

DEMOCRATS SCORE NIXON'S MESSAGE IN REBUTTAL ON TV

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Charge President Neglects Problems on Home Front and Prolongs the War

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WASHINGTON, Jan. 21—Congressional Democrats presented their own "state of the union message" today on a nationwide television program, accusing President Nixon of neglecting problems on the home front and prolonging the war in Indochina.

Against the criticism, however, was a promise by the Democratic leaders of the House that the Democratic-controlled Congress would enact in some form major Administration proposals calling for welfare reform, revenue sharing and abatement of water pollution.

But in responding to President Nixon's plea in his State of the Union Message yesterday for Congress to set aside partisanship in an election year, Speaker Carl Albert emphasized that "cooperation is a two-way street."

"We are going to cooperate with the President on everything that is in the national interest," Mr. Albert said, summing up the Democratic "state of the union" program. "We simultaneously call upon the President to stop vetoing bills that are in the national interest."

To many Democrats, the form of the rebuttal to Mr. Nixon's message was as significant as the words. After years of experimenting, Congressional Democrats believed that they had finally hit upon an effective television format for answering

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the President.

The format was a combination of a television talk show and a panel discussion as nine Congressional Democrats took turns criticizing the Administration and answering questions phoned in from across the nation or raised by the audience in the studio.

As a novel feature in a program entitled "Your Voice Counts," the Democrats gave listeners a chance to make toll-free calls over a special circuit leased from the American Telephone and Telegraph Company. Midway through the program, a Democratic national committee official said that an A.T. & T. engineer had reported to the studio that more than 100,000 telephone calls had been attempted, and that the circuit had become swamped.

In years past, Congressional Democrats relied largely on party leaders and elders to present their rebuttal to the President's State of the Union Message. This year, they turned to new and younger faces in the party.

The panel was composed of Senators Thomas F. Eagleton of Missouri, William Proxmire of Wisconsin, Frank Church of Idaho and Lloyd M. Bentsen of Texas and Representatives John Brademas of Indiana, Martha W. Griffiths of Michigan, Ralph H. Metcalfe of Illinois, John Melcher of Montana and Leonor K. Sullivan of Missouri.

Candidates Missing

Notably missing were the committee chairmen and the Presidential candidates, although in keeping with past practice the job of summing up the program was given to the two House leaders, Speaker Albert and Representative Hale Boggs of Louisiana.

Mr. Boggs, according to Democratic sources, had originally not been scheduled to appear but insisted that he be included when he heard about the planned program.

Serving as anchorman and moderator, Senator Eagleton led off the program with the observation that the President had presented "a domestic grab bag" in his message.

"No one could possibly disagree with the broad, humane generalities in his speech," he said. "The problem is not where we are going, but how we're going to get there."

With that as a preface, the panelists, each assigned a particular subject, made the following observations in brief statements followed by questions:

MR. BRADEMAs—There is a large gap between the promises and performances of the Administration on education. "On the record, not of words but of deeds no Administration of this generation has been as hostile to education as has that of Richard Nixon."

MRS. GRIFFITHS—The President's health insurance proposals are inadequate, and the Administration has failed to give active support to the Equal Rights Amendment for women pending in Congress.

MR. PROXMIRE—Unemployment remains the No. 1 domestic problem: "What does the President propose to do about it? Nothing. When a phone caller from Billings, Mont., said that he was a recent college graduate unable to find a job, Mr. Proxmire replied, "The President has said the employment picture is getting better, but the fact is that the statistics just belie him."

MRS. SULLIVAN—In every area of consumer protection,

the Administration has been "timid and indecisive."

MR. CHURCH—The President, upon his election, could have withdrawn the bulk of the ground forces in nine months, but instead the withdrawal is being "dragged out over four agonizing years," and "the end of the war is still not in sight."

MR. METCALFE—The Administration has not responded to the needs of cities and minority groups and has "clearly misplaced priorities" by proposing a \$5.5-billion space shuttle.

MR. BENTSEN—Mr. Nixon in 1968 made "huge promises" suggesting that "the crime problem would be solved if only he became President," but crime rates continue to rise, and "the empty promises of the past have become the failures of the present."

MR. MELCHER—The Administration has neglected rural America and forgotten farmers.

'Continued Crummy'

Contending that he wanted to end the program on a "sunnier note," Mr. Eagleton thumbed through yesterday's edition of The San Clemente (Calif.) Sun Post, which had been especially flown in for the program, and found a weather forecast reading: "Continued crummy."

The 55-minute program was carried live by the three commercial networks and the education network, which provided free air time worth \$210,000 at regular commercial rates. In the last six years, the opposition party has been provided free air time to answer the President's State of the Union Message, but today marked the first time that the rebuttal was carried simultaneously by all the networks.

For the Congressional Democrats, the cost to the program was estimated at \$6,000, most of which was for the renting the telephone circuit. The cost will be borne by the House and Senate Democratic Campaign Committee. They are independent of the Democratic National Committee, which still owes the phone company for bills run up in the Presidential campaign of 1968.

A total of six telephone calls—from Peekskill, N. Y., to Billings, Mont., were heard on the program and three questions were presented from the obviously partisan studio audience of 150 persons that had been assembled largely by the League of Women Voters.

Senator Robert Dole of Kansas, chairman of the Republican National Committee, issued a statement accusing the Democrats of "putting on a party-athon."