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California Storms Kill Six

Floods, tornadoes, avalanches wreak havoc

(AP) - A deadly series of storms across California spawned everything from tornadoes to avalanches, flooding freeways with steady rain and sending rivers of mud crashing through homes.

At least six deaths have been blamed on the storm, including a woman buried by an avalanche north of Lake Tahoe and others who were victims of landslides, traffic accidents, falling trees and flooding.

Mudslides forced Amtrak offi-

cial to suspend service from Los Angeles to Santa Barbara. Dozens of homes were evacuated or red-tagged - marked as uninhabitable - because they were threatened by sliding hillsides, authorities said.

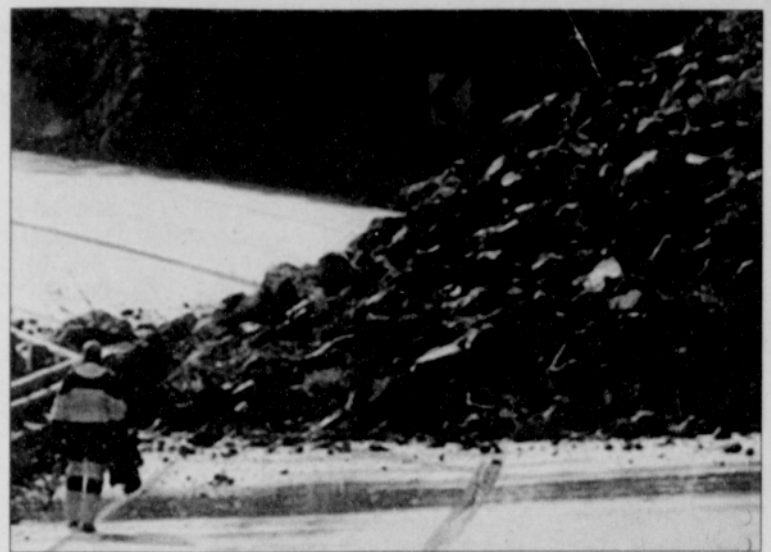
Northern California also was hit by severe thunderstorms, hail and at least two afternoon tornadoes in the Sacramento area that uprooted trees and damaged roofs and fences.

The California Highway Patrol reported more than 300 crashes in a

14-hour period in Southern California, compared with 50 to 75 accidents on a normal, dry day.

A section of the Hollywood Freeway in Los Angeles was shut down for several hours late Monday because it was flooded by as much as 5 feet of water.

More than 31 inches of rain has fallen since July 1, the start of the region's annual "water year" measuring period, the fifth wettest on record. The record is 38.18 inches, set in 1883-84.



A large rock slide closes Malibu Canyon Road near Los Angeles. A deadly series of storms across California spawned everything from tornadoes to avalanches to flooded freeways. (AP photo)

Iraq War Debated in Portland Forum

Protester throws shoe at war supporter

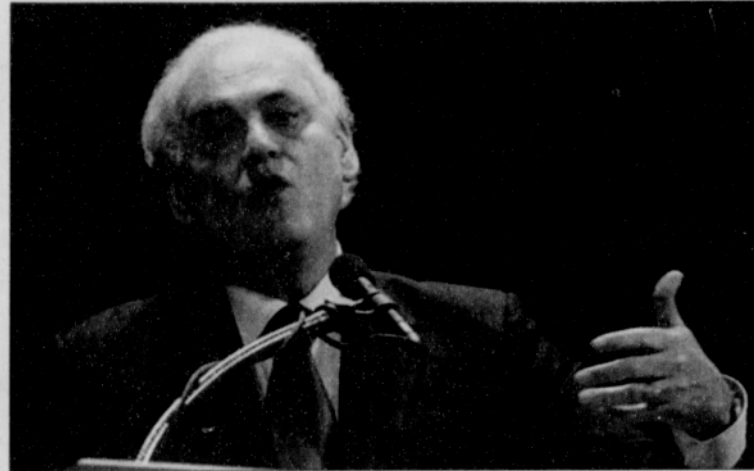
(AP) - Howard Dean, the newly minted leader of the Democratic Party, and former Pentagon adviser Richard Perle made clear their opposing views on the war in Iraq during a debate marred by a protester who tossed a shoe at Perle.

