

# Bush's Tokyo trip hits 'desert storm' of criticism

□ Republican challenger, Democrats say visit transparent election ploy that did nothing for the trade deficit

WASHINGTON (AP) — Top Bush administration officials denied Sunday that President Bush's trade mission to Japan was a flop, with the secretary of commerce describing it as the economic equivalent of Operation Desert Storm.

But Bush challenger Patrick Buchanan derided it as "a fiasco" and Sen. Lloyd Bentsen, D-Texas, called it "obviously a political trip to assist (Bush) in his re-election campaign."

Bentsen announced that his Senate Finance Committee would hold hearings next week to examine the Japanese trade concessions that Bush has said will create at least 200,000 American jobs.

National Security Adviser Brent Scowcroft sought to sidestep the criticisms, saying he didn't believe "anything really negative happened" on Bush's controversial journey to Asia with U.S. automakers and other executives in tow.

"The trip as a whole was really a definite success," Scowcroft said on CBS'

"Face the Nation."

Commerce Secretary Robert Mosbacher, who quits the Cabinet this week to become general chairman of Bush's re-election drive, said the president "was supporting the economic security of this country as he did in Desert Storm for our military security."

Mosbacher, on CNN's "Newsmaker Sunday," said Bush "was out there selling jobs and getting business overseas."

Much of the criticism at home and in Tokyo zeroed in on the high-paid auto executives in Bush's party, who despite their criticisms of Japanese trade practices have made few efforts to design cars for Japanese consumers.

U.S. auto sales are in a slump, and General Motors last month announced plans to lay off 74,000 workers.

Asked if the auto executives should have been left home, Mosbacher said: "We talked about that but you couldn't ... because the autos were one-half of our total trade deficit with Japan."

As for any hard feelings in Tokyo, Mosbacher said, "We should worry about how we're putting Americans to work and stop worrying about whether we might be hurting someone else's feelings."

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Scowcroft acknowledged that taking the businessmen on the presidential trip was highly controversial.

"I don't think it ought to be a normal practice," he said, but added that it did develop "a better understanding between business and government ... (on) how they could cooperate."

Buchanan, who hopes to wrest the GOP nomination from Bush, described the trip as "a fiasco." Bush "got a reality check in Tokyo" on his vision of a new world order, Buchanan said on NBC's "Meet the Press."

When Bush sought concessions "from his old friends, he got something close

to a stone wall," Buchanan said. "I hope the president will ... realize he's got to start taking care of his own country first."

Bentsen said the Finance Committee would hold a hearing when Congress returns Jan. 22 to scrutinize the Japanese concessions, which Bentsen described as "too little, 10 years too late."

He said the \$41 billion trade deficit with Japan defies economic logic, because it's declined by only \$5 billion in the last six years while the dollar has fallen more than 50 percent against the yen in the same period.

Bentsen, who also appeared on "Face the Nation," questioned why Bush took his national security adviser to Tokyo, but not his trade representative, Carla Hills.

"The fact is that trade has always been an afterthought for this administration and the previous one," said Bentsen, the 1988 Democratic vice presidential candidate.

"Today's recession is part of the price we are paying for years of inattention to trade," he said. "This country needs a comprehensive national economic strategy — not a three-day trip to Japan."

## Yankees see Detroit's Big 3 as 3 big oafs

WASHINGTON (AP) — The editorial cartoon depicts a huge, hulking football player with "Detroit" emblazoned on his jersey.

"No fair! He keeps hitting me!" he whines to the referee, a George Bush look alike. The big guy points toward an undersized but trim player wearing a "Japan" jersey who scampers across the goal line, triumphantly waving the ball.

It's typical of the ridicule heaped upon the chairmen of the Big Three U.S. automakers by the Japanese media during their visit last week.

Except that this particular dart wasn't thrown by the Japanese. It was the work of a Chicago Tribune cartoonist.

And it underscores a big problem for the U.S. auto industry and its congressional allies in their struggle to knock down Japanese trade barriers and stave off further Japanese gains in the American auto market.

Japanese car sales in the United States have risen steadily for decades, and they now claim about 33 percent of the U.S. market. The Big Three's share has fallen from 100 percent in the mid-1950s to around 60 percent today.

The Big Three grudgingly acknowledge their quality fell in the 1970s and early 1980s and the Japanese took advantage of it. But the American companies say those days are over, and industry analysts agree that U.S. quality has improved.

But buyers have been slow to respond.

"If you bought a clunker six years ago, the product today may be terrific but your impression of what they're doing is based on a 6-year-old experience," said Clyde Prestowitz, president of the Economic Strategy Institute, a research group partially funded by the automakers.

During the visit to Japan, editorial writers and commentators of all ideological stripes lambasted the chairmen of Chrysler, Ford and General Motors and belittled their complaints of unfair competition.

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