

As Time Ebbs, Futility of Talks Starts to Dawn

1/21/96
Last of four articles

By David Maraniss and Michael Weisskopf
Washington Post Staff Writers

On the ride back to the Capitol from the White House on Tuesday evening, Jan. 2, it occurred to Newt Gingrich that he had botched the most important political fight of his speakership.

He had just spent several hours in the Oval Office listening to President Clinton and the White House negotiating team explain their latest balanced budget proposal. Beforehand he had thought that a breakthrough might be imminent. After endless policy discussions over the previous 10 days, the White House had indicated it was ready to talk about a real deal. Finally there might be movement toward a compromise and with it an end to the crippling and unpopular government shutdown, which was entering its third week.

But was there anything new in what Clinton and his team, using an easel and arrows and encouraging words, had presented? When he was in the Oval Office, Gingrich thought so, as did his negotiating partners, House Majority Leader Dick Armey and Senate Majority Leader Bob Dole. Clinton could do that to them, the speaker thought. His body language, his speech patterns, his ability to convince people of a sense of joint effort and understanding, made the president "one of the most compelling developers of mood" that Gingrich had ever encountered.

Yet with every passing minute that he was away from Clinton, Gingrich grew more dubious. When he first saw his aides in the Roosevelt Room afterward and they asked him to rank the evening's negotiations on a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 meaning no deal and 10 meaning a deal, he had given them a 4. On the car ride back to the Capitol, he was feeling even less optimistic.

See INSIDE, A16, Col. 1

Piece by piece, he began reconstructing that night's talks to examine the reasons for his growing unease. After all this time, Clinton still would not make significant moves on Medicare and Medicaid, the entitlement programs that were at the center of the Republican budget balancing effort. The Democrats were invoking "absolute moral necessity" as a reason for their intransigence, Gingrich told his staff, while his own team was put at the disadvantage of searching for middle ground.

When he got back to his office on the second floor of the Capitol, Gingrich called his wife, Marianne, who had been a valuable sounding board during the negotiations. "You know, this doesn't feel right, but let me tell you where we're at," he said. The more he talked to his wife, the more he realized that for all the atmospherics of compromise and movement that night, "there had been no movement."

The outer boundaries of where Clinton and his team would go now seemed clear to Gingrich, and the realization stunned him. All fall and winter, he had believed that Clinton in the end would move to the center, relent to significant cuts in Medicare and other entitlement programs and risk angering congressional Democrats in the interests of making a deal. He thought he understood Clinton. Gingrich's old friend, Trent Lott, the Senate majority whip who was close to Clinton's consultant, Dick Morris, told the speaker unequivocally that a deal was inevitable.

Small doubts had been seeping into Gingrich's mind since Dec. 15, when the Clinton team had upset the Republicans by declaring that their policy priorities were as important as the GOP mantra of balancing a budget within seven years using economic estimates from the cautious Congressional Budget Office. Now those doubts had hardened into certainty. Gingrich felt he had utterly misread the entire budget endgame. The deal was not going to happen.

Clinton, he concluded, had a "George Bush problem." The president had drawn such a hard line on Medicare and Medicaid that to move away from it would make him look as weak as Bush looked in 1990 when he backed away from his "No new taxes" pledge.

For the first time, Gingrich said later, "the realization hit me that it was very likely going to prove to be impossible to get to an agreement." The thought made him weary and depressed.

How could he have been so naive? Gingrich wondered. Why had he kept believing that Clinton was about to give in? Marianne Gingrich said it reminded her of an episode from the old television sitcom, "Leave It to Beaver." The Beaver was walking home with a pocketful of money he had earned and ran into a hobo, who managed to talk him out of it by relating a sob story about his life. Beaver's older brother laughed when he heard what happened and asked, "How could you do that, Beaver? You knew the story wasn't true." And Beaver said, "Yeah, but it was such a good story and I felt so good doing it."

"Newt," said Marianne Gingrich to her husband. "You're just being the Beaver!"

