



Beirut unrest: Bomb kills anti-Syrian lawmaker/6A

THE DALY GRIND

LINEBACKER BOBBY DALY IS IN THE MIDDLE OF EVERYTHING FOR THE BOBCATS

Sports 1C

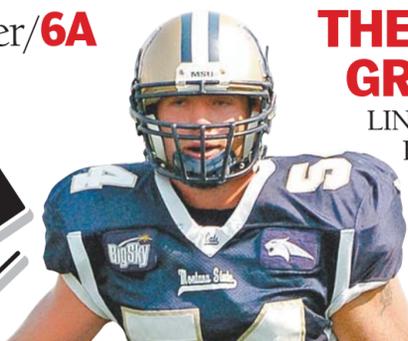
IN THE BOOK

Colstrip hunter bagged record buck in 2006.

Outdoors 1D



Billings Gazette



THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 20, 2007

The Source

LOCAL EDITION

Today's briefing

Local



A new playground with modern equipment, slides, a rope ladder, a zip line and a natural climbing rock was dedicated Wednesday to the students at Orchard Elementary. 1B

FIRST INTERSTATE EXPANDING: First Interstate BancSystem Inc. is buying 18 First Western banks in western South Dakota to expand its reach across three states. **1B**

SPIRITUAL SUPPORT: Prison Fellowship Ministries' field director for Idaho and Montana was in Billings on Wednesday to recruit volunteers for the nonprofit ministry. **1B**

GUILTY VERDICT: A federal jury Wednesday convicted a Crow Agency man of attempted escape for kicking out the window of a van while on his way to sentencing for murder. **2B**

State

INMATE SUPPORT CONTINUES: Supporters of Montana State Prison inmate Barry Beach who recently was denied clemency for a murder he claims he didn't commit say they will continue their efforts even as state officials say the case is closed. **1B**



BEACH

EX-TRIBAL OFFICIAL SENTENCED: A former Crow tribal official who took a tribal vehicle and traded it for another for personal use will spend three years on federal probation. **2B**

LANGE TAX CUT PLAN: Republican U.S. Senate candidate Michael Lange is proposing to slash federal taxes by \$1.5 trillion over the next eight years, targeting the cuts at retirees and working families. **3B**

Nation

RATHER SUES CBS: Former anchorman Dan Rather filed a \$70 million lawsuit Wednesday against CBS, alleging that the network made him a "scapegoat" for a discredited story about President Bush's National Guard service. **2A**

SIMPSON POSTS BAIL: O.J. Simpson was released from jail Wednesday after posting \$125,000 bail. **3A**

World

SHOOTING CONTROVERSY: Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki on Wednesday disputed Blackwater USA's version of a weekend shooting that left at least 11 people dead in Baghdad. **4A**

RETALIATION PLANS: Iran has drawn up plans to bomb Israel if the Jewish state should attack, an Iranian military official said Wednesday. **4A**



A meteorite crashed into southern Peru over the weekend, experts confirmed on Wednesday, leaving this crater. But they were still puzzling over claims that it gave off fumes. 6A

GAZA DISPUTE: Israel declared the Palestinian-controlled Gaza Strip an "enemy entity" on Wednesday and said it would cut utilities to the territory. **6A**

Bridge on the edge

Locals fret over century-old Absarokee span



Courtesy Rock-N-River Homeowners' Association

The Johnson Bridge is a favorite fishing site for recreationists, but some neighboring landowners see it as an accident waiting to happen, particularly because a natural-gas pipeline runs along the side of the bridge.

Repairs could cost \$100K, officials say

By LINDA HALSTEAD-ACHARYA
Of The Gazette Staff

ABSAROKEE — When Crystal Gerttula called the emergency phone number posted at the end of the Johnson Bridge, the response she got was far from comforting.

Gerttula, who lives less than a quarter of a mile from the century-old bridge, is one of several locals who question the structure's integrity. "We as homeowners are putting our trust in the county that it's safe," she said. "Is it? I don't think so."

Not only is she concerned about the bridge itself — locals say that, years ago, a truck fell through the decking — but she's also worried about the natural-gas pipeline attached to the side of it. Several weeks ago, wanting to find out more about the pipeline, she called the number



Courtesy Rock-N-River Homeowners' Association

The most serious risk, engineers say, is that a vehicle would fall through the planking of the bridge, not that the structure itself would fall.

posted on yellow stakes at both ends of the bridge. The call connected her to the company's office in Texas, where she spoke with one of the geologists on staff. The geologist was not familiar with the bridge or the specific location of the pipeline.

