

News Digest

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Clinton talks of education, social progress

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es for tax cuts.

The prospect of the first balanced budget in 30 years caused Clinton to pose the question of what should be done with the projected surpluses.

"I have a simple four-word answer. Save Social Security first," the president said. "Tonight I propose we reserve 100 percent of the surplus - that's every penny of any surplus - until we have taken all the measures necessary to strengthen the Social Security system for the 21st century."

Clinton urged \$21.7 billion for a child-care initiative, doubling to 2 million the number of children eligible for child-care subsidies.

"Not a single family should have to choose between a job they need and the child they love," he said.

He proposed \$7.3 billion to hire 100,000 teachers, with a goal of reducing class sizes in grades one to three. He also urged tax credits to pay interest on nearly \$22 billion in bonds to build and renovate public schools.

Carrying the family-friendly theme a step further, Clinton underscored his proposal to let Americans as young as 55 buy into the Medicare system. "It won't add a dime to the deficit," he promised, "but the peace of mind it will provide will be priceless."

With the economy booming and the government collecting more tax revenues, Clinton boasted that he would submit a balanced budget for 1999, three years earlier than required in his deal with Congress. Clinton also asked Congress to support his decision to keep American troops in Bosnia for an unspecified length beyond their scheduled June withdrawal.

"The progress is unmistakable, but it is not yet irreversible," Clinton said. "To take firm root, Bosnia's fragile peace still needs the support of American and allied troops when the current NATO mission ends in June."

First lady accuses Starr

■ Hillary Clinton says the prosecutor allied himself with right-wing opponents in a conspiracy against the president.

WASHINGTON (AP) - In an extraordinary clash, Hillary Rodham Clinton accused the Whitewater prosecutor Tuesday of allying himself with "right-wing opponents" out to destroy her husband.

The prosecutor dismissed her comments as "nonsense" and summoned President Clinton's personal secretary before a grand jury.

"Our current investigation began when we received credible evidence of serious federal crimes," Whitewater Independent Counsel Kenneth Starr said in a tersely worded statement defending the expansion of his investigation into allegations of a presidential affair and cover-up.

Among the issues Starr is investigating is whether Clinton encouraged former White House intern Monica Lewinsky to lie on a sworn affidavit she gave in connection with the Paula Jones sexual harassment lawsuit and whether job offers that presidential friend Vernon Jordan arranged were in any way connected.

The president's personal secretary, Betty Currie, was brought before Starr's grand jury.

The White House waited anxiously to see whether Lewinsky would be granted immunity from prosecution.

Her attorney, William Ginsburg, said there were no talks with prosecutors Tuesday. He also said he did not think presidential gifts that FBI agents seized from Lewinsky's home would shine much light on the relationship because they were "small and inconsequential."

Presidential aides struggled to push attention from the crisis to Clinton's State of the Union address.

With the president out of sight preparing the speech, Hillary Clinton went on a television offensive to defend him. She launched her most direct and personal attack to date on Starr's investigation.

He is "a politically motivated prosecutor who is allied with the right-wing opponents of my husband," she said on NBC's "Today" show.

Prosecutors have been "looking at every telephone call we've made, every check we've

ever written, scratching for dirt, intimidating witnesses, doing everything possible to try to make some kind of accusation against my husband," she said.

Hillary Clinton predicted the allegations would be proven false and said they were the work of a "vast right-wing conspiracy that has been conspiring against my husband since the day he announced for president."

This is "an effort to undo the results of two elections," and when all the facts are known "some folks are going to have a lot to answer for," Hillary Clinton said.

Her offensive came as Starr opened a grand jury investigation of the allegations by summoning Currie. A lawyer for Paula Jones also delivered documents to the grand jury.

Prosecutors wanted to question Currie, the gatekeeper who schedules Oval Office visitors, about checking Lewinsky in and sending the young woman to longtime presidential friend Vernon Jordan.

Officials have confirmed that Lewinsky visited the Oval Office to see Currie several times since starting a new job at the Pentagon last year.

At least one of those visits came in December after Lewinsky had been subpoenaed in the Jones lawsuit. About the same time, Jordan helped arrange a new job for her and got her a lawyer.

Jordan said last week that it was Currie who referred Lewinsky to him. However, in secretly tape-recorded conversations with a friend, Lewinsky says it was Clinton.

The clash between Starr and Hillary Clinton spilled to the Senate floor. Sen. Patrick Leahy suggested the prosecutor had exceeded his authority by asking a friend of Lewinsky to secretly tape-record her.

Leahy, D-Vt., called Starr's investigation "the most partisan ends-justify-the-means investigation I can remember in my life." Democrats were generally tepid in their defense of the president as they awaited more details.

"We don't know what the situation is," Sen. Fritz Hollings, D-S.C., said. "I don't know what's going on. ... You just hold up 'till you know what you're talking about."

Hollings said the controversy has been "a distraction so far. If we get in two more performances by Hillary, it will level off."



