

National News

Minnesota town keeps dry with infrastructure

The town of Oslo, Minnesota is sitting high and dry behind dikes keeping out the flooded Red River because the town and the Army Corps of Engineers built protective structures in the 1960s and then maintained them. Oslo is between Grand Forks, North Dakota and the U.S.-Canada border.

As described in the "Flood of 1997" report in the April 25 *Grand Forks Herald*, "Big strong dikes get the credit for keeping Oslo dry for the past 30 years. Though the northern Red River Valley regularly floods around it, the dikes have kept Oslo dry since they were built in 1966, following the flood of '65. . . . The dikes were built around town like a fortress wall on the prairie in 1966, and then improved in 1973. This spring, the Corps of Engineers and local volunteers worked for weeks to build them up some more."

"The morale in town is super," says Mayor Ole Soltvedt. "We've been through this many times before. It's peaceful—until the reporters come in."

Clinton praises FDR at Memorial dedication

At the dedication of the Franklin Delano Roosevelt Memorial on May 2, President William Clinton characterized FDR as the greatest American President of this century. Clinton said that the America Roosevelt built "was a memorial all around us, from the Golden Gate Bridge to the Grand Coulee Dam; from Social Security to honest financial markets; from an America that has remained the world's indispensable nation to our shared conviction that all Americans must make our journey together, Roosevelt was all around us."

Clinton then quoted President Roosevelt's statement that "we have faith that future generations will know that here in the middle of the 20th century there came a time when men of good will found a way to unite and produce, and fight to destroy the forces

of ignorance and intolerance and slavery and war." The new memorial, said Clinton, "will encourage us, reminding us that whenever America acts with certainty of purpose, and FDR's famous flexibility of mind, we have always been more than equal to whatever challenges we face."

President Clinton then noted FDR's assertion of the important role of the national government, saying that "he forged a strong and unapologetic government, determined to tame the savage cycles of boom and bust, able to meet the national challenges too big for families and individuals to meet on their own. And when he restored dignity to old age, when he helped millions to keep their farms or own their homes, when he provided the simple opportunity to go to work in the morning to millions, he was proving that the American dream was not a distant glimmer but something every American could grasp, and then that faith of his infused all of his countrymen."

Greenspan perplexed by soaring bankruptcies

Federal Reserve Board Chairman Alan Greenspan, speaking on May 3 before the Conference of State Bank Supervisors in San Diego, expressed amazement at the soaring rate of personal bankruptcies. "We don't know why personal bankruptcies have soared as sharply as they have," stated the perplexed Fed chairman, "especially considering the fact that the economy is doing so well and consumers in general are doing well."

Greenspan told the assembled bankers that he was "not concerned that it will create any issues beyond the immediate credit card problem, but there is no question that this issue is a considerable amount of concern to banks." He also revealed the chilling fact that many personal bankruptcies are now occurring very suddenly, rather than after a protracted period of 30- and 60-day delinquencies.

Two days before, in a speech at the Federal Reserve Bank of Chicago, Greenspan praised "innovations" in banking and financial markets, such as derivatives. These and other innovations, according to Greenspan,

have transformed banking and finance in ways that render regulation by states and other government agencies obsolete. Greenspan did, however, state that some form of central oversight, presumably by the Federal Reserve, is needed to deal with any instance of "systemic" financial problems. Nevertheless, Greenspan insisted that "over the last three decades, the folly of attempting to legislate or regulate against the primal forces of the market is one of the most fundamental lessons learned by banking regulators."

Strobe Talbott refutes clash of civilizations

In a May 6 speech to a conference on "Bridging the Atlantic," sponsored by the European Union and the United States Information Agency, Deputy Secretary of State Strobe Talbott launched into a vigorous attack on the "clash of civilizations" thesis so dear to the heart of the British Foreign Office. Referring to the significance of Turkey's application to join the European Union, Talbott said, "The current debate over Turkey resonates with references to culture, or as it's sometimes called, civilization. These words are often euphemisms for 'religion.'"

Talbott then stated that "there is a theory currently in vogue that the Cold War rivalry between communism and capitalism has been replaced by a global clash of civilizations, including one between Western and Muslim countries. That idea, among other things, gives short shrift both to the great diversity within these supposed civilizations, and to what they have in common. It underestimates the ethnic and religious diversity of the United States, and increasingly of Western Europe as well. And it underestimates the dangers we may face in the future if we raise today barriers against the aspirations of any European nation that is willing to accept the standards and responsibilities of our democratic community, or if we define the 'European-ness' of a village on the basis of whether its landmarks are church spires or minarets."

Talbott quoted a statement made by former Secretary of State Warren Christopher last year, that U.S. strategy of integration must "not recognize any fundamental divide

among the Catholic, Orthodox, and Islamic parts of Europe. That kind of thinking fueled the war in the former Yugoslavia, and it must have no place in the Europe we are building."

