

# Republicans Divided Over Arms Budget

5/12/95

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As the \$46 billion difference in the House and Senate budget proposals show, congressional Republicans remain a conflicted lot when it comes to national defense spending.

The Senate Budget Committee this week voted to propose a sober defense budget whose bottom line was the same as President Clinton's five-year proposal: \$1.31 trillion.

The House Budget Committee, on the other hand, added \$46 billion on top of that, a flamboyant move for a body that also is advocating historic cuts in social and medical programs for the poor and aged.

It was the first time in memory of many Senate staff members that the Senate proposal has not been the high-water mark on defense between the two chambers, a fact that reminded them of how different life has become in the 104th Congress.

In the Senate, the plan of Budget Committee Chairman Pete V. Domenici (R-N.M.) immediately was attacked by many Republican leaders and members of the Senate Armed Services Committee. Ranking minority member Sam Nunn (D-Ga.) plans to join forces with Committee Chairman Strom Thurmond (R-S.C.), Nunn's staff said, to propose an amendment that would boost spending closer to the House figure.

"I hope that, in the final outcome, Congress will have the wisdom to correct the \$12 billion shortfall," Thurmond said in a statement. "I believe it is critical that Congress make every effort to provide adequate protection for our great nation."

Last week, 17 Senate Republicans, including Majority Leader Robert J. Dole (R-Kan.), warned Domenici that "defense spending is at a dangerous level" and that the Clinton defense budget proposal "fails to provide sufficient resources to meet the national security requirements and ensure the United States' position as a world leader."

But even the most steadfast defense hawks like Sen. John McCain (R-Ariz.) acknowledge that advocates for increased defense spending have a difficult road ahead. Domenici's plan, McCain said, "is a reflection that a majority of Americans don't care that much about defense. But the evidence is clear we live in a dangerous world . . . and I expect senators to understand that."

Clinton and Domenici have proposed a \$256.6 billion budget for next year. House Budget Committee Chairman John R. Kasich (R-Ohio) has proposed \$267.3 billion. Roughly half of all federal dollars not earmarked for entitlements such as Medicare, Social Security and welfare is spent on defense.

In the House, Kasich's plan had the opposite effect. It pleased leading defense advocates and many Republicans on the National Security Committee. But like the Republicans' "Contract With America" defense bill, which was considerably watered down before it was adopted by the House, Kasich's defense plan also may run up against Republican members who believe it is too expensive for these deficit-reducing times.

In fact, said National Security Committee staff members, the subcommittees that will begin working on their budgets next week likely will use a number half way between the House and Senate figures. "We have to assume there'll be some splitting of the difference," a committee staff aide said.

Whether or not Congress adds more money for defense, Republicans have pledged to revise the way Clinton wants to spend on defense. On the chopping block are major cuts in funds for environmental cleanup, in programs to help the private sector develop dual-use technology and in funds allocated to multinational peacekeeping operations.

Many Republicans also are committed to spending more money to develop a new, scaled-back version of President Ronald Reagan's "Star Wars" program to defend the United States against intercontinental ballistic missiles.

The House budget plan "will get us started on a wide range of initiatives to enhance our military posture," said House National Security Committee Chairman Floyd Spence (R-S.C.).