

# Legislative session starts on state budget crisis

TOPEKA (AP) — Legislators began their session Monday with the unenviable task of finding a solution to the state's continuing budget crisis.

Besides closing a projected \$1 billion revenue gap over the next 18 months, legislators said they want to complete their work more quickly than in 2002, when the session lasted a record 107 days.

In the Senate, signs of dissension within Republican ranks showed in an unusual 30-9 vote that made John Vratil, R-Leawood, vice president over Stan Clark, R-Oakley.

Typically, leadership votes

aren't recorded — or contested.

The chambers' leaders recalled the spirit of the state's pioneers, seeking courage and wisdom for the challenge of balancing the state budget.

Their key theme was revitalizing the economy while protecting services for vulnerable Kansans.

"Our state stands at a crossroads," said House Speaker Doug Mays. "Its people are restless, and they demand and deserve from us, their elected representatives, our very best efforts."

Mays, R-Topeka, encouraged the 125-member House to do its home-

work and set aside partisan politics, adding, "We can't run from our problems."

House Minority Leader Dennis McKinney, D-Greensburg, said Democrats had a responsibility to generate ideas for solving the state's woes.

He said observers should not confuse debate with a lack of cooperation.

"It's part of the process to reach a consensus," McKinney said.

Mays and McKinney agreed that the budget crisis gives legislators an opportunity to evaluate every program and what Kansans expect

from state government.

Two dynamics that helped shaped the 2002 session are absent this year.

Legislators are not facing election, and redistricting is out of the way until after the 2010 census.

"We're not all starting off angry," McKinney said.

The surprise matter of the leadership vote in the Senate was touched off when Sen. Tim Huelskamp, R-Fowler, a conservative, nominated Clark as the chamber's vice president.

Senate Republicans had met last month and chosen Vratil on a 16-14

vote to replace Sandy Praeger, R-Lawrence, who was elected insurance commissioner.

Such pre-session leadership decisions, no matter how close the vote, traditionally are ratified quietly when the full chamber convenes.

Huelskamp nominated Clark on Monday because, he said later, "We need a little more balance in leadership. Just having the moderate or left wing of the party is not balanced."

Senate President Dave Kerr, R-Hutchinson, said of the vote: "I think all they accomplished was to

delay things and be somewhat disruptive, but sometimes that's the goal."

Two new senators were sworn. Mark Buhler, R-Lawrence, replaces Praeger, and Bill Buntin, R-Topeka, fills the vacancy created by Lynn Jenkins' election as state treasurer.

The House has 29 new members, although two — Tom Sawyer, D-Wichita, and Jim Yonally, R-Overland Park — have served in the chamber before, and Rep. Jim Ward, D-Wichita, is a former senator.

# Navy rapidly builds up firepower in Gulf region

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Pentagon, preparing for possible war in Iraq, is dispatching an enormous array of naval combat power to the Persian Gulf region, including two seven-ship armadas carrying thousands of Marines.

The Navy also is prepared to put as many as six aircraft carriers within striking distance of Iraq. Two already are in position, two are prepared to sprint to the region and two are gearing up for possible deployment.

The latest naval movements are part of a broader buildup of U.S. air, land and sea power in the gulf region as President Bush contemplates whether to use force to disarm Iraq. Administration officials hope the size of the buildup alone will add to the pressure on Iraqi President Saddam Hussein to give up chemical and biological weapons that U.S. officials say he is hiding but that Saddam insists do not

exist.

Despite the movements of ships and personnel, the White House spokesman denied on Monday that Bush has an "artificial timetable" that would trigger hostilities.

Asked whether the president was willing to wait a year, which U.N. weapons inspectors said Monday might be necessary for a definitive reading on Iraq's armory, presidential spokesman Ari Fleischer said: "The president has not put any type of artificial timetable on how long he believes it's necessary for Saddam Hussein to prove to the world that he's going to comply."

Also on Monday, officials disclosed that the Navy is preparing to deploy as early as this week a seven-ship armada with 6,000 to 7,000 Marines from California. The amphibious force would mirror a seven-ship deployment of about 7,000 Marines from the East Coast, which headed out over the week-

end, the officials said.

Together the task forces will present Gen. Tommy Franks, the Central Command commander, who would run a war against Iraq, with the option of amphibious assaults from the northern Persian Gulf, the officials said. Marines also could go ashore in Kuwait to be part of an Army-led land attack into southern Iraq.

