

Today	Saturday	Sunday
High: 59 Low: 37 Precip: 0%	High: 62 Low: 39 Precip: 0%	High: 56 Low: 38 Precip: 20%

IN BRIEF

Canada opts out of U.S. missile defense shield

TORONTO — Prime Minister Paul Martin said Thursday that Canada would not join the contentious U.S. missile defense program, a decision that will further strain brittle relations between the neighbors but please Canadians who fear it could lead to an international arms race.

The Bush administration has tried to make a public show of understanding that Martin heads up a minority government that could fall over such a contentious debate. But after the announcement, U.S. Ambassador Paul Cellucci told reporters he was perplexed over Canada's decision, which he said effectively allows Washington to decide what to do if a missile was headed toward Canada.

"We simply cannot understand why Canada would in effect give up its sovereignty — its seat at the table — to decide what to do about a missile that might be coming towards Canada," said the outgoing ambassador.

Bush challenges Putin on Russian democracy

BRATISLAVA, Slovakia — Struggling to repair troubled relations, President Bush prodded Vladimir Putin on Thursday about Moscow's retreat from democracy, but the Russian leader bluntly rejected the criticism and insisted there was no backsliding.

"Strong countries are built by developing strong democracies," Bush said he told Putin. "I think Vladimir

heard me loud and clear."
"Russia has made its choice in favor of democracy," the Russian leader replied.

Confronting criticism that he is quashing dissent and consolidating power, Putin said Russia chose democracy 14 years ago and "there can be no return to what we used to have before."

Four years after Bush said he had gotten a sense of Putin's soul and found him trustworthy, the two leaders talked for two-and-a-half hours at a hilltop castle in hopes of easing mounting distrust between Moscow and Washington. Bush said he had not changed his opinion of Putin and wanted to remain friends.

Senator lobbies against cell phone use in cars

OLYMPIA, Wash. — Chatty drivers using one hand to hold their phone should not speed or break any other traffic laws if one lawmaker's crusade against distracted drivers makes it into law this year.

Sen. Tracey Eide has tried to get a hands-free requirement onto the books for years without success. This year, her bill has passed out of the Senate Transportation Committee and could go to a floor vote within the next few weeks.

If the bill passes, using a cell phone without a headset would be considered a secondary offense, which means a police officer can't pull people over simply because they're on the phone. They would have to be committing some other type of violation, such as speeding. The headset violation would be considered a moving violation, and they'd have to fork over an additional \$101 in fines.

Suicide bomber strikes Tikrit police headquarters

BAGHDAD, Iraq — A suicide bomber wearing a police uniform blew up his car at police headquarters in Tikrit, killing at least 15 people in Saddam Hussein's hometown in the

bloodiest of several attacks Thursday that claimed 30 lives. Two American soldiers were among the dead.

The suicide bombings and other attacks came as politicians negotiated behind the scenes to forge the alliances needed to win enough backing for the 275-seat National Assembly for the post of prime minister.

The U.S. command said two American soldiers were killed and two wounded in separate bomb attacks, one northeast of Baghdad in Qaryat, and a second near Samarra, west of Qaryat.

In the Sunni Arab stronghold of Tikrit, 80 miles north of Baghdad, a man dressed as a police lieutenant drove through the station's gates and blew himself up as dozens of policemen were arriving to relieve colleagues who had worked through the night, police Col. Saad Daham said.

Gay issues cause split in global Anglican church

LONDON — The U.S. Episcopal Church and the Anglican Church of Canada withdrew Thursday from a key body of the global Anglican Communion under pressure from conservative church leaders distressed by the election of a gay bishop in the United States and the blessing of same-sex unions in the two countries.

Though the suspension of the two churches was said to be temporary, it marked the first formal split in the communion over the explosive issues of sexuality and biblical authority.

The statement, which also summoned the two churches to explain their thinking on gay issues at another Anglican meeting in June, was issued a day earlier than planned after a week of meetings in Northern Ireland by leaders of the national churches.

