

"All the News
That's Fit to Print"

The New York Times

Late Edition

Today, times of clouds and sun, still warm. High 65. Tonight, mostly cloudy. Low 50. Tomorrow, cloudy, rain arriving. High 63. Weather map appears on Page 21.

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Fearful of Alienating Afghans, U.S. Turns Blind Eye to Opium

Policy Rift on Destroying Illegal Poppy Crop

By ROD NORDLAND

KABUL, Afghanistan — The effort to win over Afghans on former Taliban turf in Marja has put American and NATO commanders in the unusual position of arguing against opium eradication, pitting them against some Afghan officials who are pushing to destroy the harvest.

From Gen. Stanley A. McChrystal on down, the military's position is clear: "U.S. forces no longer eradicate," as one NATO official put it. Opium is the main livelihood of 60 to 70 percent of the farmers in Marja, which was seized from Taliban rebels in a major offensive last month. American Marines occupying the area are under orders to leave the farmers' fields alone.

"Marja is a special case right now," said Cmdr. Jeffrey Eggers, a member of the general's Strategic Advisory Group, his top advisory body. "We don't trample the livelihood of those we're trying to win over."

United Nations drug officials agree with the Americans, though they acknowledged the conundrum. Pictures of NATO and other allied soldiers "walking next to the opium fields won't go well with domestic audiences, but the approach of postponing eradicating in this particular case is a sensible one," said Jean-Luc Lemahieu, who is in charge of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime here.

Afghan officials, however, are divided. Though some support

the American position, others, citing a constitutional ban on opium cultivation, want to plow the fields under before the harvest, which has already begun in parts of Helmand Province.

"How can we allow the world to see lawful forces in charge of Marja next to fields full of opium, which one way or another will be harvested and turned into a poison that kills people all over the world?" said Zulmai Afzali, the spokesman for the Afghan Ministry of Counternarcotics.

"The Taliban are the ones who profit from opium, so you are letting your enemy get financed by this so he can turn around and kill you back," he added, referring to how the Taliban squeeze farmers for money to run their operations.

The argument may strike some as a jarring reversal; in the years right after the 2001 invasion, tensions rose as some Afghan officials vehemently resisted all-out American pressure to stop opium production.

Though the United States government's official position is still to support opium crop eradication in general, some American civilian officials say that the internal debate over Marja is far from over within parts of the State Department and the Drug Enforcement Administration.

A spokesman for the United States Embassy in Kabul, Brendan J. O'Brien, said officials

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AMERICAN MARINES IN AN OPIUM POPPY FIELD IN MARJA, AFGHANISTAN, LAST MONTH. THE MILITARY DECIDED NOT TO DESTROY THE FIELDS.

Rethinking Sex Offender Laws For Youths Showing Off Online

By TAMAR LEWIN

In Iowa, Jorge Canal is on the sex offenders registry because, at age 18, he was convicted of distributing obscene materials to a minor after he sent a picture of his penis by cellphone to a 14-year-old female friend who had requested it.

In Florida, Phillip Alpert, then 18, was charged with distributing child pornography and put on the sex offenders registry because after a fight, he sent a photograph of his nude 16-year-old girlfriend by e-mail to dozens of people, including her parents.

In most states, teenagers who send or receive sexually explicit photographs by cellphone or computer — known as "sexting" — have risked felony child pornography charges and being listed on a sex offender registry for decades to come.

But there is growing consensus among lawyers and legislators

that the child pornography laws are too blunt an instrument to deal with an adolescent cyberculture in which all kinds of sexual pictures circulate on sites like MySpace and Facebook.

Last year, Nebraska, Utah and Vermont changed their laws to reduce penalties for teenagers who engage in such activities, and this year, according to the National Council on State Legislatures, 14 more states are considering legislation that would treat young people who engage in sexting differently from adult pornographers and sexual predators.

And on Wednesday, the first federal appellate opinion in a sexting case recognized that a prosecutor had gone too far in trying to enforce adult moral standards.

The opinion upheld a block on

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PRESIDENT OBAMA, SATURDAY, ON CAPITOL HILL: "WE'RE A DAY AWAY. AFTER A YEAR OF DEBATE, AFTER EVERY ARGUMENT HAS BEEN MADE, BY JUST ABOUT EVERYBODY, WE'RE 24 HOURS AWAY."

The Long Road Back

Tactics, Perseverance and Luck Resurrected a Bill

This article is by Sheryl Gay Stolberg, Jeff Zeleny and Carl Hulse.

WASHINGTON — Speaker Nancy Pelosi was at her wits' end, and she let President Obama know it.

Scott Brown, the upstart Republican, had just won his Senate race in Massachusetts, a victory that seemed to doom Mr. Obama's dream of overhauling the nation's health care system. The White House chief of staff, Rahm Emanuel, once Ms. Pelosi's right hand man on Capitol Hill, was pushing Mr. Obama to scale back his ambitions and pursue a pared-down bill.

Mr. Obama seemed open to the idea, though it was clearly not his first choice. Ms. Pelosi scoffed.

"Kiddie care," she called the scaled-down plan, derisively, in private.

In a series of impassioned conversations, over the telephone and in the Oval Office, she conveyed her frustration to the president, according to four people familiar with the talks. If she and Harry Reid, the Senate Democratic leader, were going to stick out their necks for Mr. Obama's top legislative priority, Ms. Pelosi wanted assurances that the president would too. At the White House, aides to Mr. Obama say, he also wanted assurances; he needed to hear that the leaders could pass his far-reaching plan.

"We're in the majority," Ms. Pelosi told the president. "We'll never have a better majority in your presidency in numbers than we've got right now. We can make this work."

