

News briefs

Jobless to get \$3 billion in emergency aid

WASHINGTON (KRT) - President Bush announced \$3 billion in emergency aid for unemployed workers Thursday as top budget leaders in Congress began defining how they intend to spend up to \$80 billion more to spur America's stumbling economy.

As the latest weekly filings for unemployment relief skyrocketed to 528,000, up 71,000 over last week, Bush said he will give \$3 billion to workers laid off since the Sept. 11 attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon. Bush also authorized an extra 13 weeks of unemployment insurance in hard-hit areas.

On Capitol Hill, the leading lawmakers who draft budgets held a joint press conference to discuss how they plan to meet Bush's call Wednesday for up to \$75 billion in new economic stimulus.

Top Republicans and Democrats on the House and Senate budget committees agreed that they would work to place limits on the stimulus package, saying it would throw federal finances into deficit for the first time since 1997. The Treasury surplus is estimated at only \$52 billion.

To guard against plunging the Treasury deeper into debt for any longer than necessary, the top budget lawmakers agreed that any stimulus measures Congress adopts must last no longer than one year. If their resolve prevails, that would block conservatives who want to ram permanent tax cuts through Congress as part of the stimulus package.

With Capitol Hill tax cutters already clamoring to cut taxes on everything from corporate rates to capital gains, a test of wills between them and fiscal conservatives appears inevitable.

"If challenged, we ought to be prepared to stand strong," said Sen. Pete Domenici of New Mexico, the ranking Republican on the Senate Budget Committee. "There are some who are not going to want us doing this."

Domenici made his comments flanked by Senate Budget Committee Chairman Kent Conrad, D-N.D.; House Budget Committee Chairman Jim Nussle, R-Iowa, and that panel's ranking Democrat, Rep. John Spratt of South Carolina.

The four said the government would have to spend at least \$60 billion to give the flagging economy a boost. But they agreed that much of that spending should be paid back in future years as the economy improves.

They declined as a group to offer recommendations on how the money should be used.

— Sumana Chatterjee and James Kuhnhehn

Florida man hospitalized with anthrax

MIAMI (KRT) — A 63-year-old Palm Beach County, Fla., man has been hospitalized in critical condition with anthrax, state health officials confirmed Thursday.

State of Florida and federal investigators from the Centers for Disease Control are at the Columbia JFK Medical Center in Lantana, Fla., and are investigating, federal sources said.

The patient was tentatively identified as Robert Stevens, though the spelling of his last name was unclear. Investigators said he had recently returned

from dropping his son off at Duke University in Durham, N.C.

At a hastily arranged news conference, Florida Lt. Gov. Frank Brogan and Florida Department of Health Secretary John Agwunobi said the man was first diagnosed with meningitis, but the Centers for Disease Control confirmed that it was anthrax Wednesday afternoon.

Brogan said the man may have inhaled the deadly bacteria but added that the health officials believe it is an isolated case. The FBI has been alerted.

"We're going to stress a calm and reasoned approach to this particular event," Brogan said.

Anthrax is not contagious from one person to another, and in the rare occasions when it is spread to humans, it is usually done so by infected animals. The bacteria is most deadly when spread by air, making it one of the most feared methods of biological attack. But such cases are rare.

In the United States, about one case of anthrax has been confirmed each year over the last 10 years, according to a report by Dr. Arthur M. Friedlander, chief of the Bacteriology Division in the U.S. Army Medical Corps.


The last case in Florida was in 1974, Brogan said.

In 1979 in Sverdlovsk, Russia, anthrax spores accidentally released from a military research facility reportedly killed dozens of people.

At Columbia JFK Medical Center in Lantana, Fla., hospital officials declined to comment, and said information would be released later in the day Thursday. A security guard was posted at the entrance to the critical care unit on the hospital's second floor.

— Manny Garcia and David Kidwell

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