

White House official resigns

WASHINGTON — Associate Attorney General Webster Hubbell, a longtime friend of President and Mrs. Clinton, resigned Monday, saying distractions from a probe at his former law firm "will interfere with my service to the country."

Hubbell was the second high-ranking Clinton official to resign in just over a week. White House Counsel Bernard Nussbaum quit March 5 after revelations of White House briefings with federal regulators who are investigating an Arkansas savings and loan with ties to the Clintons.

The president said Hubbell had done valuable work at the Justice Department, but "he made the right decision" to resign and return home to Arkansas to deal with an investigation into billings he charged while in private law practice.

Clinton said he found it "hard to believe" that Hubbell was guilty of wrongdoing.

Attorney General Janet Reno said his departure would be a loss for the Justice Department, where he had been the No. 3 official for nine months.

"I don't believe he did a thing wrong," she said.

Hubbell did not attend Reno's brief news conference, but released a statement recalling the "wonderful journey" he took from Little Rock, Ark., to Washington a year ago when Clinton was inaugurated.

He lamented that "private issues" involving his billings at the Rose Law Firm in Little Rock, where he and

"I believe too much in this country, the president, the attorney general, the Justice Department, my wife and family, and my colleagues."

—Hubbell
former associate attorney general

Hillary Rodham Clinton were partners, were "elevated to public speculation." He said he was confident the dispute would be resolved satisfactorily.

The law firm has been investigating whether Hubbell overbilled clients. He has denied doing so and has said he was cooperating with the firm's probe.

Hubbell recused himself last fall from any role in the department's investigation of the Clintons' investment in the Whitewater Development Corp., the co-owner of which also owned Madison Guaranty Savings & Loan. The Rose firm had represented Madison in the past, and Hubbell later sued an accounting firm blamed in the thrift's failure on behalf of the Federal Deposit Insurance Corp.

Hubbell said he would "stand and take the blows from wherever they came" if they affected only him. He decided to resign, he said, because "I believe too much in this country, the president, the attorney general, the Justice Department, my wife and family, and my colleagues."

"After a thoughtful weekend, I believe that my continued service will not be as effective as it has been; that the distractions on me at this time will interfere with my service to the country and the president's agenda, and that my family, although totally supportive, is being harmed," he said.

Hubbell said his association with Reno "has meant more to me than words can describe. She knows that I consider her one of America's heroes."

As for the Clintons, Hubbell said their 20-year friendship "has been a never-ending source of pride and sustenance. Their support of me has been unflinching."

House Republican Whip Newt Gingrich of Georgia, renewing a call for congressional hearings on Whitewater, said he was disturbed that Reno said Hubbell was leaving to take care of old private issues.

"Issues about whether the federal government was overbilled, issues about how the Rose Law Firm handled savings and loan legal affairs for the federal government, these kind of issues are not private matters," Gingrich said.

Christopher optimistic about Chinese meetings

BEIJING — After two days of gloomy reports, Secretary of State Warren Christopher gave an upbeat assessment Monday at the conclusion of his visit to China.

"I find the differences between China and the United States are narrowing somewhat," he said.

He said the Chinese turned over information about political prisoners, agreed to procedures to inspect suspect sites of prison labor and to work to resolve remaining emigration matters.

Christopher then was flying to Vladivostok for a meeting with Russian Foreign Minister Andrei Kozyrev before returning to Washington.

Christopher's final meeting in China was with Foreign Minister Qian Qichen who he said told him that "the Chinese side now understands the views of the United States" on human rights.

Despite the secretary of state's cautiously upbeat assessment, there were no public statements from the Chinese indicating they were ready to yield to U.S. demands for human rights reform.

Rather, Qian told a separate

"I find the differences between China and the United States are narrowing somewhat."

—Christopher,
secretary of state

news conference that China and the United States would continue to have different human rights concepts "for a long time to come."

Qian also warned that if the United States withdraws China's low-tariff trade status, as Washington has threatened to do over human rights, U.S. businessmen "will not be able to enter the Chinese market."

The United States has insisted the Chinese make significant progress toward improving human rights as the price for getting renewal of trading preferences for goods entering the U.S. market.

Job summit promotes cooperation

DETROIT — President Clinton Monday urged America's major trading partners to combine their "collective energy and ideas" to solve the world's crisis of chronic unemployment and stagnant wages.

Clinton, speaking to the top economic policy-makers of the seven richest industrial countries, said every nation faced a "stubborn and persistent problem" of how to create more and better-paying jobs.

He said that the problem was different for each country, with the United States hampered by stagnant wages and Europe saddled with high unemployment rates.

"I asked for this conference to summon the same collective energy and ideas and experience to one of the greatest problems of our era," Clinton said. The president said the most advanced industrialized countries had to learn how to obtain and maintain growing living standards for its citizens.

The president continued to pressure Europe and Japan to do more to end the global recession by stimulating domestic demand. He said the United States would do its part by continuing with efforts to reduce its budget deficits.

Clinton also urged the world's industrialized powers to talk openly about the challenges they face in a rapidly changing global economy.

"If we can honestly debate these problems, we can help people overcome their fear of change," Clinton said.

"We've got to make our people believe that productivity can be a source of gain, not pain," the president said.

Clinton's remarks came at the opening of a two-day conference that the administration hopes will foster free-

wheeling discussions among finance, labor and economics ministers from the so-called Group of Seven countries — the United States, Japan, Germany, Britain, France, Canada and Italy.

