

# Democrats Escalate GOP Budget Attack

## *Cuts Denounced as 'Mean-Spirited'*

5/13/98  
By Eric Pianin and John F. Harris  
Washington Post Staff Writers

The White House and congressional Democrats yesterday escalated their attack on the House and Senate GOP budget proposals, accusing Republicans of championing "mean spirited" cuts in Medicare, tax credits for the working poor and student loans to help finance tax cuts for wealthier Americans.

Vice President Gore called the GOP proposals "dead flat wrong" and vowed all-out Democratic opposition unless Republicans dramatically scale back their tax cut proposal in the House, restore funding for education and student loan programs and agree to discuss Medicare savings in the larger context of health care reform.

Sen. Christopher J. Dodd (Conn.), one of several Democrats who appeared with Gore on Capitol Hill, de-

clared: "It is just very wrong to turn Medicare into a piggy bank to pay for tax cuts for the affluent."

There's no mystery behind the White House's choice of which Republican cuts to highlight. Administration officials say they are certain that Republicans have overreached in cutting Medicare and education, programs Democrats believe still have a broad constituency even among a public generally suspicious of the federal government.

Republican leaders responded by blasting Democrats for engaging in scare tactics and distortions, and challenged them to present an alternative. "The thing that amazes me about the criticism from the White House is, first, they have no plan of their own," House Budget Committee Chairman John R. Kasich (R-Ohio) said.

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### BUDGET, From A1

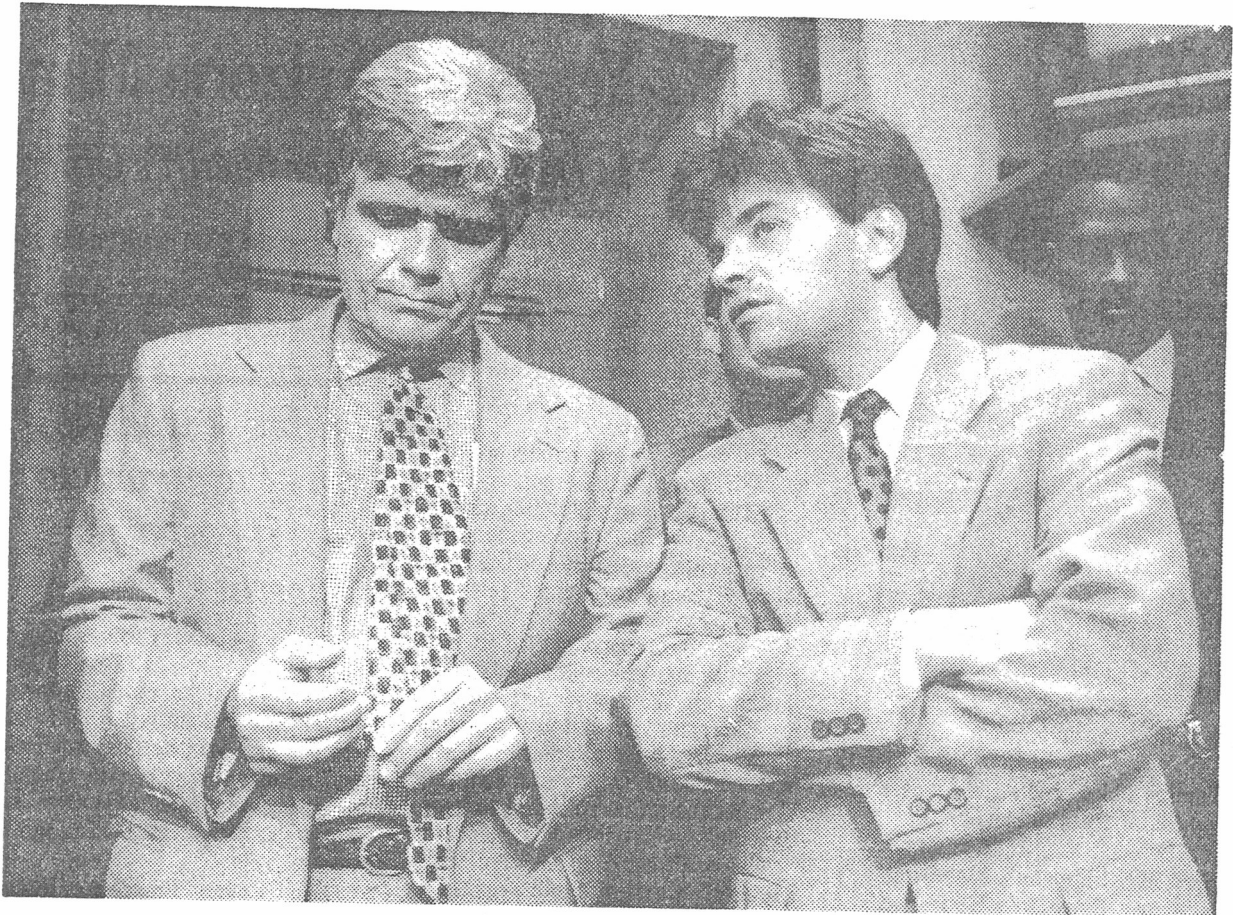
As the House and Senate prepare for debate next week on their plans to balance the budget by 2002, yesterday's fireworks suggest that the political lines are hardening. Just as Democrats were forced to pass President Clinton's anti-deficit plan in 1993 without Republican support, the new GOP majority in Congress will have to do the heavy lifting this time with little help from the Democrats.

