

National News

Senate Dems propose greater pension coverage

At a Capitol Hill press conference on Dec. 10, Senators Edward Kennedy (D-Mass.) and Jeff Bingaman (D-N.M.) presented plans for expanding workers' pension coverage during the next Congress. Citing the fact that 56% of the workforce is not covered by pension plans, the senators proposed to make pensions "portable" and "affordable" for lower-paid workers employed by small businesses, who are generally not covered by pensions.

In firms with 25 employees or less, for example, 80% of the workers have no pension plans. Workers generally move through seven to nine different jobs in their lifetime, which also creates a problem with respect to continuity of pension coverage, the senators said. Kennedy and Bingaman proposed a national pension clearinghouse, chartered by Congress, though which employers could easily enroll their workers in a pension plan, which would carry over into future jobs.

NASA official calls for U.S. leadership in space

Michael Mott, deputy associate administrator of NASA, opened the 43rd annual meeting of the American Astronautical Society in Houston on Dec. 12, by calling for a long-range commitment to space exploration to increase our knowledge of the universe, and "excite kids to study." Making a statement of policy that has been unheard of for more than ten years, because being best was considered too expensive, Mott said the United States should have "preeminence in technological innovation and space leadership."

Leadership in space exploration will give us "untapped sources of materials," such as fuels for fusion power, and new medical breakthroughs as well, Mott explained. There are tremendous budget pressures, he told conference participants from industry, government, and universities; and what hap-

pens to the NASA budget will depend upon "how serious the President and the Congress are about downsizing the government." Mott said his answer is, "So what? If we wait until we balance the budget, we'll never go anywhere." We must make people understand, he said, that "exploration isn't a luxury. Economic growth and world leadership is what we'll leave posterity, with a space exploration effort."

Countering the hare-brained "Mars Direct" scheme, which proposes to skip the Moon and go to Mars as quickly and cheaply as possible, Mott said that on the Moon, we will learn the lessons we need to go to Mars. The Moon will be used as a "technological test bed" and "a way station for exploration." The idea of "rushing off for Mars" without going to the Moon first is "totally illogical," he emphasized. The U.S. Apollo program produced "72 hours of total experience living on another body," he said, which is not enough to send crews to live on Mars for 500 days.

New study shows growing poverty among children

A study released Dec. 10, by Columbia University's National Center for Children in Poverty, reports that poverty among children under six has jumped from 18% in 1975, to 25% in 1994. The rate of poverty among young children is not only higher than it is for the overall population, but it has climbed at a faster rate. The study also found that the rate has increased nearly twice as fast in the suburbs as in urban areas, and twice as fast among whites as among blacks.

Spokesmen for the Columbia group, and for the Children's Defense Fund, attribute the rise in suburban poverty to the mushrooming of low-wage jobs and the growing rate of single motherhood in the white suburbs. The study also indicated that most parents of poor children already have some kind of job; about 62% of poor children under the age of six lived with a family member who worked full or part time. A spokesman for the Columbia Center concluded that the

message for welfare reformers, is that you can move people from nonworking poor to working poor, but they will still be poor.

The findings were based on census data, with the poverty line defined as a cash income of less than \$15,141 for a family of four. The study also found that American children are also more likely to be poor than are children in the industrial nations of Europe.

Johns Hopkins University's School of Hygiene and Public Health also released a study Dec. 10, reporting that the 1995 birth rate in the United States fell by 3% from 1994. The 1995 figure—14.8 live births per 1,000 total population—was the lowest birth rate since the late 1970s. *EIR* has reported that the fertility rate for women aged 19 to 45 has been below the level needed simply to maintain the population—2.1 children per woman—since 1971.

U.S. mayors say hunger, homelessness increasing

The U.S. Conference of Mayors released its annual "Status Report on Hunger and Homelessness in America's Cities: 1996" on Dec. 16. The study, based on a 29-city survey, paints a devastating picture of increasing hunger and homelessness, and a diminishing ability of cities to provide emergency food and shelter services. Those problems are expected to worsen under the new welfare reform law, signed by President Clinton last August.

According to the report's executive summary, requests for emergency food aid increased in the survey cities by an average of 11% over the past year, and 18% of the requests went unmet, primarily due to lack of resources. Of those people requesting food aid, 62% were members of families with children; and 37% of the adults were employed. Unemployment and employment-related problems were the leading causes of hunger identified by city officials. Other causes include high housing costs, low-wage jobs, inadequate levels of public assistance benefits, and cuts in welfare payments.

WHITEWATER prosecutor Kenneth Starr is the *National Law Journal's* "Lawyer of the Year." Starr directed "an array of investigations of unequalled breadth into a sitting President's life," while racking up \$956,601 in private practice on the side in 1995. Starr's one-year haul, it notes, "was almost exactly the same amount Bill Clinton had made cumulatively through 1995, in his 12 years of service as Arkansas governor and his three years as President."

