

British and Irish governments give peace proposals to parties

By The Associated Press
INTERNATIONAL
BELFAST, Northern Ireland — The British and Irish governments gave their peace proposals today to key Northern Ireland parties, urging each to accept their recommendations in full and thereby save the province's Catholic-Protestant administration.

Officials from Sinn Fein, the Irish Republican Army-linked party, and the Ulster Unionists, the major Protestant party, confirmed they received copies of the document this morning. The proposals reached seven parties simultaneously by courier or fax, Britain's Northern Ireland Office said.

The British and Irish governments promised in mid-July to publish a "take it or leave it" list of commitments and recommendations designed to spur IRA disarmament and, in turn, a continuation of Northern Ireland's 20-month-old administration.

NATIONAL
JACKSON, Wyo. — Homeowners began cleaning fire-retardant foam from their ritzy mountain retreats as the 1,400 firefighters who saved the houses from a stubborn blaze wrapped up their task.

With the fire in the southwest corner of the Jackson Hole valley expected to

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be contained this week, fire crews turned their attention to a new blaze that forced the closure of an entrance to Yellowstone National Park.

About 200 more firefighters were added Tuesday to the 900-acre fire, which was difficult to reach because of its location in treacherous terrain, park spokeswoman Cheryl Matthews said.

That blaze also threatened the Pahaska Tepee resort, which features a hunting lodge built in 1904 by Buffalo Bill Cody.

The fire near Jackson no longer posed the danger that it did last week, when it threatened more than 100 of homes, including a subdivision where houses average \$5 million. The fire, which charred 4,470 acres, brought an aerial blitz of water and fire retardant from tankers and helicopters that stopped its advance.

Residents cleaned up the mess left by the firefighting effort and felt blessed that no serious damage was done. The fire came within several feet of some homes last week, but no structures were destroyed.

FORT BLACKMORE, Va. — Virginia Gov. Jim Gilmore joined his West Virginia counterpart in making a pitch for federal aid after visiting areas ravaged by another round of flooding.

Torrential downpours last week swept away homes and bridges in the two states and killed two people.

On Tuesday, one day after touring the ravaged areas, Gilmore requested federal disaster assistance for nine counties. The floods caused about \$12 million in damage to roads and bridges

uses to attack.

WASHINGTON — The Environmental Protection Agency has endorsed a Clinton administration proposal to dredge PCBs from the Hudson River but plans to implement the plan in stages, according to a New York congressman.

The \$460 million plan, one of the largest dredging operations ever, is opposed by General Electric Co., which would have to pay for most of the cleanup.

GE discharged 1.3 million pounds of PCBs into the northern Hudson River from its capacitor plants in Fort Edward and Hudson Falls until 1977, when the substance was banned by the federal government.

The company spent millions of dollars on a public relations blitz and lobbyists to defeat the plan. The company's chief executive, Jack Welch, personally lobbied Environmental Administrator Christie Whitman.

Rep. John Sweeney, R-N.Y., was informed late Tuesday by EPA officials that Whitman was supporting the plan, said his spokesman, Kevin Madden. But Whitman modified the Clinton administration plan so that it would be phased in with stops along the way to see how effective the dredging was, Madden said.

WASHINGTON — A \$7.5 billion package of special farm assistance stalled in the Senate as Democrats risked a presidential veto rather than give in to White House demands for a bill offering farmers \$2 billion less.

The White House says \$5.5 billion is enough, given recent improvements in the agricultural economy.

President Bush pressed the issue in a private meeting Tuesday with Republican senators and later told reporters he wants lawmakers "to stay within the limits of the budget."

But in a party-line vote, the Senate rejected, 52-48, a \$5.5 billion GOP alternative identical to a measure that passed the House in June.

"We have to meet our needs," said the Agriculture Committee chairman, Sen. Tom Harkin, D-Iowa.

It was not clear when the Senate would vote on the \$7.5 billion package backed by Democrats. The Senate was expected to move on to other bills today.

Senate Majority Leader Tom Daschle, D-S.D., said he is determined to send Bush a final version of the farm measure by the end of this week, when Congress is scheduled to begin its monthlong August recess.

WASHINGTON — Senators say they are closing a loophole in a federal law meant to force insurers to cover mental health conditions as they would any other medical problem.

Sens. Paul Wellstone, D-Minn., and

Pete Domenici, R-N.M., want to update a 1996 bill that is set to expire this fall. The act's flaw, the senators said, is that it dictates equal footing only for annual and lifetime benefits provided patients. The new fix would prevent health plans from limiting hospital stays and doctors' visits for treatment of mental health symptoms.

The legislation does not require companies to offer mental health coverage as part of employee health benefits.

Instead, companies that do must provide the same level of coverage for mental health as they do for physical health, from routine checkups to major surgery. Insurers would have to charge the same co-payments and deductibles for either types of conditions, whether influenza or schizophrenia.

Sponsors said the original legislation was not as expansive because of political considerations. The Senate Health, Labor and Pensions Committee is set to vote on the new, expanded version of the law today; supporters expected it to head for a full Senate vote by the end of the session.

Oz park sparks questions

DE SOTO (AP) — Lt. Gov. Gary Sherrer wants to know if he has the authority to extend the deadline for a \$400,000 repayment by developers of a Wizard of Oz theme park.

On Monday, Sherrer asked the state Attorney General's office for an opinion on whether state law would allow the late payment to Wyandotte County's Board of Public Utilities.

A law passed earlier this year appeared to set an October deadline for the payment. But Oz Entertainment Co. and the utility board are negotiating to give the company an extra year to repay the money.

The law also says the money should be repaid "as ... determined by the secretary of commerce and housing."

Sherrer wants to know how much discretion he has in approving the arrangement, he said Monday.

EPA building evacuated

KANSAS CITY, Kan. (AP) — The federal Environmental Protection Agency's regional headquarters here was evacuated Tuesday after a can of pepper spray was accidentally set off, said an EPA spokesman.

Employees complained of eye and nose irritation, and a small can of pepper spray was found on the building's first floor, said EPA spokesman Dale Armstrong.

A woman was taken by ambulance to a hospital, treated for exposure to the pepper spray and released, said a spokeswoman for Overland Park Regional Medical Center.

Armstrong said the agency did not know who set the can off. The incident is being treated as an accident, he said.

Employees were told to return to work Tuesday afternoon or Wednesday after the building could be aired out, Armstrong said.

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