World and Nation

Deficit commission's future in doubt

From Associated Press reports

WASHINGTON — The high-level commission created to break the seven-year deadlock over the federal budget deficit is beset by internal dissension as hopes dim that it will be able to fulfill its mission.

Long-simmering disputes over tax and spending questions have broken into the open among commission members, and some fear President-elect George Bush may dismiss the whole exercise.

"At this stage, it is hard to tell whether there is any hope for the commission or whether their entire effort will be a waste of time," said David Wyss, senior financial economist for Data Resources Inc., a private economic consulting firm.

The current state of affairs is a far cry from what supporters had in mind when Congress created the commission a year ago.

The 12-member panel, which will grow to 14 with the appointment of two more members by Bush, was expected to come up with a solution to the thorny deficit problem by devising a package of spending cuts and tax increases acceptable to the new administration and Congress.

Supporters believed the weight of the commission's recommendations would mobilize the support needed for the politically painful actions necessary to eliminate the string of deficits that have sent the national debt spiraling to $2.6 trillion, almost triple the level when President Reagan took office.

The commission will kick off its post-election deliberations on Wednesday at a daylong session when it will hear from some of the biggest names on budget and economic matters, including Federal Reserve Chairman Alan Greenspan.

But supporters are worried about what comes after the hearing. Originally, the commission had an ambitious schedule that involved almost daily meetings in late November and early December, aiming toward completion of a final report by Dec. 21.

However, that timetable has now been scrapped with commission co-chairman Robert Strauss suggesting the panel's report may be delayed until March or perhaps as late as September 1989.

The delay was apparently first proposed by Republican members of the commission with Strauss and other Democrats deciding to go along.

Some argue that Strauss, considered a savvy Washington insider, is being politically astute in deferring to Bush's desires on the grounds that the commission's work-product will go nowhere without the support of the new administration.

But Rep. William Gray, a commission member and the head of the House Budget Committee, complained that too much delay would make the commission's efforts "irrelevant."

PLO leaders accept Israel's right to exist

From Associated Press reports

ALGIERS, Algeria — PLO leaders accepted a U.N. resolution Sunday implicitly recognizing Israel's right to exist and recommended the PLO's parliament endorse the decision.

Approval by the Palestine National Council, the PLO's parliament-in-exile, is virtually certain and would meet one of the conditions for U.S. recognition of the Palestine Liberation Organization.

The action by a committee of PLO leaders showed chairman Yasser Arafat had won his struggle with hardliners over the controversial U.N. Resolution 242. In the 450-member PNC, 80 percent to 85 percent of the parliamentarians are aligned with Arafat.

In Washington, President Reagan was asked if he was pleased with the PLO leaders' action and said, "We're still looking at that; that's all I can say."

The declaration accepting the resolution will be presented to the plenary session of the PNC, which began a special four-day meeting in Algiers on Saturday.

"The PNC will come out with a political decision and a program of peace," PLO spokesman Ahmed Abdul-Rahman said.

"In the political statement, we will adopt all resolutions of the U.N. Security Council dealing with the Palestinian question. What's more, we will emphasize resolutions 242 and 338 as the basis for an international conference to achieve peace in the Middle East."

Resolution 242 calls for an end to hostilities and Israeli withdrawal from territories occupied in the 1967 war. Adopted by the Security Council in 1967, it implicitly recognizes Israel by referring to the right of all states in the area to live within secure and recognized borders.

Resolution 338, passed in 1973 during the Arab-Israeli war, calls for an end to fighting; urges implementation of Resolution 242; and, most important, calls for negotiations between Arabs and Israel toward "a just and durable peace in the Middle East."

In closed-door committee meetings, there was strong opposition to Resolution 242 from the Marxist-oriented groups, particularly George Habash's Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine.

Habash's faction is the second-largest of the eight groups comprising the PLO. Arafat's Fatah is the largest.

Sources close to the talks said that after two days of haggling, it was clear no compromise was possibie.

Habash agreed to note his reservations but bow to the majority and not create a major split.

Salah Khalaf, a top Arafat aide known as Abu Iyad, said, "Never in my career have I seen the Palestinian leadership acting as responsibly as it is during this session."

