

# Iraq remains top story

*Election, nuclear programs also earn votes*

By DAVID CRARY  
The Associated Press

NEW YORK — The convoluted, increasingly costly war in Iraq was chosen the top story of 2006 by U.S. editors and news directors in The Associated Press' annual vote, followed closely by the U.S. election in which debate over Iraq played a pivotal role.

The war received 176 first-place votes out of 242 ballots cast. The election, in which Democrats seized control of Congress, received 46 first-place votes and was the overwhelming pick for the No. 2 story.

Last year's top story was Hurricane Katrina and the other devastating Gulf Coast storms. The Iraq war finished third in that poll, was runner-up in 2004 and the No. 1 story in 2003, while the buildup to the war was 2002's top story.

Here are 2006's top 10 stories, as voted by AP members. There was a tie for seventh place:

*'All news paled in comparison to the developments in the Middle East, which are beginning to be felt in every community.'*

— Ken Stickney,  
The News-Star at Monroe, La.

## Democrats surge to win in November elections

Unhappiness with events in Iraq was one of the driving forces behind the Democrats' surge in the Nov. 7 election. They took over the House with a large majority, gained a narrow edge in the Senate, and also advanced in statehouses nationwide. Nancy Pelosi, assailed by the Republicans as a "San Francisco liberal" during the campaign, will become the first female speaker of the House.

## Nuclear programs make global headlines

The United States and its allies were frustrated in their efforts to rein in nuclear programs in North Korea and Iran. North Korea tested a nuclear bomb in October, and Iran — despite a threat of sanctions — pushed ahead with plans to bring its first nuclear power plant on line in late 2007.

## Efforts to curb illegal immigration collapse

Congress tried to confront the influx of illegal immi-



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U.S. Army soldiers from Company A of the 5th Battalion, 20th Infantry Regiment patrol a street Tuesday in New Baghdad, an eastern neighborhood in Baghdad, Iraq, where soldiers searched for weapons and suspected insurgents.

grants from Latin America, but the effort collapsed amid deep divisions over whether to stress a crackdown or include provisions to help some illegal immigrants work toward citizenship. The get-tough approach triggered huge protests by immigrants-rights supporters.

Scandals plague Washington lawmakers. Several Republican congressmen were brought down by scandals, including Mark Foley, who resigned over sexually explicit messages sent to male pages, and Randy Cunningham, who pleaded guilty to accepting bribes

from defense contractors. House Majority Leader Tom Delay resigned after being indicted on campaign finance charges in Texas, and Ohio's Bob Ney pleaded guilty in connection with the probe of lobbyist Jack Abramoff.

## Ex-Iraqi leader Hussein sentenced to hang

Saddam Hussein was convicted in the slaying of 148 Shiite Muslims, including children, following an assassination attempt against him in 1982. He was sentenced to death by hanging, but proceedings against him contin-

ued on genocide charges stemming from a chemical attack on Kurds in 1987.

## Donald Rumsfeld resigns as defense secretary

As conditions worsened in Iraq, President Bush publicly stuck by his defense secretary. But a day after the midterm elections gave Democrats control of Congress, Bush announced Donald Rumsfeld's departure. Though his brusque style initially won some admiring reviews, Rumsfeld was seen as underestimating Iraq's challenges while alienating

## Eyes still on Iraq

The Iraq war was voted the top story of the year by Associated Press member newspapers and broadcasters, receiving 72 percent of first-place votes.

### Top stories of 2006

Voted by U.S. editors and news directors

1. Iraq war	2,243 points
2. U.S. election	2,069
3. Nuclear standoffs	947
4. Illegal immigration	801
5. Scandals in Congress	731
6. Saddam convicted	636
7. Mideast fighting	631
7. Rumsfeld resigns	631
9. Airliner plot	554
10. Disaster in Darfur	407

242 ballots were cast

the military brass and members of Congress.

## Fighting continues Mideast; Hezbollah support grows

Israel and the Lebanon-based Hezbollah militia fought a monthlong war in the summer; more than 900 people were killed and much of southern Lebanon was battered. Lebanon's Western-backed government emerged more embattled than ever, while Hezbollah claimed increased popular support.

## New terrorist plot targets jet planes over Atlantic

British authorities said they narrowly thwarted a terrorist plot to bomb several jets over the Atlantic. The disclosure led to tough new restrictions on the contents of carry-on luggage.

## Violence escalates in Darfur region of Sudan

Violence worsened in Sudan's Darfur region, where fighting between rebels and government forces has killed more than 200,000 people. The United Nations approved a 20,000-strong peacekeeping force, but Sudan blocked its deployment.

Just missing out on the Top 10 was mounting concern over climate change and global warming, highlighted by the release of Al Gore's movie, "An Inconvenient Truth," and alarming new warnings from many scientists.

Several voters remarked on how Iraq — and its ripple effects — dominated the year. "All news paled in comparison to the developments in the Middle East, which are beginning to be felt in every community," wrote Ken Stickney of The News-Star at Monroe, La.



President Bush, right, congratulates outgoing Defense Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld, second from left, during a farewell ceremony in his honor at the Pentagon, Dec. 15. Vice President Dick Cheney, left, and Joint Chiefs Chairman, Gen. Peter Pace, second from right, applaud in background.

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