Perle had just started his comments Thursday at the Arlene Schnitzer Concert Hall when a protester threw a shoe at him before being dragged away, screaming, "Liar! Liar!"

Perle was a major proponent of the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq, while Dean was among the war's most prominent opponents.

In his new role as chairman of the Democratic National Committee, Dean has stressed that Democrats are stronger than Republicans on defense.

"Defense is a lot broader than swaggering around saying you're



Howard Dean (left) debated Richard Perle at the annual forum held by Pacific University to honor Tom McCall, former governor of Oregon.

going to kick Saddam's butt," Dean said Thursday, drawing cheers from the crowd.

Perle said the war in Iraq was justified based on the intelligence available at the time. "Sometimes the things we have to do are objectionable to others," he said.

Dean also said the Bush administration has ignored the mounting threat in Iran and North Korea. "We picked the low hang-

ing fruit in Iraq and did nothing" about the other, more dangerous regimes, he said.

Perle was forced by one of the questioners to recast a comment he made on Sept. 22, 2003, in which he predicted that within one year, there would be "a grand square in Baghdad named for President Bush."

"I'd be a fool not to recognize that it did not happen on the schedule I had in mind," Perle

said, adding that he did not deny that the administration had made mistakes in Iraq.

But, Perle added, "I will be surprised, yet again, if we do not see a square in Baghdad named after this president." He did not specify a time.

Thursday's debate was part of the annual forum held by Pacific University to honor Tom McCall, a former Republican governor of Oregon.

Hanging Blamed in Iraqi Death

(AP) - An Iraqi whose corpse was photographed with grinning U.S. soldiers at Abu Ghraib died under CIA interrogation while in a hanging position condemned by human rights groups as torture - suspended by his wrists, with his hands cuffed behind his back, according to reports reviewed by The Associated Press.

The death of the prisoner, Manadel al-Jamadi, became known last year when the Abu Ghraib prison scandal broke. The U.S. military said back then that the death had been ruled a homicide. But the exact circumstances under which the man died were not disclosed at the time.

The prisoner died in a position known as "Palestinian hanging," the documents reviewed by The AP show. It is unclear whether that position was approved by the Bush administration for use in CIA interrogations.

The spy agency, which faces congressional scrutiny over its detention and interrogation of terror suspects at the Baghdad prison and elsewhere, declined to comment, as did the Justice Department.

Non-Combat Deaths Increase

Soldiers in Iraq at peak levels

(AP) - U.S. troops in Iraq suffered a rash of fatal vehicle accidents and other non-combat deaths in recent weeks, even as the number killed in insurgent attacks has declined.

Although details of recent accidents have not been made public, some officials believe the jump in their number can be explained in part by turbulence from the troop rotation that is now approaching its peak, with tens of thousands of troops arriving and like numbers going home.

"The sheer volume of soldiers on the ground and high volume of vehicular traffic may reflect a higher rate of individual accidents or non-battle injuries," said Maj. Richard Goldenberg, spokesman for the 42nd Infantry Division of the New York Army National Guard, which is commanding a mixed Guard/regular Army task force responsible for



U.S. Army soldiers gather around the crater left by a roadside bomb attack on a U.S. Army convoy in Mosul, Iraq. (AP photo)

an area of north-central Iraq. There currently are about 155,000 U.S. troops in Iraq, according to the U.S. military. That is the highest number of the entire war, including the initial invasion.

The number of troops is expected to drop to about 135,000 over the next month or two as units that complete their one-year tours of duty in Iraq pack up and head for home.

NAACP in Social Security Fray

Bush proposal would hurt blacks, leaders say

(AP) - Denouncing President Bush's plan for Social Security reform as one that would disproportionately hurt blacks, NAACP leaders asked to meet with the president to discuss the issue, the NAACP chairman announced Saturday.

Julian Bond, speaking at a news conference during the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People's annual meeting here, also said he expects to name the Baltimore-based organization's new president by July.

