

**Tough tournament**  
Arkansas soccer teams face top competition at regional. — Sports, 1C



**Man of appeal**  
Superman returns from Krypton more emotional, thrilling. — MovieStyle, 1E

# Arkansas Democrat Gazette

ARKANSAS' NEWSPAPER

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## In the news

■ **Noor al-Zahra**, an Iraqi infant brought to the United States to be treated for spina bifida, has been returned to her family in Iraq after six months of treatment, according to the Atlanta organization that helped arrange for her medical care.

■ **Carlos Castaneda**, a 39-year-old coffee grower, has been selected by Colombia's coffee producers as the new Juan Valdez, the country's coffee ambassador to the world.

■ **Clarence Cooper**, a U.S. district judge in Atlanta, has temporarily blocked Georgia from enacting a provision in a law cracking down on registered sex offenders that would have prevented such offenders from living within 1,000 feet of school bus stops.

■ **Britney Spears**, 24, best known for such hits as "...Baby, One More Time" and "Oops! ... I Did It Again," is showing off her pregnancy by posing nude in the August edition of *Harpers Bazaar* magazine.

■ **Ward Churchill**, a University of Colorado professor who faces dismissal over research misconduct allegations, says the accusations against him are "just a farce" and that he was singled out after he wrote an essay likening some Sept. 11, 2001, victims to Nazi Adolf Eichmann.

■ **Betty Jean Barachie**, 39, a Kunkletown, Pa., woman accused of embezzling more than \$1.5 million from a credit union and buying more than 1,500 items, including hundreds of pairs of shoes and a \$60,000 swimming pool, has been sentenced to 27 months in prison.

■ **Truman Duncan**, a 36-year-old rail yard worker, was in critical condition at a Fort Worth hospital after he used a cell phone to report that he was trapped and had been "cut in two" after he lost his legs when a train ran him over.

■ **Donald Thompson**, 59, a retired judge in Sapulpa, Okla., was found guilty on four counts of indecent exposure for using a sexual device while at work after his former court reporter testified that she traced an unfamiliar "sh-sh" sound in the courtroom to her boss.

■ **DMX**, a 35-year-old rapper whose real name is Earl Simmons, showed up in a White Plains, N.Y., court to face speeding and other traffic charges and was sent to jail by City Judge Barbara Leak, who had issued a warrant for his arrest after he failed to appear in court.

■ **Ta Mok**, 82, the former military chief of Cambodia's Khmer Rouge communist movement who is awaiting trial, has been hospitalized in Phnom Penh with various ailments, including high blood pressure, stomach pains and coughing.

■ **Barbara Markey**, a 71-year-old nun who co-wrote the popular FOCCUS marriage-preparation program, has been arrested in Omaha, Neb., over accusations of improperly spending more than \$300,000 on casinos, gifts and air travel.

### WEATHER

#### LITTLE ROCK

Today Partly cloudy.

High 95 with a south wind at 5 to 10 mph.

Tonight Partly cloudy.

Low 68.



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Guards move through the gates recently at the U.S. naval base at Guantanamo Bay in Cuba. About 430 prisoners are held there.

Associated Press/BRENNAN LINDSEY

## Gaza besieged



Associated Press/ODED BALIITY

An Israeli soldier passes an M-16 rifle to a fellow soldier Thursday as armored vehicles stand ready in southern Israel outside the Gaza Strip. Israel held off a planned invasion of northern Gaza on Thursday.

Article, 6A

## State high court tosses out ban on gay foster parents

BY CHARLOTTE TUBBS  
ARKANSAS DEMOCRAT-GAZETTE

The Arkansas Supreme Court ruled unanimously Thursday that a state regulation banning gays from becoming foster parents was unconstitutional, stating that the board that issued the regulation did not have the power to do so.

The court stated that no connection exists between a foster child's well-being and the sexual orientation of that child's foster parents. The court, upholding a 2004 ruling by Pulaski County

Articles on state Supreme Court actions, Page 1B, 5B.

Circuit Judge Tim Fox, agreed that the ban seeks to regulate "public morality," something the board was not given authority to do. The high court stated that the Child Welfare Agency Review Board, which adopted the ban in 1997, violated the separation-of-powers doctrine.

The court, however, did not rule on other assertions brought by a group of Arkansans who

oppose the ban — that the ban violated the Equal Protection Clause of the U.S. and Arkansas constitutions and federal and state rights to privacy.

