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Thursday, March 13, 2008

More from Congress

Russ Feingold called recently captured arms dealer Viktor Bout "diabolical" and denounced the "unrestrained capitalism" in post-USSR Russia that allowed Bout to build his empire. Diabolical! He's not Dr. Evil, Russ! (Although I will say he probably is evil, with a lower-case "e"; Feingold mentions that he's been known to sell arms to both sides of conflicts -- I think if I were an arms dealer, I'd be more ideologically based, and just pick a side.) Most interestingly, Bout, according to Feingold, has been linked to Russian intelligence and American government contractors. That's kind of problematic.

(We interrupt this Congressional commentary to bring you this: I just received a call from "Angela at New York Sports Club". She asked me if I was enjoying my time at NYSC. I said yes. She said, "Great, thanks." That was the end of the call. Literally like 10 seconds. That's the weirdest phone survey I've ever been part of.)

Posted by Jason Wojciechowski in Politics at 16:41

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Wednesday, March 12, 2008

Recent Congressional action, with obnoxious commentary

So GovTrack.us is an amazing site -- you can set up "alerts" for various things happening in Congress: particular congresspeople speaking or voting or introducing bills; action on particular types of bills; committee actions; and so forth. You can use their website to track these alerts, or you can set up RSS feeds. Also, they use OpenID. Anyway, I now Track our Gov. Here's some interesting stuff from the last two days, which will go partly to show just how much random, time-wasting stuff our legislature gets up to.

John Shadegg, R-AZ, introduced "Jenny's Law", which would disallow "Tier III sex offenders" from being buried in the National Cemetery or getting burial honors and whatnot. "Tier III sex offender" comes from the Sex Offender Registration and Notification Act, at P.L. 109-248. III is the highest tier, and refers to sex offenders who commit offenses punishable by more than a year in prison and is "comparable to" aggravated sexual abuse or abusive sexual contact (both of which are defined federal crimes). I don't see any conceivable purpose for this bill. Then again, I'm not a believer in retributivism in criminal punishment, so I guess your view of the propriety of this kind of law depends on how you feel about the purpose of punishment.

John Salazar, D-CO, introduced this: "The Secretary of Defense may not transport hydrolysate from the Pueblo Chemical Depot, Colorado, or the Blue Grass Army Depot, Kentucky, to an off-site location for treatment, storage, or disposal." The bill is cosponsored by a Kentuckian and a fellow Coloradan. Wikipedia tells me this about hydrolysate: "Hydrolyzed collagen, HCP, also known as purified gelatin and collagen hydrolysate, is collagen that has been enzymatically or chemically processed to make it more digestible and more easily absorbed by the body. HCP is often used by body builders because it is a relatively inexpensive protein source. It is also used to treat skin disorders, treat or prevent malnutrition and for those who cannot tolerate large amounts of bulk food, such as patients of weight loss surgery." It seems that the bill may refer to VX hydrolysate, which is a neutralized form of a chemical weapon. Apparently shipping this stuff can, if it's not properly neutralized, cause a health hazard. Thus perhaps it's sensible for the Coloradans and Kentuckians to be a little worried about truckloads of VX hydrolysate making its way down their highways to be incinerated.

Tim Murphy, R-PA, wants a Resolution honoring the recently deceased Steelers announcer Myron Cope. I'm sure Myron would have appreciated that while he was alive, Mr. Murphy. (That said, maybe Congressional recognition that Myron Cope invented the Terrible Towel is entirely appropriate.)

Steve Kagan, D-WI, offers a Resolution honoring Brett Favre. Don't do it! He'll cry! And then right-wing radio hosts will make vicious jokes! But, you know, of course, the House has to "understand[]" that retirement means reoccupation, knowing that Brett Favre will now be busier than ever before as he helps to build a better future for all of us." If not for Brett Favre, who'll do it? (Oh, wait, you mean that's supposed to be Congress's job?)

The late E. Arthur Gray, former mayor Port Jervis, New York (no, it's not a port; yes, it is basically in Pennsylvania), may get a Post Office in his town named for him. The bill has passed the House.

Not to be outdone, Steve W. Allee is getting a Carrier Annex in Lebanon, Missouri named for him. If you just do a quick Google, Allee just looks like a guy who died in a car accident when he tried to drive across a flooded roadway. Turns out, though, that it was a flash flood and he was on duty at the time, delivering the mail. (Google does add something that Congress didn't, though: Allee wasn't wearing his seat belt.)

The House has passed a Resolution adopting an Office of Congressional Ethics. This passed essentially on party lines, 195 Dems and 33 Reps for, 23 and 159 against. Crossover Democrats include John Murtha, Heath Shuler, and Maxine Waters. Crossover Republicans include the aforementioned Tim Murphy and Chris Shays.

A unanimous resolution in the House congratulated Kansas for winning the Orange Bowl. Dude, you're like two months late, Congress.

This one's a little better. UCLA won the championship in women's water polo, which obviously deserves a House Resolution. (More importantly, the Resolution notes that this is UCLA's 100th NCAA championship, the most ever. Awesome. Go Bruins.)

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Posted by Jason Wojciechowski in Politics at 22:06

Thursday, February 7, 2008

Romney goes down swinging ... at Obama and Clinton

Mitt Romney, on dropping out of the Republican race: "In this time of war, I simply cannot let my campaign be a part of aiding a surrender to terror. This is not an easy decision. I hate to lose." And: "If this were only about me, I'd go on. But it's never been only about me. I entered this race because I love America, and because I love America, in this time of war I feel I have to now stand aside for our party and for our country." Really, Mitt Romney? "Aiding a surrender to terror"? That's completely cheap, utterly indefensible, and will, sadly, only endear him to a certain (significant) element of the Republican party.

Posted by Jason Wojciechowski in Politics at 15:10

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Monday, April 23, 2007

French presidential election = ok

At least things are going right somewhere in the world: Jean-Marie Le Pen received only about 10% of the vote in the first round of the French presidential election, placing a distant fourth and leaving him on the outside of the runoff to take place in about two weeks.

The turnout rate for the election, by the way, was near 85%. Democracy can involve participation.

Posted by Jason Wojciechowski in Politics at 06:37