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Clinton seeks 'fairness' for victims with constitutional amendment

ASSOCIATED PRESS

Appealing for "simple fairness," President Clinton yesterday declared support for a constitutional amendment to protect the rights of crime victims, the first time in his presidency he has called for changing the Constitution.

"Today, it is time for us to make sure that while we continue to protect the rights of the accused, government does not trample on the rights of the innocent," Mr. Clinton said. "When someone is a victim, he or she should be at the center of the criminal justice process, not on the outside looking in."

In a Rose Garden ceremony attended by victims of crimes, Mr. Clinton said a constitutional amendment is the only way to assure that crime victims are given equal treatment in all courts, from juvenile to military.

"We want to level the playing field. This is about simple fairness," he said.

At the ceremony were Mark Klass, father of kidnap-murder victim Polly Klass, and John Walsh, who turned the 1981 abduction and slaying of his son Adam into an anti-crime crusade.

A constitutional amendment has support in both parties, said White House spokesman Michael McCurry, but the president is not endorsing any specific proposal. At least 20 states already have victims' rights amendments in their constitutions.

Because a constitutional amendment could take years to ratify by the states, Mr. Clinton directed Attorney General Janet Reno to adopt a nationwide system to alert victims about court proceedings and help assure they will be heard in court.

Presidential support for the amendment is part of a strategy to take a strong stand on a traditionally Republican issue like crime. Bob Dole already has endorsed a victims' rights amendment.

The Republican presidential candidate is sure to criticize Mr. Clinton, as he has before, for embracing GOP themes.

In the past, Mr. Clinton has opposed constitutional amendments dealing with flag burning and balancing the budget. But Mr. McCurry said the president wanted a level playing field so that victims can be heard in court.

Mr. Dole supports an amendment introduced in the Senate by Arizona Republican Jon Kyl and California Democrat Dianne Feinstein. A different version has been introduced in the House.

The Kyl-Feinstein amendment would extend constitutional protection to crime victims, ensuring they are notified of court proceedings, can object to plea bargains, can make their views known at sentencing hearings and are informed of any release or escape of offenders.

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First lady's 1970s trading in question

House panel seeks records from her cattle-futures deals

By Bob Dart
COX NEWS SERVICE

Adding to the first lady's woes, a House Agriculture subcommittee now is looking into Hillary Rodham Clinton's highly profitable trading in the cattle futures market in the late 1970s.

The Chicago Mercantile Exchange has been asked to provide additional information on the deal, in which Mrs. Clinton turned an initial $1,000 investment into nearly $100,000 in the high-risk market in 10 months, said Tom Hammer, a spokesman for the House Agriculture Committee.

The request was made by Agriculture Committee Chairman Pat Roberts, Kansas Republican, and Rep. Thomas Ewing, Illinois Republican and chairman of the House Agriculture subcommittee on risk management and specialty crops. Mr. Ewing's subcommittee has jurisdiction over commodities trading.

The new questions about Mrs. Clinton's commodities trading come amid reports that New Age philosopher Jean Houston helped the first lady hold imaginary conversations with Eleanor Roosevelt and Mohandas K. Gandhi. And the Agriculture Committee inquiry comes as investigations continue regarding Whitewater, the White House travel office firings and allegations of White House misuse of power in requesting FBI files on members of Republican administrations.

White House spokesman Michael McCurry said yesterday the Agriculture Committee is plowing old ground concerning the commodities dealing.

"My understanding from our counsel's office is that we asked the Merc for and were told that we received all of Mrs. Clinton's trading records, and we released them publicly in May of 1994," Mr. McCurry said yesterday.

But Mr. Hammer said additional information has been requested.

"We haven't gotten it back," he said. "We just sent the request on Friday."

Mrs. Clinton's commodities trading created a controversy in 1994, but she effectively dealt with the charges in the celebrated White House news conference in which she wore a pink sweater. In her investments, she was advised by Jim Blair, a friend of the Clintons and attorney for Tyson Foods, one of Arkansas' biggest agriculture businesses.

The first lady said her good fortune in the futures market was based on sound research, but that she quit after her extraordinary success because she didn't like the strains of such high-risk investing.

