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Analysis:

I. Budget:
Nearly all the editorials supported the passage of the budget bill. Two major newspapers in Texas were the most critical of the President's plan. Most articles praised the President's plan as bringing fiscal responsibility to Washington. The editorials found that even with tight caps on appropriations, the budget bill will be ineffective without health care reform.

The editorials supporting the budget bill differed on its merits. The Wall Street Journal called the President's plan a combination of tax boosts and phantom cuts but concluded that any alternative would probably be even worse. Some editorials thought that raising taxes to reduce the deficit without providing appropriate investment initiatives will harm a fragile economy. Others concluded that the nation can make a major step towards deficit reduction without pushing the economy into recession because interest rates will go down.

Most editorials urge Congress to make a decision and expressed frustration at a possible further delay. Many articles give examples of expensive pork-barrel concessions to members of Congress such as Senators Feingold and DeConcini in order to gain their votes. The Boston Globe warned that if Clinton's plan goes down in flames, no phoenix will rise from the ashes.

Most editorials considered Bob Dole's budget plan to be a fine campaign document but not a serious alternative. The Washington Post said that "Republicans say the bill is too weak, but weakness is not the reason they are voting no." Many articles attacked the GOP for its lack of cooperation in the budget process, calling it
partisan politics which is hurting the country.

II. Bosnia:
The editorials about air strikes were mixed in nature. The St. Louis Post-Dispatch cautioned that the introduction of U.S. air strikes into Bosnia may escalate the fighting between U.N. and Serbian troops. The New York Times argued that launching air strikes against the Serbs is the wrong way to go about gaining peace in Bosnia. The U.S. should "confine itself to protecting civilians and encouraging political settlement." Those editorials in support of the President's stand on Bosnia said that if the U.S. did not take a stand in Bosnia, no other country will. The Wall Street Journal suggests that whatever the President finally decides on Bosnia, he should do it fairly soon because Sarajevo may fall to the Serbs before the President's budget is passed.

III. Immigration:
Of the six editorials that appeared in the major papers last week all agreed that reform in immigration policy was necessary. The Baltimore Sun argued that it was a political necessity as well as a structural necessity. The Chicago Tribune argued that the plan offered by the President was exactly what was needed. "He [the President] has asked for the tools to solve the real problems." The Atlanta Constitution also offered a positive response to the President's immigration plan, arguing that we should only crackdown on those who abuse and exploit the current immigration policy.
The Des Moines Register offered the most negative view of the proposal, agreeing that reforms are necessary, but not the ones the President has offered.
Other responses characterized the policy as a good start in the right direction.

IV. Middle East:
A majority of the editorials praised the administration's actions in stopping the violence in Southern Lebanon. The Chicago Tribune stated that "Warren Christopher and President Clinton deserve credit for prevailing upon the leaders of Syria, Lebanon and Israel to restore a measure of calm to the always-volatile region." Although the fighting has stopped, the Washington Post states that Secretary of State Warren Christopher "has his work cut out for him."
The Washington Post and Detroit Free Press criticized Israel for its tough retaliation against Hezbollah guerrillas in Lebanon. Despite the violent attacks, the editorials did not state that the attacks would hinder the peace talks. The Dallas Morning News suggested that the fighting could actually "provide the very catalyst needed to advance the stalled talks."
Surrender on Energy

AFTER FIVE MONTHS of struggling with energy taxes and the idea of a coherent energy policy, Congress has given up. It has settled for a barely visible increase of 4.3 cents a gallon on the gasoline tax. Once again Congress has been unwilling to push for conservation or to warn the country about its declining reserves of domestic oil.

Instead, a lot of senators have been loudly telling their constituents that they are the special victims of tax schemes that would burden them far more heavily than all those other people who live in other places and in different ways. It's been a rich display of one of the oldest and least attractive tactics in congressional politics. President Clinton's original proposal struck a good balance among the various regions' interests. But each state found something in it to hate, and the package quickly fell apart.

Sen. Max Baucus has been vehemently explaining to his state that a gasoline tax would be bitterly unfair to it because westerners have to drive far more than those people in the East who keep trying to impose it on them. In fact, how much more? In 1991, the last year for which the government has published figures, Montanans used 9 percent more gasoline per capita than Virginians did. That's a difference, but not the big difference that all the talk about big sky country might have led an unwary listener to suppose.

Sen. Herbert Kohl's Wisconsin used slightly less gasoline than the national average. Mr. Kohl adamantly opposes any gasoline tax increase beyond 4.3 cents on grounds that there should be no additional burdens on the middle class. Most Americans consider themselves middle class, and it's hard to go very far toward balancing either the federal budget deficit of the national energy deficit without their help. But when citizens begin to think of themselves primarily as the victims of everybody else, the prospect for sensible legislation fades.

Oil production in this country has been falling steadily since 1985, and imports so far this year are up about 10 percent over the same period last year. A gasoline tax of 4.3 cents a gallon will reduce consumption, according to an estimate by Resources for the Future, by almost 2 percent—just about the amount by which consumption has risen in the past year alone. As a way to reduce air pollution the tax is no more expensive than other methods, such as the elaborate automobile inspection and maintenance program. The conference was mainly around the margins. Because they were five-year figures, the amounts at issue often sounded larger than they were. There is not a definite reduction there should have been, and some of the programmatic choices could have been made differently. But overall, this is good legislation that the Democrats can easily defend and should be proud to pass.

The House and Senate bills both already contained the major elements of the president's program. The conference was mainly around the margins. Because they were five-year figures, the amounts at issue often sounded larger than they were. There is not a definite reduction there should have been, and some of the programmatic choices could have been made differently. But overall, this is good legislation: Democrats are facing up to structural problems too long ignored.

The president said he wanted a half-trillion dollars in deficit reduction over five years: he'll get $496 billion, the conferees say. The 54 billion would give some of it back; the progressive edge of the income tax would be restored. The middle class would pay little. Perhaps the most demeaning aspect of the entire conference was the effort to minimize the burden of an energy tax on the middle class. It was negligible to begin with.

The Democrats broke with the tradition of exempting Social Security, which is a fifth of all spending. A larger share of Social Security benefits would be subject to the income tax—the fairest way to reduce the giant program's net cost. Meanwhile, the appropriations caps in the bill for the next five years are tighter than has generally been recognized. A lot of the very members complaining today that the bill would cut spending too little will be complaining a year from now that it cut spending too much.

The working poor would be deserving winners as a result of a major increase in the earned-income tax credit that supplements their wages. That and a food stamp increase in the bill represent a first step toward the president's image of welfare reform. The bill would begin the restructuring of college student aid he has proposed as well, and take such lesser steps as expanding child immunization and funding a "family preservation" program meant to reduce the need for foster care. The estimated deficit five years out would be reduced by more than a third. Health care costs would then begin to take it up again, as the administration has warned. That is partly what health care reform will be about. But that's Step Two. What the Democrats have to do first—the Republicans having taken their usual walk—is pass this Step One.
The Budget Holdouts

The Democrats withholding support for President Clinton's budget need to ask themselves the question, compared to what? The most frequent criticism of the plan is that it contains too few spending cuts. That's the argument you hear from the congressional Republicans and Ross Perot. You hear the echo from holdout Democrats as well.

But the fair next question is, which spending? The budget offers specific cuts; the critics, air. Mr. Perot particularly has become a parody of himself. Last year the presidential candidate favored larger tax increases than those for which he now denounces the president. This year he favors spending cuts, but somehow he can never never remember to bring from home the chart on which they are spelled out.

The Republicans are no better. A month ago Bob Dole and company endorsed the specific spending cuts the president has proposed, atop which they managed to drape ... an entitlement cap. It's the same thing they've been doing for 12 years. They oppose spending in the abstract, but either can't or won't identify the particular spending that would make the rest of their mythical budget math come out even. The result is that the government now incurs debt at a rate of $1 trillion a presidential term and interest is a seventh of the budget.

The interest costs can't be cut except as projected deficits are reduced. Where else would the cutters turn? Not to defense; most members who would cut total spending more than the president think that defense spending has already been cut too much. Probably not to domestic programs subject to the appropriations process, either. In an underappreciated bow to conservative House Democrats earlier in the year, the appropriations total has already been basically frozen for five years; the agreed-to caps are already squeezing out proposed presidential "investments" or spending increases.

That leaves entitlements, of which the largest is Social Security. Some Democrats say it should be means-tested. But the budget already includes a proposal to reduce benefits as income rises by subjecting a larger share to the income tax. It had to be watered down to win the votes of some of the very senators who complain that spending has not been cut enough. Next largest are the major health insurance programs, Medicare and Medicaid. But to cut federal health insurance for the elderly and the poor outside the context of broader health care reform is merely to shift the rising cost to other payers—most likely the privately insured and state governments.

The lesser entitlements that make up the rest of the budget include such staples as military retirement, veterans' benefits, unemployment compensation, college student loans and the basic forms of aid to the poor. Are those what the holdouts want to cut? Not likely.

The president's budget would reduce the likely deficit by 1998 by more than a third. It includes more spending cuts than he has been given credit for—and probably about as many as Congress is realistically prepared to vote for. The holdouts threaten to vote no anyway; then a bipartisan summit could do more, some say. For the first time in 12 years the country has a president willing to take the political risks of driving down the deficit, and some in his own party say the way to help him achieve even more of that worthy goal is ... to weaken him? The Democrats who say a vote against the president's plan is a vote in favor of greater deficit reduction are blowing smoke.

The choice this week is not between the president's plan and some imaginary other. They vote for his, or they go home with none.
And Sen. Dole’s Four Questions

Sen. Robert Dole, speaking for the Republicans, responded to President Clinton’s budget speech with four questions. He then proceeded to answer them to his own satisfaction—but not quite completely.

First question: Will Mr. Clinton’s budget plan raise taxes? Of course it will. Mr. Dole referred to it twice as the largest tax increase in history. Its purpose, as he might accurately have added, is to cut the largest budget deficits in history, which under 12 years of Republican administration have created the largest national debt in history.

Second question: Will the Clinton plan reduce federal spending? Mr. Dole sniffed that it will merely slow down the rate of rise in spending. Under the Clinton budget, to be precise, spending will rise much less rapidly than it rose during the 12 Republican years. The Republicans are notably more enthusiastic about cutting spending when out of the White House than when in. Mr. Dole spoke of the Republican plan for “real” cuts—but that plan, like most of its predecessors, is conspicuously vague when it comes to the hard parts. As for the Clinton budget, slowing down the rise in spending will help crucially in cutting the deficit.

Third question: Will the Clinton budget create jobs? Mr. Dole gloomily assured his audience that it will instead cost jobs. But as a matter of economics, the spending cuts on which the Republicans say they want to rely would cost more jobs dollar for dollar than the tax increases Mr. Dole is fighting. In reality any threat of job losses probably will be offset by lower interest rates. Interest rates stayed unusually high during the last recession because the federal Treasury was sucking up huge amounts of capital to finance the Bush administration’s deficits.

It’s not just the number of jobs that counts, but their quality. Because the budget deficits are preempting most of the investment capital this country generates, too little is left for business to buy new tools, push research and expand. That’s why productivity has been growing too slowly, wages have been flat and the standard of living hasn’t risen. Republicans think of themselves as the party of business, but their deficits have done great damage to American businesses.

Fourth question: Will the Clinton budget cut the deficit? Mr. Dole acknowledges that it will cut it deeply for the next four years, but says that the deficit will begin to rise again around 1998. True. Mr. Clinton said exactly that in his budget speech: It will begin to rise again because of medical costs. That’s why health care reform is essential. Will Mr. Dole oppose that too?
The compromise budget that Congress will now vote on isn't as bold or inspiring as President Clinton asserted in his television address. But neither will it lead to the economic Dunkirk forecast by Bob Dole, the Senate minority leader. To the President's and the conference committee's credit, the plan would begin to bring the deficit down in the balance of the budget. This is not the fake deep spending cut that most such caps have been in the past. It allows for the normal growth of these giant programs due to population, inflation and recession, and will ring an alarm if they grow more. In the meantime, the president proposes to cut entitlements spending through his Medicare plan and, the Senate would add, the limitations have won two major victories in the in-fighting over the terms of the bill. The first was an agreement last spring to impose tight new caps on the part of the budget subject to the appropriations process for the next five years. The importance of these caps is still not fully appreciated. They already are forcing the administration and Congress to make spending choices that would otherwise have been finessed; they are crowding some of the president's spending initiatives out of the budget—and they will bind even more in the future.

Now the president, also at conservative best, has issued an executive order imposing a limited cap as well on the entitlement spending that makes up the balance of the budget. This is not the fake deep spending cut that most such caps have been in the past. It allows for the normal growth of these giant programs due to population, inflation and recession, and will ring an alarm if they grow more. In the meantime, the president proposes to cut entitlements spending through his Medicare plan and, the Senate would add, the limitations have won two major victories in the in-fighting over the terms of the bill. The first was an agreement last spring to impose tight new caps on the part of the budget subject to the appropriations process for the next five years. The importance of these caps is still not fully appreciated. They already are forcing the administration and Congress to make spending choices that would otherwise have been finessed; they are crowding some of the president's spending initiatives out of the budget—and they will bind even more in the future.

The compromise budget cuts deficits by almost $100 billion and Medicare by about $55 billion. The conferees didn't preserve many of Mr. Clinton's investment initiatives because, to reach a compromise that could get past Senate Democrats, they scrapped the President's $70 billion broad-based energy tax and adopted instead a Senate-passed gas tax that would raise only $20 billion. The conferees made up the difference responsibly—by chipping away at but not eviscerating the President's programs to provide new money for low-paid workers (including, for the first time, those without children), families on the verge of breaking up, childhood immunization, food stamps and economic development for urban slums.

