

News Digest

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Clinton renews fight on teen smoking

WASHINGTON (AP) — With Democratic congressional leaders at his side, President Clinton attacked defenders of the Joe Camel cigarette ads and made a pitch for Congress to follow his lead on tobacco and education legislation.

Clinton renewed his call for the election-year Congress to act soon on bills to reduce teen smoking, as part of a comprehensive tobacco settlement, and to put more money into repairing and modernizing public schools.

Appearing in the White House Rose Garden Tuesday after meeting with Senate Minority Leader Tom Daschle of South Dakota and House Minority Leader Dick Gephardt of Missouri, the president took aim at the Joe Camel character, which he said was designed to "hook our children early to the deadly habit of smoking."

"Even as the (industry) executives denied they were targeting children, Joe Camel became as recognizable to them as Mickey Mouse," Clinton said.

"Now, some in Congress say that teen smoking has nothing to do with Joe Camel. Medical science and common sense makes it plain: Teen smoking has everything to do with

Joe Camel — with unscrupulous marketing campaigns that prey on the insecurities and dreams of our children."

Daschle was more pointed in his criticism, saying House Speaker Newt Gingrich is "hinting he's more on Joe Camel's side" than on the side of those who want to enact measures — such as new restrictions on advertising — to discourage teen smoking.

Gingrich fired back, saying the Clinton administration is on the wrong track.

"We're prepared to focus on stopping kids from smoking," Gingrich said. "Now, does the president want to stop kids from smoking, or does he want a smoke screen behind which he gets higher taxes, bigger bureaucracy and bigger government?"

Later, White House aides kept up the attack. Referring to House Republican leaders, press secretary Mike McCurry said, "They're in a world of hurt up there, and you can tell it today because they have elected to side with the tobacco industry."

McCurry emphasized the administration thinks House Republicans are vulnerable to public pressure on the tobacco issue this election year.

"They're going to find that's a very uncomfortable position to be in," McCurry said. "And we intend to raise the cost of them being in that position, as you saw (Tuesday)."

A spokesman for the tobacco industry, Scott Williams, said Clinton's focus on Joe Camel was an example of using "the rhetoric of the industry's past." He said Joe Camel has not been used in advertising for more than a year.

Clinton, in his Rose Garden remarks, was careful to praise Sen. John McCain, R-Ariz., whose anti-tobacco bill the White House favors but Gingrich calls too liberal.

Later, Senate GOP leaders told reporters they favor Gingrich's approach: a more narrow tobacco bill aimed at reducing teen smoking and drug use rather than a comprehensive measure that would include expanding federal regulatory powers on tobacco.

Still, White House officials held out hope for a bipartisan bill that includes a multibillion-dollar settlement with the tobacco industry and other provisions.

Bruce Reed, the president's domestic policy adviser, told reporters: "We think things are going well. We are within striking distance." He spoke after attending a meeting between

McCain and Erskine Bowles, the president's chief of staff.

Even while he attacked Republicans on tobacco, Clinton acknowledged that he was wrong to be seen with a cigar in his mouth, as happened on his recent Africa trip. A reporter asked him about Gingrich's comment Monday that Clinton was sending the wrong signal to youngsters by smoking cigars on celebratory occasions.

"I think he's probably right about that," Clinton said. He called that an "isolated event" and less significant than the impact of cigarette company advertising.

Addressing another of his chief priorities, Clinton urged Congress to pass an education bill that includes billions of dollars to build and repair school buildings.

He said it is as important to invest in school buildings as highway projects.

"The infrastructure of the '90s will be the superhighway that carries information, and I believe the people that can travel it will be those that have a good education, not the finest vehicle."

Senate defeats school-construction plan

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Senate defeated a plan to subsidize school construction with federal dollars Tuesday, despite President Clinton's call for Congress to give school buildings the same kind of financial support it gives highways.

The defeat, 56-42, was expected. The measure, introduced by Sen. Carol Moseley-Braun, D-Ill., was the Democrats' chief substitute for a Republican bill to let tax-free savings accounts be used for school expenses.

Clinton has said he would veto the savings bill, already passed by the House, because it would mostly benefit families sending their children to private school. But both parties are using the legislation to parade their differences over education, a top issue among voters during this congressional election year.

