

News Digest

By the Associated Press

Economists predict record deficit

Shortfall to be 'worse' than Reagan administration estimate

WASHINGTON — Congressional economists on Thursday projected a record \$224 billion budget deficit this year that is below the Reagan administration estimate, but said the 1987 shortfall will be worse than the White House predicts.

The Congressional Budget Office said Congress will miss its Gramm-Rudman deficit reduction targets in fiscal 1987 even if every promise in the budget is carried out.

The new CBO prediction is \$6 billion below the White House estimate but \$12 billion above the record set last year and \$16 billion above the agency's

last projection in February. CBO director Rudolph G. Penner said part of the problem was that the anticipated rebound in the economy was occurring later than expected.

"We thought we saw the light at the end of the tunnel," he said. "Unfortunately, the tunnel moved on us."

The Reagan administration on Wednesday issued its prediction that the 1986 deficit would balloon to \$230 billion, up \$27 billion from its earlier projection. But its economic estimates and spending predictions for next year were more optimistic than CBO's.

The CBO projects that economic growth in calendar 1986 will be 2.9 percent, as measured from the fourth quarter of 1985, compared to a 3.2 percent administration forecast. From the fourth quarter of this year to the end of 1987, the economy will grow 3.5 percent, the CBO said. That compared to 4.2 percent predicted by Reagan's advisers for the same period.

The White House put Congress close to the \$144 billion Gramm-Rudman deficit target, perhaps even below the \$154 billion threshold for ordering across-the-board spending cuts, either by legislation or automatically if law-

makers follow through with pending legislation to revise a mandatory reduction mechanism overturned by the Supreme Court.

But the CBO said the budget Congress passed in June to meet the deficit target, would now yield \$161 billion in red ink if followed to the letter.

Letting current spending and tax policies continue would push the deficit \$50 billion over target, to \$184 billion, the CBO said, compared to \$171.5 billion in the administration report. The \$184 billion figure gives "a real sense of how much pain is necessary" to reach the deficit goal, Penner said.

Son found guilty of murdering tobacco heiress

FORT MYERS, Fla. — Steven Wayne Benson was found guilty Thursday of killing his mother and adopted brother and trying to kill his sister with pipe bombs in an attempt to get his mother's \$10 million tobacco estate.

Benson, 35, sat stone-faced as the verdict was read before a hushed courtroom.

The jury found Benson guilty on nine counts: two counts of first-degree murder; two counts of felony murder; one count of attempted murder; and four counts of arson.

The 12 jurors deliberated for 1½ days.

The jury, which was sequestered at the start of deliberations Wednesday, will meet again to recommend a sentence. Benson could be sentenced to the electric chair or life in prison with a minimum of 25 years.

Benson was convicted of killing his mother, Lancaster Leaf Tobacco Co. heiress Margaret Benson, 63, and her adopted son, Scott Benson, a 21-year-old aspiring tennis pro. Mrs. Benson's daughter, Carol Lynn Benson Kendall, 42, was severely burned in the July 9, 1986, explosion outside of the Benson family home in nearby Naples.

Prosecutors charged Benson planted the pipe bombs because he feared being cut out of the family's \$10 million estate. They contended he had been siphoning off money from his mother's account and grew fearful when she discovered the losses.

Reagan, Bush to take drug tests

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Reagan and Vice President George Bush will take drug tests next Monday "to lead the way" toward achieving a drug-free American workplace, the White House said Thursday.

Spokesman Albert Brashear said the 78 members of Reagan's senior staff also have been asked to give urine samples Monday if they are not on vacation, but he stressed that the tests were voluntary. "We're not out to punish anyone," he said.

"The president has made it clear that he is seeking a drug-free workplace for all Americans," the spokesman said. "He believes that all federal employees deserve a drug-free environment, and that federal employees should set the example for state and local government and the private sec-

tor to follow in identifying users of illegal drugs."

The announcement sparked a flurry of questions about how voluntary the tests would be, what would happen to senior staff members refusing to take it and whether the results would be made public.

The White House staffers were notified up to five days in advance about the tests, thus raising questions about the effectiveness of the screening. For occasional drug users, most drugs would disappear from the body after one to four days. Under mandatory testing, there is no advance notice.

Brashear said, "This is a voluntary program." Asked whether it might become mandatory, he said, "We're not at that point yet."

Convicted child molester sentenced to life in prison

FORT LAUDERDALE, Fla. — A Broward Circuit Court judge sentenced a Fort Lauderdale man to life in prison on Thursday for the kidnapping and molestation of a teen-aged boy during a three-month, cross-country journey.

Ronald Mulholland, 35, was convicted June 5 by a six-member jury of one count of kidnapping and 59 counts of indecent assault.

Police found Mulholland with Jay Phillips, 14, at a Nebraska highway rest stop on Aug. 5, 1985, more than three months after the teen disappeared from his home in an unincorporated area near Fort Lauderdale. Phillips later told police of daily sexual assaults.

"You are clearly a danger to children and I don't think you should see

another child eye-to-eye for the rest of your life," Circuit Judge Arthur Franza told Mulholland during his sentencing.

Before sentencing, John Voigt, Mulholland's public defender, read a prepared statement on behalf of his client.

