

IN THE NEWS

Briefs

Valdez spill damage is worse

Damage from the 1989 Exxon Valdez oil spill was much worse than originally thought - and cleanup methods may have contributed to the problem, reports say. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service says more animals died than originally reported. The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration criticized use of high-pressure hot water to clean beaches, saying it "sterilized" the area.

Older Americans abandoned

Thousands of older people who are being abandoned by spouses and children. Most aren't sick enough to require hospitalization. Their families simply can't or won't take care of them. Emergency room doctors are only now beginning to compare notes about these so-called "border grannies" - geriatric patients, most women, left on their doorsteps.

Proposal to close military bases

Defense Secretary Dick Cheney - known to relish a political fight - is sure to have one when he proposes closing two dozen to three dozen military bases across the USA. The list of Army, Navy and Air Force bases is secret until it is released Thursday. The list is certain to cause outcries, especially in places like the San Francisco Bay area with five Navy bases.

Crimes would be reclassified

Rapes, domestic beatings, and other violent crimes against women would be classified as civil rights violations under a proposal expected to pass a Senate committee Thursday. "The Violence Against Women Act" is described by its advocates as the first bill ever to address gender-based crime. But the Justice Department opposes the Senate bill.

U.S. breaks Mideast taboos

The USA is attempting to bring about Middle East peace by breaking the taboos: on Arabs talking to Israelis talking to Palestinians. Traditionally, Israel has shunned group discussions in favor of one-on-one, direct talks with the Arab nations.

Baker travels to Middle East

By JOHN OMICINSKI

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WASHINGTON — Tuesday's news that Israelis and Arabs may talk about peace, face to face, didn't come a moment too soon for the White House.

That's because Secretary of State James Baker's trip around the edges of the gulf war zone amounts to a damage-control effort designed to regain some political and diplomatic momentum for President Bush.

"It's exactly what's required," said Alan Goodman, associate dean of the Georgetown School of Foreign Service. "You can only win the peace with Arab-Israeli-Palestinian negotiations."

Since the end of the gulf war six weeks ago, bad news has flowed from the Middle East like oil from an uncapped well. Baker's diplomatic mission is akin to that of Red Adair and the Coots and Hoots oil-riggers trying to stanch Kuwait's blazing wells.

Having failed to oust Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein, the president has been forced to share indirect blame for damage that Iraq has wreaked on the region:

— Perhaps a million Iraqi Kurds, a people without a country, many of them starving and injured, continue to flee Saddam's avenging armies into encampments in Turkish and Iranian valleys around Iraq.

— Hundreds of oil fires, torched by Iraqis, roar out of control in Kuwait, providing vivid footage for the nightly news programs. Commentators, impatient for instant democracy, continue to call attention to the Kuwaiti emir's demands

Seasonally adjusted jobless rate

The nation's unemployment rate climbed in March for all categories of workers, with young and minority workers hit hardest.

Worker	March 1990	February 1991	March 1991
Overall	5.3%	6.5%	6.8%
Men (adult)	4.6%	6.3%	6.5%
Women (adult)	4.7%	5.4%	5.7%
Teens (16-19 yrs.)	14.8%	17.1%	18.7%
Blacks	10.7%	11.8%	12.3%
Whites	4.6%	5.9%	6.2%
Hispanics	7.7%	9.5%	10.3%

Source: Department of Labor

Frank Pompa, Gannett News Service

that his gold-plated faucets be replaced first.

— Stains and damage from the gulf oil spill continue to spread, alarming environmentalists.

So Israel's announcement that it was ready to hold peace talks with Arabs came as welcome news. The Israelis, historically America's strongest allies in the region, have been embarrassments to Washington recently with news that they are secluding newly arriving Soviet Jews in West Bank areas set aside for Arabs.

Baker called his meetings with Israeli Foreign Minister David Levy on Tuesday "productive and very constructive."

Public opinion polls indicate that there

is support for Bush's hands-off policy.

Overall, 69 percent of those polled in a Washington Post-ABC survey last week said they approved of Bush's handling of the situation involving the Iraqi rebels, while 24 percent disapproved.

Some 55 percent said they opposed helping the Iraqi Kurds rebelling against Saddam. Of those 45 percent who said they approved of using force, a majority said they opposed using U.S. troops to help the rebel forces.

Baker will meet with Egyptian, Saudi, Syrian and Jordanian officials this week. Israeli sources said he may return to Jerusalem before going home to report to Bush.

Proposed smoking ban angers bar owners

By MARIA GOODAVAGE

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WALNUT CREEK, Calif. — Carol Maloney mashes her cigarette into the ashtray at Abernathy's bar.

"If they dare to take away my right to smoke in a bar, I'm taking my business to other cities where I can smoke like a chimney if I want," she said.

The City Council votes Tuesday night on perhaps the strictest anti-smoking law in the United States. If it passes, smoking will be banned at work, at restaurants and even in bars.

You won't even be able to find a cigarette vending machine in this city of 62,600 east of San Francisco.

The ordinance sparked one of the hottest debates this area has ever seen. Hundreds have spoken — and yelled — their opinions at council meetings.

Restaurateurs and bar owners say the ordinance could ruin business. The council is split.

"It's like Big Brother is trying to tell people what their personal habits can be," said Abernathy's owner, Cookie Gryfakis. "Does Big Brother care that he's killing our trade?"

The ordinance was borne out of one council member's concern about the health dangers from smoking.

"If we make it tougher for people to smoke, those who don't smoke won't be exposed to the risk," Councilman Ron Beagley said. "And maybe those who smoke will finally decide to quit."

Major anti-smoking regulations are nothing new in the nation's cities.

The Walnut Creek ordinance is modeled after one in effect in San Luis Obispo. But the Walnut Creek law is stricter because of the vending machine clause.

In New York City, Mayor David Dinkins approved a ban on cigarette

vending machines in most public places. The ban takes effect next year.

In Beverly Hills, a no-smoking ban in restaurants was repealed after a group representing restaurants claimed business was down by 40 percent.

Some Walnut Creek residents and business operators are asking the City Council to exclude bars from the ban. But, says Beagley: "I'm not in a negotiating mood."

The local ordinance could spread. Contra Costa County public health director Wendell Brunner says a similar law may soon be proposed for the county.

"People from here are going to start eating and drinking in San Francisco, anywhere but here," said Maximillian Wolfe, owner of Maximillian's restaurant in Walnut Creek.

Counters Brunner: "Who knows? Maybe people from San Francisco who hate cigarette smoke will start eating and drinking here."