AFL-CIO's Trumka urges no expansion of NAFTA

In a statement released May 5, AFL-CIO Secretary-Treasurer Richard Trumka urged President Clinton, on his trip to Mexico, to "look beneath the surface and assess first hand how NAFTA [the North American Free Trade Agreement] has failed to live up to its promises on both sides of the border." The release goes on to state that although NAFTA was sold to this country as a job creator, it has functioned, in fact, as a job destroyer. In NAFTA's first three years, says Trumka, trade deficits with Canada and Mexico have cost us 420,000 lost jobs.

Trumka also highlighted the effect of NAFTA on Mexico. "NAFTA has failed Mexican workers, too. It was sold as an agreement that would shore up the Mexican economy and create a prosperous middle class. But since 1993, the average hourly compensation for a Mexican manufacturing worker has fallen 36%, from \$2.40 to only \$1.51, including benefits. That's about one-eleventh what a comparable U.S. worker earns."

"Simple expansion of NAFTA," says Trumka, "must be rejected because NAFTA isn't working for American workers. NAFTA clearly isn't a model we want to build on. NAFTA should not simply be expanded to Chile, to the Caribbean Basin, or anywhere else."

Clinton presses Blair on Northern Ireland peace

Wasting no time after the recent British elections, President Clinton has challenged new British Prime Minister Tony Blair to break from the former Major government's obstructionist tactics toward the Northern Ireland peace process. On May 3, Clinton urged

Blair to help jump-start the stalled peace efforts. "It's high time, and I can tell you that's what the people of Northern Ireland want," Clinton told a group of reporters. "I hope and pray, now that the British election is over, that Prime Minister Blair will take up the torch, the IRA will declare a cease-fire, and they can get back on the road to resolving their problems."

The same day that President Clinton spoke of Northern Ireland, the new British Minister for Northern Ireland, Dr. Mo Mowlam, traveled to Belfast where she demanded that Sinn Fein leader Gerry Adams persuade the IRA to announce an immediate cease-fire. Adams has just won a seat in the British Parliament in last Thursday's election. Mowlam maintained that if there is no IRA cease-fire, the Sinn Fein will not be allowed to participate in the all-party peace talks, scheduled to resume the first week in June. Adams has insisted that Sinn Fein's participation in the talks be unconditional.

Kasich tries to cut off nose to spite face

A bill sponsored by Conservative Revolution devotee Rep. John Kasich (R-Ohio), due to be voted on this month in Congress, proposes shutting down both the U.S. Export-Import Bank and the Overseas Private Investment Corp. on the grounds that the \$800 million government support for them constitutes "corporate welfare." This theme has been echoed by members of the environmentalist/neo-con "Green Scissors" coalition, especially by Grover Norquist of the National Taxpayers Union.

But at a press conference on April 30, Sen. Carol Moseley-Braun (D-Ill.) and four House members from both parties charged that the Conservative Revolution attack on government agencies which promote exports would cost 700,000 jobs. Moseley-Braun stated that the shutdown would cost \$24 billion in lost tax revenue and another \$42 billion in export growth. She noted that Japan subsidizes 32% of its exports, and France subsidizes 19%, while the Export-Import Bank only supports 2% of U.S. exports.

Briefly

FOOD IRRADIATION sanity won out over green terrorists in Hawaii on April 24, when a Hawaii County Council committee voted 6-1 in favor of spending \$2 million to build an irradiation facility to deinfest tropical fruit for export to the mainland. The tiny but well-funded eco-terrorist group Food & Water, Inc. had threatened local growers and their employees in order to get them to oppose the facility.

TEXAS GOVERNOR George W. Bush's plan to privatize the process whereby applicants for welfare are screened by the State of Texas was rejected on May 2 by the federal Department of Health and Human Services. A ruling said that current law clearly prohibits private companies from deciding who gets welfare.

THE U.S. GEOLOGICAL Survey Library in Reston, Virginia is being forced to cut its budget for periodicals and books by almost 50%, an order that has provoked strong protests from geologists around the world. Heavily relied upon by scientists for inter-library loans, the USGS has been a target of the "Contract on America," which has tried to eliminate the organization by "privatizing" it.

TWOSTATE medical groups have voted to reverse their neutral stance on the issue of physician-assisted suicide. Both the Oregon Medical Association and the Michigan State Medical Society now join the American Medical Association and some 44 other state medical groups that oppose, albeit with severe compromises, this Nazi practice.

SAN FRANCISCO Judge Fern Smith of the U.S. District Court ruled on April 30 that the U.S. Justice Department cannot interfere with doctors who discuss and recommend marijuana as a possible treatment for their patients, so long as the doctors do not actively assist their patients in obtaining the drug. The Clinton administration is expected to appeal the decision.