Italy and Spain republish the controversial pictures in defiance of widespread Muslim protests in the Middle East and elsewhere.
- The Latin American TV station Telesur, backed by the Venezuelan government, has signed a co-operation agreement with the Arabic channel al-Jazeera.

Australian Conservation Foundation's Don Henry is worried. "The important thing from this warning is that we're starting to see this damage to the reef from warmer waters and climate change happen more often and more extensive," he said. "There's going to be a point when the reef just doesn't recover."

With February, the hottest month, just ahead, this is a critical time. The last severe cases of bleaching occurred in 1998 and 2002, the last leaving more than 5 per cent of the reef destroyed.

Professor Hoegh-Guldberg, a renowned coral expert, said he was amazed at the damage to corals on the Keppel islands. "Corals at the Keppels are completely bleached and we are only halfway through January," he said.

The Great Barrier Reef is a big attraction for Australia's tourism industry, which employs 6 per cent of the country's workforce and contributes 12 per cent of exports. Paul Marshall, manager of the Great Barrier Reef marine park said "We are going to be pretty lucky to escape coral deaths in the southern Great Barrier Reef."

The Reef's future looks even darker following a report by climate scientists. The United Kingdom Meteorological Office report, Avoiding Dangerous Climate Change, suggests that a two-degree warming would also

Featured story

Congressional staff actions prompt Wikipedia investigation



Edits by Massachusetts congressman Marty Meehan's staff on his Wikipedia article spurred a Lowell Sun story and a subsequent Wikipedia investigation of all Internet addresses assigned to the Congress of the United States.

Scientists shocked at Great Barrier Reef bleaching

Scientists say Australia's hot summer has had a devastating effect on Queensland's Great Barrier Reef. Coral reef specialists are comparing the severity of the damage to the worst case ever recorded in 2002.

University of Queensland scientists say they were shocked by the reef's condition and are concerned the entire reef may be at risk of destruction from global warming.

Professor Ove Hoegh-Guldberg said most of the reefs they saw were completely bleached. "Going down to 10 metres, every piece of coral was a glowing white colour - all that brown colour had disappeared and that was surprising for us," he said.

Wikipedia Current Events

- Shares in Google fall dramatically after the company reported profits below Wall Street estimates. \$12 billion in market value was lost.

see 97 per cent of the world's coral reefs lost, lower crop yields, put 2.8 billion people at risk of water shortage and the total loss of summer Arctic Sea ice, sparking the extinction of the polar bear and walrus.

Online retailers in Canada experience strong growth

Comscore Media Metrix Canada has reported that Online Retailers in Canada have seen significant increase in traffic to their websites. In December 2005, 17.9 million shopped retail web sites, an increase of 13 percent over December 2004.

At the top of the list is eBay with 10.9 million visitors, an increase of 16 percent over December 2004. Amazon was next with 6.5 million, an increase of 21 percent. Best Buy, Canadian Tire, Apple, Sears, and Walmart are among the retailers who all saw an increase in online retail sales.

Flowers and home furnishings purchases also showed big increases from a year ago.

AT&T sued over NSA eavesdropping

A class action suit has been filed on Tuesday by the Electronic Frontier Foundation (EFF) against the telecom giant AT&T. The suit, filed in San Francisco, alleges that AT&T violated federal laws by collaborating with government to eavesdrop on U.S. citizens.

The Bush Administration and NSA have come under fire over the issue. They defend the program by saying they are only listening in on suspected terrorists.

The EFF claims that AT&T turned over 2 databases consisting of their subscribers' communication and internet usage records.

Attorney Kevin Bankston representing the EFF said the government could not conduct their surveillance without the help of companies like AT&T. He also said their goal is to tell AT&T that it is not in their fiscal best interests, along with not being legal, to cooperate with the President's wiretap program.

According to the class action suit, AT&T granted "access to all or a substantial number of the communications transmitted through its key domestic telecommunications facilities, including direct access to streams of domestic, international and foreign telephone and Internet communications." The lawsuit is seeking damages of \$22,000 for each AT&T customer in addition to punitive fines.

AT&T is also facing scrutiny from the Federal Communications Commission and possibly fines for failing to properly certify that customer records were safeguarded.

President Bush delivers 2006 State of the Union Address

Bush opened the speech to Congress by honoring Coretta Scott King, wife of civil rights activist Martin Luther King Jr., who died on Monday.