"I feel that due to the circumstances of the case, I had no chance even before I walked into the courtroom," Mulholland's letter read. He said that widespread media attention had made it impossible for him to get a fair trial.

Voigt claimed during Mulholland's trial that Phillips willingly accompanied the mechanic because the boy wanted to flee from a miserable home life.

Assistant State Attorney Kathleen Kearney argued that Mulholland had

befriended and then seduced the boy. At the sentencing, Kearney played a videotape of an FBI special agent describing Mulholland as a psychopath and pedophile who was a danger to society.

According to the boy's mother, Connie Landers, her son suffered emotional damage from the experience and said that trauma will be with him for the rest of his life. Landers was at Mulholland's trial and sat weeping when the guilty verdicts were read.

Landers met Mulholland when he worked on her car. After her divorce from Phillips' father and the death of her second husband, Landers said she allowed her son to associate with Mulholland, hoping he would provide a male role model for the boy.

Selling secrets

Judge sentences airman

BEALE AIR FORCE BASE, Calif. — A military judge on Thursday sentenced to 25 years in prison an airman found guilty of passing classified Air Force documents about his spy plane unit to FBI agents posing as Soviets.

Lt. Col. Harold Sweeney also reduced Airman 1st Class Bruce Ott to the lowest rank in the Air Force, ordered forfeiture of pay, and gave him a dishonorable discharge.

Ott will be imprisoned at Fort Leavenworth, Kan. Sweeney gave Ott 259 days' credit for time already served.

Ott was found guilty Wednesday by Sweeney, who then held a brief sentencing hearing.

The defense attorney, Lt. Col. William K. Atlee Jr., asked for eight years because Ott "may have been a great fool, but he was not a great villain."

But the prosecutor, Maj. Charles Wilcox II, requested 20 years. The maximum sentence was 32 years.

The conviction and sentence will be automatically reviewed by Lt. Gen.

James E. Light Jr., commander of the 15th Air Force, headquartered at March Air Force Base in Riverside, Calif. The case will also be reviewed by the Air Force Court of Military Review in Washington, D.C.

If the conviction is upheld, the case will then go to the U.S. Court of Military Appeals in Washington. The final step in the appellate process is the U.S. Supreme Court.

Ott, 26, of Erie, Pa., was arrested Jan. 22 in a Davis, Calif., motel when he allegedly passed a copy of an Air Force Strategic Air Command regulation on the SR-71 spy plane to two FBI agents posing as Soviets.

He was found guilty of contacting the Soviet consulate in San Francisco without prior permission, and taking a SAC regulation with reason to believe it would be used to injure the United States.

He was also found guilty of passing a copy of an Air Force unit recall roster to an FBI agent Jan. 13 during another clandestine rendezvous.

Ex-CIA agent given asylum

MOSCOW — Fugitive ex-CIA agent Edward Lee Howard, who vanished last year just before being charged with selling U.S. secrets to Moscow, has received political asylum in the Soviet Union, the government newspaper said today.

One U.S. newspaper recently quoted sources as saying the information Howard gave the Soviets devastated the CIA operation in Moscow and led to the execution of a Soviet engineer who was an agency contact.

Howard was "given the right of residence in the U.S.S.R. for political" and humanitarian reasons, the newspaper Izvestia said in a brief announcement on its back page.

He was believed to be the first former or current CIA agent to defect to the Soviet Union and the first American to defect to Moscow since the 1960s.

Howard, 34, worked for the CIA from January 1981 until June 1983, when he was fired, according to the FBI. He had been preparing for a post at the U.S. Embassy in Moscow, where he was to operate under the cover of being a

Chernobyl death toll at 31

MITINO, U.S.S.R. — Another person was buried this week at the grave site reserved for victims of the Chernobyl nuclear accident, indicating that the death toll from the world's worst nuclear disaster stands at 31.

Western reporters today found the grave of K.I. Luzganova, a woman, topped by a white card saying she died Monday.

It was the third new grave found at the Mitinskoye Cemetery since the last official death toll of 28 was issued on July 19. The two other new graves were for men, A.V. Novik, who died July 29, and Y.A. Vershinin, who died July 23.

The three deaths have not been officially announced, and there was no official confirmation that the death toll had risen from 28. The name cards on the new graves do not mention Chernobyl, but the graves are in an area that a cemetery official said was for victims of the accident.

FCC cuts AT&T's rate of return

WASHINGTON — The Federal Communications Commission today lowered the American Telephone & Telegraph Co.'s allowable profit margin from interstate telephone operations from 12.75 percent to 12.2 percent.

The commission lowered from 12.75 percent to 12.0 percent the maximum profit margin that local telephone companies can earn for providing connections to long-distance companies.

Commission chairman Mark S. Fowler said the two moves will save telephone users \$600 million a year. Most of the savings will be felt by AT&T's interstate long distance users. Leased private line charges will also be lowered.

The rate will be reconsidered in two years.

The FCC meeting was held an hour earlier than usual so the commission could act before the opening of the stock exchanges.

AT&T spokesman Herb Linnen said the company was unhappy with the rate and was weighing an appeal. He said the lowered profit margin would not necessarily mean immediate reductions in long-distance charges, but could be translated into delays in future increases.

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