

NEWS DIGEST

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PAGE 2

Court backs school tax break

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Supreme Court is letting Arizona give tax breaks to people who donate money for scholarships at religious schools.

The decision was a development saluted as a major victory by backers of tuition vouchers and other aid for families whose children attend private schools.

The court rejected two appeals Monday in which challengers called the Arizona program a violation of separation of church and state.

The action comes at a time when the political debate over tuition vouchers is heating up, sparked by Florida's adoption of the nation's first statewide voucher program.

The court, which began its 1999-2000 term with the traditional first-Monday-in-October flurry by issuing orders in some 1,750 cases, is sure to play a key — and still emerging — role in

that debate.

Monday's action set no legal precedent, and the justices could decide some time in the future to take up a similar case. In Arizona, the state's highest court voted 3-2 to uphold the tax-credit program.

Clint Bolick of the pro-voucher Institute for Justice said the Arizona ruling "will now resonate widely."

"Clearly, the momentum remains on the side of school choice supporters," Bolick said.

The Rev. Barry Lynn of Americans United for Separation of Church and State disagreed. "It's dangerous to read too much into this denial of (review), especially when the court has before it a case much more directly involving aid to parochial schools," he said.

"We hope the court will stop this erosion of the church-state wall of separation."

"Clearly, the momentum remains on the side of school choice supporters."

CLINT BOLICK
Institute for Justice

The justices will hear arguments in December in a Louisiana dispute over the use of taxpayer money to supply computers and other instructional materials for parochial schools. Their decision, expected by late June, could offer important new insights.

The court has not yet said whether it will review appeals stemming from Maine's tuition-help program for families whose children attend private schools.

In that state, the help is not offered for children attending religiously affili-

ated schools — a law upheld by the Maine Supreme Judicial Court.

Last November, the justices similarly left intact a Wisconsin program providing vouchers good for up to \$5,000 a year per child for students of poor families who attend private schools in Milwaukee. Most of those schools are religiously affiliated.

In Arizona, the state provides up to \$500 in dollar-for-dollar tax credits for charitable donations to eligible private schools — and religious schools are among those eligible.

Survey: Racism is top millennium problem

■ Poll gives opinion of the greatest challenges of the new millennium.

WASHINGTON (AP) — When asked the biggest problems people must deal with in the new millennium, Americans mention racism and prejudice more than any others, says a new poll.

Almost one in four thought living together in harmony will be hard, according to an ABC News poll released Monday: 14 percent said it's because of racism and prejudice, 9 percent because of people's need to learn to get along with each other.

Racism and prejudice were chosen most often by whites as well as by blacks.

Other top challenges mentioned for the new millennium were pollution, violence and overpopulation. War, immorality and food shortages came next.

The greatest hope for the new millennium is peace in the world, named by 38 percent, followed by the discovery of cures for dread diseases such as cancer and AIDS, named by 13 percent.

The ABC poll was unusual in that it asked "open-ended" questions, which means people were able to offer whatever answers first came to mind rather than choose from a list. ABC pollster Gary Langer said "asking open-ended questions allows for an unlimited range of answers, and that lets us delve more deeply into people's hopes and fears."

The telephone poll, taken Aug. 16-22 of 506 adults, has an error margin of plus or minus 4.5 percentage points.

When asked the greatest historical figures of the last 1,000 years, Americans tended to look close to home.

Former presidents Abraham Lincoln and George Washington were each named by 12 percent of those questioned. Martin Luther King Jr., former president John F. Kennedy and German dictator Adolf Hitler were next.

When people were asked the top figure in several different fields, these people got the most mentions:

■ Medicine: Jonas Salk, who developed the polio vaccine.

■ Politics or government: Presidents John F. Kennedy and Abraham Lincoln.

■ Literature: William Shakespeare.

■ Sports: Michael Jordan.

■ Music: Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart.

■ Exploration: Christopher Columbus.

■ Business: Bill Gates, chairman of Microsoft.

■ Science: Albert Einstein.

■ Religion: Pope John Paul II, followed closely by Billy Graham and Mother Teresa.

■ The military: Gen. Dwight D. Eisenhower, followed closely by Gen. Colin Powell and Gen. George S. Patton.

■ Entertainment: Bob Hope, followed closely by Frank Sinatra, Elvis Presley and William Shakespeare.

Japan examines nuclear facilities

■ Prompted by the country's worst nuclear accident, the government expands safety probe.

TOKAIMURA, Japan (AP) — The government announced plans to search the offices of 20 nuclear facilities around the country Monday as it intensified the probe into practices that ignited Japan's worst nuclear accident.

The government also said the operating procedures of all nuclear power companies will be examined after discovering that the company that ran the uranium-processing plant did not follow government-mandated procedures.