"I want someone with the fundraising ability of Bill Gates, with the oratorical ability of Martin Luther King and the managerial ability of someone

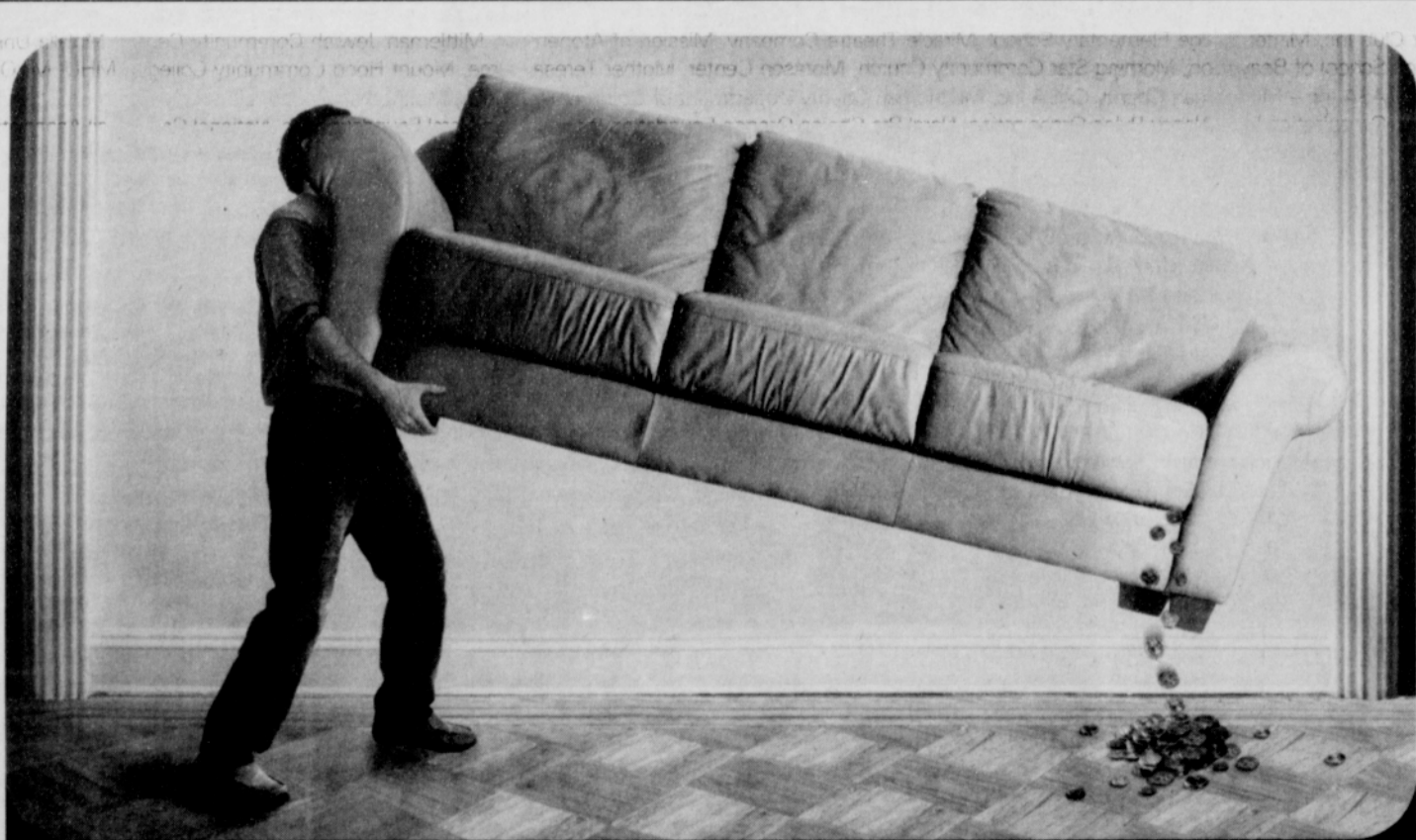
who's managed big, big things successfully and done well," said Bond, who has repeatedly declined to identify potential candidates.

A search committee has interviewed more than 200 candidates to replace Kweisi Mfume, who was NAACP president for nine years and resigned in December.

Last week, NAACP leaders asked to meet with the president, submitting a letter to the White House that detailed their concerns over education and unemployment, but focused largely on Bush's plan to privatize Social Security.

"This proposal is extremely dangerous to us," said Hilary O. Shelton, the NAACP's Washington bureau chief.

Among married couples, twice as many blacks as whites rely on Social Security for their entire retirement income, and blacks in their 50s are twice as likely to become disabled as whites, he said.



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