

WORLD AND NATION

SHOE

by Jeff MacNelly

Democrats tell voters party is 'alive and well'



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Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Democratic leaders declared Wednesday their party is "alive and well" and looking to the future, as the opposition party responded to President Reagan's State of the Union message in a 30-minute television show.

The Democratic Party "knows how to change," party officeholders emphasized in the program, broadcast nationally by two of the three commercial television networks. The third, ABC, opted for a regularly scheduled soap opera.

The show focused on elected officials talking about deficits, Social Security, taxes and defense spending with 58 ordinary Americans in four discussion groups across the nation.

"Our objective is not to disagree with our president and his party, although our differences are many," said Gov. Bill Clinton of Arkansas, the narrator of the show produced by the Democratic campaign committees. "Like all Americans, we must celebrate any success that builds a better future. We believe that Democrats should work with Republicans to insure that kind of future."

"But tonight is the first opportunity for our Democratic Party to speak to America since the defeat of 1984," Clinton added, going on to say that "resounding" defeat by Reagan last November left an impression on the party.

"We are listening and we do care," said Senate Minority Leader Robert Byrd, R-W.Va.

"This is a party that knows it has to change, a party that wants to reach out to all Americans, Democrats, Republicans and independents," said Clinton. NBC and CBS agreed to broadcast the response right after Reagan's speech to the joint session of Congress on Capitol Hill, but ABC broadcast an episode of its prime-time soap opera "Dynasty." ABC will air the response Friday night at 10:30 p.m.

As has been the case in the past few years, the Democratic "response" was taped before Reagan's speech and responded to it only in general terms.

"We have had a very acceptable rate of economic growth in the past year," House Majority Leader Jim Wright, D-Texas, said in the show. But he went on to talk about a record number of bankruptcies, farm failures and bank collapses.

The show claimed the latest tax reform idea — tax simplification — came from the Democrats three years ago in the Bradley-Gephardt bill. Rep. Richard Gephardt, D-Mo., one of authors, appeared on the show to say the party is responding to people's frustrations with the nation's tax code.

Raymond Strother, the media consultant who produced the \$100,000 show, said the participants in the discussion groups were overwhelming the type of voters who defected from nominee Walter Mondale in November and who are identifying more and more with the GOP.

"That show is focused on that group of defectors, those people we tend to be losing. It's directed to them, it's going to appeal to them," Strother said.

Pentagon resists changes

Pensions under fire

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The military pension system, which provides a minimum of half pay for hundreds of thousands of service personnel who retire as early as their late 30s, has been the target before of reformers inside and outside the Pentagon, but has resisted attempts to change it.

Budget Director David Stockman is the latest critic, castigating the system as "a scandal... an outrage."

He told Congress on Tuesday "institutional forces in the military are more concerned about protecting their retirement benefits than they are about protecting the security of the American people."

The counterattack on Capitol Hill was quick, but even some of Stockman's strongest opponents conceded the pension system needs reform.

"I do think we need to take a look at the pension system," said Sen. Sam Nunn, D-Ga., at a Senate Armed Services Committee hearing. Nunn, one of the most widely respected defense experts in Congress, then blasted Stockman's comments.

A military person is eligible to draw half his base pay after 20 years in the service, rising to a maximum of three-quarters of base pay after 30 years service. There is no pension for less than 20 years.

But he can also draw the pension in addition to any salary he earns in a new career.

According to the Pentagon, a lieutenant colonel who retires after 20 years would be paid a pension of \$1,706.70 a month and a sergeant first class would get \$702 monthly.

The Pentagon currently is spending \$16 billion for pensions, a figure

that will rise to \$17.8 billion next year and an estimated \$44 billion by the year 2000. Currently, the total accounts for 5.7 percent of the defense budget.

Since 1970, as the cost of pensions has risen steeply, there have been at least nine studies of the pension system, including five sponsored by the Pentagon.

The Grace Commission, a panel of businessmen appointed by President Reagan, said a military pension "costs more than six times as much as the better private-sector plans" and recommended that benefits not be paid until a retiree was 62.

The latest Pentagon study said 20-year retirees should be limited to 35 percent of base pay instead of 50 percent.

U.S. considers alternatives to Australian missile support

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The Reagan administration, conferring with Australian Prime Minister Robert Hawke, said Wednesday it is "looking at the availability of alternatives" in the wake of Australia's reported plans to withdraw support facilities for MX nuclear missile tests.

An administration official, briefing reporters only on the condition that he not be otherwise identified, said Hawke discussed the MX issue with U.S. officials briefly Tuesday night at a dinner given by Vice President George Bush. It was expected to come up again Wednesday and Thursday in meetings with Secretary of State George P. Shultz and President Reagan.

"We ourselves have been aware of the controversy in Australia and have been looking at the availability of alternatives," the official said. Pressed for more details, he said, "We are in the middle of discussions and are not going to comment."

The official made clear, however, the administration does not consider the Australian action as serious a matter as New Zealand's decision to close its ports to nuclear-equipped U.S. ships.

"There is no comparison between the issues," the official said. "In the case of New Zealand, we are talking about something that is really at the very core of our military interaction as allies. You have to distinguish between that

and a broad range of other cooperation."

Sen. William S. Cohen, R-Maine, a member of the Senate Armed Services Committee, introduced a resolution calling upon the United States to form a bilateral pact with Australia, excluding New Zealand, if the New Zealand government persists in its policy. Cohen also called for a "tougher stance" on New Zealand agricultural imports.

The administration official declined to say what position the administration would take on the resolution, but told reporters, "We are not in the business of sanctioning. If New Zealand does not want to be an ally, that does not mean it has become an enemy."

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HEY AGGIES!
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We're going Saturday February 23, and returning on February 24. The trip includes:

- Hotel room (the hotel has a sauna, hot tub, and indoor pool)!!
- Tickets to the game!
- Beer and munchies!
- Bus ride to and from Lubbock!
- Only \$35 for members \$47 for non-members, which includes \$12 membership!

Sign up to at The Aggie Club, between G. Rollie and Deware Field House. Sign ups close Feb. 16 so HURRY!