Abdul-Rahman said the council wanted to adopt resolutions unanimously, although it also was capable of operating by majority rule.

Likud bloc gets endorsements of Shas, Agudat Israel parties

From Associated Press reports

JERUSALEM — Two ultra-Orthodox parties endorsed the hard-line Likud bloc Sunday, apparently giving party leader Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir the parliament majority he needs to form a coalition government.

President Chaim Herzog planned to meet Monday with representatives of Likud and its rival, the left-leaning Labor Party, and give the party with the greatest support the go-ahead to form the government.

The endorsements ended almost two weeks of uncertainty following the inconclusive results of the Nov. 1 elections in which neither of the two main political parties gained a majority in the 120-member Knesset, or parliament. Likud won 40 seats and Labor 39.

The support of the Orthodox Shas and Agudat Israel parties will give Likud and its allies on the far right control of 63 seats.

Although most observers were certain that Likud would secure the support of the Shas and Agudat Israel, both parties delayed their endorsements apparently to win concessions from Likud.

The main concession Likud had to offer was a promise to amend the "Who-is-a-Jew" law, which defines who is Jewish and thus eligible for automatic Israeli citizenship.

The Orthodox have demanded the law be amended so only Orthodox rabbis would be able to convert non-Jews to Judaism. Those converted by non-Orthodox rabbis would not qualify for citizenship.

Jewish leaders in the United States, where most Jews belong to the more liberal Conservative and Reform streams of Judaism, have strongly opposed the amendment, seeing it as a slight to the more liberal streams. They have said it could cause a rift among the Jewish people.

Shamir made the concession over the proposed amendment last week.

Foreign Minister Shimon Peres, whose Labor Party apparently lost the slim chance it had to form a government, said he was disappointed by the recommendations of the religious parties. Peres held last-minute negotiations with the parties Sunday afternoon.

"We did what we could and these are the results," he said. "I don't know exactly what happened behind closed doors, but during the day there was reason to think it would go otherwise."

Rabbi Aryeh Deri of the Shas party told The Associated Press Sunday that "the Council of Torah Sages decided after a long and difficult meeting that . . . Shas will recommend to the president that Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir will form the next government."

The Council of Torah Sages, a panel of rabbis, serves as the spiritual leadership of the Shas and made the party's decision about the endorsement.

Deri telephoned Shamir and told him he would continue being prime minister for four more years, Israel television said.

Inspectors to check for ice on planes in Denver airport

From Associated Press reports

DENVER — A year after an airliner crashed while taking off in a snowstorm, inspectors have been ordered onto runways at Denver's airport to determine if planes need respraying with de-icing fluid before takeoff.

Ice buildup on the wings of Continental Flight 1713 was believed to have been a factor in the Nov. 15, 1987, crash of the DC-9 in which 28 people, including the pilot and co-pilot, were killed and 54 others injured.

Even a minute accumulation of ice or snow can change the shape of an airplane's wings, reducing the amount of lift they can generate.

Inspectors at Stapleton International Airport will check planes awaiting takeoff for evidence of surface ice or snow contamination in what is believed to be the only such program in the nation, said Bob Shelton, manager of the Federal Aviation Administration flight standards district office in Denver.

Less stringent runway inspections were implemented following the Continental crash.

Parole, probation numbers rise

WASHINGTON — Nearly 2 percent of American adults were being punished for crimes last year, with record numbers on parole or probation, according to a Justice Department study.

The report by the department's Bureau of Justice Statistics said that of the 3.4 million Americans under the supervision of federal, state or local corrections officers, a record 2.6 million men and women were either on probation or parole.

Of those, 2.24 million were on probation, a 6 percent increase over the previous year, and 362,000 were on parole, an 11 percent increase. The study is based on records for the end of 1987.

Joseph M. Bessette, acting bureau director, said the probation and parole population has grown by 40 percent since 1983, while the number of people in jails or prisons increased about 33 percent. He gave no explanation for the increases.

News in Brief

Guerilla kills hostage

JERUSALEM — A Palestinian guerrilla, who kept himself awake during an 18-hour hostage drama by cutting his arm with a bayonet and pouring salt in the wound, killed a Lebanese captive Sunday before being overpowered by U.N. soldiers.

