

National News

What Happened To Pelosi: Columnist

"Who sucked the life out of [Rep.] Nancy Pelosi?" asked syndicated columnist Arianna Huffington in her Nov. 25 column. "Was it 'Meet the Press' or the Sci-Fi Channel?" queried Huffington of the California Democrat's Nov. 24 talk-show appearance. "Nancy Pelosi. . . [the new] House Minority Leader . . . sounded like a character from 'Invasion of the Body Snatchers.'" Huffington compared the the former "bold, combative, impassioned, progressive politician" with the present "soulless pod person—an empty shell mouthing the kind of pallid, inoffensive, focus group-tested and cringe-inducing platitudes that have driven two-thirds of the American electorate away from politics—and a little more than half of the remaining one-third away from the Democratic Party." Huffington cited Pelosi's switch to acquiescence in an Iraq war, after having voted against the use-of-force resolution.

"To hear Pod Pelosi tell it, her leadership role is all about finding the political middle. 'We must seek our common ground with the administration,'" Pelosi told "Meet the Press." Pelosi's communications director, Brendan Daly, explained, "She has got her beliefs. But we are here to win [sic], and she understands that to do that you need to be in the middle."

LaRouche Rep At Nevada Economic Forum

The State of Nevada Economic Forum took 10-15 minutes of testimony on Dec. 2, on Lyndon LaRouche's emergency economic infrastructure program, from Ann Reynolds, a leader of the LaRouche movement in the state. Reynolds asserted, "Lyndon LaRouche has a plan that will work." She made what she reported as "a polite, but rather cruel, critique" of the fantasies of economic recovery upon which this body pro-

jected that state revenues would increase by 3.5% in the current fiscal year, 4.6% in 2003-04, and 5.1% in 2004-05. Reynolds scoffed at their proclaimed assumption of "a jobless recovery based on continuing consumer debt," and warned that the demise of the airlines is ominous for Las Vegas. In contrast, Reynolds outlined LaRouche's program for debt reorganization and publicly funded infrastructure building as the only way to get a functioning economy which provides for the general welfare.

The state financial panel "seemed a bit stunned," Reynolds reported, as they had already acknowledged being uncomfortable with their own projections—noting that they had omitted many potentially negative local factors—and now were more uncomfortable, for broader and more reality-oriented reasons.

Reynolds testified via teleconference from Las Vegas. In the capital Santa Fe, Gov. Kenny Guinn and state legislators immediately reacted to the panel's projections. Even with its foolish assumptions of an economic recovery, it punched an \$800 million hole in the budgets which had been planned for the next two years. The squabble is on over which taxes to raise, and which services to cut, the two Las Vegas dailies reported on Dec. 3.

Food-Stamp Use Is Rising Nationwide

Between July 2000 and August 2002, usage of food stamps increased by 2.8 million Americans, bringing total participation to 19.7 million. Some 86% of that increase came in the last 17 months—between March 2001 and August 2002—according to a recent report issued by the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities.

Despite claiming "it is not possible" to know "what caused the increase," the authors debunked a few standard myths. For example, seasonal trends of decreased usage in Summer months didn't hold, as usage didn't decline between May and August 2002, "but rather rose to its highest level since April 1998." Changes in eligibility—

i.e., restoring access to legal immigrants and modest benefit improvements—"do not explain the increase," say the CBPP authors, as the "majority of [them] are optional" and could not even be implemented now. Getting to reality, they admit, "Much of the increase in food stamp [use] came as the unemployment rate was rising." The report notes that unemployment "rose steadily through 2001," and "fluctuated in 2002" but stayed in the high 5% range. Yet, the real explosion in usage will be seen as the September and October data become available, as they confess, "Increases in food stamp [use] often occur slightly after the unemployment rate rises," which it did in those two months.

Food stamp caseloads grew by 20% or more in five states: Alaska (20.4%); Arizona (28.5%); Delaware (29.7%); Nevada (30.1%); and Oklahoma (27.1%). There were increases of 15% or more in 11 other states, and rises of 10% or higher in 16 more.

Candidate Kerry Doesn't Address Crisis

Newly announced Presidential pre-candidate Sen. John Kerry (D-Mass.) failed to tackle the economic crisis, in a Dec. 3 speech before the Cleveland City Club, billed as a major economic policy address. While Kerry identified economic issues as key, and spoke of a critical moment in our nation's history, he repeated the usual Democratic line that Clinton Administration's economic policies had been successful, and that current economic problems are the result of the Bush Administration's pursuit of tax cuts for the wealthy—an idea discredited by the facts of the nationwide revenue collapse.

