

# Furlough-Ending Deals Fold Along Party Lines

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Congressional leaders last night remained at loggerheads over an interim agreement that would put federal employees back to work, even as balanced budget talks at the White House moved from a preliminary stage toward the start of serious bargaining.

Although the House quickly approved a measure Republicans proposed Friday that would reopen the entire government, Senate Democrats remained firm in their insistence that its terms were unacceptably restrictive. Senate Majority Leader Robert J. Dole (R-Kan.), in his third attempt of the now 16-day shutdown to bring 280,000 workers back to their jobs, pledged last night to work with Senate Democratic leaders today to find terms acceptable to all congressional factions.

But Senate Minority Leader Thomas A. Daschle (D-S.D.) said the Republican plan to send the employees back to work with a guarantee of eventual, but no immediate, pay, was "an unacceptable situation." While commending Dole as someone who "I believe wants solutions," Daschle charged that "the House wants confrontation, not solutions."

As aides struggled to find a solution to the shutdown in the absence of a budget agreement, President Clinton and his top advisers sat down with Republicans at the White House for the second day and scheduled a

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third session Sunday in an unprecedented effort to break the stalemate over reaching a balanced budget by the year 2002.

The three hours of top-level meetings Friday, more than four hours yesterday afternoon and another two scheduled for last night, were unprecedented. But the meetings thus far appeared to be less a substantive negotiation than a series of presentations of each side's proposals, political and policy rationales and possible areas of give. "It was an amazing policy seminar," said one source, "but the seminar is now over. They have to start the deciding now."

White House spokesman Michael McCurry said the president, Dole and House Speaker Newt Gingrich (R-Ga.) were working "on all the areas of disagreement. They're sorting through the implications of possible agreements rather than making agreements."

House Budget Committee Chairman John R. Kasich (R-Ohio) said, "There has been a lot more explanation and a lot more discussion than there have been decisions. . . . There still is a long way to go but we made, I think, the most significant progress we've had, I think, all year."

Both sides described preliminary agreements that would save about \$100 billion in spending on social programs—about one-sixth of what

would be needed to balance the budget by the year 2002. There were no offers exchanged, however, on deep differences over more fundamental positions concerning tax cuts, whether federal entitlements should continue to guarantee health care for the poor, or whether social welfare programs should be administered by states with federal block grants—both parts of the Republican agenda to which Clinton has said he is unalterably opposed.

Senior administration officials said that after today's meeting, the group is likely to recess until Tuesday, with aides working on proposals for meetings next week that would involve more direct give-and-take.

Clinton and the Republican leaders began the meeting, which also included congressional Democratic leaders and numerous aides on all sides, by expressing optimism. Such upbeat statements have become a mantra for the sessions and are part of intricate ground rules in which all sides have agreed to say virtually nothing about the substance of the talks.

As a result, all public statements were positive—Clinton declared "good progress" as yesterday's first session began shortly before noon—but no one offered any substantive reason for the optimism. Gingrich described "real progress" and said, "It is not easy . . . but I thought the spirit was very positive."

Dole tempered his comments with a dose of sobriety, offered during his Saturday morning radio reply to Clinton. "So far, so good," Dole said. "We've exchanged a lot of views on different issues raised yesterday and we've had no big problems so far. But let's face it, we haven't gotten to the big issues."

With the White House mess closed for the weekend, the leaders ordered a carry-out lunch of sandwiches from the nearby American Cafe and dinner from the California Pizza Kitchen on Connecticut Avenue. White House congressional liaison Patrick Griffin paid for both orders with a personal credit card.

In neither the negotiations for President Ronald Reagan's first controversial budget nor in the Bush Administration's 1990 tortured budget negotiations did the president sit at the negotiating table for endless hours as Clinton has done and, according to aides, is prepared to continue doing.

"Clinton has his policy wonk hat on. We've had some very interesting policy discussions," a House GOP aide noted with some exasperation at the pace and range of the discussions.

In the meantime, the government shutdown moved into its history-making third week. The previous record of three days for such closures was first broken in November, when the government closed for six days. More than 760,000 workers are affected—280,000 have been fur-

loughed and the rest, deemed "excepted," are working without pay.

The plight of the furloughed workers caused the only partisan upheaval yesterday, with Daschle complaining that House GOP extremists—not Democrats—are responsible for the idled workers and lost services to taxpayers.

The issue that is the subject of the White House discussions—achieving a balanced federal budget—and that of returning workers to their jobs, are not directly connected. The immediate cause of the shutdown is the failure of Republicans and the White House to agree on government funding levels for the current fiscal year. But Republicans have used the partial government shutdown as leverage against the White House to try to obtain their much larger goal of forcing Clinton to agree to balance the budget within seven years under their terms.

Although both sides have been feeling the heat of negative public opinion on the shutdown, polls have indicated most Americans blame Congress more than the White House. Although House Republicans have been loathe to give up the le-

verage over Clinton, they were willing to do so on Friday under a plan that would have restricted ability of Senate Democrats to oppose any budget deal that eventually might be worked out with Clinton. Specifically, it would have put an agreement under "fast-track" legislative rules, limiting debate to 10 hours and restricting the ability of Democrats to amend or kill the deal by filibuster.

Senate Democrats balked at the proposal, which in addition to the budget debate restrictions authorized continued work without pay by federal employees and prohibited federal agencies from incurring any "new expenses," including everything from massive federal contracts to gas for government vehicles. But yesterday, they offered an alternative, easing the debate restrictions—allowing 25 hours of debate and ample opportunity to offer amendments—as their price for allowing workers back on their jobs.

But Dole said the offer didn't go far enough, and House GOP leaders gave it a cold reception. "It just doesn't accomplish the expediting of procedures that are needed," said Tony Blankley, Gingrich's press sec-



BY KEITH JENKINS—THE WASHINGTON POST

Senate Minority Leader Thomas A. Daschle, left, discusses his objectives for negotiations yesterday at the White House as House Speaker Newt Gingrich, center background, and President Clinton listen across the table.

retary. "I don't think it would fly with the Republicans in the Senate, let alone in the House. . . . It's not a serious alternative."

In statements on the Senate floor early yesterday evening, Dole and Daschle pledged to continue searching for a compromise that would re-

open the government by Tuesday. He added, however, that "I don't think the House should dictate the rules of the Senate."

"I'm frustrated by the current circumstances," Daschle said, and blamed House Republicans for throwing up barriers to efforts to

end the government shutdown. He said the House GOP "has tried to force its radical agenda on the American people" and that "each day there's a new demand."

"The government remains shut because some members of the House want it shut," he said.