
National News

Neo-Con Podhoretz Stumps for Al Gore

Al Gore would be the strongest candidate that the Democrats could field in 2004, claimed *New York Post* columnist John Podhoretz, himself a neo-con, Kennedy-hating Republican, on Aug. 21.

Podhoretz acknowledges that many Democrats are against Gore, and would like to dump him, the same way many Democrats turned against Walter Mondale and Michael Dukakis after their failed bids in 1984 and 1988, respectively. But it would be foolish for Democrats to turn against Gore, Podhoretz slyly advises, claiming that Gore is in the best position, because he's the best known, that he comes with a great story—"The Rematch Following the Closest Election Ever"—and that he could even come at the nomination as an "outsider," this time around.

Backlash Against Use of Ritalin

Opposition is growing to the use of Ritalin and its competitor drugs for childhood "attention deficit" disorders, according to a *New York Times* report on Aug. 21. Several states have acted to prevent schools and social service agencies from mandating such drugs, and a backlash is occurring over the move by Ritalin's competitors to advertise their drugs for Attention Hyperactivity Deficit Disorder directly to parents, rather than only to doctors.

Minnesota is the first state to bar such mandating by state agencies. Connecticut will enact an even tougher law in October, and there are bills introduced in Arizona, New Jersey, New York, Utah, and Wisconsin.

The use of Ritalin and its competitors has taken off in recent years, going from 13 million monthly prescriptions in 1995, when it was approved, to nearly 20 million in 2000. Sales of the drugs in 2000 rose 13% over 1999. Young boys, in particular, are victimized by schools and other agencies that attribute their restiveness to this syndrome. Yet Ritalin (and its competitors) are

Schedule II controlled substances, which are seriously addictive.

Prueher Says China No Threat to U.S.A.

Former U.S. Ambassador to China Adm. Joseph Prueher, during a speech in Seattle on Aug. 17, played down the capabilities of China's military, the *South China Morning Post* reported on Aug. 18. "Is China a threat?" he asked. "As a military person, I say, not really."

Prueher said that the People's Liberation Army is "not very potent" as a fighting force, even though China yearns for a strong military to match its position in the world. He said that the United States should negotiate with China from a position of strength, but that it should also treat China with respect. He also warned against pressuring China too hard on "democratic reforms." "If we push too hard for openness, there'll be resistance."

Iran-Contra Players Join Administration

There is growing controversy in Washington, over the fact that President George W. Bush has appointed a number of "Iran-Contra" bigshots to senior positions, reported Duncan Campbell, Los Angeles correspondent for the London *Guardian*, on Aug. 20.

Most controversial, is the appointment of Elliott Abrams, former Assistant Secretary of State under President Reagan, to head the National Security Council's Office of Democracy, Human Rights and International Operations. Campbell notes that Abrams described himself as a "gladiator" for the Reagan-Bush policies in Central America. During the late 1980s Senate hearings about concealment of information regarding illegal government activities, Sen. Thomas Eagleton (D-Mo.) warned Abrams that lack of cooperation could lead to "slammer time." Abrams responded, "You've heard my testimony," to which Eagleton replied, "I've heard it, and I want to puke."

Other appointments include John Ne-

groponte, Iran-Contra era U.S. Ambassador in Honduras, where the Nicaraguan Contras were based, as Dubya's UN Ambassador; and Otto Reich as Assistant Secretary of State for Western Hemispheric Affairs. Abrams didn't need confirmation, but there will be a big battle over the Negroponte and Reich appointments, the *Guardian* says.

One Washington source cited by Campbell warned about bringing back the "Contra Alumni Association" into the U.S. government.

New Bush Assault on Medicaid Beneficiaries

Health and Human Services Secretary Tommy Thompson on Aug. 4 announced a ruthless new attack on Medicaid beneficiaries. The "Health Insurance Flexibility and Accountability Initiative" will allow states to cut benefits of Medicaid patients and force them to pay higher co-pays for treatment and medications. Medicaid is the Federal-state health insurance program for indigent families, the elderly, and about 7 million disabled individuals.

HMO protector Bush will deny basic life-saving protections to some 20 million patients in Medicaid managed care plans, and will defer regulation of managed care plans that contract with Medicaid. The regulations had been announced by President Bill Clinton, and would assure Medicaid managed care patients basic rights, such as the right to emergency care at any hospital without prior authority by their HMO, the right to timely specialist care, and the right to appeal negligent decisions by HMOs. Another regulation provided that the Medicaid HMO/managed care plans must have enough physicians to care for all the needs of the population. It is well known that once that an HMO has a Medicaid contract, utilization of medical services by Medicaid patients is slashed.

The Clinton regulations were part of a 1997 deal that gave states the right to force Medicaid beneficiaries into cheaper managed care plans without Federal approval, in exchange for substantial new protections for Medicaid patients. Now these protections, like those included in the Bipartisan Patient Protection Act which Bush is working so hard to kill, are to be deferred.