The Science and Technology Agency inspected the site of Thursday's accident and questioned officials of JCO Co., the private company that ran the plant in Tokaimura, 70 miles north-east of Tokyo.

The three workers responsible for the accident were using bucket-like containers to mix the uranium, the national Asahi newspaper reported Monday. The Tokaimura accident sent the three workers to the hospital — two suffering potentially lethal doses of radiation.

Forty-six other people were also exposed to radiation.

Prime Minister Keizo Obuchi asked for tighter emergency safety checks at all facilities handling nuclear fuel. He also requested a study on the "proper moral discipline" of employees at nuclear fuel plants.

For years, Tokyo insisted its nuclear facilities were far safer than those in

other nations because of Japan's high technology and its meticulous workers.

But revelations that corner-cutting led to Thursday's accident have dampened that sense of infallibility. Workers put in too much uranium, setting off an uncontrolled atomic reaction that continued for hours, spurring radioactivity into the air.

JCO, a wholly owned subsidiary of Sumitomo Metal Mining Co., has admitted that it had for years deviated from government-approved procedures by having its own illegal manual.

The company was not required to be prepared for possible atomic reactions because the uranium-processing plant was, in principle, not supposed to set any off, Japanese media reports said.

The atomic reaction, called fission, set off by the accident is similar to what happens in a nuclear reactor and is the principle behind the atomic bomb. Processing uranium, if done properly, does not entail an atomic reaction.

By using the bucket-like containers instead of more sophisticated equipment, the mixing could be shortened from three hours to just 30 minutes, the Asahi said, citing a hospitalized worker's statement to police.

The company's reaction to the accident also is under investigation.

Firefighters called in to help injured workers were never warned of a potential release of radioactivity and went in without protective gear.

Firefighters were among those exposed to radiation.

The speed of JCO's warning to town officials was also being examined. According to information provided by the company and Tokaimura municipal officials, nearly two hours elapsed between the accident and any notice to residents that something was wrong.

Japanese media reports said JCO knew within the first 10 minutes that an atomic reaction had begun.

In Tokaimura, meanwhile, schools filled once again with children and shops opened for business Monday.

But signs of the accident remained. Two Greenpeace activists were testing for radiation outside the hobbled uranium reprocessing plant. The plant operator, meanwhile, held counseling services for worried residents and farmers in the area feared returning to their fields.

World and Nation

Datelines

■ North Carolina

In area Floyd hit hard, students return to class

TARBORO, N.C. (AP) — Nearly three weeks after Hurricane Floyd, thousands of students returned to class Monday in North Carolina's hardest-hit county.

At one school, more than 100 evacuees were still living in the gym.

The gym at Tarboro High was one of the last shelters still open in Edgecombe County.

"You can't get away from it anywhere in Tarboro," said senior Jonathan Kirkland, whose home was spared. "I have so much, and these people have nothing."

Monday was the first day Edgecombe County's 8,000 students had set foot in the classroom since Sept. 15, the day before Floyd came ashore and drenched eastern North Carolina in more than 20 inches of rain, causing the worst flooding in state history.

■ Croatia

Concentration camp leader sentenced

ZAGREB, Croatia (AP) — The last known living World War II concentration camp commander was sentenced Monday to 20 years in prison — the maximum punishment permitted — for war crimes committed more than a half-century ago while running Croatia's infamous Jasenovac camp.

Dinko Sakic, 78, was found guilty of carrying out or condoning the torture and slayings of inmates while in charge of the concentration camp in 1944.

Jasenovac was considered the worst of more than 20 camps run by the pro-Nazi puppet state of Croatia.

Chief Judge Drazen Tripalo said that while commanding Jasenovac, Sakic "maltreated, tortured and killed inmates — acts that he either personally ordered, participated in or did nothing to prevent his subordinates from doing."

"We hope that the sentence — made 55 years after the events — will be a warning that all those who committed crimes in the near or distant past will not escape justice."

■ India

Voting violence kills one, injures 19

ANANTNAG, India (AP) — Separatist militants triggered explosions during voting Monday, leaving one dead and 19 wounded and making good on threats to disrupt polls in Kashmir.

Two explosions in Pampore, 20 miles south of the regional capital, Srinagar, injured nine policemen and two polling agents supervising the voting. One polling agent later died at a hospital.

Nine policemen were injured when rebels fired a rocket at a polling center in Pulwama before it opened. The rebels detonated at least four more explosive devices near voting stations.

Dozens of separatist groups have been fighting for a decade for Kashmir's independence or merger with neighboring Pakistan. Exit polls indicated the coalition led by Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee would return to power with a majority.

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