

Clinton retreating from gay ban pledge



WASHINGTON (AP) — Under pressure, the White

House began positioning President Clinton on Wednesday to retreat from his promise to completely lift the ban on homosexuals in the military.

"I think he recognizes that it's very difficult, that there is not support from Congress for a complete lifting of the ban," White House press secretary Dee Dee Myers said.

White House officials said they were awaiting recommendations from Defense Secretary Les Aspin, who has been struggling to produce a compromise between Clinton's promise and intense opposition from the Pentagon and Congress to lifting the ban.

The issue has been a major political headache for Clinton, distracting attention from his economic plans and requiring him to defend a stand on an issue that has bitterly divided Americans.

Moving cautiously toward a decision, the White House kept its distance from a reported compromise proposal from the Pentagon to allow homosexuals to serve in the military only if they keep their sexual orientation private.

That reported compromise would ban military personnel from declaring they are homosexuals or from engaging in homosexual conduct anywhere. It also would label homosexual conduct as inconsistent with military service.

Gay activists said they would reject any language about homosexuality or homosexual conduct being inconsistent with military service.

"That's totally unacceptable," said Tim McFeeley, executive director of the Human Rights Campaign Fund. "That just has to go."

"And we believe that people who conduct themselves according to the rules should not be dismissed because they're gay, no matter how people find out that they're gay," he said.

McFeeley said he could accept some restrictions on a member of military publicly declaring he or she is a homosexual. "I think we can accept that a public, intentionally disturbing kind of speech may have to be proscribed," he said.

White House officials said they expected to get "an interim report" from Aspin this week on his recommendations, officially due July 15.

"It's just an update, nothing final" one senior official said. "They're not set in stone, and this is an area where little changes mean a lot."

For instance, the official said, there would be a difference between saying that homosexuality is inconsistent with military service, and saying that homosexual conduct is inconsistent.

The controversy delayed action by the House Armed Services Committee on next year's defense bill. Under pressure from the White House, the committee postponed work in its personnel subcommittee until after the congressional July 4 recess.

Republicans had the votes for approval in the subcommittee for their plan to write the ban into law, according to congressional sources, who spoke on condition of anonymity.

Elsewhere on Capitol Hill, Rep. Barney Frank, D-Mass., one of two acknowledged gay members of Congress, said any plan must contain two elements: it cannot say that homosexuality is incompatible with military service and the ban on sodomy in the Uniform Code of Military Justice must be even-handed toward homosexuals and heterosexuals.

Frank acknowledged that what will emerge may be problematic.

"People don't expect to be satisfied, but there are degrees of dissatisfaction," he told a Capitol Hill news conference.

Rep. Patricia Schroeder, D-Colo., a member of the House Armed Services Committee, sent a letter to Aspin demanding that he release a report prepared by the Rand Corp. on gays in the military, which Schroeder said argues for complete lifting of the ban.

Worst Boss labeled as 'demented'

NEW YORK (AP) — The nation's worst boss demands that workers who take time off for a funeral return with an obituary. He asks employees to steal phone books from customers. He couldn't make a decision if his life depended on it.

All that bad news added up to good news Wednesday for the winner of a national contest to find the worst boss in the nation.

The winner, whose name was not released by contest organizer Jim Miller, will get an all-expense paid week's vacation for two in Hawaii for his tale of working woe.

The winning entry detailed a demented, penny-pinching, abusive incompetent. "He's actually worse," said the winner, who didn't identify himself in order to protect his job.

Miller, author of *The Corporate Coach*, a book on proper management techniques, found various candidates for the worst of the worst.

Among them: The boss who made his female employees raise the flag in the pouring rain; one whose motto was "people are animals"; and the ex-military man who liked to "playfully" choke and bite his employees.

Religious groups oppose education nominee

WASHINGTON (AP) — The nomination of former San Diego school chief Thomas Payzant as an assistant education secretary has stirred the wrath of some conservative religious groups who contend he is anti-Christian and pro-gay.

Enough of a fuss has been raised that the Senate Labor and Human Resources Committee, breaking with its usual procedures, has scheduled a hearing for July 1 on Payzant's nomination. Assistant Cabinet secretaries generally are not subjected

to such scrutiny.

"The problem is that he wants to use the word 'diversity' to cover perversity," said the Rev. Louis Sheldon, chairman of the Traditional Values Coalition, which is leading opposition to Payzant's nomination as assis-

tant secretary of education for elementary and secondary schools.

A native of Boston, Payzant, 52, holds master's and doctoral degrees from Harvard University. He is now a consultant for the Department of Education.

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