The conferences made several unwise decisions. In a triumph of petty bookkeeping over economic good sense, they chose to impose more taxes this year, when the economy is limping along, than the Senate had proposed. They also approved several "cuts"—health care reform, they know that Congress will almost surely extend them when they expire. Under the budget rules, that means Congress will then have to find offsetting spending cuts and taxes.

Finally, the proposed "cuts" in Medicare are essentially disguised tax hikes. Congress wouldn't cut benefits for retirees, but would reduce reimbursement for doctors and hospitals, which will be expected to make up the loss by raising fees for their non-Medicare, mostly middle-class patients.

The plan is not, contrary to Mr. Clinton's claims, a first step to a "national economic strategy." It's deficit reduction, pure and simple. But it would impose the burden of reducing the deficit on those most able to afford it. And it is far better than anything its opponents in either party have offered.
EDITORIAL

A call for change dominated last year’s election campaign, and the American people will soon find out if their elected representatives have the courage to deliver. President Clinton’s bold deficit reduction package is scheduled for final votes today in the House and tomorrow in the Senate. If it passes, it will have fallen victim to partisanship and shortsightedness – petty politics of the worst sort.

The president’s plan is the most important economic legislation to come before Congress since Ronald Reagan’s 1981 budget. That accord, and those that followed for the next 11 years, erected an impressive yet misleading facade of prosperity – one built behind a fragile scaffold of debt.

Clinton’s budget is not without flaws, not the least of which is the disproportionately high tax increase that will fall on middle-income retirees, a feature being played down by both political parties for obvious reasons. But the general thrust of the budget – raising taxes primarily on the most affluent Americans, bolstering the income of workers with the lowest wages and targeting new revenues to reduce the deficit – represents a vital first step in returning America to fiscal health.

The plan encourages growth not with debt and gimmicks but through incentives for investment and expansion. If the budget is passed, America could owe almost $500 billion less to its creditors by 1998 than if Congress had done nothing.

But Republicans – unanimously – and a handful of Democrats are shilly-shallying. They say they want the president to succeed – only not on his terms. They say they want to defeat the plan only so they can draft a better version – their own.

But make no mistake, if Clinton’s plan goes down in flames, no phoenix will rise from the ashes. The unanimous opposition of the GOP is understandable. Though Sen. Bob Dole’s response to the president’s address Tuesday was riddled with distortions, he is simply playing his partisan role. Senate Democrats who vote against the plan, however, deserve harsh political punishment.

If the plan passes, the Democratic Party will have demonstrated its control of both elected branches of government; it will have shown it can craft and implement a legislative agenda. If the plan gets shot down, the failure will give powerful ammunition to Republicans who say Democrats are an ineffectual bunch who can only bicker among themselves.

The single turncoat Democrat from New England is Rep. Dick Swett of New Hampshire, who plans to vote against the plan.

The announcement yesterday by Sen. Dennis DeConcini of Arizona that he will vote for the budget is a welcome sign that gridlock is on its last legs. The rest of the Democratic fence-sitters and wigglers should follow suit and show that their party can fulfill the mandate of last November’s election.

The Senate vote Friday is the closest thing America has to a parliamentary vote of confidence. If the Clinton plan passes, not only will the country benefit economically, but there will also be hope for crucial reform of welfare and the health care system.

If it fails, the Clinton presidency itself will falter, making it that much more difficult to tackle the other huge challenges the country faces.

For a man whose future political effectiveness could be decided in the next few days, President Clinton delivered a remarkably confident appeal Tuesday night for his economic plan.

But as much as he hoped to gain popular support by his televised speech, the president also wanted to give fence-sitting Democratic senators a convincing rationale to okay the plan. He needs some of those votes to pass the measure, which was approved initially only when Vice President Gore broke a tie.

For senators who face difficult re-elections, there are elements of the plan they can single out to justify a “no” vote. For some, it doesn’t do enough to limit the cost of entitlement programs or to stimulate investment. For others, a higher gasoline tax will cause pain for their constituents.

Despite its flaws—present in most political compromises—Clinton still offered a compelling, overriding reason why Democrats should pass his deficit-cutting bill. It’s a beginning, he stressed repeatedly, the start of a difficult process to return fiscal responsibility to Washington and to put the economy back on a sound footing.

“Passing this plan will be a bold step and the first step on a longer journey toward giving our nation a comprehensive economic strategy,” he said. “This economic strategy begins with putting our house in order, but it can’t end there.”

The nation must go on to tackle reform of its health care and welfare systems, he added, and to reshape the federal government itself.

Exaggerated rhetoric from both supporters and opponents of the bill has distorted its significance. If it passes, it won’t solve the deficit problem or what Clinton called America’s “economic crisis.” If it fails, the economy isn’t likely to slide back into recession, although there could be a rise in interest rates and a drop in stock prices as financial markets react to Clinton’s ability to govern.

Clinton made an important convert Wednesday, Democratic Sen. Dennis DeConcini of Arizona, who voted against the plan initially, announced he will go for it this time. His vote will offset that of Sen. David Boren of Oklahoma, who recently defected from the supporters’ ranks.

Even with DeConcini’s vote, passage isn’t certain because other lawmakers still are wavering. They should side with DeConcini so Clinton can take this first step. Then they should work to ensure that the administration completes the trip.
The Budget Logjam

DEMOCRATIC leaders in Congress say President Clinton's deficit-reduction plan will be passed by the end of this week. But a great deal of persuading and bargaining must be done between now and then to pull this off.

Democratic leaders and the White House have until Aug. 7 to find an uncommitted Senate Democrat to vote yes — thereby canceling the presumed negative vote from Sen. David Boren (D) of Oklahoma, who says he cannot, "in conscience," support the president's plan — even though it was modified to placate oil-state Democrats.

At this point the proposed legislation is as much symbol as substance, aimed at producing some $496 billion over five years from spending cuts and tax hikes. The gasoline tax of 4.3 cents per gallon that Mr. Boren can't abide is a time-honored source of government funds.

Although imperfect, the present compromise should be approved. The status quo is not tolerable. We hope the Democrats succeed in convincing at least one other recalcitrant party member to vote for it.

Yes' to the new budget plan

Today, it all comes down to this: The choice is either approving a serious federal deficit-reduction package, or abandoning this year's entire anti-deficit effort. There is no third choice, and there is no more time for delay.

For Ohio's representatives in Congress, the right vote is "Yes" on the first Clinton-era budget package. As the budget reconciliation measure nears its final showdown today in the House of Representatives and tomorrow in the Senate, Ohioans should support the five-year outline for restraining the deficit, promoting investment and restoring tax-code fairness.

The mammoth, five-year budget outline is certainly not perfect. Congress indulged in many disappointing compromises that protected special interests — especially agriculture and military programs — rather than cooperating with President Bill Clinton in slaughtering more of Washington's sacred cows. But this package, on balance, offers an acceptable combination of spending restraints and tax increases.

This package is designed to squeeze the deficit by $496 billion over the next five years, with $255 billion in spending restraints and $241 billion in higher taxes. Despite the doubts of cynics who claim that this package would not attack the deficit, this plan would reduce the projected deficit of about $300 billion in 1993 to an estimated $243 billion in 1994 and $198 billion in 1997. That's still not good enough — yet this plan would begin to substantially constrain the deficit.

Middle-income taxpayers have little to fear from this package. About 80% of the new revenue will be raised from families earning more than $200,000 — the wealthiest 2% of Americans, in the income bracket that gained most of the benefits from the excessive tax cuts of the 1980s. The middle class would be hit only with a 4.3-cent-a-gallon gasoline-tax hike, requiring the average motorist to pay an extra $29.90 a year.

The plan requires a "hard freeze" for five years, with no adjustment for inflation, on all discretionary programs. But the package also includes cost-effective new aid for those who need help most. About 18 million families with annual incomes under $30,000 would receive a tax break, thanks to the expansion of the Earned Income Tax Credit. Distressed inner cities would be helped by the creation of enterprise zones. About 25 million of the lowest-income families would get a modest increase in food stamps. An expanded child-inoculation program would provide early medical treatment to families in poverty.

Business could benefit, too. By encouraging interest rates to stay low, the budget plan could make it easier for businesses to invest and thus create jobs. A reduction in the capital-gains tax would promote long-term investment in start-up industries. And 90% of small business would be eligible for a tax break on new expenses.

Deficit reduction requires still more efforts to reduce spending — and that will require an overhaul of the nation's health-care system, which is by far the taxpayers' biggest budget-buster. But this first Clinton-era budget package offers a realistic way for America to start investing and growing again. This plan merits support.
An all-too-modest tax on gasoline

B race yourself for a predictable outcry over a sensible economic idea: increasing the federal tax on gasoline. The people who say "the only good tax is a dead tax" are certain to complain about Capitol Hill's decision to settle for even the most modest of its options for taxing energy consumption. But if the main point of this year's budget package is deficit reduction, skeptics ought to complain that an extra 4.3-cent-per-gallon tax really isn't enough. Opponents would be hard-pressed to make a case that the increase — projected to cost the average U.S. driver only $29.90 a year — would be an unbearable burden for middle-class taxpayers. In fact, the dime-a-day tax would be a small price to pay if it becomes a step toward reducing the federal deficit.

No one in Congress should consider using the gasoline-tax increase as a pretext for opposing the centerpiece of this year's budget package: the five-year, $466-billion deficit-reduction effort that awaits House debate tomorrow and Senate debate Friday.

The new tax would raise about $21.5 billion over five years, to be placed in a deficit-reduction trust fund. The depleted Treasury certainly can use the additional 4.3 cents a gallon for deficit reduction, atop the existing 14-cent levy used mostly for highways and mass transit.

The tax will bring in far less revenue than President Bill Clinton's original proposal for a tax on all energy sources, which would have raised at least $72 billion over five years. Of the broad range of increases proposed under the energy tax plan, the gasoline tax was the least onerous, which probably explains why a tax-shy Congress seems willing to take a chance on it.

Thanks to today's relatively low price of oil, there's plenty of room to raise the gasoline tax. Only twice in postwar history — in 1972 and 1988 — has the average inflation-adjusted national price been lower than today's $1.20 a gallon. Now, when oil is plentiful, is the least painful time to raise energy taxes.

This modest increase deserves Congress' approval as part of a plan to restrain the deficit. But it would have been far wiser if lawmakers had summoned the courage to tell Americans that their energy consumption is, by global standards, drastically undertaxed. Congress has again flinched from the logic of higher U.S. energy taxes.
Enact President's Problematic Budget

As President Clinton's budget bill totters toward congressional resolution, debate on it has become more and more a numbers game at which all sides play with tricks of accounting.

The charade became all the more visible after Clinton's linchpin broad-based energy tax was whittled down to the present 4.3 cents per gallon tax on gasoline. That amount would raise only about one-fifth of what the original proposal would have yielded.

This sets the stage for debating the economic plan in terms of its five-year impact on the deficit: Will it measure up? Clinton and his allies say yes; Republicans say no.

That argument misses one crucial point.

Although artfully described as a five-year deficit reduction blueprint, in reality the bill locks into place spending and taxes only for the first year. The remaining years are subject to whatever whims motivate future Congresses.

And while the Clinton administration boasts that its blueprint calls for matching $1 in spending cuts for every $1 in new taxes, that means a match by the end of five years. The first year calls for much more in taxes than in cuts, although estimates vary depending on which numbers are used.

To further blur debate, the president insists his budget will create 8 million jobs, while his main adversary, Senate Republican leader Robert Dole of Kansas says it would lose 1.5 million jobs. Both estimates can be made plausible by using different assumptions and projections, but it leaves the public wallowing in confusion.

Many economists agree that the budget bill now taking shape would represent, at the least, a holding action against what otherwise would be a swelling of the deficit.

If that is the best that can be had, it beats doing nothing. Passing the Clinton budget, with its modest 4.3-cent tax on a gallon of gas, would get us through the next year without further increasing a runaway deficit.

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Budget bill
Taxes rise, deficit continues

JUST as the cresting Mississippi heads for New Orleans, so the Democratic-run Congress heads for another tax increase. They call it a “deficit reduction plan.”

The floodwaters will recede, but not the tax increases. The government’s record $275 billion bite out of the economy will be doing damage long after the mud has been cleaned and the houses repaired.

President Clinton’s plan is the same as the spending plan taxpayers were forced to swallow in 1990.

The gas tax will rise by 4.3 cents. In 1990, it rose by 5 cents.

The top income tax rate will rise from 31 percent to 39.6 percent. Small businesses are expected to collapse under the strain. In 1990, a 10 percent “luxury” tax was placed on boats, airplanes and cars — and 19,000 boat builders lost their jobs.

Congressional Democrats promise spending “cuts,” but the “cuts” are really only a slowdown of the steady rise of government spending. In 1990, the same “cuts” were made.

The administration promises a reduction in the deficit. Congress said the same thing when it passed huge tax increases in 1990. Instead, the deficit rose to $327 billion a year.

Everybody in the United States is cutting back, from large corporations to individual consumers. The federal government should cut back too — not ask Americans to absorb huge tax increases that will cut economic growth.
CLINTON BUDGET

This version should not be approved

The political drama that has captured Washington over the last week — budget conference room scuffling over House and Senate differences while the White House pitches its economic program to political delegations, corporate chieftains and journalists — now comes to a close. By week's end, after President Clinton addresses the nation, Congress will cast its final vote on the budget package Mr. Clinton began presenting to it in February.