That night of Jan. 2 marked another turning point in the balanced budget endgame and the beginning of one of the most exhausting and politically complicated weeks of Gingrich's time running the House. After putting a year's worth of effort into a balanced budget endeavor that he expected to be the defining legislative accomplishment of his conservative revolution, he had to confront a sobering reality: There might not be an ending to the endgame.

This final article on the House Republican revolution and

the balanced budget negotiations covers the period from that late night conversation between Gingrich and his wife until the following Tuesday, Jan. 9, when the budget talks stalled, perhaps for good. It was during that stretch that Gingrich faced the difficult task of convincing his troops that the battleground had shifted and they had to shift with it. The confrontational policy of shutting down the government, which

About This Series

This chronicle of budget talks and the politics behind them is based on more than 50 interviews with negotiators, their aides and advisers in the White House, Senate and House. Interviews were conducted while talks were proceeding to assure the greatest degree of accuracy. In most cases, accounts of conversations and internal meetings were confirmed by two or more sources and augmented by diaries, notes and documents.

he had never thought wise, would be impossible to sustain. His task over those eight days in January, Gingrich said, was to "outline a strategy for success" that allowed the Republican House to "feel that it had not betrayed its beliefs."

It was a delicate mission. It meant admitting that to a certain extent he had let his troops down as a leader. It meant persuading them that they had been at times misguided themselves, at least in terms of the shutdown tactic. It meant devising a new message for the coming months that would allow them to regain some of the moral high ground they had lost in the blizzard of bad publicity over the six-day government shutdown in November and the 21-day shutdown in December and January.

To Gingrich's surprise and regret, Clinton and the Democrats had held firm, their message never wavering: protect Medicare and Medicaid, education and the environment. Whatever ambiguous signals the president had been giving to Gingrich and Dole and their agents in private, he had demonstrated a public resolve on the budget that at least in the short term enhanced his position. And the speaker's changing relationship with Dole further complicated his situation. By carefully playing out his own triangulation theory—distancing himself at once from the White House on the budget and the House Republicans on the shutdown—Dole emerged as a voice of reason in a city that no longer seemed to work. Gingrich's relationship with the Senate majority



BY ROBERT A. REEDER—THE WASHINGTON POST

Republican split: Speaker and majority leader enter White House a day after Dole declared "Enough is enough," and Senate voted to end shutdown, an action sparking animosity in Gingrich's House.

leader was perhaps permanently altered. His admiration for Dole had increased just as the power he had in his dealings with Dole diminished.

The Pursuer and the Pursued

After a sleepless night, Gingrich met at 7:30 the next morning, Jan. 3, with a group of assistants and close allies. Former Reagan aide Kenneth Duberstein was there, along with Don Fierce from the Republican National Committee, Dan Meyer, Gingrich's chief of staff, top budget aide Arne Christenson, Michigan Gov. John Engler, Majority Leader Arney, longtime political adviser Joe Gaylord and Chuck Boyd, a retired Air Force general who had been a prisoner of war in Vietnam for seven years.

Everything the House had tried from November on had led nowhere, Gingrich said. "We have to rethink this. We've reached a dead end."

The shutdown strategy had obviously failed, argued Dan Meyer. Rather than forcing the White House to compromise, it was only obscuring the larger Republican campaign for a balanced budget. The split between the House and Senate was widening. The day before, Dole had taken to the Senate floor, declared that "Enough is enough," and dispatched a resolution through his chamber to end the shutdown. He had warned Gingrich before doing it, and the speaker had said he understood. But the morning papers screamed with headlines about Dole's action and the animosity it stirred in Gingrich's House.

"Look at this one!" said Fierce, throwing a paper on the table.

"How about this!" said Duberstein tossing up another.

Soon five newspapers were there, each headline more troubling than the last.

Gingrich remained protective of Dole.

"This old soldier says that one of the most important things is to have unit integrity, keeping your formation intact," said Boyd. "We can't lose that."

