

Pittsburgh mechanic leaks Edwards selection

The man saw 'Edwards' decals on Kerry's plane Monday night and posted the information online

DAVID BAUDER
AP TELEVISION WRITER

NEW YORK — The political scoop of the year came not from some hotshot journalist, but an airplane mechanic in Pittsburgh.

Bryan Smith, a 39-year-old US Airways employee who lives in Moon Township, Pa., found out that John Kerry had chosen John Edwards as his vice presidential candidate several hours before journalists, and even before Edwards was asked Tuesday.

He posted the hot news on a little-noticed Web site, USaviation.com, and went to sleep.

Most of the nation's top political journalists had been hunting the story for months, with some staying up much of the night Monday trying to uncover the secret.

On duty Monday night, Smith rode a golf cart through a hangar where Kerry's 757 was resting, waiting for a trip from Pittsburgh to Indianapolis the next day. He was later told the hangar was off limits.

"They secured the hangar to keep people out of it, but they didn't close all the doors and some of the windows were open," Smith said.

He looked in and saw "Edwards" decals

being attached to the airplane's fuselage, then quickly covered up with brown paper and masking tape.

"I guess I looked at the right time," he said.

After getting off work, Smith went home and, at 11:45 p.m. EDT Monday, posted a one-line message on USaviation.com, using the code name Aerosmith: "John Kerry's 757 was in hgr 4 pit tonight John Edwards decals were being put on engine cowlings and upper fuselage."

That was it. He didn't wait for any response or think of seeking out any political reporters.

"At a quarter to 12 at night, I was just thinking about going to bed," he said.

The first inkling that Web site owner Kevin Laufer had that something was up was when the Web site, used for chat on contracts and other airline news, had more than 60,000 visits on Tuesday. Usually it gets 5,000 to 10,000 a day.

The first mainstream journalist to report the Edwards selection was Andrea Mitchell on NBC's "Today" show at 7:30 a.m. Tuesday.

Yet the story was there to be had, right there on the Web. It would have been particularly helpful to the New York Post, which put an erroneous report that Kerry had chosen Rep. Dick Gephardt on its front page Tuesday.

"They should have looked at the right place," Smith said.

Washington, Oregon sue Department of Energy

The states claim plutonium production has caused harm to natural resources

SHANNON DININNY
ASSOCIATED PRESS WRITER

YAKIMA — The states of Washington and Oregon plan to sue the U.S. Department of Energy, demanding the agency begin assessing what harm 40 years of plutonium production has caused to natural resources at the Hanford nuclear reservation.

A letter notifying the Energy Department of the two states' intent to sue will be filed Thursday, said Elliott Furst, senior counsel for the Washington State Attorney General's Office.

"We're not asking for money for damages. It's very focused, asking that the court order the Department of Energy to start studying what injuries there will be to natural resources," he said.

Kevin Neely, a spokesman for Oregon Attorney General Hardy Myers, declined to comment until after the letter has been filed,

but said the state has been discouraged by the federal government's position and is prepared to take action.

The Energy Department cannot respond until after the letter has been received, said spokeswoman Colleen Clark.

The two states, as well as the Nez Perce Tribe of Idaho, had asked to be allowed to join mediation talks between the Energy Department and the Yakama Nation. The Yakamas filed suit against the federal agency in 2002, seeking restoration of Hanford natural resources that may have been damaged by plutonium production for the nation's nuclear weapons arsenal.

The tribes allege that contamination of the Columbia River with radioactive waste and other hazardous substances had contributed to declining Northwest salmon populations in the past 50 years.

A court ordered the Yakama Nation and the Justice Department, which represents the Energy Department, into mediation talks earlier this year.

The Energy Department declined to allow any new parties to join mediation.

Washington and Oregon officials had hoped that by joining the mediation talks, they could begin pushing for an assessment of harm done to natural resources at the site, Furst said.

The Energy Department has said it is too soon to determine if there were injuries to the environment or whether reparations should be paid.

A spokesman for the Yakama Nation did not immediately return a telephone call seeking comment Wednesday evening.