But while Mr. Clinton's aim is commendable — asking for tax hikes and spending cuts is never simple — his plan does not warrant final passage. In the end, it does not represent the best mix of variables.

Now, yes, the budget reconciliation bill Congress will vote on this week contains important steps. It's honest about the fact that tax increases cannot be avoided in any deficit reduction plan. It contains cuts in Medicare spending, which is to entitlement programs what teen-agers are to family grocery budgets: a driving force of expansion. And it keeps the ceiling on appropriated spending (defense, highways, FBI, water projects, etc.) that was implemented during the 1990 budget accord. The caps would provide a mechanism to keep spending levels on a flat line between 1994 and 1998.

Some of Mr. Clinton's spending increases also are sensible: More dollars for early childhood programs; expansion of a tax credit that rewards low-income Americans for working; and creating tax benefits for most small businesses.

Yet while the president was correct in telling Texas journalists last week that "it's hard to adopt a five-year budget," his long-term plan is not the final resting spot. The budget reforms may represent movement, but movement need not be confused with resolution.

A strong reason to push toward a better resting spot stems from this political period's uniqueness: Americans appear willing to absorb more spending cuts as a means to reduce the deficit. The evidence may be anecdotal, but what some Quinlan, Texas, residents recently told this paper seems representative. They would be willing to assume higher Social Security taxes, less Medicare spending and tighter cost-of-living adjustments in federal benefit programs to fight the deficit.

The White House and Congress should act on this kind of willingness and return in September to craft a deficit package that contains more spending cuts than tax increases.

In a conference call with editorial writers Monday, the president promised there would be more spending cuts later, when Vice President Al Gore submits his "re-inventing government" audit. But it is not fair to make tax increases retroactive to Jan. 1 and make spending cuts prospective. If history is a guide, the taxes are certain and the future cuts are uncertain.

The new cuts should also be actual, and not just a function of linguistic cleverness. For example, key Republicans and Democrats alike term higher taxes on Social Security a spending cut, just as they consider projected savings in interest expense on the national debt a spending reduction. Perhaps both changes give the treasury more money, but it's hard to imagine such semantic "reductions" are what Mr. and Mrs. America consider spending restraint.

By defeating the budget reconciliation bill this week, which the White House claims contains 80 percent of Bill Clinton's original economic plan, Congress could reconvene in September and take the budget process to a new level. Deeper cuts in the 20 percent of the budget that goes to domestic programs like honey and mohair subsidies, further reforms in the nation's $748 billion entitlement budget and a reduction in President Clinton's $100 billion in new spending for infrastructure and social projects are the places to start. The nation has an unusual opportunity to rectify its budget problems, and Congress should take advantage of this opening and assemble a different budget package.
Once upon a time had something to do

Hill. With Senator David Boren de
deals have been cut all over Capitol
examples make the final cut. similar
a S41 million sting, but the federal
gram for 1994-98. The Senate went for
easily, even if it's mostly in Utah. So
de la Garza will not give up any turf
that Candidate Clinton promised to
the honey money, the one subsidy
part of it survives in the final bill.
the latest word is that he'll make sure

Chairman Kiki de la Garza and Presi-
dent Clinton. But as of this writing,
Mr. Feingold was holding them all
hostage: after all. without his vote the
budget will fail.

For Texas's Kiki de la Garza the
nitty-gritty means a chance to stand
like the Alamo against cutting the
budget will fail.

For Texas's Kiki de la Garza the
nitty-gritty means a chance to stand
like the Alamo against cutting the
budget will fail.

Mr. de la Garza has already saved the
honey money, the one subsidy
that Candidate Clinton promised to
zero out, no doubt because most bee
farmers are in Western states popu-
lated by Republican senators. But Mr.
de la Garza will not give up any turf
easily, even if it's mostly in Utah. So
he made sure the House bill proposed
only a token $23 million cut in the pro-
gram for 1994-98. The Senate went for
a $41 million sting, but the federal
honey pot will live again.

These are only a couple of exam-
pies of what the nitty-gritty means to
them; whether or not these individual
elements make the final cut, similar
debates have been cut all over Capitol
Hill. With Senator David Boren de-
verting the 50-vote-plus-Gore passage of
the original bill, the swing vote now
appears to be Arizona's Dennis
DeConcini. We will probably never
know his price; we were lucky even to
find out about his interventions with
the rest of the Keating Five to protect
a crooked S&L.

Now, what the nitty-gritty means to
you: Your tax increase will be retro-
active to January 1. Struggle as
they might, the conference just
couldn't figure out any other way to
get to their deficit-cutting targets.

The last time increases in personal
tax rates were made retroactive was
during the Vietnam War. The John-
son administration imposed a special
surtax and made it retroactive for the
express purpose of slowing down an
overheated economy. It is, in short,
easily the opposite of what's needed in
an economy that's growing today at
a feeble 1.6% annual rate.

Come next April, not so incident-
tally six months before the next elec-
tion, a lot of taxpayers are likely to
find themselves underwithheld. Or,
since the big tax boosts affect upper-
income taxpayers and the firms they
declare on their personal income
taxes, next January or so they'll have
to dig into capital or take out loans on
the final installment of their esti-
mated taxes. They'll have to cough up
three quarters worth of taxes out of
one quarter's income— for that com-
pressed period a tax rate of 75% or so.
The Clinton Treasury has magnani-
mously agreed not to impose penal-
ties or interest charges on those who
underwithhold their taxes.

It's easy to predict that the first
quarter of 1994 will be an economic
bummer, just as the final quarter of
1992 was inflated because everyone
from Michael Eisner to Hillary Clin-
ton was cashing out income to beat
the expected tax increase. The econ-
omy will in any rate be suffering the
incentive-stifling effect of higher tax
rates, even before the double
whammy of retroactive increases.

Economic effects aside, there is
the issue of the simple justice of
retroactive taxation. If you're going
to make everything retroactive to
January 1, after all, why stop there?
Why not catch the Michael Eisners
and Hillary Clintons by making it De-
cember 1, 1992? Or maybe November
4, 1992, when Bill Clinton's election
was reported and everyone under-
stood taxes were going up.

Come to think of it, why not just
repeat the decade of greed, when by
Mr. Clinton's expressed view high-in-
come taxpayers didn't pay their "fair
share." If the Clinton-Rostenkowski-
Moynihan conference can make taxes
retroactive to last January 1, why not
to October 1, 1981, the date of the first
tranche of the Reagan tax cuts?
Where Gridlock Worked

The final, desperate argument for the Clinton-Rostenkowski-Moynihan budget deal is: Go along with our tax boosts and phantom cuts, or we'll give you something even worse. This is a point to be taken seriously. Defeating the first absurdity and passing a worse one is exactly what Congress did in the 1990 budget debacle. It could very well do the same thing with the Son of 1990.

Anyone who thinks that's the only way it can happen, though, should take a look at the current tax revolt in Michigan. When voters there spurned the mess of potage their politicians had cooked up, the two parties started to compete to give them what they wanted. With both Republican Governor John Engler and his probable 1994 opponent, Democratic State Senator Debbie Stabenow, on board the legislature repealed all property taxes for local schools. Much political turmoil lies ahead, but the momentum clearly is for change.

The Michigan pols had originally cooked up a bipartisan deal to provide property tax relief by jacking up the sales tax. Unlike their Washington counterparts, who think they have the power to rewrite history by making taxes retroactive, the Michigan crew had to submit their deal to a referendum. In June, voters turned thumbs down, electing for gridlock.

In the furious politicking that inevitably followed, Senator Stabenow concocted a ploy to make the Governor oppose a tax cut. She offered a bill to repeal the school tax entirely. Governor Engler had the alacrity to accept, promising to finance schools by cutting elsewhere. As the state House voted for tax repeal, lobbyists in the gallery held their heads in their hands. Michigan's property taxes will likely go from 30% above the national average to well below it.

Over the next year, lawmakers will replace much of the $6.5 billion they've cut, but only after they have restructured state education. The Michigan Education Association called the tax cut "one of the most destructive pieces of legislation affecting children in recent history," but Senator Stabenow disagrees with her long-time ally. She says, "We did not create a crisis; we created a deadline for solving the crisis." She is talking about replacing much of the lost revenue with increases in other taxes. She also muses about creating new regional authorities to restructure schools.

Mr. Engler says eliminating local property taxes gives Michigan a real chance to reform government. "In government, the taxing part is easy," he says, "It's setting the right policies and the right principles that's hard. This action forces us to do that." Governor Engler says he wants to change the "very definition of public schooling," building a new educational system that relies on choice, parental involvement and accountability.

Michigan's constitution bars vouchers that allow parents to select private schools, but he will at least push for full statewide public-school choice. The demand for schools that break the educational mold is enormous. Detroit's first self-governing charter school opens next month with room for 330 children. Over 2,200 applications were sent in.

Governor Engler is convinced better education doesn't require more money. He believes schools can shed much of the bureaucracy that soaks up a majority of education dollars. Michigan teacher salaries are high, given a 180-day work year. He wants to bring them into line with other workers. He will also push to let schools hire private firms to provide non-teaching services.

Whatever the eventual outcome, the mold is broken and change is in the air. This is clearly what the public wants; polls show an unsatisfied demand for radical political reform. It's too bad voters don't get the chance to express themselves in referendums nationally as they do in Michigan. Last year in California, not so incidentally, voters took up a "soak-the-rich" tax initiative much like the Son of 1990, and hooted it down by 58% to 42%.

We very much doubt that voters believe what's now before Congress will work. For that matter, members of Congress don't believe it either; they just go along because they don't trust themselves. They would do better to follow the Michigan example, call their own bluff and get on with the tough decisions of how to pare government back to what it can actually do.
A ‘Sausage’ Budget Down to the Wire

President Clinton is scheduled to press his budget case to the nation in a TV address tonight. The irony is that in beseeching viewers to urge their Washington representatives to vote for his budget, he is really asking his own Democratic Party for support. What that strategy means is that this is a budget that only connoisseurs of the sausage can love. Even so, sausage is sometimes the best deal on the menu. That is the case here.

Clinton’s budget has been chopped here and there to eliminate items distasteful to opponents and has been seasoned with a sprinkling of other compromises to feed waffling supporters. Political realities are forcing the President to deal, cutting the deficit by a bit less than the $500 billion that he had sought over five years.

But what are the alternatives to this budget? Ross Perot, despite his high-profile sniping at Clinton, offers an ambitious plan that, if not sausage, surely is hole-ridden Swiss cheese. As for the Republican alternative, it is a fine campaign document—but not a serious budget.

If Congress rejects the current budget, it will have to authorize a continuing resolution just to keep the government in business while legislators go back to square one and start over. Starting over would drag out the budget process considerably, offering no assurance of a better result but clearly the prospect of more gridlock.

The President’s budget has at least one virtue. Many economists and analysts believe that, absent major disruptions caused by global events, it would help gradually push down the deficit by reducing the increase in federal spending.

However, the budget proposes to do some things that worry us. A broad-based energy tax including home heating oil would have been our preference, instead of an energy levy only on gasoline. The Clinton approach does not take into account the greater distances typically driven in some parts of the country, especially here in the West.

The higher marginal rates for upper-income taxpayers would indeed help offset some of the spending increases; but would taxing the one sector of the economy that is purchasing and investing dampen hopes for a true recovery—and step all over the liquidity of small business people? Not even top Administration experts can answer that for sure.

President Clinton first laid out a deficit-cutting plan when he addressed a joint session of Congress last February. This was a move that the industrialized nations had long been seeking from the United States. In his own zigzagging way, Clinton is trying to deliver a sense of national self-discipline. It’s still his first year as President. He deserves support.
Takin What You Can Get

Few jobs for kids but, still, a few bright spots for L.A. in federal budget

Washington hasn't done enough to help Los Angeles provide summer jobs for kids. Many thousands of poor yet hopeful teen-agers and young adults wanted work during the break—but few could find any. They eagerly applied for the federally funded jobs, which were provided through city programs and community organizations. They were willing to do whatever they could to earn a wage that most adults would find paltry. But that $5.47 an hour, as any poor person (young or old) will tell you, is much better than nothing—which is exactly what you, is much better than nothing.

President Clinton's bold "Summer of Service" initiative would have delivered tens of thousands of jobs to youngsters across the nation. But Congress balked. Los Angeles city officials had expected from Clinton's proposal at least 40,000 jobs for low-income teen-agers and young adults, who are traditionally the last to be hired. To fill those jobs, government workers circulated 75,000 applications. But only about one in seven of 60,000 applicants got jobs—barely 11,000.

No doubt, the cuts were motivated by fears that an expanded summer jobs program would drive up the huge federal deficit. Yet after Los Angeles' riots last year, President George Bush personally pledged specific help. He promised to work with Congress in a bipartisan push for urban enterprise zones, which give businesses tax breaks to encourage entrepreneurs to bring jobs to poor neighborhoods. He also promised support for law enforcement efforts and new social programs.

Adding to the disappointment, Democrats as well as Republicans overloaded last year's emergency urban aid bill with a little something for everybody. The cost exceeded $1 billion. Bush, with some justification actually, then vetoed the legislation.

Washington's refusal to respond strongly places the burden of providing jobs on private businesses. The private sector can only do so much, even with the help of Rebuild-L.A., the public-private effort created to stimulate economic development in poor neighborhoods. A national disaster—whether man-made or natural, whether riots or floods—requires a response from the White House and Congress.