The gunman, who U.N. officials said was high on drugs or alcohol, belonged to a five-member Palestininan squad that seized a U.N. observation post in south Lebanon about 8 p.m. Saturday.

The guerrillas took the victim — a Lebanese technician — and five Finnish soldiers hostage after their plans to launch an attack in Israel failed, security sources in south Lebanon said.

Timur Goksel, spokesman for the 5,700-member U.N. Interim Force in Lebanon, said U.N. negotiators refused to meet the guerrillas' demands for a helicopter or an escort to take them to the port city of Sidon. After nightlong negotiations, four Palestinian guerrillas surrendered Sunday morning.

Party makes segregation plans

JOHANNESBURG, South Africa — Plans by the far-right Conservative Party to resegregate facilities in about 100 towns have set off fears of a black backlash at home and tougher sanctions from abroad.

Nearly 400 Conservative Party town councilmen, who were elected Oct. 26 in nationwide balloting, held a closed-door meeting Saturday in Pretoria to plan the party's pro-apartheid strategy on the local level.

The party — which campaigned on a promise to return the "whites only" rule to public spaces — won control of about 100 towns, mostly in Transvaal, the most populous province.

The National Party, which controls Parliament, has in recent years rescinded many of the so-called "petty apartheid" laws. Restaurants, bars, hotels and cinemas began opening to all races.

Man goes on shooting spree after job firing

From Associated Press reports

WEST GARDINER, Maine — A man posing as a policeman killed a state official and wounded three other people in a two-state shooting spree believed linked to his firing from a home for the retarded, police said Sunday.

The man killed himself while police chased him at speeds up to 90 mph.

Alan Matterson, former head of the Mechanic Falls group home, shot the home's former bookkeeper, two officials involved in regulating such homes and one of their relatives. One was upgraded from critical to serious condition Sunday night.

The series of shootings spanned about 100 miles in New Hampshire and Maine within less than four hours late Saturday and early Sunday, said state police spokesman Stephen McCausland.

Matterson, 36, of Cumberland, was spotted near Gardiner, and two state police cars pursued him at high speeds.

The state troopers saw Matterson shoot himself during the chase, McCausland said. That sent his car careening off the road, becoming airborne for a moment before it landed in a field.

McCausland said the motive appeared to be revenge.

"He knew his victims by their first names and asked for them specifically when he came to their home," he said.

Gov. John McKernan said he was "deeply disturbed and saddened by this weekend's tragic shooting. My heart goes out to the families and friends of the victims of this shocking episode."

"I am totally shocked," said Commissioner Susan Parker of the Maine Department of Mental Health and Mental Retardation. "The unfairness of it all makes me furious."

Matterson posed as a police officer at at least one of the residences where the shootings occurred, McCausland said. He said a police hat, handcuffs, flashlight, two pistols and other items were found in Matterson's car.

The shooting spree began in Milton Mills, N.H., on the Maine border, where Howard Hedegard, 43, and his sister-in-law, Patricia Collins, 27, of Derry, N.H., were shot at Hedegard's home, police said. They were treated at Frisbee Memorial Hospital in Rochester and released, said a nursing supervisor who declined to be identified.

Hedegard had been a bookkeeper at the group home in Mechanic Falls, Parker said.

The next stop was in Poland, Maine, about 50 miles east, where William Twarog, 44, a regional administrator for the Mental Retardation Bureau, was killed at his home, McCausland said.

After that, he said, Matterson drove to Topsham, where he shot Louis T. Dorogi, 46, director of licensing for nursing homes in the state Human Services Department, in the kitchen of his home.

Dorogi was in charge of inspection of state-affiliated homes for compliance with Medicaid standards, Parker said. He was in serious condition Sunday after emergency surgery at Brunswick Regional Memorial Hospital.

Management and financial problems came to light at the Mechanic Falls group home, formerly known as Androscoggin Community Home, in mid-1987, Parker said. "Alan had trouble keeping track of the finances," she said.

Matterson was fired in early 1987 as the home's administrator, said Betsy Davenport, director of the department's Bureau of Mental Retardation.

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