

Monday, April 23, 1990

Bush stands tough

President demands release of remaining hostages, refuses to deal

ISLAMORADA, Fla. (AP) — President Bush thanked Syria and Iran on Sunday for helping win freedom for an American hostage in Lebanon but said his feeling of satisfaction was "substantially tempered" because other U.S. citizens and Westerners are still in captivity.

"I'm not making gestures. I don't trade for hostages," he said when asked whether the release of Robert Polhill would trigger a tangible expression of his policy of "goodwill begets goodwill." Bush said nothing short of the release of all hostages would satisfy him.

"That's the ground rules," he said earlier in the day. "That's the bottom line."

Spokesman Marlin Fitzwater issued a statement in Bush's name and stressed time and again that the only U.S. response would be to press for the release of the remaining hostages.

"We would hope that this release would be the forerunner to the release of others and would pave the way towards the goodwill begets goodwill summation at some point," Fitzwater said. "But at this point, with seven hostages still in captivity, the situation has not changed a great deal."

Bush spoke with Polhill and his wife by phone, and said, "This is mission uncompleted." He said a night does not pass without his thinking of the American hostages, adding, "I do not have forgiveness in my heart as long as one American is held against his will."

Earlier in the day, Bush reiterated that any re-

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— President George Bush

sponse would await release "of all the hostages."

Whatever his public posture, Polhill's release drew calls from Congress and an Iranian diplomat for a gesture from Bush. Bush himself said he wasn't about to make a gesture and that he did not know if Iran had played a substantial role in arranging the Polhill release.

Rep. Lee Hamilton, D-Ind., chairman of the House Foreign Affairs subcommittee on the Mideast, said the hostage release would make it "appropriate for the United States to send some kind of a gesture that we're willing to enter into a dialogue with Iran."

In New York, Kamal Kharazzi, Iran's ambassador to the United Nations, said his government was "very hopeful that this process would be sped up and more hostages would be released." But he said that depends on "the policies that the other sides would adopt."

Fitzwater expressed the president's appreciation to Syria and Iran for their roles in Polhill's release and said, "There were no deals, no nego-

tiations with the hostage takers. We have no way of identifying any specific action on our part that could have been a contributing factor" to the release.

Iran is thought to be interested in obtaining billions of dollars in assets frozen after Americans were taken hostage in 1979. Syria is trying to move back into the Arab mainstream after years of isolation, and apparently is hoping to improve its image in the West.

Polhill was to be flown to a U.S. military medical facility in Wiesbaden, West Germany, for a physical examination.

"This is a long sought and happy occasion," said Edward Djerejian, the U.S. ambassador to Syria, as he presented Polhill for a brief appearance in Damascus. "An American hostage ... has been freed and will soon be with his loved ones. Our prayers for his safe return have been answered."

While expressing pleasure over Polhill's release, Bush said, "Our satisfaction ... is substantially tempered by the knowledge that seven other innocent Americans, as well as a number of foreign nationals, are still being cruelly held hostage in Lebanon."

"Once again, we urgently call on all parties who hold hostages, or who have any influence, to work to obtain the immediate and unconditional release of the remaining hostages as a humanitarian gesture."

Judge issues gag order for attorneys

LEXINGTON, Miss. (AP) — Jury selection begins Monday in the second trial of a lawsuit filed by a Mississippi family seeking \$17 million against cigarette industry giant, the American Tobacco Co., in the death of Nathan Horton who died in 1987.

Last week, Circuit Court Judge Eugene Bogen issued a gag order for attorneys in the case.

"I entered a gag order barring all persons involved with the case from talking about the case to anyone or from any further distribution of information to the media," Bogen said.

Bogen's reference to "information distribution" was likely targeted at the "Media Kit and Cigarette Litigation Summary" which lawyers for the plaintiffs sent to various media outlets.

The packet included a press release, a historical overview of the case, a profile of the plaintiff's attorneys, the attorney's business cards and facts about cigarette smoking and the attorney's viewpoints.

The plaintiffs, Nathan Horton's widow and children, are claiming Horton's death was caused by cigarettes. They are seeking \$17 million in compensation and punitive damages. Horton, 50, of Durant, was a two-pack-a-day smoker of unfiltered Pall Mall cigarettes when he died Jan. 27, 1987. He smoked for 35 years.

Horton told his lawyers before his death, "Sure, I saw the warning on the package, but I didn't think it would hurt me."

Analysis reveals nation's increasing real estate woes

WASHINGTON (AP) — Real estate problems are spreading from the Southwest and Northeast, threatening metropolitan markets across the nation, according to a new statistical analysis by banking regulators.

Banks in regions already beset with falling or flat real estate prices have responded by tightening their

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—William Seidman, FDIC Chairman

lending policies. An analysis by the Federal Deposit Insurance Corp. shows that lenders elsewhere also may have reason for concern.

The FDIC, which insures bank and savings and loan deposits up to \$100,000, has fashioned what it hopes will be an early warning system that identifies soft real estate markets before they turn sour.

A preliminary version released last week examined commercial real estate in 40 metropolitan areas. Some well-known sore spots in the Southwest ranked high on the list.

Phoenix, Ariz.; was first, Austin, Texas, was sixth and Oklahoma City was seventh.

But many of the riskiest markets were surprises. Nashville, Tenn., was second, followed by Anaheim, Calif., Atlanta and Philadelphia. Rounding out the top 10 were San Jose, Calif., Detroit, and Fort Lauderdale, Fla.

The FDIC ranked the markets on three factors: increase in new office construction started, growth in office jobs and change in office vacancy rates. Markets with the slowest job growth, the biggest increase in construction and the steepest increase in vacancies are considered the most vulnerable to a downturn.

