

Senate passes new spending bill

WASHINGTON (AP) — Republicans pushed the last and biggest spending bill of fiscal 2000 through the House on Thursday despite a promised veto by President Clinton.

The spending-measure, approved on a near party-line 218-211 vote, also carries a 0.97 percent across-the-board cut in federal agencies' budgets.

Senate passage is expected early next week, the next step in a political dance that will lead to a Clinton veto and then intensified budget talks.

Even so, Republicans claimed a triumph as they moved toward finishing the last of the new fiscal year's 13 annual spending bills.

They also rallied around twin themes — protecting Social Security and not boosting taxes — that they hope will propel them in next year's elections.

"Today's vote is a victory for the American taxpayer and America's seniors," said House Speaker Dennis Hastert, as dozens of GOP lawmakers gathered on the Capitol's East Lawn. A four-piece jazz band played "Pennies from Heaven."

"Mr. President, please make the responsible decision for American taxpayers and American seniors and sign this important bill into law," said Hastert, R-Ill.

But Clinton stood ready to veto the measure because of the damage he said the spending cuts would inflict on defense, schools and other programs.

He also objected that the GOP did not provide money he sought to help communities hire thousands of elementary school teachers.

The president also joined Congressional Democrats in insisting that Republicans already had violated their own pledge and were on track to spend billions in Social Security funds.

"We're going to have to work together to get a budget that works," Clinton told reporters. "And all this sort of smoke and mirrors that they have been doing and claiming that we and the Democrats were trying to spend the Social Security surplus when they were spending it all along is not helpful."

Neither side, however, was ready to let the budget fight produce a government shutdown.

So Congress sent Clinton a measure letting federal agencies function through Nov. 5 as the two sides work through their differences. It was the third temporary extension for agencies since fiscal 2000 began on Oct. 1; the second was set to expire tonight.

The House vote was 424-2, Senate passage was by voice vote, and Clinton's signature was expected quickly.

Meanwhile, Clinton acknowledged what has been a political fact in Washington for many weeks: that his proposals to extend the solvency of Medicare and Social Security and create a new Medicare prescription drug benefit would have to wait until next year.

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PRESIDENT CLINTON

said of GOP opposition to handling those matters in Congress' few remaining weeks. He added, "We can come back to all that early next year."

Overhauling Social Security and Medicare, the government's huge pension and health-care programs, has been a top Clinton priority. But the political and technical difficulties of revamping those programs, plus the enormous price tags, have made it difficult for a bipartisan consensus to emerge.

The spending bill the House approved Thursday contained \$314 billion for education, labor and health programs for the new fiscal year and \$429 million for the District of Columbia budget. It included more than Clinton wanted for the Job Corps and AIDS treatment, but less than he wants for substance abuse and programs for the elderly.

World and Nation Datelines

Washington Clinton advocates help for debt-ridden Nigeria

WASHINGTON (AP) — Calling Nigeria's debt burden "neither morally right nor economically sound," President Clinton appealed to Congress and other countries Thursday to help the African nation back onto its feet through debt relief and improved trade.

After meeting with Nigerian President Olusegun Obasanjo, Clinton offered law enforcement assistance to help recover national assets stolen under the regime of the late Gen. Sani Abacha.

He also said he would advocate "generous" debt rescheduling for Nigeria through the Paris Club, the group of major creditor nations that determines the type of relief granted to debtor nations.

Armenia Nation mourns the loss of its prime minister

YEREVAN, Armenia (AP) — President Robert Kocharian declared three days of nationwide mourning on Thursday to honor the prime minister and seven others killed by gunmen in an attack on parliament.

The assassinations stunned the nation. Armenians gathered to discuss the killings in offices, on the streets and at bus stops — some of them openly weeping.

The gunmen, who said they opened fire to punish corrupt officials, surrendered Thursday morning after they were allowed to speak on national television and were promised a fair trial. They turned over their weapons and freed about 40 hostages taken after they burst into the parliament and opened fire Wednesday.

South Dakota Investigators continue search for clues after crash

MINA, S.D. (AP) — Investigators picked through Payne Stewart's shattered Learjet on Thursday for valves and other small parts that might help answer whether the golfer's flight was doomed by a loss of oxygen in the cabin.

The National Transportation Safety Board also said it is looking closely at three similar Learjet crashes over the past two decades.

Still, investigators are concerned that the cause of Stewart's crash will never be known because the plane and the bodies were so severely damaged, according to a high-level government official who spoke on condition of anonymity.

Washington Clinton acknowledges affair may hurt Gore campaign

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Clinton conceded Thursday that his impeachment scandal may hurt Vice President Al Gore's election hopes, acknowledging that "a lot of people who may not like me may hold it against him."

But Clinton said any Americans who fault Gore also should give him credit for the administration's accomplishments, including the longest peacetime economic expansion in history, the lowest unemployment in 29 years and other achievements.

"You know, people are not dumb. They vote for what is in their interest," Clinton said.

His remark came on the heels of blunt criticism from Gore about Clinton's conduct.

In remarks that surprised and irritated some White House officials, Gore said during his debate Wednesday night with former Sen. Bill Bradley that Clinton's behavior had disappointed and angered him.

