

Astronauts face spacewalk

Engineers may leave shuttle

CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla. (AP) — NASA told Columbia's astronauts Thursday they may have to make an emergency spacewalk as early as this weekend to fix a loose seal on the space shuttle's cargo bay doors.

A special team of engineers was conducting tests to determine whether the flapping weatherstripping will prevent the doors from closing tightly at the end of the mission.

"There are no real concerns that we couldn't today, right now, if we needed to, crush that seal and latch the doors down," NASA flight director Randy Stone said. "But it's always the better part of valor to analyze things in their entirety and understand all of the options you have in front of you, and that's what we're doing."

The engineers planned to duplicate the problem Friday on the shuttle Discovery at Kennedy Space Center.

Stone said a spacewalk, if necessary, probably wouldn't occur before Sunday. The likeliest day would be Tuesday, a slow research

day that would have the least impact on medical work being conducted by the astronauts, he said.

Two of the seven astronauts — Tamara Jernigan and James Bagian — are trained to perform spacewalking repairs, including manual closing of the two cargo bay doors. Bagian, a physician, is one of four medical specialists on board who are conducting blood tests and other experiments on one another.

The 60-foot-long cargo bay doors must be closed tightly for Columbia to safely make the fiery re-entry through the atmosphere June 14, after a nine-day mission. Otherwise, the ship could burn up.

Before a spacewalk, the crew probably would be asked to try closing the cargo bay doors, although that could cause more problems, Stone said. He said any spacewalk would be short and relatively simple — either trying to put the seal back in place or clipping off the loose part.

Television images sent down shortly after

Columbia reached orbit Wednesday showed two crooked strips of reinforced rubber protruding from the edge of the doors. Several white blankets of insulation also came loose in the payload bay. Stone said the two problems probably were related, possibly caused by the rush of trapped cargo bay air into the vacuum of space.

"It's all part of that same phenomenon that's disturbing those blankets back there," Stone said.

The four medical specialists drew more blood, breathed gases from a pipe and donned pressure-monitoring collars Thursday as they circled the world in the most elaborate medical clinic ever sent into space.

It is the first shuttle mission devoted to understanding how the body adjusts to weightlessness. Also aboard were laboratory rats and jellyfish.

Despite the medical team's expertise with needles, the blood collection took a little longer than expected.

"It's still running a little ragged because

House saves space station, grants \$2 billion in funding

WASHINGTON (AP) — The House rescued the embattled space station Thursday, voting to spend nearly \$2 billion next year on NASA's centerpiece program well into the 21st Century.

By a vote of 240-173, the House agreed to give President Bush \$1.9 billion that the space agency requested for the fiscal year that begins Oct. 1. The money will be taken mostly from other NASA programs.

"If we aim to become a second-class nation, then we should go ahead and kill the space program, kill the space station and kill it all," said Rep. Jack Brooks, D-Texas.

The impassioned debate lasted six hours. Republicans, prodded by the Bush administration, voted for the station, 133-27 while Democrats split 145-107 against.

A beaming NASA Administrator Richard Truly cautioned that much work remained before a final 1992 budget for space emerges.

While the space station would get nearly all the money the agency sought, the money would have to be trimmed from other NASA programs in science, technology, aerodynamics and the like. "It would be a very, very difficult problem for us," Truly said.

But he expressed hope that the Senate, which has yet to act on the measure, will come to NASA's aid. Salvaging the space station was the most important issue, he said.

Advocates of the space station invoked the names of space pioneer Wernher von Braun, the moon program, the Bible, "Neil Armstrong's Spirit," Daniel Webster and Star Trek.

They warned that America's manned space program would end in mid-decade if the project were cancelled and that America's young people would turn from science and engineering education without a big goal to shoot for.

Presidential panel considers closing of military bases

WASHINGTON (AP) — A presidential commission opened public deliberations Thursday on the process of choosing which military installations to close across the country.

"This is an experimentation in open government," said Jim Courter, a former New Jersey congressman who heads the seven-member Defense Base Closure and Realignment Commission.