Before the construction vote, the Senate rejected another Democratic proposal to recruit 100,000 teachers a year by forgiving their student loan debt. It approved an amendment by Sen. Alfonse D'Amato, a New York Republican in a tough re-election campaign, and Sen. Connie Mack, R-Fla., to encourage competency testing for teachers and merit pay.

Clinton weighed in at a Rose Garden appearance with Vice President Al Gore, Senate Democratic Leader Tom Daschle, D-S.D., and House Minority Leader Dick Gephardt, D-Mo.

"The right way to fix schools is to fix them, not walk away from them," said Clinton, who had made the school construction proposal last year but withdrew it as part of the balanced budget deal. He renewed it this year, and the measure is a key issue in Moseley-Braun's re-election campaign.

"They believe it's OK for Congress to invest money in highly specific, local transportation projects, but not to give even the most general kind of support for our education infrastructure," Clinton said, referring to a \$217 billion transportation bill passed by the Republican-dominated House.

The building proposal would use \$11 billion over 10 years for interest rate subsidies, enabling local school districts to reduce their capital costs significantly. The subsidies, in the form of tax credits to investors, would permit the issuance of \$22 billion in bonds to build or repair 5,000 schools.

The construction bill was needed because of burgeoning enrollments in some areas and decaying school buildings in cities, the administration said.

But Republicans argued that school construction is a local issue, and a federal program to boost education would let the Education Department decide who gets money, while financiers received the breaks.

However, the GOP bill also contains a less ambitious school-construction proposal, costing \$194 million over 10 years, to help schools in the fastest-growing districts.

Republicans also said the education savings bill, co-sponsored by Sens. Paul Coverdell, R-Ga., and Robert Torricelli, D-N.J., brings decision-making down to the family.

Torricelli voted with the Republican majority to defeat the Moseley-Braun amendment. So did Democrats Joseph Biden of Delaware, Robert Byrd of West Virginia and Joseph Lieberman of Connecticut. D'Amato and Sen. Arlen Specter, R-Pa., voted with the Democrats.

"This will pump more money

"(Congress believes) it's OK ... to invest money in highly specific, local transportation projects, but not to give ... support for our education infrastructure."
PRESIDENT CLINTON

into people who make a real difference: families," said Sen. Rick Santorum, R-Pa.

The measure would permit families to open savings accounts for children to meet education expenses from kindergarten through college.

Interest buildup and withdrawals would be tax-free, although the contributions of up to \$2,000 a year would be taxed. The measure builds upon one signed into law last year that would permit tax-free savings for college and limit contributions to \$500 a year.

Although critics say the measure would benefit mostly wealthy families sending children to private schools, supporters argue that it would benefit parents sending chil-

dren to Catholic, Jewish or other religious schools as well as public school families wanting to use savings for expenses such as tutors or supplies.

On the House side, meanwhile, Majority Leader Dick Armey, R-Texas, announced an advertising campaign to support federally paid vouchers for poor children in the District of Columbia to help them attend private or religious schools. The House is expected to take up the Senate-passed bill next week.

The ads would be paid for by the Americans for Education Reform Foundation, an Indianapolis-based group that supports alternatives to public schools.

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THE DAILY NEBRASKAN

Fewer graduating in 5 years

Some reasons include scheduling difficulty, course availability

The Daily Illini
University of Illinois

Champaign, Ill. (U-Wire) — Not sure if you'll graduate on time? Don't fret — you're not alone.

According to The American College Testing program, there is an all-time low in the number of students who graduate from college within five years.

A nationwide study showed that 52.8 percent of students earn a bachelor's degree within five years, according to ACT. This is nearly a 5 percent decrease since 1983, when the study began.

The universities with the highest graduation rates were Harvard, Princeton and Stanford, with graduation rates of 97 percent, 94 percent and 94 percent, respectively.

Kelley Hayden, director of communications for ACT, said in a press release that many reasons contribute to students attending colleges for more than four years.

Some of these reasons, Kelley said, are an increase in the number of part-time students and students who attend college straight from high school, scheduling difficulty and the availability of courses.

Those reasons seem to coincide with opinions of University of Illinois students.

Alan Harwood, freshman in engineering, said he will probably not graduate in four years.

"The requirements are too high for the college I'm in," Harwood said.

Eric May, freshman in commerce, said he will not graduate in four years because he plans to take a year off. He said he feels some of his required courses are unnecessary.

"(The University of Illinois) makes us take a lot of classes we don't need."