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Clinton's speech labeled, critiqued

State of the Union Address yields Republican scorn, Democratic worry

WASHINGTON (AP) — In the moments after President Clinton's State of the Union speech, most members of Congress stuck to the polite party scripts. But it didn't take long for the Republican scorn and Democratic unease to filter through.

Most striking were the Republicans. Most began by applauding Clinton for coming their way and talking about tax cuts and smaller government. But before long many were ridiculing the president, saying he was trying to pander to liberals and conservatives at the same time, and muddying his already troubled image in the process.

Republican Rep. Jack Kingston of Georgia mocked Clinton's address as "a great marching speech. It went left-right, left-right, left-right."

Perhaps the Republicans were expected to have second thoughts about being so polite — they believe Clinton was seriously wounded politically by the November elections and are in no mood to help him recover.

But a morning-after review of the Democratic commentary suggested that Clinton's repeated overtures to Republicans left some Democrats wondering where they fit in — or just what to believe.

"He opposed every moderate effort in the last Congress," said conservative Democratic Rep. Mike Parker of Mississippi. "I can only wonder now if he actually believes in his own promises, or will he reverse course yet again?"

Democratic Rep. Peter DeFazio of Oregon found himself much in agreement with Clinton. But instead of leaving it at that, DeFazio went on to point out major differences with Clinton — not exactly what the White House had in mind on a night Clinton hoped to reassert himself.

DeFazio took issue with Clinton's efforts to stabilize the Mexican peso through \$40 billion in loan guarantees, and the president's proposal to raise Pentagon spending by \$25 billion.

Adding to the Democratic disunity, others questioned Clinton's demand for a middle-class tax cut.

Overall, most Democrats came loyally to Clinton's defense. But even many in this group took pains to protect themselves.

"I could close my eyes and hear him talking about increasing opportunity but requiring responsibility," Sen. John Breaux of Louisiana said Thursday. "It was getting back to basics and the middle class themes that helped him get elected."

Yet for all his praise of Clinton, Breaux issued a statement that noted "he will support the Clinton administration when he can and oppose it when necessary."

That line was reminiscent of last year's campaign, when Democrats were eager to put a little distance between themselves and Clinton. And it was evidence that some Democrats fear having him atop the ticket in 1996.

Republicans were more than happy to feed those concerns.

Most labeled Clinton's speech "me-tooism," suggesting he would not be talking about smaller government, lower taxes or incremental health care reform were it not for the Republican rout of Nov. 8.

Outside Washington, instant polls gave Clinton high marks roughly eight in 10 said they believed Republican in Congress were taking a stronger leadership role in the capital than Clinton—a dynamic that has a lot to do with the GOP willingness to bluntly criticize Clinton.

"They hear him getting back on the right themes so they want to put the final nail in the coffin," said Breaux. "I think they know his capacity to come back and his resiliency, so they are going to keep after him with a veneance."

"He opposed every moderate effort in the last Congress. I can only wonder now if he actually believes in his own promises, or will he reverse course yet again?"

— Mike Parker, Democratic representative, Georgia

House presses for balanced-budget amendment

Differing views on implementation lead to showdown, discussion, debate

WASHINGTON (AP) — In a debate with enormous economic and political significance, the Republican-controlled House advanced Wednesday toward a showdown on a balanced-budget amendment designed to end the government's massive run-up in red ink.

"This is the cornerstone of our party's 'Contract With America,'" said Rep. Dan Schaefer of Colorado, as GOP leaders brought the proposal to the floor a scant three weeks after swearing in their new, aggressive House majority.

GOP lawmakers were nearly unanimous in their support. But with a two-thirds majority required for passage, the amendment's fate was in the hands of a divided Democratic party.

House Democratic Leader Richard Gephardt of Missouri told lawmakers the proposal was "perhaps the most important issue we will consider in your whole time in the Congress."

He pressed his demand for Republicans to identify the cuts they would make to wipe out the deficit. "Is there a hidden agenda here? Is there somewhere in here a veiled attack on Social Security or Medicare, which some of our

friends on the other side have threatened in the past?"

Republicans denied the politically potent charge, and arranged passage first of a companion measure — which does not have the force of law — proclaiming that Social Security not be used to balance the budget.

With majorities in both houses of Congress, Republicans expressed optimism that they would finally prevail in a struggle that has been waged unsuccessfully in the House and Senate since 1982. It takes a two-third majority in both houses and ratification in three-fourths of the states to add the measure to the Constitution.

In the Senate, an all-out fight is expected from Sen. Robert C. Byrd, D-W.Va., but Republicans expressed confidence that they have the votes to prevail. One longtime GOP opponent, Sen. Nancy Kassebaum of Kansas, said the amendment was "a bad idea whose time may have come," and several GOP officials said they expected she would support the proposal.

In the House, the main point of controversy concerned a requirement for a three-fifths vote in both houses to raise taxes.

House Speaker Newt Gingrich and most Republicans supported it, but many Democratic balanced-budget supporters did not.

Under the rules established by the GOP, the House scheduled a first vote Thursday on an amend-

on the first roll call and see whether they could pressure enough reluctant Democrats to switch their votes and assure passage.

Both versions call for a balanced budget by 2002, and require a three-fifths vote of both houses of Congress to run a deficit thereafter, with an additional three-fifths vote requirement to raise the debt.

Gingrich, architect of the "Contract With America" that led to the GOP election sweep, sought to frame the debate: "You have a Republican Party and some Democrats who are saying, 'We believe that cheating our children and dumping our debt on them is bad. It is immoral. It is wrong.'"

— Newt Gingrich, Speaker of the House



"You have a Republican party and some Democrats who are saying, 'We believe that cheating our children and dumping our debt on them is bad. It is immoral. It is wrong.'"

ment including the three-fifths requirement — the version contained in the "Contract With America."

That would be followed by a vote on a milder version that required only a majority of the whole House and Senate to raise taxes. With many freshmen demanding passage of the tax-limitation provision, GOP aides held out the possibility that they would change plans if they came close

to frame the debate: "You have a Republican Party and some Democrats who are saying, 'We believe that cheating our children and dumping our debt on them is bad. It is immoral. It is wrong.'"

On the other hand, he said, are "mostly liberal Democrats, the old guard of the old order, saying, 'It is impossible to rethink the federal government. It is impossible to cut spending, itself.'

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