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CHANCE OF SHOWERS TODAY'S HIGH: 88 LOW: 70
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COLOMBIA

THE STING



NELSON URREGO, the DEA collaborator who delivered the satellite phones to the FARC.



EL TIE

WITH THE HELP OF AN EX-CON, U.S. OFFICIALS PUT SATELLITE PHONES INTO THE HANDS OF TOP COLOMBIAN REBELS AND LISTENED TO THEIR CHATTER FOR YEARS

BY GERARDO REYES AND STEVEN DUDLEY
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COMBITA, Colombia — It sounds like a spy novel: Using a cooperating drug trafficker, U.S. officials put several supposedly untraceable satellite phones in the hands of Colombia's FARC guerrillas, then listened to their chatter.

But the sting of Latin America's most secretive insurgency — accused of direct involvement in cocaine smuggling to the U.S. and European markets — really did take place, several U.S. officials told The Miami Herald.

U.S. intercepts of FARC communications were mentioned in a March U.S. indictment of the FARC's seven top leaders and 43 other commanders on charges of running a \$25 billion drug trafficking network responsible for 60 percent of the cocaine on U.S. streets.

Other U.S. indictments have implicated mid-level commanders

•TURN TO FARC, 22A

YESID ARTEA, the alleged FARC leader who met Urrego in prison.



JUAN ALBERTO CASTAÑEDA/INPEC

FERNEY TOVAR, the alleged FARC courier who received the phones from Urrego and distributed them to FARC leaders. He is now at Cóbmita prison, below.



MARTINGARCIA

MIAMIHERALD.COM Click on Today's Extras to read indictment and affidavit



JOSE MIGUEL PALENCIA/EL TIEMPO

MEDICARE

Drug plan deadline assailed; low-income seniors get help

■ President Bush toured Florida on Tuesday as he faced mounting demands to extend the deadline for signing up for the new Medicare prescription drug benefit.

BY MONICA HATCHER
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Less than a week before the Monday deadline for enrollment in the new Medicare drug benefit plan, the Bush administration said it will waive penalty fees for low-income seniors who sign up late.

The small concession came amid growing pressure to extend the deadline, which U.S. Health and Human Services Secretary Mike Leavitt has said he is not willing to do. In recent weeks, several reports have indicated seniors are still stumped when it comes to choosing a



PABLO MARTINEZ MONSIVAIS/AP

A CHAT: President Bush speaks with Judy Fauci and her husband, Larry Fauci, in Coconut Creek.

plan and don't have adequate resources to help them.

On Tuesday, President Bush visited Florida to pro-

•TURN TO DRUG PLAN, 22A

MIAMIHERALD.COM: FOR VIDEO OF PRESIDENT BUSH ON MEDICARE AND MORE STORIES, CLICK ON TODAY'S EXTRAS

PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSION

Regulators: FPL request is too high

■ FPL's request to recoup hurricane repair costs from its customers should be reduced, the staff of the Public Service Commission recommended Tuesday. Regulators will make the final call Monday.

BY JOHN DORSCHNER
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Analysts for state utility regulators recommended Tuesday that the amount Florida Power & Light can bill customers to recoup hurricane costs be slashed by \$562 million.

The reduction from FPL's request of \$1.7 billion, if approved, would save the average customer about 50 cents a month for the next 12 years. Under FPL's request,

the average customer would pay a \$1.60 monthly surcharge.

While 50 cents may seem trivial at a time when fuel prices are sending electric bills soaring, consumer advocates believe the report is important because it signals a major shift in the way the state's utility regulators look at storm damages.

In making its recommendation, the staff of the Public Service Commission criticized the utility for bad pole maintenance, lack of tree-trimming and loose bolts in transmission towers.

•TURN TO FPL, 2A

MIAMIHERALD.COM: TO READ THE REPORT ABOUT STORM RECOVERY FINANCING, CLICK ON TODAY'S EXTRAS

BROWARD COUNTY

3-bedroom, 2-bath, multiple murders

■ The home where a West Park woman was found murdered Monday had been the scene of bloodshed before.

BY WANDA J. DeMARZO AND STEPHANIE CHEN
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One day after Henriette Lubin was found slain in her West Park home, neighbors wonder if her house could be evil.

The neighbors were jolted from their living rooms shortly after 10 p.m. Monday by the sound of screams coming from outside Lubin's three-bedroom, two-bathroom cream-colored home at 3811 SW 31st Ct. in South

Broward.

Daniel Corugedo, who lives two doors down, said he peeked outside his living room window to see half a dozen patrol cars, lights flashing.

And his mind flashed back to another Monday night seven years ago:

On that balmy evening, May 4, 1999, the bloody bodies of John and Mary Holzknecht, ages 78 and 77, were discovered in the same house.

