

Arms proposals score big with European leaders

From Associated Press reports

BRUSSELS, Belgium - From socialist France, traditionally wary of American influence in Europe, to conservative Britain, eagle-eyed for any sign of U.S. isolationism, the Europeans are crediting President Bush with seizing back the arms control initiative for the West.

For Bush, the NATO summit marked an impressive debut with America's often restive West European allies.

Gone are the grumblings about Bush's getting off to a slow start, leaving foreign policy vacuums and letting Soviet leader Mikhail S. Gorbachev hog the stage.

And the plaudits were a good deal more than official courtesy demanded.

"Mr. Bush is a very sympathetic man. He looks toward Europe, he has a feeling for Europe, he is an understanding ally," French President Francois Mitterrand told a news conference at the end of the two-day summit Tuesday.

Bush scored his biggest hit by unveiling sweeping proposals for big cuts in American and Soviet troops strengths and conventional arms in Europe.

The initiative, presented as a challenge to Gorbachev, could end the much-feared Soviet superiority in

conventional weapons. It also was a major factor in pushing the divided Europeans into an agreement on the future of short-range nuclear missiles, by tying negotiations to the implementation of an accelerated conventional arms agreement.

Even British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, who has said in the past that any cut in U.S. troop levels in Europe would send the wrong signal to the Soviets, welcomed the prospect of troop reductions to 275,000 soldiers each.

Along with the other NATO leaders, she said the plan had been the key factor in averting a deadlock over the future of short-range nuclear missiles.

Immediately after Bush unveiled the offer in a closed-door meeting of the allies, Mrs. Thatcher said the president had "transformed the summit."

"His leadership set the tone for the whole meeting," said NATO Secretary-General Manfred Woerner.

With a last-minute compromise, the allies agreed to superpower negotiations to reduce the weapons, but only on strict conditions linked to progress on both getting and carrying out conventional arms cuts.

"I think he has given a very clear lead," said Mrs. Thatcher. "But I never had much doubt about the quality of

(his) leadership. I much prefer a leader to be measured rather than dashing into things. In the long run you get policies right."

Mrs. Thatcher, who had an exceptionally close relationship with former President Ronald Reagan, appeared at the summit to strike a good personal note with Bush.

Because of the alphabetical arrangement — United Kingdom and United States — the two leaders sat next to each other throughout the summit and usually left meetings chatting together.

British officials said they had no sense that Bush's proposals to withdraw some American troops reflected a desire for the United States to loosen the costly ties that now bind it to Western Europe's defense.

"We saw it seizing back the arms control initiative, and that's not to be sneezed at," said a senior British official.

Said Spanish Prime Minister Felipe Gonzalez: "European unity is reaffirmed."

For Bush, it seemed, at least for now, things could not have gone better.

"I was elected to do what I think is right," he said. "I have been told by others here that the allies really have never had a meeting that is more upbeat. Whatever political arrows may have been fired my way, it's all been worth it."

Claude Pepper, champion of the poor and elderly, dies

From Associated Press reports

WASHINGTON - Claude Denson Pepper, whose political odyssey took him from the Senate to the House, spanned 53 years and 10 presidents, and made him the unrivaled champion of America's senior citizens, died Tuesday at age 88.

Pepper, the Florida Democrat, was elected to the Senate in 1936 as a liberal crusader for Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal. He promptly made his mark as an architect of some of the nation's most enduring "safety net" programs, including Social Security, the minimum wage, and medical assistance for the elderly and for handicapped children.

Pepper, who was the oldest member in Congress, remained in the Senate for 14 years. After an interlude practicing law and teaching following a bitter re-election defeat, he began a House career that would include 14 terms.

Among several leadership posts over the years, he was most recently chairman of the Rules Committee, a position he took because of its influence in deciding what bills would go to the floor affecting the elderly and poor.

Pepper also gained prominence as chairman of the House Select Committee on Aging, an advisory forum that he unabashedly used to draw public attention to the problems of old people. He was instrumental in the passage of the

News in Brief

Medicare Catastrophic Coverage Act of 1988.

Oil spill toll piles up

ANCHORAGE, Alaska - Dead animals are piling up in refrigerated trailers on the coast as officials collect evidence of the vast damage caused by the oil spilled from the tanker Exxon Valdez.

The carcasses of 22,818 migratory birds, 733 sea otters and 51 birds of prey, most of them bald eagles, had been collected, tagged and stored by Tuesday at four coastal cities.

The gooey fingers of the spill have drifted more than 500 miles from Prince William Sound across the Gulf of Alaska and beyond Kodiak Island. About 11 million gallons of oil spilled from gashes in the Exxon Valdez when it ran aground March 24.

"They are saying these numbers are about 5 percent of the actual number impacted from this," said Craig Tidrick, a Fish and Wildlife Service employee in Valdez. "The carcasses are being saved for evidence ... for the courts."

Surveys are underway, but the federal government has not yet made an official estimate of the wildlife deaths.



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