

GOP's slim support may trim defense

WASHINGTON — President Reagan is showing signs of flexibility on his defense budget in the face of slim support from Senate Republicans.

Publicly, Reagan and his top aides say the administration request for a 10 percent growth in military spending might be trimmed because cheaper fuel, lower inflation and a new MX missile passing plan will save money. In a White House meeting Tuesday with 10 Republican members of the Senate Budget Committee, it became obvious that support for the 10 percent rate from Reagan's own party is severely lacking.

Reagan was ready to disclose some of the lower figures for fiscal 1984 military spending Wednesday to Senate Budget Committee Chairman Pete Domenici, R-N.M., and the ranking Democrat, Sen. Chiles Lawton of Florida.

After the meeting Tuesday with GOP members from the

committee, both Domenici and Senate Majority Leader Howard Baker reported that the president stuck to his proposed 10 percent increase in defense spending.

But sources said only one of the group, Sen. John Tower, R-Texas, backed the president's request.

Following the two-hour White House meeting, Domenici told reporters that the administration did suggest refiguring costs for inflation, fuel and areas of the MX missile program, which could result in a reduction.

He said the savings might be in the ballpark of 1 percent, and even that may be a little high.

"I told him it would be very difficult to get it (his proposal for a 10 percent increase in defense spending) out of committee, and I think he ended up seeing that on the basis of the various senators speaking for themselves," Domenici said. "The president, as of Wednesday, is still asking that we consider his 10 percent increase in defense."

The budget committee was scheduled to begin drafting a budget resolution Wednesday, but progress was expected to be slow. The House version of the budget, drawn by Democrats, authorizes only a 4 percent defense increase.

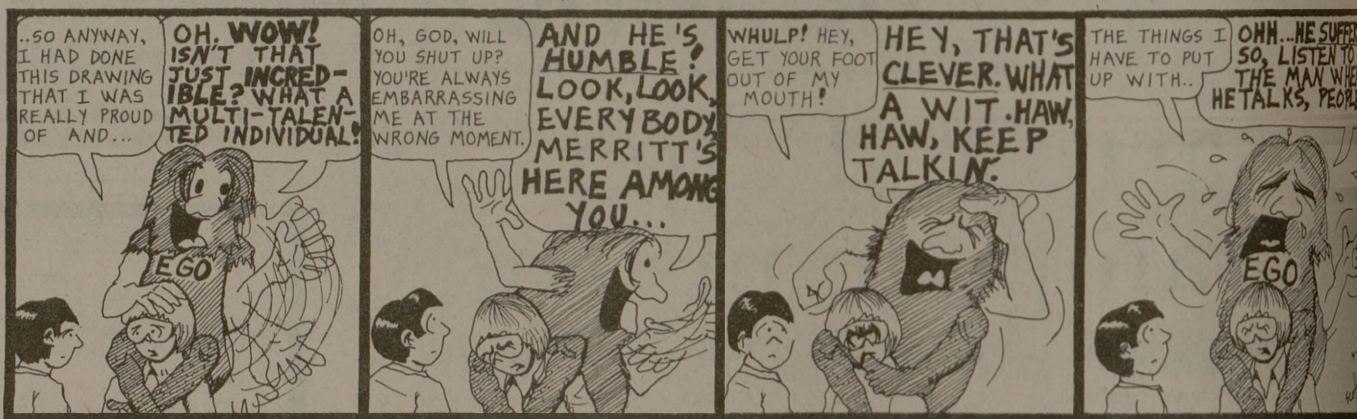
A majority of Republicans on the Senate committee are believed to favor about a 5 percent increase which includes inflation.

"The committee clearly indicated to the president the votes aren't there for his 10 percent increase," Sen. Nancy Kassebaum, R-Kan., said.

Deputy press secretary Larry Speakes said in a statement after the meeting, "With regard to defense spending, the president said it might be possible to find additional savings as a result of lower inflation and lower fuel costs."

Warped

by Scott McCullar



User fees will help ports

WASHINGTON — Shippers using the nation's 250 ports would share the cost of harbor improvements, in some cases paying as much as 75 percent of the cost, under new legislation being considered by Congress.

The measure, introduced Tuesday by Sen. Daniel Moynihan, D-N.Y., would impose user fees on ships which would pay for most of the improvement work, thereby discontinuing the practice of relying totally on the federal government.

The current system has been viewed as ineffective, especially since Congress has approved only two interim port project measures since 1970.

However, Moynihan's proposal to phase in a cargo tonnage charge didn't meet with complete support.

Peter Gatti, counsel for the American Association of Port Authorities, said his organization has not taken an official stance on the bill, but he said any user fee itself is going to adversely impact travel through

the ports and harbors. "If we are going to be imposing additional fees, we are going to make ourselves less competitive," he said.

In addition, he said, there was a disagreement between large and small ports over how to pay for improvements. The larger facilities, which handle more traffic, generally believe that each should handle its own projects, while the smaller ports are usually in favor of uniform fees, he said.

The user fee suggested by

Moynihan would be phased in during a five-year period. Originally, he said, it would be about 8 cents per ton to cover about 30 percent of project costs, but it would grow to about 12 cents per ton in 1988 to recover about 50 percent of the project costs.

The measure would authorize an average of \$430 million in projects for each of the next five years. Maintenance and repair projects would eventually be paid half by the fees and half by the federal government.

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