

Thursday, February 2, 1989

Tower confirmation hearings end Defense Secretary-designate: 'I am a man of some discipline'

WASHINGTON (AP) — Defense Secretary-designate John Tower on Wednesday denied he had a drinking problem or would be hampered in his new job by past ties with military contractors.

"I'm a man of some discipline," Tower told the Senate Armed Services Committee near the close of four days of testimony. The committee chairman, Sen. Sam Nunn, D-Ga., said he expected the panel to vote Thursday to recommend that the Senate confirm Tower's nomination.

The committee began Wednesday with a closed session to discuss possible conflicts of interest involving Tower and to allow him to answer allegations made Tuesday by conservative activist Paul Weyrich that he had "on a number of occasions" seen Tower publicly inebriated and in the company of women other than his wife.

After the hearings, Tower said little to reporters, describing himself as "embargoed" until after confirmation.

"I feel like I am glad it is the end of the hearings," he said as he left the hall.

In open session, Nunn asked Tower whether he had a drinking problem.

"I have none," Tower replied. "It is essential that the secretary of defense be at all times capable of exer-

cising the duties and responsibilities of his office, some of which are even more sensitive and more critical than the general public realizes."

"Therefore I think there should be zero toleration of anyone as secretary of defense or any other sensitive job in the Defense Department who has an alcohol problem," Tower said.

On the subject of women, Nunn asked Tower whether he would tolerate any sexual harassment in the

Defense Department.

"I will answer again with the term 'zero tolerance' for discrimination against women, the sexual harassment of women," Tower responded.

"I believe that professional women should be afforded the respect and the deference that they deserve," he said. "I will say that I do not believe women should serve in combat slots."

Nunn also read aloud a letter from the White House counsel, C.

Boyden Gray, rebutting a statement Tuesday by Weyrich that President Bush's transition team received hundreds of letters, including some by members of Congress, accusing Tower of moral laxity.

"To the best of my knowledge, no letters containing specific allegations of impropriety concerning Senator Tower were received by either the transition office or the White House" since the election, Gray wrote.

Platoon sergeant found guilty of negligence in soldier's death

CAMP LEJEUNE, N.C. (AP) — A military judge on Wednesday convicted a Marine platoon sergeant of negligence in the death of a soldier who had been left behind in the Mojave Desert during a training exercise in August.

The judge, Maj. Kent Smith, ruled that Sgt. Christopher Clyde failed to properly account for the whereabouts and welfare of his Marines.

Clyde was the platoon sergeant of Lance Cpl. Jason Rother, 19, of Minneapolis, Minn., who was left behind during a night exercise Aug. 30 after being posted as a road guide in the California desert. His remains were found in December.

The sergeant was found innocent of willful disobedience. He had been accused of failing to obey orders in granting leave to Rother's squad leader after the exercise, resulting in a delay in realizing Rother had been left behind.

Clyde has maintained he did nothing wrong and that he only relied on the instructions of his superiors. "If he's guilty of anything, he's guilty of relying on other people," defense attorney William Fisher said in closing arguments.

Prosecutor Robert Nunally had argued, "He screwed up and he screwed up in a major way."

New legislation would expand health coverage, reduce infant death rate

WASHINGTON (AP) — Rep. Mickey Leland introduced legislation Wednesday to expand government health coverage for low-income pregnant women and infants in an effort to reduce the nation's "disturbing" infant mortality rate.

The package of reforms would require the states to phase-in Medicaid coverage by 1993 to pregnant women and infants living at 185 percent of the poverty level.

The reforms also would gradually expand Medicaid coverage to children up to age 18 in families below 100 percent of the poverty level, now set at \$9,700 for a family of three.

"While infant mortality rates have declined significantly since 1970, this trend has clearly stagnated," Leland, a Houston Democrat, said. "In some areas, both rural and urban, infant deaths have actually increased. In 1986, 39,000 babies died in the United States."

Sen. Bill Bradley, a New Jersey Democrat and the legislation's sponsor in the Senate, said he fears the nation will not meet the

Surgeon General's goal of reducing the infant mortality rate from its current level of 10.4 deaths per 1,000 live births to nine deaths per 1,000 live births by 1990.

"We must expand access to Medicaid programs if we are to have any hope of reaching our goal," Bradley said. "It is appalling that the infant mortality rate of a nation as technologically advanced and wealthy as ours ranks so far behind other industrialized nations."

Bradley said quality prenatal care can reduce the incidence of low birth weight, a major contributor to infant mortality.

"It is also extremely cost-effective; for every \$1 spent on prenatal care, \$3 is saved during just the first year of the infant's life," Bradley said.

The Office of Technology Assessment recently reported that every low-birthweight birth avoided by prenatal care saves the U.S. health care system between \$14,000 and \$30,000 in initial hospitalization and long-term costs, Bradley said.

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