

President Stresses Limits In Using GOP Themes

'Era of Big Government Is Over,' Clinton Tells Nation

By Ann Devroy
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Borrowing generously from Republican themes, President Clinton last night declared that the "era of big government is over" and sought to ease middle-class anxieties with an upbeat vision of a nation pulling together to ready itself for the new century.

With Republicans bruised by weeks of vicious partisan budget battles sitting mostly silently in their seats, Clinton used his election-year State of the Union address before a joint session of Congress to point out how many goals he and Republicans share, without dwelling on how strenuously he and Congress have fought over how to achieve them. He is for a balanced budget, but not their balanced budget. He is for welfare reform, but not their welfare reform. He is for family. Individual responsibility. Self-reliance. The fight against crime. The battle against drugs. But they disagree on government's role.

Senate Majority Leader Robert J. Dole (Kan.), the leading Republican presidential candidate, made the differences between the presidential rhetoric and presidential action the theme of his televised response. In a tough, mince-no-words address, Dole said that though Clinton's "words speak of change, his deeds are a contradiction."

Clinton, Dole said, is the "chief obstacle" to a balanced budget, the "rearguard of the welfare state" and "the last defender of a discredited status quo." Predicting a winter of challenge, Dole said congressional Republicans will keep sending Clinton the elements of

their agenda and "challenge President Clinton again and again to walk the talk he talks so well."

Clinton, far less sharp in his approach and much more conciliatory, instead reenlisted in the smaller government movement in words that could come out of the mouths if most, if not all, Republicans. "Big government does not have all the answers," Clinton said. "There is not a program for every problem. We know we need a smaller, less bureaucratic government in Washington—one that lives within its means."

The speech comes at an extraordinary moment for Clinton, as he pauses between innings in the bitter struggle with reigning Republicans over balancing the budget and his tough reelection campaign. Hillary Rodham Clinton, in the traditional first lady's balcony spot with daughter Chelsea at her side, was a visible reminder of the president's continuing, intractable problem with the Whitewater investigations and their many offshoots. It was Hillary Clinton's first public appearance since the announcement Monday she has been subpoenaed to appear before a grand jury.

Clinton made no mention of those troubles last night.

Instead, the president broadly laid out what he called seven challenges for an "Age of Possibility," sketching a future in which individuals, community and other segments of society take more responsibility for making America work.

Among the challenges Clinton outlined for the nation was to strengthen the American family, to provide educational opportunities for all Americans, to help Americans achieve economic security, to protect the nation

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Vice President Gore and House Speaker Newt Gingrich applaud after President Clinton is introduced to Congress.

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against criminals and drugs, and to protect the environment.

In a brief segment on foreign policy, the president also said the nation's challenge is to maintain its leadership in the international fight for freedom and peace. And finally, he listed what he called the nation's challenge to politicians to produce a smaller, less bureaucratic government that earns, again, the "respect and trust of the American people."

He challenged Congress to pass new campaign finance reform as a step in that direction.

Ending his address with the same "big government is over" assertion as he began, Clinton said that despite that, "We cannot go back to the era of fending for yourself. We must go forward to the era of working together as a community, as a team, as one America to solve our problems."

benefits for employees who change jobs or have preexisting conditions.

By federal program standards, the money involved was a thimble of water in a receding ocean of federal spending.

Next week, Clinton is to formally lay down a 1997 budget that cuts \$297 billion in domestic discretionary spending over seven years, \$159 billion more than the president was proposing only a month ago.

Clinton did not avoid his fights with Republicans over the budget, but he did not emphasize them last night.

The president reiterated a position he has repeated almost daily since the budget talks broke down almost two weeks ago—that the Republicans should accept an increase in the federal debt ceiling and agree to a balanced-budget deal that locks in \$600 billion in savings while deferring settlement of major differences.

What Clinton did emphasize on the budget was the human side to the government

With government funding disappearing and Republicans in charge of Congress, Clinton had little to offer in the way of new government programs, a traditional State of the Union device for Democrats and even some Republicans before the current balance-the-budget era.

Instead, the president offered a handful of modest proposals aimed primarily at easing middle-class anxieties, including a \$1,000 scholarship for the top 5 percent of all high school graduates.

Aides said it would cost taxpayers \$125 million.

He called for tax incentives for businesses that clean up abandoned properties and expansion of a federally funded college work-study program to 1 million students, up from 700,000 now.

He called for an FBI-led war against youth gangs and for legislation protecting workers' pensions and insuring health care

shutdown, in the form of Richard Dean, a Social Security Administration employee flown to Washington to sit in the audience and have his story told by the president.

With the White House almost giddy the past month in its public relations advantages over the budget, Clinton used Dean to tell the nation—and the Republicans—that government shutdowns are a mistake. Dean, who works in Oklahoma City, helped rescue fellow workers in the bombing there and then was "forced out of his office again" by the government shutdowns.

"On behalf of Richard and his family, I challenge all of you in this chamber: Never, ever, shut the federal government down again," Clinton said.

