

Former U.S. treasurer busted

WASHINGTON (AP) - Catalina Vasquez Villalpando, the U.S. treasurer in the Bush administration, was sentenced to four months in prison today for tax evasion, obstruction of justice and conspiring to hide income received from a former employer.

"I'm embarrassed," she told U.S. District Judge Thomas F. Hogan. "I hope you will find it in your heart to take what I owe society in some sort of community service," rather than in a prison sentence, she said.

"I can find no basis to excuse your conduct," said U.S. District Judge Thomas Francis Hogan as he imposed the sentence on the woman whose signature appears on U.S. paper money printed between December 1989 and January 1993.

He said that the high office she held imposes even more of a burden to obey the laws.

After she completes her prison term, Villalpando will be placed on supervised release for three years, including four months of home detention overseen by a probation officer.

She was told to surrender to a federal prison, still to be determined. She also must complete 200 hours of com-

munity service after her release.

Villalpando had faced a maximum possible sentence of five years in prison and a \$250,000 fine on each of the convictions.

An oddity in the case involved the conflicting views of two prosecutors about how much Villalpando had cooperated in their separate investigations.

Justice Department lawyer Jonathan J. Rusch said she had lied "time and time again" and had done "nothing to advance the ball."

Robert P. Warren, of the Office of Independent Council which is conducting an investigation of the HUD scandal, said, "She has been entirely truthful. ... She has not dissembled with us."

Rusch said, "She did not file tax returns over five years, a period that overlaps her service as a special assistant to the president of the United States." He said she "admitted nothing about her own criminal culpabilities until after she was confronted with her crimes."

In February, when she entered her plea, Villalpando admitted reporting 1989 taxable income of \$161,983 rather than the actual \$329,884, thus evading \$47,013 in federal income taxes.

Villalpando acknowledged obstructing an independent prosecutor's investigation of the Reagan-era influence-peddling scandal at the Department of Housing and Urban Development.

She also admitted conspiring to conceal during her confirmation proceedings that she was still receiving financial benefits from her former employer, Communications International Inc.

The company is an Atlanta-based firm that sold and leased telecommunications equipment to U.S. government agencies, state and local governments and commercial users. Villalpando was the firm's senior vice president from 1985 to 1989.

"She knows she's done wrong," Villalpando's lawyer, Bradford Reynolds, told the judge. "I'm hard pressed to see any purpose that would be served by having this person serve some time."

Pilot had taken drugs

WASHINGTON (AP) — The dispirited truck driver whose plane plowed into the White House grounds died with trace amounts of cocaine in his system and more alcohol than legally allowed for flight, officials said Tuesday.

The aircraft showed up on radar screens at the nearby National Airport, but operators did not notice until after the crash. "It was ... missed," a Secret Service spokesman said.

The news provided federal investigators their first clues about how Frank Corder's plane slipped past security systems, and whether his flight was a suicide, a bungled prank or a threat against President Clinton.

Agency spokesman Dave Adams said an autopsy showed that Corder's blood-alcohol content was 0.045 percent, slightly above the 0.04 percent legal limit for pilots. The legal limit for driving an automobile in most states is 0.10 percent.

Adams said the autopsy found "trace amounts of cocaine in his system," but complete results will not be available until tissue samples are examined in the next few days.

The Secret Service at first said Corder's blood-alcohol content was 0.32 percent, eight times the legal limit. It is possible follow-up tests could pinpoint his alcohol content at an entirely different figure, officials said.

Investigators said privately they were not surprised by the autopsy findings, but the results didn't point to a single motive.

"He could have had a final drink or two" before killing himself, "or he might have been a little too drunk to land," said one investigator, speaking on condition of anonymity.

Adams said radar at National Airport picked up the plane shortly before the crash, but the operators did not notice it.

"They did not see the aircraft on the radar screen. After reviewing the tapes ... they did see it on the image," he said.

Secret Service agents at the White House did not know the plane had invaded restricted airspace until it was spotted by a guard just seconds before the crash. Adams said he did not know how much time elapsed between the time the plane was recorded on radar and the crash.

The Federal Aviation Administration keeps recorded images of everything operators see on the radar.

An FAA spokesman said the normal contingent of two radar operators was on duty at the time of the crash, but he did not confirm the Secret Service report that investigators have preliminarily determined that the plane could be seen on the radar screen as it approached the White House.

Government officials, lawmakers and security experts acknowledged that there are limits to what can be done to protect a president housed in the middle of a major city, a few miles from a major airport.

Burns stable following surgery

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Comedian George Burns was hospitalized in intensive care Tuesday after surgery to drain a buildup of fluid on his brain, which was beginning to impair his speech.

The 98-year-old comic made it through the surgery well and was expected to remain in Cedars-Sinai Medical Center for about a week, said hospital spokesman Ron Wise. Burns even cracked a few jokes after the operation.

The fluid collected on Burns' brain after he fell in his bathtub and hit his head at his Beverly Hills home on July 13, Wise said.

"He's OK," said Irving Fein, Burns' longtime manager, after visiting the comic in his hospital room.

Burns was admitted to Cedars-Sinai on Monday night and underwent about

two hours of surgery.

The fluid was drained. He tolerated the operation and has been making gradual progress since the surgery," Wise said, adding that Burns was stable.

Burns hit a soap dish when he fell, suffering a head cut that required two stitches. He was hospitalized at the time for observation.

Fein said Burns' speech was impaired for a few days after the fall, but he was released from the hospital. Doctors had hoped to avoid draining the fluid because of Burns' age and examined him every two weeks, Fein said. But when Burns' impaired speech came back he returned to the hospital.

"His speech was getting a little impaired again so they drained" the fluid, Fein said.

Burns was drowsy after surgery but able to talk with his speech therapist, Fein said.

"He was cracking jokes with her. He was doing routines with her," Fein said.

The fall forced Burns to cancel a show at Caesars Palace.

Despite his age, the comedian has continued to perform and has even booked a show to celebrate his 100th birthday at Caesars.

Earlier this year he commemorated his 98th birthday in a sellout show where he received several standing ovations as he traced his 91-year career.

Burns, with his trademark cigar, has been a fixture in comedy since vaudeville and moved into radio, motion pictures and television.

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