Candidates slam Bush for no-show

Five GOP candidates debate abortion and taxes in New Hampshire

HANOVER, N.H. (AP) — Republican presidential hopefuls discussed abortion, health care and taxes Thursday night in a generally polite campaign debate spiced by jabs directed by Steve Forbes and Gary Bauer at absent front-runner, George W. Bush.

"Perhaps in the future at a forum like this if we call it a fund-raiser he might show up," Forbes said of the Texas governor, whom he accused of skipping campaign events to raise funds for his candidacy.

Forbes was on the receiving end on another issue, when conservative activist Bauer said his flat tax proposal would let some corporations escape taxes "while you are paying 25 percent between the income tax and the payroll tax," he said.

"Gary you're wrong," Forbes rebutted, and noted proudly that while he was alone among GOP hopefuls in supporting a flat tax four years ago, others have now joined the cause.

But for the most part, the five men on stage stuck to the issues, refraining from attacking one another.

Stressing his opposition to abortion, Sen. John McCain said the Republican Party must nevertheless

reach out to voters who differ and "have respectful disagreements" — and not a single one of his four rivals on the Dartmouth College stage offered any immediate challenge.

Forbes, Sen. Orrin Hatch, Bauer and radio commentator Alan Keyes all said the nation's health care system needs reforming. Each offered slightly different prescriptions, and none made any immediate attempt to draw distinctions with his rivals.

Together, the five men shared the stage for a debate sponsored by CNN and WMUR-TV. It was the second such event in two nights in the state where the first presidential primary ballots of 2000 will be cast in January.

Onstage before the television cameras began rolling, the candidates fielded questions from the audience on gay rights and China. Bauer, a conservative activist, used the pre-debate to get the first jab at Bush, calling him "the absent governor from Texas."

McCain, who emphasized his signature issue of campaign finance during the evening, has emerged as Bush's closest rival in the polls, particularly in the wake of Elizabeth Dole's recent withdrawal from the race.

Bush, the GOP front-runner by far, decided in advance not to attend. But he made his presence felt, granting an interview to the Manchester television station two hours before the camera was switched on for the debate.

Falun Gong members vow defiance at event

BEIJING (AP) — Nearly 30 members of the banned Falun Gong spiritual movement spoke out Thursday at an extraordinary news conference organized in secrecy, denouncing torture at the hands of Chinese police and promising continued defiance.

One member displayed wrists bruised by manacles; another told how police burned her face with an electric baton; an 11-year-old said he was expelled from school for his beliefs.

China's Communist Party, meanwhile, promised it would show no mercy to what it called "the devil cult."

Police detained at least 20 Falun Gong members Thursday on the vast expanse of Beijing's Tiananmen Square, pushing them into blue-and-

white minibuses and driving away.

Seven foreign reporters contacted by e-mail about the news conference first met at a restaurant on one side of Beijing. Then under escort by members, the reporters changed taxis twice before arriving at a suburban hotel.

The slow-motion exercises the 30 followers performed to close out the news conference were once common sights in city parks but have been rarely seen in public since the ban.

The Falun Gong members were far from the ill-educated dupes officials often portray them to be, and included a government aerospace researcher, a shoe factory manager, a radio reporter and two police officers, both Communist Party members.

Law & Order

Two teen-agers ticketed for vandalism

Lincoln police ticketed two Lincoln teen-agers with 18 counts of vandalism early Thursday morning after an officer caught them puncturing car tires along a residential street in south Lincoln.

A Lincoln police officer on patrol at about 2:30 a.m. saw the pair driving slowly along the 3100 block of S. 32nd Street and stop near a parked van, officer Katherine Finnell said. After a moment, the car in which the teen-agers were driving sped away.

The spree was Lincoln's third instance of large-scale vandalism in the last eight days.

Four Lincoln men were arrested Sunday on suspicion of firing a BB gun into 22 cars in northwest Lincoln.

On the night of Oct. 20, three Mickle Middle School students broke into the school and smeared paint across several classrooms and the principal's office.

ATM stolen from truck stop

An ATM was stolen from a truck stop outside Lincoln at about 4:45 a.m. Thursday morning, Lancaster County Sheriff Terry

Wagner said.

The ATM was taken from the Shoemaker's Texaco Truck Stop at the intersection of Highway 77 and Saltillo Road by people who first broke through a window, then carried the machine out.

Two men arrested on suspicion of theft

Sheriff's deputies arrested two men Thursday morning after the pair allegedly stole a car from a home near the intersection of S.W. 42nd Street and Martell Road, drove the stolen car into a ditch and fled from pursuing officers, Wagner said.

A deputy sent to the scene of the crime was passed by the pair as they fled, Wagner said.

The deputy chased the two men into Lincoln, finally stopping the car near the intersection of S. 14th and Cushman streets. One of the men fled the scene but was later found hiding in a Dumpster with the help of a Lincoln Police Department dog.

Nick Roberts, 25, was arrested on suspicion of DWI and theft from motor vehicle. Matthew Hernandez, 23, was also arrested on suspicion of theft from motor vehicle.

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