

Commercial deals in schools worry Congress

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

WASHINGTON - Eager for team uniforms and new computers, the nation's schools with little state oversight are making deals that bring soda machines, PG-rated movie commercials and marketing surveys onto their grounds, congressional investigators said Thursday.

"This is a cold, calculated effort," said Rep. George Miller, D-Calif., worried that the ads could promote unhealthy or inappropriate activities or products for schoolchildren.

The report by the General Accounting Office, the investigative arm of Congress, said little about whether the school ads

were appropriate. It mainly looked at how states regulated things like on-campus soda machines, company logos on athletic scoreboards and television ads on Channel One or other commercial stations shown in classrooms.

Only California, New York, Florida, Illinois and Maine specifically limit certain types of advertising and other commercial activity within their public school buildings, the report indicated.

Researchers said just 19 state laws even addressed school-related advertising.

Company representatives have defended their contracts and sponsorships, saying they provide valuable resources and a high-

profile commitment to an embattled public education system.

Channel One, a daily news broadcast that offers free television sets and satellite dishes to schools that reserve time for students to watch the show, earns high ratings from teachers, says Eileen Murphy, spokeswoman for Primedia, Channel One's parent company.

She said ads on the show were approved by a committee of educators. "We have never had a complaint," she said.

The report indicated officials rarely needed permission from parents or others to use commercial products.

Nearly all of the nation's 86,000 schools participate in

some type of program where they get cash or equipment based on the receipts or proof-of-purchase coupons.

No one has made a comprehensive count of commercial contracts in the nation's schools, though the report maintains such deals are growing.

For example, in Grand Rapids, Mich., a contract with a soft-drink company guaranteed the district \$30 per student, or 0.4 percent of the district's \$206 million budget.

In another district, not named in the report, a school rented its softball field to a production company shooting an episode of the former steamy prime-time soap, "Melrose Place."

Some districts bowed out of

contracts because parents complained.

According to the report, current laws, mainly covering fundraisers such as candy and gift-wrap sales, were weak, varied and offered little guidance to schools boards, superintendents or principals.

Sen. Christopher Dodd, D-Conn., was troubled by the finding that many companies gathered address, ZIP code and purchasing habit information from students, a practice school officials said they were sometimes unaware of.

"All we're trying to do is put up a warning sign," he said. "The three R's should not stand for retail, resale and rebate."

China executes senior official in bribery case

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

BEIJING - A senior Chinese legislator who took nearly \$5 million in bribes in hopes of marrying his mistress was executed Thursday in a highly publicized case meant to convince an angry public that communist leaders are stamping out rampant corruption.

Cheng Kejie, vice chairman of China's national legislature, became the highest-ranking figure put to death for corruption since the communists came to power in 1949.

Hours after the execution was announced, portions of the 66-year-old Cheng's trial in July were shown on national television, adding to a propaganda campaign meant to show official determination to attack abuses at even the highest levels.

Cheng was convicted of extorting \$4.9 million while he was the governor of Guangxi, a poor southern region. Earlier reports said that beginning in 1992, he took payoffs for land deals, building contracts, promotions and allocations of subsidized commodities.

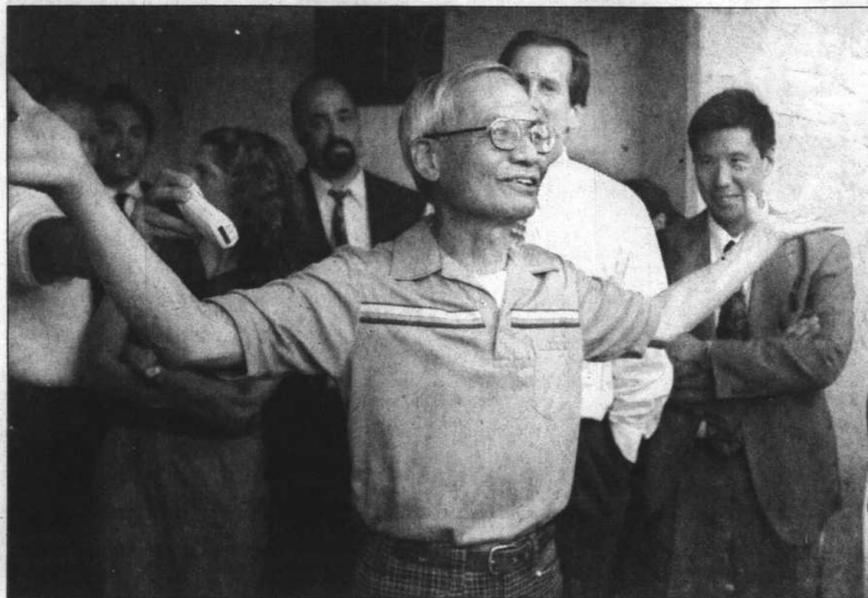
The case illustrated the pervasive corruption that is costing China's struggling economy heavily and undermining public acceptance of communist rule. A recent series of unusually candid reports by China's auditor general accuse officials of stealing or squandering billions of dollars in a country with an average per capita income of about \$700.

