

Bush pressured to sign Sudan's divestment bill

Crawford, Texas (AP) - President Bush signed legislation Monday to allow states and local governments to cut investment ties with Sudan because of the violence in Darfur.

But in doing so, Bush made clear that he will construe the law as he chooses to make sure that lower governments do not try to intrude on the powers of the federal government.

The bill permits state, county and municipal officials to adopt measures to

divest their government investments from companies involved in the four sectors that provide vital revenue for Sudan's government's oil, power production, mining and military equipment.

"I share the deep concern of the Congress over the continued violence in Darfur perpetrated by the government of Sudan and rebel groups," Bush said in a statement.

Bush's administration has for weeks objected to letting state and local governments adopt divestment policies

that delve into foreign policy, a traditional federal role.

Nevertheless, Bush signed the bill, which was approved with strong support in Congress.

Bush said the legislation risks being interpreted in such a way that "could interfere with implementation of national foreign policy."

He emphasized that the Constitution gives the federal government the authority to handle foreign relations, and that the "executive branch shall construe and enforce

this legislation in a manner that does not conflict with that authority."

The aim is to pressure Sudan to ease suffering in its Darfur region.

Hundreds of thousands of people have been killed and millions driven from their homes in four years of violence in the Darfur region since ethnic African rebels took up arms against militia supported by the Arab-dominated central government.

The new law allows mutual fund and private pension fund managers to cut ties with companies involved in the major economic sectors, and provides investment managers a safe harbor from lawsuits.

The new economic pressures come on top of existing sanctions against the Khartoum government.

Bush said his administration will keep pushing for major improvements for the people of Sudan through "sanctions against the gov-

ernment of Sudan and high-level diplomatic engagement, and by supporting the deployment of peacekeepers in Darfur."

White House officials said that despite the legislation's intentions, it could raise fundamental problems.

They predicted, for example, that a patchwork of divestment policies may conflict with a presidential decision to ease sanctions one day.

And the legislation could invite a messy precedent, with localities boycotting business with nations the federal government sees as strategic partners, White House aides said.

Bush's constitutional concerns about the bill raised the question of why he signed it. White House spokesman Scott Stanzel said Bush did so because he broadly agrees that doing business with Sudan should be discouraged.

Speculation is that Bush was reluctant to sign the legislation, but bowed to pressure from a wide range of forces — civil rights leaders, entertainment celebrities, political leaders — to sign the bill that proponents say will help pressure the Sudanese government to stop the genocide taking place in the Darfur region of the country.

The administration will monitor reports of divestment decisions by states, Stanzel said, and will step in as needed by taking "all appropriate and legal actions available."

The White House's concerns deal with any financial decisions that could interfere with foreign policy, not just with the sectors of the economy targeted in the bill, he said.

Bush signed the bill at his ranch in central Texas, where he was taking a few days of quiet time before returning to Washington on New Year's Day.

Census data: Louisiana on slow road to renaissance

WASHINGTON (AP) - Louisiana appears to be rebounding from the devastation of Hurricane Katrina, gaining 50,000 residents in the year ending July 1, according to new Census Bureau state population estimates released recently.

After the storm hit in August 2005, the bureau estimated the state lost 250,000 residents from displacement and casualties. Despite the most recent gain, the state is far from returning to its pre-Katrina population level of 4.5 million.

The Census Bureau estimate is reached by measuring births, deaths and migration into and out of each of the 50 states, the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico.

In Louisiana, the Census estimates a net increase of people moving into the state from other states of 29,000, accounting for more than half the jump.

The bureau will release county population breakdowns in the spring, which should give a clearer indication of exactly how many residents have returned to the parishes in and around New Orleans.

Earlier this week, urban planning consultancy firm GCR & Associates estimated New Orleans' population at 300,000, or about 65 percent of its pre-Hurricane Katrina size, which was around 455,000.

GCR chief executive and New Orleans native Greg Rigamer said people have been coming back to the city at a rate of 3,000 to 4,000 per month, which includes in-state migration. Things are looking up, but the city still suffers from failing infrastructure, poor healthcare

and educational services and a "horrific" criminal justice problem.

"Things are not all well in New Orleans," he said.

"They are clearly getting better. It's no time to be popping the champagne corks."

The Constitution requires the Census Bureau to count the population every 10 years. The results are used to allocate seats in the U.S. House of Representatives as well as electoral votes.

This year's state population estimates are consistent with previous years that show high-growth states like Texas will likely gain seats in Congress, while slow-growth states such as Ohio will likely lose seats.