TOKYO

Finance minister resigns

Jolted by the arrests of two senior officials on bribery charges, Japan's Finance Minister Hiroshi Mitsuzuka announced Tuesday that he will step down. The scandal centers on allegations that Finance Ministry officials accepted pricey dinners, golf outings and other entertainment bribes from banks in exchange for alerting them about inspections.

Though he has not been directly implicated in the scandal, Japanese leaders often resign to take responsibility for the mistakes of those below them.

The accusations hit at the heart of mounting criticism of the Finance Ministry: that lax government oversight shares the blame for the decay of Japan's debt-saddled financial institutions.

TEGUCIGALPA, HONDURAS

President declares war on poverty

Carlos Flores Facusse, who was sworn in as president of Honduras Tuesday, vowed to fight the poverty afflicting some 80 percent of the 5.9 million Hondurans. The new president, who was elected in November to a four-year term, also has promised to move the country beyond a painful, two-decade transition from military rule.

Flores Facusse, a 47-year-old newspaper owner and past president of Congress, succeeded fellow Liberal Party politician Carlos Roberto Reina in the presidency.

NAIROBI, KENYA

22 killed by raiders

Raiders armed with automatic rifles, arrows and spears have killed another 22 people in central Kenya, police said Tuesday, raising the death toll in politically motivated violence this month to 77.

The attacks apparently are aimed at driving Kenya's biggest tribe, the Kikuyu, off their land in Rift Valley province because they voted against President Daniel arap Moi's Kenya Africa National Union party in the Dec. 29-30 elections.

"Kikuyus are ready to lose 1 million lives, but we are not going to let them take even a single acre of our land," said Kihika Kimani, an opposition parliamentarian.

The government has deployed paramilitary police to restore peace, and Kimanthi, the police spokesman, said four attackers were arrested.

LONDON

Cause of speech disorder found

Researchers have proved a genetic cause for a severe speech disorder afflicting one British family - a discovery that could lead to earlier diagnosis and improved treatment of childhood language problems.

"We knew language disorders were genetic, but nobody had found a gene location before," Dr. Anthony Monaco of Oxford University's Wellcome Trust Center for Human Genetics said Tuesday.

Genes reside on stringlike structures called chromosomes, and Monaco and his colleagues identified a segment of a chromosome containing the gene that causes the British family's disorder. They expect to isolate the gene itself within two years.

For the last decade, Monaco and his team have been studying a family of 30 with an unusually high incidence of a speech disorder related to defective motor skills. The disorder, which affects half the family members, is caused by a defect in a gene involved with brain development, he said.

About 4 percent of children worldwide have language problems. Those include children unable to understand language, those who understand but cannot articulate because of a defect in motor skills and those who cannot structure speech properly, even though they understand language and have the motor ability to speak.

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Various Hostess snacks recalled from 21 states

SCHILLER PARK, Ill. (AP) - Some of America's favorite snack cakes may have more than a white creamy filling inside.

More than a dozen types of Hostess snacks, including HoHo's and Twinkies, sold in 21 states - including Nebraska - are being recalled because they may have been contaminated by asbestos in a suburban Chicago bakery.

Consumers are being warned not to eat snacks made at the Schiller Park plant of Interstate Brands Corp., which was closed Monday night during an investigation by state and federal authorities.

Illinois State Police and the state attorney general are investigating to see if the company broke any laws. Dan Curry, spokesman for the attorney general, said the office is likely to ask a judge to keep the plant closed until it has been cleaned up properly and a monitoring plan has been established.

The recall includes 13 Hostess products plus Dolly Madison cupcakes, almost all of which have expiration dates ranging from Jan. 22 through Feb. 6. HoHo's included have expiration dates ranging from Jan. 29 to Feb. 13. The products can be returned to the place they were purchased for a refund.

Ray "Sandy" Sutton, general counsel for the Kansas City-based Interstate Brands, called the product safe.

A company statement said the firm's Hostess cake division is voluntarily recalling the snacks

because of concerns they "may have been affected by asbestos fibers in insulation removed from a boiler" at the Schiller Park plant Jan. 11.

Sutton said the worker removing the insulation did not realize it contained asbestos. "If we'd known it was asbestos we would have had a licensed person in there to do it," Sutton said.

Company employees hauled the asbestos through an area where the food is made and discarded it in an outside dumpster, Schafer said.

Asbestos, once widely used in insulation because it is fireproof, is a fibrous substance known to cause cancer and other health problems when inhaled. Not much is known about the health risks of eating food contaminated with asbestos, Schafer said. But he said studies have linked repeated consumption to cancer in the esophagus and the gastrointestinal tract.

The products have a "57" code as part of the expiration date on the package, the company said. Only products with the "57" code are subject to the recall.

Illinois health officials said the company has estimated the individual snacks made at the plant and distributed number more than 1 million.

Schafer said the company told Illinois public health officials that the other states involved are: Arkansas, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Michigan, Minnesota, Mississippi, Missouri, Nebraska, Ohio, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, South Dakota, Tennessee, Texas, West Virginia and Wisconsin.