

Clinton Vows To Veto Policy Bill

President Assails GOP For 'Isolationist' View Of U.S. Role in World

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President Clinton, who has already threatened to veto a number of domestic policy bills, extended his warnings into foreign affairs yesterday, accusing Republicans of conducting a "frontal assault" on presidential authority and producing "the most isolationist proposals" in 50 years.

Clinton, in a statement to reporters in the Rose Garden, said he would veto a broad foreign affairs bill on which the House opened debate yesterday unless the legislation is substantially changed. A White House official said the Senate version, on which hearings began yesterday, "is even worse."

The Republican-crafted legislation would sharply reduce foreign aid authorizations, merge several foreign policy agencies into the State Department and set some policy guidelines regarding North Korea, China, Russia and other countries.

Clinton's statements came as the White House worked to recruit prominent Republicans to endorse its argument that the legislation represents an attempt by Congress to trample on the president's responsibility for foreign affairs and to "micromanage" policy in a number of areas. The administration contends that a Republican president would not stand for it either.

The White House is conducting its fight without the backing of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee, an important ally in past foreign policy battles. The White House strongly courted the powerful pro-Israel lobby but was unable to persuade the group to abandon its tradi-

tional position of backing foreign aid bills that fully fund Israel's aid package.

AIPAC President Steven Grossman said that "while we understand the administration's concerns, nevertheless we support the legislation"

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and have so notified members of Congress.

One senior official, noting that Clinton has backed virtually every Israeli and AIPAC request over the past two years, said the lobby "is taking the shortsighted route; Congress butters its bread so it's walking away from us."

In the House, the American Overseas Interests Act would cut \$2.8 billion from Clinton's proposed \$21.6 billion foreign affairs budget, and would fold three independent foreign affairs agencies into the State Department. Even as Clinton was threatening the veto, the House was moving further away from his position, voting an additional \$478 million in cuts to make the legislation conform to its budget resolution.

Just as bad as the funding cuts, Clinton said, are the "dangerous" policy mandates in the House legislation that would "compromise our efforts to stop North Korea's nuclear program, impose conditions that could derail our support for democratic reform in Russia and restrict the president's ability to prevent illegal immigration."

The budget cuts, taken together with the policy proposals, Clinton said, "represent nothing less than a frontal assault on the authority of the president to conduct the foreign

policy" of the United States. They are "shortsighted, scatter-shotted budget cuts and attempts to micromanage" policy by Congress, he said.

Clinton defended the fraction of the total federal budget taken up by foreign aid—slightly more than 1 percent. He cited a recent set of surveys showing that most Americans think the United States spends far more than that on foreign aid, and made the case that if Americans knew it was such a small amount they would support it.

Clinton's announcement that he would veto the legislation is the end result of a public assault on the bill by all the administration's foreign

policy team members, culminating with the announcement over the weekend by Secretary of State Warren Christopher that he had recommended a veto to Clinton.

Christopher sent House Speaker Newt Gingrich (R-Ga.) a letter yesterday broadly outlining the administration's objections and a formal statement of administration policy ticking off nine specific and three broad objections. Among the specific objections are provisions on North Korea, China, Indochinese refugee policy, illegal immigrant smuggling policies, restrictions on aid to Nicaragua, proposals affecting Russia and those affecting family planning activities.

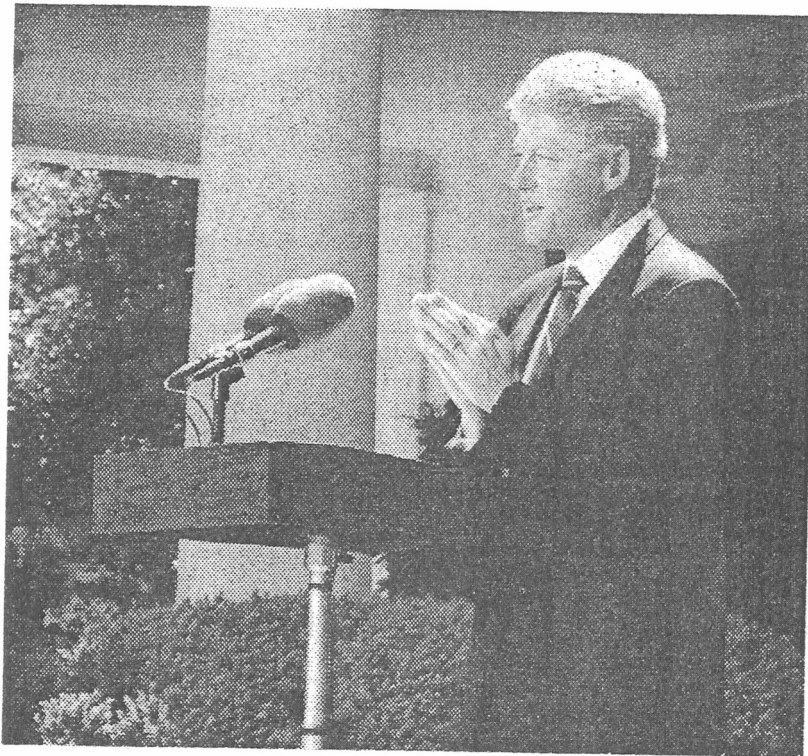
A senior official called the legisla-

tion a "compendium of Republican hobby horses" rather than a serious foreign policy bill. "The imperative in the House is balancing the budget and letting every House Republican hang his pet peeve on this bill," the official said. "This is politics, policy be damned."

AIPAC president Grossman noted that the legislation contains full funding for Israel and its Camp David peace partner Egypt, a vital concern for Israel. A senior official said White House national security adviser Anthony Lake had at least two conversations with Grossman but could not obtain his backing.

Sources familiar with AIPAC's position said it "cannot be against" a foreign aid bill that provides everything the group had sought, even if AIPAC is thus put on the opposite side of an overwhelmingly supportive administration. Clinton addressed the AIPAC convention only two weeks ago and, compared to the Bush administration's efforts to be more "evenhanded" between Israel and the Arabs in the Middle East, has openly given strong support to Israel's positions.

Lake earlier this week met with President George Bush's national security adviser, Brent Scowcroft, to enlist him in lobbying against the legisla-



POOL PHOTO

Clinton says the legislation represents an attempt to trample on the president's responsibility for foreign affairs and to "micromanage" policy.

tion with fellow Republicans. Scowcroft said he agrees with the Clinton administration that some elements of the legislation amount to improper infringement on presidential foreign policy authority.

A bill substantially similar to the House reorganization measure has been approved by the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, and the committee began yesterday to mark up a separate bill that would impose

comparable cuts in foreign aid spending.

The foreign aid cuts, beginning with a \$2.2 billion reduction in fiscal year 1996, would go slightly further than required by the Senate budget resolution, which aims to balance the federal budget by 2002 without tax increases.

Staff writer Thomas W. Lippman contributed to this report.