

National News

Panel urges freeze on hospital Medicare funds

For the first time in the history of the program, federal payments to hospitals for treating Medicare patients will not be increased next year, if a recommendation by a federal advisory panel is accepted. According to the Jan. 19 *New York Times*, the Prospective Payment Assessment Commission, headed by Harvard Prof. Joseph P. Newhouse, has voted to recommend a "zero update" on payment rates to hospitals, claiming that no increase is needed because they have effectively controlled their budgets. Medicare payments to hospitals last year totalled \$84 billion, or 44% of all Medicare spending. It is expected that the recommendation will "save" Medicare some \$2 billion in 1998.

Carmela S. Coyle, a vice president of the American Hospital Association, told the *Times* that hospitals were being punished for improving their productivity: "We've kept down costs for two or three years in a row. There have been real cuts in the cost of treating Medicare patients. But how long can these cost reductions be sustained?"

The advisory panel notes that one reason the hospitals have reduced the cost of delivering care, is that wages and benefits of hospital employees are growing more slowly than compensation in many other industries.

Calif. senator asks: 'Why not outlaw poverty?'

A California legislator has an answer to Gov. Pete Wilson's plan to eliminate welfare assistance in the "Golden State." Sen. John Burton announced, in a Jan. 14 press release, that he will introduce legislation making poverty a crime in California. Burton's plan to skewer Wilson's scheme—in the spirit of Jonathan Swift's attacks on the 18th-century British monarchy's genocidal policies—consists of three bills currently being drafted, according to his staff.

Burton declared that his legislation

would: "Make it a crime to be poor, by creating a felony for 'intentionally and maliciously' living on a yearly income below the federally established poverty level; make it a crime for poor people to have children, by creating a felony for parenting a child while living below the . . . poverty level; [and] provide state orphan asylums to house the children of poor people."

Burton described his bills as "the key to Gov. Pete Wilson's quest to eliminate welfare. There won't be jobs for the people he plans to cut off, so why not just make poverty illegal and stop poor people from having children? . . . My bills are consistent with Pete Wilson's philosophy of deterring certain behavior by making it illegal. If we aren't going to help poor people, then we'd better discourage them from being poor."

Regarding the governor's plan to cut young girls and their children off the welfare rolls, Burton said, "If the Legislature approves Wilson's plan to cut off welfare to such children, we need to also use the criminal justice system to stop their parents from having them in the first place."

Activists link 'right to die' and Nazis

Two spokesmen for the Philadelphia Family Policy Council have questioned the Supreme Court's taking up the issue of "physician-assisted suicide," by arguing that euthanasia in any form, violates the sanctity of human life affirmed in the Declaration of Independence.

In a commentary in the Jan. 16 *Philadelphia Daily News*, William T. Devlin and Rodger E. Barnette declare, "Leaders of the euthanasia movement deny significant parallels between what took place in Germany in World War II and what is happening in the United States. But are these movements truly dissimilar?"

"An attempt has been made to portray the Nazi experience, which emphasized state euthanasia, and the Anglo-American emphasis on the individual's 'right to die' as distinct movements. The issue of state versus individual autonomy is always import-

ant; but the defining issue here is the sanctity of human life, a concept best understood as it relates to the 'inalienable rights' in the Declaration of Independence, endowed not by a government but by the Creator.

"Once the concept of the sanctity of human life is discarded," they argue, "a progression of thought and act is begun that is difficult to envision or halt." But, the authors leave the door open to repudiating natural law on the basis of opinion, by arguing that the courts should let "the people decide" on the "right to die."

U.S. studying critical infrastructure risks

A special White House commission, charged with evaluating threats to infrastructure vital to the security of the United States, is expected to issue recommendations for action later this year. The body was established by President Clinton on July 15, 1996, under Executive Order 13010, as the President's Commission on Critical Infrastructure Protection, chaired by Air Force Gen. Robert T. Marsh (ret.).

The declassified order declares at the outset, "Certain national infrastructures are so vital that their incapacity or destruction would have a debilitating impact on the defense or economic security of the United States. These critical infrastructures include telecommunications, electrical power systems, gas and oil storage and transportation, banking and finance, transportation, water supply systems, emergency services (including medical, police, fire, and rescue), and continuity of government. Threats to these critical infrastructures fall into two categories: physical threats to tangible property ('physical threats') and threats of electronic, radio-frequency, or computer-based attacks on the information or communications components that control critical infrastructures ('cyber threats'). Because many of these critical infrastructures are owned and operated by the private sector, it is essential that the government and private sector work together to develop a strategy for protecting them and assuring their

continued operation.”

