

Heralded Perry accepts defense secretary position



WASHINGTON (AP) — Filling an embarrassing gap in his national security team, President Clinton promoted the Pentagon's No. 2 man to defense secretary Monday. He called William J. Perry "a real pro," a man "you can depend on."

The quick reaction from Congress was enthusiastic, with predictions Perry would win easy confirmation. Though he is little known to the general public, senators dealing with military issues are familiar with him from frequent testimony at hearings.

Seemingly a reluctant warrior, Perry said he told the White House Saturday he could not say yes at that point because "I did not want to drive my family into a decision — my decision — without their support."

After a talk with Vice President Al Gore and then a meeting with family members, he telephoned the White House on Sunday to say he would accept an offer if one were forthcoming.

"I did not have to be persuaded to take this job," Perry said.

Perry, 66, is to replace outgoing Secretary Les Aspin, who announced his resignation under pressure from the White House last month. Clinton's first choice to take Aspin's place, Bobby Inman, withdrew last week in a news conference filled with complaints about attacks from columnists and lawmakers.

Despite Inman's shocker — and comments from a handful of other job

prospects that they were not interested — Clinton said hiring a new Pentagon chief was easy.

"It wasn't hard to fill," Clinton said. "I asked Secretary Perry and he said, 'Yes.'"

Perry, who also served in President Carter's Pentagon, is a former engineering professor and mathematician, a key early supporter of stealth technology who was later proven right. Unlike Clinton, he is also an Army veteran, perhaps positioned to help his commander-in-chief improve relations with military leaders and wrestle with a shrinking Pentagon budget.

Republican as well as Democratic senators were quick to praise the nominee.

"A great choice ... a real professional with depth of experience," said Sen. Joseph Lieberman, D-Conn., a member of the Senate Armed Services Committee.

"I have worked well with Dr. Perry in the past, and he has done a good job," said Sen. Strom Thurmond of South Carolina, the ranking Republican on the committee.

Clinton said he made the choice "based on his lifetime of accomplishments and his solid leadership at the Pentagon."

"He has the right skills and management experience for the job. He has the right vision for the job," said Clinton, who credited Perry with being on the "cutting edge of defense issues."

Clinton predicted Perry would reform Pentagon spending procedures, keep a tight reign on the shrinking defense budget and maintain the nation's strong military force.

He said many people have told him, "Bill Perry is real pro — you can depend on him."

In contrast to Inman who said he needed to reach a "comfort level" with Clinton, Perry quickly endorsed his commander-in-chief. "I have a great respect for the way you have been guiding national security," he told the president.

Perry said the end of the Cold War offers "a window of opportunity" to reform the way the Pentagon spends its money, especially the rules under which it purchases goods.

"This is a time of great change, great challenge and great opportunity," Perry said.

The soldier, scholar and entrepreneur is described as an unassuming gentleman who quietly rose to the top of the Pentagon hierarchy.

Aides had said the president was seeking a "star" as his new Pentagon chief, a political celebrity. But pressure grew to make the choice quickly after the spectacle of Inman's withdrawal and announcements that several prospects, including Sen. Sam Nunn, D-Ga., said they didn't want the job.

Aspin, who was eased out by Clinton, has agreed to remain aboard until his successor is confirmed. He was present for the announcement.

Besides Perry's concern about his family, he also said over the weekend that he wanted to make sure he would have adequate access to the president, said an administration official, speaking on condition of anonymity. A poor line of com-

munication with the Oval Office hurt Aspin.

Perry is highly regarded in the military, with a reputation for managing unwieldy bureaucracies. He is credited with pushing the successful stealth aviation technology on Air Force officials who resisted it in the 1970s.

As deputy defense secretary, Perry has overseen the daily business of the Pentagon and traveled to Russia to promote the conversion of Russian weapons factories to non-military production.

He managed to retain the respect of the military establishment while overhauling the way the Pentagon spends money on acquisition and research.

Clinton, angered in the past by leaks involving personnel decisions, snapped at reporters who suggested Monday that candidates had turned him down.

"The job was absolutely not offered to anyone else. Absolutely, categorically not offered to anyone else," Clinton said.

Perry was easily confirmed last February as deputy secretary, with the only problem being a report that he participated in Pentagon budget discussions while still on the boards of defense companies. He denied the claim.

Perry served in Carter's Defense Department, responsible for the purchase of weapons and all research and development. Before his return to government early last year, he worked for a San Francisco investment banking firm; a Menlo Park, Calif., consulting firm and as a professor of engineering at Stanford University.

USFSA waits for facts on Harding

PORTLAND, Ore. (AP) — The U.S. Figure Skating Association wants some hard facts about Tonya Harding and the attack on her rival, Nancy Kerrigan, before deciding whether she competes in the Winter Olympics.

