

Clinton Tactic on Cuts Angers Republicans

Conferees Charge No Guidance Was Provided on Projects President Now Calls 'Pork'

By Dan Morgan
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When President Clinton sent his budget to Congress Feb. 6, he included proposals for rescinding some \$1.5 billion in programs and projects for which money had been approved in previous budgets but not spent.

But federal building projects—the courthouses, federal offices and border stations that are popular in local communities—were not included in Clinton's hit list. Instead, he requested \$1 billion for 33 new projects in 20 states. Angry Republicans yesterday cited this as one sign the president and his advisers are not serious about reaching an accommodation on the \$16.4 billion spending cut package Clinton has promised to veto.

Late yesterday, the GOP-controlled House easily approved the spending cut measure 235 to 189, and sent it to the Senate where passage is expected next week.

At the White House, Clinton said he was prepared to veto the bill because it protected special interest projects at the expense of programs for children and the poor. "This is not a partisan issue at all. This is about pork." It is wrong, he said, to allow a \$100 million courthouse to be built in Arizona when a similar amount was being cut from education programs.

The administration has suggested in its alternative that Congress rescind \$438 million in unspecified federal building projects to offset the cost of restoring money for education, crime fighting and environmental programs trimmed in the bill.

Republicans charge this is just politics. "You have a case of the president playing Monday morning quarterback on a game he didn't even watch," said Rep. Jim Lightfoot (R-Iowa), who chairs the Appropriations subcommittee with

jurisdiction over General Services Administration building funds.

He said the subcommittee was informed yesterday that the Office of Management and Budget had instructed GSA not to provide a suggested list of building projects that could be cut, leaving the panel in the dark about how to reach the \$438 million.

The measure already rescinds \$580 million for 39 federal building projects. Lightfoot said it would be difficult to cut another \$438 million without terminating projects that have started, or disrupting the plans of numerous government agencies.

House and Senate conferees considered, but rejected, cuts in another 50 projects for which funding of \$1.3 billion has been appropriated but not yet obligated to contractors. But that includes projects on which construction has begun, such as a new federal courthouse in Sacramento. A sum of \$113 million set aside for a new building for the U.S. Secret Service was not touched, Lightfoot said, because the lease on its current facility expired this month and the landlord could sue for damages if the service does not move quickly to a new site.

Some of the facilities spared by the House-Senate conferees, such as a courthouse in San Diego, a federal building and courthouse in Albuquerque and a courthouse in Las Vegas, are included in the list proposed for new construction funds in Clinton's 1996 budget.

"They were a priority for him when he submitted his budget," Lightfoot said. "Now he seems to think they're pork."

Meanwhile, White House officials stuck to their guns. Chief of Staff Leon E. Panetta said on ABC's "Good Morning America" yesterday "the president thinks you should not cut people, you ought to cut pork." The White House has proposed restoring funds cut for the Goals 2000 education program, safe and drug free schools, school-to-work programs, anti-crime

initiatives and safe drinking water grants, offsetting the costs by cutting GSA building funds, the Public Law 480 agricultural export program, and highway demonstration projects.

House Speaker Newt Gingrich (R-Ga.) conceded yesterday he will not have enough Democratic votes to override a veto, but hinted he will not try to renegotiate it.

On NBC's "Today," Gingrich painted Clinton as the loser because the measure, along with cuts, contains funds to aid California and Gulf Coast earthquake and flood victims, rebuild the federal building in Oklahoma City, strengthen the FBI's counterterrorism capabilities, and aid Jordan. "I don't know what he's doing," Gingrich said. But the veto ultimatum has soured relations between the White House and GOP leaders beyond the level of political sparring.

A key House appropriator, Rep. John Edward Porter (R-Ill.), who heads the subcommittee with jurisdiction over education, labor and health funding, charged yesterday that the president had provided no guidance as to what was acceptable or not.

House conferees agreed to reduce proposed rescissions in social programs from \$5.6 billion in the House bill to \$3.3 billion, closer to the Senate version that Clinton said he would accept. The bill agreed to by conferees left intact such programs as Headstart and the \$6 billion-a-year Chapter 1 program, but sharply cuts funds for such Clinton initiatives as the Goals 2000 education innovation program, safe and drug free schools, and national service.

Rep. Bud Shuster (R-Pa.), chairman of the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee, yesterday denounced Panetta for "gross misstatements" Wednesday suggesting conferees failed to rescind nine highway projects in his district. Conferees did reject eliminating some \$140 million worth of projects, as proposed by the Senate, but Shuster said only two of the 72 projects were in his district.