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Republican issues of crime, welfare liberated by Clinton

The Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Clinton's seizing the initiative on crime and welfare reform has knocked Republicans off balance — suddenly on the defensive on issues that have been dependable GOP weapons against Democrats for a quarter century.

Clinton's efforts are causing considerable worry within a Republican Party already at odds internally over how to position itself in the coming health care reform debate, and concerned that GOP hopes for gains in this year's midterm elections could be undermined.

With Clinton promising to push three popular issues through Congress, Republicans find themselves in a quandary not unlike last year's North American Free Trade Agreement debate: They

can help Clinton to victory and watch him get most of the credit, or try to block the president and run afoul of voters anxious for action on crime, welfare and health care.

"There's a potential, if this speech was sincere, for a remarkable coalition that could pass a lot of stuff," House GOP Whip Newt Gingrich admitted.

"He can try all he wants, but the Democrats in Congress are not going to let him take the issues of crime and welfare away because their special interest constituencies won't let them go in the direction the public is demanding," said GOP pollster Robert Teeter.

"It won't be easy, but we'll get there," Democratic National Committee Chairman David Wilhelm said. After a White House meeting with Clinton, Democratic congressional leaders made similar predictions.

"Clinton's speech isn't going to be one of the great ones in history, but he was pretty effective in positioning himself more solidly than he was before in the eyes of the middle class by linking the three issues of health care, welfare and crime," said Kevin Phillips, a GOP theorist often critical of the party leadership. "I think Republicans have gotten themselves in some real trouble here."

"He doesn't have the votes on the Democratic side," said Senate Republican leader Bob Dole. "He's going to have to drop a lot of these price controls, mandates, the mandatory health care alliances, before we make any real inroads."

Even Dole conceded in an NBC interview that in the end, "we can probably accommodate most of what the president is talking about."

Mexico's Blanca White's destroyed Famous border watering hole burned down in fire

The Associated Press

MATAMOROS, Mexico — When this year's invasion of sunburned and thirsty Spring Breakers swamps this bordertown, there will be a big shock.

The hands-down favorite cantina, Blanca White's, will be dark, its wrought-iron gates padlocked. Cool nights of snake dancing between the small, wobbly tables will be but a warm memory, along with thousands of Polaroid snapshots tacked to the walls that caught customers in full-blown rumpus.

Gone, too, will be the unbelievable array of junk, trash and treasures hung from the rafters by happy clients.

Blanca White's has burned down. For more than a decade, Blanca White's has been the best-known bar in northern Mexico.

The eclectic watering hole, an easy three-block walk from the international bridge, hosted not only vacationing collegians, but was a popular after-dinner destination for locals from both sides of the Rio Grande.

But a few days before Thanksgiving, the bar's interior was gutted by fire, possibly caused by an electrical short circuit.

For owner Blanca Beltri, 37, — the bar's name was a pun, Blanca is "white" in Spanish — the loss was hard to take.

"For me, it's a terrible emptiness not to have it,"

Beltri said. "To go by there and see it, and to see there is nothing left — Lord!

"When the accident happened, something was wrenched from very deep in my soul."

But if fate has dealt Beltri a cruel blow, don't count her out.

The same determination and drive that led her to open the club in 1982 with no financial backing is prompting her to try again.

The success of Blanca White's was in large part due to the personality of its owner. Beltri, a petite woman with blonde hair, usually stationed herself at the front door and greeted her clients with a smile. Throughout the evening, she made rounds of the tables to make sure the service was good, or to sit and talk. It was rare to walk into Blanca White's, at any hour or any day, and not find Beltri.

Energetic, and always wearing a tuxedo shirt and black slacks like the club waiters, Beltri exhorted her customers to have a good time, but had no patience with drunks or brawlers.

Instead of linen tablecloths, she covered the tables with butcher paper and provided chalk and other writing materials. The rest of the interior decorating was done by clients, who over the years have suspended a bizarre collection of hats, crutches and other personal items from the rafters.

"I put the place up, but my customers made it what it was," Beltri said.

Grand Jury

Continued from Page 11

route being taken by his driver and insisted on being let out of the car. Once in the west Houston neighborhood, the two began knocking randomly on the doors of homes, scaring some residents who refused to open their doors.

De Vries rang the doorbell at Agee's front door and then hid. He then jumped the backyard fence and banged on the glass doors.

A police autopsy revealed De Vries had a .08 blood alcohol content, below the .10 limit for intoxication while driving in Texas.

Agee told police he thought he was about to be the victim of a home invasion, but a companion

of De Vries claimed they were only trying to get someone to call the police for them.

Home invasions, where burglars kick in the doors and attack residents who are still in the home, have been a problem in parts of Houston for the past year.

"All we're asking is that they look at the facts and let justice prevail," said Gelt De Vries. "If

Houston socialite sells belongings to pay IRS debt

The Associated Press

HOUSTON — Federal authorities plan to auction more than \$1 million worth of jewelry, furs, antiques and a ranch all belonging to a prominent Houston businesswoman to pay back taxes she owes.

The auction of Teresa Rodriguez' belongings will generate revenue to satisfy her debts, which include a \$1.2 million Internal Revenue Service tax bill, as part of a proposed settlement.

Rodriguez, once recognized as the Hispanic Businesswoman of the Year, saw her computer and financial services empire crumble last May amid accusations she was running a Ponzi scheme and owed money to the IRS.

Investors forced her into involuntary bankruptcy. The IRS seized her Montrose-area townhouse, Mexia ranch and other properties, as well as her jewelry, furs, clothing and antiques.

The FBI collected 62 boxes of documents in May, said James G. Conway, an FBI spokesman.

Court documents show the IRS and the trustees have agreed on the tentative settlement. U.S. Bankruptcy Judge Karen Brown still must approve it Feb. 3.

"Some of the jewelry is exempt and we want it back," said Joel Androphy, Rodriguez' attorney. "There are things, like her wedding ring and jewelry her husband bought her — sentimental things she wants to keep for her whole life — and she is entitled to have them back."

In November, Rodriguez filed a list of items she wanted returned under Texas law exempting \$60,000 of personal property from tax lien auction.

But the bankruptcy court refused her request because she invoked her Fifth Amendment right not to incriminate herself and did not provide information requested by the court.

they are given and take the time they will see this was a senseless killing."

Though the De Vrieses hope charges will be brought against Agee, they know the chances are slim.

"This law allows a man that we consider is a killer to be made out to be a hero," the victim's mother said.

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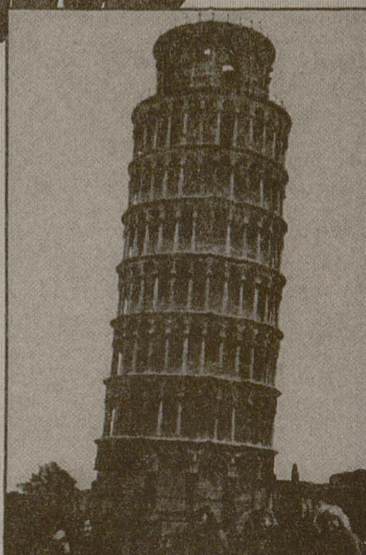
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