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Forecast, B6

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THE WAR IN IRAQ

CIA chief saw decline of Iraqi government as 'irreversible'

Michael Hayden's assessment, presented to the Iraq Study Group, is in stark contrast to the optimistic view offered by President Bush.

BY BOB WOODWARD
THE WASHINGTON POST

WASHINGTON — Early on the morning of Nov. 13, 2006, members of the bipartisan Iraq Study Group gathered around a dark wooden conference

table in the windowless Roosevelt Room of the White House.

For more than an hour, they listened to President Bush give what one panel member called a "Churchillian" vision of "victory" in Iraq and defend the country's prime minister, Nouri al-Maliki. "A constitutional order is emerging," he said.

Two hours later, around the same conference table, CIA Director Michael Hayden painted a starkly different picture for members of the study group.

Hayden said "the inability of the government to govern seems irreversible," adding that he could not "point to any milestone or checkpoint where we can turn this thing around," according to written records of his briefing and the recollections of six participants.

"The government is unable to govern," Hayden concluded. "We have spent a lot of energy and treasure creating a government that is balanced, and it cannot function."

Later in the interview, he qualified the

statement somewhat: "A government that can govern, sustain and defend itself is not achievable," he said, "in the short term."

Hayden's bleak assessment, which came just a week after Republicans had lost control of Congress and Mr. Bush had dismissed Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, was a pivotal moment in the study group's intensive examination of the Iraq war, and it helped shape its conclusion in its final report that the situation in Iraq was "grave and deteriorating."

In the eight months since the interview, neither Hayden nor any other high administration official has publicly described the Iraqi government in the uniformly negative terms that the CIA director used in his closed-door briefing. Among the 79 specific recommendations the Iraq Study Group made to Mr. Bush was withdrawing support for the al-Maliki government unless it showed

SEE **CIA, A7**



AP / EMAD MATTI

While an interim report on the situation in Iraq released yesterday says the overall level of violence has declined in recent months, Iraqis are still the victims of attacks daily. Kahtan Adnan is comforted by his mother yesterday as he is treated at a hospital in Kirkuk, Iraq, for a gunshot wound.

Bush says more time needed to judge strategy

But on the heels of a report showing the Iraqi government is failing to make political progress in several key areas, the House votes to begin withdrawing U.S. troops within 120 days.

BY MICHAEL ABRAMOWITZ
and **JONATHAN WEISMAN**
THE WASHINGTON POST

WASHINGTON — President Bush, delivering a mixed report to Congress on political and military progress in Iraq, insisted yesterday that he would not be rushed into an early withdrawal, even as lawmakers voted to begin pulling troops from Iraq in the coming months.

Just hours after the administration's much-awaited report reached Capitol Hill, the House approved legislation requiring U.S. combat forces to start leaving Iraq within 120 days. The resolution passed on a largely party-line vote, with only four Republican defections — a reflection of White House efforts to keep House Republicans from joining restive GOP senators in challenging the president.

With most Democrats solidly opposing Mr. Bush on Iraq, the White House yesterday appeared intent on easing Republicans' concerns over their politically costly support of the president. In both the report and a sub-



AP / EVAN VUCCI

President Bush at yesterday's news conference invoked the threat posed by al-Qaida in defense of his Iraq policy.

sequent news conference, Mr. Bush made the case that progress is under way, albeit fitfully, and that Congress should wait until September before demanding any dramatic shifts in strategy. At a morning news conference, Mr. Bush repeatedly invoked the threat of al-Qaida as a reason to stick with his strategy, saying the group he referred to as al-

SEE **BUSH, A7**

Frustration takes its toll in the surly skies

Jam-packed planes, late flights proving too much for both passengers and airline employees.

BY BONNIE MILLER RUBIN
and **JAMES JANEGA**
CHICAGO TRIBUNE

CHICAGO — After one canceled flight and hours of waiting at O'Hare International Airport, traveling software consultant Andy Simmons stood inches from a gate agent, who studiously ignored him and the other passengers in line.

Finally, Simmons recalled, the gate agent declared simply: "I'm out of here."

"You're out of here?" Simmons said he asked incredulously. It was 7 p.m. and she had been at work since 3 a.m., the agent said, stopping only long enough to give him a

SEE **FLIGHTS, A5**

Luxury wheels while on welfare

Several alleged drug-ring leaders traveled in style, received assistance

BY AMANDA MILKOVITS
JOURNAL STAFF WRITER

PROVIDENCE — A state welfare caseworker probably wouldn't have known about the 2004 Porsche Cayenne, the 2004 Cadillac Escalade, or the 2002 BMW 745i and 2000 Lincoln Navigator that the police say were owned by welfare recipients allegedly running a lucrative crack-cocaine organization.

The state Department of Human Services doesn't check with the Division of Motor Vehicles to find out what vehicles are registered to people needing assistance, said acting Director Gary Alexander. Instead, the department relies on applicants to disclose what they're driving — and if they don't tell Human Services what they own, the caseworkers don't know, he said.

What Human Services didn't detect, the Providence police and the Drug Enforcement Agency allegedly did. Their 18-month investigation uncovered what the police are calling the largest street drug-trafficking organization in the city in years — where eight of the top players were welfare recipients reaping thousands in profits



THE PROVIDENCE JOURNAL / ANDREW DICKERMAN

The Providence Police Department is holding this Porsche Cayenne, which they allege has been used by a drug dealer.

and buying luxury vehicles with drug proceeds.

A spokesman for Attorney General Patrick C. Lynch said yesterday that

SEE **WELFARE, B3**

Pension costs to soar 14 percent in coming year

Every city and town will feel the pinch, as they share a \$21.7-million increase in their contribution to the state teacher pension fund alone.

BY STEVE PEOPLES
JOURNAL STATE HOUSE BUREAU

PROVIDENCE — Pensions for teachers and state employees will cost Rhode Island taxpayers \$397 million next year.

That's an increase of roughly \$50 million, or 14 percent, over this fiscal year. And it represents a significant and unexpected new burden for every city and town at a time when any additional state aid to local communities has all but dried up.

The cost of the state pension system, which covers more than 45,000 working and retired state employees and public school teachers, for the next fiscal year was set by the State Retirement Board this week. The numbers will be used as the state and municipalities craft budgets that will take effect July 1, 2008 — a process that has already begun.

Pensions for municipal employees such as fire-

SEE **PENSIONS, B3**



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RECORD DAY ON WALL ST.

Even without any extraordinary announcement or other catalyst, stocks roar ahead, with both the Standard & Poor's 500 index and the Dow Jones industrials reaching record highs. **F3**

NOMINEE OFFERS A PLEDGE

Dr. James W. Holsinger Jr., President Bush's nominee to be the next surgeon general, says he would resign if he were asked to put politics over his scientific judgment on an important issue. **A2**

2007 PROVIDENCE JOURNAL HONOR ROLL



Meet Ryan Coffey of Burrillville High and Julie Ruggieri of Barrington High, chosen as the top senior high school scholar-athletes in Rhode Island. **C1**