

U.S. says North Korea has restarted reactor

Warren P. Strobel

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WASHINGTON — North Korea has restarted a mothballed reactor capable of making plutonium for nuclear weapons in the latest challenge to President Bush's refusal to talk directly with the communist state, senior U.S. officials confirmed Wednesday.

The reactor at Yongbyon, frozen since 1994 under a now-defunct deal with the United States, began operations recently, said the officials, speaking on condition of anonymity.

The officials called the development provocative but cautioned that it would take the reactor roughly a year to produce enough plutonium for a single nuclear weapon.

It would be far more worrisome, they said, if the reclusive North Korean leadership restarted a separate reprocessing facility that can quickly extract plutonium from thousands of spent nuclear fuel rods now in storage.

The move underlined the

North's ability to continue raising the stakes with the United States on the eve of a possible U.S.-led war with Iraq.

"Certainly it demonstrates a desire to continue their nuclear weapons development program and their intent to apply pressure on the United States," said a U.S. official.

News that the reactor was back in operation — a fact that one official said was captured by U.S. spy satellites — came little more than a day after the inauguration of South Korean President Roh Moo-hyun.

It also came hours after Secretary of State Colin Powell returned from a trip to Japan, China and South Korea in which he garnered little support for a tough stance toward the North.

White House National Security Council spokesman Sean McCormack said North Korea isolates itself further from the international community with each step it takes to advance its nuclear capability.

"I think this is another example of the regime of North Korea taking

escalatory actions in order to gain concessions," he said. "We seek a peaceful diplomatic solution, but all options remain on the table."

U.S. allies in East Asia, particularly South Korea, have urged the administration to begin negotiations with North Korean leader Kim Jong Il.

The North has taken a series of steps in recent months to ratchet up tensions, most recently firing a short-range missile into the Sea of Japan the day before Roh's inauguration.

Restarting the Yongbyon reactor "would be another step in a series of provocative actions North Korea has taken to challenge the international community," State Department spokesman Louis Fintor said.

It is "a very serious step, but it's not an unexpected one," Fintor said.

The United States is consulting with its allies but remains committed to a peaceful solution to the crisis, Fintor said.

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Protesters flood lawmakers with calls in 'virtual march'

Dana Hull

Knight Ridder Newspapers (KRT)

SAN JOSE, Calif. — Opponents of a U.S.-led war against Iraq bombarded Senate offices and the White House on Wednesday by fax, phone and e-mail in what organizers billed as the first "virtual march" on Washington.

Time constraints, child care, commuting conflicts and work schedules make attending demonstrations difficult for many people. But the "virtual march," coordinated by the Win Without War coalition, was accessible to anyone with a phone or a modem.

"I started at 7 a.m. and I finally got through to (Sen. Dianne) Feinstein's office at 10 a.m.," said Linda Carmichael, 57, who lives in Willow Glen, Calif. "I haven't gone to any of the anti-war marches, mostly out of laziness. This seemed to be a wonderful way to have my voice heard without having to do a lot of work. But it ended up taking more time than I thought. I had to keep hitting redial."

Fax-blasting members of Congress and making phone calls about a particular issue is nothing new, and indeed scores of citizens have contacted their representatives in recent months on everything from tax cuts to prescription drug coverage. But Wednesday's anti-war effort highlights how technology continues to influence the way protests are orchestrated.

"In the Gulf War, people did not use e-mail that much, and cell phones were rare," said Howard Rheingold, author of "Smart Mobs: The Next Social Revolution." "Now there's the possibility of war at a time when the Internet is part of popular culture, and people are increasingly sophisticated about e-mail and cell phones. Text messaging is big in a lot of places outside of the U.S. A year from now, that will be different."

Rheingold predicts sending text messages by cell phone, which is popular in many countries outside the United States, will spread here and become yet another tool for

organizing protests.

Virtual protest organizer Win Without War is a coalition of 32 liberal organizations that includes the National Council of Churches, the Sierra Club, the NAACP and MoveOn.org. The coalition supports rigorous United Nations weapons inspections but believes that a pre-emptive military invasion of Iraq will increase the likelihood of terrorist attacks and damage the economy.

It's impossible to determine how many people took part in Wednesday's virtual march, and the White House declined to comment when asked about call volume to the White House switchboard. Organizers estimate that more than one million phone calls were made, in part because 400,000 people pre-registered their intent to participate on Win Without War's Web site.

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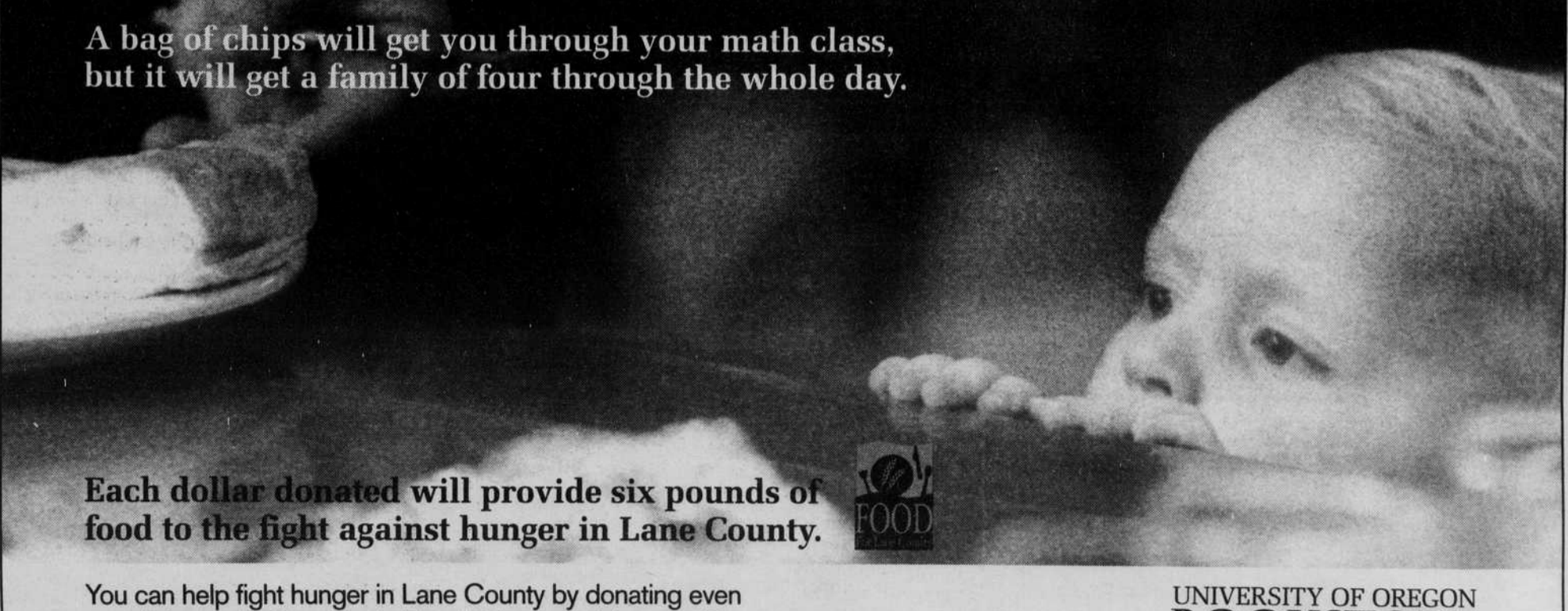


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