

National News

Welfare cuts eliminate child disability support

The federal government has sent out letters to the parents of 260,000 children who receive supplemental disability payments through Social Security, informing them that their eligibility for benefits will be reviewed, according to the Nov. 29 *Washington Post*. An estimated 100,000 to 200,000 children may be eliminated from the program.

Prior to the passage of the welfare "reform" law, benefits were granted to children who suffer from cerebral palsy, autism, diabetes, and mental retardation (about 1 million children nationally). Children were eligible for benefits if they were considered unable to engage in activities appropriate for their ages. The new bill has narrowed eligibility to those whose impairments result in "marked or severe functional limitations." The new restrictions are projected to save \$7 billion over the next six years, at the children's expense. Benefits will be cut beginning June 1997, unless the Clinton administration intervenes.

Bush-men hysterical over campaign against Starr

Flunkies for ex-President George Bush are foaming at the mouth, about Democratic political consultant James Carville's declared campaign against Whitewater special prosecutor Kenneth Starr. "It is totally inappropriate for him to be in a campaign against a publicly appointed prosecutor," said Bush's former general counsel C. Boyden Gray, in an interview in the Nov. 27 *Washington Times*.

"There is no basis to say that he [Starr] is biased or unfair or conflicted in any way," Gray continued. "It is a dangerous thing for Carville to be engaged in this, and it is a dangerous thing for the rule of law in this country." Mark Levin, a former Reagan-Bush official in the Department of Justice, suggested that Starr should now investigate Carville's funding and associates!

In reply, Carville asked, "How can it be that you can attack the President, you can attack the pope, you can attack the American Red Cross, you can attack anything you want, but it's inappropriate to attack Ken Starr? Where is it written that Ken Starr is above the Constitution? I am waiting for the appropriate authority to say that it is inappropriate for me to say what I think of Ken Starr. I am looking for the relevant statute, the relevant part of the Constitution, or anything else."

Gray was less than cooperative with the Iran-Contra special prosecutor, when Gray's boss, George Bush, was being investigated. Former independent counsel Lawrence Walsh emphasized, in his final report on those investigations, that Bush failed to produce the diary which he began keeping in late 1986. Although the diary should have been provided to Walsh's office in 1987, Walsh was not notified of its existence until December 11, 1992—after the Presidential election.

"Much of the evidence relating to the failure to produce the diary," Walsh reported, "focuses on Gray, Bush's counsel as vice president and as President, and his deputy [John] Schmitz. . . . Gray and Schmitz refused to be interviewed by Independent Counsel."

Austerity 'experts' find budget cuts hit the poor

The Center for Budget and Policy Priorities issued a report Nov. 26, which notes that the budget cuts imposed by the 104th Congress fall disproportionately "on the backs of the poor." That finding should come as no surprise, because that was the Gingrichites' intent; but the think-tank's "balanced-budget" advocates now argue that such brutal austerity should be made more "equitable."

No wonder. The study reports that cuts in low-income entitlement programs will amount to \$61 billion over the next six years, accounting for 93% of all entitlement reductions, even though such programs comprise only 23% of total entitlement spending. The figures do not include chain-reaction cutbacks in state programs which result from the Federal budget reductions, especially

those in the welfare "reform" bill enacted last summer.

According to the study, job training programs were cut by 22% in the FY 97 budget from FY 95 levels, housing programs by 29%, and low-income discretionary programs by a total of 10.2%. "The disproportionate reductions in programs for low-income families and individuals," it concludes, "will affect virtually all types of low-income households," including "low-income working families with children and the low-income elderly and disabled."

Robert Greenstein, the Center's executive director, said it is impossible to quantify the effects of these cuts. But the implication is, "when the two parties and their political leaders are unable to take on some of the areas of the budget that are tougher and more politically controversial, but where savings can be made, we slide toward a situation in which those who have the weakest voices and don't have an array of either campaign contributions or powerful representatives in Washington working for them, tend to do least well."

Cardinal O'Connor links Social Darwinism, Nazism

In his Nov. 24 homily at St. Patrick's Cathedral in New York City, Cardinal John O'Connor called attention to the millions of people who are homeless, naked, and hungry "right here in our streets or in the horrors of Rwanda." In repudiating any attempts to justify such conditions, he turned to Pope John Paul II's recent statement on evolution.

"Our Holy Father is saying that biological evolution is not what is crucial, but that we truly believe in the sacredness of every human person, because each comes from the hands of Almighty God," Cardinal O'Connor declared. "What has most drastically affected the world and our culture is not the question of biological evolution, but what has been called 'social evolution,' 'social Darwinism,' the concept of rugged individualism, the principle of the survival of the fittest in society. This principle leaves no room for the misfit, for the poor, for the homeless. . . ."