Trained to operate in austere environments, the Marines also could move by helicopter into Iraq from their ships in the Gulf or from Kuwait to establish forward bases, as they did in southern Afghanistan early in that 2001 war.

About 60,000 U.S. troops currently are in the Gulf region, and Defense Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld signed orders in recent days for an additional 67,000 to go there over the next few weeks. Eventually the size of the U.S. force arrayed against Iraq could reach

250,000.

Even though the White House says Bush has not yet decided to attack, the rapid pace of troop deployments has convinced many that a U.S.-led invasion could be only weeks away. Central Command is sending much of its battle staff to a command post in Qatar, where Franks would direct a war, and officials have said the post is likely to be ready for operations by the end of this month.

The top Democrat on the House Armed Services Committee said Monday he believes war with Iraq is inevitable.

"I'm convinced that the president is going to go in there one way or the other," Rep. Ike Skelton of Missouri said in an interview with The Associated Press.

The vessels pegged for movement with Marines from the West Coast are the amphibious assault ships USS Bonhomme Richard and

USS Boxer; the USS Cleveland and USS Dubuque, amphibious transport dock ships that carry troops, vehicles and cargo; and three dock landing ships that carry troops and amphibious craft like air-cushioned troop transports — the USS Comstock, the USS Anchorage and the USS Pearl Harbor.

All seven are based at San Diego. The Marines they will transport are based at Camp Pendleton, just north of that Southern California city.

A separate deployment of Marines aboard Navy ships, led by the amphibious assault ship USS Tarawa, left San Diego on Jan. 6. That group, with about 2,200 Marines from the 15th Marine Expeditionary Unit, is on a regularly scheduled cruise. A similar-sized unit led by the USS Nassau and carrying Marines from the 24th Marine Expeditionary Unit has been off the coast of Yemen for weeks.

The Navy's other major forces

within striking distance of Iraq are the battle groups of the carriers USS Constellation in the Persian Gulf and the USS Harry S. Truman in the Mediterranean Sea.

The carrier USS Abraham Lincoln, which was to have returned to its home port at Everett, Wash., this month, is being kept in the Western Pacific, currently at Perth, Australia, in case it is needed back in the Persian Gulf. Similarly, the USS George Washington, which returned home to Norfolk, Va., just before Christmas, has been told that it should be prepared to head back to sea on short notice.

The carrier USS Carl Vinson left its home port at Bremerton, Wash., on Monday for a training exercise in the Pacific that could turn into a deployment for war. The Norfolk-based carrier USS Theodore Roosevelt, which returned from its most recent deployment in March 2002.

# Raytheon settles government allegations

WICHITA (AP) — Raytheon Aircraft Co. has paid \$3.99 million to settle allegations it incorrectly billed the cost of its liability insurance to the Department of Defense from 1988 to 1999, U.S. Attorney Eric Melgren announced Monday.

The Department of Defense, as part of its contract, had agreed to pay Raytheon part of its cost of aircraft product liability insurance. Aircraft manufacturers carry the insurance as protection in the event

they are sued, for example, as a result of one of their aircraft being involved in a crash.

The United States contends that between 1988 and 1999 Raytheon billed the defense department for the insurance using an allocation method not in compliance with cost accounting standards, resulting in higher charges to the defense department.

Raytheon changed the practice on Jan. 1, 2000.

The settlement did not include an admission of liability, Melgren said.

In a brief statement, Raytheon Aircraft denied any wrongdoing.

"In December, Raytheon Aircraft agreed to a settlement with the United States government without an admission of liability to avoid long and costly litigation," said Raytheon spokesman Tim Travis.

The settlement comes after a 15-

month investigation by the Affirmative Civil Enforcement Unit of the U.S. Attorney's Office in Kansas, the Department of Defense, Defense Contract Audit Agency and the Office of Inspector General.

"This settlement reflects the continued commitment of the United States Attorney's Office in investigating and pursuing any allegations of violations of the Federal False Claims Act," Melgren said in a news release.

## Railroad lays off workers

TOPEKA (AP) — Burlington Northern and Santa Fe Railway Monday eliminated hundreds of jobs at the railroad's maintenance shops in Topeka and Burlington, Iowa.

The railroad cited a lack of locomotive repair work when it announced the elimination of 248 of the 388 jobs at its Burlington shops and 64 of the

367 jobs in Topeka.

The cuts came as the company studied a possible consolidation of its shops in Topeka or Burlington. That won't be done until later this year, spokesman Steve Forsberg said.

Forsberg said Topeka fared better than Burlington because Topeka works on DC powered locomotives.

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