

Tuesday, March 7, 1989

Tower gets much-needed boost Democrat crosses party line, backs defense nominee

WASHINGTON (AP) — Sen. Howell Heflin of Alabama became the first Democrat to swing behind John Tower's confirmation as defense secretary on Monday, delivering a major boost to the troubled nomination a few hours after President Bush appealed for lawmakers to "put aside partisanship" in the struggle.

"I will rely on his pledge and give him a chance to prove himself," Heflin said in a speech on the Senate floor, referring to Tower's promise to

swear off drinking if he is confirmed to head the Pentagon.

Republican Sen. John Warner of Virginia walked to Heflin's side moments after the Democrat completed his speech and thanked him.

Tower, in a statement, said he was "grateful to Sen. Heflin for his objectivity and for the clear and lucid way in which he stated the arguments for my confirmation. He has put the issue in its proper perspective."

Heflin, who had been courted by

the Bush administration, bucked the growing list of Democrats who have come out against the nomination. He cited Tower's qualifications; the "uncertain state of the evidence" against the nominee, specifically the allegations included in an FBI report on the nominee; and the alcohol promise as the reasons for his decision.

Heflin's announcement leaves 47 Democrats and Sen. Larry Pressler, R-S.D., either solidly opposed or leaning against confirmation and 40

Republicans and one Democrat either leaning for or supporting confirmation, according to an Associated Press survey.

The Democrats hold a 55-45 edge in the Senate.

In addition to Heflin, the Bush administration has courted Sen. Bennett Johnston, D-La., who labeled the FBI report on Tower as "unreliable" but said he has not made a decision on the nomination.

Heflin said the FBI report was "not conclusive as to whether he had a drinking problem in the 1980s that impaired his judgment on issues in his official capacities."

Heflin noted Tower's no-drinking pledge and said the "primary safeguard against abuse or the breaking of his pledge is the president himself. I don't believe that President George Bush would allow a person to serve as secretary of defense whose conduct is a threat to national security."

As for Tower's knowledge of defense issues, Heflin said, "I don't believe I've heard anyone question his qualifications."

Bush said as much in his own remarks to an enthusiastic Veterans of Foreign Wars audience.

Bush backs 'this decent man,' asks for stop to partisanship

WASHINGTON (AP) — An angry President Bush Monday fed up with innuendos against Defense Secretary-designate John Tower — "this decent man" — and called on lawmakers to approve the nomination as bitter debate resumed in the Senate.

"I stand by this man," Bush told a wildly cheering Veterans of Foreign Wars audience. "I stand by him because he is uniquely qualified as the right man to take charge of the Pentagon."

He asked senators to "use their own experience with John Tower as an expert on defense issues, as a former colleague and as a tough, hard-nosed negotiator to guide them."

Hours after Bush spoke, Republicans and Democrats, ignoring Bush's call to "put partisanship aside," clashed once more on the Senate floor.

Republican Whip Alan Simpson of Wyoming called the accusations against Tower "so obviously flimsy" and urged his colleagues not to base their decision on allegations recounted in the FBI report on Tower.

Simpson called on his fellow senators "to walk a mile in John Tower's shoes before they cast a vote against him based upon the testimony I've seen."

Sen. James Exon, D-Neb., retorted that while he had voted with the president on other nominations, he would not support Tower because of "the personal qualifications of the nominee."

Democratic opposition to Tower remained solid. An Associated Press survey showed 47 Democrats and Sen. Larry Pressler, R-S.D., either solidly against the nomination or leaning against it, and 40 Republicans either solidly committed or leaning toward confirming Tower. Democrats hold a 55-45 majority in the Senate.

There remains the possibility Tower will be allowed onto the Senate floor to answer the allegations against him, which include excessive drinking, indiscreet behavior toward women and his lucrative consulting con-

tracts with defense contractors.

But a majority of the chamber would have to approve the appearance and a vote was unlikely before Tuesday at the earliest.

As he began his speech to the VFW, Bush said he wanted to get something "off my chest."

"I'm getting sick and tired of the rumors and the innuendo that are used against this decent man," Bush said.

"You know John Tower is a fellow veteran," he told the VFW.

"Now, he and I are fighting for what I think are some very important principles — principles that the American people understand, like fairness and truth, and principles like the prerogative of a president of the United States to assemble the most talented and qualified team to guide this nation forward."

Meanwhile, a conservative group said it had raised \$100,000 to finance an advertising campaign on Tower's behalf in states with Democratic senators who conservatives think might be persuaded to vote for Tower.

Brent Bozell III, chairman of the Conservative Victory Committee, said the group's lobbying campaign came after Bush last week urged conservatives to generate political heat for Tower.

In two days of Senate debate last week, Democrats argued that the cumulative evidence made Tower an unacceptable nominee. Republicans said that their colleagues have given too much weight to unproved allegations and that Bush was entitled to a Cabinet of his choosing.

The Tower nomination has threatened to undermine relations between the White House and Congress at the outset of the Bush administration. The Senate Armed Services Committee voted 11-9 along party lines to recommend that the full Senate reject the nomination.

Representative: Energy Department earns 'golden wastebasket' for mailout

WASHINGTON (AP) — A New Hampshire Republican gave "golden wastebasket" honors Monday to the Energy Department for mailing 17,000 copies of a 26-pound environmental impact statement on the superconducting super collider at a cost approaching \$1.5 million.

