

NEWS DIGEST

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Berlin celebrates wall's demise

BERLIN (AP) — With fireworks, concerts and a huge party at the landmark Brandenburg Gate Tuesday, Germany celebrated the courage of hundreds of thousands of East Germans who brought down the reviled Berlin Wall 10 years ago with peaceful demands for democracy.

Daylong observances — starting with religious services and official ceremonies — sought to inspire a sense of shared national identity and remind Germans that the Wall's collapse alone did not guarantee the bloodless transition from communism to democracy that took hold in East Germany and spread eastward.

"We should look at German unity as a gift and a chance for the future," former Chancellor Helmut Kohl told lawmakers and invited guests at the German parliament, including former President Bush and former Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev.

Reuniting a decade after the Cold War ended peacefully, the former world leaders reflected on how it might have been otherwise had they not developed a personal trust, allowing each to pursue

a course that redrew the map of Europe and created a new world order.

The rest of the world may have been celebrating communism's imminent demise on Nov. 9, 1989, but the leaders recalled their fears that communist hard-liners might order a crackdown. Bush and Kohl expressed particular gratitude toward Gorbachev, who kept Soviet soldiers in their East German barracks in the crucial hours after the Wall tumbled and then helped negotiate German unity a mere 11 months later.

Despite the euphoria now associated with Nov. 9, it is not a national holiday, largely because it coincides with the anniversary of Kristallnacht — the Night of Broken Glass — when Nazi storm troopers destroyed Jewish businesses and synagogues 61 years ago, presaging the Holocaust.

That dark side of Germany's history was remembered in speeches by Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder and others in parliament.

Kristallnacht "stands for our eternal shame and the unforgettable dishonor that the Nazis and their supporters brought upon Germany and the world,"

"We should look at German unity as a gift and a chance for the future."

HELMUT KOHL
former German chancellor

Schroeder said.

Two former eastern dissidents — parliament president Wolfgang Thierse and Joachim Gauck, administrator of the former Stasi secret police files — honored as "heroes" ordinary East Germans who exerted popular pressure that toppled the Wall — and spoke of the difficult transition of the last decade.

"After unification we felt like apprentices again. Many felt like strangers in their own country," Gauck said.

Germany has struggled to overcome enduring psychological differences 10 years after the most tangible symbol of Europe's division was dismantled.

A party in the former no man's land that once marked the Cold War fault line

set out to recreate that mood of exultation and bring Germans together.

Despite typically rainy weather, up to 50,000 revelers showed up to hear musicians play on five stages along the Wall's former path from the Brandenburg Gate to the former American-run border crossing at Check Point Charlie. Cellist Mstislav Rostropovich repeated his spontaneous 1989 performance at the Wall.

Events climaxed with the illumination of a 2 1/2-mile path once followed by the Wall with sparkling flares, ending with fireworks behind the Brandenburg Gate, a symbol of Europe's division that was incorporated into the Berlin Wall during the three decades it divided the city.

Data recorder found from EgyptAir flight

■ The information on the device will shed light on why the airplane fell, investigators say.

NEWPORT, R.I. (AP) — Nine days after EgyptAir Flight 990 went down, the banged-up flight data recorder — minus its "pinger" — was raised from the ocean floor by a robot Tuesday and rushed to Washington for analysis.

The National Transportation Safety Board said it was extracting data from the recorder Tuesday evening but had no comment on the quality of the data recovered so far.

"The magnetic tape was removed from its protective casing, cleaned and dried," NTSB Chairman James Hall said in a statement. "The tape has data on it, and NTSB engineers are currently working to extract information."

The NTSB was hoping to reveal partial findings from the recorder today.

The minivan-size robot Deep Drone stumbled across the dented box amid wreckage 250 feet below the surface. It was missing its pinger, the small, cylindrical transmitter that emits a signal to help investigators find the recorder after an accident.

The tape could provide the best evidence of what caused the Boeing 767 to plunge into the sea Oct. 31 off the Massachusetts island of Nantucket, killing all 217 people aboard.

The flight recorder, which is 20 inches long and 5 inches wide, captures information from 55 systems on the jet, telling investigators such things as the plane's altitude, speed, spin, roll, when electrical power was cut off and how the autopilot functioned. The NTSB said it can record more than 150 individual data items.

Deep Drone continued to search for the other "black box," the cockpit voice recorder, which contains tape of conversations between crew members as well as discussions with air traffic controllers and any other sounds in the cockpit.

Senate votes raise in minimum wage

WASHINGTON (AP) — With eyes cast to the 2000 elections, the Senate voted Tuesday to give minimum-wage workers a dollar raise over three years — but tied the increase to \$18.4 billion in business tax sweeteners opposed by the White House.

