

## Eye on Washington by Nicholas F. Benton

### Pat Buchanan's desperation move

Fire-breathing Pat Buchanan of the Republican Party right wing caught everyone by surprise by putting a halt to growing speculation about his running for President. ABC's Sam Donaldson dared Buchanan to run at White House press briefings nearly every day. Buchanan issued a statement, saying that "it would be a Pickett's Charge of the American Right" if he became a candidate.

Buchanan's action came on the eve of a three-day gathering of the Republican National Committee. The Republicans are staring at an upcoming presidential race that looks gloomier for them than the disarray on the Democratic side.

Buchanan's early pull-out can only be seen as an effort to salvage a virtually hopeless situation for the GOP. He claimed he did it to avoid splitting party conservatives by taking support away from Rep. Jack Kemp. Kemp has only a 5% showing in the polls even though he's made no secret of his intention to run since the time that there was nothing much to talk about at the Republican National Convention in Dallas two and a half years ago.

The Republicans know that things are only going to get worse for President Reagan. "Irangate" wouldn't be such a problem, voter-wise, if it weren't for the economy. "Irangate" is simply giving the farmers and industrial workers who have been wiped out

by the Reagan "economic miracle" the last six years more vent for their frustrations.

Picture this: The elf-like Beryl Sprinkel (the epitome of what Buchanan has called the Don Regan "mice" or yes-men) came into the White House briefing room Jan. 21 to recite his latest litany about the Reagan recovery, and was unable to respond to a question from this reporter about the statistics showing that 60% of the jobs created in the U.S. since 1980 pay under \$7,000 a year. "Oh, yes, I've heard that statistic," Sprinkel said. "But I haven't time to check it out."

Even in Sprinkel's rosy projections—which ignored the trade-war threat—was the admission that the economic picture is going to look worse in 1987. Only one day after Sprinkel bragged about the 1.1% inflation rate for 1986, the news came out that the official Gross National Product grew a "sluggish" 2.5%, much lower than expected, for the year. Sprinkel admitted that he projects a fourfold increase in the growth of the inflation rate in 1987, based on oil prices going back up, and that big interderminate factor called "adjustment to the new tax laws."

The Republicans realize that they are looking at a situation in which, by 1988, the Democrats could elect almost anyone but Boy George. They are trying to close ranks. But Buchanan's was an act of supreme futility as things now stand.

### Mayors commiserate in deep freeze

A heavy snowstorm hit Washington the day the National Conference of Mayors began, symbolic of the reception they got from the federal budget-cutters here. The roster of mayors in attendance is dramatically down from

recent years, as lean municipal budgets have made out-of-town travel a political liability for any incumbent.

Even the staunchest Republican mayors are unable to repress their pessimism over the direction of administration economic policies. One example, lankey Mayor William Hudnut of Indianapolis, told me that after the war, 48% of Indiana's workforce was working in industrial production; the total is now under 20%. He said the shutdown of two large plants—a General Motors and an AT&T facility—in his city in recent months has dealt a heavy blow.

Predictably, the chairman of the Arts, Culture, and Recreation workshop at the mayors' conference was Houston's Kathy Whitmire, who is trying to sell her constituents on the idea that 20% unemployment and 67% vacancy rates in all those office buildings and apartment houses that just lost their tax shelter status won't stop "growth"; not as long as the baseball team keeps winning, and legalized gambling down the road in Galveston is approved by the voters.

Whitmire's idea of "arts and culture" was the "Rendez-Vous Houston" light show and concert held in downtown Houston last year, in which light beams were bounced off downtown skyscrapers while heavy-metal rock music was performed. Forget that Houston was once, only six years ago, the biggest export port in America, she implied. This is how we're going to "make it" from now on.

Whitmire's counterpart from San Francisco, Mayor Dianne Feinstein, had a much more serious panel to chair—on AIDS. But its focus was on programs for "education," rather than evaluating the species-threatening impact of the administration's proposed cutbacks in Medicaid funds, and lack of leadership to prevent the spread of this pandemic.