Rep. Chuck Douglas called the mass mailing a "ridiculous waste of taxpayer's money" and an extravagant misuse of funds.

Douglas blasted the Energy Department for sending several sets of the environmental impact statement, which was so large it had to be broken into 23 separate volumes, to some Illinois households that had not even requested the report.

"This, in my eyes, is a totally absurd waste of money and that's why I

think the DOE is a worthy recipient of the first 'golden wastebasket' award for waste in government," Douglas told a news conference, placing a copy of the 8,800-page report in the "official golden wastebasket."

"It is appalling in this day of tight budgets that such a ridiculous waste of taxpayers' money could have occurred, but it did," Douglas said.

Douglas estimated the cost of the mailing at \$1.4 million, but Energy Department spokesman Jeff Sherwood said the cost was closer to \$1.3 million.

Then-Energy Secretary John Herrington acknowledged the mailing late last year was a mistake, but said it was better to err on the side of

too much information rather than not enough.

The final environmental impact statement included 7,000 comments from 5,700 people who addressed the Energy Department's draft impact statement on seven sites that had been in the running for the superconducting super collider, Sherwood said.

A site near Waxahachie was selected in November to house the giant atom smasher, but Congress has yet to approve construction of the \$5.9 billion high-energy physics project.

Arizona, Colorado, Illinois, Michigan, North Carolina and Tennessee had also been finalist states.

Douglas said Energy Secretary James D. Watkins will be sent a replica of the golden wastebasket.

Electronic part failure forces NASA to delay launch of shuttle Discovery at least 2 days

CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla. (AP) — Failure of an electronic part forced NASA on Monday to postpone for at least two days Saturday's planned launch of space shuttle Discovery.

Liftoff was delayed at least until Monday, space agency spokesman Lisa Malone said. She said a firm launch date would not be set until Wednesday, after a new part had been installed on the shuttle and checked out.

The failed system is vital because it separates the booster rockets and fuel tank from the spaceship in flight.

Malone said thunderstorms predicted for overnight could keep technicians from working on the pad, causing additional delay.

The postponement is the fourth for the Discovery launch since an original target date of Feb. 18.

NASA has said if Discovery, which is to carry five astronauts, could not be launched by March 18, it might have to yield the pad to Atlantis, set for liftoff April 28.

Atlantis has priority because it is to send the Magellan probe to Venus. If Magellan can't be launched sometime from April 28 to May 23,

Venus will not be in proper position again until 1991.

Malone said routine pre-launch tests of Discovery turned up a failure in a Master Events Controller, one of two such shuttle systems that receive separation commands from the spaceship's main computer.

The controllers arm and fire explosive devices that separate the two solid fuel rockets two minutes after liftoff and the external tank after the main engines burn out about 8½ minutes into a flight.

Engineers replaced the failed unit with one borrowed from shuttle Columbia.

Chinese police fire on protesters in 2nd day of riots

BEIJING (AP) — Police opened fire on Tibetan protesters who marched through Lhasa and burned Chinese businesses Monday in a second straight day of violence. Four Tibetans were reported killed.

Security forces moved into the city's Tibetan section and pulled people from their homes, taking some away in jeeps, American tourists said. Chinese troops also beat Tibetans, said the travelers, who spoke on condition of anonymity for fear of police reprisal.

"One boy's face was completely bloodied," a man from New Orleans said. "He was no older than 10. Blood was coming from his ears, his eyes."

The Americans and other tourists were contacted by telephone in the Tibetan capital from Beijing. As they spoke, automatic weapons fire and exploding tear gas canisters crackled in the background. Bonfires burned in the streets, they said.

The official Xinhua News Agency reported one Tibetan was killed and eight others, including two policemen, injured in the violence Monday.

Xinhua had said 10 Tibetans and one Chinese policeman were killed in anti-Chinese demonstrations Sunday. Western travelers quoted Tibetans as saying that many more had died on Sunday and that at least four Tibetans had been slain Monday.

The U.S. State Department on Monday deplored the use of weapons on pro-independence protesters in Tibet and called for a restoration of order.

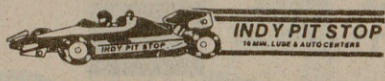
Police in Lhasa fired from rooftops near the city's main square late Monday afternoon, killing at least two Tibetans, an American tourist quoted Tibetans as saying.

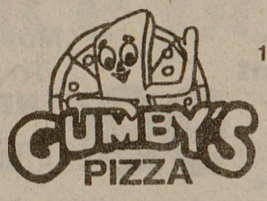
Several hours later, security forces fired on a group of 40 independence activists as they threw rocks at a building near the Jokhang Temple, another tourist said. He quoted Tibetans as saying at least two protesters were killed in that incident.



On Monday morning, thousands of Tibetans flooded the old city, breaking into the small Chinese- and Moslem-run stores that fill the area, pulling out their contents and burning them in bonfires along the main thoroughfare in the city.

The protests began Sunday when 13 Buddhist monks and nuns started marching near the Jokhang, shouting "Independence for Tibet." Police opened fire. A crowd of Tibetans then began ransacking Chinese buildings.

The bloodshed occurred days before the 30th anniversary of a failed Tibetan uprising against the Chinese on March 10. It marks the fourth violent outburst in 18 months against Chinese rule. Scores have died in the earlier protests.

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