As soon as possible, Gingrich said, they had to devise a way at least to pay the federal workers who had been suffering since the second shutdown began back on Dec. 15. Since Christmas he had imagined one bad scenario after another. "The next thing that's going to happen," he confided to his staff, "is that some federal worker somewhere in the U.S. is going to commit suicide for some reason and they're going to blame it on the shutdown."

Duberstein said they should bear in mind that Clinton would face some tough moments in late January and early February. The State of the Union address was coming, he noted, and Clinton would want to appear before Congress that night striking a positive note. And soon after that, the Clinton administration would have to come up with a whole new budget for the next year. They would be forced, finally, Duberstein said, to put down detailed numbers on how they would cut programs to balance the budget. Without a budget deal, they would have no bipartisan cover. Those two factors, he said, might still push Clinton toward a late deal.

Arney wondered whether it was worthwhile to go back to the White House for more talks. He used a story from his own life to explain his concern. "We keep going back up to the White House and have these wonderful talks and at the end of a long hard day there is nothing concrete. How many times are we willing to go back for that?" Arney said. "Look guys, I've got some tolerance for that kind of treatment. My wife canceled our wedding three times and I loved her enough to hang around for a fourth time. But there ain't

many people I'd be willing to go back to again. They have all the power now because we're the pursuer and they're the pursued."

If nothing else, Arney added a touch of levity to an otherwise somber meeting. "She made a mistake the fourth time," Fierce grumbled about Arney's wife.

But Gingrich was not in a jocular mood. "This is the worst I've felt since Bush was defeated," he said. He was a dreamer, he said, and one of his dreams was being shattered. He had to recover his resolve. Two weeks earlier he had written a memo outlining the dilemma and suggesting that the House reopen the government. He had been overridden that time, but he did not intend for that to happen again.

Listen, Learn, Help, Lead

Gingrich is a creature of habit, a man of lists, aphorisms, historical allusions and simple management theories. One of his favorite sayings is that his job as speaker is to listen, learn, help and lead. On Jan. 3 and Jan. 4, Gingrich mostly listened. He held four leadership meetings and two conferences during that period, spending 22 hours in meetings with members of the House. He knew where he wanted to take them. He wanted to end the week with a bill paying the federal workers and possibly reopening the government. But he could not move the House until it realized it had to move.

He began his first leadership meeting on Wednesday by saying that the prospects for a deal seemed bleak. Then he acknowledged his own shortcomings. "Frankly, I thought we'd have this resolved and worked out by now," he said. He had operated on the mistaken theory, he said, that Clinton would collapse and they would have a deal. He was a bad negotiator. What should they do next? What's the condition of the troops? The questions went around the table.

Reports came back that some members were getting antsy. Somewhere between 25 and 45 Republicans were ready to break ranks or at least grouching about the pounding they were taking for closing down the government. It was within the realm of possibility that the leadership could lose control of the House. Arney said he was disappointed to hear that. Budget Committee Chairman John Kasich said he'd met with his members that morning and encountered "no buckling."

Gingrich broached the subject of an interim spending bill to reopen the government and another measure to pay federal workers. They were in for a long haul, and he could see that people were getting tired. "Fatigue makes cowards of us all," he said, quoting the legendary football coach Vince Lombardi. "We've got to find a way to get our members home. We can't sustain this and keep everybody together. But we can't do it with this federal worker issue up in the air."

Bill Archer, chairman of the House Ways and Means Committee, said the shutdown strategy had backfired and they had to extract themselves from it. But the very mention of reopening the government enraged others in the room. Most of their anger was directed at Dole.

"The Senate is the enemy!" one sophomore thundered.

"Screw the Senate. It's time for all-out war" against the Clinton administration, said Majority Whip Tom DeLay.

House Republican Conference Chairman John Boehner said several House members who had endorsed Dole for

president were talking about withdrawing their support, an idea Boehner was trying to quash.

