

# World and Nation

## Basement heater fire kills nine

**Associated Press**  
 WASHINGTON — A hot water heater apparently burst into flames in a row house basement apartment frequented by transients early Sunday, killing nine people and leaving four hospitalized.

All of the victims were in the basement apartment, which neighbors described as a popular gathering place for many poor Hispanics who went there almost nightly after nearby saloons closed.

"It was like a neighborhood bar down there," said Daniel del Valle, who lived upstairs and escaped by climbing out a second-story window.

Fire department spokesman Rayfield Alfred said as many as 20 people may have been in the building at the time of the fire, which broke out before 3 a.m. EST.

Three people were dead on the scene while six others died at area hospitals. Four were admitted for treatment, including a 5-year-old boy and 2 1/2-month-old boy who were in good condition.

Two men were in serious condition.

Susan Rasky, who lives next door to the burned building, said many of the homeless people in the area are from El Salvador.

"This block is a chronic problem," she said.

Fire officials said 90 firefighters took about 15 minutes to put out the fire, which was confined to the basement and caused about \$75,000 damage.

Del Valle, who had lived in the house about two years, said he and the Rosses had been trying to stop the nightly parties in the basement.

Fire Chief Theodore R. Coleman said the fire was the worst since 1979 when 10 people died in a row house fire about three blocks away from the Sunday blaze.

## AP survey: Battle for aid to Contras is winnable

**Associated Press**  
 WASHINGTON — President Reagan faces a tough but potentially winnable battle to resume military aid to rebels fighting to overthrow Nicaragua's leftist government, according to an Associated Press survey of key swing votes.

In the Democratic-controlled House, where the main legislative battle will be fought, only a few swing congressmen said they were leaning toward voting with Reagan on lethal military aid, but that could be enough for the president considering the 64-vote majority he gained for non-lethal aid last year.

Democrats, however, note that Reagan's expected proposal for \$100 million in military and logistical aid will go to a Congress doubtful about his Nicaraguan policy and grappling with painful spending cuts mandated by the Gramm-Rudman deficit reduction act.

## Congress readying for battle with Reagan

**Associated Press**  
 WASHINGTON — Congress returns Monday for an election-year battle with President Reagan over budget cuts, taxes and spending priorities that promises to turn into a political bloodletting.

Even before the president delivers his State of the Union address Tuesday night, congressional Democrats were maneuvering to focus attention on big, politically unpopular domestic spending cuts in the fiscal 1987 budget Reagan will propose on Feb. 4.

Some legislators say it may take \$80 billion in total cuts to reduce the federal budget deficit to \$144 billion next year, the target set by the new Gramm-Rudman budget-balancing law.

Reagan's refusal to accept any revenue-raising tax increases or any slowdown in his military buildup almost certainly will result in a bitter and prolonged deadlock with Congress unless the president is willing to compromise, legislators said.

Senate Finance Committee Chairman Robert Packwood, R-Ore., said

An AP survey of 33 swing votes from last year's congressional battles over aid to the Contra rebels found 13 "against or leaning against" Reagan's lethal aid plan, 17 undecided or not available and three "leaning for."

But since Reagan had a 64-vote victory margin on the non-lethal aid vote last June, the Democrats must win back nearly all the swing votes or persuade other House members who normally back the president to switch.

Many of those swing votes, who supported Reagan's request for \$27 million in non-lethal "humanitarian" aid to the rebels, say the president cannot count on their support for open military aid.

Some congressmen expressed concern over the size of Reagan's expected request at a time when the Gramm-Rudman act is forcing deep cuts in domestic and military spending.

on NBC's "Meet the Press" that Congress would produce a tax revision bill by August at the latest.

Sen. Ernest F. Hollings, D-S.C., said on the same program, however, that he believes "a tax increase will be necessary if we are to comply with

*"If there is a tax increase that comes forward, albeit with a few deficit cuts, I think that he will look at it, but I don't think that he will buy it."*

— Donald Regan, chief of staff.

Gramm-Rudman-Hollings."

