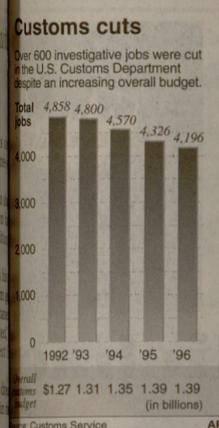


Customs job cuts spark controversy



WASHINGTON (AP) — The U.S. Customs Service, which protects America's borders from illegal drugs, money and weapons, has quietly cut 662 investigative jobs and brought thousands fewer criminal cases since President Clinton took office, records show.

The cuts occurred even though Congress has increased the agency's overall budget by \$121 million since 1992, and politicians everywhere are clamoring for tighter border controls.

Big-crime cities such as Los Angeles, New Orleans, New York and Miami have taken some of the largest hits, according to documents obtained by The Associated Press.

The agency says the personnel cuts were necessary to free up money to modernize dilapidated equip-

ment and bolster Southwest border patrols — and that it is now more efficient despite less manpower.

"I would say between '92 and now, because of our sophistication, that we are better able to protect our borders — with the caveat that we have less people," Customs Director of Operations Connie Fenchel said. "We are doing very well with less, but we could do better with more."

Not everyone agrees that the borders are now better protected, and they are upset by the personnel cutbacks.

"The agents are very concerned and know it was a mistake. They're saying it's hampering the fight against the drug cartels," said Rep. Spencer Bachus, R-Ala., chairman of a House Banking subcommittee

that recently heard complaints from front-line agents.

Statistics show Customs is securing a larger percentage of federal convictions, but its overall number of cases — particularly those in federal court — has dropped by thousands over the last three years.

The disclosure comes at a sensitive time for the Clinton administration as Republican Bob Dole sharpens his attacks on the president's drug interdiction efforts.

The picture for Customs' field agents, however, isn't likely to improve any time soon.

A memo from Customs headquarters this month instructed field supervisors to freeze current investigative staffs, and leave vacant positions unfilled for the foreseeable future.

Palestinians attack Jewish settlements

NETZARIM, Gaza Strip (AP) — Yasser Arafat's security forces battled Israeli troops Thursday as thousands of Palestinian stone-throwers attacked two isolated Jewish settlements in the Gaza Strip. Two Palestinians were reported killed and at least 15 wounded.

The violence marked the third day of Palestinian rioting set off by Israel's decision to open an archaeological tunnel along the Al Aqsa mosque compound, one of Islam's holiest sites.

Palestinians claim the tunnel undermines their control over the Jerusalem holy sites and violates Israeli assurances that no changes will be made in Jerusalem until the disputed city's future is determined in peace talks.

Arafat had urged Palestinians on Wednesday to hold protest marches and strikes against Israel's decision. It was not certain Thursday, however, whether Arafat was in control of his 30,000 armed policemen, some of whom were involved in the fighting.

The clashes marked a new stage for Arafat and the Palestinians by challenging a basic premise of their peace talks: that the two sides would co-

operate in maintaining security in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

Thursday's fighting erupted when thousands of Palestinian protesters marched toward the two tiny Jewish settlements of Netzarim and Kfar Darom, isolated enclaves in the heart of the Palestinian-controlled Gaza Strip.

Palestinians threw stones, fire-bombs and bottles at Israeli troops at a small outpost about a mile from Netzarim. Soon, more than 100 Palestinian policemen began trading automatic gunfire with about a dozen Israeli soldiers.

Israeli troops pulled back toward Netzarim as army commanders sent in three armored personnel carriers and two helicopters.

Shots were fired from one of the armored vehicles, as the battle spread into surrounding fields and farms.

Farther south, hundreds of Palestinians surrounded the Kfar Darom settlement and hurled stones into the small enclave.

A senior Israeli army officer and five Palestinian demonstrators were wounded by gunfire, but it was not immediately clear whether Palestinian police were shooting at Israel troops.

Israeli-Palestinian violence

The Israeli government has ordered more troops into the West Bank and Gaza, along with tanks and helicopters. Rioting began on Tuesday after Israel's decision to open an archaeological tunnel alongside an Islamic holy site in Jerusalem.

Legend:
 - Palestinian civil control / Israeli security: Light grey
 - Total Israeli control: Dark grey
 - Total Palestinian control: Black
 - Israeli settlement: Circle with dot
 - Israeli army outpost: Square with dot
 - Israeli border crossing: Square with 'X'
 - Areas of population: Dotted area

Detail areas: ISRAEL, JORDAN, EGYPT, Med. Sea, Gaza Strip, Netzarim, Kfar Darom, Jerusalem, West Bank, Ramallah, Jericho, Bethlehem, Hebron, Dead Sea, Gaza City, Erez, Tulkarim, Janin, Nablus, Ramallah, Jerusalem, Jericho, Bethlehem, Hebron, Dead Sea.

