

White House deserts Social Security freeze

WASHINGTON — The White House abandoned consideration of a one-year freeze on Social Security benefits Monday after an outcry from senior citizens and congressional Democrats. A more likely move to cut the deficit now seems higher taxes on Social Security benefits to the well-off.

As Clinton continued to struggle with elements of his deficit-reduction package, he declared a short-term stimulus package nearly complete. He also moved to extend a related program that provides extra benefits for unemployed workers.

Saying hard times remain despite improved economic statistics, Clinton announced he would send Congress legislation to prolong a program allowing the jobless to draw up to 26 weeks of unemployment benefits beyond the 26 weeks in the basic law.

He coupled the extension with a proposal to make it easier for permanently displaced workers to take advantage of job-retraining services.

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—Clinton

During a picture-taking session with his economic advisers, Clinton said he had made most of the major decisions on the economic stimulus package he would unveil in a speech to Congress on Feb. 17.

"We're going to go back over it one more time to refine it," he said. The unemployment-compensation package is part of that stimulus program, which overall is expected to cost about \$31 billion, divided between job-producing programs and business tax breaks.

The deficit-reduction part of the program that Clinton will outline at the same time was not as well along as the stimulus part. The administration backed away entirely from a proposal

it earlier said it was considering — a one-year freeze on cost-of-living increases for Social Security recipients.

That proposal was denounced by senior citizens and Democratic lawmakers.

"I think it's very unlikely it's something the president wants to do," White House Communications Director George Stephanopoulos said Monday. Earlier, he had said the freeze was one of a number of items on the table. "That's something he never wanted to do," Stephanopoulos said.

A more likely option is raising taxes on Social Security benefits paid to the well-off.

It and the cost-of-living freeze were reportedly the two main items under review in terms of Social Security changes in a program that Clinton has said will mean "shared sacrifice."

Retired couples with incomes above \$32,000—and individuals with incomes above \$25,000—now must pay income taxes on 50 percent of their Social Security benefits.

Administration officials, speaking on the condition of anonymity, said that Clinton is considering increasing that level to about 85 percent.

WORLD WIRE

Walsh: Officials prepared to protect Reagan

WASHINGTON — Ronald Reagan's chief of staff and secretary of state had been prepared to testify that his administration misstated facts about the Iran arms sales to protect the president from impeachment, the Iran-Contra prosecutor asserted Monday.

Special Prosecutor Lawrence Walsh suggested in a report to Congress that Attorney General Edwin Meese "was warning the president's advisers that to disclose the president's knowledge" of a 1985 missile shipment to Iran "would

expose him to a charge of illegal activity."

If Caspar Weinberger had gone to trial, former White House chief of staff Donald Regan was prepared to testify that he knew it was untrue when Meese stated in a Nov. 24, 1986, White House meeting that the president hadn't known about the Hawk missile shipment, Walsh said in an interim report to Congress.

Regan "was concerned about the possibility of impeachment," Walsh contended.

Gunman shoots and wounds 3 doctors

LOS ANGELES — A gunman yelling for pain medicine shot and critically wounded three doctors in a hospital emergency room Monday, then took at least two hostages and holed up in the building, authorities said.

The gunman entered the emergency room of Los Angeles County-University of Southern California Medical Center at 12:40 p.m. and opened fire on a group of doctors sitting at a desk near the door, hospital spokesman Harvey Kern

said. Patient Hope Flynn said she heard a man demanding pain medication seconds before the shots rang out.

The attacker then took at least two hostages and was barricaded in an isolated section of the emergency room, on the hospital's first floor, police Lt. John Dunkin said. The area was cordoned off and SWAT members were called in, he said.

Rising early, retiring late, this night owl rarely sleeps

WASHINGTON — At his Cabinet retreat, it was late-night bowling and an early morning prayer service. A White House reception for visiting governors ran past midnight, yet President Clinton invited several for a pre-dawn jog in a freezing rain.



President Bill Clinton

"He doesn't need a lot of sleep," Myers says.

And she ought to know. Campaign veterans like Myers have long known Clinton is a night owl. What's new, however, is that as president he's trying to be an early bird, too.

History will note the pattern began on Day One.

It was nearly 4 a.m. the morning after his inauguration when Clinton ended his round of visits to inaugural balls and began his first night's sleep in the White House.

Just a few hours later he was greeting visitors at a White House

open house, and his baggy eyes didn't go unnoticed.

One woman said hello and told Clinton he looked exhausted. But Clinton assured her, "I'll get a good night's sleep tonight."

He didn't. That night, Zoe Baird's nomination as attorney general died in a storm of protest over her hiring of illegal aliens. Instead of getting his sleep, Clinton was popping in and out of aides' offices well past 1 a.m. keeping track of the Baird crisis.

It was a sign of things to come. "I'm 24 years old and I'm having a hard time keeping up with him," said Andrew Friendly, an aide to the 46-year-old president.