The couple's throats had been slashed by their 17-year-old neighbor, who later told investigators he had been "in a killing mood."

And even that wasn't the

•TURN TO HOME, 2A

UP FRONT | BASKETBALL

FREE THROWS ARE EASY? TELL IT TO SHAQ, OTHERS

■ Making a free throw seems so simple, but some of the NBA's elite find themselves frustrated and perplexed as they clank this seemingly easy shot time after time.

BY JOSEPH GOODMAN
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In every basketball gymnasium and on every playground there's one fundamental distance that denies no one — 15 feet of universal freedom. The concept of a free throw is a beautiful thing.

Not everyone can dunk a basketball, but everyone, from the guy at the local arcade Pop-a-Shot to the kid at the county fair, can shoot a free throw. And in a league where men insult gravity and unnatural athleticism abounds, a free throw is the National Basketball Association's great everyman equalizer.

So if a free throw is so simple, then why do some of the world's best athletes make it look so foul?

There's no defender. It's a stationary target. The distance never changes. Jumping isn't involved. Noth-

•TURN TO FREE THROWS, 20A

MIAMIHERALD.COM: CLICK ON TODAY'S EXTRAS TO TRY OUT OUR FREE THROW GAME



COLOMBIA

FARC guerrillas talked; U.S. listened

*FARC, FROM 1A

and couriers. In all, at least 55 members of the 50-year-old, 17,000-fighter Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia are facing U.S. charges ranging from drug trafficking and extortion to kidnapping and terrorism.

It's not known whether the eavesdropping on the U.S.-provided satellite phones contributed to the indictments of the FARC members. But it is clear that the phones were delivered to top FARC leaders, including its top military commander, a notorious commander better known as Mono Jojoy.

COOPERATION

U.S. officials say the sting began when Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) agents won the cooperation of Nelson Urrego, a Colombian communications specialist who allegedly helped coordinate cocaine shipments that totaled 10 to 15 tons per month for the North Valley Cartel.

Urrego was captured, convicted and jailed in Bogotá's La Picota prison in 1998. While there, he met Yesid Arteta, a high-ranking FARC member who also had been captured, as well as Ferney Tovar, an alleged FARC courier who visited Arteta on occasion.

At the time, Tovar was general manager of Contrafluvial del Caguán, a company based in his hometown of Cartagena del Chairá that used its 65 motor boats to transport people and supplies on the Caguán River — the main transportation route in that part of southeastern Colombia.

Until a massive military



WOUNDED:

Military personnel carry alleged FARC courier Ferney Tovar a day after his capture last year to a military hospital.

PHOTO COURTESY OF MARTIN GARCIA

offensive in the region launched in 2003, Cartagena del Chairá had long been a FARC stronghold as well as a key coca-growing region. Tovar was captured last year and is facing extradition to the United States for conspiracy to traffic and distribute cocaine.

An affidavit filed by U.S. prosecutor Juan Antonio Gonzalez in Miami as part of the indictment against Tovar describes him as a "broker/facilitator [for higher ranking members of the FARC organization] and distributor of narcotics for the FARC organization."

Miami DEA agent Rufus Wallace wrote in another affidavit that Tovar promised to supply unidentified "cooperating government witnesses every 15 to 45 days with between 1,000 and 2,000 kilograms of cocaine which would be obtained from the

FARC drug laboratories."

Tovar denied he was a FARC member during a recent interview with The Miami Herald at the Cómbita prison in the windy highlands of central Colombia. But he openly confirmed several aspects of the satellite phone deals.

U.S. officials, who asked for anonymity because of the sensitivity of the case, said the jailed Urrego first offered his FARC contacts to smuggle cocaine from FARC-controlled areas to the United States. Tovar told The Miami Herald he refused. His indictment claims he accepted and arranged for several loads to be shipped to Miami.

Tovar said he and Urrego kept in touch, and sometime in 2001 or 2002, after Urrego had served his sentence and been released from prison, Urrego offered him four NER-A-brand satellite telephones



— which allow users to make telephone calls from the most isolated areas.

Urrego claimed that the phones' location, ownership and call records could not be traced because they were specially outfitted by some "Middle Eastern" people, accord-

ing to Tovar. What's more, Urrego said they would never see a phone bill.

In fact, the satellite phones were provided by the DEA, which knew their phone numbers and arranged for U.S. eavesdroppers to easily listen in, the U.S. officials said.

Tovar told The Miami Herald he sent a messenger to pick up the four phones in Panama. Upon return, one of the telephones was confiscated by Colombian customs; Tovar kept one for himself and gave the others to a FARC commander in the Caguán River area known as Orlando Porcelana and to José Benito Cabrera Cuevas, second in command of the rebels' Southern Bloc.

