

# National News

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## Gov't employees' union pins crisis on Congress

The American Federation of Government Employees (AFGE) reacted angrily Nov. 13 to the shutdown of the federal government, placing responsibility for the crisis squarely on the Republican-controlled Congress. The union asked its members not to go home when furloughed, but to go directly to their congressmen to give them a piece of their minds. AFGE members were also advised to "jam the phone lines" to Congress and send thousands of telegrams.

AFGE President John N. Sturdivant declared in a press release, "Congress has callously neglected the needs of all Americans." He predicted that "this irresponsible act of Congress will create a renewed sense of political activism." He warned, "We will not be passive victims and be held hostage. Taxpayers are paying for our services and Congress has taken them away."

The AFGE also filed suit against the government, charging that 60% of its federal workers had been illegally required, as "essential" employees, to continue working without being paid.

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## Labor's new leadership builds strike support

The newly elected leadership of the AFL-CIO has moved quickly to reassert labor's interests on a national level. President John Sweeney, Secretary Treasurer Richard Trumka, and Executive Vice President Linda Chavez-Thompson led a rally Nov. 12 in Everett, Washington, in support of a five-week-long strike by 23,500 machinists against the Boeing aircraft company. The union is fighting the company's cuts in workers' health benefits, and its subcontracting of manufacturing parts for commercial airliners to cheap-labor suppliers from other countries.

The International Association of Machinists called the strike on Oct. 6 to "draw a line in the sand . . . to stop the loss of decent family-wage jobs," following

18,000 Boeing layoffs over the past five years. "This [strike] is a symbol of what is going on around the country. American workers are in a crisis, and job security is a major issue," President Sweeney told the rally, estimated at up to 7,000 people, at Everett's Memorial Stadium. The National Labor Relations Board ruled Nov. 6 that the company has failed to bargain in good faith.

Secretary Treasurer Trumka has also made repeated visits to Detroit, in support of a four-month-old strike forced upon 11 unions against the *Detroit News* and *Free Press*—one of the bitterest and bloodiest in recent memory. The two papers are owned by the same company, which claims its scabs are "permanent replacements" for the unionized workers.

In Boston on Nov. 13, hundreds of Massachusetts senior citizens and welfare recipients joined with labor union members, for a rally outside a fundraising dinner addressed by First Lady Hillary Clinton, under the slogan "Veto Gingrich." The rally was organized by the Coalition for a Responsible Budget, backed by the Massachusetts AFL-CIO and dozens of organizations. Its purpose was to "deliver a loud and clear message to the President . . . to stand firm on his commitments to both veto the Republican budget and to fight against tax cuts for the rich financed by spending cuts in health care, education, and other essential services."

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## Black churches follow up on 'Million Man March'

The Congress of National Black Churches (CNBC), representing the 19 million members of eight historically African-American religious denominations, concluded a three-day leadership conference in Washington Oct. 20 by issuing an agenda for political action.

In its press release following the meetings, the CNBC declared, "On the heels of the 'One Million Man March' in the nation's capital, 300 of America's key Black religious leaders from eight denominations gathered to devise an action plan for the nation's 68,000 congregations of the African-American free church."

The leadership conference called for a "year-round" campaign of voter education, registration, and "get-out-the-vote mobilization," as well as an "accountability" campaign "for all elected officials . . . on a quarterly basis." The conference declared it was "launching immediately the mobilization of a telephone campaign across the nation to insist that President Clinton veto welfare legislation presently being shaped in the Senate and the House."

The African-American religious leaders also announced plans, "in response to President Clinton's Austin speech on racial tensions," for "a Day of Reflection and Resolution slated for the 1996 Martin Luther King, Jr. birthday celebration. The conferees [plan] to invite President Clinton, the U.S. Congress, and members of the nation's churches, synagogues, and mosques to join the African-American Church in this initiative."

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## Religious leaders decry child welfare cutbacks

Representatives of the major U.S. religious denominations issued a joint statement Nov. 9, urging their members to voice their opposition to proposed cutbacks in child welfare programs. The Christian and Jewish leaders declared they were "united by our belief that the very moral fabric of our nation would be torn, by the proposed dissolution of our 60-year-old promise to be the protector of last resort for poor, disabled, and abused children.

"We fear that this will make countless children more poor, sick, hungry, or at risk of abuse and neglect, while at the same time providing tax breaks of at least \$12,000 to the richest 1% of Americans," the statement continues. "We call on the faithful to examine their consciences faithfully. If they are convinced, as are we, that this legislation violates the tenets of faith, mercy, and justice, we urge them to call the President to say we must not end our nation's promise of protection to children. Unholy legislation . . . must not be signed into law by President Clinton.

