

Distraction drives Espy out

WASHINGTON — Agriculture Secretary Mike Espy resigned Monday, saying an investigation into gifts he accepted from people and companies who do business with his department was too distracting for him to stay on. He predicted he would be exonerated.

"I owe it to the president to allow his agenda to go through with a minimum of distraction," Espy said in announcing he would leave the Cabinet effective Dec. 31. Both Espy and his attorney said there was no evidence that any government practice or policy was affected by the gifts given to Espy or his girlfriend.

"I must personally overcome the challenge to my good name," said Espy, 40.

A court-appointed independent counsel is investigating whether Espy violated rules governing contacts with companies that do business with his department. Among the companies involved is Tyson Foods Inc., the nation's largest poultry company. The Arkansas company has longtime ties to President Clinton.

Questions also have been raised about Espy's acceptance of tickets to sports events, travel and lodging. Espy denied any wrongdoing, and has re-

"I must personally overcome the challenge to my good name."

MIKE ESPY

Agriculture Secretary

paid more than \$7,600 in expenses.

"I have failed myself," Espy said. He said he had not been as careful as he should have been in "managing some of the details" of his personal finances. And he apologized to President Clinton for any embarrassment he had caused the administration.

He said allegations he improperly billed the government for travel or other expenses were "untrue and unfounded."

Espy said he could not comment specifically on the allegations because of the investigation.

Espy said he had been fighting the allegations for months and had begun to feel as if he was "twisting in the wind, twisting in the wind. ... The bough finally broke."

The resignation will end a two-

year Cabinet career for Espy, a former Mississippi congressman who made history by being the first black Southerner and the youngest person to serve as secretary of agriculture. He becomes the second Clinton Cabinet member to resign, following former Secretary of Defense Les Aspin.

Espy took over at Agriculture promising change and a "new attitude," quoting from the Patti LaBelle song. He sped to the sites of crises including a food poisoning case and record flooding in the Midwest.

He also worked on global trade treaties and an overdue move to reorganize the department.

Espy's frenetic travel schedule also included professional sports tickets, corporate jet travel and lodging from Tyson Foods.

Espy's closeness with Tyson raised allegations, reported in March by The Associated Press, that Espy aides suppressed, then delayed, work on tighter sanitary controls in poultry plants.

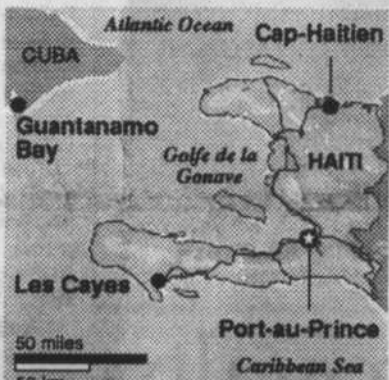
Further investigation by the department's Office of Inspector General, then the Justice Department, found Espy had accepted free football tickets from Quaker Oats, another company doing business with the department.

Weapons seized

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti — In the most dramatic strike yet at Haiti's ruling military, U.S. soldiers raided the headquarters of a hated pro-army militia Monday, seizing weapons and arresting more than three dozen people.

A joyous crowd of Haitians gathered to cheer the Americans. As the soldiers pulled away from the paramilitary headquarters, the Haitians surged forward in a jubilant mass and gleefully trashed the place, smashing everything they could lay hands on.

The raid came hours after Haitians in the southwestern town of Les Cayes shot and wounded a U.S. Special Forces soldier — the second American casualty since U.S. troops arrived two weeks ago.



■ An American soldier was shot and wounded Monday in Les Cayes. He was the second American wounded since U.S. troops arrived two weeks ago.

■ 300 soldiers from six Caribbean nations are scheduled to arrive Monday to form an international peacekeeping force.

■ 1,800 U.S. Marines in Haiti will begin to withdraw.

Video shows locks failed on ferry doors

Videotapes sent up by robots from the wreck of the ferry Estonia showed a two-fold failure: The front cargo door was ripped off and the bow's inner door was partly dislodged.

Front cargo door

The hinged door used for loading cars and trucks on the ferry had separated from the ship. The door has not been found.

Hydraulic lock

Visor operating cylinder

Ramp operating cylinder

Hydraulic link mechanism

Inner bow door

This door, which doubles as a ramp for vehicles, had been partly dislodged. A gap of about three feet along the top edge allowed water to rush into the car deck.

Source: International Maritime Organization, Sea Link

AP

Cargo door failure doomed the Estonia

TURKU, Finland — Banging thunderously in a violent storm, the huge front cargo door of the ferry Estonia was ripped off after its locks failed, letting in tons of water that sank the vessel, investigators said Monday.

The crew probably was helpless to save the ship and the more than 900 people who died in the tragedy last Wednesday, according to a preliminary conclusion based on video images sent up from the wreck by robots.

Eerie images of twisted metal, broken windows, unused lifeboats and even wafting newspapers flickered on a screen as investigators described their findings from the

wreck lying 230 feet below the Baltic Sea's surface.

"There's really nothing the crew could've done," said Tuomo Karppinen, a member of the investigatory commission.

The nine-member commission still must determine why the locking devices on the 60-ton front cargo door failed. Karppinen speculated there likely was a problem before the ferry sailed out of harbor in Tallinn, Estonia, into the storm, headed for Stockholm, Sweden.

Swedish police launched a criminal investigation Monday looking for possible negligence in the disaster, the Swedish news agency TT reported.

Mechanical heart pumps for transplant patients

WASHINGTON — The Food and Drug Administration approved the first implantable heart pump to keep patients alive while they await heart transplants.

The HeartMate Left Ventricular Assist System provides hope for the 20,000 Americans who vie for some 2,000 donor hearts every year, the FDA said in approving the device Monday.

"This device could help save the lives of many transplant candidates who now die for lack of available donor hearts," said FDA Commissioner David Kessler.

HeartMate supports the natural heart when its main pumping chamber, the left ventricle, is no longer strong enough to pump on its own.

The only viable therapy for this fatal disease is a heart transplant. HeartMate helps patients' hearts con-

tinue beating while they undergo the typical yearlong wait for a transplant, the FDA concluded.

The 1 1/2-pound titanium pump is implanted into the abdomen and connected to the left ventricle, helping the ventricle pump blood into the main artery that supplies the body.

The natural heart continues performing such vital biological functions as regulating blood flow and producing peptides.

The FDA approved the device only as a bridge for patients on transplant waiting lists whose hearts are failing so rapidly that they are likely to die within two days.

So far, 230 Americans from age 14 to 66 have received the device. The average implant lasted 76 days, although one patient lived with the device for 344 days.

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