Fortunately, the budget bill, if the latest version survives, still contains some help for Los Angeles. It provides a few thousand summer jobs to help Los Angeles. It also includes some help for low-income housing and California's two senators—Dianne Feinstein and Barbara Boxer—there is funding for slimmed-down federal empowerment zones, presumably including Los Angeles. A business tax credit for research and development would be extended, as would tax credits for hiring disadvantaged inner-city youth and for low-income housing and mortgage bonds. So let's end this editorial by looking at the portion of the glass that is half full, rather than half empty.

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BUDGET PACKAGE

Plan may be imperfect, but it points in right direction

For Bill Clinton and Democrats in Congress, this week's votes on the budget reconciliation package were likely to emerge from the conference committee will provide defining tests.

The Republican minority in Congress has already defined its stance: no new taxes, no to any attempt to achieve greater fairness in the allocation of the tax burden, no to even a scaled-down version of a plan that attempts to combine human investment and deficit reduction.

The theory of that position—that any tax increase is inherently anti-growth and will not reduce the deficit—stills has many adherents. What President Clinton has argued, and what the Democrats are asked to accept, is that the country can make a major step toward deficit reduction without pushing the economy into recession.

The bill does not do everything it could have to cut the deficit. The administration will have to be even more aggressive in its next budget about cutting unnecessary spending. Above all, it will have to get a handle on health care costs, which have driven the cost of government generally.

Yet even with the pared-down energy tax, even with all the compromises that have reduced the human investment potential of this package, the program marks a real national commitment to deficit reduction. We hope that the Democrats in Congress will give Mr. Clinton the votes he needs to put this plan into effect.

And contrary to those, such as Ross Perot, who keep asking for delay, we hope Congress will move this week to end the uncertainty and show the country that it can act on some plan. That uncertainty, even more than the detail of the package itself, has been harmful to the nation.

It is time to make a decision. What Congress will consider this week is by no means perfect. It is, though, a serious deficit reduction package, and those in the president's party would be well advised to join the president and put it in place.

Perhaps then, with both parties firmly on the record about what fiscal policy they think will most benefit the country, the partnership will subside, and Congress can search with a little less rancor for what is best for the nation.
The Budget Shell Game

President Clinton, proclaiming the need to end "gridlock," began selling the budget deal last night. His pitch depends heavily on the promise that the agreement reached by Democrats in Congress would reduce the federal deficit by nearly $500 billion over the next five years. According to Clintonomics, lower deficits would keep interest rates low and lower interest rates would generate gushers of economic growth.

There are some big problems with this analysis, however. Interest rates have been coming down since 1981, so it’s not clear that this latest stab at deficit reduction would make any difference. And the level of interest rates becomes a moot issue if people fear for their jobs — or just don’t have any money.

Many struggling little firms will get socked next year with tax increases of nearly 25 percent, which could result in more economic stagnation. That will keep interest rates low, all right, but not because of Bill Clinton’s economic genius. Nobody will want to borrow any money.

The most profound problem with the Clinton budget lies with its most fundamental promise — that $500-billion deficit cut. You’ll remember that that is almost exactly the amount of deficit reduction promised by George Bush in 1990. Instead, the deficit promptly doubled.

One reason is that despite all the talk of “spending cuts,” spending actually increased rapidly. If you look closely at the Clinton budget figures, the shell game is being repeated. (Congress itself has not produced final figures on the budget, so we will illustrate the problem by citing the most recent Clinton administration proposal, which you can be sure understates the final spending figure.) Despite record cuts in defense — $120.6 billion over the next five years, twice the president’s campaign proposal — the Clinton budget includes the largest ever five-year increase in spending.

As a result, under the best possible circumstances, the deficit in 1998 will fall only to $250 billion — only $14 billion less than it’s predicted to stand this October.

So how does the president get away with claiming to “cut” the budget? The Clinton budgeteers estimate it would take a 25-percent increase in spending just to keep “baseline services” on track over the next five years. The president says he will increase spending by only 18 percent, however. Thus, by the weird logic of Washington, he “saves” tens of billions of taxpayer dollars — even though he spends, taxes and raises debt by unprecedented margins.

Yesterday various Cabinet officials were tasked with calling local editors to make a pitch for the emerging budget. Commerce Secretary Ron Brown drew The Detroit News. When we asked him to name one spending program that was being cut in the Clinton budget, he quickly responded “Medicare.” But when we asked him whether that meant spending on Medicare would decline in absolute terms next year compared to this year, there was a brief pause on the line: “Well, you know better than that,” he responded.

Yes, we do know better than that. But we still think it’s a point worth making. Mr. Clinton hasn’t ended gridlock. He’s simply perpetuating the same old shell game, much to the delight of the Democratic majorities in the House and Senate. Between them, they are giving gridlock a good name.
Earned-income credits make sense

With Congress in the final hours of negotiations over budget deficit reduction, one point still being hotly debated is the earned-income tax credit. Failure to include this tax break for low-wage workers would be more than callous. It would be fiscally irresponsible.

The tax break is intended to help workers making minimum wage stay out of the welfare system. The credit targets aid to those most deserving — working people who are trying to be independent.

Currently, the hourly minimum wage is $4.35. That means a full-time worker earns just $174 a week, or about $9,048 a year. For a teenager living with mom and dad, such wages are great. The youth can use the extra money to buy clothes and to keep another car in the driveway.

But for a mother trying to pay the rent and take care of a child, the minimum wage is simply too low to survive — especially in urban areas. After subtracting for rent, food and transportation, the worker has nothing left for insurance or a down payment on a house.

Raising the minimum wage would help working people stay out of poverty. But boosting the wage could also prompt companies to lay off workers to control costs. In addition, higher wages tend to drive up consumer prices, creating inflation.

A more sensible way to keep working families off welfare is to target aid to them with an increase in the tax credits on earned income. Under current law, a worker making $7,990 a year and having one child would get a maximum bonus of $1,836 in 1994. The Clinton plan would boost that bonus to $2,062. Such a change would bring the two-person family's annual income to just over $10,000 — enough to stay above the federal poverty line.

Such a system encourages people to keep working throughout the year so they can maximize their income. The Clinton plan also contains a small credit for single workers over the age of 22 who have no children. Those are the people struggling to establish themselves and build a work record. An annual bonus would help keep them in the workforce.

This tax credit program would increase government spending by some $21 billion over five years. But in time, it would lower costs by keeping people off the public dole and out of a life of crime. This is a first step toward real welfare reform.

The cost of the program could be offset by about a nickel of tax on gasoline. This is a very reasonable proposal that deserves congressional approval.
Nunn could turn the tide

"It's all politics now, hardball politics." That was Senate Republican Leader Bob Dole's assessment of negotiations in Washington as President Clinton tries to shore up support for budget reform. Mr. Dole was quite right about the politics. He should know.

He's the one who made sure the debate centered on party politics, not fiscal responsibility. He's the one who worked hard to see that not a single Republican will back the effort to control the budget deficit.

That means Democrats alone must determine whether this country moves forward with a responsible budget plan or continues down the path of irresponsibility. To get his package approved by Congress this week, Mr. Clinton must change the mind of least one of the six Senate Democrats who opposed the bill during the initial vote last month. Democrats outnumber Republicans in the Senate 56-44.

Back in June, the House and Senate each approved a version of a budget-reduction package. In the House, the proposal passed by a small majority. In the Senate, the vote was tied, so Vice President Al Gore had to cast the final "yes" vote. Now a compromise between the two versions of the budget is being negotiated by a conference committee of the House and Senate.

The final vote is expected this week. If approved, the country will be on its way toward reducing the deficit by nearly $500 billion over five years.

The final vote on a deficit-reduction package is expected this week. If approved, the country will be on its way toward reducing the deficit by nearly $500 billion over five years.

Unfortunately, Sen. David L. Boren (D-Okla.) has turned on the president. After demanding that Congress give up a broad-based energy tax, he got what he wanted, and then found other excuses to abandon reform.

As a result, the budget is doomed unless another Democrat comes into the Clinton fold. Sen. Sam Nunn of Georgia is one of those who could make a difference. If he were to swing to the president's side, the country would be able to move toward greater fiscal stability and lower interest rates.

Among Democrats who potentially hold the deciding vote, Mr. Nunn is in the best position to switch. For example, Sen. Dennis DeConcini (D-Ariz.) is facing a tough re-election fight next year in a state with many wealthy retirees. It's difficult for him to support a package that boosts taxes on Social Security. Mr. Nunn is not up for re-election for three years. Politically, he can well afford to support his party and his president on budget reform.

If Mr. Nunn refuses to do so, all the months of hard negotiations in Congress could collapse into chaos. The financial markets would react badly and interest rates would rise. The economy could fall into recession because of the confusion that would result.

Mr. Nunn may unleash an economic nightmare if he concerns himself more with his own rigid ideology than with the nation's progress. The time for a courageous stand is now.
Hypocrites hold up budget

As Congress prepares to vote on President Clinton's deficit-reduction budget, the outcome is still too close to call because many senators say they cannot back a budget with so few spending cuts.

They are, of course, exactly right about the meager cuts. The government should be slashing spending by $1 trillion—not $250 billion—over five years. Absolutely.

Unfortunately, that simply is not possible, given the rules that govern congressional elections. Because lawmakers are indebted to the special-interest groups that raise money for their re-election campaigns, they are pawns incapable of making tough decisions.

Without serious campaign reform, Congress is never going to cut spending significantly. The politicians will cry in front of the cameras about the importance of cuts, but they will go on spending.

Consider Sen. Richard Shelby of Alabama. He is a leading Democratic opponent of the budget package. We must have more cuts, he declares.

But while grandstanding against spending, Mr. Shelby also is working hard to waste government money on a project to benefit special interests in Alabama. He is sponsoring a bill to give $100 million over five years to a newly formed group called the American Metalcasting Consortium. The group wants to hand out government funds to metalcasting companies, many of which happen to be in Alabama.

The handout program would not require any private matching funds. It would not have any government oversight, nor would it be subject to competitive bidding.

When it comes to government spending, Mr. Shelby is a hypocrite, one with lots of company.

There's Rep. Joseph McDade, the Republican from Scranton, Pa., who can't possibly support the Clinton package because it lacks sufficient cuts. Of course, he twisted every arm in Washington to keep alive a program to spend millions of tax dollars on the Steamtown National Historic Site, a second-rate collection of railroad equipment that just happens to be in his district.

For months, the members of Congress—Democrats and Republicans—have been scrambleing madly to keep federal dollars flowing to their own special interests. The belowing about cuts is a joke.

In this system, reducing spending enough to balance the budget is not possible—period.

Mr. Clinton has cobbled together a realistic assortment of tax hikes and spending cuts that at least push the country closer toward balancing the budget. Sure, it's not nearly good enough. But passing this budget would slow the deficit enough to give the nation a chance to address its real problems. The best plan of action would be to approve this package as a stopgap measure. Then completely rewrite the campaign finance laws. Then elect people who are serious about fiscal reform. And finally, slash that budget.
SHOULD BE DEFEATED

The president's budget plan is a spending package

The five-year budget scenario on which Congress will vote Thursday and Friday is least often described by its most proper description: a spending package.

President Clinton's original budget plan has been much overhauled by the House and the Senate, but it still is essentially as proposed six months ago: A mind-boggling and fast-shuffling complexity of tax increases now — even retroactively — and spending reductions in later years, the arguments over which tend to disguise the large increases in federal government spending.

It is primarily on the grounds of that increased spending that the budget package should be defeated. It is to us unconscionable that the president and the Democrats controlling Congress, while boasting of deficit reduction, have added new and/or increased spending to that deficit.

Clinton's initial proposal had something close to $1 in new/increased spending for each $1 in spending reduction. The Republicans managed to block the economic-stimulus package which contained a part of the spending. There still remains something like $130 billion to $150 billion in increased spending.

Perhaps the best example of the too-clever arguments for more taxes, more spending in the Clinton plan is the increase in the earned-income tax credit. That is $21 billion in additional spending. The president justifies it as necessary to offset for lower-income working people the effects of the increased gasoline tax. Note what that means: If the gasoline tax was not raised, there would be no need for increased spending on the earned-income credit.

Much of what the president has proposed and the Democrats have given him — if it passes — is put together in the same fashion as the earned-income credit: a jumble of tax hikes and supposed spending cuts which muddles the reality of the bottom line: increased spending.

The country cannot afford that approach. There is no better time than now for Congress to make that point, and no better way than to defeat the president's budget plan.
Congress should approve Clinton's economic package

While the Clinton administration's economic plan does not reduce the deficit or cut expenses as much as it should, it is a fair one and does respond to the need for more social and fiscal responsibility. Congress should stop playing partisan games and pass it.

The government can no longer ignore the economic problems in the country that have accumulated over the years. And we as taxpayers simply cannot go on telling the government to cut somebody else's benefits, but not our own. That will not work.

The $496 billion package relies on higher taxes on the rich, though not onerously. Middle classes will pay little. Some Social Security recipients will pay a little more taxes on their benefits.

The gas tax of 4.3 cents per gallon is so minimal as to be ridiculous. People in the United States are terribly spoiled by their energy costs. Europeans pay as much as $4 for a gallon of gasoline.

But the best news is for the working poor. That includes a third of all El Pasoans, whose incomes fall below the poverty level. The increase in the earned-income credit will allow them to keep more of their wages.