Base closings have attracted widespread attention because military installations play an important economic role in their communities. Members of Congress and local activists have lobbied to keep their bases open.

The panel's process of targeting bases got off to a slow start as members quizzed commission staff members about the merits of individual Air Force bases. The panel will look later at the other services.

Courter said there was no timetable on when the panel would make its decisions, but public hearings are scheduled Thursday and Friday. The commission's objective is to "whittle down and pare down" the list.

The panel stopped work Thursday without making any decisions about bases.

The deliberations culminate two

months of work during which panel members held public meetings around the country and visited bases.

Courter said he hoped a final list would be finished by June 18.

Under law, the panel must present its target list to President Bush by July 1. The president and Congress must then approve the list as a total package.

Panel members are looking closely at 79 facilities: 43 targeted by Defense Secretary Dick Cheney and 36 added by the commission as alternatives.

Among the major bases on the commission's list are five of the Navy's home ports: Staten Island, N.Y.; Pascagoula, Miss.; Mobile, Ala.; Everett, Wash.; and Ingleside, Texas.

The list also includes the Long Beach Naval Shipyard in California, Fort Drum in New York and Fort Richardson in Alaska.

Cheney's list includes Carswell Air Force Base in Fort Worth, Texas, and the Army's Fort Dix in Wrightstown, N.J.; and Fort Ord in Seaside, Calif.

Two Pennsylvania lawmakers — Democratic Rep. Tom Foglietta and Republican Sen. Arlen Specter — said Thursday that Cheney overrode a Navy memo that recommended keeping open the Philadelphia Naval Shipyard.

"Two weeks before Secretary Cheney released his base closure report, the Navy's experts said to keep the yard open," Foglietta said, adding that the memo was written by the Naval Sea Systems Command.

Judge denies court ordered continuation of tube feedings to brain-damaged patient

NOBLESVILLE, Ind. (AP) — A judge denied a request Wednesday to extend a court order that resumed tube feedings to a brain-damaged woman whose parents want to let her die.

Superior Court Judge Jerry Barr denied the request from the National Legal Center for the Medically Dependent and Disabled, whose attorneys are trying to have the feedings permanently restored to Sue Ann Lawrance.

A lawyer for the center, Mary Nimz, said it will ask the Indiana Court of Appeals, perhaps as early as Thursday, to continue the feeding order while the case is appealed.

Lawrance's parents obtained an order from Barr last month allow-

ing them to end her feedings, but he later ordered the feedings to resume for 21 days — until Saturday — pending an appeal.

The center needs more time to prepare an appeal, Nimz said. Without an extension, the Lawrance family could withdraw food and water again, she said.

"I'm hopeful the Court of Appeals will recognize the seriousness of this case and want to make sure that her condition remains stable until all the legal issues have been completely resolved," Nimz said.

Lawrance, 42, of Indianapolis, who has had brain damage since childhood, was left in a persistent vegetative state in 1987, when she fell from her wheelchair.

Her parents, William and Bonita Lawrance, have said their daughter would be better off dead. Lawrance went without nourishment from May 3 to May 17 after Barr ordered feedings to resume temporarily.

Because Lawrance became retarded while still a child, her case is different from the landmark case of Nancy Cruzan, the brain-damaged Missouri woman who died last year.

The U.S. Supreme Court ruled that Missouri officials could block the removal of Cruzan's feeding tube unless there was "clear and convincing" evidence she wouldn't want to be kept alive. Her parents provided the evidence, and her feeding tube was removed.

Secured health-care insurance proposed

Employees protected

WASHINGTON (AP) — Senate Democratic leaders on Wednesday proposed legislation to guarantee

basic health-care insurance for all Americans by requiring employers to pay into a government-sponsored plan if they don't offer their own.

The program is designed to protect an estimated 35 million people who now have no health insurance. Two-thirds of them are workers or their dependents. And most have incomes above the federal poverty line and hence don't qualify for Medicaid, the health-care program for the poor.

