

U.S. votes to repay U.N.

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

WASHINGTON - The Senate voted Wednesday to release \$582 million in dues owed the United Nations as part of a deal pushed by Foreign Relations Committee Chairman Jesse Helms to reduce the United States' share of U.N. operating and peacekeeping costs.

Helms, R-N.C., a longtime critic of financial support for the United Nations, gave his blessings to the funding.

"U.N. member states have come a long way on reforms and fairer assessment scales," Helms said.

Sen. Joseph Biden, D-Del., ranking Democrat on the Foreign Relations Committee, praised the conservative Helms for his tenacity in linking U.S. payments to U.N. reforms.

"Just as only Nixon could go to China, only Helms could fix the U.N.," Biden said.

The 99-0 roll call, the Senate's first legislative vote of the new Congress, sends the bill to the House. Sen. Daniel Inouye, D-Hawaii, did not vote.

At U.N. headquarters in New York, spokesman Fred Eckhard said: "The Senate Foreign Relations Committee has kept faith with the United Nations by voting to free up this money, and now the Senate has endorsed their vote."

"The countries that contribute troops to U.N. peacekeeping operations, to whom we owe all of this money, join us in waiting for final approval by the House," Eckhard said.

Helms and Biden crafted legislation in 1999 under which the United States would pay \$926 million in U.N. dues if the organization streamlined its bureaucracy and reduced America's share of U.N. operating and peacekeeping costs.

In December 1999, the United States paid the first \$100 million of that amount that was needed to stave off suspension of U.S. voting rights in the U.N. General Assembly. The third portion of \$244 million would be paid next year if the United Nations follows through on the agreement, including implementing budgetary improvements at the World Health Organization, International Labor Organization and other U.N. bodies.

Last December, in the first financial overhaul of the regular U.N. budget in 28 years, the General Assembly agreed that the U.S. share of the operating budget would drop from 25 percent to 22 percent and its share of the peacekeeping budget would be reduced gradually from 31 percent to 26.5 percent in 2003.

Key to reaching the deal was a one-time gift of \$34 million offered by American media tycoon Ted Turner to cover the shortfall in the main U.N. budget created by the reduced U.S. contribution in 2001.

Helms said the peacekeeping share was still above the 25 percent cap set by Congress in 1994, but the deal would save United States about \$170 million a year. The Senate vote Wednesday was necessary because the Helms-Biden language of 1999 also conditioned release of funds to the 25 percent cap.

In Foreign Relations Committee debate on the legislation Wednesday, Sen. Richard Lugar, R-Ind., urged Congress to consider lifting that 1994 cap so the United States will not build up more debt in the future.

Man fires on White House

Secret service agents found the former IRS employee after they heard gunshots near the South Lawn.

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

WASHINGTON - A middle-aged accountant with a history of mental illness fired several shots outside the White House on Wednesday, then was shot by the Secret Service in a tense, noontime standoff that sent tourists running for cover.

The midday drama unfolded just outside the fence at the edge of the South Lawn, 200 yards from the building where President Bush was inside exercising.

The man, identified by law enforcement sources as Robert W. Pickett, 47, from Evansville, Ind., had been fired by the Internal Revenue Service in the mid-1980s. Neighbors said Pickett kept to himself and resented the IRS.

In court records, Pickett had acknowledged suffering from mental illness and trying to commit suicide after his dismissal.

President Bush, exercising in the White House residence, was alerted by Secret Service agents "but understood that he was not in any danger," spokesman Ari Fleischer said.

First lady Laura Bush was in Texas. Vice President Dick Cheney was working in his White House office.

The shooting was the latest in a string of security scares that have brought tighter protection for the first family. In 1995, then-President Clinton ordered Pennsylvania Avenue closed in front of the White House following the Oklahoma City bombing. Earlier that year, a man was shot on the White House lawn after scaling a fence with an unloaded gun.

The latest incident, shortly before noon on a sunny day, triggered a tight security clamp down. Tourists were evacuated from White House rooms, and police in riot gear took up positions around the executive mansion and beyond its gates.

Dan Halpert, a tourist from Queens, N.Y., was on the National Mall nearby when officers told him to get down and clear out.

"We were all running away. It was scary," said Halpert, 24.

The confrontation occurred on E Street where tourists gather along the White House fence to snap photos of the executive mansion and hope for a glimpse of Bush jogging on the track encircling the South Lawn. There is an unobstructed view from the fence to the mansion about 200 yards away.

