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NEWS BRIEFING

A LOOK AT THIS MORNING'S HEADLINES

Smith and Wyden clash over environment Sunday



MEDFORD (AP) — Locked in a dead-heat battle for the U.S. Senate, candidates Gordon Smith and Ron Wyden clashed sharply Sunday over the environment in their second campaign debate.

Smith, the Republican state Senate president from Pendleton, said he supports restoring Columbia River salmon runs, but also supports logging healthy old-growth timber under the controversial "salvage rider" because it provides jobs for people, who should not be left out of the environmental equation.

Wyden, a Democratic congressman from Portland, responded that "our salmon had better watch out," if Smith is elected. He characterized Smith's position on the salvage rider as "farfetched," even to the right of the Conservatives in Congress now trying to change it.

The salvage rider enacted by Congress last summer suspended environmental laws to speed the logging of dead and dying timber on national forests as a way to lessen the danger of catastrophic forest fires.

Pushed by the timber industry, the rider also suspended environmental laws to expand logging in green old-growth timber on national forests in the Northwest, raising loud objections from environmentalists.

Smith said the expansion of logging in old-growth timber west of the Cascade Range honored President Clinton's commitment to timber workers to protect their jobs and was not harmful to the environment, because millions of acres are still off-limits to logging.

Wyden agreed that dead and dying timber east of the Cascade Range needed to be cut to reduce fire danger, but said Smith was to the right of conservatives such as Rep. Jim Bunn, R-Ore.

East coast snowstorm strands travellers, causes power outages



(AP) — One of the East's worst snowstorms in 70 years blew up blizzard conditions Sunday, piling knee-deep snow that shut down airports, made truckers give up and even closed the doors at Wal-Mart. Thousands were without heat and light.

"We are stranded big-time," said Neva Runyon at remote Hardy in the hills of eastern Kentucky. About 18 inches of snow was on the ground by midday and a deputy had to hike to her house with a delivery of special formula for her 5-month-old son.

"We just didn't know it was going to get this bad," she said.

Thousands of travelers were stranded at airports, bus terminals and highway rest stops. USAir said it canceled about 1,100 flights serving airports from Washington north to Boston.

"We're stuck wherever we're at," said trucker Johnny Vollrath, idling his big rig at a service station along Interstate 64 in West Virginia. "It's real bad. We're stuck in the truck stop or the Kmart parking lot bored to death."

States of emergency were declared in West Virginia, Virginia, Maryland and New Jersey, sending hundreds of National Guardsmen out to help. Most state offices were ordered closed Monday in West Virginia and Pennsylvania, and the United Nations in New York told some 10,000 workers to stay home.

At least seven deaths were blamed on the storm, with two in Ohio and one each in Washington, West Virginia, Virginia, Pennsylvania and South Carolina.

The snow piled up as an intense low pressure area sucked in moisture from the Atlantic and combined it with arctic cold. Blizzard and heavy snow warnings were posted from Kentucky into Connecticut, the National Weather Service said.

Recent killings in Mostar threaten Bosnian peace plan



MOSTAR, Bosnia-Herzegovina (AP) — With NATO troops and armor patrolling the streets, Mostar's European Union administrator warned Sunday that Bosnia's fragile peace plan will collapse if Muslims and Croats cannot come together in this battered town.

Elsewhere in Bosnia, NATO's patience began to wear thin as its troops came under fire for the fifth time over the weekend. No one was hurt, but the alliance warned that it will blast back with increasing might.

In Mostar, two killings and a surge in shooting have put the city on edge and could doom efforts to reunite the town — the scene of bitter fighting in the Muslim-Croat war within a war in 1993-94.

A failure in Mostar would undermine the already weak Muslim-Croat federation, which was awarded 51 percent of Bosnia under the U.S.-brokered peace deal signed in Paris Dec. 14.

"If there's no answer for Mostar, there will be no answer for the federation, and there will be no balance against the third side, the Serbian side," said Hans Koschnick of Germany, who administers Mostar for the EU.

"That would mean a new crisis."

The federation is the cornerstone of the peace plan and was designed by the Americans to counterbalance the Serbs. If the Muslim-Croat entity collapses, the Bosnian Serbs will not feel bound by the Paris accord.

The Croats in the western part of the country, a region known as Herzegovina, claim support from Croatian President Franjo Tudjman. They have long tried to make Mostar the capital of their self-styled Herzeg Bosna republic.

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