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Trade deficit at highest level in eight years

WASHINGTON (AP) — The United States spent \$11.7 billion more on foreign purchases than it sold overseas in July, a sharp jump in the trade deficit that was blamed on increased demand for Japanese cars, Chinese toys and foreign oil.

The Clinton administration insisted the 43 percent widening in the trade gap was only a temporary aberration. But the Dole campaign seized on the dramatic worsening of the deficit to highlight its attacks on White House trade policies.

"This underlines why we have to have a new economic policy," said Robert Lighthizer, a Dole trade adviser. "The country has become less competitive. We are losing our manufacturing jobs. Wages are stagnant. This is why people are so anxious."

Wall Street was initially jolted by the larger-than-expected deficit and renewed worries about rising interest rates. But by the close of trading Wednesday, the Dow Jones industrial average had recouped some of its earlier losses, ending down 11.47 at 5,877.36.

On the New York currency market the dollar suffered its biggest one-day drop against the yen in seven weeks. In late trading the dollar cost 109.15 yen, down from 110.24 on Tuesday. The dollar also fell against the German mark and British pound.

The Commerce Department said the July deficit in goods and services trade was the worst showing since the end of 1987. The

deficit in just goods of \$15.6 billion was the second worst showing in U.S. history, surpassed only by a \$15.9 billion deficit in December 1985.

Commerce Secretary Mickey Kantor, a top adviser in Clinton's re-election effort, sought to put the best face on the figures, arguing that despite the dramatic widening of the deficit in July, the imbalance through the first seven months of this year was 10.4 percent below the same period a year ago.

He predicted that the deficit for all of 1996 would be lower than last year's \$105.1 billion gap, reversing a trend that has seen the deficit rise steadily during Clinton's first three years in office.

Both Dole and Reform Party candidate Ross Perot have sought to make trade an election issue, charging that the administration's policies have cost millions of American jobs.

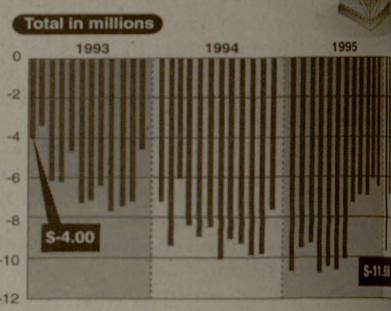
Kantor charged that opponents were ignoring the fact that U.S. exports have climbed to record highs during the Clinton presidency. He blamed the overall deficit on unequal economic growth rates with U.S. performance far outstripping growth of its major trading partners.

Standing beside a chart labeled, "The Clinton Economic Success Story," Kantor said: "Don't let any one month skew the picture. We are competing and winning."

Analysts, who had been expecting only a modest widening of the deficit in July, were tak-

Trade deficit

The U.S. trade imbalance reached its highest level in more than eight years. The month-by-month changes in the government's new trade report, which includes trade in services as well as trade in goods.



Source: U.S. Census Bureau

en by surprise. They worried in particular the deficit with Japan, which had been rising, increased 33 percent in July to \$4.3 billion. Some suggested that the 38 percent increase in the value of the dollar versus the yen over the past year was beginning to price American goods out of the Japanese market.

"Everything is going in the wrong direction now," said Lawrence Chimerine, an economist at the Economic Strategy Institute, a Washington think tank. "The administration's market-opening successes are being set by other factors and the truth is we're making a lot of progress."

House members opt to take drug tests

WASHINGTON (AP) — More than 30 House members lost a lock of hair Wednesday, submitting to a voluntary drug test organized by a Texas congressman intent on bringing mandatory testing to Capitol Hill.

By late afternoon, 39 Republicans and Democrats had paid visits to a first aid office, spending \$30 apiece for a drug test. Most chose to lose a snip of hair, although a few preferred urinalysis.

The event was organized by Rep. Joe Barton, R-Ennis, who has required drug testing for himself and his staff since 1989. The Texan is pushing legislation that would require mandatory random testing of House members. He promised to return with his bill next year, if re-elected, and predicted it would become part of the House rules members must abide by.

The House's 435 members should agree to drug tests to send the message that Congress does-

not exempt itself from an obligation required of millions of federal and private-sector workers,

"Drugs are an epidemic in this country and we've got to be willing to step up and be tested."

Christopher Shays
House representative

Barton said. The message also should be sent to teen-teenagers that Congress takes drug use seriously, he added.

"We should do everything we can to make it clear that we're setting an example for the youth of this country and that drugs are not to be tolerated," said Rep.

Martin Frost, a Dallas Democrat who opposes Barton's mandatory testing proposal but was one of the first legislators who showed up Wednesday.

Said Rep. Christopher Shays, R-Conn.: "To me, it's a no-brainer. Drugs are an epidemic in this country and we've got to be willing to step up and be tested."

Although Barton denied a political component, some lawmakers grumbled that the event was nothing more than an election-year stunt.

"It's just election-year demagoguery," said Rep. John Bryant, D-Dallas, who didn't participate.

Barton and others who took part in the testing conceded they don't know of any lawmaker with a drug problem. Others said they didn't believe the testing has any merit — but went along anyway.

"I've found that it's a whole lot easier to take the test so that I don't have to respond to my opponent

by saying why I didn't," said Charles Stenholm, D-Stamp.

Who opposes mandatory testing? Hair tests detect use of marijuana, cocaine, opiates, PCP, methamphetamines within the last 90 days.

A spokesman for the Atlanta-based Parent's Resource Institute for Drug Education said the congressional testing may be helpful.

"We welcome the attention that Congress could give to this issue and we welcome the attention that the White House could give to the issue ... if the message goes out," said the official Doug Hall.

But Hall expressed some concern that Barton's call for mandatory testing of members would not translate into a push for all teen-teenagers. "I don't have a great deal of concern about anything that would disrupt the trust between a parent and child," he added.

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