Arme y came to Dole's defense. "He's been with us all the way in the meeting with the president. Bob Dole is as tough as any of us," Arme y said.

The leadership discussions were interrupted late in the afternoon by a negotiating trip to the White House. There was no movement in the two-plus hours of talks. Vice President Gore told the Republicans that opposing capital gains tax cuts was a theological issue for the Democrats. On the way back to the Capitol, Dole muttered, "Al Gore's driving me nuts."

Clinton left the negotiating session in a happier mood. He had pushed his staff all day to let him go on television again and blast the House Republicans as extremists for keeping the government shut down. The opposition still seemed to be in disarray.

The Last Hurrah

By the next morning, Thursday, Jan. 4, Gingrich had the outlines of his plan to move the House out of its shutdown policy and pay the federal workers through March 15, a date that would clear Dole of any government headaches while he was campaigning for president in Iowa and New Hampshire. Leadership opposition was also dissolving. The whip's office was picking up more signals of members breaking ranks, a fact that was turning Tom DeLay into less of a hardliner. He had no intention of leading a revolt against Gingrich in any case, and the speaker seemed utterly determined this time to prevail.

As the leadership team gathered in the second-floor meeting room, Bill Paxon, the boyish-looking chairman of the National Republican Congressional Committee, suggested that the group should do something to let the reporters standing outside the closed doors know that they were unified. "We've got to show them we're together," Paxon said. "Let's let out a cheer." The room reverberated with yips and hurrahs. A few minutes later, Paxon said, "Okay, let's cheer again," and again a roar went up. Gingrich knew he was halfway home.

'You Guys Have to Sell This'

At the White House that day, Clinton's chief of staff, Leon Panetta, had invited House Budget Committee Chairman Kasich and Senate Budget Committee Chairman Pete Domenici in for lunch. He wanted to give them another version of the pitch that had been delivered to Gingrich, Dole and Arme y on Tuesday. Kasich and Domenici were the ones who knew the numbers, after all, and any deal ultimately would have to go through them, even if they had been reduced to the status of advisers.

Tortilla soup was served, and Panetta immediately started eating. "Well, Leon," said Kasich. "Are we eating first because you know we won't have an appetite later?" Panetta took three more spoonfuls then got up and went to the easel.

There were no numbers on the board, just categories and arrows. The first category was a seven-year balanced budget scored by the Congressional Budget Office.

See INSIDE, A17, Col. 1

The arrow pointed to the Republican side. "CBO. Seven years. That's worth a couple hundred billion dollars each," Panetta said, meaning that by acceding to the Republican request that any budget reach balance in seven years as calculated by the conservative estimates of the CBO, the Democrats in effect were giving up that much money right at the start of the negotiations.

"In other words, we owe you big time, huh Leon?" said Kasich.

"You got it," said Panetta.

The next category was Medicare, with an arrow pointing toward the Democrats.

"We've got to have a win there," said Panetta. "That has to be our win."

Kasich thought it was like some old hackers going over their scores in golf deciding who won each hole. Panetta was making the argument that the Republicans should concentrate on the holes they won and brag about them. "Ultimately," he said. "You guys have to sell this."

The budget chairmen returned to Capitol Hill feeling much like Gingrich had two nights earlier. They could not envision a deal.

Wearing Them Down

The meetings were back to back to back for Gingrich that Thursday afternoon and night. At 2 he had a session with the 73 freshmen, who had been getting most of the publicity as the uncontrollable radical faction in his House, a reputation they only partly deserved. There were some rumblings when Gingrich presented his state of the negotiations rap and his plans for easing the House out of its confrontational shutdown position. But it was largely a positive meeting. Sonny Bono got up at one point and declared, "This strategy is brilliant!" which led some in the room to wonder if it should be reassessed.

George Nethercutt suggested that if Gingrich wanted to reopen the government with an interim spending bill, he should place the burden of keeping the government closed back on the White House at the same time. One way to do that, Nethercutt said, was to make the resolution reopening the government contingent on the White House presenting a seven-year balanced budget proposal scored by the CBO. Gingrich liked the idea.