President Clinton immediately denounced the measure as a "cynical tool to advance special interest tax breaks" and renewed his promise to veto it. He urged Congress instead to pass a \$1-an-hour increase over two years without the large tax cuts.

Veto threats notwithstanding, some Republicans viewed the package as a way to neutralize a Democratic political advantage on the minimum wage for 2000 races. Other Republicans were happy to vote for a new round of tax relief, an issue they want to resurrect following Clinton's veto in September of the GOP's signature \$792 billion tax cut.

"This just seemed like the right combination as far as pulling Republicans together," said Sen. Pete Domenici, R-N.M. "Sooner or later, a very significant tax reduction for the American people is going to be achieved."

The vote was 54-44 for the Republican measure. A few minutes earlier, the Senate had rejected, 50-48, a Democratic alternative raising the minimum wage by \$1 over 13 months and providing \$9.6 billion in tax relief. That measure would have also raised other taxes.

If the GOP bill becomes law, the current \$5.15-an-hour minimum wage would rise by 35 cents in March 2000, by 35 cents more in March 2001 and 30 cents in March 2002. About 11 million workers would be directly affected, half of them younger workers under age 24 and many of them holders of part-time jobs.

The five-year tax package includes a health insurance deduction for people who don't have employer-provided coverage and an immediate 100 percent deduction for the self-employed. It also would increase the business meal deduction from 50 percent to 80 percent and allow higher 401(k) contribution limits.

Although the Ways and Means

"Sooner or later, a very significant tax reduction for the American people is going to be achieved."

PETE DOMENICI
New Mexico senator

Committee in the House planned to take up a similar GOP minimum wage and tax package, it is unlikely that differences between the two can be ironed out before next year, if at all. The Senate measure was attached to an unrelated bankruptcy bill that would also have to be approved.

But the political fight was at full tilt on both sides of the Capitol.

Senate Democrats sought to portray the Republican bill as a tax giveaway for well-off GOP business allies that would do little for workers who are struggling despite the booming U.S. economy.

But Republicans said the tax breaks would help absorb the cost to businesses of paying a higher minimum wage that they said could reduce the number of available low-wage jobs by as much as 500,000.

The tax cuts would be paid for out of projected non-Social Security surplus dollars in all but the first year. Clinton has repeatedly said he will not accept the bill if it uses surplus dollars before other priorities are met. Republicans contend the president just wants to spend all of the money on government programs.

Ten states and the District of Columbia already require minimum wages higher than \$5.15 an hour, including a \$6.50-an-hour wage paid in Oregon. The other states are Alaska, California, Connecticut, Delaware, Hawaii, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Vermont and Washington.



■ Texas Belief statement rejected by Texas Southern Baptists

EL PASO, Texas (AP) — Texas' Southern Baptists today repudiated the denomination's call for women to "submit graciously" to their husbands.

The Baptist General Convention of Texas is the largest state organization with 2.7 million members within the nation's 15.7 million-member Southern Baptist Convention. But the state organization is more moderate than the national one.

It is the first state affiliate of the Southern Baptist Convention to reject the "submit graciously" stance.

All but a couple dozen among about 2,200 delegates to the Texas group's annual meeting voted in favor of affirming the Baptist Faith and Message Statement of 1963 — without an amendment added in 1998.

The amendment marked the first change in the statement of beliefs by the Southern Baptists in 35 years. It defines marriage exclusively in heterosexual terms and says that husbands and wives, while equal before God, have different roles.

■ Paris Territory disputes continue between Arafat, Barak

PARIS (AP) — Yasser Arafat and Ehud Barak entered a Paris conference hall Tuesday shaking hands vigorously, but their cordiality quickly dissolved into a dispute over language in U.N. resolutions on territory claimed by both sides.

Palestinian leader Arafat gave the more strongly worded speech, telling socialist delegates he expects Israel to live up to past commitments and to respect international law.

"Our Palestinian Arab people are still knocking on the door of international legality," he said. "International legality is pivotal in the search for a just and comprehensive peace."

It was a clear reference to Barak's contention, repeated several times over the past two days, that U.N. resolutions calling for Israel to return captured lands "have a different context" when referring to the Palestinians than when referring to Arab nations with recognized borders.

■ Washington House votes give validity to electronic contracts

WASHINGTON (AP) — Recognizing the rapid growth of electronic commerce, the House on Tuesday took up legislation that would give electronic signatures and records the same legal validity as written contracts.

The legislation is "perhaps the most important pro-technology vote that this Congress will take," said Commerce Committee Chairman Tom Bliley, R-Va., the chief sponsor.

The bill would establish a single, nationwide standard for electronic signatures and records. It would prohibit the enactment of any state law denying the legality of agreements that are electronically signed.

The administration, while backing standards for contracts signed in electronic form, strongly opposes extending that legal authority to notices and disclosures, saying that could undermine consumer rights.

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