

## Kurds, Shiites near power-sharing deal

### N.C. contractors killed by bomb

By Todd Pitman  
The Associated Press

BAGHDAD, Iraq — Kurdish leaders said Sunday that they were nearing completion on a deal with the

dominant Shiite-led alliance on forming a coalition government at this week's National Assembly, while two American security contractors were killed and a third wounded by a roadside bomb south of the Iraqi capital.

The three contractors were working for Blackwater Security, a North Carolina-based contracting firm that

provides security for U.S. State Department officials in Iraq. They were attacked Saturday on the main road to Hillah, south of Baghdad, U.S. Embassy spokesman Bob Callahan said.

Two Iraqis also were killed and five wounded Sunday when a roadside bomb missed a U.S. convoy in al-Obeidi in southeastern Baghdad,

said Dr. Ali Karim of Kindi hospital, where the casualties were brought.

In the north, Kurdish leaders said they would go ahead with a deal they made with the Shiite-dominated United Iraqi Alliance last week to help form a coalition government when the 275-member National Assembly convenes on Wednesday.

See **DEAL**/Page A2

## Law may worsen teacher shortage

The Associated Press

CHARLOTTE — Sandy Fowler has taught for 13 years, has a master's degree, and is a former Mooresville school district teacher of the year.

But according to a new federal definition, though Fowler is nationally board certified, she's insufficiently qualified in the subjects she teaches. The problem is that Fowler teaches several subjects to students in an alternative school, and she hasn't "proven" herself in each topic.

It's a scenario that helps explain why educators across North Carolina worry a well-intentioned federal law could worsen statewide teacher shortages.

The No Child Left Behind Act requires school districts to show that all teachers in core academic subjects are "highly qualified" by next summer. Teachers must have earned a bachelor's degree, obtained a state license and proven their mastery of subjects they teach by methods such as taking a state test or undergoing evaluations.

In rapidly growing North Carolina — where districts add 10,000 teachers a year — educators warn they won't be able to hire enough who meet requirements under the law. One looming problem is the state's stringent licensing standards.

North Carolina requires teachers to score higher on a national test than some other states. Teachers moving from other parts of the country now have up to two years to earn North Carolina licenses. But under the federal law, they have to qualify before entering classrooms.

About 80 percent of the 110,000 teachers in North Carolina and South Carolina meet the federal requirements. The rest can choose either to receive additional training or retire.

The U.S. Education Department has not yet decided what penalties districts will face for not finding enough teachers meeting the standards.

High-poverty schools that receive federal aid and don't meet the requirement would have to send letters home, telling parents their children don't have highly qualified teachers.

If North Carolina's tougher standards deter teachers from moving to the state, that's a local decision, federal education officials said. The goal of the federal law is to boost student achievement, they said.

"A teacher cannot teach what he or she doesn't know," said Rene

See **LAW**/Page A2

## Speaker admits aiding lawmaker

### Rep. Jim Black helped create job for political ally

The Associated Press

RALEIGH — House Speaker Jim Black worked closely with the state to create a job for the man who kept him in power by switching political parties in 2003, according to documents that contradict Black's earlier comments.

Black and his press secretary have previously said that Black merely recommended former Rep. Michael Decker of Forsyth County for an existing job.

The documents show that Allen Rogers, Black's assistant for special projects, provided the state Department of Cultural Resources with salary recommendations, drafts for the position's qualifications and a vacancy announcement Jan. 21, nearly two weeks before the job was posted on the department's employment Web site.

Rogers' e-mail indicated that there was a desired employee for the job and urged that the job description be tailored to that person. The job was posted Feb. 2. Several people applied and a few were interviewed, officials said.

Two weeks later, Decker was hired at a salary of \$48,000 a year.

Black then transferred \$45,000 from a state fund that he controls to the department to help pay for it, according to a Feb. 18 e-mail message to the department from another Black aide.

Black confirmed in a telephone interview Saturday with The News & Observer of Raleigh that he helped create and fund the position to try to help Decker.

Decker switched to the Democratic Party just before the 2003 legislative session after 18 years as a Republican legislator. The change

See **ADMITS**/Page A2

## Duke makes it six in seven



Mike Krzyzewski, coach of the Duke University men's basketball team, cuts down the net Sunday after the Blue Devils beat Georgia Tech 69-64 to win the ACC Tournament at the MCI Center in Washington. Duke has won the tournament six times in the past seven years. For more on the game see the Sports front.

Peter Schumacher / Times-News



Peter Schumacher / Times-News

Hilda Hommer, 93, pauses from her work Wednesday at Loaves and Fishes in Burlington. Hommer has volunteered her time for the past two years.

## Local volunteer still going strong at 93

**REAL PEOPLE**  
with  
Jim Wicker

Hilda Hommer is tiny. She's energetic. And it would be no exaggeration to say she's got some vinegar in her.

More on that later.

Hommer may be 93 years old, but she's been a volunteer at Loaves &

Fishes Christian Food Ministry for the past two years.

"She's one of the best," said Brenda Ingle, manager of Loaves & Fishes. "She works as diligently as a lot of people who are half her age, or less. But, well, she is small — just a little person."

Ingle said she was among those at

See **STRONG**/Page A2

### Inside today



Accent . . . .D1  
Classifieds .C4  
Comics . . .D2

Crossword .D5  
Editorial . . .A4  
Good News .D6

Horoscope .D5  
Movies . . . .D5  
Obituaries .C2

Region . . . .C1  
Sports . . . .B1  
Television .D4



## City offers residents an insider's view

By James Moffat  
Times-News

Do Burlington residents really want to learn what it takes to run the city on a day-to-day basis?

Not only do city leaders think so, they believe those same people will pay for that opportunity.

The Burlington Government Academy will provide residents the chance to learn the ins and outs of city government through the eyes and experiences of the staff.

Burlington is accepting applications for the 10-week academy, which starts September 8. Classes would be on Thursday evenings.

Only the first 30 people over the age of 18 will be accepted.

According to the program's information packet, the Burlington Government Academy "unravels the mystery behind city government as...students go behind the scenes and talk face to face with city administrators and decision-makers."

Residents would attend classes taught by city staff members on topics such as law enforcement, water

and sewer services, parks and recreation and economic development.

Residents can also earn extra credit by attending Burlington City Council meetings and volunteering at a city-sponsored event or at the city-run Pet Adoption Center on Stone Quarry Road.

The \$25 tuition will cover the cost of course materials, refreshments, diplomas and a graduation ceremony and reception at the end of the academy.

Jennifer Smith, the city's public information officer, said the academy offers the city a chance to find people interested in serving on citizen advisory boards and commissions. "I think it's a good way to find folks," Smith said.

City leaders said having a cost associated with the program would encourage only those residents really interested in the program to sign up. "Having a cost makes people more committed," Mayor Stephen Ross said. "They take it more seriously."

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### Government academy

A sample of course offerings in the Burlington Government Academy:

■ **So You Wanna Graduate from Citizen U**

Topics: Introduction & Overview of Course; Local Government 101 and How To Balance a City Budget

■ **Cultivating Culture**

Topic: Parks and Recreation

■ **Come Fly With Me**

Topics: Growing, Growing, Growing... Economic Development, Planning and Zoning, Inspections, Community Development & Land-Use  
Optional City Bus Tour Beginning at 3:00 p.m.

■ **Constitutional Connection/Putting It All Together**

Topic: Panel Discussion with City Council, Department Heads