

National

New spending cuts aimed at entitlement programs

WASHINGTON — The administration is zeroing in on federal assistance programs in its drive for additional spending cuts, amid doubts about how far Congress will go in meeting President Reagan's call for new reductions.

Treasury Secretary Donald Regan said Monday programs such as welfare, Medicaid and Medicare have grown too large in recent years and are now considered candidates for cuts that in the past have been politically unpopular.

"We know that we've overspent in many of these areas, and we have to cut back," Regan said in ABC's "Good Morning America."

The Washington Post reported Health and Human Services Secretary Richard Schweiker has proposed cutting as much as \$9.3 billion from welfare, Medicaid and Medicare benefits in 1983 as part of the administration's effort to fight rapidly rising deficit projections.

The Post said Schweiker described about \$5.9 billion of the cuts in an Oct. 26 memo to budget director David Stockman, in which he also said they had been approved by the White House Interagency Entitlement Advisory Group.

Regan confirmed cuts have been proposed, but provided no details.

"Secretary Schweiker has come forth with a brand new program," he said. "I think we can work with the Congress and insist that these are the programs where the budget cuts should come."

House Budget Committee Chairman James Jones, D-Okla., said on the ABC program that Congress will respond with a very critical eye to the proposed cuts.

If the Reagan program is to work, he said, "it has to be perceived as fair, and there is a growing impression that the poor, less fortunate among us are taking a disproportionate share of the sacrifice."

White House Chief of Staff James Baker said Sunday that cutbacks in so-called entitlement programs will be "cuts at the margin — rounding off at the nearest dollar" of benefit checks.

"You'll see a number of those changes," Baker said on NBC's "Meet the Press." He predicted such changes could produce major savings in entitlement programs.

The Post said Schweiker's proposals would save \$635 million in cash benefits in 1983, and would include forcing states to adopt "workfare" programs that require recipients to actively search for jobs.

Senate Budget Committee Chairman Pete Domenici, R-N.M., said Sunday on ABC's "Issue and Answers" that Reagan can expect Congress to approve only about half of the additional \$13 billion in budget cuts he wants for the current fiscal year.

Baker, however, said the administration needs more time to prove the budget and spending cuts that form the backbone of its economic program will work.

Citing record tax and spending cuts as well as reduced federal regulations and a lower inflation rate, Baker said "the foundation has been laid" for economic improvement "by the end of next spring or the start of next summer."

Regan made the same forecast. Last week, faced with projections of a ballooning deficit that could hit \$145 billion in fiscal 1984, the president conceded his goal of balancing the budget by that year may not be reached.

Speaking in New York Friday he said: "A balanced budget has never been an end in itself. Maybe it will take a little longer than we had planned, but we are not retreating one inch."

Suicide plot seen in triple slaying

SAN FRANCISCO — Homicide investigators confirmed Monday that the weekend deaths of two elderly women and a middle-aged man in a plush hotel suite were the result of a meticulously planned killing-suicide pact.

"When we got there, the man was seated in a chair with the gun still wedged in his fingers," Homicide Inspector Frank Falzon said. "One of the women was shot first while the other didn't move. Then he turned the gun on the second one, and her position never changed."

The trio, described by friends as reclusive musicians, had hung a "do not disturb" sign outside their \$150-a-day hotel suite, before carrying out their pact.

Falzon said the apparent triggerman was a sometimes shoe salesman and music teacher.

After firing two shots into each of the women, he said, the man took his own life with a bullet to the head.

The bodies of the three were found Saturday, each with a gunshot wound to the head, in their suite at the Four Seasons Clift Hotel. Homicide detectives found a note, but refused to reveal the contents pending autopsies Monday.

"It looks like a classic murder-suicide arrangement," Deputy Coroner David LeNoue said.

One detective said one of the victims might have had a terminal illness.

Deputy coroners identified the victims as Nestor Wolfers, 39, of

Las Vegas, Nev.; Harriette Wolfers, 68, of San Jose, Calif., and Audrey A. Whittington, 58, of Oakland. The coroner's office said the Wolfers were apparently mother and son, while Whittington was a close friend and possibly a relative.

"It was all very neat, very deliberate, with no mess," Chap Riese, the hotel's assistant security director, said. "There were folded towels placed under each body to prevent bloodstains."

He said the death pact was apparently carried out between 11 p.m. Friday and 11 a.m. Saturday.

The victims left a note on a dresser, as well as a check for the room they had taken on Tuesday, officials said. A half-empty bottle of Benedictine and Brandy was also found in the room.

A .38-caliber pistol was located near Wolfers' body, which was in a chair, and the women's bodies were found on twin beds.

"It looks like it was all planned," Veronica Davis, an assistant manager at the hotel, said. "They'd had their last cigarette, their last drink. Their bill was paid."

The three were believed to have lived together for some time at the Vern-Lee Apartments in Oakland. Manager Homer Carpenter said they described themselves as mother, son and family friend and kept pretty much to themselves.

"When they left here Monday they were smiling and seemed well and happy," Carpenter said.

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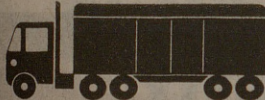
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