Secret Service officers on routine patrol in a car "heard shots fired and proceeded to surround a subject who was wielding a weapon, a gun," Fleischer said.

A 10-minute standoff ensued in which witnesses said they heard offi-



A Secret Service agent walks with his gun drawn after shots were fired near the South Lawn of the White House on Wednesday.

cers try to persuade the man to put the gun down.

"He was waving it in the air - it was pointed at the White House at one point - and pointing it in all directions," said Park Police spokesman Rob MacLean. At another point, the man placed the gun in his mouth, MacLean said.

Pickett was shot in the right knee by a member of the Secret Service's Emergency Response Team when he "raised the gun again and started aiming it at people," a Secret Service source said, talking on condition of anonymity.

A five-shot, .38-caliber handgun and shell casings were recovered at the scene, a Secret Service official said.

Pickett was taken to George Washington University Hospital, five blocks away, where he was in stable condition and undergoing surgery and psychological evaluation.

Dr. Yolanda Haywood, associate

professor of emergency medicine, said he was silent and unusually calm for someone with a bullet wound.

In Evansville, Secret Service agents searched Pickett's home, looking for firearms, threatening letters or other evidence. Before entering, officers from the Evansville police bomb squad scouted outside for booby traps or bombs.

Pickett had no criminal record and was not listed in Secret Service files as a potential threat to the president, authorities said. He lived alone in a modest, two-story house that had been owned by his parents before their deaths.

"I don't recall that there were ever any cars coming in to visit or any people associating with him. He was really always by himself," said Marwan Wafa of Racine, Wis., who lived across the street from Pickett for seven years before moving last summer.

World/Nation

The Associated Press

Florida Mayor arrested for hitting wife in head with teapot

MIAMI - Mayor Joe Carollo was arrested Wednesday for allegedly hitting his wife in the head with a teapot.

Maria Ledon Carollo, 42, suffered a golf ball-size lump and bruise on the side of her head, according to police. Carollo, 45, was charged with battery and jailed while he awaited a hearing on bail.

Carollo had two scratches on his neck, but his wife was not charged because he was the aggressor, Lt. Bill Schwartz said.

Schwartz said Carollo threw a terra-cotta teapot at his wife.

The incident came three months after Maria Carollo announced that she was seeking a divorce from her husband of 15 years. In court papers, she said that there was "no hope for a meaningful reconciliation."

Police went to the couple's home after getting a 911 call from one of the couple's daughters. The mayor refused to give a statement to police.

Jay Rhodes, a spokesman for the mayor, declined comment. "It's strictly a personal matter and it's business as usual here," he said.

Florida Space shuttle Atlantis lifts off with \$1.4 billion science lab

CAPE CANAVERAL - Space shuttle Atlantis blasted off Wednesday with the most expensive and pivotal piece of the international space station: a \$1.4 billion science laboratory.

Atlantis and its crew of five soared into a clear sky at 6:13 p.m., with a rising full moon in the background and the setting sun turning the exhaust trail a beautiful gold and peach.

"You got a good day to go fly," launch director Mike Leinbach told the astronauts moments before liftoff. "We wish you luck and deliver the heart and soul of the international space station. And have fun."

The future of the space station, Alpha, is riding on the 11-day mission, three weeks late because of the need to inspect wiring on the shuttle's boosters.

NASA's Destiny laboratory is the first of at least three research modules planned for the station. It is so expensive that the space agency could not afford to build a backup. If the lab is damaged or destroyed in flight, the space station will be set back for years.

Netherlands Libyan agent's conviction for Pan Am bombing appealed

AMSTERDAM - Lawyers on Wednesday appealed the murder conviction of a Libyan intelligence agent sentenced to life in prison for the 1988 bombing of a Pan Am passenger jet that killed 270 people.

The move had been anticipated from the moment the ruling was handed down against Abdel Basset Ali al-Megrahi

was convicted on Jan. 31 by a special Scottish court in the Netherlands for the bombing of Flight 103.

Judges in the nine-month trial ruled that al-Megrahi had a role in sending a bomb on the flight in an unaccompanied suitcase from the Mediterranean island of Malta.

Al-Megrahi's alleged accomplice, Lamen Khalifa Fhimah, was acquitted and returned to a hero's welcome in Libya.

Al-Megrahi's lawyer now has six weeks to submit a detailed argument with documentation on why the conviction should be overturned. A judge would then be appointed to decide whether the case should go before an appellate panel.

