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Gabrielle Giffords lets her pride show after her husband, retiring astronaut and Navy Capt. Mark Kelly, received the Legion of Merit. She presented him with the Distinguished Flying Cross at the Washington event. Vice President Joe Biden, left, officiated.

WHITE HOUSE PHOTOS BY DAVID LIENEMANN

Beaming Giffords, at Kelly's retirement, moves without aid

By Stephanie Innes
ARIZONA DAILY STAR

WASHINGTON — U.S. Rep. Gabrielle Giffords got up from her chair unassisted and pinned a military medal on her husband's jacket Thursday during a ceremony for his military retirement.

She traveled to the nation's capital for the ceremony to support her husband, now-retired U.S. Navy Capt. and astronaut Mark Kelly. At the request of Giffords and Kelly, Vice President Joe Biden oversaw the event.

"As vice president I get to work with an awful lot of people who devote their lives day to day to public service," Biden said. "But it's not every day you

See GIFFORDS, A3



Giffords hears Kelly's speech. "NASA ... must remain a permanent part of the fabric of this great country," said the former astronaut who flew four missions.

Census: Vacancy, rental rates soar in AZ

Only Nevada had a higher rate of housing growth

By Max Levy
CRONKITE NEWS SERVICE

WASHINGTON — The Census Bureau on Thursday confirmed what many Arizonans already knew: Over the last decade, the state built too many houses and didn't fill enough of them.

The bureau said the increase in the percent of vacant and rented homes in Arizona was among the highest in the nation.

Vacant housing grew by 61 percent

and rentals increased 33 percent in the state between 2000 and 2010.

By 2010, more than 16 percent of Arizona's houses were vacant, according to bureau data. Of the 10 most populated counties in the country, Maricopa had the largest percentage increase in the number of vacant houses between 2000 and 2010, the Census said. It also had the highest vacancy rate at 13.9 percent.

"Arizona took it a little bit more in the chin than the other states," said Anand Bhattacharya, a finance professor at Arizona State University with expertise in the real estate market.

But he said the changes are consistent with national trends in the housing market in the last 10 years.

"(It's) the reflection of the real estate boom, which then went bust," Bhattacharya said.

The number of houses grew by nearly 30 percent in Arizona between 2000 and 2010, higher growth than any state except Nevada. Experts say most of that construction happened before 2007.

A spokesman for the Arizona Department of Housing said the state was adding "60,000 homes each year from

See HOUSING BUST, A3

Number set up to deal with 911 flaws

Problems with your call? Then make another call, Fire Dept. asks

By Jamar Younger
ARIZONA DAILY STAR

The Tucson Fire Department has established a phone number for people who have trouble getting through when they call 911.

People who have trouble reaching emergency personnel can call 791-5058 and give specific information on the type of problems they are having with the system, according to a Fire Department news release.

The service line prompts people to leave a message with the date, time and location of the 911 call, the problem they experienced, the phone number they were calling from and whether it was a cellphone, land line or another type of phone.

The service line was created after residents near Davis-Monthan Air Force Base flooded the 911 system last month while the base detonated explosives in the middle of the night.

The Fire Department, which took over the 911 system in August, has heard complaints about callers receiving busy signals, but has heard the complaints only through the media and other sources,

REPORT PROBLEMS

The Tucson Fire Department has set up a customer-service line for people to report problems with the 911 system. The number is 791-5058.

See NUMBER, A3

State says drivers are responsible for dust-storm wrecks

By Veronica M. Cruz
ARIZONA DAILY STAR

State officials say that motorists — not a lack of safeguards — are to blame for dust-related crashes such as the multivehicle wrecks on Interstate 10 on Tuesday.

And there are no plans for state agencies to collaborate on strategies to reduce collisions related to dust storms.

"Dust storms don't kill people; highways don't kill people. Drivers kill people," said Bart Graves, a spokesman for the state Department of Public Safety. "They panic and they do the wrong thing and something bad happens."

In instances where DPS receives advance warning of severe weather events, highways can be shut down or other measures can be put into place to avoid traffic accidents, Graves said.

In cases of unpredictable dust storms, Graves said,

See DUST, A3

SN On StarNet: See more photos of the crash at azstarnet.com/gallery and go to azstarnet.com/video for a video of the dust storm and wreckage.

COMING SUNDAY

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