

House passes 'get tough' crime package

WASHINGTON — The House passed a \$28 billion get-tough-on-crime bill Thursday demanding life imprisonment of three-time violent and drug offenders and greatly expanding the federal crimes subject to the death penalty.

The bill passed 282-141. Negotiators from the Senate and House will now attempt to work out a compromise with a \$22 billion version approved by the Senate last November.

"This is a historic moment," said Rep. Charles Schumer, D-N.Y., chairman of the Judiciary Committee's crime panel.

"For the first time, this body is recognizing the anguish on the streets that calls out to us to do something tough

on crime." Majority Leader Richard Gephardt, D-Mo., said, "This is not a perfect bill from anyone's viewpoint in this chamber, but ... it accomplishes punishment ... and it encompasses prevention."

The bill drew the support of 219 Democrats, 65 Republicans and one independent. Voting against it were 107 Republicans and 34 Democrats. House Speaker Tom Foley cast his vote in favor of the bill.

The measure would authorize spending \$13.5 billion for state prison building grants, \$7 billion for crime prevention, \$2 billion for rehabilitation such as drug treatment in prisons and \$3.45 billion for 50,000 more

community police.

The bill expands from two to nearly 70 the number of crimes that could result in the death penalty, including drive-by killings, fatal carjackings and actions of big-time drug pushers, even when no one is killed. Some of the crimes carried the death penalty before the Supreme Court overturned it in 1972, but some, like the drive-by killings, are new.

It would allow defendants facing the death penalty to use racial statistics on capital punishment as evidence of discrimination. With the support of the Congressional Black Caucus, the House voted 235-192 to leave it in the bill.

Judiciary Committee Chairman

Jack Brooks, D-Texas, renewed his promise Thursday that when the bill emerged from the House-Senate conference, the racial statistics section would apply only to future cases. The bill would make it retroactive.

The three-time-loser section is much like the Senate's. It would require life in prison for those convicted in federal court of a third violent or serious drug-related felony. One difference is that the House bill provides an early out for some prisoners over 70 who have served 30 years of their sentences if the federal Bureau of Prisons successfully petitions a court to free them.

Unlike the Senate bill, the House

measure contains no ban on assault weapons. The House has never supported such a ban, but Foley said a separate vote on a ban would likely occur before negotiators begin their work.

The House bill's \$13.5 billion in state prison grants has little in common with the Senate's \$3 billion for regional prisons.

The House version would offer bonuses to states working toward "truth-in-sentencing" standards by incarcerating violent criminals more often and longer.

The Senate bill envisions regional prisons housing inmates from several states and federal convicts.

Nixon slips into coma after suffering stroke

NEW YORK — Former President Nixon slipped into "a deep coma" Thursday, three days after he suffered a major stroke, according to New York Hospital.

His family was at his bedside, according to the mid-afternoon hospital statement. No other details were provided.

Before the latest turn for the worse, the 81-year-old former president suffered swelling of the brain, a potentially deadly complication of the stroke he had on Monday.

Doctors sometimes try to reduce brain swelling after a stroke by placing the patient on a mechanical respirator to make the patient breathe faster.

Nixon, however, was not put on a respirator in deference to his explicit wishes, The New York Times reported Thursday, quoting an unidentified health worker.

Nixon had in the past expressed "some fairly strong intentions about the kind of treatment he wishes," the health worker said.

Nixon spokeswoman Liz Johnston declined to comment on the report. Get-well messages have poured in

from ordinary people and heads of state.

"We've gotten too many telephone calls to count," Johnston said at Nixon's office in suburban Woodcliff Lake, N.J.

Russian President Boris Yeltsin, who was miffed last month when Nixon met with his opponents during a trip to Russia, sent a telegram saying, "I hope you recover and return to the rough and tumble of political life."

At the White House, President Clinton opened a news conference about Bosnia by saying he and Hillary Rodham Clinton were praying for Nixon.

"I have appreciated the wise counsel he has given me on the question of Russia and many other issues since I have been president," Clinton said.

The Richard M. Nixon Presidential Library in Yorba Linda, Calif., received hundreds of calls. Visitors filled a dozen pages in a get-well book in the lobby.

"You are a hero of mine," wrote Kevin Walters, a Biola University student. "Stay with us, OK? Hang in there, and keep your eyes on God."

Serbs continue attack despite warnings

SARAJEVO, Bosnia-Herzegovina — Scorning the United States' tough talk, Bosnian Serb forces shelled a hospital annex and Red Cross refugee center in besieged Gorazde on Thursday. Dozens of people were reported killed.