Clinton's economic package is not perfect, but it is the only one out there that attacks the deficit.
What will be the effect on Arkansas if, or rather when, Bill Clinton's economic plan passes? Not good if a gasoline tax stays in. Here's why: There are only so many taxes any product will bear. Every penny in gas levies that makes its way to Washington is one that doesn't go to the state's own highway program. Fewer tax dollars, fewer new state roads.

The implications of such a tax didn't escape this state's governor. Jim Guy Tucker must have spent enough time around Bill Clinton to know that there's always a catch, and he saw this one immediately. The higher the federal tax on gas, the less room for a state tax, and the fewer highways may be built in Arkansas.

"We need roads in Northwest Arkansas," the governor noted, adding that folks in that part of the state who wanted to take a four-lane "shouldn't have to drive through Little Rock to get to Texarkana."

The president's proposed gas tax started at nine cents a gallon, and now has been whittled down to 4.3 cents a gallon. The 50 states won't see any of that revenue. The money will go straight to Washington, in order to "reduce the deficit." As if anything ever gets reduced up there except accountability.

One would feel better about the sacrifice involved, and the inadequate roads Arkansas will have to put up with a little longer, if there were some assurance that this tax would actually reduce the deficit. Instead, the administration's economic package tends to tax now but cut spending later, if ever.

There is a fairer way. Picking out gasoline to tax makes the president's proposal regressive. The poor will be paying as much as the rich on every gallon of gasoline bought. How much in extra taxes doesn't depend on how much you're able to pay, but only on how much gas you buy. Last time we checked, three-quarters of Americans earning less than $10,000 a year commuted to work.

The final version of the president's package needs to include some way of recompensing the poor for this additional tax, and it might. But there may be no provision to lighten the burden on the middle-class commuter. This era's Forgotten Man is the one caught in the middle.

Not just the poor but the rural pay more than their fair share when only gasoline rather than all fuel is taxed. The average American who lives outside a city drives more than 40 miles a day, compared to the 25 miles racked up by urban drivers. It's estimated that folks out West in the Rockies and Northwest will be paying 54 percent more in gasoline taxes than those in the more thickly settled mid-Atlantic states. Drivers in the Southwest may pay up to 48 percent more than those on the Eastern seaboard.

Originally, the president promised taxes on all forms of energy. That way, the burden would have been shared more fairly. Well, high hopes and campaign promises met political action committees, and the rest is history repeating itself. Fairness took still another hit. So did road programs in small, wonderful and rural states like Arkansas.
The Clinton deficit reduction package is now complete, but for minor details. It is ready to be voted on by Congress later this week. At no time in recent memory has so much depended on the results of a single vote. At stake is not merely the Clinton deficit reduction plan or to provide even a single vote for it in either house — an unprecedented attempt at political sabotage — their fate, a single vote for it in either house — an unprecedented attempt at political sabotage — their fate.

If Congress rejects the plan, the fragile credibility President Bill Clinton has built in favor of the reforms the economy needs will be shattered. The chance for any other successful legislative initiatives will virtually disappear. After a mere six months, the political establishment and much of the public will declare another failed presidency.

Congress must not let that happen. In particular, a few reluctant Democrats who remain uncommitted must not permit it. They must set aside their personal and parochial political concerns and give the president a chance to lead.

Despite the Republicans' refusal to participate in writing the deficit reduction plan or to provide even a single vote for it in either house — an unprecedented attempt at political sabotage — their fate, too, depends on this week's vote. The GOP may see the president a chance to win the "White House by wrecking the administration. But it will do the GOP little good to inherit a nation too divided, distracted and dispirited to govern.

Besides, there isn't much wrong with the Clinton package, even if it represents small steps in deficit reduction and investment incentives, instead of a grand plan. That it is not more ambitious is the fault of the very deficit it seeks to cut and the failure of the people to stiffen the spine of their legislators.

Cut through the rhetoric and consider what's in the package. It would cut the projected deficit five years from now from a possible $350 billion to as little as $200 billion if the economy doesn't stall. It does so both by cutting spending and raising taxes.

The tax rate would rise to 36 percent from 31 percent. On single with taxable incomes between $115,000 and $250,000 and for couples with taxable incomes between $140,000 and $250,000. Those earning more than $250,000 would pay 39.6 percent. The gross income required to generate these figures is substantially greater. For those earning such money to pay more is neither hardship nor punishment.

The corporate tax would also rise, to 35 percent from 34 percent. Only 12.5 percent of those on Social Security — singles whose incomes, including Social Security, exceed $34,000 and couples whose take is above $44,000 — would pay tax on 85 percent of their benefits, not 50 percent.

All motorists would pay 4.3 cents more a gallon in federal fuel tax, on top of today's 14.1 cents. Taxpayers are not alone in bearing the pain. Medicare spending would be cut; so would the earned income credit for the working poor. Small companies would get a higher deduction for equipment purchases; depreciation rules for real estate would be liberalized; a capital gains cut for certain investments in small business is included.

But the budget is not all pain; it contains several incentives for investment and needed help for the poor. Small companies would get a higher deduction for equipment purchases; depreciation rules for real estate would be liberalized; a capital gains cut for certain investments in small business is included. The earned income credit for the working poor would be expanded; so would food stamps and the child immunization program. Tax breaks for investing in poverty-stricken urban areas would be added.

These provisions may be modest, but they move in the right direction. They are certainly the most Congress will accept, making Ross Perot's and the GOP's call for still more cuts disingenuous if not downright silly. If the best is not to become the enemy of the good, this bill must be accepted.
Deficit decision time

No one said slashing the federal budget deficit would be easy, but President Clinton's plan, savaged from several directions, looks perilously close to defeat in Congress. Although far from perfect, it is the most coherent and soundest proposal on the table at the moment. Legislators who feel like blocking it should offer persuasive alternatives.

No plan that raises taxes and cuts popular programs is going to win a popularity prize on Capitol Hill. Republicans are united as rarely before in opposing tax increases, while many Democratic liberals are determined to protect Medicare and other programs against reductions. But if Washington is ever to bring down the corrosive and costly deficit, both sides have to bend a little. It is Mr. Clinton's challenge to get the votes necessary to pass a reasonable facsimile of what he proposed last winter.

It won't be easy. The package hangs by a hair in the Senate, and only slightly more securely in the House. A few Democratic defections in either chamber could mean the bill's defeat. Mr. Clinton has to make the case, more vigorously than he has, that fiscal discipline of the sort that his measure contains is crucial to lightening the deficit burden on the economy.

A creditable final compromise, acceptable to both the House and Senate conferees, is not out of reach. Nearly all Democrats support most elements in the deficit-reduction package; but there is opposition to a gasoline tax increase (a fair and simple revenue-raiser), and here Mr. Clinton needs to stand firm. lest anti-tax critics reduce the whole package to mush.

But the President needs to heed one leading Democratic skeptic, Sen. David Boren of Oklahoma, who wants the package to contain more spending cuts. Senator Boren makes a strong case. Not only is there room to trim back spending without seriously harming any large constituencies, but Mr. Boren's vote could be pivotal when the Senate votes on a House-Senate compromise.

Congressional Republicans, who have stood steadfast against the Clinton plan, would have had more credibility if they had offered a serious alternative of their own. Such an initiative might have paved the way for a bipartisan compromise that would have brought credit to both parties. Instead, the GOP has chosen the role of obstructionist. And Sen. Robert Dole's vague and fatuous "program" to start imposing "spending caps" on entitlements in fiscal 1996 is a joke.

A new Wall Street Journal/NBC News poll shows growing public support for the Clinton plan, with fully 54 percent of those polled saying that the plan represents a step in the right direction. This suggests that Congress would take risks in spurning the package. Defecting Democrats in particular would risk labeling their party as inept and unable to govern effectively.

President Clinton has given Congress a generally prudent measure that responsibly attacks the swelling deficit, which represents the most severe long-term threat to the economy. Some sharper spending cuts are highly desirable (how about eliminating such scams as the honey subsidy, instead of just reducing them?); they probably would bring enough Senate skeptics back on the reservation to secure passage. In any event, the President needs to remind Congress and the nation of the consequences, first in the financial markets, if the deficit is not cut.
The tax bill: pain but no gain

Last night, President Clinton gave his tax-and-budget plan one last push. Again we heard his familiar numbers and claims: The package will reduce the federal deficit by nearly $500 billion; it will cost most Americans next to nothing; the rich will pay through the nose; and anybody with courage, decency, and patriotism ought to support it.

Well, we don't support it. A majority of Americans doesn't support it. History doesn't support it. The Clinton bill gets its final votes in the House and Senate this week. It deserves to be defeated.

Only in the unreal world of Washington politics does this bill make sense. Take the by-now standard claim that it will cut the deficit $500 billion within five years. Let's see. The budget deficit this year is projected to be $285 billion. In the fifth year under the tax bill, the deficit would stand at $210 billion. So where does $500 billion come from? From comparing real numbers with an imaginary estimate of where the budget would be in five years if spending trends continued unchanged. Americans deserve better than to be told that a $75 billion deficit reduction is really 6% times larger. And they deserve better than a patronizing assurance that it won't really cost anybody but the rich a thing.

For one thing, higher gasoline taxes will directly hurt everybody. And they'll indirectly hurt everybody even more, as the higher costs of transporting everything from food to building supplies get added to consumer prices. Some firms won't be able to absorb their higher costs, and will go out of business. When they do, layoffs will follow. Estimates of job losses caused by a gas-tax increase range up to 132,000.

Hiking tax rates on the rich (and on small firms that are usually taxed through individual returns) will also cost jobs. The more they pay in taxes, the less the wealthy will have left to invest. The less they invest, the fewer new businesses will be launched, the fewer new jobs created, the less economic growth.

Just three years ago, tax rates on high incomes, gasoline, and payroll earnings were raised. Then, too, the payoff was to be a $500 billion reduction in the deficit. It didn't work in 1990, and it won't work in 1993. Tax revenues will come in well below the projections and the economy will struggle along at an anemic growth rate.

George Bush promised "No new taxes," then broke his word. He paid the price in 1992. Bill Clinton promised a "middle-class tax cut," and is now breaking his word. Maybe he hasn't learned from history. Let's hope congressional Democrats have.
No Guts

Lawmakers caved on the gas tax. Congress better find the nerve to pass the compromise.

The deficit-reduction plan worked out in conference committee is disappointing, falling short of its overall dollar target and scrapping some needed social legislation. But the final product appears to be close enough to President Bill Clinton's primary goal — cutting $500 billion over five years from federal budget deficits — that lawmakers have no responsible choice now but to approve it.

No single vote that Congress is likely to take during the next four years is as important to the long-term health of the U.S. economy. It's outrageous that the Senate couldn't muster the courage to approve a significant gas tax increase. The negotiators had already given up on retaining Clinton's broad energy tax, which the House had endorsed earlier. All Finance Committee chairman Daniel Patrick Moynihan was asking of his colleagues was a modest increase of about two cents, to 65 cents a gallon, in the gas tax hike the Senate had already approved. But no soap. No guts.

As a result, there will be less money for expanding the earned income tax credit, less for extending Head Start for children's immunization programs. And relatively larger reductions in spending for Medicare. Too bad.

Even worse is the message it sends to the nation. If the deficit is the major economic problem we face, as the president has said — and if not dealing with it will jeopardize the nation's economic future, as it will — how can members of Congress be so utterly gutless when faced with a politically difficult step? And why didn't the president push harder for a higher gasoline tax?

Nevertheless, the overall package does meet Clinton's broad goals: a deficit cut of about $500 billion, an energy tax, higher taxes on the wealthy. The actual deficit reduction of about $490 billion is only slightly under Clinton's target, and Washington's biggest, ever.

And despite the package's shortcomings, getting a handle on the deficit is of such paramount importance to the U.S. economy that the bill fully merits Congress' approval.

That's not guaranteed. Republicans are reflexively and unanimously opposed. Conservatives wanted more spending cuts; liberals wanted more for new programs. And Sen. David Boren (D-Okla.), who supported the Senate bill, says he'll vote no on the compromise. So every vote will be important. We'll be watching New York legislators' votes in particular, to see if they are ready to put the public interest ahead of narrow, short-term goals.
THE REGISTER'S EDITORIALS

What is all the fuss?

If Clinton's deficit-reduction package doesn't pass, what will?

From all the sound and fury in Washington, you'd think that a monster earthquake was about to happen. Would that it were so, but it isn't.

Listen to the Democrats and they'll tell you about a historic breakthrough in deficit reduction. Listen to the Republicans and they'll tell you that making people pay 5 cents more for a gallon of gas will bring the Republic to its knees.

In reality, the Clinton budget started out as a modest proposal, then was watered down. It will neither conquer the deficits nor be the ruin of the country. At best, it's just a beginning toward getting the nation's fiscal house in order.

Where is the big change that people voted for? Where is the reordering of priorities? Where are the investments in the economy that Americans were supposedly ready to make?

The Clinton plan does include a slight reordering of priorities away from military spending and toward domestic needs. But the investments in the economy generally died for lack of congressional enthusiasm. And the shared sacrifice ran into the reality of special-interest politics: Who, me? Sacrifice? Let somebody else do it.

So the plan President Clinton tried to sell on TV last night ended up somewhat short of his goal of $500 billion in deficit reduction. And even that is shaky, because many of the "cuts" in spending are contingent on future congressional action. Moreover, while $500 billion may sound like a lot of deficit reduction, it's spread over five years. Even with the deficit reduction during those five years, another $1 trillion will be added to the national debt (now somewhat over $4 trillion).