Corrections

Because of an editing error, Andy Mixan's name was misspelled in a Wednesday story on the first student government debate. Mixan is running for ASUN president under the No Bull party.

Also because of an editing error, the date of the ASUN election was misstated in a Wednesday staff editorial. The election will be held Feb. 28.

Sharon promises trip to holy shrine

Supporters try to portray new Israeli leader as pragmatic and willing to make peace.

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

JERUSALEM - Ariel Sharon, flush from an election victory seen as a mandate to veto more concessions to the Palestinians, pledged in a symbolic pilgrimage to Judaism's Western Wall on Wednesday that Jerusalem will remain in Israeli hands forever.

Sharon's promise, delivered the day after his decisive win over incumbent Prime Minister Ehud Barak, ran directly counter to a key Palestinian demand for control over Jerusalem's walled Old City and its holy shrines.

However, Sharon aides were quick to portray Israel's new leader as a pragmatist the Palestinians will be able to do business with. "Sharon wants to bring peace," said an adviser, Raanan Gissin. "I certainly believe the Arabs ... know they may not get everything they want, but it will be a real agreement."

Sharon aides suggested Wednesday that - contrary to reports during the campaign - he would be willing to carry out territorial concessions in the West Bank and even dismantle some settlements.

Reuven Rivlin, a lawmaker from Sharon's Likud Party, told Israel TV this would involve "uniting" some islands of Palestinian autonomy in the West Bank, which could involve the dismantling of some isolated Jewish settlements.

Palestinian officials said they were ready to hear Sharon's

offers. Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat told Sharon in a congratulatory message that his hands "remain stretched out in peace," according to Sharon's advisers.

Arafat advisers said they were unaware of such a message, but that they expected the leaders to make direct contact soon.

Palestinians said they would not contemplate any Israeli proposals that fall short of Barak's most recent offer - a Palestinian state in virtually all of the West Bank and Gaza Strip, as well as parts of Jerusalem. Sharon has ruled out such concessions, and said he wouldn't begin talks until violence ends.

After a four-hour meeting in Gaza, Arafat's Cabinet issued a statement calling on Israel to resume peace negotiations from the point at which they left off, and calling for international supervision of renewed peace talks. "Only peace can guarantee security for Israelis and Palestinians," the statement said.

Arafat, meanwhile, came under pressure to ostracize Sharon, widely reviled among Palestinians as a ruthless oppressor.

Arafat's Fatah movement, which has led a bloody insurgency against Israel, demanded that he not resume peace talks as long as Sharon is in power. "The uprising and resistance are our strategic choice," Fatah said in a leaflet distributed Wednesday.

The 17 weeks of fighting, which began after Sharon's visit to a key Jerusalem shrine Sept. 28, have turned many Israelis against the far-reaching compromises Barak offered and contributed to his political downfall.

Clintons repay White House for furniture

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

WASHINGTON - Former President Clinton and Hillary Rodham Clinton on Wednesday returned \$28,000 worth of donated sofas, rugs and other furnishings they took when he left office.

They acted because it was unclear whether the gifts were meant for them or the White House collection.

"As a result of the questions being asked, the property is being returned to government custody until such time that the issues can be resolved," said Jim McDaniel, the National Park Service's liaison to the White House. "It may well turn out that that property is rightly the personal property of the Clintons. I think those questions have yet to be resolved."

After they were criticized for taking \$190,000 worth of china, flatware, rugs, televisions, sofas and other gifts with them when they left, the Clintons announced last week that they would pay for \$86,000, or nearly half the amount.

The latest decision to return about \$28,000 other gifts brings to \$114,000 the value of items the Clintons have either decided to pay for, or return.

The Park Service and the White House Curator's Office took another look at the gift inventory after \$28,000 worth of items the Clintons took were discovered on a list of donations given to the Park Service for the 1993 White House redecoration project. The Washington Post quoted three donors this week as saying that the furnishings they gave were intended for the White House, not the Clintons.

"As a result of questions about the status of certain property donated to the White House during the Clinton administration, the National Park Service will accept the return of the property in question and act as a custodian of such property," a statement released by the Park Service said.

The Clintons' transition office had no immediate comment.

A person familiar with the Clintons' move out of the White House, who spoke on condition of anonymity, said: "They've been returned."

Weather
TODAY
Wintery mix
high 34, low 20
TOMORROW
Windy
high 22, low 7

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