Doctors and town officials contacted by ham radio said Thursday's bombardment was the worst of the three-week Serb offensive against the Muslim enclave.

"Counting the dead and wounded doesn't make sense anymore," Esad Ocranovic, a local official, said.

Ocranovic said four wire-guided rockets landed near a building that houses U.N. aid workers and military observers, killing or wounding 25 people. There was no word on whether U.N. staff were hurt.

On Wednesday, President Clinton urged NATO to "make the Serbs pay a higher price" for the continued carnage by authorizing air strikes to protect civilians in Gorazde and the other safe areas. He also called for tighter sanctions against Serbia.

Bosnian Serb leader Radovan Karadzic called Clinton's approach

a "fatal mistake" and said there would be no more peace talks without a full lifting of sanctions against Serbia.

NATO diplomats reacted favorably to a U.N. request for wider use of air power in Bosnia, but delayed a final decision pending military consultations.

A convoy of 100 U.N. peacekeepers and 41 medics was allowed to leave Sarajevo for Gorazde on Thursday, but was blocked about 10 miles north of its destination. Although the peacekeepers would boost morale of the trapped and desperate people of Gorazde, they are not equipped to stop the Serb attack.

Two cannon rounds slammed into a hospital annex Thursday afternoon.

"When I entered the devastated building, I saw heaps of flesh and metal," Dr. Ferid Tutic said.

Aid workers reported up to 20 killed. Tutic said only seven of 35 patients in the building were rescued.

Soon after, a mortar shell hit the entrance of a neighboring building, killing five people, he said.

The hospital itself was hit dozens of times, Ocranovic said. He estimated that throughout the town, at least 100 people were killed and 250 wounded Thursday, but he did not have details.

Shells also hit a Red Cross refugee center and near the town's mosque, aid officials said. The number of casualties was not determined.

Russian President Boris Yeltsin blamed the air strikes for worsening the situation.

More than 400 people have been killed and 1,300 wounded in the three-week Serb offensive, according to aid workers.

The Serbs claim their attacks are in response to an offensive by Muslim-led government troops.

Serb leaders say the right bank of the Drina River is rightfully Serb. The hospital is on the right bank.

Bosnian Premier Haris Silajdzic said the Serbs had given an ultimatum for government soldiers to leave the right bank and partially withdraw on the left bank by Thursday afternoon. A Bosnian Serb official denied such an ultimatum was given.

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Investigators search Rose Law Firm

LITTLE ROCK, Ark. — Federal investigators have swarmed into the Rose Law Firm, poring over Whitewater-related documents that fill nearly 10 offices, the firm's managing partner said in a rare interview.

Ronald M. Clark said his firm has cut off contacts with former partner Hillary Rodham Clinton to avoid any appearance of impropriety.

"We don't want to be accused of sharing information, conspiring to destroy documents, that sort of thing, so we've intentionally not communicated with Hillary," Clark said.

Sixteen of the firm's employees already have been questioned in connection with Whitewater special prosecutor Robert Fiske's investigation, according to one person familiar with the proceedings.

Two federal banking agencies conducting their own investigations have sent eight to 10 people to the Rose

firm daily for the past three weeks to review records relating to a failed Arkansas savings and loan, Clark said.

Clark discussed the investigations during a two-hour interview at the firm, which calls itself the nation's oldest west of the Mississippi.

"We don't think we have anything to hide or anything to be ashamed of," he said.

That hasn't eased the intense scrutiny of the 174-year-old firm, which sent four partners to Washington with Bill Clinton only to see them surrounded by controversy.

The first lady has been dogged by questions involving the Whitewater land venture she and her husband owned.

Another Rose partner, deputy White House counsel Vincent Foster, was found dead in a park last summer in what police have ruled a suicide.

A third former partner, Webster Hubbell, resigned his job as the No. 3 Justice Department official this winter after the firm questioned him about alleged overbilling of clients. Rose has since filed an ethics complaint against him. Former partner William Kennedy lost some of his duties as a White House lawyer after revelations that he had failed to pay Social Security taxes for a family nanny.

The firm itself came under investigation after two couriers alleged they were directed to shred documents in folders bearing Foster's initials shortly after Fiske was appointed.

The allegation has become an early focal point of Fiske's investigation.

Rose employees questioned by the special prosecutor so far have been asked mainly about the shredding, according to the individual familiar with the investigation.

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