

# National News

## California Disabled Vets Wait Months for Aid

Almost 10,000 disabled veterans in southern California alone must wait six months for Veterans Administration benefits, and the Bush Administration's 2005 budget cuts would worsen the crisis. This was the finding of a report released on Oct. 12 by the Special Investigations Division of the Democratic staff of the Government Reform Committee, at the request of Rep. Henry Waxman (D-Calif.). These long waiting times cause financial hardships by delaying tens of millions of dollars worth of benefits for over 300,000 disabled veterans nationwide; yet the President's proposed 2005 budget would cut over 500 positions from the Veterans Administration staff that handles disability claims—even as more disabled veterans are returning from Iraq and Afghanistan. Veterans groups warned Congress last month that the budget cuts would have “a devastating impact on the VA's ability to deliver timely services.”

According to the study, of the 9,880 veterans with pending VA disability claims at the regional VA center in Los Angeles, 2,257—almost one in four—have been waiting six months or longer just for resolution of their claims. Most have to wait even longer before they start receiving benefits, after their claims are finally processed.

## Arnie Smears FDR, To Endorse Bush Policies

California Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger tried to smear President Franklin Roosevelt's reputation, in an interview with the Swiss weekly *Facts* published Oct. 18, while stating his 100% support for Bush's war on terrorism. Arnie added a scandalous interpretation of history: “The Styrian [Austria] local politician Alfred Gerstl, a friend of mine, thinks that if Bush had been President in the 1930s, Hitler would not have taken

power in Austria, because the Americans would have intervened in Germany earlier and finished him off.”

The “Gubernator” also came out in defense of an “Arnold's Law” change in the U.S. Constitution, which would—guess what?—allow him, as a naturalized American, to run for President. He made the argument that foreigners like Madeleine Albright and Henry Kissinger have done great things for the United States.

## Conyers Holds Hearing On Post 9/11 Liberties

The ranking Democrat on the House Judiciary Committee, Rep. John Conyers (D-Mich.), convened a “Citizens Forum on Civil Rights and Civil Liberties After September 11” on Capitol Hill on Oct. 13, to discuss the state of civil liberties in the United States after the 9/11 attacks. The primary focus of the hearing was the provisions of HR 10 (the House intelligence-reorganization bill), and attacks on Muslims in the United States.

Organized in conjunction with the Muslim American Society's Freedom Foundation, the hearing was chaired by Conyers, former Rep. Walter Fauntroy; Laura Murphy, Executive Director of the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU); and Mahdi Bray, Executive Director of MAS Freedom Foundation. Other participants included Amnesty International, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, and several other civil rights and human rights organizations.

Timothy Edgar, Legislative Counsel to the ACLU, testified forcefully against HR 10. He made it clear that if the provisions passed by the House were to be incorporated into the Senate/House conference bill on intelligence reform and signed into law, that this would be the most significant expansion of the Patriot Act that has been considered by Congress in three years, even beyond the so-called “Patriot II” provisions.

Edgar discussed the compromise on the torture provisions which was adopted by the House, and which still approves indefinite and potentially life-long detention, not just

of terror suspects, but of any immigrant whom the government says is “specially dangerous”—with no court review. And immigrants can still be sent back to countries which carry out torture, if the Secretary of State gets “diplomatic assurances” from that country.

## Waxman Scores Bush on Flu Vaccine Shortage

Rep. Henry Waxman (D-Calif.), ranking minority member of the House Committee on Government Reform, which is investigating the Food and Drug Administration's lack of response to early warning signs of problems with influenza vaccine production at the Chiron facility in Liverpool, England, issued two fact sheets highly critical of the Bush Administration. In the first, he reveals that, as far back as June 2003, after an FDA inspection of Chiron, FDA officials were aware that the plant had “systemic quality-control issues.” In June 2004, after Chiron announced that several million doses may have been contaminated, the FDA did not conduct its own inspection, but simply relied on Chiron's report.

In a second fact sheet, Waxman charges that the Bush Administration has ignored a series of warnings about the fragility of the flu vaccine supply system, as well as recommendations for response. Beginning as far back as 2001, they failed to take actions recommended by a series of government agencies such as the Government Accountability Office, the Council of Institute of Medicine, and the National Vaccine Advisory Committee—all of which warned of developing problems in the vaccine delivery system, and recommended measures to be taken.

Waxman cites the Bush Administration's failure to create a National Vaccine Authority, the failure to create a method for fast-tracking vaccine approval, and the failure to plan for a potential shortage. As early as 2001, and in later reports, the GAO had warned that a flu vaccine shortage could turn into a public-health crisis, and that the administration lacked plans to ensure that high-risk individuals would be vaccinated first under conditions of a vaccine shortage.