In a meeting with a group of moderates known as the Lunch Bunch, Gingrich encountered several members who were dismayed by the shutdown policy and ready to vote with the Democrats to reopen the government. Most of them were heartened by Gingrich's plan. Then came a meeting with the Conservative Action Team, a group that included some of the staunchest members of the freshman class and their veteran allies. They gave Gingrich the toughest time. Lindsey Graham of South Carolina said he was adamantly opposed to the idea of paying any federal workers who were not on the job. Graham's statement made sense to Gingrich. He saw that a pay bill had to be linked to a reopening the government. By listening to Graham and Nethercutt, he had refined his plan.

But he had to listen for hours more. The full Republican membership gathered in conference that night for three hours. Several speakers said they could go along with the new plan, but not with extending the bill to keep the government open until March 15. That leash was too long. Gingrich stayed until the last member had his say. "We're not going to make a decision tonight," he said. "Sleep on this and tomorrow we'll get back together to decide where to go."

He then retreated with his leadership team up to Arme y's

congressional office in the Cannon building. The mood of the meeting, according to other participants, was that anyone who wanted to challenge Gingrich that night would have to fight him for the speakership. His job was on the line. When a few people tried to raise questions, "he cut their legs off," as one put it. Gingrich did accede on one point—they would reopen the government only until Jan. 26—but one participant described the atmosphere as "weird, very weird." Everyone was sitting in a circle, with Gingrich in the middle.

"I think everyone knew that if they challenged me I'd call four more meetings," Gingrich said later. "That's the other part of this technique. You have to have the endurance to be the most patient and the most willing to listen, and when you literally burned out everyone else, they will accept leadership out of exhaustion."

'Sit Down and Shut Up'

At 9:30 the next morning, Friday, Jan. 5, Gingrich met with his staff in his office before leaving for a House Republican membership meeting over in the Cannon Caucus Room. Dole's chief of staff, Sheila Burke, came over for the meeting to hear the final details of Gingrich's plan, which she and her boss would help move simultaneously through the Senate.

At long last Dole would get the House to move on his long-standing plea to reopen the government. Perhaps the House's recalcitrance had helped Dole politically, allowing him to seem the voice of reason, the adult, in a shouting match between the House and the White House. But time was slipping away and he wanted to get on to the primary states and his presidential campaign.

An aide reminded Gingrich that Denny Hastert, the deputy whip, had suggested the night before that the entire leadership should line up behind Gingrich physically when he made his pitch to the rank-and-file.

"Yeah," said Gingrich. "We're through listening and learning."

Members were milling around the caucus room when Gingrich marched in.

"All right, everybody sit down!" he shouted.

David Hobson, one of the gentlest souls in the Republican Party, an Ohio congressman known to friends as "Uncle Dave," was hobbling around near the coffee machine. "Hobson! Sit down and shut up!" Gingrich yelled.

"All right," he continued, as he stepped to the lectern, his leadership team arrayed behind him. "I'm not taking any questions. I'm here to tell you what the team's going to do. Now some of you wanted to have a shutdown forever. And that's unsustainable for 30 or 40 of our members. So we can't do that.

"Some of you want to do a one-year CR and just give up. And that's unsustainable for a lot of our members. So we're not going to do that, either. This is a team vote and we're

going to do this as a team. We're all wearing the same jerseys today. Sometimes you don't agree with the plays that are called. But this is the way we're going."

Gingrich pulled out a piece of paper that described his plan. First, on the House floor, they would vote on a pay bill. Then they would pass an interim spending bill contingent on the White House presenting a balanced budget bill.

"If anybody votes against it, I'm not going to take it out on you," Gingrich said. "I'm not going to punish you." Then he described what sounded like a form of punishment. "But I'm going to keep a list. And if any of you on the list come up to me later and talk about anybody else not being on the team, I don't want to hear about it. If any of you come up and talk

about how the team's got to help you out, I don't want to hear about it.

