

# National News

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## Scowcroft Sees Threat Of Iraqi Civil War

Brent Scowcroft, the National Security Advisor to the George H.W. Bush Presidency, warned on Jan. 7 that the rush to elections in Iraq may result in civil and regional war. Speaking at a luncheon sponsored by the New America Foundation, he also indicated that the problem was the result of having no exit strategy.

"With Iraq, we clearly have a tiger by the tail," Scowcroft said. "And the elections are turning out to be less about a promising transformation, and it has great potential for deepening the conflict. Indeed we may be seeing an incipient civil war at the present time. What kind of Iraq are we after? We're after an Iraq that fundamentally is stable, that has a cooperative outlook towards its neighbors in the region. And with a government that is concerned about minority rights in such a way that these minorities come to support that government. And a military that is both disciplined, and effective, and that owes its allegiance to that government."

Asked about reports that he has been dismissed as longtime head of the President's Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board, Scowcroft responded, "No comment."

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## Will PBGC Foot the Bill For Airline Pensions?

A plan announced on Jan. 10 by Labor Secretary Elaine Chao, for a 58% increase in the premiums that corporations pay to the Pension Benefit Guaranty Corporation (PBGC), left no doubt that the PBGC soon expects to absorb the pensions of the already-bankrupt United Airlines and U.S. Airways, as well as the remaining non-budget major airlines.

PBGC Executive Director Brad Belt had testified before the U.S. Senate Commerce Committee on Oct. 24, that United Airlines' pension plans were then underfunded by \$8.3 billion on a termination basis, of which

\$6.4 billion is guaranteed by the PBGC. On Dec. 30, the PBGC went to court to take over the United pilots' pension plan, before its liabilities increased.

Belt also testified then that U.S. Airways had suspended all contributions to its pension plans, which were already underfunded by \$2.3 billion on a termination basis, "almost all of which—\$2.1 billion—would be guaranteed by the PBGC," he stated. Belt warned the Senators that the total exposure of the pension plan participants and the PBGC to the airline industry was, in the event of termination, a whopping \$31 billion at the end of 2003.

Belt delivered his testimony at same time that the PBGC, which guarantees the pensions of employers with "defined benefit plans" (plans which pay set monthly amounts for the lifetime of a worker, and often a spouse), doubled its deficit to \$23.3 billion (from 2003 to 2004), due largely to its takeover of the pensions of the nation's former steelmakers.

If the PBGC were unable to meet its obligations, the U.S. government would be politically forced to pay its obligations.

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## Supreme Court Rejects Sentencing Guidelines

Reflecting the institutional assertion of the U.S. Supreme Court against Congress and the Executive Branch, the Court on Jan. 12 threw out the mandatory sentencing guidelines which have all but eliminated judges' discretion in sentencing for the past 20 years. Henceforth, according to the Supreme Court, the sentencing guidelines enacted by Congress in 1984, will only be "advisory," not mandatory. The ruling left mandatory minimum sentencing laws in place—which are separate from the guidelines.

There were two related, and at times contradictory rulings. One said that the guidelines violated the Sixth Amendment's guarantee to trial by jury, because judges are required to increase sentences by considering factors which were not decided by the jury. The other said that the guidelines should remain in place, but that they should

be regarded as advisory. A sentencing determination is still subject to review by an appellate court.

It is not yet clear what the effect will be on the Federal courts and prison system. Some observers predict a flood of appeals, while others don't. The Justice Department said it was "disappointed" by the ruling, and it urged judges to follow strict sentencing guidelines. It is expected that Congress will rewrite the sentencing laws, perhaps trying to get around the Supreme Court ruling.

Lyndon LaRouche has addressed the evil of mandatory sentencing on a number of occasions. At an Oct. 22, 2003 speech in Washington, he said: "We also have people parked in prisons, who shouldn't be there. . . . We need a general approach to rehabilitating society. . . . there are young people, who can fit into something, and make something of themselves, if we give them the opportunity and the guidance. So, why not give them something useful to do, something necessary to do, with the intention, they shall come out of it, as citizens in the full sense of self-respecting citizens? We must do that, now."

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## Washington State Gets A Governor—Finally

Democratic Attorney General Christine Gregoire was inaugurated on Jan. 12 as the new Governor of Washington, although the state Republican Party is still refusing to accept the final hand-recount verdict in the bitterly contested election.

An attorney for the Republican candidate, Dino Rossi, said the GOP was filing suit, alleging that "thousands of illegal votes" were counted, due to "errors, omissions, misconduct, neglect, and other wrongful acts."

The suit was filed in a sparsely populated, heavily Republican county in eastern Washington, seeking to have the entire gubernatorial election annulled and run over again. The Republicans are trying to get an order for a new election, which would then have to be decided by the State Supreme Court, and possibly, by the legislature.