In round numbers, the red ink is now piling up at about $300 billion each year. In the fourth year of the Clinton plan, it will be piling up at "only" $200 billion a year. After that, the deficit is projected to start growing again, unless a way is found to stem rising health-care costs.

That's what all the fuss is about. If anything, Clinton's plan is too cautious, yet it has Congress in a tizzy. The president had to back off his proposed broad-based energy tax and settle for a minor gasoline-tax increase, plus accept some phudging of the numbers to stay in the ballpark. Imagine the shock if the president presented something that really tackled the deficits.

Like most legislation born of compromise, the budget plan isn't pretty sight. And who knows how many goodies the lobbyists managed to get tucked away in the conference-committee report. Still, it is the only deficit-reduction bill in town.

Voting for it will be the only opportunity this year for members of Congress to stop flapping their gums and actually do something about the deficits — a little something, anyway.
Today's debate is on the **CLINTON BUDGET PACKAGE** and whether it should be approved by Congress.

# Deficit-reduction bill is good start, but just a start

**OUR VIEW**

The increase in debt still poses a threat to today's young people. But it's better than nothing.

"More to come"

That's what President Clinton promised Tuesday in his campaign for a five-year, $496 billion deficit-reduction package hammered out by House-Senate budgeters.

In proclaiming the compromise "the beginning, not the end" of budget cuts, Clinton gives a nod to this reality:

Even if this plan works, the federal deficit — the amount added to the nation’s debt each year — will only drop from $285 billion this year to about $210 billion in 1998. And then it will start rising.

Critics are playing upon that fact to stir up public resentment. People have grown cynical about a process that forever either taxes them more or deprives them of a needed program without ever bringing the budget close to balance. They have a right to be.

But that can’t be an excuse to do nothing. It should be an argument to get these deficit measures enacted and then come back and do more. Consider this:

As a share of the nation’s whopping $4.3 trillion gross federal debt, a family of three now owes about $50,000. If nothing is done, that family’s share will zoom to $75,000 in 1998 and to nearly $110,000 by 2003.

The budget-reduction plan would cut that bill down to $70,000 for 1998 and $90,000 for 2003.

That's not enough, as critics contend. But truly doing more about the deficit requires something Congress and the nation right now lack — the stomach to go where the money is: the middle class.

This plan demands almost nothing directly from them.

Only the wealthiest 1% or so of taxpayers will be hit with higher income taxes — on average amounting to about $23,000 a year.

The average family will pay less than a buck a week toward deficit reduction — through a 4.3-cents a gallon gas tax.

With fluctuating gas prices, drivers hardly will notice the change.

Cuts alone aren't a viable alternative. Many of the biggest ones in this plan are nothing more than another kind of tax — although a hidden one.

When an average $11 billion a year is cut out of Medicare, for instance, the brunt of the burden won't be borne by doctors and hospitals. They'll merely shift the cost to insurers and business, who will pass it on to — guess who — the middle class.

The economic impact of deficit reduction? It will slow the economy, as critics claim. But only for a while. There's no way to escape that short-term pain unless the deficit is never touched. And then a problem would turn into a crisis.

Clinton is right. There must be more to come. And that more must include enlisting the middle class in the budget-deficit fight:

- With health-care reform that brings those spiraling costs under control.
- With higher taxes, particularly on energy which we continue to waste.

But before doing more, Congress must first do something — pass this deficit-reduction plan.

**The budget: Who pays**

How much different income levels on average will pay in added taxes:

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<th>Income Level</th>
<th>Added Taxes (in $)</th>
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<td>$200,000-plus</td>
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Source: USA TODAY research

**Tax plan. 1A**
Budget Plan Merits Approval

Now that the critical crunch point on the budget compromise has come, the choice is plain: Should Congress, despite a variety of reservations about our new president’s approach, give life to his plan to begin to deal with our deep-seated economic problems? Or should this much-debated program be dismissed for failure to meet each and every challenge with precision and efficiency?

The only proper option is enactment of the compromise. Rejection will simply mean more of the same old divisiveness and stagnation.

Clinton: ‘... only two choices. Our plan and no plan’

This budget compromise is not ideal. Many of the president’s major proposals, particularly the form an energy tax will take, have been altered beyond recognition — and not for the better. There’s increased fairness in income tax apportionment, but there’s still too much reliance on taxes to do the job.

It is appropriate to place a major tax burden on the very rich. But just how far down will the higher tax bite go? There are differing interpretations. The president has pledged that working families with incomes under $180,000 a year would not pay higher income taxes. That presumably would protect the middle class, which sorely needs sympathetic treatment.

There is also the matter of making taxes retroactive, a practice repugnant to most of the public. Americans don’t expect this kind of uncivil pocket-picking on an ex-post-facto basis.

This said, though, the Clinton program, for all its faults, is a start and a courageous one. As the president put it: “Now there are only two choices. Our plan and no plan.” One can respect dissenting arguments and still say the opportunity must be seized to move forward.

President Clinton was elected by the American people in large part to kick start the economy and bring some fairness to the tax equation. He deserves the chance to carry out his plan.
Clinton’s budget pitch

Almost six months have elapsed since President Clinton first outlined plans for his administration’s first budget. In the interim, there has been a barrage of rhetoric by its supporters and opponents, and virtually every argument that was made has been countered, good or bad. It was not surprising, therefore, that Mr. Clinton had little new to add as he intensely lobbied to nail down undecided votes in what is expected to be an extremely close congressional vote.

“We are dependent on people who do not have a lot of money,” the President said. “Their vote is not dependent on people like us.”

Mr. Clinton had his now-familiar pie charts and bar graphs as he appealed to a television audience for support for a program, with rhetoric that was also familiar. Once again, he sought to shield himself in the mantle of responsibility and to paint the label of irresponsibility on his Republican opponents. It would be irresponsible not to take decisive action to reduce the budget deficit, he said.

Mr. Clinton is at his best when he is in campaign mode, attempting to sell either himself or his program, which in this instance calls for a new tax increase. His budget address can be looked upon as an effort to exert public pressure on those members of Congress who are still undecided about their vote.

Sen. Bob Dole, the Senate Republican leader who leads a Republican phalanx of opposition to the Clinton plan, used the same Clinton technique in his rebuttal address that immediately followed the President’s remarks. While Sen. Dole was strongly opposed to what he called “the biggest tax increase in world history,” it should also be noted that he did not offer an alternative deficit-reduction proposal.

Mr. Clinton emphasized that 40 percent of the new tax money would be paid for by the wealthy—those making $200,000 a year—whose taxes, along with others, including a gasoline tax, will be raised retroactive to Jan. 1. While this is true, public skepticism on this point runs high. Polls show many people with lesser incomes, whose income tax will be unaffected by the changes, are still of the opinion they will pay higher income levies.

While there are other ways of cutting the budget deficit than the one proposed by the President, his plan is the only one likely to pass this year. The solid Republican opposition to any new taxes has been a barrier to any viable alternate proposal.

In the end, the biggest single argument for raising taxes now is that they were lowered too much in the past. In 1981, Ronald Reagan cut taxes by the largest amount ever and the result was the enormous budget deficit that now exists. Mr. Reagan claimed then that lower taxes and a balanced budget were not incompatible. This statement has been proven false.

The Clinton budget is far from a cure for all our fiscal ills but it is an overdue starting point, providing $498 billion in deficit reduction over five years. That’s an imperative as we labor to come out from under a mountain of debt, a mountain that will be even heavier if the Clinton plan fails.
Tax and Spend

Congressional negotiators finally have settled on a compromise version of the five-year budget plan sought by President Clinton. Some details remain murky, but the known specifics suggest the budget plan — if it passes — would do what Clinton swore he would not do as a “new” Democrat: Tax and spend.

Look at the highlights: Individual income tax rates would increase — with the increase retroactive to January 1. (As Senate Minority Leader Bob Dole points out, Congress at least could have made the date January 20, Clinton’s inauguration day.) The budget would raise Social Security taxes and corporate taxes. It likely would cut the moving expenses deduction and certain business deductions. It would impose a 4.3-cent gas tax. Finally, it would impose fees on banks and financial institutions — another tax.

What about spending cuts? That seems to be Congress’ attitude as well — what about them?

Medicare would receive a $56 billion cut … sort of. The actual arrangement provides for a cut in the growth of Medicare spending, not a true spending cut. Medicaid spending supposedly would grow $7 billion less than it would without the budget compromise. The compromise bill would create $2.7 billion in new food stamp benefits. And the President wants a new entitlement program aimed at family preservation.

The remainder of spending cuts would come from defense, which Clinton threatens to cut by twice what he promised, which was twice what many experts argued would be the maximum permissible for national security. In 1961, before the era of big deficits, defense spending accounted for 51 percent of the federal budget. Now it accounts for 26 percent. Defense spending keeps falling; the deficit keeps rising.

As is customary, the tax hikes would take effect immediately, if not sooner. The spending cuts (or reductions in the growth of projected spending, or whatever) would occur some time in the misty future. When George Bush broke his “no new taxes” promise and signed on to the 1990 budget agreement, he and Congress promised raising taxes would lower the deficit $500 billion in 5 years. The deficit rose. Congressional negotiators now promise raising taxes would lower the deficit … $500 billion in five years.

Any bets?
President Clinton surely realizes better than anyone that his deficit-reduction package isn’t going to win him any popularity contests. His best hope — and the country’s — is that most people have long enough memories to understand the need to deal responsibly in 1993 with the deficit mess that the federal government began creating for itself and all of us back in 1981.

“I inherited this big federal deficit just like you did,” the president said in his Tuesday night national address, “and I don’t like taxes any more than you do. But our nation is in economic danger, and now we’ve got to take this problem we inherited — you and I — and do something about it.”

As the Reagan administration’s director of the Office of Management and Budget, David Stockman was the primary architect of the irresponsible economic plan that is still haunting the federal government 12 years later. Today, Stockman is a repentant sinner. He says that he and other Reagan White House officials realized early on that it would be impossible to give huge tax breaks to the wealthy and approve massive increases in defense spending without creating disastrous deficits.

“The job of every president since Reagan — a sunshine boy who didn’t want to acknowledge that the deficit was his problem — is to distribute and administer pain,” Stockman recently told The New Yorker’s Sidney Blumenthal. “Clinton is mired neck deep.”

So are we all. The Clinton proposal is at best a deficit-stabilization plan that doesn’t begin to attack the chronic gap between spending and revenues that began with the 1981 budget. However, given the howls of pain that even this modest effort has provoked from Republicans and Democrats alike, the president can hardly be blamed for failing to take even bolder action.

Congressional Republicans are being cynical. Senate Republican leader Bob Dole said in his Tuesday night response that he and his colleagues unanimously oppose the president’s budget plan because it would add another $1-trillion to the deficit over the next four years. However, he failed to note that his own vague alternative would create even larger deficits. And where did Dole hide his balanced-budget rhetoric while the Reagan administration was tripping the national debt?

Meanwhile, congressional Democrats are running scared. That, too, is nothing new. They were too timid to offer any serious opposition to the Reagan budget fiasco 12 years ago, and many of them are afraid that a vote for budgetary restraint will be held against them now.

Polls suggest that they may be right. The president’s plan has produced considerable public opposition, much of it based on a fundamental misperception of what it would do. In one survey, 68 percent of respondents said that the taxes in the proposal would fall primarily on the middle class. That simply isn’t the case. The great majority of Americans would pay only a few dollars a year more as a result of a 4.3-cent-a-gallon increase in the gasoline tax. Only those working families making more than $180,000 would see their income taxes increase. Meanwhile, low- and middle-income Americans would benefit from several programs designed to restore an element of fairness to a tax code that has greatly favored the rich since 1981.

However, many members of Congress don’t want to be bothered with the facts. They care more about their own short-term political fortunes than the long-term economic security of the country, and they are betting that voters are selfish, ignorant of the details of the president’s plan and forgetful of recent history.

If this deficit-reduction plan fails in Congress as a result of Republican posturing and Democratic cowardice, Stockman’s description of events in 1981 will apply equally well today: “The whole thing got turned into a cynical, politicized, surreal substitute for sane fiscal governance.”
Bosnia: Air strikes and striking a deal

A Timely Threat on Bosnia

You can read it on the front page. Administration officials, speaking on condition of anonymity, announced today that Bill Clinton is getting tough. First a greenhorn State Department spokesman said the United States would use air strikes to defend Sarajevo, whether or not NATO allies agreed. Then President Clinton said it wasn't exactly like that. Then one of those handy nameless officials said, oh, yes, it was.

O.K., so it wasn't pretty to watch. These days, you take signs of White House resolve—of any kind, on any issue—where you can find them. And on this issue, the Clinton Administration is picking the right time to try to threaten convincingly.

* * *

Having learned, at some cost, the distinction between passive consultation and alliance leadership, the Administration now offers its NATO partners a serious plan for using air power to prevent the destruction of Sarajevo and put constructive pressure on the Geneva peace talks.

Washington's purpose is not to refight a lost war but to stabilize the zone, saving innocent lives and deterring aggressors from once again mocking their own pledges of compromise peace. That's why the Administration is acting now, with peace negotiations in a delicate phase and Sarajevo under its heaviest and most of the heavy Serbian guns around Sarajevo, along with laser-guided bombs in a few days of concentrated attacks. If necessary, low-flying A-10 "Warthog" planes now based in Italy could hit Bosnian Serb targets with high-tech infrared-beam-guided missiles, the same combination used against Iraqi armor during the Persian Gulf war.