The president said the conference participants needed to have the courage to ask the "hard questions," such as why unemployment has remained high even in periods of economic expansion, and how fears of inflation can be balanced against the need to promote growth.

"None of us can find the answers to these questions just within the borders of our own countries," Clinton said, urging the nations to learn from each other.

"Today we are beginning a serious conversation about the economic well being of people in all countries," Clinton said. "This is an historic, important and long overdue moment."

In advance of the speech, Clinton had said he planned to seek a new coordinated strategy among America's major trading partners. However, in the speech the president laid out no major new initiatives.

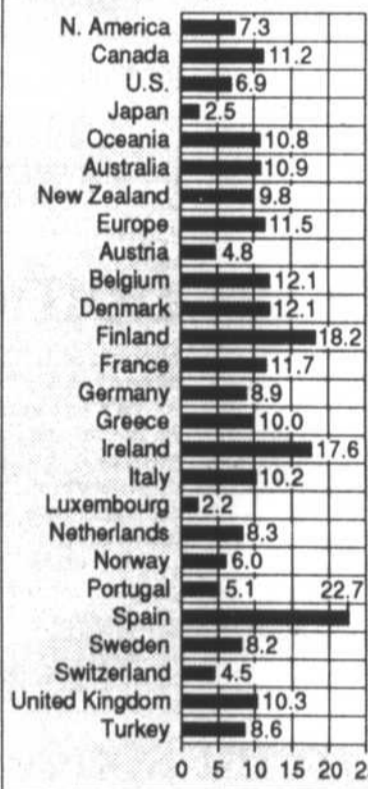
While urging Europe to do more to cut interest rates, Clinton earlier in the day had told reporters that he did not think that rising American rates would choke off the U.S. recovery.

"I think that since there's no inflation in the economy, the interest rates should not continue to go up," the president told reporters before a breakfast meeting with economics ministers.

"If they moderate, tail off a little, we'll be all right," he said. Low interest rates are the cornerstone to Clinton's strategy to strengthen the economy.

World unemployment

We are currently in the worst global employment crisis since the Great Depression of the 1930's. Worldwide, one of three men and women are either unemployed or not earning enough for a minimum standard of living.



Student credit spending causes national debate

WASHINGTON — When Connie Bedell of Springfield, Va., sent her twin daughters to college, she offered them the standard advice: Don't drink, don't stay out too late and buckle up. In retrospect, she wishes she had offered one more admonition: No credit cards.

The daughters, Michele and Diana, now seniors at Radford College in Virginia, both got into debt trouble after obtaining credit cards as sophomores.

Neither had a job or a regular income beyond what their parents provided. They did not need their parents' co-signatures to obtain their Visa and Discover cards. Yet when both daughters fell behind, their creditors turned to their parents to repay the more than \$4,000 they owed.

According to Rep. Joseph P. Kennedy II, D-Mass., college students and credit cards are becoming an increasingly bad mix thanks to the card companies' aggressive marketing campaigns and easy standards for granting cards.

"Why in God's name would they say students don't need a job or a co-signer?" asked Kennedy, whose district includes Harvard, MIT and other major universities.

Credit card companies say students seem to handle credit cards at least as well as older adults.

"College students are some of the most responsible credit users in the market today," said Susan Murdy, a

vice president at Visa U.S.A. Inc. "College students pay their balance in full more than half the time, and when they do carry a balance, the amount is about one-third that of the average for other consumers."

Gary Flood, senior vice president for MasterCard International Inc., said his company's educational campaign includes free videos and teacher's guides on sound financial practices.

Bedell and her daughters told their stories recently to the House Banking consumer subcommittee, which Kennedy chairs.

Like hundreds of other parents, she is facing a choice: Pay off debts she didn't know were accruing or see her children's credit rating ruined for the crucial seven years following graduation when they are buying their first cars, renting apartments and, perhaps, buying their first homes.

Ruth Susswein, executive director of Bankcard Holders of America, a consumer advocacy group, said an estimated 61 percent of the nation's eight million college students have at least one credit card. And card issuers are pushing aggressively, with giveaways and promotions, to sign up even more.

"Students are one of the very few untapped markets left," she said. "Some of the largest issuers... are now targeting college-bound high school seniors. ... However, too many students have no idea what they're getting into."

Japanese businessman wants Harding to wrestle

TOKYO — It might not have the prestige of an offer from Disney or Revlon. But one Japanese businessman says Tonya Harding has just the image he's looking for.

"Tonya was made to be a pro wrestler," Takashi Matsunaga, chairman of the All Japan Women's Professional Wrestling Association, said Monday.

"She's about as tough as they come, and she'll last a lot longer in our sport than she will in figure skating."

Matsunaga says he's willing to pay Harding \$2 million to get into the ring.

"If that's what Disney's paying Nancy Kerrigan, that's what we'll pay Tonya, even if I have to go into debt to do it," he said.

A representative of the wrestling association has been sent to Oregon to make Harding an offer, Matsunaga said. He said he hopes to meet Harding while she is in Japan for the World Figure Skating Championships, which begin outside Tokyo next week.

Both men's and women's professional wrestling are popular in Japan. Wrestlers have been known to record hit songs and become fixtures on variety shows. One wrestler, Antonio Inoki, holds a seat in parliament on the Sports-Peace Party ticket.

"I think we have a 70 percent chance of signing her," Matsunaga said. "Of course, she'd have to be the bad guy at first, but I think she can learn to be a heroine as well."

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