

FEMA's standby legislation promotes 'emergency czar'

Attorney General William French Smith recently voiced his alarm at Federal Emergency Management Agency Director Louis Giuffrida's proposal to crown himself the nation's "emergency czar" in the event of war or natural disaster.

Jack Anderson & Joseph Spear

Smith's legal and constitutional sensibilities were offended by the thought of the civil defense agency usurping the powers of Cabinet-level departments, emergency or not.

But the attorney general will be positively stunned when he learns of Giuffrida's latest plan. It would suspend the Constitution and give the president as much arbitrary power as Hitler or Stalin ever exercised.

This blueprint for autocracy is in the form of "standby" legislation drafted by FEMA's eager empire-builders. That means it won't be submitted to Congress in advance — when its drastic provisions would certainly spark debate and draw opposition from conservatives and civil libertarians alike.

Instead, it is intended to be held on "standby" until an emergency arises. Then a panicky Congress will presumably be ready to abdicate its responsibilities under the Constitution and vote for a dictatorship.

Our associates Donald Goldberg and Indu Badhwar have seen the draft legislation, which would be titled disingenuously the Defense Resources Act. Here are some of the specific outrages:

—Private property would be effectively abolished. Real estate and personal belongings "that shall be deemed necessary for national defense purposes" would be confiscated by the government. And there'd be no haggling or taking it to court.

"Upon or after filling the condemnation petition," the standby legislation reads, "immediate possession may be taken and the property may be occupied." There goes your house. There goes your

car. There goes the neighborhood.

—The bureaucrats at FEMA want to nationalize the means of production. If a factory owner proves reluctant to turn out what the bureaucrats dictate, the president "may take immediate possession of such plant, mine or facility and operate it for the production of such materials or services as may be necessary."

—Just to be fair, FEMA proposes nationalizing labor as well. The government would be empowered to set limits on the number of employees in any type of work, and in fact restrict workers to "activities essential to the national health, safety or interest."

And if anyone lies to a federal bureaucrat about the availability of manpower, it'll rate either a \$10,000 fine or a one-year hitch in the gulag. The right to strike will, of course, be revoked. Violators will be declared felons in the same class as those who try to overthrow the government.

On the rebound: Now that the furor over her finances is behind her, Geraldine Ferraro has begun to enjoy the rigors of the vice presidential campaign. Her

friends say she is delighted by the size of the crowds she is drawing across the country and by the warmth of their response.

Ferraro's earlier troubles were partly self-inflicted, but her friends put some of the blame on Walter Mondale for giving his running mate an inexperienced campaign staff that was not equipped to deal with the press that descended on their candidate.

"Mondale gave her his rejects, his second string," complained one Ferraro insider.

Ferraro herself is now setting her own agenda, instead of defending herself from the press. Consequently, she expects to be giving more attention to the war-and-peace issue she feels is the most important of all.

Watch on waste: For decades, Air Force families housed at the tiny Bolling Air Force Base in Washington, D.C., have managed to get along without doorbells. Visitors simply knocked. But now the Air Force has decided to give each of the 1,340 units its own doorbell. Wiring and installation are expected to cost \$200,000.

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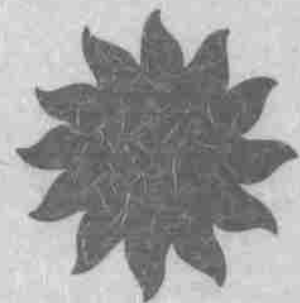
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