
National News

Clinton: Patients' rights are a 'top priority'

According to a Dec. 2 press release from Senate Minority Leader Tom Daschle (S.D.), President Clinton announced his determination "to make passage of a comprehensive patients' bill of rights a top priority in the next Congress," shortly after meeting with Daschle, other Senate Democrats, and Vice President Gore. "We must give the American people the peace of mind that comes from knowing that when they fall ill, they will be treated as people, not dollar signs on a ledger," he said.

Clinton stressed that his administration has sought to enforce patients' rights for those enrolled in Federally funded health plans, and has passed new Federal rules for treatment of emergency-room patients, even before patients ask for insurance authorization. He added, "We have gone to the Supreme Court, to help clear the way for patients who have been harmed by health plans' decisions, to seek justice under the law." He urged, "Now, its time has come, for Congress to do its part to give all Americans the protections of the patients' bill of rights. . . . We will make this not a Democratic issue or a Republican issue, but an American issue. . . . Thirty days ago the American people gave all of us our marching orders."

AFSCME union leaders face racketeering probe

At least 30, mostly African-American, leaders of the American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees (AFSCME) District Council 37 in New York City face indictment in a Racketeering Influenced and Corrupt Organizations (RICO) investigation being run by Manhattan District Attorney Robert Morgenthau. Morgenthau teamed up with "reformers" in the union, and convinced lower-level union officers to cooperate with Morgenthau's investigation. While the investigation has been the subject of quiet memos on union websites for a month, it hit the front page of the *New York Post* on Dec. 4. A week earlier, the *Wall Street Journal* ran a lead editorial praising the witch-hunt.

AFSCME officials have made no public statements, other than to say that they are conducting their own investigation. The probe charges the union with rigging elections and stealing millions of dollars from its members. DC 37 President Stanley Hill, whose hard-hitting interviews with this news service denounced workfare as slave labor, has been forced to step down.

Workfare, cheap labor policies spark protests

Twenty-eight people were arrested in Boston, on Nov. 30, while protesting at Gov. Paul Celluci's office against the cutoff of welfare funds to 5,000 people. Dec. 1 marked the end of 24 months of cash benefits allowed under the new law in any 60-month period, and able-bodied recipients with children over two years old were cut off welfare on that date. Catholic Charities, the largest private social agency in the state, is bracing for people looking for food and shelter. The state's homeless shelters are already full.

Unionists also demonstrated against Wal-Mart's cheap-labor policies in Kansas City, Little Rock, St. Louis, and Washington, D.C. on Nov. 30. AFL-CIO President John Sweeney announced a nationwide boycott of Wal-Mart and Sams Clubs, at a Bentonville, Arkansas, protest. "When Wal-Mart moves into a neighborhood, wages are driven down so low, that full-time workers have trouble feeding their families without food stamps."

Lawyer compares Pollard to embattled Clinton

In what can only be classified as "From the Chutzpah Files," the attorney for Israeli spy Jonathan Pollard wrote to President Clinton, comparing the prosecution of his client to the British-orchestrated attack against the U.S. Presidency. Larry Dub has written to Clinton, on his client's behalf, asking that Pollard, who is serving a life sentence in U.S. prison for espionage, be given a chance to present evidence to the President, as he considers the request by Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu for clemency for Pollard. Clinton has given Defense Secretary

William Cohen, Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, CIA director George Tenet, and Attorney General Janet Reno until Jan. 11 to make recommendations on whether to free Pollard.

Dub wrote: "Just as your attorneys are now appropriately demanding the right to see the material being prepared for impeachment in order to allow you to mount an adequate defense, elementary justice and a sense of fair play dictate that the same opportunity must be afforded to Jonathan Pollard to answer his accusers." Dub claimed that Clinton was relying exclusively on the opinion of people "whose public opposition to my client's release has been rife with slander, false allegations and gross distortion of the facts."

Dub then charged, "Mr. President, as you well know, under Tenet the CIA has initiated a witch-hunt to rid the agency of Jews holding security clearances." Recently, vocal partisans of Pollard—most of them from what U.S. intelligence calls the "X Committee" that ran Pollard's operations—have mobilized against Tenet and the CIA.

Commerce Secretary makes visit to Nigeria

"This is a pivotal time for Nigeria," said U.S. Commerce Secretary William Daley, on Dec. 6, during a brief stop in the Nigerian capital of Abuja, one day after local elections took place. Daley is on a tour of Africa, following up President Clinton's visit earlier this year.

"The world is watching and the world is waiting for Nigeria to emerge as a trusted trading partner. Progress over the last several months has been very promising," said Daley, who is the most senior U.S. representative to visit this country since 1993. Nigeria's trade with the United States is significant: It is the largest African oil exporter to the United States, and an important buyer of U.S. wheat.

On the elections, Daley said that the large voter turnout "was a clear sign that Nigerians want to join the world family of nations, doing business with one another every day of the year." Although his visit was brief, he said that "perhaps in the not too distant future, we will have an extended visit to seal our business ties and walk together on a path of peace and prosperity."