

# Ringling Brothers' circus comes to Capitol Hill



WASHINGTON (AP) — Three months after the GOP swept into control, 130,000 pounds of pachyderm — the Republicans' beloved symbol — came lumbering to Capitol Hill Wednesday.

But bringing the circus to Congress seemed almost redundant as House members debated which party claims the bigger clowns.

Why bother with the performing elephants and dancing girls on the Capitol plaza when you can watch professional politicians defy logic, asked Rep. Luis Gutierrez, D-Ill.

"Step right up and you'll see Republicans juggle numbers," he promised visitors to the House gallery, bracing for at least six

hours of debate on the GOP tax bill.

Rep. Jack Kingston, R-Ga., who followed Gutierrez to the House floor, said Democrats were simply afraid of being trampled by charging elephants.

"They already had that experience in November," Kingston said.

One by one, House members trooped to the microphone and loaded tons of circus jargon into the partisan speeches that opened the day's session.

In a Capitol basement conference room, Democrats calling themselves the "GOP Prize Patrol" staged a mock TV show awarding pretend \$1 million cash prizes to the "billionaire Benedict Arnolds" and wealthy corporations they said would benefit from Republican legislation.

Outside the Capitol — home to at least 23 tons of GOP lawmakers — 13 five-ton elephants balanced on their hind legs and formed what circus people call a long mount.

"We have the outer circus and the inner circus," said House Speaker Newt Gingrich, R-Ga., as he went to greet Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey president Kenneth Feld.

Earlier Wednesday, Columbus (Ohio) Zoo director Jack Hanna turned the animal-loving speaker's office into a petting zoo — complete with hissing cockroaches and a fire-belly newt.

Gingrich, cuddling a North African fennec fox, confessed that his first boyhood dream was to be a zoo director.

It took a House-Senate resolution to authorize the circus'

125th-anniversary performance in the Capitol parking lot.

Gingrich, who watched from a folding chair placed on a small slice of red carpet, reveled in the performing elephants' symbolism.

Asked about the absence of donkeys — mascot for the Democrats — Gingrich said, "That was an independent, private-enterprise circus decision about what works."

For Senate Majority Leader Bob Dole, a GOP presidential contender, it was a picture-perfect photo opportunity.

The 71-year-old Kansan posed beside the 48-year-old King Tusk ("a young Republican," Dole quipped) and flashed reporters a "thumbs-up."

As if on cue, the 14,762-pound pachyderm curled his trunk up to his forehead and winked.

Accompanied by a police motorcade of presidential proportions, the elephants had lumbered trunk-to-tail the nearly two miles from the D.C. Armory, where the circus opens a two-week run on Thursday, to the Capitol.

Sen. Bob Smith, R-N.H., the only senator to oppose the performance, said the sergeant-at-arms told him security for the two-hour circus act would rival that used for the president's State of the Union address — a cost to taxpayers of about \$52,000.

The plaza was roped off to the uninvited public but about 300 local schoolchildren packed the Capitol steps at Gingrich's invitation. They waved small American flags, marveled at the jumping dogs and giggled at the clowning clowns.

## Survey: College freshmen drink alcohol early, often

BOSTON (AP) — More than half the freshmen attending colleges where drunken parties are a way of life go on a binge during their first week on campus, according to a survey released Wednesday.

"We anticipated they would drink a lot, but these findings surprised even us," said researcher Henry Wechsler of the Harvard School of Public Health. "We found they start drinking early, and they

do it often." The study, conducted at schools where binge drinking is common, was designed to examine what happens to freshmen who enter this drinking culture.

An earlier report by the same team, published in December in the Journal of the American Medical Association, sampled 17,592 students at 140 colleges in 40 states. It found that at one-third of the schools, half the students go on drinking

binges, meaning they down at least four or five drinks in a row.

In the new study, the researchers questioned 720 freshmen at 13 of the same heavy-drinking colleges. They found that 68 percent of new students had binged by the end of their first semester, 54 percent of them in their first week at school.

Timothy Brooks, dean of the University of Delaware, said many college administrators view drinking as their biggest

problem and the latest freshman data "are right on target."

Researchers did not identify the heavy-drinking schools.

Wechsler said he has presented the freshmen data to conferences of college deans and trustees. He decided to make the results public now because high school seniors are deciding which colleges to attend.

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## AIDS virus becomes resistant to new experimental drugs

NEW YORK (AP) — The AIDS virus becomes resistant to many members of a promising class of drugs if it is exposed to just one of them, according to a study that offers new evidence of just how slippery a foe HIV is.

The study involved protease inhibitors, which are experimental drugs designed to stop the virus from reproducing by disabling a crucial enzyme.

Researchers said the finding suggests that treating a patient with one protease inhibitor may make using another one later less effective, and that using several protease inhibitors at once may not avoid resistance, either.

Other experts said it is too soon to draw conclusions about what the findings mean for therapy.

The work is reported in Thursday's issue of the journal *Nature* by Jon Condra and colleagues at the Merck Research Laboratories of West Point, Pa., and scientists elsewhere.

The work involved a Merck drug called MK-639, and Condra stressed in an interview that the results do not question the usefulness of that drug or of other protease inhibitors.

Patients appear to be benefiting from MK-639 despite the development of resistance, and Merck is developing the drug very aggressively, he said.

The results suggest that if researchers want to test combinations of protease inhibitors, they should keep in mind that one drug in the mix might create resistance to the others, he said.

The study found that in four AIDS patients receiving MK-639, the AIDS virus spawned variants that showed varying degrees of resistance to MK-639 and all five other protease inhibitors tested. Resistance was measured in test tubes by noting how much drug was needed to suppress virus reproduction.

In one patient, resistant variants appeared after 24 weeks of therapy. Other

patients showed them at 44 and 52 weeks.

Condra said the results do not mean that the variants would show resistance to all protease inhibitors. He also said nobody knows what percentage of patients treated with MK-639 develop resistance to multiple drugs.

Condra said the study was done with patients who took a lower dose than current studies use. Higher doses may delay the appearance of resistant variants, he said.

Dr. Robert Schooley of the University of Colorado said it is not known whether drugs other than MK-639 would have the same effect. He also said using a combination of drugs may delay the development of resistance.

## Cook allegedly spikes breakfast

LEBANON, N.H. (AP) — A breakfast cook at a Denny's was charged with assault for allegedly spiking two Vermont state troopers' eggs with Tabasco sauce.

Michael Towne, 20, could get up to two years in jail and a \$4,000 fine.

Troopers Timothy Clouatre and Michael Manning, who had crossed into New Hampshire for breakfast on Feb. 7, said the eggs burned their mouths and upset one officer's stomach.

Towne claimed that the hot pepper sauce must have been left on the grill from an earlier order, police said.

He was arrested three weeks later. "We've got enough trouble without people screwing around with our food," said Lebanon police Lt. Ken Lary.

In court papers, police quoted an unidentified witness who claimed to have seen Towne put a large amount of Tabasco on the food. The witness "said that Towne did not like police officers and did it as a joke," police said.

Towne's trial is set for June 6.

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