The odd working hours are partly a result of Clinton's tight day schedule of meetings and receptions.

However, whether it's work or reading mysteries or playing a combative game of hearts, Clinton loves to stay up late.

He hates, on the other hand, getting up early.

But he has no choice now. His official day begins with a national security briefing, usually at 8:30 a.m.

Iranian airliner collides with air force jet; 132 people die

TEHRAN, Iran — An Iranian airliner with 132 people on board collided with an air force jet after takeoff Monday from Tehran's main airport and exploded in a fireball as it plummeted into a military compound. There were no survivors.

The leased, Russian-piloted Tupolev airliner was bound for the northeastern Shiite Muslim holy city of Mashhad, and most of its 119 Iranian passengers were pilgrims. The crew of 13 included a Russian pilot and four other Russians. No other foreigners were on board, aviation authorities said.

The Russian-designed Sukhoi fighter was taking part in an exercise to mark Air Force Day, when 14 years ago its command pledged allegiance to Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini's Islamic Revolution — the first armed force to do so.

Authorities gave no information about the crew of the fighter, but Iran's official Islamic Republic News Agency reported the pilot and co-pilot also were believed killed.

IRNA reporter Sattar Oudi, who saw the accident as he drove to work at Mehrabad Airport, said the jetliner was about 1,300 feet high when the collision occurred at 10:15 a.m.

"The airplane was just taking off

“The airplane was just taking off and the fighter came from the opposite side and the two collided. The airplane fell out of the sky. It hit the earth and exploded. There was a very, very terrible noise, fire and smoke.”

—Oudi
IRNA reporter

and the fighter came from the opposite side and the two collided," he said. The airplane fell out of the sky. It hit the earth and exploded. There was a very, very terrible noise, fire and smoke.

The plane fell in an empty lot inside a compound of Iran's Revolutionary Guards Corps, 25 miles from the center of the capital.

There were no casualties on the ground, sentries at the base said.

The guards refused to allow non-



military personnel into the fenced compound, turning back even forensic experts. The guards said the wreckage of Flight 962 and the bodies were strewn over a 600-square-yard open area inside their compound.

A group of anxious relatives gathered at the airport, most of them weeping into their hands.

A man in civilian clothes stood on the roof of a military car to read the list of victims. As he read each name, cries and screams erupted from the crowd. Some people collapsed.

"My sister, my sister, What a disaster! What misery!" one woman wailed as she banged her head against the bars of a metal gate.

Standards becoming fuzzy for public servants

WASHINGTON — Smoking marijuana spelled doom for a Supreme Court nominee but it couldn't derail the nation's first Baby Boom president. Hiring an illegal alien scuttled two attorney general hopefuls — even one who never broke the law.

Just how and when ethical standards will be applied to public servants is a fuzzy matter. Should Americans expect perfection from their highest officials?

"We seem to lurch back and forth between what we consider sort of appropriately in the public purview and what we consider private," said Jean Elshain, a professor of political science and philosophy at Vanderbilt University. "Sometimes we're forgiving, and sometimes we're not."

President Clinton's first attorney general nominee, Zoe Baird, knowingly broke the law when she employed illegal aliens to take care of her children.

Most legal experts believe that rightfully disqualified her from the post of attorney general.

"I think most Americans expect fairly high

standards in their elected officials," said Robert Royal, vice president of the Ethics and Public Policy Center in Washington. "But in the Justice Department, we have an expectation that they should be above average, if not impeccable. After all, an attorney general is sort of like a police officer or captain."

But many say the case is much less clear against Kimba Wood, who withdrew Friday after being talked up as Clinton's likely choice. She had hired an illegal alien but had broken no laws.

"I think she basically got caught in the crossfire after a legitimate question was raised about Zoe Baird," said Ronald N. Green, director of the Ethics Institute at Dartmouth College. "It was her misfortune."

Ethical considerations are murkier still for other political jobs.

The easy confirmation of Commerce Secretary Ronald H. Brown, a former well-connected lobbyist, is an example of how strangely Americans apply their ethical codes, Elshain said.

"Let's call it 'the Ron Brown problem,'" she

said. "Here is a person with a million-dollar handshake and a nice red carpet connecting his corporate life to his government life. But people don't seem bothered."

"My hunch is probably we're almost cynical about the Ron Browns and other Washington insiders. We're used to it," she said. "But when it comes to women coming into these top slots and issues being raised about how they raised their children, that strikes home. People can compare their own experiences and their own lives."

Still, Wood's case is completely different from Baird's and she was treated very unfairly, contends New York University Law School professor Lea Brilmayer. "She didn't break the law. In fact, she paid the taxes on her domestic help even though she must have known that the chances of anyone finding out were very slim," said Brilmayer. "It's a very good statement of her high ethical standards."

"I think the people of the United States are adult enough to be able to understand the difference."

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