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ALBUQUERQUE JOURNAL

HOME-OWNED AND HOME-OPERATED ■ MADE IN THE U.S.A.
124TH YEAR, NO. 72 ■ 108 PAGES IN 6 SECTIONS

FRIDAY MORNING, MARCH 12, 2004

STATE ★★★
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Attacks 'Mass Murder,' Spain's Leader Says

Ally to al-Qaida Suspected in Train Blasts



PETER DEJONG/THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Rescue workers remove victims at Atocha station after explosions rocked three railway stations in Madrid on Thursday, three days before Spain's general elections. The blasts killed more than 190 rush-hour commuters and wounded nearly 1,500.

By **KEITH B. RICHBURG**
The Washington Post

MADRID — Ten nearly simultaneous explosions tore through four packed commuter trains in Madrid during rush hour Thursday morning, killing at least 190 people and wounding nearly 1,500 in the worst terrorist attack in modern Spanish history, three days before national elections.

The explosives were placed in backpacks and left aboard trains and on tracks at three stations. Witnesses describing the scenes of chaos and carnage said they heard multiple explosions at the city's busy Atocha station, which sent passengers scrambling in a near-stampede. A makeshift emergency hospital was set up alongside the tracks at the station, just south of the Prado Museum. Buses were hurriedly converted into ambulances. The walking wounded were asked to make it to hospitals on their own, and leave vehicles available for the more severely injured.

Prime Minister Jose Maria Aznar called the attacks "a mass murder" and compared them to the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist strikes in the United States. "March 11, 2004, now occupies

a place in the history of infamy," he said.

Government officials and the media immediately blamed the attacks on the Basque separatist group ETA, which has waged a 30-year fight against the Spanish government.

Later Thursday, however, the Spanish interior minister, Angel Acebes, said the government was investigating a possible link to Islamic extremists after a van was discovered on the outskirts of Madrid carrying seven detonator caps and a cassette tape in Arabic containing verses from the Quran. The van was parked in the town of Alcala de Henares about 15 miles east of Madrid, where at least three of the targeted trains originated.

"I have given our security forces instructions not to rule out anything," Minister Acebes said, adding that he still considered ETA the principal suspect.

The discovery of the van was followed by a report from London by the Arabic language Al-Quds Al-Arabi newspaper that it had received an e-mail from an Islamic militant group claiming responsibility for the attacks.

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JOSE HUESCA/THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Two people injured by one of the 10 explosions that rocked railway stations in Madrid, Spain, on Thursday wait for aid outside Madrid's Atocha station.

Higher Medicare Plan Estimate Was Kept Quiet

Official Cautioned He Better Not Talk

By **TONY PUGH**
Knight Ridder Newspapers

WASHINGTON — The government's top expert on Medicare costs was warned that he would be fired if he told key lawmakers about a series of Bush administration cost estimates that could have torpedoed congressional passage of the White House-backed Medicare prescription-drug plan.

When the House of Representatives passed the controversial benefit by five votes last November, the White House was embracing an estimate by the Congressional Budget Office that it would cost \$395 billion in the first 10 years. But, for months, the administration's own analysts in the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services had concluded repeatedly that the drug benefit could cost upward of \$100 billion more than that.

Withholding the higher cost projections was important because the White House was facing a revolt from 13 conservative House Republicans who

had vowed to vote against the Medicare drug bill if it cost more than \$400 billion.

Rep. Sue Myrick of North Carolina, one of the 13 Republicans, said she was "very upset" when she learned of the higher estimate.

"I think a lot of people probably would have reconsidered (voting for the bill) because we said that \$400 billion was our top of the line," Myrick said.

Five months before the November House vote, the government's chief Medicare actuary had estimated that a similar plan the Senate was considering would cost \$551 billion over 10 years. Two months after Congress approved the new benefit, White House Budget Director Joshua Bolten disclosed that he expected it to cost \$534 billion.

Richard S. Foster, the chief actuary for the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, which produced the \$551 billion estimate, told colleagues last June that he would be fired if he revealed numbers relating to the higher estimate to lawmakers.

"This whole episode which has now gone on for three

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N.M. Man Faces 222 Counts of Kiddie Porn

Cops Say Images 'Very Disturbing'

By **CAROLYN CARLSON**
Journal Staff Writer

State Police were searching Thursday evening through the computer hard drive of a 21-year-old Albuquerque man who was arrested Thursday on 222 counts of possessing or distributing child pornography.

New Mexico State Police arrested Rene Garcia at a Rio Rancho apartment Thursday afternoon after officers executed a search warrant earlier in the day at another residence used by Garcia at 4201 Coors SW.

State Police spokesman Lt. Jimmy Glascock said officers seized photographs, a computer, paperwork and other computer components that con-

tained child pornography from the Coors location.

"The images were very disturbing, graphic and sexually explicit photos of young children," Glascock said.

The counts stem from 111 images. Garcia faces 111 counts each of possessing and distributing the images.

Also, Garcia's brother, Eduardo Garcia, 28, was arrested at the Coors location on two counts of possessing a fictitious New Mexico driver's license.

He is not a suspect in the child pornography investigation and will not be charged in connection with it, Glascock said.

"Rene Garcia is the only person of interest in this case. There are no other suspects," he said.

Glascock said Rene Garcia's

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Fire Season Expected To Start Late, Heat Up

By **TANIA SOUSSAN**
Journal Staff Writer

Fire danger in New Mexico is expected to be above average again this spring and summer, with conditions reaching the critical stage from mid-May through early July.

Northern New Mexico will likely be spared the worst of the big fire activity because it has a fairly strong snowpack. But the southern part of the state is in worse shape, according to the outlook report issued Thursday by federal fire forecasters.

Fire season will likely start

later than usual but flare up for a relatively short but intense peak, said Chuck Maxwell, leader of the predictive services team at the federal Southwest Coordination Center in Albuquerque.

"Everything is being pushed back but also amplified," he said, adding that New Mexico will probably have an average number of large fires but within an unusually short period of time.

"It's basically the same kind of signal we're going to see year after year until we kill the

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Court Stops Gay Weddings in Calif.

By **DAVID KRAVETS**
The Associated Press

SAN FRANCISCO — The California Supreme Court ordered an immediate halt to same-sex weddings in San Francisco on Thursday as Massachusetts lawmakers gave preliminary approval to a constitutional amendment to ban gay marriages in the only state where they have been ruled legal.

Teary-eyed couples were quickly turned away at San Francisco's City Hall, where more than 3,700 gay couples have tied the knot in the last month.

"We were filling out the application and they told us to stop," said Art Adams, who was the first to be denied as he and partner Devin Baker

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