

# National News

## Arafat to attend prayer breakfast

Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat accepted the invitation to attend the Feb. 4 National Prayer Breakfast, sparking howls of protest from the Christian Coalition and the Traditional Values Coalition, which demanded he be “disinvited” because he is an “unrepentant terrorist.” The two groups, close to Pat Robertson and Jerry Falwell, are allied with the Israeli right wing of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Foreign Minister Ariel Sharon. The groups are also up in arms, because Arafat has planned to meet with President Clinton, to discuss getting the peace process, which Netanyahu et al. have all but derailed, back on track.

The two groups have said that they will boycott the breakfast, and they are putting pressure on this year’s host, Rep. Steve Largent (R-Okla.), to disinvite Arafat. Largent has refused to withdraw the invitation (which he did not extend, but supports). The Christian “conservatives” are heating things up with statements like “inviting Arafat means embracing a man with blood on his hands.”

This is the third time that Arafat has been invited, and the first time he has ever accepted. So far, none of the Zionist lobby groups have protested Arafat’s attending the prayer breakfast.

## Virginia parole rates kept low to fill prisons

Parole rates in Virginia under Gov. Jim Gilmore (R) have fallen far below what they were even under his predecessor Gov. George Allen (R), and the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) and Citizens United for Rehabilitation of Errants (CURE) have charged that the rate is being deliberately kept low in order to fill five new prisons that have been recently built. Under Allen, the parole rate averaged 18%, down from 40% under Gov. Doug Wilder (D). Under Gilmore, and a new parole board, the rate has dropped to 5.4%, among the lowest in the nation. The number of inmates considered for parole has also dropped from an av-

erage monthly of 1,200 to only 261 last June.

Kent Willis, executive director of the state ACLU, told the Feb. 1 *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, that “it is a possibility that because Virginia has so grossly overbuilt its prison system, whether consciously, or unconsciously, the parole board is making decisions that will help maintain an adequate prisoner population.” Jean Aldridge, director of Virginia CURE, agreed: “To me, it seems obvious, that if we build them, we have to fill them up to justify the expense. . . . Denying parole coupled with longer prison sentences help fill up these supermax prisons.”

Under Conservative Revolutionaries Allen and Gilmore, Virginia has built two “supermax prisons,” a new women’s prison, and two new maximum-security prisons. They were built to accommodate a rising prison population, which never materialized, because violent crime rates have dropped.

## Did Tom DeLay lie in civil court deposition?

Rep. Tom DeLay (R-Tex.) has been accused of lying in financial disclosure inquiries, according to a front-page exposé in the *Houston Chronicle* on Jan. 30. The *Chronicle*, after characterizing DeLay as the “House Majority Whip, who wants President Clinton ousted on charges of lying under oath,” details the contradictions in DeLay’s statements that closely parallel what DeLay claims was Clinton’s crime in the Paula Jones deposition.

The conflict concerns a lawsuit against the Albo Pest Control Co., when DeLay was chairman, filed by one of the firm’s ex-partners, Robert Blankenship. In a 1994 deposition taken by Blankenship’s attorney Gerald DeNisco, DeLay claimed that he had not been an officer of Albo “for two or three years.” But, his signed financial disclosure documents for the House of Representatives, just three months after the 1994 deposition, list him as the chairman of the company. The *Chronicle* notes that the annual financial disclosure is a “U.S. House document” that is signed “under penalty of fine and imprisonment.”

DeNisco said that he was not aware of the conflict when he took the deposition, and that DeLay “either lied in the deposition or

lied when he filled out that disclosure form.” He believes that the matter should be pursued as a possible perjury case, and that his testimony would have been an issue if the case—which ended in an out-of-court settlement—had gone to trial.

## Hillary Clinton invokes optimism for millennium

First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton invoked a spirit of optimism against apocalyptic pessimism for the Third Millennium, in her Jan. 29 address to the U.S. Conference of Mayors. In speaking of the Millennium Community, a national initiative for communities to participate in celebrating the millennium, she pointed to the treasures in our country which should be saved, citing such examples as Thomas Edison’s laboratory in New Jersey and Harriet Tubman’s home in Auburn, New York. Some communities, she said, might want to “join the Mars Millennium Project, which is challenging schoolchildren around the nation in conjunction with NASA to design a community that they would want to live on on the planet Mars in the year 2030.”

Mrs. Clinton continued, “If you try to think back 1,000 years, there were many differences, of course; but there were some similarities that we might also overlook. People even at that time were imagining the future. They were creating new art forms, they were building cities, they were forming reading groups—those who could read. They were designing new systems of cultivation, they were spreading religion from every corner of the globe. They were remapping the world as they were discovering it.

“And they were—importantly—saying ‘No!’ to the doomsayers. You know, there’s always a split when there is an important point in time. . . . Well, we know that there are those among us in our country who are stockpiling water and canned goods and worrying about Y2K. . . .

“People are much more likely to come together across racial or ethnic or linguistic lines if they feel hopeful about the results that would flow from their taking what they see as a risk to try to be vulnerable and work with others unlike themselves. . . . People who are hopeful are really those Americans who are true to our tradition of hopefulness.”