Cabrera and his brother, Erminso Cuevas Cabrera, were among the 50 FARC members recently indicted in the United States. Tovar said he believes Cabrera later passed his NERA to a lower ranking FARC member, and that both phones are still in use. Tovar said that in 2004 Urrego provided him with four more satellite phones, this time manufactured by the Thrane&Thrane firm, but with supposedly the same untraceable protections as the NERAs.

After the new phones made it to the Caguán River region, Tovar added, he gave one to Jorge Briceño, alias Mono Jojoy, the FARC's head of military operations and a member of its overall high command. Suárez was also named in the recent U.S. indictment.

Tovar took one set for himself, gave another to Cabrera and passed the last to a FARC chieftain only known as Jairo Martínez, he said.

The scheme to sting the

FARC with U.S.-monitored communications equipment was first revealed by the website narconews.com when it published a 2004 memo written by then Justice Department attorney Thomas Kent partially describing the operation. A subsequent article by El Nuevo Herald revealed Urrego's role — and the fact that he even supplied the DEA with a video he shot surreptitiously of his jailhouse talks with FARC's Arteta about the phones — apparently in an effort to prove his ability to infiltrate the rebel organization.

Tovar's account also was verified to The Miami Herald by a FARC member who participated in the satellite phone deals but remains at large and did not want his name published for fear of capture.

RELEASED

Urrego was released from jail in September 2001 and could not be located for comment on this story. Arteta remains in a Colombian prison.

And Tovar, who was injured when he was captured last year, is still in prison, not feeling so good now about the telephone deal.

He says that he used his phones only for "friendly conversations, to talk to family and friends, not to talk drugs." And he insists the FARC commanders did the same.

But when told that the U.S. indictments against the guerrilla commanders were based in part on U.S. intercepts of FARC communications, he seemed to become resigned.

"I was tricked and entrapped," Tovar told The Miami Herald. "Whatever happened, happened."

MEDICARE

Late penalty waived for some

*DRUG PLAN, FROM 1A

mote the drug prescription plan and made a brief stop in Broward County at a conference on aging to press seniors and the disabled to sign up.

"Coming down the stretch toward the May 15 deadline, we want everybody to sign up," the president said at the Broward Community College north campus in Coconut Creek, where dozens of seniors were gathered at the Broward Aging Network conference. "We want people to understand that they are going to save a lot of money when it comes to prescription drugs."

The president spoke in a courtyard after watching volunteers help seniors with the Medicare Part D benefit and the more than 100 plans available in Florida. He shook hands, posed for photos and joked with about 60 people.

Bush's Florida tour this week touched off strenuous calls from Florida Democrats, including U.S. Rep. Debbie Wasserman Schultz, to extend the deadline. The congresswoman, whose district covers areas of South Broward and North Miami-Dade counties with heavy senior populations, said the seven-month enrollment period was unreasonable.

"I've had hundreds of calls to my office from people who are trying to figure out how to sign up, and they don't know where to begin," she said. "They're being asked to find information online [when they] haven't even touched a computer."

Eligible seniors who don't sign up by Monday will face an automatic 7 percent increase in their monthly premiums (or a 1 percent penalty per month). Enrollment for 2007 coverage opens in November.

Until Tuesday, low-income recipients who signed up late faced a percentage of the same penalty; that is now waived. Low-income recipients can enroll at any time.

To qualify as low-income,



PHIL LONG/MIAMI HERALD STAFF

MAKING HIS PITCH: President Bush pushes the drug plan's savings to a group of mostly seniors Tuesday at Sun City Center southeast of Tampa.

singles must earn no more than \$14,700 a year and couples less than \$19,800. They must also meet certain limits for assets, such as houses or other personal property.

STILL UNENROLLED

As of last week, about 190,000 eligible people in South Florida and about 500,000 statewide had not yet enrolled in a Part D plan, according to estimates by the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid. Nationwide, about five million of an estimated 42 million eligible seniors, many of them low-income, have not signed up, according to the White House. Some critics say the number is far higher.

In a recent report, the Kaiser Family Foundation found a bewildering array of choices and a difficult enrollment process were discouraging some seniors from signing up. And last week, the Government Accountability Office issued a report saying Medicare's telephone hot line frequently gave callers the wrong information.

The Bush administration noted the study was conducted between Jan. 17 and Feb. 7 and said those prob-

SMART BOX

EVENTS

These are free events hosted by My Medicare Matters to help seniors choose a plan and enroll during the sign-up period ending Monday.

- **Thursday,** St. George Community Center, 3501 NW Eighth St., Lauderhill. 12:30 to 7:00 p.m. Call: 954-791-1039.
- **Monday,** Mount Sinai Medical Center, 4300 Alton Rd., Miami Beach. 10:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. Call: 305 674-2600.

lems had been fixed. Insurance companies providing Part D plans say major glitches in the system have been smoothed.

