

Gridiron dinner has its laughs

Reagan, others take the stage

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Reagan's work habits, Vice President Bush's travels and, yes, even the deaths of Soviet leaders provided some of the fodder for the irreverent fun-making at the 100th anniversary dinner of the Gridiron Club.

With President Reagan joining in the laughter, Treasury Secretary James A. Baker III said Soviet leaders take naps just like the American president.

"The difference is, said Baker, 'They don't wake up.'"

And Geraldine Ferraro, the Democrats' 1984 vice presidential nominee, also touched on the recent death of Soviet President Konstantin Chernenko.

She commiserated with President Reagan that the Soviet leader's death came "just as you learned to say Chernenko."

The Gridiron Club, with a membership of 60 newspaper men and women who work in Washington, meets once a year for an evening of good food and good humor. By tradition, world events and politicians from the president on down are lampooned in speeches and in parodies of well-known songs.

The president's humor didn't always sit well with some of the guests. The Washington Post reported in Monday's editions. The newspaper quoted some dinner guests as saying Reagan quipped: "I think we should keep the grain and export the farmers."

"I didn't think it was funny, and I didn't laugh," said Republican Sen. Larry Pressler of South Dakota, one of the states beset by the current farm credit crisis.

Baker, who left his job as White House chief of staff earlier this year to take the Treasury post, represented the Republican side. Ferraro took up the cudgel for the Democrats.

"The last time I saw this many people dressed like this was at a Republican come-as-you-are party," Baker told the white-tie crowd of more than 600.

Slouch

By Jim Earle



"It looks as if the gold market is solidifying, and even silver is coming around. Maybe we should move some of our holdings from commons and bonds into a long position to give us more leverage."

U.S. considers easing imports of some cattle

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The Agriculture Department is considering a proposal to certify three additional Canadian provinces — Alberta, Manitoba and Saskatchewan — free of cattle brucellosis.

Bert W. Hawkins, administrator of the department's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, said last week that the proposal would allow easier entry into the United States for breeding cattle from those provinces.

However, entry would be limited to cattle which had passed a brucellosis test within 30 days prior to entry and which originated from herds that had been intact for at least one year before entry.

Currently, in addition to a negative brucellosis test within 30 days before U.S. entry, cattle from non-certified provinces must originate from herds which have been intact for at least two years and which have passed a brucellosis test within the past 12 months. Female cattle under 18 months may instead be certified as having been vaccinated for the disease.

Brucellosis, sometimes called Bang's disease, is an infectious bacterial disease which causes pregnant females to abort or give birth to weakened offspring. Brucellosis can be transmitted to humans who come in contact with infected animals or who drink unpasteurized milk from them.

Chicken challenges beef

American diet changing

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Americans consumed a record amount of meat and poultry last year but may ease back a bit in 1985, the Agriculture Department says.

In any case, the department's statistics show that the historic domination of beef in the American diet is being challenged.

According to the most recent figures, the average person ate 210.6 pounds of red meat and poultry in 1984. About 143.5 pounds of that was red meat, mainly beef, and 67.1 pounds poultry, mainly broilers.

This year, says the department's Economic Research Service, Americans are expected to cut back slightly to around 209.4 pounds each, on the average.

Meat-eaters will consume an average of 138.5 pounds, 5 pounds less than in 1984. That would mean a jump in poultry consumption to 70.9 pounds, an increase of 3.8 pounds.

Those are equivalent retail weights of meat and poultry, the packaged cuts ordinarily found in supermarkets. The figures are based

"Almost all the signals to broiler producers are for increased production in 1985 — lower feed costs, less pork and relatively strong broiler prices given supply levels." — according to a report from the Agriculture Department.

on federally inspected slaughter reports.

"Since 1980, beef and turkey consumption have remained relatively stable," the agency said in a recent report. "However, beef consumption is expected to decrease slightly in 1985 to its lowest level since 1980, and perhaps the lowest since the mid-1960s."

The determining factors have been cutbacks in cattle and hog inventories in recent years, reflecting

many of the problems in the agricultural economy and the tight profit margins faced by producers.

On the other hand, poultry supplies are expected to be plentiful, buoyed by larger corn and soybean harvests last fall that helped ease high prices for feed.

"Almost all the signals to broiler producers are for increased production in 1985 — lower feed costs, less pork and relatively strong broiler prices given supply levels," the report said. "With the expanding general economy, demand for broilers will likely remain strong."