Washington has threatened air strikes before, but then backed off after European allies argued that such actions would disrupt peace negotiations, endanger U.N. troops and further provoke the Serbs. But Serbian leaders themselves have refused all those arguments for their brazen duplicity at the bargaining table and unrestrained attacks, even on U.N. forces.

The fact that Europeans on U.N. duty have themselves come under Serbian attack may now begin to break down longstanding British and French objections to showing partiality between Bosnia's Serbian and Croatian militias and its Muslim-led Government. Yesterday NATO ministers were still unprepared to endorse the Clinton proposal, though they vowed to prevent Sarajevo's fall.

Ideally, the credible threat of NATO air strikes would be enough to assure good-faith bargaining and deter further assaults on Sarajevo. But perhaps not. In any event, Washington needs to be absolutely clear about the limits of its military involvement, both strategically and tactically. It should not act unilaterally. It should not directly enter the war, even on the side of the legitimate government; but it should confine itself to protecting civilians and encouraging a political settlement. And it should avoid ground combat involvement for any purpose.

Even with these cautions, the Clinton proposal marks a clear advance over the fumbling effort to organize the allies a few months ago, when Secretary of State Warren Christopher's mild suggestions for a "greenlight" for NATO's French and Spanish troops as¬signed to UN peacekeeping units came under attack, reminding one and all that a Security Council decision to furnish air cover for peacekeepers had yet to be implemented. Nor has the UN fulfilled a pledge to provide "safe havens" for Muslim communities.

Responding to the deteriorating situation in Bosnia, President Clinton restated a U.S. commitment to help out. "The United States is bound, we are committed," Clinton said, "to come to the aid of the United Nations forces, as a part of NATO, if they are attacked. And they have been.

Even so, the peacekeepers aren't necessarily cia¬morning to have allied fighter-bombers take out Serbs in their behalf. "It's an option we don't think needs to be used at this time," their spokesman said.

If it is needed at some point, limited American participation can be justified. A more ambitious air campaign is another matter. However, a dangerous matter. Allied warplanes, and certainly U.S. aircraft and crews, should avoid indulging in an escalating series of attacks on Serb positions.

But perhaps that risky course of action just got a lot easier to avoid, thanks to timely saber-rattling heard in Geneva and Bosnia. Dare one hope?
In Bosnia, the Clock Ticks

Stung by taunts it has been indecisive and timid in reacting to the Bosnian conflict, the Clinton administration has muscled its NATO allies into authorizing air strikes to end the "strangulation" of Sarajevo and to ensure the delivery of relief supplies to that stricken city. Important decisions still have to be made about where United Nations authority ends and NATO's begins if continued Serbian aggression requires actual use of air power.

U.N. Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali has contended "it is his responsibility to initiate, in consultation with the Security Council, actions of this type." Secretary of State Warren Christopher has declared the NATO will be prepared "to use air power against Bosnian Serb targets at times and places of NATO's own choosing."

There is an obvious tension between those two statements, but they are not incompatible. The assertive Mr. Boutros-Ghali may "initiate" a peace-enforcement operation that NATO will implement according to its "own choosing."

This time, however, the U.N. will not be just the facade for U.S. power it was in Korea and the Gulf War, nor will it be in actual command and control, as is currently the case in Somalia. Look for something in between, something in which the misgivings of the British, French and Canadians with peacekeeping troops on the ground exert limitations on the U.S. military.

NATO involvement in Bosnia, if it comes to pass, will convert what has long been a defensive alliance against the old Soviet Union into an offensive arm of the United Nations. How NATO performs in this role is linked to the international community's current interpretation of "a new world order."

The immediate question is whether the threat of NATO air strikes will encourage the peace process, as Washington hopes, or stymie it as U.N. negotiators David Owen fears. The Serb offensive against Sarajevo continues and the Bosnian Muslims, hopeful for outside help at last, are reluctant to implement an ethnic partitioning plan they sorrowfully accept last weekend.

The Clinton administration is restricting its goals in Bosnia to lifting the siege of Sarajevo, getting in humanitarian supplies and protecting U.N. forces from attack. It has not undertaken to roll back the Serbian and Croatian aggressors but, on the contrary, seems to have supported partition.

This arrangement is less than heroic, which is just as well, since the Pentagon is rightly wary about getting entangled on the ground in a Balkan rivalry going back centuries. Those who have to fight wars often try to restrain politicians and diplomats from embarking on military adventures of that reach beyond legitimate national objectives.
President Clinton’s affirmation of US willingness to participate in a UN-sanctioned air response to Serbian attacks on UN peacekeepers is a sound reaction to this anguishing conflict. It would be a mistake, however, to expect that it will affect the outcome unless Serbs commit themselves to ending their assaults on Bosnians and participating in meaningful negotiations. The early signs are not encouraging.

UN officials have clearly defined the terms on which planes might be used. Aircraft will be limited to attacking sources of gunfire on UN forces in Bosnia, and then only as a last resort. The limit guarantees that the United Nations and its member nations will not militarily affect the outcome of the war.

Whether the limited UN move can persuade the Serbs to cease their assault on Sarajevo and other Bosnian enclaves is uncertain. Serbian endorsement of a cease-fire agreed to in Geneva by Bosnians and Croats had scarcely been announced when new gunfire erupted near Sarajevo. Whether the outbreak reflected freelance military action by individual units or hypocrisy in Belgrade also remains unclear.

From a military point of view, the utility of UN-US air attacks on artillery posts also remains in doubt. Lacking ground-based spotters, aircraft would be shooting blind, risking collateral damage that might have political repercussions. Putting spotters on the scene might require greater military participation than outsiders have yet been willing to undertake.

Deteriorating military outlook means Bosnians must hope that international pressure can lead the Serbs and, to an increasing degree, the Croats to stabilize the situation in order to avoid additional world criticism. UN-sponsored countermeasures, limited though they may be, might help. That small comfort may be the most the Bosnians can hope for.
Why Intervene Now?

It looks as if American air power may be put to use in the war in Bosnia. Ironically, the air attacks will come, if they come at all, long after American military might have influenced events.

Initially the United States offered its air power to protect United Nations peacekeeping forces after a peacekeeping unit in Sarajevo, made up of French soldiers, came under attack from Serb gunners. The U.N. Security Council had authorized the use of air power in such circumstances earlier, but when the United States declared itself ready its NATO allies demurred. Even the French said they didn't think that air strikes were necessary. And U.N. Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali said if air attacks were to be launched he would be the one to decide.

Undeterred, the Clinton administration said it would instigate air attacks to prevent Sarajevo from falling to the Serbs and humanitarian aid from being cut off. Again, the country's NATO allies responded without enthusiasm. However, when the administration said it would probably go ahead anyway, the NATO allies' resistance seemed to weaken.

Aside from the risks to American fliers, the air raids raise several questions that one would hope have been fully answered by U.S. military leaders and Clinton strategists. Would the targets be Serb gun emplacements outside Sarajevo? How difficult would it be to destroy them? After they had been destroyed could they be easily replaced? Or does the U.S. contemplate a broader attack on Serbian military capability — supply depots, command centers, ground units? Finally, why now?

Muslims, Croats and Serbs are meeting in Geneva to divide Bosnia-Herzegovina among them. What is mainly left to decide is how much of the country to allow the Muslims to have. Perhaps Mr. Clinton is trying not only to keep Sarajevo out of Serb hands but to see that the Muslims are treated fairly.

Whatever his objectives, the air attacks could lead to a war between the Serbs and the U.N. peacekeeping forces on the ground. If, in that event, the French and British withdrew, the situation would worsen for the people of Bosnia, and Mr. Clinton's Air Force couldn't do much about it.

Clinton stands up to NATO, the Serbs

Shortly after President Clinton sought allied air strikes to protect Sarajevo, the Muslim president of Bosnia withdrew from peace talks with Serbs and Croats in Geneva. U.N. officials quickly complained that Clinton's action had put the kibosh on a peace plan very near completion. Now, they argued, Bosnian President Alija Izetbegovic wasn't under such intense pressure to negotiate. From that perspective, Clinton botched things royally.

But there is another perspective — on the ground in Sarajevo — from which it appears clear that Clinton did just the right thing in the nick of time.

This war was instigated by and has been most vigorously prosecuted by the Serbs. Their "say one thing, do another" diplomacy has always sought to prevent outsiders from intervening while Serbian forces achieved their military objectives.

In Geneva Friday, the three Bosnian factions accepted the broad outline of an agreement that would split their country into independent ethnic enclaves. Hours later, the Serbian commander signed a cease-fire that was to remain in effect until the peace conference was concluded. Peace, it appeared, might be settling on Bosnia.

Except that the Serbs quickly ignored the cease-fire and began pressing an intense offensive against Bosnian defenders of Zuc, a strategic mountainous region northwest of Sarajevo. All weekend long the Serbian tanks, howitzers and mortars pounded the defenders of Zuc. Should Zuc fall, Sarajevo would lay open for the taking. Once again, the Serbs were talking peace while waging war.

Clinton, however, called their bluff and finally bullied the NATO allies into going along. He has earned strong applause on both counts: His decision to act was the right one, and his ability to twist NATO arms shows that his administration's diplomacy is maturing. While obviously risky, protecting Sarajevo from siege or sacking by the Serbs appears quite achievable with allied air power.

The prospect of those air strikes may indeed have stiffened Izetbegovic's spine and made the peace talks more difficult to conclude. But that outcome is far preferable to the most likely alternative: letting the Serbs have their way with Sarajevo and its long-suffering residents. Clinton chose not to let that happen. Good for him.
Finally the United Nations is saying that it is going to get tough with the Bosnian Serbs. Because of recent attacks against French peacekeepers, Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali is expected to request that North Atlantic Treaty Organization forces prepare for retaliatory airstrikes should the attacks on peacekeepers continue. Yet even this latest threat of military action is unclear. How tough can the NATO forces be? Will it be enough to alter the desperate situation on the ground for besieged Muslims?

The qualified response by Mr. Boutros-Ghali suggested that, like previous hollow threats, the Serbs will have little to fear. Therefore they will not be deterred. The U.N. leader specified that even when NATO forces have all the necessary personnel and equipment in place to act against Serb aggression, that will not mean that retaliation will be immediate.

In short, Bosnia-Herzegovina will continue to burn while the U.N. continues to fiddle. Protection of U.N. peacekeepers in Bosnia is long overdue. How effective can peacekeepers be without the U.N. supporting the authority of the blue helmets? The U.N. must provide the necessary muscle to protect them and implement U.N. resolutions. But, at the same time, what good will it do to ensure the safety of U.N. personnel and their mission without also protecting the very people they are trying to help? What is the rationale behind providing food and medicine to the war-weary non-combatants only to have them killed and maimed at the hands of the Serbs?

If the U.N. acts to protect its own personnel, it raises the question of why not do more to protect the Bosnians in the six so-called safe havens? At the least, the Bosnians should not be denied the resources and weapons to protect themselves. No sensible reason remains to deny the Bosnian Muslims the means to protect themselves. The weapons embargo against the Muslims should be lifted immediately.

To his credit, President Clinton has committed U.S. forces to do their part in the anticipated operation. He must stand firm after having knuckled under to the weak-stomachs who wouldn't support his plan for tougher action early on. He should insist that the U.N. be willing, in hard, immediately, to retaliate and force a change in the situation on the ground.

**BOSNIA**

U.N. must not bluff about airstrike threat

Cloud the awful facts on the ground in Bosnia and give Americans at home a feeling something positive may soon happen there. But there is little evidence that the White House has altered its "hands off" approach. Indeed, while some in the administration urge Clinton to do more to stop Serb genocidal actions, a more influential argument is being made not to raise the Bosnian government's hopes by coming to their assistance.

Talk of military action also takes place within an argument as to who is to blame for Bosnia. US Secretary of State Warren Christopher has blamed Germany for its recognition of Croatia. Clinton this week blamed the Europeans for not backing his plan in the spring for air strikes and a lifting of the arms embargo. Is the US offering aid merely to keep up appearances?

One other item: Bosnia must now be discussed in the context of the Muslim world. For the US to say, in the middle of a genocide against Muslims, that it will protect only UN lives will further anger ordinary Muslims and offer fuel for radicals.

Of course, since the West does not protect the safe havens, the US is trying to the no-fly zone, or deliver the aid it promised in Bosnia. The West is wide open for such criticism.

**Bosnia Air Strikes?**

P RESIDENT Clinton this week reopened the possibility of United States military action in Bosnia in the form of air strikes. The White House says it is considering two plans – one to protect the United Nations forces in Bosnia, and one to stop the shelling of the six UN mandated "safe havens" and to ensure that aid gets through to them. The first plan is the more likely of the two.

The announcement comes during a brutal Serb offensive that may result in the fall of Sarajevo and a related shelling of French UN peacekeepers in that city by Serb forces.

Mr. Clinton has talked tough in hopes that this would somewhat cow the Serbs. as similar talk seemed to this spring when the US was considering real intervention in Bosnia. But so far there is little evidence the 60 US aircraft waiting in Italy are ready to conduct the kind of strikes that would worry Belgrade. There is none of the necessary planning or the basic communications and logistics in Sarajevo. The Serbs know this. They believe they have won the battle for Bosnia. Indeed, so do many Western leaders who seem irritated that Bosnian President Alija Izetbegovic does not just agree to a surrender plan in Geneva.

Clinton's proposal may temporarily
Taking a stand in Sarajevo

Not a moment too soon, the NATO alliance is threatening to use its air power in a desperate bid to prevent the slow strangulation of Sarajevo. It would be tragic if this turns out to be another hollow warning to the Serbian aggressors and their Croatian co-scavengers, who together are picking over the remains of Bosnia-Herzegovina. This time the West must make good on its word.