Scale: 4 miles / 4 km, 15 miles / 15 km

Latest violence in Israel

- Gaza Strip**
Thousands of enraged Palestinians attacked two isolated Jewish settlements of Netzarim and Kfar Darom.
- Israeli troops came under fire as they tried to rescue a critically wounded TV cameraman at the checkpoint leading into the Gaza Strip.
- West Bank**
Palestinian police and Israeli troops traded fire at an Israeli army checkpoint.
- Palestinian troops ransacked a Jewish seminary and burned hundreds of religious books.
- Hundreds of Palestinians marched toward the tunnel's new exit in Jerusalem's Muslim Quarter and were pushed back by Israeli troops swinging clubs.
- Israeli soldiers fired tear gas and rubber bullets in an attempt to disperse the crowds.

Lucid begins long rehabilitation process

CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla. (AP) — Astronaut Ellison S. Sizemore, NASA's space superwoman, returned to Earth on Thursday after six debilitating months of weightlessness and to everyone's amazement, walked off the shuttle Atlantis.

Doctors had met her inside the space shuttle with a stretcher, figuring the 53-year-old chemist would be too weak and wobbly to walk alone.

But she surprised them, insisting, "I can walk."

Two workers assisted her during the short walk onto an airport-style moving sidewalk into a reclining chair.

After a record-shattering 188 days in space, most of that time aboard the Russian space station Mir — she was thrilled to be home.

"We could hear her laughing all the way from the flight deck, I'll tell you, she was

just so tickled," said Atlantis' commander, William Readdy.

She was still laughing when she met her family a few hours later.

"It was just a great mission and I just had a great time," said Lucid, who rocketed away in March and spent a longer stretch in space than any other American and any other woman.

Lucid was welcomed back to Earth with a 10-pound box of red, white and blue M&M's from President Clinton and an offer for 188 cases of potato chips — one for every day she spent in orbit. She had craved both while living aboard Mir.

Clinton called from the Oval Office to congratulate her. "I couldn't believe you walked off the shuttle," he said.

Lucid, who traveled 75 million miles and

circled the Earth 3,008 times, faces weeks of rehabilitation to recover from the effects of prolonged weightlessness, which include weak muscles, fatigue, vertigo, anemia and deteriorating bones. She could be dragging for months to come.

Unaccustomed to the pull of gravity, she said she felt heavy, but noted that was normal. She also was wobbly, almost falling over when she got up from a chair at NASA's crew quarters. She grabbed onto a table to steady herself.

"It will take just a little bit to get fully adapted back to living in one-G (gravity) again," Lucid said.

Lucid was taken to the crew quarters building for a battery of medical tests. She was reunited there with her husband, Michael, and their three children, all in their 20s.

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- *EXTREME MEASURES (R) 11:05 1:40 4:10 7:00 9:50
- *TWO DAYS IN THE VALLEY (R) 12:15 2:35 4:55 7:10 9:35
- *FIRST WIVES CLUB (PG) 11:25 2:15 4:40 7:25 10:10
- MAXIMUM RISK (R) 11:05 1:35 4:00 7:05 9:20
- *LAST MAN STANDING (R) 12:10 2:40 5:20 7:40 10:05
- SPITFIRE GRILL (PG-13) 11:45 2:15 4:55 7:35 10:10
- BULLETPROOF (R) 12:20 2:10 4:05 7:05 9:00
- RICH MAN'S WIFE (R) 12:00 2:20 4:30 6:45 9:10
- FLY AWAY HOME (PG) 11:20 1:50 4:10 6:55 9:35
- THE ISLAND OF DR. MOREAU (PG-13) 11:15 1:40 4:00 6:50 9:40
- TIN CUP (R) 12:40 4:10 7:25 10:30
- A TIME TO KILL (R) 11:55 3:00 7:20 10:25
- INDEPENDENCE DAY (PG-13) 11:30 2:40 6:45 10:00
- JACK (PG-13) 11:10 1:40 4:45 7:20 10:20
- CROW: CITY OF ANGELS & SUPER COP - DOUBLE FEATURE (R) 11:00 2:30 6:25 9:45
- TWISTER (PG-13) 11:35 2:10 4:45 7:15 9:55

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