"Access to affordable, quality health care should be a right for all Americans, not merely a luxury for those who have the economic means to purchase health insurance," said Senate Majority Leader George Mitchell, D-Maine. Other co-sponsors were Edward M. Kennedy of Massachusetts, Donald Riegle of Michigan and Jay Rockefeller of West Virginia.

The program, which would replace about half of the \$60-billion, federal-state Medicaid program, was estimated by sponsors to cost the federal treasury an additional \$6 billion the first year. Medicaid would continue to provide long-term care for the poor.

But sponsors said that cost-containment requirements of the program would actually save the nation \$78 billion over five years in combined public and private health-care costs, by mandating a standardized billing system, implementing new fee guidelines and cracking down on unnecessary treatment.

Employers, meanwhile, would be given the option to "play or pay."

Farmers angry, blame USDA for problems

Weather kills harvests

WASHINGTON (AP) — Rep. Kika de la Garza chastised Agriculture Department officials Thursday for not responding to approaching disaster for wheat and cotton farmers on the parched High Plains and rice farmers in the muddled fields along the Coastal Bend.

"Y'all ought to be out there hustling," said a clearly frustrated de la Garza, chairman of the House Agriculture Committee. "I know the system is not responding to the immediate need."

De la Garza, a Mission Democrat, said farmers in half of the nation's 3,000 counties face problems due to extreme weather.

"We have to respond. Or do you only act when it's on the 6 o'clock news," de la Garza told several high-ranking USDA officials during a hearing on troubles facing farmers from Minnesota to the Rio Grande.

But Rep. Glenn English, D-Okla., said that despite

a disastrous year for wheat farmers on the High Plains of Oklahoma and Texas, it's too early to "point the finger" at the USDA.

Agency officials also said it was too early to assess whether the nation's farmers face full-blown disaster.

"It may not be the proper time for USDA to say a disaster situation justifies emergency provisions of the law or not," English said. In Western Oklahoma, however, "we've got a disaster and a pretty serious one, but we don't know the true extent. ... It'll be a greater disaster than we anticipate today."

English said some farmers may not even harvest their wheat this year because there is not enough to start the combines.

"The timing of these disasters could hardly come at a worse time when grain prices are the lowest in recent memory, production costs are up, and agricultural lenders are becoming more reluctant to provide financial credit to farmers," English said.

Interior minister questions defector's death

SOFIA, Bulgaria (AP) — The Bulgarian interior minister said Wednesday he is convinced that Bulgarian secret police killed a prominent defector who was stabbed with a poison-tipped umbrella in London in 1978.

Two British intelligence officials, meanwhile, arrived Wednesday with their files to work with Bulgarian investigators, the state news agency BTA said.

The murder of the writer and journalist Georgi Markov has never been solved, but British investigators long have suspected that Bulgarian agents carried out the deed.

"No one can ever convince me that writer Georgi Markov was not assassinated by the Bulgarian secret services," Interior Minister Hristo Danov told BTA.

Last month, Deputy Premier Di-

mitar Ludzhev told The Associated Press that the case was "typical of political terrorism," and said he was certain the former Bulgarian secret service had had a hand in the murder.

Ludzhev is co-chairman of a government commission reviewing the activities of the Bulgarian secret police under Communist rule.

New York City passes tough rights bill

NEW YORK (AP) — The City Council on Wednesday passed a civil rights bill described as one of the toughest in the nation, but the lone dissenter argued it would encourage racial quotas.

The measure, approved 34-1, shifts to the employer the burden of proving that employment tests don't discriminate if one group of individuals — such as women or racial minorities — fails at a disproportionately high rate. It also provides for civil fines of up to \$250,000.

"While the bill speaks of no quotas ... it nevertheless shifts the burden on the small business owner to provide the mechanism for the legal process in proving their hiring practices," said Fred Cerullo of Staten Island, the only Republican in the legislative body, who also cast the only dissenting vote.

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