

National News

Clinton: NASA achieves 'impossible missions'

NASA is where "impossible missions are accomplished by remarkable people," President Clinton told employees at NASA's Johnson Space Center in Houston, during a visit on April 14. President Clinton was given a tour of the facilities by former Mir crew member David Wolf and other astronauts, and spoke with Sen. John Glenn (D-Ohio), 76, who is in training for a flight on the Space Shuttle next year. He also spoke by phone to the crew of the next Space Shuttle mission, at the Kennedy Space Center in Florida, and which was set to launch on April 16 for a 16-day mission to study neurological changes in microgravity.

President Clinton referred to the experiments on aging to which Glenn will contribute on his mission, and those that will be conducted on the Neurolab Shuttle mission: "We are living longer than ever before. . . . It is imperative that we live healthier than ever before. That requires not only the maintenance of our physical health, but the continuing fires of our imagination. . . . It is imperative that we learn as much as we can about the aging process. . . . It's also imperative that we hold up as role models, people who, in their mid-70s, still dare to dream new dreams. And I think we should all learn a lesson from that, whether we go into space, or not."

Virginia defies world protest, executes Breard

Both Virginia Gov. Jim Gilmore—a "law and order" Republican—and the U.S. Supreme Court defied demands from the International Court of Justice at The Hague and a request from the Secretary of State Madeleine Albright to delay execution of Paraguayan citizen Angel Breard, who was killed on April 14. The World Court and Mrs. Albright based their arguments on the fact that Breard's right to contact his embassy under the Vienna Convention was denied when he was arrested in 1993. On April 9, the World Court requested the U.S. to stop the execu-

tion, until the judges consider whether Breard should receive a new trial on the basis that Virginia had violated his rights. This is the first known intervention in a U.S. criminal matter by the World Court.

While Secretary Albright urged Gilmore to stay the execution, the Justice Department, ultimately with the sanction of the Supreme Court, put its imprimatur on the execution, employing the usual "procedural arguments." Had Breard been allowed to consult the Paraguayan consul, his attorneys argued, he would have been advised to accept a plea agreement, under which he would have to serve life in prison. Virginia acknowledges that it violated the Vienna Convention, but shrugs that Breard got a fair trial anyway.

The Breard execution underscores a recent report from the UN Human Rights Commission that some U.S. states ride roughshod over the law in their rush to carry out the death penalty.

U.S. diplomatic activity gears up throughout Asia

The Clinton administration is intensifying its diplomatic activities in Asia, in anticipation of President Clinton's trips to China and India this year. On April 9-11, Undersecretary of State for Political Affairs Thomas Pickering was in Beijing for meetings with Chinese officials, to discuss "global, regional and bilateral issues of mutual concern."

Soon after, Undersecretary of Commerce for International Trade David Aaron travelled to Beijing, Shanghai, and Hong Kong from April 13-18. Accompanying him was a delegation of 18 business leaders, many of whom are from small and medium-sized business, encompassing industries with expertise in "infrastructure . . . engineering, design and construction, information technologies, machine tools, insurance and project finance," according to a Commerce Department release.

UN Ambassador Bill Richardson left on April 10, for visits to Afghanistan, Pakistan, India, Sri Lanka, and Bangladesh. According to an unnamed senior administration official cited by the April 9 *Washington Post*,

Richardson is expected to deliver a strong message to Afghanistan's Taliban government, that the United States will not recognize the regime, until a broad-based government is established in Kabul. According to the *Post*, he will speak both as a U.S. representative, and on behalf of the group comprised of Afghanistan's six neighbors plus Russia, and the United States. The *Post* notes that Afghanistan policy is one area where Iran and the United States are cooperating.

From April 28-May 2, Secretary of State Madeleine Albright will travel to Japan, China, Korea, and Mongolia, the first of four trips to the region this year. The focus of this trip includes the "situation on the Korean peninsula; the Asian financial crisis; progress toward free, fair and credible elections in Cambodia, and Burma (Myanmar)."

FBI racist sting trial in Houston falling flat

The first four weeks of testimony in the Houston trial of African-American elected officials and lobbyists have shown up the desperation of the FBI agents who conducted the sting, and the corruption within the Department of Justice (DOJ). Defense attorney Dick DeGuerin said, "They want to corrupt people. They want to create crime."

The trial, which opened on March 11, is the product of an elaborate sting operation designed by FBI special agent Ron Stern, who also ran the 1990 entrapment of Washington, D.C. Mayor Marion Barry. Stern's gang from the Public Integrity Section of the FBI, created a dummy corporation to run a sting, using job-creation programs for minorities to incriminate minority elected officials.

The defense knocked two holes in the DOJ's case: First, there is no evidence of a crime, since the defendants already supported the program, and assumed that "contributions" offered by the dummy company—which were less than the limit for campaign contributions—were legitimate campaign donations. Second, the FBI's dummy investor, Julio Molineiro, served time in Paraguay, was later fired as an informant for the Drug Enforcement Administration, and currently has 27 arrest warrants outstanding from Chile and Paraguay.