

Bush boasts of domestic strategy amid protests

PHILADELPHIA (AP) - President Bush, warming up for the election year, boasted about his programs for America's domestic problems Thursday but expressed concern about a spread of "moral emptiness" in the nation.

Democrats ridiculed his domestic strategy as nothing more than "props and photo opportunities."

And, outside a downtown hotel where Bush addressed a Republican fund-raiser, upwards of 2,000 people gathered to demonstrate against the president's positions on a variety of issues. One person complaining about the planned closing of the Philadelphia Naval Yard held a sign saying, "Bush and (Defense Secretary Dick) Cheney raped Philadelphia."

At a Veterans Administration Hospital, Bush said he worried that his appearances would be considered "just show business . . . the basic photo op . . . so you'll be on the six o'clock evening news." He said that was not the case. "I am interested."

Flying to Philadelphia at mid-afternoon, the president first visited a drug-treatment program where he cited figures from the National Institute on Drug Abuse showing that overall drug use fell 11 percent over an 18-month period.

"This is good news, there's no question about it," the president said. "But, let's face it, most of the most difficult work still lies ahead."

Bush said the battle against drugs cannot succeed "in a society that feels



Brian Shellito/DN

weak or no longer cares. "People think the problem in our world is crack or suicide or babies having babies. Those are symptoms," the president said. "The disease is a kind of moral emptiness, though."

Kidnappers say they back deal but renew demands

BEIRUT, Lebanon — Shiite Muslim kidnappers said Thursday that they back efforts to arrange a comprehensive hostage deal, but renewed demands that jailed comrades in Europe be freed as part of any swap.

Despite such obstacles, there was optimism that the hostage ordeal could end with a phased release of Arab prisoners held by Israel, Israeli POWs and the 11 Westerners missing in Lebanon.

Palestinian and Israeli representatives were negotiating over the return of the remains of an Israeli serviceman in exchange for Israel's allowing a deported Palestinian to return home,

a Palestinian official said.

The body of Samir Assad, a sergeant captured in Lebanon in 1983, was flown to Vienna, where the Red Cross-sponsored talks were taking place, in preparation for its return to Israel, said Quass al Samarai. He is a member of the ruling politburo of the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine.

Samarai spoke in Damascus, Syria. United Nations Secretary-General Javier Perez de Cuellar, in Tehran for talks with Iranian officials, said he believed there was momentum toward a resolution of the hostage issue.

Senators say Thomas avoids their queries

WASHINGTON — Frustrated Democrats accused Supreme Court nominee Clarence Thomas of evading questions Thursday about his retreat from past positions and unreasonably refusing to say how he would approach future cases.

"That's the most inartful dodge I've ever heard," Thomas was told at one point by Sen. Joseph Biden, the Judiciary Committee chairman, after the nominee said he "could not sit here and decide" whether unmarried couples had a right to privacy.

Thomas eventually said sexual relations and childbearing by unmarried couples were protected by a privacy right, but not before Biden said, "It's getting more like a debate to get information."

Despite such complaints there did not appear to be a solid opposition to the nomination.

Thomas continued to turn aside questions about his views on abortion, finally telling Sen. Herb Kohl, D-Wis., "Whether or not I have a view is irrelevant."

On the subject of changing positions, Kohl asked Thomas, "Why is it inappropriate for us to make an evaluation of your career based on all of what you have written and said?"

Republicans on the committee came to his defense, as did President Bush who said at the White House that Thomas was "doing a beautiful job up there."

Bush, asked at a news conference about the credibility of Thomas' claim not to have an opinion on the landmark 1973 court decision legalizing abortion, said simply, "That's a question for the Senate to decide."

Sen. Orrin Hatch, R-Utah, complained that Thomas had been asked about abortion 70 times, compared to the 36 questions about the issue that were asked last year at David Souter's confirmation hearing. Souter was confirmed despite his refusal to answer such questions.

"I don't understand why you are being treated any differently than these other confirmable people," Hatch said.

Abortion-counseling bill is approved by Senate

WASHINGTON — The Senate approved legislation Thursday revoking a ban on abortion counseling by federally financed clinics and allowing taxpayer-paid abortions for women who are victims of rape or incest.

The measure, adopted 78-22, faced a veto threat from President Bush over both provisions.

With his promised rejection of the bill, abortion foes did little to thwart passage of the legislation. They have resorted to that tactic frequently in recent months, in a Congress that increasingly favors abortion rights but still lacks the strength required to override a presidential veto.