House Speaker Newt Gingrich (R-Ga.), in a speech to a real estate group, fumed that Clinton and his party have offered "no answers on Medicare, no answers on the budget, no answers on controlling government, no answers on saving children in poor neighborhoods; just attack and demagogue, attack and demagogue."

Senate Budget Committee Chairman Pete V. Domenici (R-N.M.) said Democrats were "trying very hard to scare to death the seniors" with dire warnings about the Republicans' Medicare proposals, when Medicare would continue to grow significantly, but at a reduced rate.

Both House and Senate plans provide for an overall increase in Medicare and Medicaid spending over seven years, although at substantially lower levels than current projections. Medicare spending would total \$283 billion less than projections under the House plan and \$256 billion less under the Senate plan.

Senate Budget Committee Republicans approved their version of the seven-year balanced budget proposal this week, 12 to 10, without a single Democrat, while a lone conservative Democrat, Rep. Mike Parker (Miss.),



At White House, Clinton aides Patrick Griffin, left, and George Stephanopoulos join criticism of GOP budget proposals.

BY RAY LUSTIG—THE WASHINGTON POST

voted with 26 Republicans on the House Budget Committee to pass its tax cut and deficit elimination plan.

Kasich met with conservative Democrats Thursday and told reporters yesterday, "I believe we will get some of their support" on final passage. However, House Minority Leader Richard A. Gephardt (D-Mo.) and Senate Minority Leader Thomas A. Daschle (D-S.D.) said yesterday that the House Republicans' \$360 billion tax cut plan over seven years and proposals for "slashing" Medicare, Medicaid and other social welfare programs would present major obstacles to Democratic support.

"Why should we enter a discussion, a communication with someone when they insist on assuming a tax break, a tax giveaway for the privileged few," Gephardt said. "This is Robin Hood in reverse."

Daschle said the Senate Republican plan to scale back by \$21 billion the projected spending for the earned income tax credit, currently benefiting 12 million low-income households, would "push people right back onto the welfare rolls." Republicans say they are only cutting the rate of increase of the funding.

Gore and some GOP leaders, however, do not rule out the possibility of a compromise further down the road, after Congress approves the budget resolution and gets on with the more difficult task of approving specific cuts in programs to meet the targets laid down in the resolution.

"At this stage they're just talking in generalities," Gore said. "When they have a rendezvous with reality and they have to vote yea or nay on Medicare cuts, and it becomes painfully

clear to the country that they are funneling Medicare cuts to tax cuts for the wealthy, I predict that they're going to experience a number of conversions within their ranks."

But in the meantime, White House aides this week were clearly relishing the chance to turn the tables on the politics of taxes: the Republican proposal to scale back the earned income tax credit. White House Chief of Staff Leon E. Panetta said the proposal amounts to a tax increase on families earning less than \$27,000.

Polls have helped shape the administration sales pitch. At a briefing Thursday, Education Secretary Richard W. Riley cited newspaper polls showing support for keeping the Education Department.

But senior White House adviser George Stephanopoulos said surveys are less important than highlighting the differences in philosophy between the president's budget and those of the Republicans. "We just think it's wrong [to make Republican cuts] and in the coming weeks and months you'll see the American people agree with that," he said.

Domenici said prospects for a compromise with the Democrats are bleak, but noted the administration would be running a political risk by remaining on the sidelines throughout the budget deliberations. "So while I don't see any daylight right now, I sure wouldn't give up on it," he said.