White House Chief of Staff Donald Regan said on ABC's "This Week With David Brinkley" that the president wants to fight the deficit and to stress "privatization" of government assets.

"If there is a tax increase that

Reagan partisans say that if the president can present the military aid request as part of a strategy for forcing the Nicaraguan government to negotiate seriously with the opposition, Congress might well support him.

They cite also the strong congressional distaste for Nicaragua's close military ties to the Soviet Union and Cuba and the Sandinistas' crackdown on internal dissent.

Although the CIA provided the rebels with an estimated \$80 million in covert military aid from 1981-84, the new aid request would be the first open military assistance that the United States has provided the insurgents.

The vote, likely in February, will be the first major test of the so-called Reagan Doctrine — strong U.S. backing of anti-communist guerrilla forces fighting leftist or pro-Soviet regimes.

comes forward, albeit with a few deficit cuts, I think that he will look at it, but I don't think that he will buy it," Regan said. He expressed doubt that "the trigger's going to be pulled" to set in motion the automatic Gramm-Rudman cuts.

House Majority Leader Jim Wright, D-Texas, predicted that the deep cuts required by the measure would force Reagan to strike a deal with Congress. He said that if the tax revision bill became the focus of such a bargain "it would not only be all right, it would be highly desirable."

House Speaker Tip O'Neill Jr. said lawmakers also are less than enthusiastic about Reagan's "privatization" plans to sell some government assets, such as the Tennessee Valley Authority, to private interests.

White House officials say Reagan plans to make a comparatively brief, nationally broadcast address before a joint session of the House and Senate Tuesday. The president will outline his specific legislative proposals in a special, written message to Congress.

## Medicare reforms labeled deficient

**Associated Press**  
 WASHINGTON — The first hard look at quality control under recent Medicare reforms has found "serious deficiencies" in procedures that are supposed to protect America's elderly from incompetent, indifferent or greedy doctors and hospitals, a senior government investigator says.

The review of more than 4,700 cases that were flagged by watchdog Peer Review Organizations as suspicious uncovered a few striking examples of physician ineptitude or hospital indifference to patient health — and a general indifference by the PROs to policing those abuses.

The results prompted an unusual "early alert" by Inspector General Richard Kusserow to the Health and Human Services Department, privately warning that the review was uncovering serious problems in the Reagan administration's heralded reform program.

"We are deeply troubled by the ineffectiveness of the existing procedures used by PROs to review cases of substandard care," he said. "We believe that it is imperative that HCFA take strong action to place more emphasis on PRO responsibilities."

Haddow, in his response, told Kusserow he was surprised by the inspector general's conclusions and disagreed with the assessment of their severity.

Kusserow, in an interview with The Associated Press, said he stood by the assessment in the "early alert," a copy of which was obtained by the AP.

The cases reviewed covered a period from October 1983 through last May, a period during which the reforms were new and review organizations still were feeling their way, Kusserow said.

Kusserow's inspection involves the potent political question of whether quality health care for the elderly is being sacrificed in the drive to reduce the federal spending, as many critics charge.

Faced with soaring Medicare costs, the Reagan administration in 1983 launched a "prospective payment" system for Medicare that dictates in advance how much the government will pay for a specific ailment.

The system controls medical costs by putting hospitals on a budget. Quick, efficient care means profit; dawdling means losses. But critics charge the system sabotages quality, pressuring hospitals and doctors to discharge patients before they are ready.

The administration has denied any quality problem, pointing to its network of 54 PROs, which monitor Medicare cases for quality assurance.

But it is there where Kusserow found the problems. The inspector general said he started with 4,724 cases flagged by PROs as suspicious discharges.

Files could not be found for about 1,000 of the cases, despite the review organizations' stated suspicion, Kusserow said.

Of the 2,900, Kusserow said, 74 were so outrageous that they would justify disciplinary action by HHS, such as exclusion from the Medicare program through Kusserow's office.