Bush emphatically claimed that terrorism was still a serious threat, citing the 2004 Beslan school hostage crisis. Bush also urged what he felt was the need for American troops to continue their presence in Iraq, to ensure what he described as the successful transition of the Iraqi government.

In reference to the Hamas victory in the recent Palestinian elections, Bush urged the Palestinian people

not to support the group, which has been criticized by the United States and much of Europe for its past attacks upon Israelis. He asked for Hamas to disarm and recognize Israel as a sovereign state.

Talking about foreign policy, Bush said Iran is held hostage by a clerical elite and alleged that Iran has nuclear ambitions, and said the world "must not permit the Iranian regime to gain nuclear weapons."

Bush outlined an economic plan that he claims would cut the budget deficit in half by 2009, if successful. Bush said that by cutting over 140 programs that were "performing poorly or not fulfilling essential priorities", that the government would save over \$14 billion. Bush briefly touched on the upcoming problem of Social Security; with baby boomers reaching retirement age, Bush urged Congress to bypass partisan differences in order to save the program. In a rare break from the usual preplanned format of the speech, Bush received applause from Democrats when he announced that "Congress did not act last year on my proposal to save Social Security".

Bush talked about the need for affordable health care. These plans include expanding the health savings account program, allowing health insurance to be more portable for workers changing jobs. Bush also urged Congress to support medical liability reform, which he said would help doctors forced out of practice by the high price of insurance.

Bush also introduced an energy plan to reduce oil dependency. The Advanced Energy Initiative would allocate federal funds for research

in clean coal technology, solar and wind energy, and for research in the use of ethanol and hydrogen fuel in vehicles, Bush stated. The President also described his support of funding "additional research in cutting-edge methods of producing ethanol, not just from corn, but from wood chips and stalks or switch grass."

On the topic of education and jobs, Bush introduced the American Competitiveness Initiative. This plan would allocate more than \$136 billion over the next ten years to increase research in the physical sciences sector, provide job skills training for workers in these areas, and improve the quality of math and science education. He urged Congress to make temporary tax relief permanent. He also mentioned that he would like Congress to pass the power of line-item veto, which was given briefly to President Bill Clinton in 1996, before being declared unconstitutional in 1998 by the Supreme Court, 6 to 3.

Bush closed the address emphatically claiming what he called the historic courage of Americans, and saying that in Iraq, "like Americans before us, we will show that courage and we will finish well."

The Democratic rebuttal, delivered by Virginia governor Tim Kaine, criticized Bush's speech, saying that Bush had failed to uphold his previous promises, and that his administration had caused many of the problems that Bush promised in his address to fix. Kaine also stated that the Democratic Party had previously introduced many policies similar Bush's, but these policies had not been supported by Republicans. In addition to Kaine's speech, a

second rebuttal, delivered in Spanish, was given by Los Angeles mayor Antonio Villaraigosa.

Cindy Sheehan, who became an anti-war activist after her son was killed serving in Iraq and gained recognition in 2005 for her protests outside Bush's ranch in Texas, was arrested in the House gallery by Capitol Police Officer Mike Weight about fifteen minutes before the speech. Initial reports claimed that she had attempted to unfurl an anti-war banner; in fact, Sheehan wore a t-shirt with the words, "2,245 dead. How many more?" Sheehan had been invited to the speech by Rep. Lynn Woolsey (D-CA). In contrast, Beverly Young, the wife of Rep. Bill Young (R-FL), was ordered to leave the gallery but not arrested during Bush's speech because she was wearing a shirt with the words, "Support the Troops Defending Our Freedom." Sheehan is charged with unlawful conduct in violation of D.C. Code §10-503.16(b)(7), a misdemeanor prohibiting demonstrations in the Capitol carrying a maximum penalty of six months in jail and a \$500 fine. Capitol Grounds Regulations defining the prohibited activities allow "wearing Tee shirts, buttons, or other similar articles of apparel that convey a message."

On Wednesday, Capitol Police dropped charges against Sheehan and apologized for ejecting her and Young. "The officers made a good faith, but mistaken effort to enforce an old unwritten interpretation of the prohibitions about demonstrating in the Capitol," Chief Terrance Gainer said in a statement.

Don Brash gives third Orewa speech

On Tuesday the 31st of January, Dr Don Brash, the leader of the

New Zealand National Party gave his third state of the nation speech to the Orewa Rotary Club where he focussed on the economy.

