

Conferees Cut Training Programs, Save Public Broadcasting's Funds

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Acting as a kind of budgetary Supreme Court, House and Senate conferees yesterday spared the Corporation for Public Broadcasting from the deep cuts proposed in a House spending bill passed earlier this year, but sharply trimmed education and job training programs favored by President Clinton.

Under an agreement between Republican appropriations committee members from the two chambers, public television and radio would receive federal subsidies for 1996 and 1997 totaling only \$36 million less than the \$572 million that would have been available if funding had continued at this year's level.

The conferees are attempting to iron out differences between House and Senate versions of a spending cuts package that retroactively cuts some \$15.7 billion worth of programs and projects approved by previous Democratic congresses.

Although opponents of public broadcasting may try to reduce the funds again when Congress takes up fiscal 1996 appropriations bills in a few weeks, supporters claimed at least a temporary victory in what has become a symbolic test of a popular federal program's ability to withstand attacks from conservatives.

"I hoped for more, but this was the best we could get," said Sen. Ted Stevens (R-Alaska), who fought behind the scenes to preserve as much of the funding as possible. Stevens pleaded with GOP colleagues that public radio stations are the only source of news in many rural Alaska areas and provide essential weather reports to the fishing fleet in Bristol Bay. Some public television shows are translated into Native Alaskan languages.

Also spared by conferees was aid that subsidizes poor people's utility bills. The program, which the House had voted to terminate, will receive \$1 billion in 1996 and will be able to tap into a \$300 million reserve fund. Also preserved is the 1995 summer

jobs program for youth.

But for Democrats, that was about the extent of the good news as conferees approved the cancellation of the same job program starting in 1996, and retroactively deleted \$1 billion worth of education funds that had been approved by previous Democratic congresses.

A total of \$90 million was taken away from funds approved last year for the president's fledgling Goals 2000 school improvement program—a cut of about 25 percent. Deleted completely was the part of the program allowing the Education Department to set up demonstration projects at selected sites.

This and other cuts were indicative of the delicate carrot and stick ap-

proach Republicans are employing with the White House, as they seek to avoid a presidential veto while beginning the dismantling of favorite Clinton and pre-Clinton Democratic programs.

The approach has placed the White House in something of a dilemma as to whether Clinton should sign the package into law. In a climate in which voters want action to rein in the deficit, the package produces net savings of at least \$8.7 billion, after some \$7 billion in emergency relief is subtracted from all the cuts.

The measure is also the vehicle for debt relief sought by Clinton for the key Middle East nation of Jordan, as well as emergency and disaster aid to vote-rich California, bombed Oklahoma City, and at least 40 other states.

The package has been crafted to spare programs with a middle-class constituency, such as the student loan program; public broadcasting; highway "demonstration" projects, defense and the national space agency.

Rather than terminate such Clinton favorites as the Goals 2000 program and the national service corps, Republicans appear to have opted for a Chinese water torture approach that cuts the programs a little bit at a time, making it more difficult for the president to justify sending the measure back to Congress.

But the strategy could backfire, White House officials have warned. "There's a sense that Republican leaders have not tried to accommodate him [the president] at all," said one Democratic congressional aide.

The politics are further complicated by tensions between more radical House Republicans and GOP senators, who are mindful of the fact only 41 senators could yet block the spending measure by a filibuster.

The differences have been evident in the fight over the funding of public broadcasting, which enjoys broad support in the Senate. The House Budget

Committee this week proposed terminating public broadcasting subsidies in 1998. But its Senate counterpart provides funding through 2002 at some unspecified level.

The discord was evident on other fronts yesterday when Sen. James M. Jeffords (R-Vt.) told the appropriations conferees that he would vote against the package unless the proposed cuts were deleted in Goals 2000, the Chapter 1 program for schools serving low-income children, and an early intervention program that he helped initiate. "It's very counterproductive to be talking about cutting education," Jeffords said.

The announcement forced the respective House and Senate appropriations committee chairmen, Rep. Bob Livingston (D-La.) and Sen. Mark O. Hatfield (R-Ore.), to postpone final action on the education cuts until Monday, in hopes of appeasing Jeffords.

Meanwhile, Senate representatives yesterday continued to reject House-proposed language barring enforcement of a pro-labor executive order issued by Clinton in March, prohibiting federal contracts with companies hiring permanent replacements for striking employees.

Senate Republicans failed to block the directive after Democrats staged a filibuster. Hatfield has warned that the House's insistence on pressing the issue will stall Senate passage of the spending package.

The same would probably be true of a bold attempt by the GOP leadership to make the spending measure a starting point for the GOP's deregulatory crusade. One proposal floated this week would attach language effectively blocking enforcement of major portions of the Clean Air Act by the Environmental Protection Agency. Draft language would remove EPA's leverage to force states to come up with centralized vehicle emission inspection plans to meet clean air standards.
