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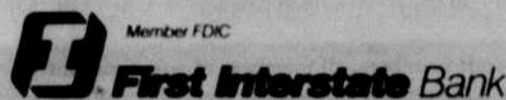


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NATIONAL BRIEFS

Student lenders in trouble

WASHINGTON (AP) — Taxpayers have been cheated out of hundreds of millions of dollars in student-loan money by financial middlemen, a Senate panel was told Tuesday.

Chief Investigator David Buckley told the Senate Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations that some lenders, guarantee agencies, loan servicers, and the student loan secondary markets have abused the system by pocketing processing fees due the government and by granting more loans than the law allows.

"Our investigation has confirmed that there are enough financial institution and servicer participants taking shortcuts, misrepresenting themselves, and engaging in fraud and abuse to cheat the taxpayer out of hundreds of millions of dollars and seriously threaten the reputation and future stability of these programs," said Buckley, reading from a staff statement.

These activities occurred with little attention from the Department of Education, described in the report as "a very poor enforcer of federal law and regulation over program participants," the staff report said.

Maplethorpe pics discussed

CINCINNATI (AP) — Potential jurors in the obscenity trial of an art gallery and its director for showing Robert Mapplethorpe's photographs heard graphic descriptions of the photos during questioning Tuesday.

The prosecution questioned the first group of eight potential jurors Monday. Lawyer Marc D. Mezibov, representing the Contemporary Arts Center, completed his questions Tuesday.

That left lawyer H. Louis

Sirkin, representing gallery Director Dennis Barrie, to question the panel.

He described the pictures, which depict sex acts and child nudity.

"Are you willing to see those photographs before making a decision as to whether any of them is obscene?" Sirkin asked several prospective jurors.

All answered that they were.

Abortion rule reversed

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Senate voted Thursday to reverse Bush administration regulations that prohibit federally supported family planning clinics from offering information on abortion.

The regulations, which are the subject of a case before the Supreme Court, were imposed in 1988 by the Reagan administration and continued after President Bush took office. They have become the focus of debate between both sides of the abortion issue.

The Senate voted 63-35 to approve an amendment offered by Sen. John Chafee, R-R.I., saying the clinics must provide "information and counseling concerning all legal and medical options" to pregnant women who ask for it, including "pregnancy termination."

Magellan successful so far

PASADENA, Calif. (AP) — The Magellan spacecraft's "jazzy" pictures of cloud-covered Venus show windblown dust deposits, a crater the size of Los Angeles and a solidified lava river 200 miles long, scientists said Tuesday.

"Believe me, it's giving us a revolutionary new view of Venus," said Brown University geologist Jim Head, a Magellan scientist at NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory.

With Magellan only 10 days into its formal 243-day mission to map the planet's surface

with radar. Head advised: "Don't touch your dial."

"We think we have a blockbuster fall season," he said at a news conference.

McD's manager 'not a hero'

LA VERNE, Calif. (AP) — A young man who helped authorities capture a gunman who held 20 people hostage inside a McDonald's restaurant said Tuesday he was a reluctant hero.

"All I knew was to take care of my people, my crew," said the restaurant's assistant manager, Ramiro Gironas. "I'm glad I'm safe and that all my people are safe. I'm not a hero. I just did what I had to."

Police said Gironas, 21, hid in the kitchen during the seven-hour standoff Monday night and Tuesday morning and kept them informed by phone of the gunman's movements.

Officers were eventually able to distract the man with explosive charges and overpower him shortly after midnight. None of the hostages was hurt.

de Klerk offers new system

WASHINGTON (AP) — South African President F. W. de Klerk said Tuesday he envisions a new power-sharing system for his country that will ensure that no one race will ever again be able to dominate another politically.

Speaking at a press luncheon as he neared the end of his official visit, de Klerk also said the U.S. sanctions imposed against South Africa in 1986 slowed down the reform process.

His message at the National Press Club was essentially the same as it has been since his arrival here Sunday morning: that South Africa is embarked on an irreversible course away from white supremacist rule and toward a new system that will embody the same values that Americans cherish.

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