But none of the 74 were referred to him for action, Kusserow said, and the watchdog agencies generally did not aggressively pursue the 2,900 cases of suspicious discharges.

In one case, a woman was admitted to a hospital for surgery but found to be so unstable from gangrene that she could not undergo the operation. For five days, doctors worked to stabilize her condition. Then, as they wheeled her to an operating room, they noticed on her file that her Medicare benefits for the procedure had just run out.

The operation was cancelled and the woman discharged, Kusserow said. The case is particularly appalling, he added, because the woman's physician simply listed the lack of further Medicare money as the reason for her discharge.

## Pope to stop in India for first official tour

**Associated Press**  
 NEW DELHI — Pope John Paul II, making the first official papal trip next weekend to the Hindu homeland of Mahatma Gandhi, visits a nation divided by piety, poverty and bitter sectarian conflicts.

Invited by the Indian government to tour this nation of 750 million people, which approximates the size of the world's Catholic community, the pope said Sunday from the Vatican that he will visit as a "pilgrim of peace" — a pastor sent to confirm among brothers of the faith an ecclesiastical unity.

Christianity, however, is regarded with suspicion in India as a colonialist ideology. Sometimes the Virgin Mary is depicted in a sari as Indian churches have attempted to shed the image of a foreign church and adopt Indian customs.

Christian missionaries are criticized for converting untouchable Hindus and impoverished pagan tribals, for stirring the lower classes to demand their legal rights. The Vatican to many Hindus represents a foreign Catholic minority that makes up less than 2 percent of the population.

Hindu zealots have declared the pope unwelcome and demanded he cease conversions. They have planned anti-Catholic demonstrations in New Delhi and Bombay, and two death threats against him have been reported.

Militant slogans, spray-painted in Madras, say: "There's no hope, pope, go home" and "The pope is a CIA agent."

In the Indian Catholic community, there is dispute over "liberation theology" in a nation of overwhelming poverty, sickness, illiteracy, inequality and discrimination. "Untouchable" Christians, like Hindu outcasts, have been protesting discrimination against them in Madras.

Activist priests and nuns have been criticized and transferred by the church for demonstrating on behalf of poor fishermen in Kerala state and for supporting landless untouchables oppressed by Hindu landlords and money-lenders in Bihar state.

## Yemen insurgents pursue legitimacy with Soviet support

**Associated Press**  
 MANAMA, Bahrain — South Yemeni rebels Sunday sought legitimacy amid official backing from the Soviets by convening a Cabinet meeting in the capital under "interim President" Heider al-Attas.

Aden-based rebel radio, monitored in Bahrain, did not identify the ministers who attended the session. The 26-member Cabinet was reported to have disbanded shortly after radical Marxist rebels and forces loyal to President Ali Nasser Mohammed began fighting on Jan. 13.

Two ministers were reported killed in street battles in Aden, the capital. Three others sided with Mohammed. The rest of the ministers have not been heard from since fighting began in the Marxist Arab nation, strategically located on the heel of the Arabian Peninsula.

Aden, a port city of 280,000 people, sustained enormous damage in nearly 12 days of tank and artillery battles, the bloodiest since the country gained independence from Britain in 1967.

Arab and Western diplomatic sources in San'a, capital of North Yemen, said about 12,000 persons were killed and nearly twice as many injured in the fighting.

Meanwhile, the triumphant rebels claimed the situation in Aden Sunday was "absolutely tranquil." Persian Gulf-based Arab diplomatic sources, however, insist the conflict between al-Attas, formerly the prime minister, and Mohammed remained undecided.

"South Yemen is virtually divided into a rebel-controlled capital on one side and tribal eastern and northern regions on another," said one diplomat, reached by telephone in San'a, North Yemen.

Soviet television quoted al-Attas as saying on his return that relations with the Kremlin would strengthen on the basis of a friendship and cooperation treaty signed by the two countries in 1979.

Mohammed, a Marxist supported in the past by Moscow, was criticized by South Yemeni hard-liners for tilting recently toward his pro-Western neighbors, Saudi Arabia and Oman.

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