But he assured her there were automatic shut-off valves that would curtail the flow of gas should problems arise.

"But how soon would that happen?" she asked. "What if

Please see Bridge, 7A

Bohlinger pushes for drought plan

Lieutenant governor urges all Montanans to be conservationists

By JENNIFER McKEE
Gazette State Bureau

HELENA — With severe drought gripping large swaths of Montana, Lt. Gov. John Bohlinger said Wednesday that he'd like to see a statewide conservation plan to help farmers, ranchers and city dwellers live in persistent dryness.

"We have to be conservationists," Bohlinger said during a break in the Governor's Drought Advisory Committee, which Bohlinger chairs. "As Montanans, we have to think about our (farmer) neighbors. Can we continue to allow people to just water their lawns until they are spongy?"

The group concluded Wednesday that all but three counties in Montana's southeast corner are experiencing drought, with large portions of Western, central and southern Montana classified as "severely" or "extremely" dry.

The committee pulls together scientists from the National Weather Service, U.S. Geological Service and state land and wildlife agencies to assess the state of drought in Montana and issue a formal drought map.

While the group has been meeting for more than 13 years, it traditionally has not offered suggestions about what people should do in a drought.

Bohlinger and Mary Sexton, head of the state Department of Natural Resources and Conservation, sent a letter Wednesday to members of the group saying they'd like the panel to begin crafting a statewide drought action plan and make recommendations to Gov. Brian Schweitzer on how the state should deal with persistent dryness.

Bohlinger and Sexton also said they'd like to find ways to get information that's presented at the committee to farmers, ranchers and sportsmen and women who need it. The information includes the amount of water in Montana's streams, reservoirs and soils.

"There are all of these professional people at the

Please see Drought, 12A



BOHLINGER

Democrats' latest war legislation falters in Senate

WASHINGTON (AP) — Democrats' efforts to challenge President Bush's Iraq policies were dealt a demoralizing blow Wednesday in the Senate after they failed to scrape together enough support to guarantee troops more time at home.

The 56-44 vote — four short of reaching the 60 needed to advance — all but assured that Democrats would be unable to muster the support needed to pass tough anti-war legislation by year's end. The legislation, sponsored by Sen. Jim Webb, D-Va., was seen as the Democrats' best shot because of its pro-military premise.

"The idea of winning the war in Iraq is beginning to get a second look," said Sen. Lindsey Graham, R-S.C., who led opposition to the bill alongside Sen. John McCain, R-Ariz.

Webb's legislation would have required that troops spend as much time at home training with their units as

How they voted

Webb amendment on troop rotation

For: Sen. Max Baucus, D-Mont.; Sen. Jon Tester, D-Mont.

Against: Sen. Mike Enzi, R-Wyo.; Sen. John Barrasso, R-Wyo.

Please see Senate, 7A

Plenty of flu shots promised

Now the push is to have more of the available doses used

WASHINGTON (AP) — Come one, come all: After years of shortages and confusion, this fall promises plenty of flu vaccine to go around — up to 132 million doses, more than the nation has ever produced.

The ample supplies have the government urging vaccinations

not just for people at highest risk of dying from influenza, but also for anyone who wants to avoid a week of aching misery.

"Flu is a formidable foe," Dr. Julie Gerberding, head of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, said Wednesday. "It is not an illness we should be complacent about."

But new CDC data show only a fraction of people who need flu shots the most get them, including just one in five babies and toddlers. And there's wide geo-

graphic variation, with Rhode Island reporting the most high-risk adults vaccinated and Nevada the fewest.

Shots aren't the only option. Wednesday, the government ruled that it's safe for younger kids to try a nasal-spray vaccine called FluMist. Once only an option for people 5 to 49, FluMist now can be used by children as young as 2.

Flu usually peaks in February

Please see Shots, 12A



Only a fraction of the people who need flu shots the most are getting them — including just one in five babies and toddlers, say health officials, who hope to boost those numbers as a record supply of vaccine is shipped this fall.

Associated Press

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Get news updates online at: www.billingsgazette.com
▲ High 76°
▼ Low 51°
Becoming windy
Warmer and windy. 8B



COMING FRIDAY

Musical season: We'll provide an early look at all those new fall CDs.

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