DICK MORRIS, fired late last summer as President Clinton's campaign adviser, treated political science students at New York University to a succinct description of his qualifications, during a Dec. 10 guest lecture. "It basically requires the ability of an academic and the canniness of a drug pusher," he explained.

THE SCHILLER INSTITUTE'S *amicus curiae* brief, in the Washington State "assisted suicide" case, was accepted by the U.S. Supreme Court on Dec. 9. Therefore, the principles established in judging Nazi war crimes at Nuremberg, will be taken into consideration, when the Justices decide whether or not "assisted suicide" is a Constitutional right.

WISCONSIN'S WELFARE reform law is a "fraud," Milwaukee County Supervisor James G. White charged on Dec. 14 in the *Milwaukee Courier*. Gov. Tommy Thompson's "W-2" workfare plan, which goes into effect Sept. 1, provides child care for less than one in six welfare families, leaving the rest unable to meet the work requirement—thus stripping them of benefits, and forcing them to flee the state or starve. "The original author of W-2 was Adolf Hitler," White declared.

HORMEL FOODS is resisting demands, by anti-nuclear loonies calling themselves "Food & Water," that it will never irradiate its meat products. The well-funded group has already forced several companies to reject irradiation—despite proof that it safely eliminates deadly bacteria.

Requests for emergency shelter increased by an average of 5% in the survey cities; and 20% of the requests went unmet—again due to lack of resources. Lack of affordable housing is the number-one cause of homelessness, followed by substance abuse, mental illness, and lack of needed services. Children make up 27% of the homeless; overall, 57% are African-American and 30% are white.

Of the cities included in the survey, "Virtually all expect that hunger and homelessness will increase as a result of the recently enacted changes in Federal programs." The city of Boston, where requests for food aid have nearly doubled over the last two years, estimates that requests for food assistance will increase five to six times because of welfare reform.

Officials in Cleveland, Ohio reported, "Work requirements and job training programs are only a solution to the extent that there are sufficient jobs paying a living wage to support all of those displaced from public assistance. With over 30,000 households in Cleveland receiving ADC [Aid to Dependent Children], and an additional 14,250 individuals receiving general assistance, there is no evidence that the local economy has the capacity to make those jobs available."

Rep. King hits British for slander of Mitchell

Rep. Peter King (R-N.Y.) sent a letter to Secretary of State Warren Christopher Dec. 10, calling for an investigation of the British intelligence agency MI-5 for its "possible role in spreading a story linking Sen. George Mitchell's aide, Martha Pope, in a romantic liaison with Gerard Kelly of Sinn Fein." The British tabloids which spread the story have since retracted it.

According to King, "There is reason to believe that MI-5 created this scandal to discredit Pope, and thereby Senator Mitchell, and in effect, derail the entire Irish peace process." King's letter makes two demands: "I am calling on you to demand that the British government conduct a thorough investigation of this incident and determine if its

intelligence agencies were involved." Secondly, "If MI-5 was involved, the British government owes the American government a direct apology. If there was no MI-5 involvement, the British government must state so unequivocally." According to the Washington newsletter *The Hill*, King also declared that the reported British involvement, if confirmed, would represent "an attack on the President of the United States."

King also blasted the U.S. State Department: "For decades the State Department's involvement with Northern Ireland has been shamefully pro-British. In recent years, State's knee-jerk Anglophilia has continued—in direct contrast to the spirit of President Clinton's policy on Ireland."

Reprieved Va. prisoner thanks Italian people

Virginia death-row prisoner Joseph O'Dell, granted a reprieve from execution for murder, sent his thanks to Italy for its role in supporting his request for a review of evidence which may establish his innocence.

"I am so happy and elated that I'm speechless," O'Dell told Italian state radio RAI on Dec. 18, by telephone from jail in Virginia. "I've come within 24 hours of dying, and I just want to thank all the wonderful people in Italy . . . who showed such compassion and love. It's something I'm not used to seeing." O'Dell's life now hangs on a decision by the U.S. Supreme Court, expected in January, on whether to hear an appeal of his case.

Pope John Paul II had made an open request for clemency, and Italian Prime Minister Romano Prodi had appealed to President Bill Clinton to stop O'Dell's execution, scheduled for Dec. 18. Prodi told *La Repubblica* newspaper that, as a Roman Catholic, he was profoundly opposed to the death penalty; and, that he believed the doubts in O'Dell's case needed to be studied. "I couldn't be silent, I had to act. And that's what I did, like so many others," he said, adding that he was happy if Italian and Vatican pressure had helped achieve the stay of execution.