

# More rats die in space, animal activists protest

## Strong economy boosts system

SPACE CENTER, Houston (AP) — Baby rats have died aboard space shuttle Columbia, prompting protests Friday from an animal rights group that accused NASA of having an "appalling record" in animal research.

NASA's chief veterinarian, Joseph Bielitzki, said 50 rats had died aboard Columbia due to maternal neglect, an increase from the 45 deaths reported Monday.

That is more than half of the 96 baby rats that were launched aboard Columbia 1 1/2 weeks ago. Bielitzki said scientists had expected only a 10-12 percent mortality rate.

The deaths drew harsh criticism from People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals.

"NASA has an appalling record. It won't keep animals alive on the ground

or in space," said Mary Beth Sweetland, director of PETA's research, investigations and rescue department.

Bielitzki, however, said crew members were doing everything possible to prevent more deaths.

"The crew has really done yeoman's work in this case," he said. "Anybody that has tried to rear an orphaned animal ... understands the number of hours and the effort that has to go into saving a single animal, let alone 45 or 50 of them."

Richard Linnehan, the veterinarian aboard Columbia, said Tuesday that several sick rats had improved after being fed a Gatorade and water mixture by hand.

"They all seemed to perk up quite a bit," Linnehan said. "We feel we're over the hump."

## Bosnian weapons move west

AMSTERDAM, Netherlands (AP) — What started as giggling, then raucous laughter. A deafening blast and the tinkling sound of a thousand shards of glass. Thirty seconds of silence. Then screams and sirens.

Khalid Lemqaddem was only 8 years old; his best friend, Othman Zarouali, only 10. It was April Fool's Day afternoon this year, and the two Moroccan-born school chums were playing on the sidewalk with the grenade they'd just found in a nearby park.

The grenade, authorities say, came from the former Yugoslavia, whose war surplus has become the latest source of light arms and explosives for militias, gang members and petty street criminals throughout Western Europe.

"There's a rising tide of this weaponry and law enforcement seems to think it can't do anything about it," said Daniel Plesch, director of the British American Security Information Council, which advises governments on small-arms trafficking.

Dutch authorities say the number of grenades circulating on the black market has increased fourteenfold since the signing of the 1995 Dayton

accords ending Bosnia's war. Estimates run into the tens of thousands.

Ordinary citizens are finding the explosives in parks, alleys and other public places with alarming regularity.

Practically all of them, authorities say, bore markings indicating they were either made in the former Yugoslavia or were the same Russian- or Chinese-made grenades that were handed out for free by the dozens to the Bosnian Serbs.

"We're concerned about the very weak and porous nature of European Union arms controls," said Brian Wood of London-based Amnesty International. "The weaponry stocks are just not controlled."

Although both the EU and the United Nations last year promised a crackdown on small-arms smuggling, "so far it's not much more than a piece of paper," Wood said.

Officials will discuss the problem at the mid-May Group of Eight summit in Birmingham, England.

Dutch authorities say grenades as powerful as the one that killed Khalid and Othman are being peddled for as little as \$12.50 apiece.

WASHINGTON (AP) — The country's humming economy is pouring more money into the Social Security system, the program's trustees said Tuesday, predicting three extra years of full benefits for retiring baby boomers before a potential cash shortfall in 2032.

"The strength of our economy has led to modest improvements in the outlook for Social Security," President Clinton said. But he said those "modest improvements only underscore the fundamental challenge we face."

Thi slightly more optimistic report also was not enough to calm cries on Capitol Hill for changes to shore up the government's biggest benefit program.

"If we don't do anything but clap, Social Security will still go broke," said Sen. Phil Gramm, R-Texas, an outspoken member of the Senate Finance Committee that oversees Social Security.

The improvement that Social Security trustees predicted in their annual report Tuesday is "almost entirely due to the strength of the U.S. economy and our projections that over the near term that strength continues," said Treasury Secretary Robert Rubin.

Unemployment and inflation are at their lowest levels in decades, and with more Americans on the job, the taxes deducted from workers' paychecks to support Social Security are up.

Low inflation also saves Social Security money because yearly cost-of-living raises to retirees can be smaller. This year's raise was just 2.1 percent, the lowest in a decade.

Social Security, in fact, now collects more

payroll taxes than are needed to pay benefits to today's retirees. The surpluses are invested in government bonds.