"We're going down now to vote."

The Republicans rose to their feet and applauded, then marched out of the room to the House floor.

When the roll call vote on the pay bill was recorded, Gingrich was handed a slip of paper listing the 15 Republicans who voted against it. He folded it and put it in his wallet.

'We've Been There'

At the strategy session at the White House that day, Clinton's aides found it puzzling that the Republicans were placing so much emphasis on forcing them to present a seven-year budget scored by the CBO. They had just such a plan ready. It was known as the "Daschle plan" because it was largely crafted by Senate Minority Leader Tom Daschle. "So the Republicans demand a plan, and we put one down—then what do they do?" said one Clinton aide. "We can no longer assume that they have a strategy. We've been there. We were there on health care."

Although Gingrich saw no need to keep meeting with Clinton, he was persuaded by his staff and Dole and Armev to head down to the White House again that Friday night. Not much of substance was accomplished. But Clinton worked his charm on Armev that night. At the end of the session, Clinton called Armev over. "I misjudged you," he said. "I had a sense you were basically a mean person and you're not."

Armev and Gingrich left the meeting talking about Clinton's body language. Dole said that Clinton had announced at the end of the meeting that "tomorrow we get down to the real S." That was Dole's polite abbreviation, not the president's.

No Exit

There were three more days of talks, from Saturday, Jan. 6, through Tuesday, Jan. 9, with Sunday off because of the massive snowstorm. When the Republicans came in with their spending bill Saturday, Clinton presented them with a modification of the Daschle plan. With that little deal done, the government would reopen.

It was all so simple and anticlimactic. For weeks the Republicans had pounded away on that one theme, demanding that the Democrats put down a seven-year budget scored by the CBO. From the Republican perspective, it was supposed to be a massive victory when and if that happened. White House strategists had known for weeks that they could present such a budget, and that when they did it probably would have precisely the opposite effect than the Republicans intended because of the way it was assembled, with much less given back in taxes and much less saved in Medicare, Medicaid and discretionary domestic programs than the Republican blueprint. The Democratic argument from then on became: Okay, we've done that, and still not cut the entitlement programs drastically. Now what's the argument?

In a sense the Democrats' ability to present a balanced plan moved the talks further apart. It more clearly underscored the serious ideological policy differences that separated the two sides. The Republicans came in with one final offer, based on the lowest numbers they could accept on Medicare cuts and tax cuts, taken from plans put together by conservative Democrats and a bipartisan Senate coalition. It was not what the White House was looking for—not close. On Monday, the Republicans reworked the same numbers. Clinton and Gore kept saying: Here's an idea! What about

this? But it was all headed nowhere. By the end of the Monday night meeting the two sides broached the notion of exit strategies. Tuesday could be the end.

If ever there was a perfect metaphor for the entire frustrating, inconclusive endgame, the scene at the White House

on that Tuesday, Jan. 9, certainly provided it. The Republicans came in coached by their staff and advisers Kasich and Domenici to cut off the talks clearly and cleanly if the Democrats would not make further substantial cuts in Medicare, Medicaid and taxes. Clinton kept making small gestures, almost literally holding them in the room with hints and suggestions of movement.

Gingrich, Dole and Armev left the Oval Office at one point to huddle with their support staff in the Roosevelt Room. It

was clear to Kasich and Domenici that the White House was not moving, just fooling around with numbers. "Just go back in and say, look, let's suspend talks," Kasich said.

The trio of Republican leaders returned to the Oval Office only to reappear in the Roosevelt Room an hour later.

"We've recessed for a week," said Gingrich.

"You *what*?" asked Kasich bewildered. What happens to these guys when they get in that Oval Office, he wondered to himself.

Armev confessed that the word recess was his idea after Clinton and Panetta balked at the word suspension, saying that the use of such a strong word might shake Wall Street's confidence in Washington and hurt the bond and stock markets.