"Our preliminary work has led us to conclude that extraordinary growth is often followed by an economic downturn," FDIC Chairman L. William Seidman said. "Imprudent growth can result in real estate supply getting ahead of market demand, sometimes with extremely unfavorable results."

Economist Mark Zandi of Regional Financial Associates of West Chester, Pa. said, "When things are good, builders want to build and lenders want to lend. But what happens is you get overbuilding. Vacancy rates can take off very quickly."

A report last week by Alex Sheshunoff, an Austin, Texas, consultant, underscored the consequences when bank lending becomes too

prescribe preventive medicine," he said. "It means pulling the punch bowl away from the party earlier in the evening to the profound displeasure of the party-goers."

Commercial banks last year earned \$16.3 billion, 34 percent less than in 1988. Sheshunoff attributed much of the deterioration to real estate lending.

Delinquent real estate loans more than doubled in eight of nine states in the Northeast last year, he said. They tripled in Massachusetts and were six times higher in Connecticut.

Sheshunoff, however, predicted that a crackdown by banking regulators will prevent the kind of real estate bust that hit the oil-producing states of the Southwest in the mid 1980s.

"It is often the regulators' job to

"When things are good, builders want to build and lenders want to lend. But what happens is you get overbuilding. Vacancy rates can take off very quickly."

—Mark Zandi, economist

Texas team places first in Academic Decathlon

DES MOINES, Iowa (AP) — High school senior David Campbell is a so-so student with a C average, but he helped pull Texas to a first-place finish in the 1990 Academic Decathlon Sunday.

"I don't really think that grades measure intelligence," Campbell said. "I struggle with laziness myself, but this has given me the opportunity to prove myself."

The gold medal in the best overall student category hung around Campbell's neck as his teammates surrounded him.

The team from Lake Highlands High School in Dallas clinched first place with 46,627 points and won a trip to the White House. They'll be received by President Bush in the Oval Office on Thursday.

Laguna Hills High School in Laguna Hills, Calif., finished a close second with 46,035 points. Third was Mountain View school from Mesa, Ariz., with 45,949.

Nine-member teams from 39 high schools nationwide have put in extra hours after school and reserved Saturday afternoons to prepare for the annual contest, which began in 1968 in Orange County, California. It became a national event in 1982.

Teams were grilled for two days on a variety of subjects, ranging from the fine arts to mathematics. The competition ended this year with a Super Quiz on American Indians.

Each student was graded on a seven-minute interview, a one-

hour essay and an impromptu speech. They were tested in economics, fine arts, language, literature, mathematics, science and social science.

The competition isn't just for the best and the brightest. It's a real team effort, with students with A, B and C averages competing against each other in separate categories and contributing to the overall team score.

"I love being with my team," said Campbell. "Our whole team is real consistent. It's a team thing."

Preparing the students for the competition was like a marathon which paid off, said Texas coach Carole Buchanan. It was the first time Lake Highlands had won the Texas contest and earned a spot in the national competition.

"We worked hard and we knew we had a chance to win," she said. "But we all knew it was going to be very close with California."

Laguna High School in California finished a close second with 46,035 points.

"We didn't know until the last moment when they announced California was second," Buchanan said. "Then we could believe it."

Laguna coach Kathy Lane didn't hide her disappointment at the second-place finish. Texas and California have been close rivals in the competition, with each state winning the national competition four times before.

Discovery scheduled to launch Astronauts prepare to release telescope

CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla. (AP) — Discovery's five astronauts returned Sunday for a second attempt to launch the shuttle with NASA's most valuable and celebrated payload, the \$1.5 billion Hubble Space Telescope.

Discovery is scheduled to lift off at 8:31 a.m. EDT (7:31 a.m. CDT) Tuesday.

"We feel very confident that things are going to go well this time," Discovery's commander, Air Force Col. Loren J. Shriver said. "We're going to come out okay on Tuesday morning and, if not, we'll just keep trying until we do. That's the kind of the name of the game here," Shriver said.

NASA test director Mike Leinbach said Sunday that the countdown was proceeding smoothly and the shuttle appeared to be in perfect condition. The countdown got under way Saturday afternoon.

A faulty power unit forced the first launch attempt to be scrubbed four minutes before liftoff April 10. The unit was replaced with a new one, which tests showed to be fine.

"Hopefully, we'll get the shuttle off the pad this time," Leinbach said.

A 70 percent chance of favorable weather was expected at launch time, with low clouds being the main concern, said Ed Priselac, Air Force shuttle weather officer. A weak cold front from the north was expected to pass through the area by Monday night.

The outlook is considerably better

for Wednesday and Thursday, Priselac said.

As Discovery's astronauts arrived from Johnson Space Center in Houston early Sunday afternoon, the shuttle Columbia was being transported to a launch pad 1.6 miles from Discovery.

It is only the second time both shuttle launch pads at Kennedy Space Center have been occupied simultaneously. The first time was in January 1986; 16 days after Columbia lifted off, Challenger exploded.

Columbia commander Vance Brand said he does not believe the National Aeronautics and Space Administration is moving too fast with his shuttle. NASA expects to launch Columbia with an astronomical observatory called Astro no earlier than May 16, one week later than planned because of Discovery's two-week delay.

"In some cases, it could be a problem" having shuttles on both launch pads, Brand said. "In this particular case, everything's fitting together."

NASA has until Saturday to get Discovery off the ground. After that, all launch attempts must be halted for eight days so Hubble's batteries can be recharged.

The six nickel-hydrogen batteries will power Hubble from the time it is disconnected from Discovery's electrical system until its energy-collecting solar panels take over in space.

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