Looking at last year's per capita consumption figures, the average of 67.1 pounds of poultry at number two, below beef consumption at about 78.5 pounds. If, as projected, poultry consumption in 1985 rises to 70.9 pounds, it would be within flapping distance of beef — which is expected to drop to 76.2 pounds.

The per capita pork consumption in 1984 averaged about 61.1 pounds, the third straight year the total poultry exceeded pork. This year, pork is expected to drop to 59.4 pounds.

Californians may soon pay for telephone time checks

Associated Press

SAN FRANCISCO — The lady on the line always knows what time it is, and every year she lets 470 million Californians know, too. Free of charge. Just because they called.

But the telephone time announcement could become another headstone in the freebie graveyard, buried alongside free directory assistance calls and free road maps at gasoline stations.

If Pacific Bell prevails, its 8.2 million customers will pay 20 cents every time they want to set their clocks after a power failure or make sure their watches are running correctly.

The plan would generate about \$31.4 million a year for the phone company, instead of costing it \$9 million a year, PacBell spokesman Roger Orr said.

"In a recent customer survey, we found that more than one-third of our customers never call time," he

said. "So this would allow those who use it to pay for it."

The idea, Orr said, is to keep basic telephone costs down. The state Public Utilities Commission, which regulates such things, seems inclined to agree, PUC telecommunications specialist James McCraney said. The PUC will hold hearings on the matter, but has not yet set a date.

A major consumer group, TURN — Toward Utility Rate Normalization — said it will tolerate the plan, at least on a short-term basis.

"We generally oppose splitting pieces off of basic service," TURN's Jon Elliott said. "But in this case, we're willing to stand aside in the interest of trading the revenue to keep phone rates down, and see how it goes after the first year. We're willing to hold our nose on this."

The charge would break a 40-year tradition that began when Bell companies asked Atlanta entrepreneur

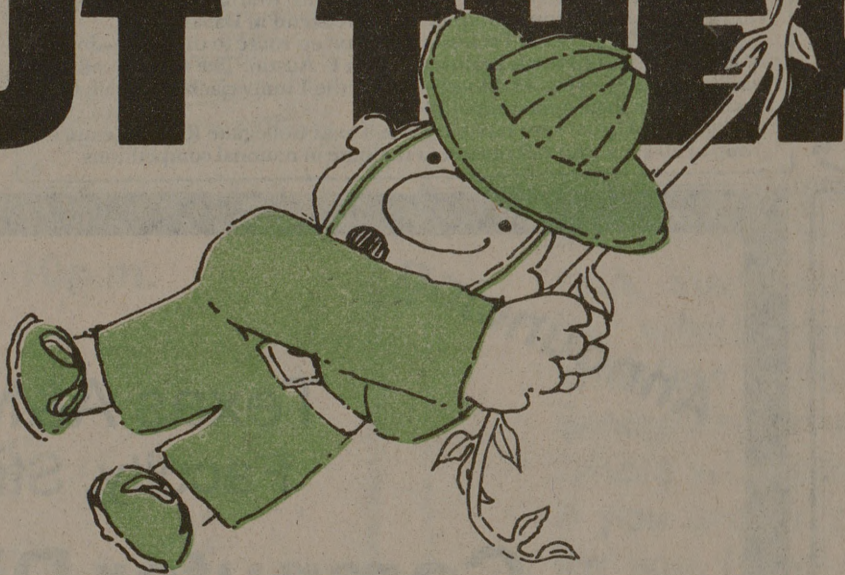
John Franklin to develop the hardware for a time announcement, according to Jim Fuller, vice president of marketing for Franklin's company, Audichron.

Back then, virtually all phone companies paid for it themselves. Fuller said. But soon, many began to look at the service as a revenue opportunity, and worked with Audichron to develop announcements sponsored by a bank or department store, he said.

California's time announcement always has been a public service. But Orr said that under the AT&T divestiture agreement, former Bell companies are prohibited from offering the service themselves and must find an alternate provider. Pacific Bell's plan would turn the service over to an independent contractor selected through competitive bids.

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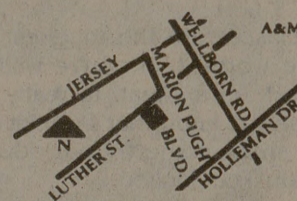
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