After Jan. 1, when the benefit first kicked in, tens of thousands of seniors had not received their cards, could not get their medicines or were overcharged. Others found their plans didn't cover the drugs they needed.

Under the plan, the gov-

ernment will pay for almost all the cost of drugs for low-income seniors, as Bush pointed out in Coconut Creek. The president also talked about savings for beneficiaries at his second stop Tuesday morning, in Sun City Center, a community with a large senior population southeast of Tampa.

CO-PAYMENTS

However, even with the low-income subsidy — which eliminates premiums, deductibles and the standard plan's coverage gap — some seniors will still make co-payments of between \$1 and \$5 on the medications; before they were free.

A study issued Tuesday by the liberal-leaning Families USA, a healthcare advocacy group, found only one in four low income seniors had prescription drug coverage. In Florida, the report indicated, only 19 percent of 542,000 low-income seniors were covered under Part D.

"The president promised that this new program would substantially improve drug coverage for low-income seniors," Ron Pollack, executive director for the Washington, D.C.-based Families USA, said Tuesday in a conference call with reporters. "Unfortunately, these promises are much more rhetorical than they are real."

Some people in Sun City Center said they have seen different levels of savings, depending on the plan they chose and whether they can use generic drugs.

Andrew Billie, 68, said he settled on a plan that he figures will cut what has been a \$4,000-annual drug bill to about \$2,500.

"If I could save \$1,500, that would be great," Billie said. "I jumped on it."

Miami Herald staff writer Phil Long and Knight Ridder Washington correspondent Tony Pugh contributed to this report. It was also supplemented with material from the Associated Press and The Sun-Sentinel, which was designated as the media representative at the BCC event.

WHERE TO GET SUPPORT

FINDING HELP

- For an online list of counselors in Florida who can help select a Medicare drug plan, go to the Department of Elder Affairs website at <http://elderaffairs.state.fl.us/>
- For all states, go to www.healthassistancepartnership.org and click on "Medicare" in the left-hand column. Then click on "State Health Insurance Programs."

HOW TO PICK A PLAN AND ENROLL

Make sure you have the following before you call Medicare or anyone involved in assisting you:

- Your Medicare claim number.
- A list of the prescriptions you take, including the names, dosages in milligrams and number of times you take them each daily.
- Medicare hot line number: 1-800-638-6833.
- Paper and pen to take notes.

To find out what your savings will be, know how much you spend monthly or annually on your prescription medications. If you have Medicaid, you will be enrolled automatically in a Medicare-approved plan, but you can still choose your own plan.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Federal:

- Medicare hot line: 1-800-638-6833
- Center for Medicare and Medicaid Services: 1-800-633-4227
- AARP: 1-800-424-3410
- Administration on Aging: 1-800-677-1116

State:

- Aging with Dignity: 1-888-987-6543
- Florida Department of Elder Affairs: 1-800-963-5337
- Florida Department of Financial Services: 1-800-342-2762

Broward:

- Serving Health Insurance Needs of Elders (SHINE): 954-714-3464

Miami-Dade:

- Elder Helpline: 305-670-4357
- Alliance for Aging: 305-670-6500

U.S. SENATE

Democrats may block insurance measure

WASHINGTON — (AP) — Senate Democrats threatened Tuesday to delay Republican-backed legislation they said would scale back health insurance for millions. Republicans said the measure would allow small businesses to offer coverage to more workers.

The legislation, sponsored by Sen. Mike Enzi, R-Wyo., would enable businesses to join across state lines to buy health insurance. The pooling would give them enough clout to negotiate better rates, Enzi said. "This is something that small businesses have been asking for for almost 15 years."

Democrats said the plans would not meet people's needs because the legislation would preempt state requirements for certain coverage, such as mammograms or diabetes supplies. Enzi's aides said he would support some mandated coverage if a majority of the states requires it.

Senate Minority Leader Harry Reid, D-Nev., said Democrats also want to attach to the bill amendments to expand stem cell research and extend the Medicare drug benefit enrollment deadline. It's unlikely Republican leaders will agree.

"If we're not given the opportunity to offer amendments, I don't see how in good faith we could go forward with the legislation," Reid said.

Sen. Edward Kennedy, D-Mass., said the legislation marked "a retreat from our commitment to cancer. It's a retreat from our commitment to diabetes. It's a retreat from our commitment to mental health parity." He said it would let small businesses buy insurance that overrode state coverage requirements.

Democrats blocked action on two other GOP-supported bills on Monday. Both sought to limit the amount of money that patients can receive from medical malpractice cases.

Enzi said he was open to compromises, but the bill's prospects were unclear.