The commission is comprised of officials from the Treasury, Justice, Defense, Commerce, Transportation, and Energy departments; and from the FBI, the CIA, Federal Emergency Management Agency, and the National Security Agency. A five-member steering committee, including two White House officials, was also created to oversee the commission's work and report regularly to President Clinton. A 15-member advisory committee, of chief executive officers of corporations involved in the critical infrastructures, was also appointed to work with the commission.

One commissioner privately told *EIR* that one of their most pressing concerns is the collapse of U.S. hard infrastructure, and the lack of redundancy in such vital sectors as the nation's power grid. The deregulation of the U.S. electrical power grid represents a “nightmare,” he said, which will greatly increase the vulnerability of the U.S. economy, to everything from severe weather to terrorist attack.

London sees pro-British turn in U.S. diplomacy

According to the Jan. 19 London *Sunday Times*, “The first Clinton administration was attacked for appointing second-raters as diplomats,” writes Andrew Sullivan. “The second does not want to make the same mistake.” Madeleine Albright, the former U.S. ambassador to the UN, now secretary of state, will appoint top diplomatic officials who should be “good news for Britain and Europe in welcome contrast to the first term, whose top diplomatic and security players at times seemed anti-British.”

Sullivan adds, “Most important, Adm. William Crowe, the former chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, has agreed to stay on until late this year as ambassador in London. Crowe is popular in London and Washington and has sometimes been a lone voice arguing the British cause.”

James Steinberg, the new deputy to National Security Adviser Sandy Berger, also gets London's nod. Sullivan emphasizes that

Steinberg “spent some time at the International Institute of Strategic Studies in London and is an expert on European integration. Steinberg will help to form American policy towards Britain and Europe and is considered by the Foreign Office to be a big plus.”

‘Green Scissors’ gang plans further attacks

The Green Scissors Coalition, the not-so-odd alliance of radical environmentalists and Conservative Revolutionaries in Congress, plans to continue its assault on key federal infrastructure programs, using the ludicrous argument of eliminating “corporate welfare,” and deploying with the enforcement power of the eco-fascist movement. The coalition includes such British-style liberals as the Cato Institute, Americans for Tax Reform, National Taxpayers Union, and such radical ecologists as Friends of the Earth, U.S. Public Interest Research Group, and the Natural Resources Defense Council.

According to the Jan. 17 *Wall Street Journal*, Green Scissors wants to eliminate a dozen federal programs, “saving” some \$2-3 billion per year, with infrastructure projects and fuel-development subsidies dominating the list. Newt Gingrich poster boy, House Budget Committee Chairman John Kasich (R-Ohio), says he will attempt to cut or kill spending on the programs, and is hoping to draw wide bipartisan support in Congress.

In keeping with its right and left radical posture, Green Scissors recommends a “scale-back” in U.S. contributions to the International Monetary Fund, which, the *Journal* writes, members view as benefiting big investors and builders, and as an “inappropriate interference by government in private markets.” Other targets include the Overseas Private Investment Corp., the Rural Electrification Administration, federal highway projects, subsidies for logging roads used by timber companies, and the Animas-La Plata irrigation project in the western United States.

Briefly

PRIVATIZING Social Security, and investing its funds in the stock market, is a “questionable” proposal, the chairman of the American Association for Retired Persons, Helen Boosalis, warned in a Jan. 13 interview in the *Omaha World Herald*. “Even the experts, for Pete's sake, make mistakes. Look at Orange County (California). They had experts investing the public's money and what happened? They went bankrupt.”

LAYOFFS announced by U.S. corporations in 1996 totaled 477,147, according to the annual survey by the Chicago firm of Challenger, Gray & Christmas—an 8.5% increase over the 439,882 reported for 1995. Corporate “downsizings” included nearly 123,000 in telecommunications, computers, and retailing; and almost 68,000 in the food and auto sectors.

MANY AMERICANS “currently holding jobs, are reluctant to seek pay raises for fear of losing their position,” Sen. Frank Lautenberg (D-N.J.) told a Budget Committee hearing Jan. 21. “I wonder whether we're moving towards the next millennium or back to days of Upton Sinclair and even Charles Dickens—to paint a grimmer picture.”

AN ANTI-LABOR LAW was the first bill introduced in the 105th Congress. House Gingrichites will again attempt to amend the 1938 Fair Labor Standards Act, which requires most private employers to pay overtime to hourly wage earners for working more than 40 hours a week. Workers would be “offered” the option of taking more time off, instead of receiving payment for extra work.

HEROIN dealt on the streets of the United States today is now 75% “pure,” compared with 15% a decade ago, according to a Jan. 15 report on National Public Radio. As a result of “cultural” promotion by the entertainment media, teenagers are now the fastest growing segment of heroin users in the U.S. population.