Almost daily, Chinese state media announce officials being punished for corruption, though most are low-ranking. More than 132,000 officials received penalties for misconduct last year that range up to death sentences, according to the China Daily newspaper.

Cheng was put to death by the No. 1 Intermediate People's Court in Beijing after China's highest court rejected his second appeal, the official Xinhua News Agency said.

It quoted the Sept. 7 ruling by the Supreme People's Court as saying Cheng "severely damaged the normal work order of government agencies and created an extremely pernicious influence on society."

According to the official account, Cheng's partner in crime was his married lover, Li Ping. Li has been sentenced to life in prison.



Wen Ho Lee greets his friends at a homecoming celebration on Wednesday at his next-door neighbor's house in White Rock, N.M. The former Los Alamos computer scientist was released from prison after pleading guilty to a single felony count of inappropriately downloading nuclear weapons data while working at the lab.

Joe Raedle/NewsMakers

Clinton rips handling of case

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

WASHINGTON - President Clinton said Thursday he was "quite troubled" by the handling of the Wen Ho Lee case and that the government could not justify the way it dealt with the former Los Alamos laboratory scientist.

Clinton expressed regrets just hours after Attorney General Janet Reno refused to apologize for the case.

Clinton said he had long been troubled about the denial of bail for Lee, released Wednesday by a federal judge who said the government's conduct had "embarrassed our entire nation."

Clinton said it was very difficult to reconcile the government's positions: "that one day he's a terrible risk to the national security, and the next day they're making a plea agreement for an offense far more modest than what had been alleged."

"I don't think you can justify in retrospect keeping a person in jail without bail when you're prepared to make that kind of agreement," the president said.

While briefing reporters

later, White House press secretary Joe Lockhart said Clinton's comments should not be read as a criticism directed at the Justice Department or federal prosecutors.

"I think we'll look to have more information on this, but I wouldn't see it as a blanket criticism of anyone," Lockhart said, adding that Reno and Energy Secretary Bill Richardson retain Clinton's support.

Earlier in the day, Reno said she was comfortable with the government's handling of the case.

Reno said she wished "with all my heart and soul" that Lee early on had provided investigators with information about seven missing computer tapes that contained nuclear secrets.

"I think Dr. Lee, from the beginning, had the opportunity to answer this, and I think now he needs to look to himself," Reno said.

Parker said the scientist's detention "embarrassed our entire nation and each of us who is a citizen of it."

The judge's criticism came as he accepted an agreement that freed Lee,

"I think we'll look to have more information on this, but I wouldn't see it as a blanket criticism of anyone."

Joe Lockhart
White House press secretary

who pleaded guilty to a single count of mishandling nuclear secrets. In exchange, the government dropped 58 other counts of breaching national security.

Reno said federal prosecutors "had tried from the beginning" to learn what Lee did with the tapes, which he acknowledged he had transferred from a highly secure computer at the Los Alamos nuclear weapons lab into unsecured personal files.

"There was no explanation of what the man did with the information that was so sensitive," Reno said.

Reno went through a point-by-point defense of the government's handling of the case a day after she and FBI Director Louis J. Freeh released statements in which they emphasized that getting Lee to acknowledge having transferred the nuclear

secrets was a top priority.

Reno said that the scientist likely would have avoided the jail time had he cooperated in assuring that the tapes had not fallen into unauthorized hands. Lee has claimed all along that he destroyed the seven tapes.

Lee, 60, a computer scientist at Los Alamos since 1980, was indicted in December on 59 counts of mishandling secrets and on the government's insistence was refused bail. Prosecutors argued that freeing him may give him the opportunity to dispose of the tapes.

Reno said prosecutors had hoped that Lee "could tell us if he had conveyed any information from the tapes" and had suggested that if he was cooperative, "we would reconsider detention. In this instance, we have now what we tried to do then."

Sydney gives torch a golden 'ello

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

SYDNEY, Australia - At the opera house, they packed the water's edge and cheered. They watched from buildings, from a docked oceanliner, even from atop the steel skeleton of the fabled Harbor Bridge.

They oohed and ahhed as the Olympic flame went by.

Ready to greet the world, Sydneysiders paused Thursday at the edge of the Olympics to see their downtown awash in fireworks, an Olympic-rings light show and even a big round moon, delivered against a cloudless sky. The collective exhortation: Let the games begin.

"This shows people what we're about - whatever that may be," said a smiling Gloria Garton, pressed up against a barricade with her husband to see blind Italian opera singer Andrea Bocelli pass the Olympic torch to Australian pop star Olivia Newton-John.

Australian sprinter Melinda Gainsford-Taylor, women's captain of her nation's Olympic team, brought the torch into the Sydney Opera House grounds at dusk, passing it to Bocelli.