"We're waiting for law enforcement officials to get the correct information," U.S. Figure Skating Association spokeswoman Kristin Matta said Sunday.

And the U.S. Olympic Committee is waiting for the figure skating association to act. "It's in their back yard," spokesman Mike Moran said.

A grand jury investigation resumed today.

Four people have been charged with conspiring to club Kerrigan on the knee Jan. 6 in Detroit: Harding's ex-husband, Jeff Gillooly; her one-time bodyguard, Shawn Eckardt; the alleged hit man, Shane Stant, and the alleged driver of the getaway car, Derrick Smith.

The attack kept Kerrigan out of the national figure skating championships, which Harding went on to win. Both skaters were given spots on the Olympic team.

Harding hasn't been charged and denies any involvement. Eckardt has accused her of helping plan and cover up the attack.

Harding today again proclaimed her innocence in a statement: "I deny all allegations

that I was involved in any way in the Nancy Kerrigan assault."

The *Oregonian*, citing unidentified sources, reported today that authorities think they have enough evidence to arrest Harding, but don't want to charge her until they're sure they've got a watertight case.

According to the newspaper, much of the case against Harding is based on statements from three of the four men charged.

FBI spokesman Bart Gori and Norm Frink, deputy Multnomah County district attorney, declined comment today on the newspaper's report. Frink said the grand jury would take no further testimony today, and declined to say when new witnesses would appear.

The grand jury has until Feb. 3 to issue its report — three days after the USFSA must name its figure skating team and nine days before the Olympics begin in Lillehammer, Norway.

While the skating association's code of ethics allows it to remove someone for "acts, statements or conduct ... considered detrimental to the welfare of figure skating," its 45 members are waiting for concrete information, like the grand jury report, before acting, Matta said.

Sunday, *The Oregonian* reported that Harding approached two men about "bumping off" her husband last summer because she suspected

him of stealing her truck.

Neither man is quoted directly, no police report is cited, and there is no independent evidence supporting the allegations. There is no specific reference to an attempt to kill Gillooly, and it is not clear if Harding was serious or exactly what she wanted the men to do.

"She told two men ... that she wanted Gillooly taken care of. They weren't sure what she meant," the newspaper said in a report based on information from one of the men, who declined to be identified.

"She had approached one of them before about being a bodyguard to protect her from her husband, but now she wanted them to knock Gillooly out of the picture altogether," the paper said.

"They laughed it off, but they had no doubt she was serious."

Harding and Gillooly separated last spring, and they were divorced in August. They reconciled in September, referring to themselves as husband and wife and sharing a house until Tuesday, when Harding said she was separating from Gillooly to concentrate on the Olympics.

Meanwhile, the Tonya Harding Fan Club has begun gathering signatures on petitions urging the USFSA, the USOC and the International Olympic Committee to keep her on the Olympic team.

Source says Jackson will pay big settlement

SANTA MONICA, Calif. (AP) — Michael Jackson will pay at least \$10 million to settle a teen-age boy's sexual molestation lawsuit, a source said Monday.

The settlement, expected to be announced Tuesday during a hearing before Superior Court Judge David Rothman, includes an eight-figure settlement, the source told *The Associated Press*.

An exact amount wasn't disclosed. Recent media reports have put the amount between \$5 million and \$50 million.

Jackson's attorney Howard Weitzman wouldn't discuss the case. The boy's lawyer, Larry Feldman, also declined comment.

The lawsuit claims that beginning last February Jackson supplied the boy, then 13, with lavish gifts and vacations, then seduced him.

Jackson, 35, has denied the allegations. His lawyers say they were the result of a failed \$20 million extortion attempt by the boy's father and lawyer.

The Los Angeles County District Attorney announced Monday that an investigation into the extortion claim was complete and no charges would be filed against boy's

father or his lawyer.

There are two ongoing criminal investigations into the boy's allegations. Jackson hasn't been charged. Prosecutors refused to comment Monday on the investigation.

An out-of-court settlement would severely damage any criminal case because under state law, a sexual abuse victim can't be forced to testify.

The civil molestation trial was scheduled to begin March 21, and Jackson faced mounting pressure to answer questions during pre-trial depositions.

Jackson abandoned his "Dangerous" world concert tour in November, saying he was addicted to prescription painkillers that he started taking after scalp surgery to repair damage caused when his hair caught on fire while filming a Pepsi commercial. He sought treatment in Europe before returning to the United States in December.

Feldman's office filed court documents Monday which said the teen-ager's divorced parents resigned as guardians over the boy's affairs. Retired appellate court Justice Jack Goertzen was designated to serve as the boy's guardian, the document said.

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