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Candidate's death shocks officials on Capitol Hill

The Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Capitol Hill was stunned Thursday about the assassination of Mexican presidential candidate Luis Donaldo Colosio — a man many of them had come to know during his lobbying on behalf of the North American Free Trade Agreement.

Lawmakers rushed to dispel concerns that Mexico's political or economic stability would waver in the aftermath of Colosio's slaying Wednesday during a campaign rally in Tijuana.

Their comments echoed those of President Clinton, who said that Mexico's government is "in sound shape."

"We think that the country's institutions are fundamentally strong," the president said.

Rep. Kika de la Garza, D-Mission, took to the House floor Thursday to make a speech decrying the death of

"His death is, in fact, a loss for all of us. For I feel this young man of 44 years of age was destined to be a world leader of major import."

— Rep. Kika de la Garza, D-Mission

a man he had known for more than 20 years.

"His death is a terrible loss to his family, to his friends and supporters, to the government of Mexico and it is a loss for the people of Mexico," de la Garza said. "His death is, in fact, a loss for all of us. For I feel this young man of 44 years of age was destined to be a world leader of major import."

To those questioning Mexico's political stability, de la Garza asked: "Do we forget Lincoln, the Kennedy brothers and Dr. King?"

Several Texas congressmen whose districts border Mexico said the assassination should bring both countries closer together. They also echoed the administration's position that the North American Free Trade Agreement, which went into effect Jan. 1, shouldn't be affected by the turmoil.

"This is a significant tragedy," said Arturo Valenzuela, deputy assistant secretary of state, who oversees Mexico policy. However, he said, "It's not something we should think in any way affects the stability of the Mexican political system, the Mexican government or the deepening relationship of the United States and Mexico."

The Mexican government, including Colosio, had helped Clinton sell NAFTA to Congress and the American public by portraying their country as a strong, stable neighbor.

"I think many citizens of Mexico will be more emboldened to move into becoming a true world trading partner," said Rep. Ron Coleman, D-El Paso.

"Along the border you will see even less of a feeling that we can't accomplish what we set out to accomplish."

Added Rep. Solomon Ortiz, D-Corpus Christi: "I think we are going to strengthen our bonds."

"I don't think this is going to give Mexico a black eye," he added.

A box of treasures



Amy Browning/The Battalion

Mike Mierzwa, a senior civil engineering major from Houston, examines a comic book Thursday found in one of the myriad boxes of treasures that can be found in the dealer's room of AggieCon

XXV. The convention will be open through Saturday on the second floor of the MSC. The event includes the dealer's room, gaming, trading, exhibit, movies and much more.

Mexicans pay tribute to slain leader, search for new candidate

The Associated Press

MEXICO CITY — Hundreds of ruling party faithful chanted a mournful farewell Thursday to Luis Donaldo Colosio, the man who almost surely would have been Mexico's next president but for an assassin's bullets.

While Mexicans dealt with the shock of the country's first major political assassination since 1928, party leaders began considering the loss of Colosio as their presidential candidate five months before the election.

The slaying of Colosio at a campaign rally Wednesday in Tijuana was a stunning blow for Mexico's leadership, already struggling with a peasant uprising in the south and growing discontent over economic changes brought by the free trade agreement with the United States and Canada.

The killing was "an offense against all Mexicans and an affront to the institutions which we have built throughout our history," said President Carlos Salinas de Gortari.

"It has injured the deepest convictions of the people of Mexico, who have always been partisans of the path of harmony, of law and of peace," Salinas said.

Officials of the long-governing Institutional Revolutionary Party met with Salinas, who is barred by law from seeking a second six-year term and by tradition picks the party's candidate.

The leaders refused to say when they might name a new candidate, who will be the strong favorite to win the Aug. 21 election and be sworn in as president in December.

The Institutional Revolutionary Party has not lost a national election since it was founded in 1929.

"It is a true tragedy. We still have not begun to think about the future," Oscar Espinosa, Colosio's campaign finance director, said as officials filed past the slain candidate's coffin at the party's sprawling concrete headquarters in downtown Mexico City.

Salinas accompanied Colosio's body from the airport to the headquarters, where it lay in state under a banner adorned with the party's red, white and green symbol. Party activists applauded as Salinas stood at attention and chants of "Colosio! Colosio!" rang across the auditorium.

Although party leaders declined to discuss new can-

"It is a true tragedy. We still have not begun to think about the future."

— Oscar Espinosa, Colosio's campaign finance director

didates, speculation quickly focused on several possibilities.

The front-runners appeared to be Ernesto Zedillo, who resigned as education secretary to coordinate Colosio's campaign, party chairman Fernando Ortiz Abundis and Manuel Camacho Solis, the government's negotiator with the Indian rebels in Chiapas state.

