

## Eye on Washington by Nicholas F. Benton

### Defense cuts flaunt Cap's 'dire warnings'

White House spokesman Larry Speakes expressed frustration when he noted to this reporter July 2 that the agreement between the House and Senate to slash \$28 billion off the administration's FY 1987 defense budget request was done "despite repeated dire warnings from Secretary Weinberger."

Caspar Weinberger insisted in congressional testimony down to the eve of the vote June 27 that every penny of the \$319 billion request was indispensable to keep the Soviets from exploiting a growing strategic military advantage.

Reacting to reports that certain congressmen will attempt to reorient the Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI) from population defense to a mere "point defense" of missile silos, Weinberger held an unscheduled press briefing at the Pentagon July 1 to lash out at this insanity.

The move to re-focus the SDI came out of the Senate Armed Services Committee, led by its ranking minority member, Sen. Sam Nunn (D-Ga.) with the support of Maine Republican William Cohen. The Republican-controlled committee voted 10-9 in favor of this position.

Weinberger pointed out that congressional cuts in defense requests

have totaled \$328 billion in the last four years—equal to an entire year's defense spending. "Thus," he said, "We've been required to try to keep pace with the Soviets over the last five years with only four years worth of funding."

The FY 1987 request of \$5.4 billion for the SDI was cut by Congress to \$3.8 billion—almost 30%—with 48 senators still on record as dedicated to shaving that figure to \$3.0 billion.

Despite the successful test of a "point defense" experiment July 1 called FLAGE (flexible lightweight agile guided experiment), Weinberger is insistent that the cornerstone of the SDI must be a forward-directed defense that uses long-range lasers to hit attacking Soviet missiles as they take off.

### New government AIDS program a sham

The Department of Health and Human Services is more interested in offering cost-efficient placebos than anything capable of dealing with the AIDS crisis. This became evident with the much-heralded new program announced June 30, which will parcel out a meager \$20 million a year for the next five years, to 14 test facilities.

These facilities will involve a handful of AIDS victims in experiments using about a dozen drugs developed in the nation's losing war against the most dangerous virus ever known.

Whereas there are conceivable benefits from this program, should an effective therapy be developed, the paltry funding, the low numbers involved in the testing (estimated to be only 1,000 after the first six months), and the fact the program involves drugs which have already been found to be generally ineffective, gives the whole

thing a "snake oil salesman" aroma. It seems designed to offer more in the way of unfounded hope than real cures. Most importantly, it fits neatly into the budget.

Even more shocking was the admission by Deputy Health Secretary James Windom, when confronted by this reporter June 30, that almost all the 179,000 who will die of AIDS in the next five years contracted the virus after the AIDS antibody test had been developed in 1983. Public Health officials who refused to deploy this test weapon to stop the spread of the virus with universal screening and quarantine, must face the fact that their neglect has doomed three times the number of Americans who died in the Vietnam War.

Dr. Windom's admission of such "war crimes," accompanied by plaintive references to "the wisdom of hindsight," makes monstrously more criminal his agency's continuing policy against such measures, and places the lives of tens of millions of Americans in jeopardy.

As far as the persistent argument that AIDS cannot be "casually transmitted," as officials at the Centers for Disease Control still hold, even experts in the field, whatever their official view, have instincts which are very different.

During congressional hearings on the status of AIDS research on July 1, when an AIDS patient was brought in as the first to testify, every scheduled witness jamming the hearing room recoiled with a gasp when Rep. Ted Weiss (D-N.Y.), chairing the hearings, suggested that the AIDS victim put his mouth closer to the microphone that would be used by subsequent witnesses.

Such a mass involuntary reaction by this room full of experts exposed the hypocrisy of the cost-motivated "no casual transmission" line.