"All of this is in reality little more than a disguise of Nietzsche's 'superman' on which the Nazi society was built, that the powerful individual determines what is right or wrong, good or bad. The superman, the superwoman is not bound by ordinary conventions of morality, and certainly not bound by the Gospel teachings of Christ. Perhaps this has never been spelled out more dramatically than in Dostoyevsky's *Crime and Punishment*."

Teachers union wants to end educational 'fads'

American Federation of Teachers President Albert Shanker issued a statement Nov. 20, urging the U.S. educational system to reject "the latest fads" and establish a more rigorous curriculum. Shanker took the occasion of the release of the Third International Math and Science Study to make his pitch.

According to the study, American eighth-graders are below average in math, and above average in science achievement, compared to their peers in 40 other countries. "If we take seriously what we can learn from countries whose students surpass ours," Shanker said, "this study upends some of the conventional wisdom about what our schools need. What we don't need to worry about is a longer school day and year, diversity, and shifting public money to private schools.

"Our students spend more actual time in class than their German and Japanese counterparts," Shanker noted, "and teachers in all three countries cite 'diversity of student ability' as a challenge in their teaching. None of the countries with the highest achieving students has a voucher program like those proposed for American schools. What we do need to worry about is how time in the classroom is used and the content of what is taught."

Shanker urged U.S. educational policymakers to "stop tinkering around the edges of our education system and toying with the latest fads." He called for "fundamental changes," including "high standards for all students, a solid curriculum with challenging academic content, and a serious, disciplined environment for learning. To make

all of this work well, we need better teacher education programs and tougher requirements for teacher credentials. . . . How many reports, studies, and commissions will it take before we finally make these commonsense changes?"

Consumer debt rising at twice the rate of wages

According to the Nov. 24 *Washington Post*, the Federal Reserve estimates that consumer debt in the United States has now reached \$1.4 trillion, and is growing at an annual rate exceeding twice that of wages. The Fed places total household debt at nearly 95% of annual income at the end of 1995—up from less than 60% in 1960, and less than 75% in 1980. Most of the debt is for home mortgages, but consumer debt alone has now risen to more than 20% of annual income.

One result of this phenomenon is the growth in personal bankruptcies, now expected to exceed 1 million by the end of 1996. Credit card delinquencies are at the highest level since the American Bankers Association began keeping records in 1974. The banks issuing the credit cards are not worried, the *Post* claims. After all, the credit card companies are making a killing in interest charges. The Federal Deposit Insurance Corp. reports it to be substantial. Commercial bankers had a gross interest yield for credit card lending in 1995 of 13.79%, compared with 8.17% for commercial and industrial loans, and 8.43% for other consumer loans. The credit-card racketeers are now also opening up "risk-based pricing," which offers credit at levels as high as 29.9% to those with poor credit histories.

"Experts" are quoted saying the trend seems odd, because those going bankrupt are acting as if they are good credit risks, right up to bankruptcy. Half of those recently filing for bankruptcy were never delinquent on any loan, said one source. Financial fantasizing also apparently remains on the rise: Ford Elsaesser, vice-president of the American Bankruptcy Institute, told a House Banking Committee recently that "the rapid increase in consumer [bankruptcy] filings during a period of economic growth has no precedent in modern times."

Briefly

GEORGE BUSH'S compulsive search for any cash cow he can milk is gaining general notoriety. A Nov. 26 editorial in the *Boston Herald* commented, "What does bother us is former Presidents lending their names to a church for a fat fee. George Bush appeared in Argentina Saturday at a launching of a newspaper owned by the Rev. Sun Myung Moon, reportedly for \$100,000. We'd feel better if he'd just endorse some golf clubs."

VIRGINIA GOVERNOR George Allen, defending plans to execute five more prisoners before Christmas, says if people disagree with his denying appeals for clemency, that's "tough, tough luck." Virginia ranks third in the country in executions, since the death penalty was reimposed in 1976. Richard Kern, executive director of the Virginia sentencing commission, boasts that the state is "numero uno when it comes to punishing violent offenders."

THE BRITISH are already drooling over their plans to install George W. Bush as the next President of the United States. The London *Economist*, widely recognized as a monarchical mouthpiece, recently touted George II's "pleasing mix of vision and pragmatism," and his "conservative reformism" on such issues as cutting taxes, "tougher sentences for juveniles," and restricting appeals by death-row inmates, "to speed the executioners' work."

A NEW BIOGRAPHY of deceased millionaire Armand Hammer, by Edward Jay Epstein, claims that the infamous oligarchical player kept a stable of mistresses, whom he routinely sexually abused; and that he stole his second wife's sizable family inheritance to build up Occidental Petroleum.

SEN. JOHN GLENN (D-Ohio) has proposed that China should join in developing the international space station. The former astronaut presented the idea to Chinese President Jiang Zemin, during meetings with a U.S. delegation to Beijing in November.