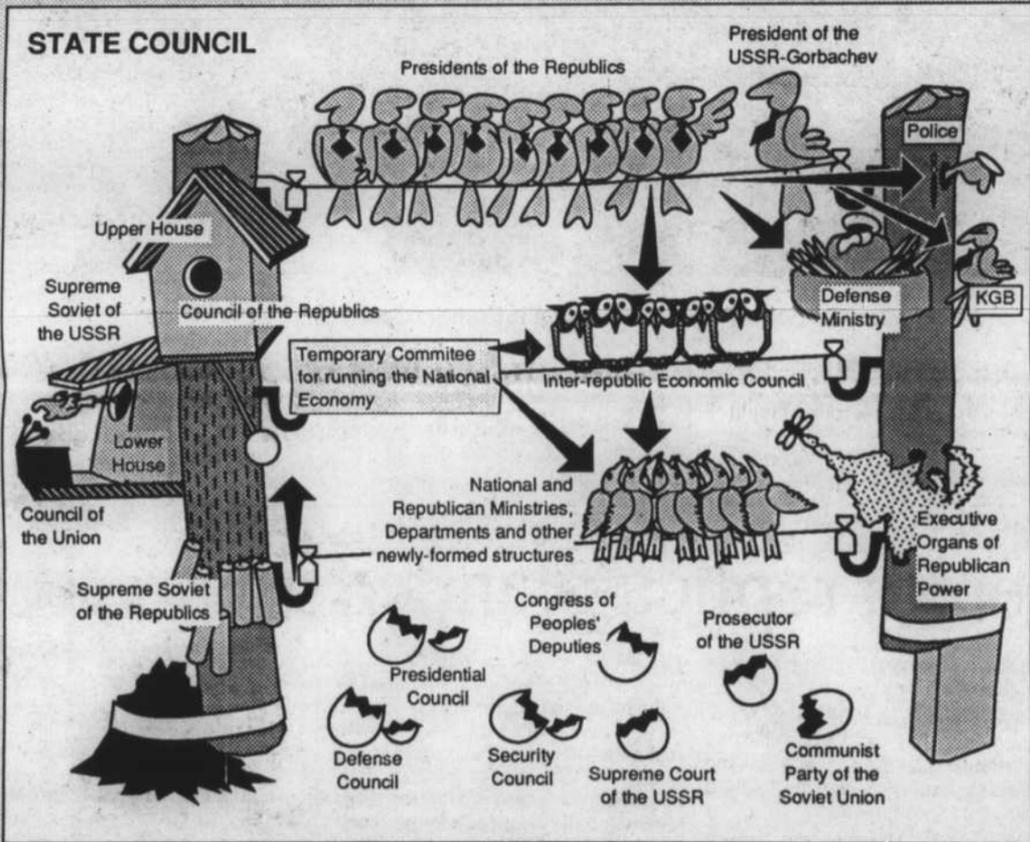
"The president's regulations . . . are not morally defensible," Senate Majority Leader George Mitchell, D-Maine, told reporters about the administration's abortion-counseling ban.

"And that is why he has chosen not to defend them. Obviously, the White House strategy is not to have either a debate or a vote squarely on that issue. It is to obscure the issue."

The abortion provisions were part of a bill providing \$204 billion for the departments of Health and Human Services, Education and Labor for fiscal 1992. The new fiscal year begins Oct. 1.

Soviet's-Eye View

This is a reconstruction of a drawing that appeared in a Soviet newspaper, Komsomolskaya Pravda, on Wednesday, symbolically explaining the current Soviet power structure.



Source: Komsomolskaya Pravda

Soviet reformers say threats remain

MOSCOW — Soviet reformers told Secretary of State James Baker on Thursday that disarray in their ranks and ancient ethnic tensions are the greatest threats to a peaceful transition to democracy in the Soviet Union.

Moscow Mayor Gavril Popov said, too, that the forces that backed the three-day coup against Soviet President Mikhail S. Gorbachev in August "will always be a threat."

But he quickly added that "the biggest threat however, is not so much

the reactionary forces, but the inability of us reformists to really come together and work out our problems."

The wary, somewhat pessimistic view of the future was echoed by former Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze and Russian Foreign Minister Andrei Kozyrev.

Kozyrev talked of the danger of "excessive nationalism," a reference to the tensions between the republics as they break the once-strong hold of the Soviet central government.

Their emphasis on the dangers that lie ahead was in sharp contrast to the upbeat statements the day before by Gorbachev and Russian President Boris N. Yeltsin.

Gorbachev and Yeltsin talked of progress toward political and economic change. Their warnings of hard times ahead were in the context of a need for massive aid from the West — short-term to meet the challenge of the harsh Russian winter and long-term to rebuild the crumbling national economy.

Orbiting ozone observer

Shuttle probe seeks answers to shrinkage of Earth's layer

CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla. — Space shuttle Discovery bolted into orbit Thursday evening with five astronauts and an observatory designed to scrutinize the shrinkage of Earth's

ozone layer. Discovery thundered away from its seaside pad at 7:11 p.m. EDT, flames spewing from its twin booster rockets. The 100-ton spaceship pierced a hazy sky as it darted out over the Atlantic Ocean and up the East Coast.

"It's the moment we've been waiting for," said Don Wuebbles, an atmospheric scientist who has been working on the project for 13 years. "After 13 years, how can I put it in words?"

The launch was delayed 14 min-

utes because of a temporary loss of communication between the launch site and Mission Control at Johnson Space Center in Houston. The countdown clock was held at the five-minute mark as engineers assessed the interruption.

Scientists watched breathlessly from Kennedy Space Center as Discovery sped out of sight with the first craft to be launched in NASA's Mission to Planet Earth, a decades-long probe of the environment from space.

"We're at a point in human history where we can affect the global environment, and we shouldn't fly blind on that," NASA's chief scientist Lennard Fisk said.

Discovery's scheduled course upon liftoff was up the East Coast as far as Cape Hatteras, N.C., where the shuttle was to arc sharply out over the Atlantic on its way to a 336-mile-high orbit. That would give people along the seaboard, especially in the South, a rare view of the ascending space-

ship provided the skies are clear.

Creighton is to maneuver Discovery to an altitude of 351 miles, one of the highest for a shuttle, about seven hours into the flight. Flight controllers left as much as possible off the ship to ease the climb.

If all goes well, astronaut Mark Brown will use Discovery's mechanical arm to release the observatory late Saturday. The satellite is to be boosted to its final destination 372 miles above Earth by on-board thrusters.