

NEWS DIGEST

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12 accept Clinton clemency deal

WASHINGTON (AP) — Twelve of 14 jailed Puerto Rican nationalists agreed Tuesday to a politically sensitive clemency deal offered by President Clinton but opposed by his wife, prospective Senate candidate Hillary Rodham Clinton.

The Puerto Ricans, jailed on weapons and sedition convictions, are members of pro-independence guerrilla groups that carried out a wave of bombings in the United States in the 1970s and 1980s.

The nearly month-old offer is conditioned on statements from each independence activist that they will not engage in violence if released. The activists had until Friday to take or leave the deal.

Two imprisoned activists are expected to reject the clemency offer, the White House said. Two others, who are not in jail, have another week to respond. If they agree to the White House terms, their fines will be reduced.

At a news conference in San Juan, activist leader Luis Nieves Falcon confirmed that 11 members of the Armed Forces of National Liberation and one leader of the Macheteros separatist group had accepted the three-week-old offer.

"The conditions are terrible," said Deadina Ortiz, mother of New York City art teacher Elizam Escobar, who has been in jail in Oklahoma for 19 years. "Clinton's crazy. How can somebody say, for exam-

ple, that two sisters can't see each other just because of their beliefs? However, I think it's enough. It's already a lot. And it's time for him to come home to me."

The Armed Forces of National Liberation, known by its Spanish initials FALN, carried out more than 100 bombings in the United States between 1974 and 1983.

The bombings killed six and wounded dozens. The imprisoned nationalists were not convicted in any of the bombings but were found guilty of seditious conspiracy and possession of weapons and explosives.

The clemency offer has divided the first family and brought criticism from both Republicans and Democrats.

"I think there have been many who have sought to inject politics, and many who have thought to inject a motive here, and all I can say is that they're wrong," said Joe Lockhart, Clinton's press secretary, at his daily briefing for reporters.

Hillary Clinton, a potential candidate for a Senate seat from New York, has urged the president to rescind the proposal.

"It's been three weeks, and their silence speaks volumes," the first lady said over the weekend.

Some Democrats, including the senator Hillary

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JOE LOCKHART
Clinton's press secretary

Clinton would replace, Democrat Daniel Patrick Moynihan, have called the clemency deal a bad idea. Now that Mrs. Clinton has spoken out, Democrats who cheered the clemency deal are calling her a turn-coat.

"I am disappointed. I am angry," said Rep. Jose Serrano, D-N.Y. "And frankly, I view her and her candidacy differently after reading reports of her comments and actions. I would be a hypocrite if I did not."

World and Nation

Datelines

■ Washington

Energy Department says gas prices will go up this winter

WASHINGTON (AP) — After several years of modest costs, heating bills are expected to take a jump this winter because of higher oil and natural gas prices and increased demand, the Energy Department said Tuesday.

Consumers got used to unusually low heating costs during the last two winters because of depressed oil prices and mild weather.

Residential heating oil on average could be 30 percent higher than last winter and residential natural gas prices about 17 percent higher, the agency projected.

■ Washington

Reno offers Waco inquiry to Republican Sen. Danforth

WASHINGTON (AP) — Attorney General Janet Reno has offered Republican former Sen. John Danforth the job of heading an independent inquiry into the government's use of force at the fiery end of the Branch Davidian standoff in Waco, Texas, government sources said Tuesday.

The sources, who spoke only on condition of anonymity, told The Associated Press that the Justice Department was in final negotiations over the details of the independent inquiry and an announcement could come as early as Wednesday.

Danforth, 63, would bring solid Republican credentials as well as a background in law enforcement. Before entering the Senate, he served as attorney general in Missouri for eight years. He retired from the Senate in 1995.

■ Indonesia

East Timor police fire at U.N. regional office

DILI, Indonesia (AP) — Indonesian police opened fire at a regional U.N. office in East Timor today, reportedly sending occupants ducking to the floor hours after the government imposed martial law and promised to return normalcy to the terror-ridden province.

East Timor's spiritual leader, Roman Catholic Bishop Carlos Belo, a winner of the 1996 Nobel Peace Prize, fled the territory on an evacuation flight from the town of Baucau to Darwin, Australia, U.N. officials said.

The bishop was one of tens of thousands of people fleeing the vicious backlash of burning, shooting and killings unleashed by opponents of last week's landslide referendum for independence.

The Indonesian government declared martial law Tuesday.

■ Greece

Earthquake rocks Greece; at least 32 dead, 100 missing

ATHENS, Greece (AP) — Rescue teams and stunned residents used everything from cranes to garden tools Tuesday to dig for those pinned under wreckage from the strongest earthquake to hit Athens in nearly a century — a 10-second shudder that claimed at least 32 lives and left close to 100 missing.