Referring to the need to go beyond quoting FDR and JFK, and to actually match their leadership, and demanding "unprecedented" economic reform and revitalization, Kerry proceeded to present the centerpiece of his economic policy proposals as tax cuts of his own: a payroll tax holiday on the first \$10,000 of working Americans' incomes to boost consumer demand; an expanded in-

HENRY KISSINGER snarled at Sen. John Kerry's call, on Dec. 1, for him to sever all ties with Kissinger Associates, Inc. due to "linkages that could remain suspect" while he heads the 9/11 investigation. Said Kissinger, to CNN's Wolf Blitzer, "the possibility that the investigation of a commission that contains eight commissioners would be affected by any conceived commercial interests is outrageous. I have served six Presidents, and I have never been accused of anything of this kind!"

CHENEY'S boys got more key spots, with the Dec. 2 promotion of the Vice President's collaborator Zalmay Khalilzad, to "special envoy and ambassador at large for free Iraqis," in addition to his job as special envoy to Afghanistan. At the National Security Council, Iran-Contra criminal Elliott Abrams was promoted to director for Near East and North African affairs. This puts Abrams—pardoned on Christmas Eve, 1992 by Bush "41" for his Iran-Contra conviction—in charge of Arab-Israeli issues at the NSC.

UNEMPLOYMENT'S average duration is at its highest level in over eight years, as fewer people are finding jobs, even though new claims for unemployment are falling, according to Irwin Kellner of CBS Marketwatch on Dec. 3. Of officially counted unemployed, 36% have been without a job for 15 weeks or more—the highest percentage since 1991—while those without work for 27 weeks or more, are at an eight-year high.

THE PENTAGON plans to train 2,000 Iraqis in Hungary, to assist in any U.S. invasion of Iraq, revealed Hungarian Defense Minister Ferenc Juhasz at a Budapest press conference Dec. 4. The project, which will include up to 800 U.S. military instructors, is to begin in January. The Iraqis will be trained for tasks such as forward-based target reconnaissance for the artillery, or as military policemen and translators. Their familiarity with Iraq's geography is what the Pentagon wants, media say.

come tax credit that rewards low-income families who are working; a one-time payroll tax break for businesses, tied to creating new jobs or providing raises; an additional tax break for small businesses; and some version of a zero capital gains tax, which is supposed to foster investment in "critical" new technologies.

Kerry also called vaguely for infrastructure maintenance and building, citing the decay of bridges, highways, sewers, and water pollution, and spoke of the need to build high-speed rail where it is "needed and feasible." He called for a national drive for "energy independence," as have legions of others over the years, as a counterpart to President Kennedy's challenge to go into space and to the Moon, saying we have to invent our way out of the problem of energy dependence. Areas for energy development he cited, were the growth of solar, geothermal, and wind technologies—all of low energy-density and efficiency.

New U.S. Military Ops in Philippines

The Singapore *Straits Times* reported on Dec. 2 that U.S. Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld has directed the Pacific Command and Joint Chiefs of Staff to draw up plans for a sequel to the Balikatan-02 counter-terror training mission that American forces carried out on Basilan Island in the southern Philippines earlier this year, and to extend that mission to Jolo, where the Abu Sayyaf terrorist gang is believed to be regrouping.

The new training operation could involve 300-400 American troops, and begin as early as January. It reflects concern that the earlier Balikatan training mission failed to quell such movements. The new operation would shift hundreds of troops scheduled for classroom or routine training in Luzon, to a combat zone in the South, involving American special forces, Army and Marines, over much of next year, unnamed American officials told the paper.

No decisions have been made on the proposal, but Adm. Thomas Fargo, commander of U.S. forces in the Pacific, was due to meet

Rumsfeld in Washington in early December. An unnamed White House official reported that President George W. Bush spoke to Philippines President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo two weeks earlier about terrorism issues. "The Philippine military has asked to extend the Basilan model to Jolo," said an unidentified senior American military official.

U.S. Clergy Invoke Jesus Against Iraq War

"President Bush: Jesus Changed Your Heart. Now Let Him Change Your Mind," is the headline of a full-page advertisement appearing in the *New York Times* on Dec. 4, which was signed by several hundred American religious leaders.

The signers belonged to the National Council of Churches, to many Catholic dioceses, to the United Methodist Church (George W. Bush's denomination), the Episcopal Church, a number of other Christian denominations, and included rabbis representing many Jewish congregations.

The ad, one of several such recent initiatives by U.S. mainstream religious groups, stresses that "This is not a just war," and that a war against Iraq "will be an unprovoked, pre-emptive attack on a nation which is not threatening the United States. It will violate the UN Charter and set a dangerous precedent for other nations."

The religious leaders remind Bush of his own words: "You have proclaimed the crucial role of your faith in your life, and you've often said that people of faith are often 'our nation's voice of conscience.' Listen to our voices now." The text also quotes the General Secretary of the United Methodist Church's General Board of Church and Society, who says "It is inconceivable that Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior and the Prince of Peace, would support this proposed attack."

The leaders said they had been rejected when they asked for a meeting with Bush. The group has a website called TrueMajority.com, and calls itself Religious Leaders for Sensible Priorities.