On Tuesday, the popular Camacho had given Colosio's campaign a big boost by announcing he would run for president as an independent candidate. That might help Camacho while the party considers a new candidate, but many party leaders were infuriated by his long refusal to endorse Colosio.

The party's options for replacing Colosio are limited by a constitutional ban on a candidate holding a senior government job six months before the election. That ruled out most of the Cabinet members who were possible candidates last year.

In Tijuana, Federal Attorney General Diego Valadez was overseeing the investigation into Colosio's murder.

Police were questioning Mario Aburto Martinez, 23, a self-described pacifist accused of using a 38-caliber revolver to shoot Colosio in the head and stomach while he walked among supporters at a campaign stop.

There was no indication of a possible motive for Aburto, an industrial mechanic in Tijuana who has brothers in the United States. "He said that even if he was tortured, he would not talk," the attorney general's office said in a statement.

Police also detained Vicente Mayoral Valenzuela. Early reports identified him as a suspected accomplice, but authorities later said he was being held as a witness to the shooting.

Clinton

Continued from Page 1

Washington was preoccupied with Whitewater "but our administration is preoccupied with the business we were sent here to do for the American people."

"The American people don't know that I and my administration will not be distracted," Clinton said in a nationally televised evening conference.

Clinton also said he would release a new accounting of his investment that would show he had roughly \$47,000 on the land.

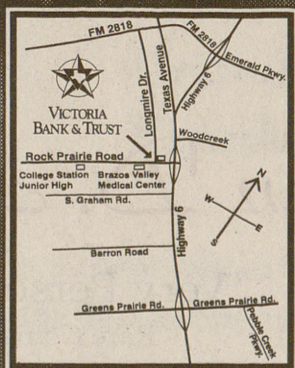
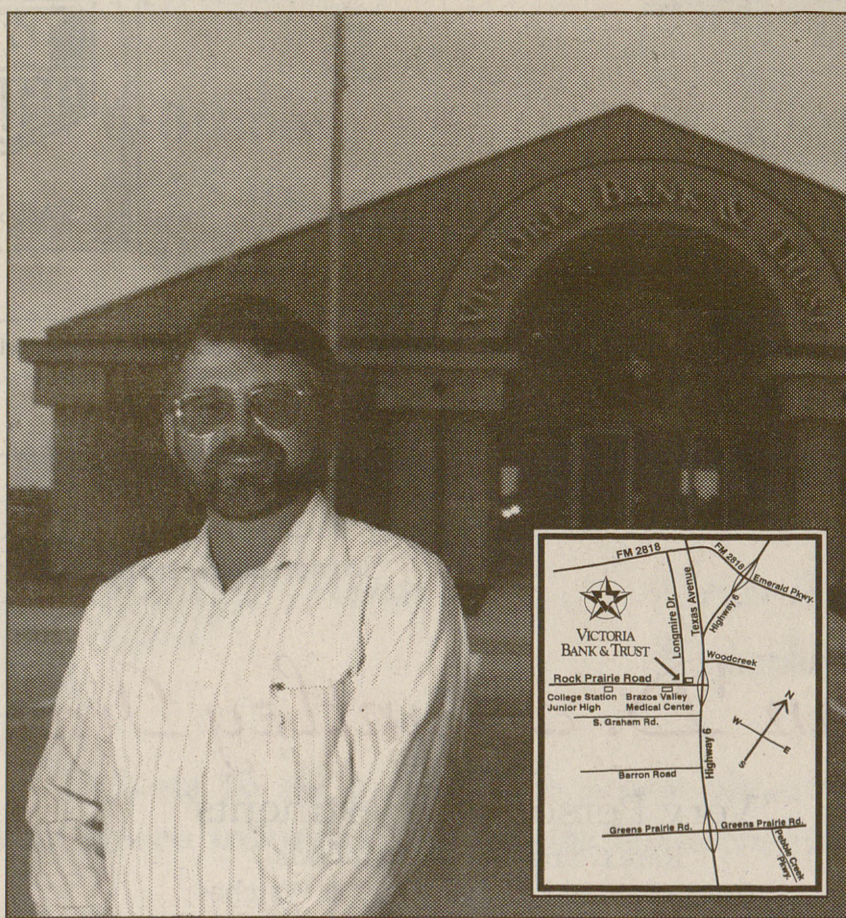
Clinton replied with a blunt "absolutely not" when asked if he had any knowledge of actions by his appointees to stall or otherwise influence federal regulators as they investigated a savings and loan at the center of the Whitewater scandal.

"The evidence is clear that I did not do that," Clinton said "absolutely," he said again when asked if he had upheld the high standards he vowed his administration would keep.

Clinton said it might appear the country that Washington preoccupied with Whitewater, our administration is preoccupied with the business we were sent to do for the American people.

Before taking questions Clinton rattled off a long list of what he were major successes, from low interest rates and 2 million jobs in his first year to recent congressional progress on crime, budgeting reform, health care and education legislation.

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