The scenes of desperate searches and survivors too frightened to return indoors were sadly familiar — last month's monstrous quake in neighboring Turkey had moved many Greeks to put aside their historical enmity with Turks and mobilize aid.

Gore sets campaign sights on health care

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Vice President Al Gore promised Tuesday to ensure that all children have access to affordable health care by 2005, offering a wide-ranging package of reforms aimed at bringing as many as 15 million uninsured Americans into the health care system.

Yet the Democratic presidential candidate stressed that, if he captured the White House, he would pursue the same incremental approach to changing health care that President Clinton adopted after his attempt to revamp the system failed to win congressional approval in 1994.

"We have all learned that we cannot overhaul the system in one fell swoop," Gore said at Children's Hospital. "Experience has taught us that there is a way to keep what is right, while fixing what is wrong with American health care."

The unveiling of Gore's health care proposals — and Texas Gov. George W. Bush's announcement of his education program last week — moves the campaign for the White House to a new stage as the candidates begin offering specifics on their agendas.

Gore did not mention Bush in his remarks, but one reference clearly was aimed at the Republican presidential front-runner.

"In some states — Texas brings to mind — one-quarter of all children are still out in the cold," Gore said.

With his proposal, the vice president staked out different ground than

that of his Democratic rival — former Sen. Bill Bradley, who has said he will propose something approaching universal coverage — and Republicans and health industry advocates, who fear imposing too many mandates on private health care firms will raise costs.

While portions of his package were new, Gore borrowed heavily from initiatives promoted by Clinton and, in a few cases, by Republicans.

Gore did not estimate the cost of his proposals. Spokesman Chris Lehane said that would come "in the near future," and said he did not anticipate a tax increase would be needed to finance them.

According to Gore, 43 million Americans lack health care coverage, and the number has grown by about 1 million a year this decade. Some 11 million children are uninsured.

To cover them, Gore would expand the Children's Health Insurance Program, which helps states provide coverage to children in working families. Currently, states can use the federal CHIP money to cover children in families that earn up to 200 percent of the poverty level. Gore would raise that cap to 250 percent.

Gore would allow families that do not qualify for the program, and do not receive health benefits through their jobs, to buy into the program.

Gore would give financial bonuses to states that meet enrollment targets for CHIP and Medicaid, programs he said are not fully utilized.

Viacom acquires CBS in merger

■ Viacom is reuniting with the network after a split in the '70s.

NEW YORK (AP) — Viacom Inc. is buying CBS Corp. in the richest media merger in history — a \$35.89 billion deal that combines the owner of hip properties like MTV and VH1 with the venerable network that brought you "60 Minutes" and "Murder, She Wrote."

The merger announced Tuesday vaults Viacom into the major leagues of media conglomerates alongside Time Warner Inc. and the Walt Disney Co. with a major stable of properties across TV, movies, radio and outdoor advertising.

The new company will be called Viacom, but the CBS name — long associated with broadcast veterans like Walter Cronkite and Edward R. Murrow — will continue to identify the TV network.

In a way, the deal was not so much a merger as a reunion. Viacom was originally split off from CBS in the early 1970s by federal rules, now repealed, that prohibited networks from owning their own shows.

Viacom chairman Sumner Redstone, who will lead the new company as its chairman and CEO, called CBS and Viacom "siblings," saying at a New York news conference that the merger "seems almost dictated by destiny."

Shares of both companies, which have been run up over the past week on speculation that a deal was in the works, shot up even more after the announcement of the merger Tuesday morning.

Even though Viacom is buying CBS's shares, CBS management will have a major role in the new company. CBS president Mel Karmazin, 56, will be president and chief operating officer, becoming heir apparent to Redstone, who is 76.

The new Viacom will own the CBS network, which was the top-rated network last season, as well as the Paramount movie and TV studio, MTV, VH1, Nickelodeon, and the Simon & Schuster publishing house.

Viacom is gaining major advertising outlets with CBS that it can use to promote its movies, cable programming and TV shows. CBS, through its Infinity subsidiary, is one of the largest radio companies in the nation, and it also has a huge array of outdoor advertising properties.

For CBS, the deal provides access to top TV studios for programming and international exposure through Viacom's overseas cable operations.

The deal would be the latest transformation of CBS, which was founded in 1927 and became known as the "Tiffany Network" under the leadership of William Paley. Paley's successor, Laurence Tisch, sold CBS to Westinghouse Electric Corp. in 1995. Westinghouse then shed its industrial businesses and took the CBS name.

The deal had its roots in talks between the two companies about combining their TV stations. Many media companies have been talking about such deals since a ruling last month by the Federal Communications Commission to allow companies to own more than one TV station in the same city.

The CBS-Viacom merger would be the biggest in the media business since Walt Disney's purchase of Capital Cities/ABC for a then-record \$19 billion in 1996.

Daily Nebraskan

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