

U.S. NOTES

CONGRESS

Scandal in The Mailroom

Neither snow nor rain nor gloom of night, it seems, will keep the U.S. House of Representatives away from scandal. Only last October came embarrassing revelations that some lawmakers had written checks returned because of insufficient funds totaling more than \$100,000 at the House bank and had tallied \$300,000 in free meals at House restaurants. Last month the House named a bipartisan task force to look into a new imbroglio at the House post office.

The facility has more than

100 employees, hired and supervised by the lawmakers. As of mid-February, four employees had been charged in U.S. District Court with selling cocaine, kiting checks and embezzling more than \$35,000 from the Federal Government. Postmaster Robert Rota is under pressure to resign.

Some Congressmen say the time has come for the House to scrap the patronage system and hire a professional administrator to oversee its operations. Says Kansas Democrat Dan Glickman: "The House has grown ... into a 13,000-employee, \$875 billion-a-year operation, but it's managed the same way it was 100 years ago." ■

LOTTERIES

Beating The Odds

When the jackpot in the Virginia state lottery topped \$27 million last month, many local residents gave in to the temptation of buying a few extra tickets. But most were beaten to the punch: in the days before the Feb. 15 drawing, a group of buyers spent approximately \$5 million snapping up the bulk of the 7,059,052 possible combinations.

Virginia lottery officials suspect that an Australian investor group, which regularly places huge sums of money in foreign lotteries, was behind the mass purchase. The group apparently located Virginia lottery outlets that were willing to churn out mass quantities of tickets in order to reap huge sales commissions.

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MARK EDWARD ATKINSON FOR TIME

Luck had nothing to do with it

bination, the gamble may have worked, as only one winning ticket was issued. The Australians are said to have claimed victory, but no one has officially come forward to collect yet. The winner is given 180 days from the drawing to trade in the lucky chit for a payoff of \$1.2 million a year over the next 20 years. Meanwhile, Virginia officials are considering rewriting the lottery rules to prevent well-heeled players from cornering the market—and scaring off other customers—in the future. ■



Cruel and unusual punishment? Cuffing a prisoner in Illinois

SUPREME COURT

The Justices Scold Thomas

At Clarence Thomas' confirmation hearings late last year, his supporters argued that the judge's deprived childhood in Pin Point, Georgia, would make him sensitive to the oppressed. But after writing a harsh dissent last week, the Supreme Court's youngest Justice and only black member found himself rebuked by seven of his judicial colleagues for ignoring "concepts of dignity, civilized standards, humanity and decency."

The court's swipe came in an opinion involving a black Louisiana prisoner who was kicked and punched by guards while he was handcuffed and shackled. A supervisor stood

by, instructing the guards "not to have too much fun." The high court held that the use of such excessive force may constitute "cruel and unusual punishment" under the U.S. Constitution's Eighth Amendment even if the inmate does not suffer serious injury. But in a dissent joined only by Justice Antonin Scalia, Thomas wrote that the court's decision was "yet another manifestation of the pervasive view that the Federal Constitution must address all ills in our society."

If Bush appointed Thomas to reinforce the court's right-leaning majority, the move was a striking success. Thomas has voted with Scalia, the most conservative member of the high bench, in each of the 13 cases he has participated in this term. Pin Point, it seems, is a distant memory. ■

MIAS

Uncandid Camera

The grainy photo of a smiling middle-aged man bore a striking resemblance to U.S. Army Captain Donald G. Carr, who was shot down over Laos in 1971. So much so that his relatives, like those of many of the 2,273 U.S. servicemen listed as missing in action, dared to believe that their loved one was still alive in Southeast Asia.



No MIA: Gunther Dittrich

But the Carr family was the victim of a cruel fraud.

The photo, purporting to show the missing soldier in a Laotian prison camp, turned out to be that of a German national named Gunther Dittrich. The man's identity, first reported by ABC News, was confirmed by U.S. Defense Department investigators who interviewed him in a German prison, where he is serving time for illegally exporting exotic Asian birds.

The photo was sent to the Carr family by retired U.S. Air Force pilot Jack Bailey, whose Operation Rescue group has raised more than \$3 million from MIA families over the past decade. Bailey claims he was duped by an unidentified hoaxer and did not knowingly mislead anyone. Nevertheless, the U.S. Justice Department is investigating Bailey's enterprise to determine whether he is responsible for other fake MIA documents and photos. ■

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