Now, in what could become a legislative Lazarus tale — or at least the most riveting cliffhanger of the Obama presidency so far — the House is set to take up the health bill for what Democrats hope will be the last time.

For Mr. Obama, who vowed earlier this month to do "everything in my power" to see the bill to fruition, the measure's passage would be an extraordinary triumph. Its defeat could weaken him for the rest of his days in office.

That Mr. Obama has come this far — within a whisper of passing historic social legislation — is remarkable in itself. But the story of how he did it is not his alone. It is the story of how a struggling president partnered with a pair of experienced legislators — Ms. Pelosi and, to a lesser extent, Mr. Reid — to reach for a goal that Mr. Obama

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NANCY PELOSI, JAN. 28 "We will go through the gate. If the gate is closed, we will go over the fence. If the fence is too high, we will pole vault in. If that doesn't work, we will parachute in. But we are going to get health care reform passed."



BARNEY FRANK, JAN. 21, ON PRESIDENT OBAMA: "He was very passionate about it, and he convinced me that we could put some fixes in."



SCOTT BROWN, JAN. 19 "One thing is clear: Voters do not want the trillion-dollar health care bill that is being forced on the American people."

DEMOCRATS RALLY TO OBAMA'S CALL FOR HEALTH VOTE

ABORTION IS AN ISSUE

Outcome Hinges on a Small Group of Legislators

By DAVID M. HERSZENHORN
and ROBERT PEAR

WASHINGTON — President Obama and House Democratic leaders on Saturday closed in on the votes needed to pass landmark health care legislation, with the outcome hinging on their efforts to placate a handful of lawmakers who wanted the bill to include tighter limits on insurance coverage for abortions.

Mr. Obama, in an emotional address at the Capitol, exhorted rank-and-file House Democrats to approve the bill, telling them they were on the edge of making history with a decisive vote scheduled for Sunday.

"Every once in a while a moment comes where you have a chance to vindicate all those best hopes that you had about yourself, about this country," he said. "This is one of those moments."

The president declared: "We have been debating health care for decades. It has now been debated for a year. It is in your hands."

With the ground shifting by the hour, House Democratic leaders dropped a plan to approve the Senate health bill without taking a direct vote on it. That proposed maneuver had outraged Republicans and caused consternation among some Democrats.

Thousands of opponents of the bill circled the Capitol chanting angry slogans. Some of the anger was directed at black lawmakers, including several who said that some demonstrators had hurled racial insults at them.

Speaker Nancy Pelosi refused

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Dose of Venom For Candidates Turns Ads Viral

By JENNIFER STEINHAUER

LOS ANGELES — The virtual image is as mesmerizing as it is creepy. Meg Whitman, the leading Republican candidate for governor of California and the former chief executive of eBay, stands in front of a private jet, her lips peeled back from thick gums, and virtually snorts into the camera, "California, let me take you for a ride."

Anyone who knows Ms. Whitman's face — or the tangy lilt in her voice — would easily recognize her in this political attack advertisement. But the ad does not actually feature Ms. Whitman at all, but rather a technically impressive avatar of the candidate, talking trash about herself.

A new chapter of campaign attacks is unfolding in California this election season, in which highly sophisticated, fairly low-cost technology is being used to create nasty — and just plain weird — ads and videos that are intended to shock and draw large audiences on Internet sites like YouTube and Facebook.

It began last month, when Carly Fiorina, a Republican running

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INTERNATIONAL 6-12

Pope Apologizes to the Irish

Pope Benedict XVI expressed "shame and remorse" for sexual abuse by clergy members in Ireland but did not call for disciplinary action. PAGE 6

Conservatives Back Lazio

New York State Conservative Party leaders voted to support Rick A. Lazio's campaign for governor one day after a challenger announced his bid. PAGE 20

OBITUARIES 22-23

Stewart L. Udall Dies at 90

Stewart L. Udall, a son of the West who served as interior secretary in the 1960s, adding vast tracts to national park holdings, died Saturday. PAGE 22

SPORTSSUNDAY

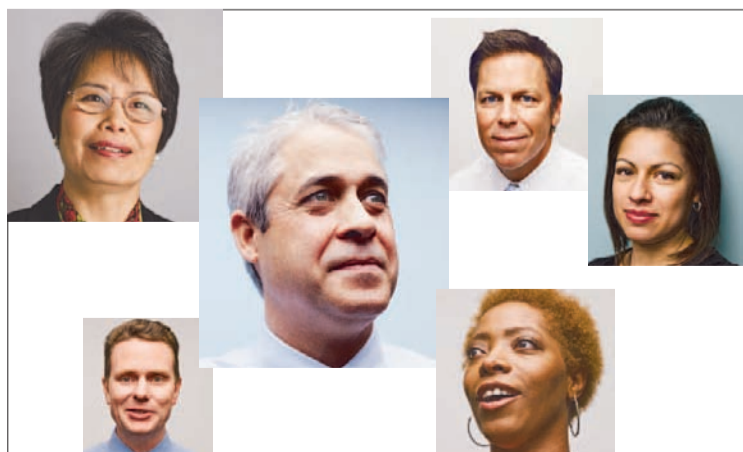
Kansas and Villanova Fall

Upsets continued at the N.C.A.A. men's tournament as top-seeded Kansas lost to Northern Iowa and No. 2 seed Villanova fell to St. Mary's. PAGE 1

OP-ED IN WEEK IN REVIEW 9-12

Frank Rich

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We recognize our special obligation to the American public. It's a commitment to conduct business responsibly; to reform our organization; and to support the recovery of the U.S. economy. We call it Responsible Finance. Let's talk about it at new.citi.com

