

40 bodies found in Waco rubble; three believed shot



WACO, Texas (AP) — Three of about 40 bodies found scattered throughout the incinerated ruins of a cult compound had recent bullet wounds, but authorities said Wednesday it wasn't clear if they were victims of suicide or homicide.

Also still unclear was federal agents' rationale for sending in tear gas-firing tanks to end a 51-day standoff with the Branch Davidian cult on Monday.

Attorney General Janet Reno has said that reports of child abuse in the compound led her to authorize the agents' assault. The White House said Wednesday that child abuse inside the compound had been continuing; the FBI said it had only old reports and a psychiatrist's analysis.

Federal and state officials said about 40 bodies were spotted in the rubble by late Wednesday, but most likely wouldn't be removed before Thursday. There was no immediate word that cult leader David Koresh's body had been found.

Investigators were moving cautiously in the city block-sized area where Koresh and 85 others, including 17 children 10 or under, were believed to have died. Nine cultists survived.

Many of the found bodies weren't immediately moved because officials were being careful to avoid possible booby traps and ammunition that could explode in the still-warm debris. Justice Department spokesman Carl Stern said in Washington.

Charred bodies were being found "generally distributed throughout the rubble," showing no signs of the group being huddled together as the fire spread, said Chuck McDonald, a spokesman for the state Department of Public Safety.

He said at least two bodies have been found in a cinderblock-lined room where Koresh and top lieutenants are believed to have sought cover.

"It's a very gruesome scene," said Mike Cox, another spokesman for the state agency.

Stern said three of the victims had gunshot wounds and died recently. He said

one had been shot in the forehead and the head of another victim was "virtually blown away."

Stern ruled out the possibility that they were victims of shootouts Feb. 28 after a raid by federal Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms agents. But he said it was possible that their bodies were struck by ammunition exploding during the inferno in the compound, where at least \$200,000 worth of weapons were believed to have been stored.

The blaze broke out at the sprawling rural complex after agents used tanks fitted with booms to break holes in the walls and pump in tear gas.

The FBI says agents saw cult members set fire to the wooden buildings in a mass suicide, and had other evidence of arson; at least two of the survivors allege that a tank knocked over lanterns and started the blaze.

Cult member Rita Riddle, 34, shouted to reporters as she left a federal courthouse Wednesday that "there was no suicide pact." She was charged with conspiracy

to murder federal agents; court documents allege she was one of five women who aimed rifles at the agents during the Feb. 28 raid.

In Washington, meanwhile, a spokesman for President Clinton said there were "mountains of evidence" of prolonged child abuse inside the compound. "Protecting the kids was the ultimate rationale for going in," said George Stephanopoulos, the White House communications director.

Koresh was "marrying children" and "sexually abusing children" and children were "being taught how to commit suicide, how to put guns in their mouths, how to clamp down on cyanide," Stephanopoulos said.

"It was continuing, it was going on," Stephanopoulos said.

Stern, however, said an FBI official told Reno the "bureau had no information on post-Feb. 28 sexual abuse of the kids, but that recently someone who had come out of the compound said he believed ... the children were being beaten."

Senate kills Clinton's jobs initiative

WASHINGTON (AP) — Democrats abandoned their effort to push President Clinton's jobs bill through the Senate Wednesday, as relentless Republicans saddled the new president with his first major legislative defeat.

After hours of fruitless negotiations between White House officials and Senate Democrats and Republicans, the Senate used a voice vote to approve only the \$4 billion the bill contained for jobless benefits and strip the rest of the money from the legislation.

The move, in effect, killed one of Clinton's major economic initiatives. The Senate measure now goes to the House.

"While the other side is congratulating each other on proving they are a force to be reckoned with, they have only proved that they are the guardians of gridlock," said Sen. Robert Byrd, D-W.Va.

Hours earlier, Democrats had lost their fourth attempt to break

a filibuster by minority Republicans that had frozen the measure in its tracks in the Senate since last month.

The jobs measure had contained \$12.2 billion to restore forests, provide immunizations for children, create summer jobs for students and finance other programs Clinton says would stimulate the economy and put more Americans to work. It also had \$3.2 billion from the existing highway trust fund for road construction.

But Republicans stood firm, arguing that the package would add billions to record federal deficits while doing little to help a \$6 trillion economy. Democrats had wanted to finance the measure by borrowing money, which would drive up the budget shortfall.

In a day of closed-door talks, Republicans offered a much smaller version of the package worth about \$6.5 billion — the jobless benefits money, plus some spending for summer jobs,

road building and other projects. All the programs but the unemployment benefits would have been paid for with cuts in existing programs, a package the Democrats rejected.

"If I am any judge, I think the American people are supporting our position on this package," said Senate Minority Leader Bob Dole, R-Kan. "Most people I talk to say cut spending first ... and don't raise my taxes," he said.

Dole said the latest administration offer was for a total of \$12.9 billion, including the highway money. And he said that for the first time, Democrats had offered to pay for some of the spending by cutting existing programs — the primary Republican demand.

But he said the new White House proposal was too large. And he said Republicans wanted everything in the measure paid for with offsetting cuts — except \$4 billion it contains for jobless benefits.

GOP hands Clinton hard lesson in defeat

WASHINGTON (AP) — Moments after a humiliating legislative defeat, President Clinton summed up the lesson of day 92 of his administration: "I must say there's a lot I have to learn about this town."

His offhand remark came in a speech delivered in the shadow of the Capitol, where, remarkably, the president elected on a promise to jump-start the economy failed for a fourth time Wednesday to get a modest jobs bill through Congress.

A year from now, even months from now, the defeat may be lost under a stack of Clinton successes. Still, the loss was significant because of how it came about and because the subject was the economy — the one issue on which the Clinton White House thought it would meet little resistance on Capitol Hill.

The defeat came after several White House strategy missteps. First it failed to win advance Republican Senate support, then mistakenly believed political pressure on a handful of GOP moderates would melt their resolve. In the end, it appeared to strengthen it.

In between, Clinton lost control of the debate, letting Republicans make the argument the package was political pork and dangerous deficit spending, not "the plan to jump-start our economy" that won Clinton so many campaign points.

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