"This an astounding victory," said Rita Sklar, executive director of the American Civil Liberties Union of Arkansas. "The court agreed that there is, most importantly, absolutely no evidence, no scientific basis, no reason to bar gay men and lesbians from being foster parents. There is none of the health or

See RULING, Page 11A

## State funneling \$265 million to 1,200 school projects

BY HEATHER WECSLER  
ARKANSAS DEMOCRAT-GAZETTE

The state on Thursday agreed to pay \$265 million to help finance public school construction projects across Arkansas, including new school buildings in at least 16 districts.

The state's contributions to the approximately 1,200 projects range from \$30 for door hard-

ware at an elementary school in the Two Rivers School District to nearly \$11.5 million for a new junior high school in Marion.

About half of the projects approved Thursday will cost less than \$20,000, according to Doug Eaton, director of the division that oversees public school facilities.

Other major outlays include

nearly \$10 million in state funds for a new high school complex in the Trumann School District and \$8.9 million for the remodeling of an old campus to create a second high school in Rogers.

The three-member Arkansas Commission on Public School Academic Facilities and Transportation chaired by Educa-

tion Commissioner Ken James approved the projects. At the same meeting, the commission approved a new project agreement that will be mailed to the state's 246 school districts starting today.

The agreement comes in a short form for projects less than \$20,000 and a long form for projects exceeding that amount.

Districts will have to fill out the forms and submit them to receive the state funds for their building projects.

Eaton told the board he expected districts to view the agreements as intrusive.

"But it's not meant for us to be in their business," Eaton said. "What it does mean is we

See SCHOOLS, Page 14A

## VA laptop recovered; data called untouched

DEMOCRAT-GAZETTE PRESS SERVICES

WASHINGTON — Federal officials Thursday announced the recovery of computer equipment stolen nearly eight weeks ago from an employee of the Department of Veterans Affairs.

They said sensitive personal information of 26.5 million veterans and current military personnel apparently had not been accessed.

The recovery of the laptop and external drive was a "positive note in this very sad saga," VA Secretary Jim Nicholson said. The theft was the largest information security breach in government history and raised fears of potential mass identity theft.

Burglars stole the computer equipment from a data analyst's Maryland home May 3. Law enforcement officials recovered the laptop and hard drive after an informant on Wednesday notified the U.S. Park Police that he had heard about a \$50,000 reward and knew where the computer and hard drive could be found.

See LAPTOP, Page 10A

## Groundhog's bad day



Associated Press/MARK A. GENITO

A groundhog clings to a tree Thursday to escape the spreading Delaware River in Shawnee-On-Delaware, Pa. Fifteen deaths have been blamed on flooding in the Northeast.

Article, 4A

## Federal Reserve hints rate ascent near end

Quarter-point added 17th straight time

BY MARTIN CRUTSINGER  
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

WASHINGTON — The Federal Reserve on Thursday raised a key interest rate for the 17th consecutive time but also indicated that a respite from two years of rate increases is in sight if the economy cooperates.

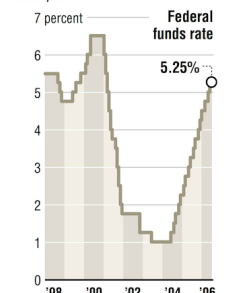
The central bank increased the federal funds rate, the interest that banks charge one another, by a quarter of a percentage point to 5.25 percent, the highest level in more than five years. When the Fed started its credit-tightening campaign two years ago, the funds rate stood at a 46-year low of 1 percent.

Wrapping up a two-day meeting, Chairman Ben Bernanke and other Fed policymakers didn't rule out another bump in rates. But they seemed hopeful that a slowing economy would lessen pressure on prices, leaving open the question of whether more increases would be needed to declare victory in their battle against inflation.

Although the Fed acts on the federal funds rate, each increase trickles down to the consumer. The funds rate influences

### Fed boosts rate

The Federal Reserve on Thursday raised the federal funds rate to 5.25 percent.



SOURCE: Federal Reserve Board

Associated Press

a variety of interest rates, such as those on adjustable-rate and other mortgages. Millions of Americans will now face a slightly higher borrowing cost that will make it more expensive to buy a house or a car or to make other high-price purchases.

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