

World and Nation

Iacocca: Liberty project hurt because of his firing

Associated Press

HIGHLAND PARK, Mich. — Lee Iacocca said Thursday his ouster as head of the government advisory commission on the Statue of Liberty "borders on being un-American," and said he was fired because he fought commercialization of the project.

"In the end, a beautiful project gets hurt; I don't get hurt," Iacocca, chairman of Chrysler Corp., said at a news conference at company headquarters.

Iacocca said he was not certain why Interior Secretary Donald Hodel fired him Wednesday night from the job he has held for four years. But he said he believed it was related to a National Park Service endorsement of a luxury hotel and confer-

ence center for Ellis Island, which also is being restored.

Hodel's action "borders on being un-American," Iacocca said. "A lot of people have worked hard for four years on behalf of this project and so have I, and I don't appreciate being disenfranchised on somebody's whim."

Iacocca remains head of the private foundation that has raised \$233 million for the project.

Hodel held an impromptu sidewalk news conference to respond to Iacocca's remarks.

"If you watched Lee today, it's apparent he's very headstrong, and it may be he's made up his mind what he wants to happen on Ellis Island,"

Hodel said, "but the American people deserve... an unfettered look."

Iacocca was replaced by Armen Avedisian, a 59-year-old retired construction executive from Hinsdale, Ill.

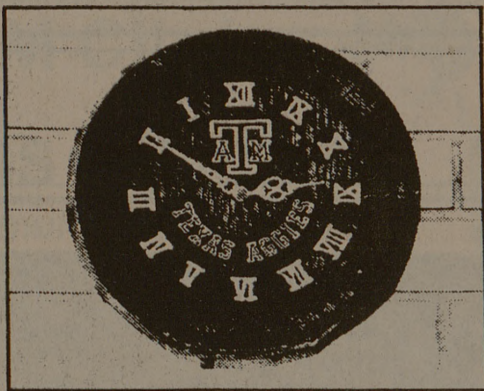
The Washington Post in Thursday's editions quoted two unidentified former administration officials as saying White House Chief of Staff Donald Regan made the decision to fire Iacocca several months ago because of "extremely bad blood" between Reagan and Iacocca over the Chrysler bailout, in which the automaker received \$1.2 billion in federal loan guarantees.

Reagan spokesman Larry Speakes said, "That's bad reporting on the part of the Post, I'm sorry."

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Cuba sends conciliatory signal to church

Associated Press

HAVANA — In a fresh signal of Cuba's newly conciliatory attitude toward the Roman Catholic Church, a draft of the Communist Party program for the next five years encourages Cubans to respect the beliefs of churchgoers.

The draft calls on Cubans to honor "the moral integrity of believers" and to avoid any practice that could "wound religious sentiments."

The proposed policy is consistent with what appears to be a studied effort by the government to improve relations with the long-suffering Catholic community.

There are now an estimated 210 priests in Cuba compared with a pre-revolutionary total of more than 800. Church activities have been severely limited.

Bureau chief reportedly revealed too much to press

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Justice Department officials were aghast Thursday over statements by the head of the Drug Enforcement Administration, which led to exposure of an undercover investigation into alleged cocaine smuggling by Eastern Airline baggage handlers in Miami, sources said.

A federal grand jury in Miami is receiving evidence in the case, and the investigation, which has involved the use of undercover operatives, is continuing, said several law enforcement sources here, who spoke on condition they not be identified.

DEA Administrator John C. Lawn disclosed the existence of the probe Tuesday following a speech in San Jose, Calif., after answering a question from the audience concerning cooperation with major airlines in fighting drug smuggling.

When an Associated Press reporter later asked for further details of the case, Lawn said the Justice Department is preparing indictments against about 50 employees of a major airline, for smuggling cocaine from South America.

Lawn did not name the airline, but he did say charges would be filed on the East Coast. The DEA chief also said "the indictments will go within the next several weeks." The next day in San Francisco, Lawn again discussed the investigation with reporters.

Several Justice Department officials, insisting they not be named publicly, said they were dismayed that Lawn would have revealed so much about an ongoing and sensitive undercover operation.

Publicly, Justice Department officials had no comment about Lawn's statements, which were made during appearances Tuesday and Wednesday in California.

The DEA chief was continuing a round of speeches in San Francisco Thursday, and could not immediately be reached for comment.

Law enforcement sources subsequently described the trafficking operation as a cocaine pipeline from Bogota, Colombia which allegedly was run through Eastern baggage handlers at Miami.

Shuttle panel shown videotape of liftoff

Associated Press

CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla. — The presidential commission investigating the Challenger explosion was shown videotape and still pictures Thursday of a black puff of smoke between the right rocket booster and fuel tank as the space shuttle left the pad, a government official said.

The official, who asked not to be identified, said he did not know the significance of the smoke, but it could indicate Challenger was in trouble from the moment of liftoff.

NASA spokesman Hugh Harris said the panel, which flew to the scene of the shuttle disaster for two days of closed-door sessions, was shown the videotape and photos for

the first time Thursday. He called the smoke unusual but refused to elaborate further.

A space agency official who requested anonymity said the puff of smoke was between the right booster and the external tank when it left the pad. Members of the commission thought it was interesting enough to study further, he said.

Previous videotapes and still photographs show a plume of fire and smoke coming out of the bottom section of the right booster 58 seconds after liftoff. The speculation is that this caused the external tank to explode, destroying Challenger and its seven-member crew 73 seconds after launch.

Commission Chairman William P. Rogers said the panel was looking forward to its on-site inspections on Friday and to continuing a detailed investigation.

One objective of the visit here was to explore the effect of the temperatures — 27 degrees several hours prior to the Challenger launch and 38 degrees at liftoff — on the so-called O ring seals, Rogers said.

Lawrence B. Mulloy, project manager for the boosters, testified before the commission in Washington on Tuesday that cold weather might make the seals stiffen and, at least theoretically, fail to seat properly in the gap they seal.

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