He held it aloft before thousands of cheering people crowded into

Bennelong Point, then handed it to a grinning Newton-John. She carried it off into the night on the last leg of its journey toward Olympic Park and Friday's opening ceremony. Then Bocelli sang Verdi's "Di quella pira."

With the crowd roaring, the Olympic rings that hang from the landmark bridge illuminated as the sunlight faded, and fireworks shot from the bridge's anchorage. Five helicopters and the Goodyear Blimp - rechristened the "G'Day Blimp" for the games - hovered overhead.

Half of the seats outside the opera house went to the general public; the other half went to those attending Thursday's opera program. It created an odd juxtaposition: On one side, rowdy youths held Australian flags aloft and chanted "Aussie! Aussie!" while opera-goers in formal garb applauded sedately on the other.

Bocelli was a surprise guest in the torch ceremony. The tenor was driven in a golf cart to the podium, where Gainsford-Taylor, who will be competing in the Sydney Games, brought him the torch.

Newton-John, known best in America for her role in "Grease" and her hit song "Physical," then ran in. The three

stood triumphantly, with the torch blazing.

The Olympic torch has been making its way across the world's only island continent since June, carried by a variety of Australians from Aborigines to athletes to a 109-year-old man.

Along the way, it has survived a theft attempt and a teen-ager's novel, if ill-conceived attempt, to douse it with a fire extinguisher.

Australians who turned out to see the harbor spectacle Thursday night said such events could bring people together and help present their country's best face to the world.

"Anything important always happens right here at the opera house," Garton said. "Nighttime, it's like fairyland down here."

The opera house, Sydney's signature landmark, opened in 1973 after 14 years of construction. Its unique three-pronged design has drawn comparisons to everything from palm fronds to sails to a Mayan temple.

The torch, which has consistently drawn large crowds as it makes its way to Olympic Park, was passed from Newton-John to tennis pro Patrick Rafter, who carried it on to Sydney's Town Hall, where it blazed overnight.

World/Nation
The Associated Press

Washington, D.C.

Pregnant woman killed by street-sweeping truck

Police were investigating Thursday how a pregnant woman was killed by a street-sweeping truck that swallowed her in its brushes and knocked aside her 4-year-old daughter, who suffered minor injuries.

The woman, Felisita Sorto, 29, was crossing a street Wednesday with her daughter when she was struck and pulled under, police said.

Sorto, a mother of three, was pregnant when she was killed, said David Vega, a lawyer for her husband, Jose Arbaiza.

Sorto was pronounced dead at the scene.

Her daughter, Onis Morlenis-Arbaiza, was struck by one of the sweeper's side brushes and knocked onto the sidewalk, said Geoffrey Grambo, a battalion chief with the District of Columbia Fire Department.

Jerusalem

Israel takes measures to combat West Nile virus

Anxiety in Israel was growing Thursday after the West Nile virus killed an eighth victim this summer.

Hospital emergency rooms were crowded with people who feared they had contracted the mosquito-borne disease.

In two dozen towns in Israel's hardest hit coastal plain, residents closed their windows this week as machines belched forth clouds of insecticide mixed with diesel oil to wipe out the mosquitoes.

In southern Israel, 3,300 geese were destroyed at a farm after some of the birds died of the disease. There were minor outbreaks among geese at other farms but no wholesale slaughter.

Washington, D.C.

Senate Democrats urge tuition tax credit

Focusing on a nearly five-fold increase in college tuitions, Senate Democrats called on Republican leaders Thursday to include a tuition tax credit in any budget package wrapping up this election-year session of Congress.

"We should not bankrupt families for doing what is right for their children," said Sen. Charles Schumer, D-N.Y., who wants to give parents yearly deductions that he says would save as much as \$2,800 per student on their tax bills.

According to the Democrats' survey of 50 major private and public colleges, the typical tuition rose from \$3,904 in 1980 to \$17,772 in 2000.

Tuition and fees spiked in the early 1980s, with double-digit annual rate increases, but such cost increases have leveled off in recent years, Jeffrey Penn, an analyst with College Board, which administers key college entrance exams and tracks college costs.

Yugoslavia

Milosevic supporters mob challenger's rally

KOSOVSKA MITROVICA - Slobodan Milosevic's supporters broke up the Kosovo campaign rally of his strongest challenger Thursday, pelting the presidential candidate with waves of rotten tomatoes and striking him in the face with a stone.

The melee failed to discourage opposition candidate Vojislav Kostunica, who had traveled to this divided industrial city as part of a Western-style campaign tour for the Sept. 24 election.

Afterward, the soft-spoken law professor wiped the blood from beneath a small cut under his eye and suggested that Milosevic, the Yugoslav president, must feel threatened if he had resorted to violence.

Correction

Because of a reporting and editing error, the Daily Nebraskan incorrectly stated the Maya Angelou speech would be simulcast in the Kimball Recital Hall. The Daily Nebraskan regrets this error.

Weather

TODAY	TOMORROW
Partly sunny high 74, low 52	Partly cloudy high 79, low 55

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