The presiding bishop of the Episcopal Church, Frank T. Griswold, said the debate would continue and his fellow church leaders had made room "for a wide variety of perspectives."

— The Associated Press

Democrats call Smith no-show on assisted suicide

BY MATTHEW DALY
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

WASHINGTON, D.C. The lack of comment from Republican Sen. Gordon Smith on a Supreme Court decision this week to take up the Bush administration challenge of Oregon's landmark assisted suicide law is drawing criticism from Democrats and advocates of the law.

The rest of the state's congressional delegation, including a fellow Republican, Rep. Greg Walden, have said they oppose the administration's efforts to overturn the 7-year-old law, which has been twice approved by Oregon voters.

Smith's Senate colleague, Democrat Ron Wyden, said he was ready to filibuster if necessary to defend the law against a potential challenge in Congress.

Smith's office said he was traveling Tuesday, the day of the Supreme Court announcement, and could not be reached for comment. Smith also declined to comment when then-Attorney General John Ashcroft filed the appeal in November, arguing that the federal Controlled Substances Act allowed him to decide whether doctors could prescribe lethal overdoses under the Oregon law.

"Where is Gordon Smith? Why won't he make his position clear to Oregon voters?" state Democratic Chairman Jim Edmunson said. "Gordon Smith has worked actively against Oregon's Death With Dignity law, and he needs to explain why he's AWOL in the fight to protect the rights of Oregonians."

A spokesman said Thursday that

Smith's views on assisted suicide are well-known.

"Senator Smith has always been up front and open about his opposition to assisted suicide and his belief that the issue will eventually be decided by the courts," spokesman Chris Matthews said.

Smith's views on the issue are "not about politics," Matthews added.

Smith, a Mormon, is morally opposed to abortion and to assisted suicide. While he supported an effort six years ago by then-Sen. Don Nickles, R-Okla., to overturn the Oregon law, Smith has kept a low profile on the issue in recent years.

During a 2002 debate with then-Democratic challenger Bill Bradbury, Smith acknowledged his opposition to the law, but said he's not been an activist on the issue in the Senate.

"I believe in states' rights, but I also recognize that we fought a Civil War that established federal pre-emption," Smith said in the October 2002 debate. "I don't think government should be involved in suicide."

Even so, Smith's silence in recent days as the issue earned front-page headlines across the nation has puzzled many in Oregon.

Barbara Coombs Lee, co-president of Compassion and Choices, an advocacy group that supports the Oregon law, said she has known and respected Smith for more than a decade since she worked as a staff member on a state Senate committee that included Smith.

"One thing about Gordon is that he has always been straightforward with

his positions. I have always had an enormous amount of respect for him for that," Lee said.

Still, Lee called Smith's recent silence "odd," especially since he declared in 2001 that his opposition to assisted suicide was "an issue of principle upon which I'm prepared to stake my political career."

Lee called it "remarkable that the entire delegation, including Greg Walden — except for Gordon Smith — would help protect the state from the aggression from Congress."

Walden, in a statement issued by his office, called the issue a matter of states' rights, adding that he hopes the Supreme Court will decide with Oregonians.

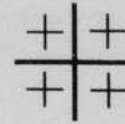
In its announcement Tuesday, the Supreme Court said it will review a lower court ruling that upheld the Oregon law, which allows doctors to prescribe a lethal overdose requested by a terminally ill patient. But the patient must administer the drugs to himself or herself.

Since 1998, 171 people — most with cancer — have used the law to end their lives. Supporters note the law has strict safeguards and the fact that it is seldom used shows even the terminally ill are careful about their choices.

Lee said she was sympathetic to Smith, especially because of his son's well-publicized suicide, but said, "the distinction that Sen. Smith needs to make is the distinction between suicide from mental illness, and aid in dying, which is the opposite."

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