Panetta arrived and started instructing the Republican staff members what everyone was going to say. They were making progress and would recess until next Wednesday. In the meantime, staff and advisers would keep meeting. Kasich was dumbfounded.

Gingrich suddenly was overcome by the sense that Clinton had charmed him one last time and rendered him indecisive. "I don't know why we keep doing it either," he said. "We ought to just cut it off."

"You should have said that in the Oval Office," Dole said to Gingrich.

"You're right," said Gingrich. "Let's get Panetta back in here."

Panetta was called back into the room. "Look," said Gingrich. "Maybe we weren't clear enough in the room. Maybe we need to reconvene the room. After talking here, I don't think we can go out with the idea we are making great progress and keep working on it."

"Look, we've got to think about the country," said Panetta.

"Well we just don't think these other meetings are of any purpose," said Gingrich.

"All right," said Panetta. "Why don't I just say we'll continue to meet and follow up and leave it at that. And we'll say recess instead of suspend."

Gingrich relented. "Fine," he said.

On the ride back to the Capitol, Gingrich started thinking about how they could manage the government with no agreement, and how the Republicans could communicate their position to the country. When the entourage arrived in the Senate Radio and TV Gallery for a final press conference, no one could find Kasich. The balanced budget was his baby. It came out of his committee. It was propelled by his energy. And now it was over.

Everyone was looking for Kasich. The "late John Kasich," as Dole teasingly called him, because he was always late for meetings. Usually he was late because he had a million things on his mind. This time he was late because he wanted to be. He was caught with no exit. He was haunted by the prospect of no deal. Yet he more than anyone did not want a bad deal. He wanted to be alone. He went for a walk. He felt empty.



BY RAY LUSTIG—THE WASHINGTON POST

Empty hands: *After a week of negotiations, Budget Committee chairmen Kasich and Domenici hold news conference on Jan. 9, the day they decided that the administration was not budging in its position.*

INSIDE THE REVOLUTION

JANUARY

TODAY'S FOCUS

- Dec. 29:** Senate Democrats reject House GOP plan to reopen government.
- Jan. 2:** Dole pushes Senate vote to reopen government.
- Jan. 3:** In Washington Post/ABC poll, 44 percent say the shutdown is GOP's fault; 25 percent blame Clinton.
- Jan. 4:** GOP offers plan to return workers with pay while limiting agencies' funding.
- Jan. 5:** After Gingrich pep talk, House passes bill to pay workers.
- Jan. 6:** Clinton submits seven-year budget, signs bill to reopen government until Jan. 26.
- Jan. 7:** Poll finds 50 percent approve of how Clinton is handling dispute; 22 percent approve of GOP.
- Jan. 8:** Two sides discuss exit strategies.
- Jan. 9:** Clinton and GOP leaders suspend budget talks.

GOVERNMENT CLOSED

GOVERNMENT OPEN

NOVEMBER

DECEMBER

Nov. 19: President Clinton agrees to offer a seven-year balanced budget, and Republicans agree to end the six-day shutdown.

Nov. 20: Congress passes interim spending bill that brings 700,000 employees back to work.

Nov. 28: White House and congressional leaders open budget talks.

GOVERNMENT OPEN

THE WASHINGTON POST

THE REVOLUTION

Dec. 6: Clinton vetoes GOP blueprint for balanced budget.

Dec. 7: Clinton offers plan GOP says is \$400 billion short.

Dec. 15: GOP rejects Clinton plan and shuts government, closing agencies whose spending bills have not been signed and furloughing 280,000.

Dec. 19: Clinton agrees to meet with GOP leaders.

Dec. 20: House GOP derails talks, refusing to support interim measure to reopen government.



Marching orders: Speaker Gingrich takes questions after House Republicans met Jan. 5 on budget impasse. Inside, he set forth the leaders' position: a pay bill and an interim spending bill to end the shutdown.

BY FRANK LUSTIG—THE WASHINGTON POST