Hanford, located near Richland in south central Washington, was created as part of the Manhattan Project in World War II to make plutonium for nuclear weapons. The 586-square-mile site now contains the nation's largest collection of nuclear waste.

Cleanup costs are projected at between \$50 billion and \$60 billion, with cleanup to be completed by 2035.

Shannon Dininny is a writer for the Associated Press.

Eugene Airport breaks ground on new runway, construction

The \$16.5 million project was delayed for more than a decade because of funding

ASSOCIATED PRESS

Oregon's second-busiest airport has begun work on a new runway, part of a \$16.5 million construction project more than a decade in the making.

Eugene Airport broke ground late last month on the project, its largest development in at least 20 years, officials said. Ninety percent will be funded by a grant from the Federal Aviation Administration, with the rest coming from airport user fees paid by passengers.

First proposed in 1990, the construction project was delayed after

several airlines lost passengers and flights following the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks.

Almost three years later, the industry is recovering and Eugene Airport is ready to build, said Gale Mills, project manager for the city of Eugene.

Eugene Airport recently added night flights to and from Las Vegas, and a fourth major carrier, Delta Airlines. That's putting even more strain on the airport's two runways, one of which is "falling apart," Mills said.

The new 6,000-foot-long runway will serve as backup for commercial air carriers, running parallel to the primary, 8,000-foot runway.

Mills said the new runway system will provide greater capacity and safety by allowing airplanes to take off

and land simultaneously.

To build the runway, Eugene Airport has chosen the city's Wildish Construction, which handled a 1991 project to extend the main runway by 1,800 feet.

The company first plans to build earthwork to prevent the pooling of water, which can attract birds. Then Wildish will build most of the runway as well as an electrical vault, a wastewater runoff channel at the end of the runway, erosion control systems and a storm drainage system.

Eugene Airport expects to open the new runway in late 2005.

Information from: Daily Journal Of Commerce

House votes to overturn restrictions on mail to Cuba

Some say such economic sanctions 'undermine' democratization in Cuba

ALAN FRAM
ASSOCIATED PRESS WRITER

WASHINGTON — The House dealt an election-season setback to President Bush on Wednesday by voting to overturn restrictions his administration has issued on the gift parcels that Americans can send to family members in Cuba.

The 221-194 vote was won by a coalition in which Democrats were joined by nearly four dozen farm-state and free-trade Republicans to rebuff the president. The vote came just four months from an Election Day in which Bush would like to once again win Florida, the pivotal state in his 2000 victory, by gaining the support of that state's Cuban-Americans.

The House vote followed a familiar

pattern of recent years in which the Republican-run House, and sometimes the Senate, has voted to block Bush policies restricting trade and travel with Cuba, which communist leader Fidel Castro has now run for more than four decades.

Wednesday's debate was an emotional one, as the debates over Cuba policy often are.

"It's hard to think of an economic sanction that does more harm to the welfare of families in Cuba, or does more to make the U.S. seem mean-spirited toward families who already have the misfortune to live under communism," said Rep. Jeff Flake, R-Ariz., one of the sponsors.

Rep. Lincoln Diaz-Balart, R-Fla., a Cuban-American, said the proposal was "dishonest" and "condescending," adding, "It seeks to undermine an entire policy President Bush has just implemented ... to hasten the Democratic transition in Cuba."

The new Commerce Department

rules, which took effect July 1, bar people from shipping items including clothing, seeds, veterinary medicine and soap-making ingredients to Cubans.

No items at all can be shipped to relatives who are not parents, grandchildren, spouses or other immediate relatives.

The administration and its supporters have said the restrictions are aimed at weakening Castro. They say the Cuban government seizes the packages and demands payments they say garner Castro millions of dollars annually.

Opponents say such rules will do little to hinder Castro. They have also accused Bush of politically motivated restrictions aimed at courting Florida's Cuban-American voters.

The amendment was offered to a \$39.8 billion measure financing the departments of Commerce, Justice and State next year. The Senate has yet to write its version of the bill.

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