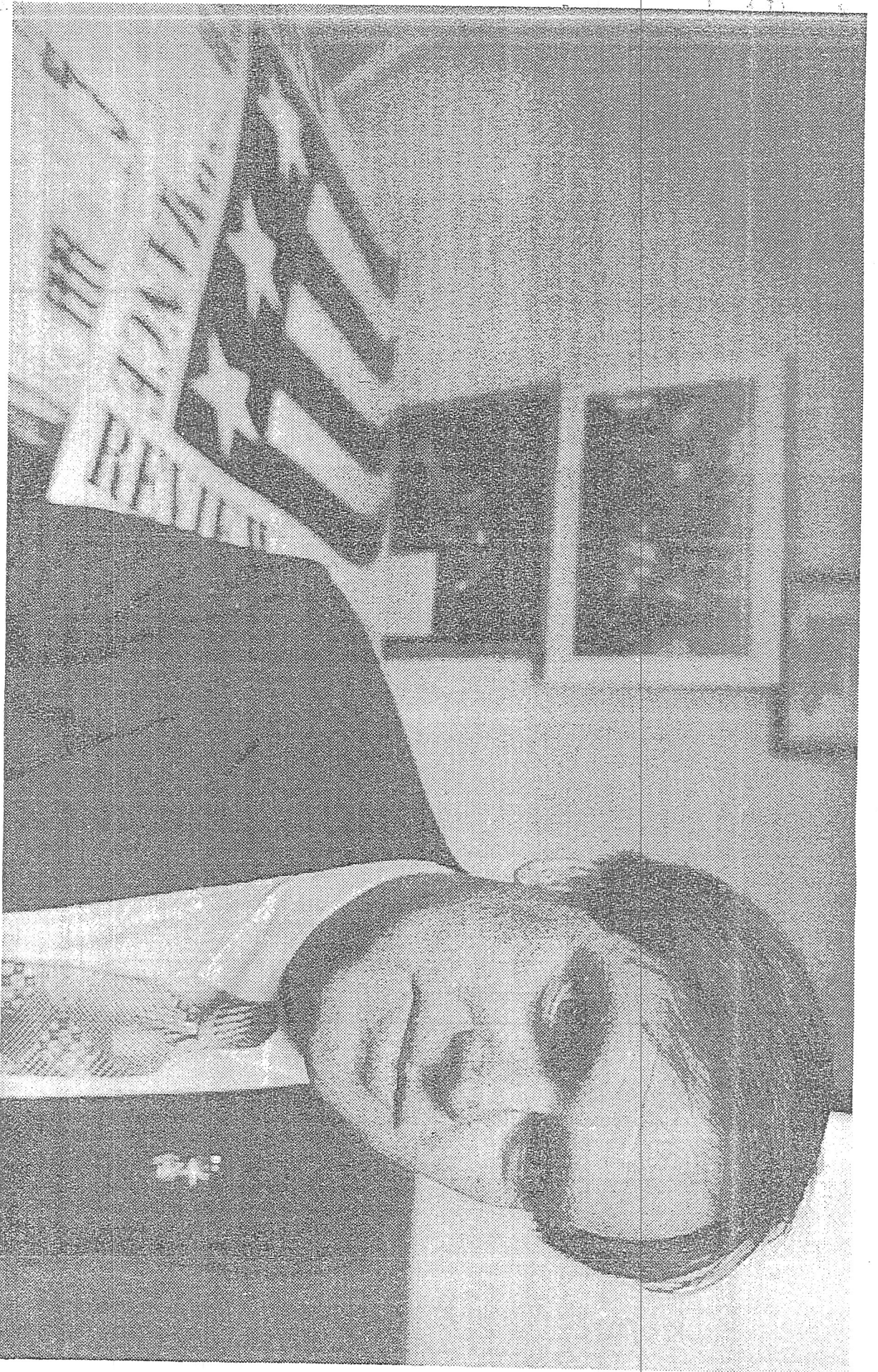
A dozen or more polls have shown that Americans blame Republicans by a wide margin for shutting down the government during the budget disputes; their faith in GOP handling of economic and budget issues has dropped dramatically. House

Speaker Newt Gingrich (R-Ga.) has said the shutdown tactic, aimed at forcing Clinton into a budget compromise, was a mistake, and last night had to sit behind the president and listen to Clinton revel in the public popularity of his position.

House Republican freshmen may be squabbling with Clinton, but that did not stop some of them from going into the House chamber hours before the speech to claim prime seats along the center aisle,

where lawmakers are most likely to shake the president's hand as he enters and leaves and be captured by the television cameras.

Coached to treat Clinton with respect or be seen as juvenile, Republicans politely applauded both Hillary Clinton, when she arrived, and the president when he made his traditional walk down the central aisle of the House chambers to his place at the podium.



Richard H. Dean, Dean, honored last night by President Clinton for his "extraordinary heroism" after the Oklahoma City bombing, said, "There are a lot of people who could fill my shoes."

BY KEITH JENKINS—THE WASHINGTON POST