

Congress Seems Responsive to Nixon's

REPUBLICANS CALL TALK A CHALLENGE

But Democratic Candidates
Find More Rhetoric Than
Substance in Address

By JOHN W. FINNEY

Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, Jan. 20 —

Despite outspoken criticism by Democratic Presidential candidates, President Nixon, with his State of the Union message, appeared today to have struck a cooperative response in Congress to his plea for enactment of his basic legislative program.

Among the Democrats — and some Republicans — a common complaint was that the President's speech was lacking in specific proposals for dealing with the problems of the nation. But with his generalities and repeated pleas to put partisanship aside, there was a common feeling among Democrats that the President had outwardly set a nonpartisan tone for the start of an election-year Congressional session.

Republicans praised the President's speech as statesmanlike, inspiring, apolitical, challenging, conciliatory and reasonable.

"Perhaps the most challenging such speech ever made to a joint session of the Congress," said Representative Gerald R. Ford, the House Republican leader, in a statement issued before the President's speech had been delivered.

The President set "the proper tone to remind the Congress of its responsibilities to all Americans," said Senator Hugh Scott, the Senate Republican leader.

'Monkey on Back'

"He put the monkey right where it belongs—on the back of Congress, which has a long agenda of unfinished business left over from the President's State of the Union Message one year ago," said Representative John B. Anderson of Illinois, chairman of the House Republican Conference.

Among such Democratic Presidential contenders as Senators Hubert H. Humphrey of Minnesota, Edmund S. Muskie of Maine and Henry M. Jackson of Washington there was the common criticism that the President's speech was full of lofty rhetoric but lacking in substance.

The more detailed, written State of the Union Message had not been delivered to members of Congress by the time the President delivered his speech. Some Democrats, such as the Senate majority leader, Mike Mansfield, thought the President had made a mistake in presenting his program to the American people by dividing his message into two parts.

"The people are hungry, but there were no meat and potatoes," said Mr. Mansfield, who at the same time complimented the President on the "fine tone" of his speech.

Senator Muskie, who sat impassively beside an equally un-demonstrative Senator Humphrey on the House floor to hear the speech and then raced his rival to the Senate television gallery to give his reaction, said, "About all the speech contained was an appeal for a constructive, positive attitude, but substantially it was empty."

Problems Seen Ignored

The speech, he charged, ignored or glossed over such problems as unemployment, the cities, the Federal deficit, an end to the Vietnam war and property taxes.

"Essentially, a recycling of past State of the Union messages," said Mr. Humphrey, who beat Mr. Muskie to the television cameras, leaving his Maine rival to cool his heels outside the studio. "The President's message was long on lofty goals," he said, "but regrettably short on a program for realization of these goals."

Rather than "reaching out for help," the President "frontally" challenged Congress by suggesting that it had done little or nothing on such proposals as welfare reforms and revenue, Mr. Humphrey said.

Senator Jackson, who was campaigning in Florida, said in a statement issued by his Washington office that the President's message had "given us a political platform instead of a program that will help those in distress all across America." With national unemployment running over 6 per cent, he said, "it is hard to believe that a serious State of the Union Message could gloss over this problem with optimistic rhetoric."

Such criticism from the Presidential contenders, however, did not reflect the attitude of Congress as a whole, nor did it necessarily pretend that the President's legislative program would become bogged down in partisan squabbling in a Democratic-controlled Congress.

Significantly, Democratic leaders and committee chairmen who will be instrumental in steering the President's program through to passage expressed either muted criticism or none.

Senator Russell B. Long of Louisiana, chairman of the Finance Committee, which will handle much of the Administration's legislative program, praised the President for mak-

FRIDAY, JANUARY 21, 1972

Appeal to Enact His

Legislative Program

ing "a good, balanced speech which avoided needless partisanship."

While expressing reservations about the directions of the Administration's spending policies, the two chairmen of the Appropriations Committees — Representative George H. Mahon of Texas and Senator Allen J. Ellender of Louisiana — generally endorsed the President's speech.

Senator Edward M. Kennedy of Massachusetts, who has removed himself from Presidential contention this year, said: "I share the great goals stated by the President, and I think Congress will accept the challenge to make 1972 a year of performance. My concern is that the President's test of performance is simply approval of the long list of programs he has proposed in the past, without any real recognition of the deep inadequacies they contain."

Bills Start to Move

Even before the President's speech, most of the major elements of his legislative program, such as welfare reform, revenue sharing and health care, had begun moving through the legislative mill.

By striking a cooperative note, the President, in the opinion of some Democrats, perhaps assured that the legislative package would not become stalled, although in most cases the ultimate product will probably bear some Democratic design changes.

"We'll try to do our part," said Senator Mansfield, "but to use another cliché, it takes two to tango."

Senator Jacob K. Javits of New York, a leader among Republican liberals, praised the President for striking "a highly auspicious opening note" for his legislative program.

"Details remain to be filled in and are subject to the usual controversy," Mr. Javits said. "But if the Congress can join

in this spirit, and he President will retain this tone, this year could be historic for achievement in a bipartisan spirit, even though it is a Presidential election year."

Senator Abraham A. Ribicoff, Democrat of Connecticut, called the speech "very uninspiring." The "basic issue," he said, "is whether the President will fight and press for the pro-

grams he talked about."

One potential point of controversy to emerge from the President's speech was his proposed increase in defense spending. With the Government running a deficit of nearly \$40-billion this year, such an increase, on the basis of the initial Congressional reaction, seems certain to run into resistance on Capitol Hill.