The fastest-growing states continue to be in the Rocky Mountain region and the Southeast. Texas also is still attracting new residents at a rapid rate.

Nevada regained the title of fastest-growing state, having increased in population by 2.9 percent to 2.6 million. Nevada had held that title for 19 years in a row before being bumped off by Arizona last year.

Arizona is the second-fastest-growing state according to the current estimate, with a population increase of 2.8 percent to 6.3 million.

Besides Nevada and Arizona, other Western states that made the top 10 list for fastest growth were Utah (third), Idaho (fourth), Colorado (eighth) and Wyoming (ninth).

Texas, meanwhile, had the seventh-fastest growth by percentage and tops numerically, having drawn about 500,000 new residents.

California remains the nation's most populous state

with about 37 million people. It gained about 300,000 new residents, second to Texas numerically, but 25th fastest by rate of growth, the same ranking as last year.

The total U.S. population was estimated at 301.6 million last July 1.

Your Horoscope Says... January 3-9

ARIES

Your money instincts are itchy! Go ahead and scratch, because you've got the golden touch this week. Promise yourself that you'll take at least one small step toward your dreams each day this week. You go!

Soul Affirmation: I seek connection with the best that is in me.

Lucky Numbers: 11, 20, 25

TAURUS

A loved one may feel a bit neglected as you pursue your material dreams with vigor this week. Time set aside for this person after you've made some gains will prove to be extra sweet. Try not to push a mate's understanding nature too far, though.

Soul Affirmation: My needs will be met if I just ask.

Lucky Numbers: 7, 13, 17

GEMINI

Stay open-minded this week and you'll actually feel the good vibrations! Co-workers will wonder at the smile on your face, but let it be your secret for now. Your smile itself will make others smile about their own lives.

Soul Affirmation: I smile as I think about far away places.

Lucky Numbers: 31, 36, 47

CANCER

Big appetites this week. Indulge at least one of your passions, and then get back to work. You are making incredible strides toward your dream by just reminding yourself of it. Drive carefully and pay attention to brake lights.

Soul Affirmation: Smooth communications is the key to my success this week.

Lucky Numbers: 27, 29, 44

LEO

Relax a bit and review your things-to-do list. Move methodically, and check off each item as you complete them. You'll be surprised by the progress you are making. Spend the afternoon with family, and friends.

Soul Affirmation: This week, family is the source of my joy.

Lucky Numbers: 2, 50, 52

VIRGO

Your best self is on parade this week. And wow! You look good! Co-workers will beat a path to your cubicle, so be prepared to turn chatterboxes away gently. Give your honey a phone call or send a loving e-mail.

Soul Affirmation: I open myself up to the vibrations of love.

Lucky Numbers: 18, 21, 28

LIBRA

This week's a good week to approach that person you've been wondering about. While you've been working very hard, you need to play, too. Good playmates make work seem more rewarding to you.

Soul Affirmation: I master life by mastering myself.

Lucky Numbers: 23, 37, 51

SCORPIO

Can you take a week off from work? It's a perfect week to relax with a loved one in one of your favorite ways. Even if you can only spend a few hours decompressing, you'll be surprised at how little it takes to feel bliss this week.

Soul Affirmation: I let the outer world and inner world change places this week.

Lucky Numbers: 34, 45, 46

SAGITTARIUS

Vibrations this week make everyone

feel as if the Universe has given them another chance. Your fresh start may come in a romantic area. Buy a bouquet of flowers for your partner on your way home from work. See what happens.

Soul Affirmation: I celebrate freedom of mind this week.

Lucky Numbers: 15, 24, 26

CAPRICORN

A short trip for business reasons gives you a little personal space to make some notes to yourself. Remember your best self, and keep a positive outlook. Buy a lottery ticket this week at your destination, or watch for some other type of "found" money.

Soul Affirmation: I judge no one, especially myself this week.

Lucky Numbers: 14, 19, 32

AQUARIUS

Your home may need some of your attention. This is a fine week to check the fire alarm battery, put away gardening equipment or redecorate your dining area. The results of a shopping trip for new bed linens will please you very much.

Soul Affirmation: I keep my smile shining, especially at home.

Lucky Numbers: 16, 38, 40

PISCES

Spend some time in the company of friends early in the week, then spend your afternoon relaxing. Your ability to tune out and mediate on the goodness that surrounds you comes easy. Let the good vibrations massage you with bliss.

Soul Affirmation: I let positive emotions carry me through the week.

Lucky Numbers: 5, 33, 55