Brash predicted that the New Zealand economy is "...almost certainly headed for a recession." He later said "A recent survey in the Christchurch Press suggested [the] South Island was already teetering on the brink of recession."

Brash said business confidence in New Zealand is at its lowest level in 30 years and almost every day there is another company closing its doors or sharply reducing its staff. He predicted that "many businesses will face very tough times, and that unemployment will rise steeply."

Brash said the blame for any recession will lie squarely with the Prime Minister Helen Clark and Labour. "[The] Government is asleep at the wheel." He warned that people will lose their jobs and savings because of its incompetence.

Brash also addressed immigration, health, and infrastructure issues.

Brash said he had hoped to return as Prime Minister to give this speech. He also said that he intends to lead National in the next New Zealand general election (2007) and would be surprised if he is replaced before then.

Finance Minister Michael Cullen called Brash's speech "vastly underwhelming". He also claimed the speech was riddled with inaccuracies, particularly over Government spending.

Brash's first speech at Orewa, delivered by Brash on 27 January 2004, was highly controversial. It

addressed the theme of race relations in New Zealand, particularly the special status of Māori, New Zealand's indigenous ethnic group. Some regard the speech as a watershed moment in New Zealand politics.

Internet Explorer 7 beta released to the public

The long awaited Internet Explorer 7.0 beta preview was released to the public on January 31. The final Beta 2 is scheduled by Microsoft to be released in April, with the full version scheduled for the Summer of 2006. The current release is intended for compatibility testing by developers and IT professionals, and is not aimed at the general public.

Large amounts of the architecture, including the security framework, have been completely overhauled. Partly as a result of these security enhancements, the browser will be a stand-alone application, rather than integrated with the Windows shell.

According to Microsoft's announcement, the beta will only run on Windows XP Service Pack 2 systems, but the final release version is intended to be able to run on Windows Vista, Windows XP Professional x64 Edition, and Windows Server 2003 as well.

Version 7 includes a number of new features. A number of these exist in Internet Explorer's rivals, including:

Improved rendering engine - Internet Explorer's rendering engine, codenamed Trident has been completely rewritten to compete with the faster rendering engines of Opera and Firefox.
 Tabbed Browsing - users can now have several web pages in the same window via "tabs".
 RSS Support - Version 7.0 now

supports RSS, which allows users to gather "news feeds" from web sites that have RSS support. Microsoft implements RSS in a shared library, known as a DLL, so that third party developers can develop their own RSS-enabled applications.

Alpha transparency - Version 7.0 now has native support for PNG alpha transparency. This allows certain image (PNGs) to have opaque areas that can blend in with other images and text.
 OpenSearch Extensions - Users of version 7.0 can now use search engines by typing in search terms directly from the browser's toolbar.

A number of other improvements have been made as well:
 Improved CSS support - Version 7.0 has improved CSS support, which means Internet Explorer will now render pages closer to the method defined by the W3C, a standards body for World Wide Web technologies. This means web page designers and developers will have an easier time designing web sites and applications to look the same on all web browsers.
 Improved AJAX functionality - Applications that use a web development technique called AJAX to make interactive web applications will run more efficiently because Microsoft has included support for its main component, the XMLHttpRequest Object, into the browser. Previous versions of Internet Explorer required a helper application, called an ActiveX Object to implement this functionality (a good example of an AJAX application is Google's popular Google Maps application).
 Enhanced security - Microsoft has attempted to fix a number of security issues with how Internet Explorer behaves. This includes: Internet Explorer 7.0 is a stand-alone application, rather than

integrated with the Windows shell like version 6.0. This means that you can no longer open a folder, type in a URL and get a web page.

Today in History

962 - Pope John XII crowned Otto the Great as Holy Roman Emperor, the first in nearly 40 years.
 1848 - The Mexican-American War ended with the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, granting the United States the Mexican Cession.
 1925 - Medical supplies to combat an outbreak of diphtheria reached Nome, Alaska on dog sleds, inspiring the annual Iditarod race.
 1943 - World War II: The Battle of Stalingrad concluded with 91,000 tired and starving German soldiers taken captive by the Red Army.
 1990 - President F.W. de Klerk declared the end of Apartheid in South Africa.

February 02 is Candlemas; Groundhog Day in Canada and US.

Quote of the Day

"There is a spirit and a need and a man at the beginning of every great human advance. Every one of these must be right for that particular moment of history, or nothing happens."
 ~ Coretta Scott King

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