The program will not need to start cashing in those investments to pay retirees' benefits until 2013, the trustees said — a year later than previously expected.

At that time, baby boomers will be retiring in droves, and it is projected that the taxes paid by those left in the work force won't cover their pensions.

Because times are so good, however, the money now accumulating will be enough to pay full Social Security benefits until 2032, rather than 2029 as previously thought, the trustees said.

If changes to the system are not made, the government at that point would be able to pay only about three-quarters of promised benefits.

Social Security makes payments to disabled people and to the survivors of workers who die young, as well as to retirees.

The trustees — including Rubin, Health and Human Services Secretary Donna Shalala and two private citizens — also released their annual report on Medicare, the nation's health insurance program for the elderly and disabled.

Paid for like Social Security with taxes on workers' wages, the part of Medicare that covers hospital care is already in trouble.

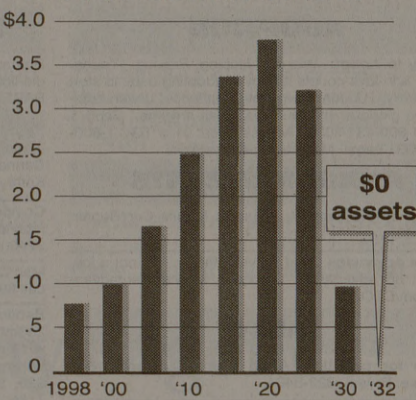
The hospital fund in 1995 started paying out more than it takes in and began spending down surpluses saved from previous years.

The trustees say changes made in last year's balanced budget act, including tighter

### Social Security

The Clinton administration announced that the Social Security trust fund will be solvent until 2032, three years later than earlier estimates.

Year-end estimates in trillions of dollars



Source: Social Security Administration AP

controls on fees paid to doctors and hospitals, will extend Medicare's ability to pay its bills until 2008.

That's better than the 2001 predicted before, but still two years ahead of the first baby boomer retirements.

## Extreme-rightist victory causes some concern

BERLIN (AP) — The German People's Union party used to be all talk, heard mostly by the small readership of its extreme-rightist newspapers.

The anti-foreigner themes struck a troubling neo-Nazi chord, but no one worried much. That is, until last weekend. With its strident appeal to Germans anxious over unemployment, the party won a jolting 13 percent in elections in an eastern state.

It was the extreme right's best showing here since before World War II.

German politicians denied the victory was a gain for racism, saying that voters in Saxony-Anhalt were merely voicing frustration with poverty and joblessness. European columnists and Jewish leaders expressed alarm nonetheless, warning Germany to counter a neo-Nazi resurgence.

Many Germans had dismissed the party as a disorganized band of far-right cranks. And perhaps no one was as surprised by the win as the German People's Union itself — known by its initials DVU.

Once weakened by infighting, the party hurried Tuesday to capitalize on its sudden strength by seeking an alliance with another rightist party.

If the Republican party accepts the DVU's overture — it has refused previous offers, saying the DVU was too radical — DVU chief Gerhard Frey said he will take his campaign to other state elections, and perhaps the national vote on Sept. 27.

The decision to ally with the Republican party will be announced within weeks, Frey told a press conference Tuesday in the southern city of Munich, his hometown.

"This is one state," Chancellor Helmut Kohl said of the Saxony-Anhalt legislative vote. "There is absolutely no danger of rightist radicalism threatening the republic."

The U.S. State Department backed him up, with spokesperson James Foley saying Germany was an "extraordinarily solid democracy and has been so for more than half a century."

Others were less certain.

The Times of London wrote: "Neo Nazis ... are starting to speak for the young unemployed who feel abandoned by the political class." The leftist Liberation newspaper in Paris cautioned that others would seek to copy the DVU's success.

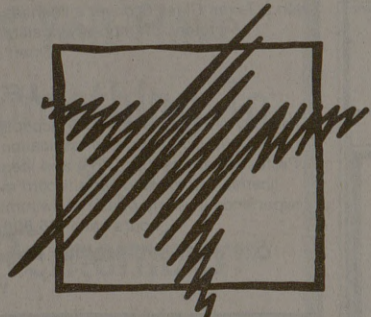
Mindful of such anxieties, the German Association of Trade and Industry worried that the DVU would hurt Germany's image and scare off investment.

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