Official admits banking violation

Transfers aided Clinton campaign

Herbert Branscum Jr.

By Jerry Seper
THE WASHINGTON TIMES

LITTLE ROCK, Ark. — A vice president at a rural Arkansas bank testified yesterday in the second Whitewater trial that bank officials violated federal law in failing to report to the Internal Revenue Service $52,500 in cash withdrawals in 1990 for Gov. Bill Clinton's gubernatorial campaign.

Buford M. Satterfield, who also was the compliance officer at the Perry County Bank in Perryville, Ark., testified that cash withdrawals for the campaign of $30,000 in May 1990 and $22,500 in November 1990 should have been — but were not — reported as required by the federal Bank Secrecy Act.

Mr. Satterfield said that when FBI and IRS agents questioned him about the cash transactions in June 1994, as part of an investigation begun by Whitewater special counsel Robert B. Fiske Jr., he told them, "You're right, there should have been transaction reports filed in this case."

The government, in an 11-count indictment, accused the bank's owners, Herbert Branscum Jr. and Robert M. Hill, of conspiring with the bank's former president, Neil T. Ainley, and White House Deputy Counsel Bruce Lindsey, then the 1990 campaign treasurer, to conceal the cash withdrawals to the Clinton campaign as part of a plan to "ingratiate themselves with the powers that be."

The Feb. 20 indictment, handed up by a grand jury here, said Mr. Branscum and Mr. Hill "combined, agreed and conspired with each other and with Neil T. Ainley" to conceal the cash transactions, to obstruct federal examiners from discovering them, and of making false entries in the bank records to hide the withdrawals.

The two men have denied the accusations.

Meanwhile, prosecutor Jackie M. Bennett Jr. yesterday charged — outside the hearing of the jury — that Mr. Branscum and Mr. Hill tried to "smear" Mr. Ainley with false charges after they discovered in 1994 that he had become a cooperating Whitewater witness.

Mr. Bennett, in arguing a defense objection before U.S. District Judge Susan Webber Wright to allow the introduction of a bank audit that alleged wrongdoing by Mr. Ainley, said the two bankers hired an auditor to justify the k's filing of criminal charges against the former bank president "only after they learned Ainley was providing information to the government regarding Mr. Branscum and Mr. Hill."

Mr. Satterfield later testified that the auditor, Kent Dollar, recommended in a report that the bank make "five or six" criminal referrals to the Federal Deposit Insurance Corp. and the FBI against Mr. Ainley. But Mr. Satterfield said that as the bank's compliance officer, he signed off on only one, the alleged misuse of expense funds.

Questioned by Mr. Bennett, however, Mr. Satterfield reluctantly acknowledged that he was not sure any crime had been committed by Mr. Ainley and that he "had to rely on the Dollar report."

"I had some questions regarding the allegations," Mr. Satterfield said.

Later this week, Mr. Ainley is expected to testify that Mr. Branscum and Mr. Hill conspired to use bank funds to illegally reimburse themselves for campaign contributions and that they ordered him to make false bank reports and conceal documents.

He also is expected to say the defendants conspired with Mr. Lindsey to conceal the $30,000 cash withdrawal from the Clinton for Governor account at the Perry County Bank, and that he was ordered to retrieve from the bank's mail room a cash transaction report prepared by Mr. Satterfield on the $22,500 withdrawal.

Mr. Lindsey, who has denied any wrongdoing in the cash transactions, was identified last year by independent counsel Kenneth W. Starr, Mr. Fiske's successor, as a "target" in the Whitewater probe and has been named as an unindicted co-conspirator in this trial. His designation as an unindicted co-conspirator makes Mr. Ainley's testimony on hearsay conversations he said he had with Mr. Lindsey admissible.

Bank records meticulously introduced by prosecutors over the last three days show that the $30,000 went directly to Mr. Lindsey in four checks on May 25, 1990, each for $7,500. They were signed by Mr. Lindsey and cashed by Mr. Ainley. The money was used to pay off campaign debts. The $22,500 withdrawal went to the campaign in November 1990.