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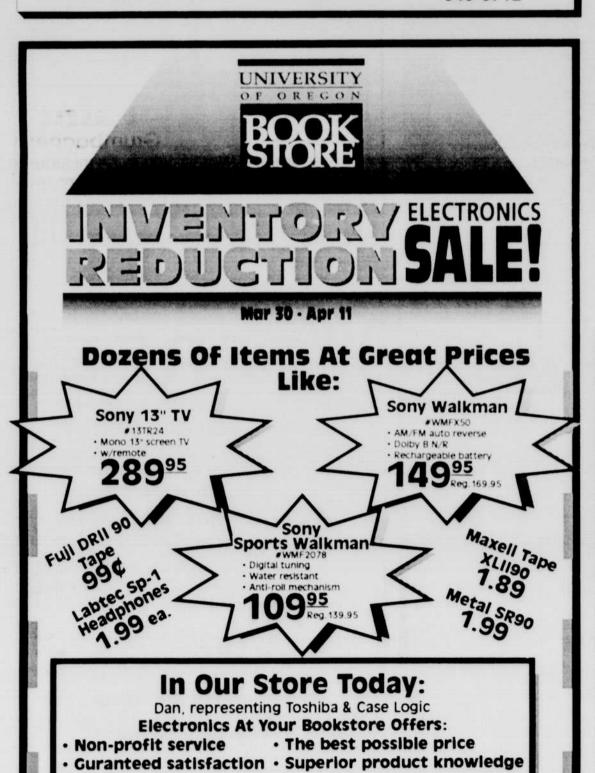
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Candidates answer charges as April primaries approach



tial front-runner Bill Clinton acknowledged for the first time Sunday experimenting with marijuana "a time or two" while attending Oxford University as a Rhodes Scholar more than 20 years ago.

Former California Gov. Jerry Brown, Clinton's lone challenger for the nomination, responded "No" when asked during a television appearance with Clinton whether he has

ever violated drug laws. 'Why don't you lay off this stuff," Brown added. "What you did 20 years ago is not relevant."

Over the last two years, Clinton has been asked numerous times whether he ever used drugs. He elaborately avoided a direct answer, saying he never violated state or federal laws.

On Sunday, a reporter noted how he told the New York Daily News he never violated "the laws of my country" and asked if he ever violated international drug laws.

When I was in England I experimented with marijuana a time or two and didn't like it," the Arkansas governor said. "I didn't inhale and I didn't try it again." Clinton was at Oxford from 1968 to

In the last presidential campaign, Tennessee Sen. Albert Gore Jr. and former Arizona Gov. Bruce Babbitt acknowledged smoking marijuana in their youth. Other candidates denied ever trying the

Those questions arose in late 1987 when Douglas Ginsburg withdrew his Supreme Court nomination after disclosing he had smoked marijuana with his students at Harvard University

Asked if he knew he was breaking English law when he smoked marijuana, Clinton said, "I assumed it was against the law, but when we got there they told us that as long as we did it inside our apartments or whatever nobody would hassle us."

Elsewhere in the campaign:

· Brown campaigned in Wisconsin and Vermont on Sunday, hitting on environmental themes, before returning to New York to hold an "electronic town meeting" through an interactive computer network.

· GOP challenger Patrick Buchanan, who said he would cut back campaigning after disappointing showings in Illinois and Michigan, scheduled a speech outside the Capitol on Monday. He then planned to fly to Wisconsin and Minnesota for a full day of campaigning on Tuesday in advance of the April 7 primaries there.

Clinton's acknowledgment Sunday morning was the only drama in an hourlong forum in which the Democratic rivals traded fresh attacks over Brown's proposed flat tax and Clinton's support of capital punishment.

Brown defended his role as director of a biomedical firm whose parent company paid a \$400,000 penalty to settle charges that it falsely promoted an anti-AIDS drug.

Although Brown has centered his campaign on fighting what he calls the corrupt system of special-interest lobbying of Congress, he confirmed a Washington Post story Sunday that he called Rep. Henry Waxman, D-Calif., and asked him to look into a dispute between the company's president, a longtime Brown supporter, and the Food and Drug Administration.

On ABC's "This Week With David Brinkley," Brown acknowledged, "Yeah, you're right," when he was asked if calling Waxman was the kind of lobbying he criticizes

There's a disproportionate ability of those who know people, who are rich and powerful, opposed to the grassroots people who don't have any power," he said

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