"America is not a mean-spirited nation. Deeply rooted in our history as a nation, and

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in the faith traditions that have flourished here, is a commitment to protect the poor, the vulnerable, the children. Our nation is more than the sum of its 50-state parts. . . . Our national government is the bearer of our covenant as Americans one with the other. Our nation must ensure minimal standards of safety and just opportunity for every child, regardless of the state or family in which [he or she] chanced to be born. This is what it means to be a democratic nation. . . . The very soul of our nation is at risk."

The joint statement was issued by: Bishop John Hurst Adams, founder and chairman emeritus, Congress of National Black Churches; the Rev. Dr. Joan Brown Campbell, general secretary, National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA; Rabbi David Saperstein, director, Union of American Hebrew Congregations; Bishop Joseph M. Sullivan, auxiliary bishop of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Brooklyn, New York; and Rabbi Mordechai Waxman, past president, Synagogue Council of America.

### N.Y. governor demands rent from homeless

The administration of New York "Conservative Revolution" Gov. George Pataki has ordered homeless shelters across the state to collect rent from homeless people who have any income or assets beyond a basic welfare grant, according to the Nov. 9 *New York Times*. Rent would be gouged from any homeless persons with jobs or bank accounts (no matter how low-paying or how small), and those who receive checks for Social Security, Supplemental Security, or government programs for the aged, disabled, and blind.

The Pataki administration issued the new regulations in the second week of November on an emergency basis—thereby short-circuiting the normal public review process. Caseworkers would also be required to deny shelter to anyone considered to have other housing options. "It's clear the governor has no interest in hearing what the public really feels about a state effort to turn poor people into the streets," said Steven Banks of the Legal Aid Society's Homeless Family Rights Project.

### Kevorkian victim was not dying of cancer

Serial killer Jack Kevorkian took the life of his 26th "assisted suicide" victim Nov. 8 by carbon monoxide poisoning. The body of Patricia Cashman was found in the back seat of Kevorkian's car, in a parking lot outside the Oakland County, Michigan, Medical Examiner's office. Geoffrey Fieger, the attorney for "Dr. Death," told the press that the victim "suffered horribly from metastatic breast cancer."

Oakland County Medical Examiner L. Dragovic and Dr. Kanu Virani reported, however, "The autopsy did not reveal any gross presence of cancer. . . . This was not a patient that was about to die from the disease." The county coroner ordered that additional tests be made on the victim's spine and brain tissue.

### Iowa declares grain transport emergency

With tons of corn and soybeans left on the ground after weeks of stalled rail shipments, Iowa Gov. Terry Branstead declared a state-wide grain transport emergency at the end of October. The situation in northern Iowa is "like Russia," according to local residents.

Throughout the recent years of domination of the grain trade by commodity and shipping cartels, grain storage capacity has plummeted; and the amount of railroad track and rolling stock has shrunk dramatically. The resulting storage and shipping emergency in Iowa threatens the center—along with Illinois—of U.S. corn and soybean production.

During the 1980s, *one-third* of the rail track in Iowa was abandoned. In 1940, there were 8,950 miles of track; today there are about 4,326 miles. Rail company mergers also led to reduced service by major carriers such as Union Pacific—which cannot provide even the locomotives needed to move the loaded grain sitting in Iowa.

● **THE U.S. SPACE SHUTTLE** executed a perfect docking maneuver Nov. 15, linking up with the Russian Mir Space Station. The successful mission represents a giant step in the international space effort. The Shuttle delivered a Russian-built docking module, which will be permanently attached to the space station to facilitate its further development by expeditions from Earth.

● **NEWT GINGRICH** conceded on NBC's "Meet the Press" Nov. 12 that, in the event of a Presidential election showdown between himself and Bill Clinton, "There's no question in my mind, if it's about personalities, he'd win." The interviewer then rattled off the latest voter polls, suggesting that Newt faced massive Republican opposition to his nomination, that he would lose to Clinton anyway in a landslide, and that "70% of all Americans say they would never vote for you for President under any circumstances."

● **BOB DOLE**, the Senate majority leader, has some blunt advice for Phil Gramm. In a *Time* magazine interview published Nov. 13, Dole said, "I'm all for burying the hatchet. In him." Dole said of the Texas senator, "He's like a bug you step on that keeps crawling around no matter how hard you squish him."

● **U.S. CATHOLIC BISHOPS** issued a letter to all congressional offices Nov. 13, declaring that proposed cuts in welfare and the earned-income tax credit "will mean more poverty and more desperation for the most vulnerable in our society." Appealing to President Clinton, the bishops added, "If the Congress does not reject this fatally flawed legislation, we urge the President to veto it."

● **EARTH FIRST!** is tired "of people denouncing us in the press and then smoking our pot around the campfire." The eco-terrorists' Nov. 1 journal whines, "Are people only willing to associate with us in the dark of night?"