Whether by calculated bluff or just dumb luck, the United States succeeded in forcing its European allies' hand on what may become NATO's first offensive military action in its history. Rather than "consult" with America's reluctant partners, as Secretary of State Warren Christopher did to no avail in May, the Clinton administration put the word out that it would defend Sarajevo by itself if necessary. That seemingly rash position was officially disavowed and then later unofficially confirmed, but the allies took the mixed signals to mean Washington was asserting its traditional leadership and grudgingly started marching in step.

Two developments facilitated what has been up to now an agonizing decision over intervention. The first is the looming defeat of Bosnian forces defending Sarajevo, with the added danger that its 380,000 remaining inhabitants may be slaughtered. Nobody in authority in the West can care to have a calamity like that on his record or on his conscience.

The second is the recent Serbian bombardment of French and Spanish troops serving as United Nations peacekeepers in Sarajevo. France and other countries have long argued that punitive Western military action would place its forces and other U.N. monitors and aid-givers at risk of Serbian reprisals. It should be clear by now that Serbian gunners will shoot at whatever moves regardless of what the West does.

Just because NATO is readying its formidable air power to break the siege of Sarajevo does not by any means assure success. It will take time to get the forward air controllers and communications gear in place for the mission. Mobile Serbian artillery and tanks will be hard targets to spot in the rough, wooded terrain around Sarajevo. The NATO allies will have to steel themselves, too, for probable aircraft losses to Serbian ground-to-air missiles and also for the kind of mistakes and equipment failures that lead to unintended civilian casualties.

Britain's Lord Owen bemoans NATO's sudden resolve and says it complicates efforts in Geneva to partition and bring peace to Bosnia-Herzegovina. He is far too patient with Serbian negotiate-and-conquer tactics. The only way to stop these aggressors is to confront them head-on. Their will to fight against determined, well-armed opposition has yet to be tested.

The United States has set a line, drawn by George Bush and reaffirmed by Bill Clinton, past which it will not tolerate further Serbian ethnic cleansing. The line was meant to protect Yugoslavia's Kosovo province and the newly independent republic of Macedonia. But U.N. monitors have been forced to leave Kosovo and only a token U.N. force guards Macedonia.

The West can dither no longer. Inaction invites a wider Balkans war, which is just as vital to U.S. interests to prevent as Saddam Hussein's adventuring in Kuwait. The place to take a stand is Sarajevo.
Force is no solution in Bosnia

President Clinton's urging of airstrikes to push the Serbs away from Sarajevo is misguided. Force will only derail peace efforts.

Several times during the crisis in Bosnia, there has been a reckless push by U.S. political leaders — including former President Bush — to intervene militarily.

President Clinton is again sounding the call. Most worrisome is his administration's signaled intention to go it alone should U.S. allies decline to participate.

That course of action couldn't be more ill-advised. Other than enforcing a no-fly zone over Bosnia and helping U.N. peacekeeping troops in the country to defend themselves, military action simply isn't justifiable. And, in any case, no military action outside U.N. auspices would be appropriate.

A broader mandate for using military force would risk prolonging the fighting. No wonder U.S. allies aren't keen on Mr. Clinton's sword-waving. It was only after arm-twisting by the Clinton administration that NATO mustered a threat of air strikes this week.

Before that, Mr. Clinton had appeared ready to stay within reasonable boundaries when he talked about retaliation against Bosnian Serb guerrillas who attacked French peacekeepers last week. Such an affront against the United Nations deserves a strong response. After all, U.N. forces in Somalia didn't hesitate when attacked; holding back in Bosnia would invite shelling U.N. targets with impunity.

But there's a big difference between appropriate retaliation and what Mr. Clinton now advocates. He's urging an aggressive campaign of airstrikes to force the Serbs away from Sarajevo, because it's supposedly in danger of falling.

In truth, Sarajevo isn't any more imperiled now than it was six months or a year ago. The fact is that if the Serbs had wanted to take over the city, they could have mounted a true bombardment and have leveled it long ago.

The Clinton administration also believes airstrikes could force the Serbs to negotiate peace more seriously.

The opposite is likely; already the Serbs have said they view the talk of airstrikes as antagonistic, and they're prepared to respond in kind.

Besides, the Clinton administration's threats obscure growing signs that the conflict in the war-torn region could wind down. For example, the various factions in Bosnia recently agreed to a plan to partition the country along ethnic lines; the details are being worked out.

Although that's not the ideal outcome, it may be the most achievable one. The emphasis in Bosnia should be on a peaceful solution.
What Clinton Wants in Bosnia Is Anyone’s Guess

President Bill Clinton is once again contemplating ordering the Bosnian special at the International House of Waffles. The last time Clinton waffled on Bosnia, he got a severe case of political food poisoning. His credibility suffered at home and abroad. Now he seems determined to do it again. Enough of this, Mr. President, please!

Over the weekend, top administration officials said — for quotation and attribution — that Clinton was prepared to use air strikes with or without NATO participation to help stop the violence in Bosnia. But yesterday, Clinton backed off, claiming news reports had distorted his true stance. He said the United States would try to “work through a common position” with its European allies on using air strikes against Serbian forces besieging the Bosnian capital of Sarajevo.

What does Clinton really mean? Only his gut knows for sure, but it would be extremely helpful if he would make it clear to the nation and to his allies. More important than what his actual position on Bosnia may be is the continuing erosion of his credibility as leader of the western alliance. Of course, it would be preferable for the United States to act in concert with its European partners if there were a large-scale military action in Bosnia. That is the position Clinton took when he failed to press his allies into going along with his plan to bomb the Serbs and re-arm the Muslims. But that was a contradiction of Clinton’s earlier assertions that the United States should do all it could, including acting alone, to end the slaughter in Bosnia.

When he waffled the first time, the Europeans shrugged collectively and proceeded to ignore further entreaties from Washington. Then Clinton started getting increasingly pointed criticism at home about his hands-off policy toward Bosnia. Hence the tough, John Wayne-like stance of the American gunfighter riding alone into the Balkans sunset to take on the bad guys single-handedly. But then came the stark headlines about American bombs flying over Sarajevo. And so Clinton went for the Bosnian waffles when he met with the Progressive Caucus yesterday morning. A tempting choice, perhaps, but it plays havoc with Clinton’s foreign policy diet.
Sarajevo's Crux

Suddenly, in the depths of August and the budget debate, the war in Bosnia has reached a crux. The U.S. and the West are threatening air strikes, maybe after a final NATO meeting Monday. But yesterday the Serbs threatened to isolate Sarajevo after taking positions on strategic Mount Igman: the city may fall before the West can decide.

Meanwhile, President Clinton is busy lobbying for his tax increase, inviting Senator Dennis DeConcini of the Keating Five up to a specially convened ceremony at the White House. The secretary of state is touring the Bekaa Valley in an armored column, looking for that great diplomatic chimera, the Middle East 'process.' The stories about new military threats against the Serbs seem to quote an assistant secretary of state from Brussels, plus Dee Dee Meyers warning that 'the clock is ticking.'

We would certainly support anything that could be done to help the Bosnians. We supported the Clinton administration's strike on intelligence facilities in Baghdad, as a demonstration that even a draft-resistant president would use military force, and that cruise missiles can destroy precise targets. But we have to say that some of our more military-minded friends thought the Baghdad strike, timed not to hurt any spies, was merely domestic political posturing. If the Clinton administration somehow decides to send the Air Force to Sarajevo, we hope that it's part of some plan that could actually make a difference.

So far the West has slipped further and further into this war, with no plan to bring it to an end. Albert Wohlstetter traced this sorry history on these pages recently, warning that 'This is the quagmire.' In this, the Bush administration and the Europeans bear the original blame, but it is now Mr. Clinton's watch.

More than air strikes, containing Serbian aggression will require a basic change in U.S. and Western policy. The ostensible purpose of threatening the Serbs is to advance negotiations, David Owen and Thorvald Stoltenberg, 'continue to exert tremendous pressure' upon the Bosnians to sign away their sovereignty and rights of self-defense.

'Despite talk of ethnically partitioning the Republic into two parts, the most likely outcome is a two-way partition between Serbia and Croatia,' he continued. 'Serbia's most recent manifestation of its long-standing intention was clearly signaled in the demand that Bosnian Muslims withdraw from the 'safe areas' of Gorazde, Zepu and Srebrenica.' The inaction of the West, and indeed the diplomatic pressures for Bosnian capitulation, make 'these negotiations yet another platform for 'ethnic cleansing.'

Even at this late date, it's possible to design military measures that would matter, not only taking out Serbian artillery around Sarajevo but destroying Serbian military assets such as airplanes. The problem is not lack of means but lack of a cogent plan and lack of purpose.

Beyond the obvious humanitarian concerns, it's becoming clearer and clearer that America and the rest of the world do have an interest in containing the aggression being conducted by the Serbian government under Slobodan Milosevic. If he succeeds in annexing much of Bosnia by force under pretext of protecting ethnic kinsmen there, it will create a precedent that could spread in dangerous directions. Swedish Prime Minister Carl Bildt has already sounded a warning about the threats to Estonia, issued under Boris Yeltsin's name, over the treatment of Russians in what the Russians have come to call the "near abroad." And of course, Mr. Milosevic's interests content with Bosnia, or more precisely may need conflict to keep his own power. He may turn his ambitions to other of his neighbors, or to the "ethnic cleansing" of his own Muslim-populated province of Kosovo.

Bosnia may not be the Czechoslovakia of the 1930s, where the West sold out to Hitler. But it certainly has the potential to become another Ethiopia, where Mussolini's invasion proved that the League of Nations was feeckless and aggression could succeed, paving the way for bigger aggression and further instability. If we cannot rally ourselves to relieve Sarajevo, we should at least understand the spreading consequences, and start to think seriously about how to contain them.
President Clinton's recently announced plan to reform the regulations on asylum for immigrants more closely resembles an efficiency program for a fast-food restaurant than it does a sound policy on immigration.


It calls for brief asylum reviews for immigrants who arrive in the United States without legitimate papers. Those deemed ineligible for political asylum would have an opportunity to make a limited appeal to the Justice Department, but if their efforts proved unsuccessful, they would be deported within five days of arrival.

The proposed policy ignores the reality that those fleeing persecution do not always have the wherewithal to gather the documentation they need to support their claims. It would also pave the way for narrow political priorities or "crises" to drive asylum decisions rather than humanitarian concerns.

The bill's other provisions include funds for 600 new border patrol agents, a tracking system for passports and visas and stiffer penalties for people who smuggle refugees. Although those proposals may have merit, they fail to get to the root of the country's immigration problem.

With only 150 asylum officers, the Immigration and Naturalization Service is ill-equipped to handle the applications of immigrants already in the country. The 15,000 refugees who applied for asylum after arriving at our borders without documents this year are dwarfed in number by the 300,000 still left in an INS bureaucratic limbo.

With immigrants waiting 18 months before getting an asylum hearing date, the administration's emphasis on the rapid deportation of inadequately documented asylum seekers seems misguided.

The administration has promised to deal with these problems with a series of separate initiatives by Sept. 30. Those would include a doubling of the number of asylum officers and a streamlining of procedures.

By making the exclusion proposal the priority, however, the administration is putting more emphasis on quick and easy measures than on thoughtful, compassionate solutions.

How to Bar Unwanted Immigrants

Public perceptions that the country is being overrun by immigrants explain the strong bipartisan support for President Clinton's tough proposals to fix a flawed asylum system and beef up patrols along the Mexican border.

These perceptions may be exaggerated or dead wrong but the political pressures they unleash can hardly be overestimated. For a Democratic president to favor a crackdown on immigration goes against tradition. For the two Democratic senators from California and a Republican senator from New York to embrace his action shows how much the Mexican tide, the spectacle of Chinese boat people landing on a New York beach and the bombing of the World Trade Center affects the current mood.

The Clinton bill is likely to sweep through Congress despite misgivings by civil liberties groups fearful of summary justice. Indeed, it may spark moves for more fundamental action, particularly requirements for a counterfeit-proof national worker identification card despite traditional American distrust of government intrusion. Doris Meissner, the commissioner-designate for the Immigration and Naturalization Service, has said "the whole document system has to be reformed" — though she doesn't know if we have the stomach for it.

What the nation clearly has the stomach for is a speed-up in handling refugees claiming to be victims of political persecution who come here without prior authorization or on temporary visas and then ask for asylum. At present, the system permits four rounds of hearings often taking as long as 18 months — a period permitting many asylum-seekers to find jobs and disappear into the population.

INS asylum officers are overwhelmed with a backlog of 275,000 cases. Mr. Clinton proposes that would-be refugees be limited to one good hearing by an experienced government official, who would have authority to order expedited expulsion if he feels asylum is unwarranted. Some of those who are already in the country could appeal on a accelerated timetable to the Department of Justice.

In terms of numbers, the horde of Mexicans crossing into the United States to seek work far surpass Islamic terrorists or the Chinese boat people who have been making headlines. In dealing with the first group, Mr. Clinton largely confines his efforts to putting 600 more Border Patrol officers in place. As for suspected terrorists, he proposes pre-boarding checks in foreign airports and, more to the point, almost immediate deportation for those whose asylum claims are judged fraudulent.

To discourage illegal entry from everywhere, including China, the president would apply stringent anti-racketeering laws to smugglers who exploit poor people desperate to come to America.

All these Clinton initiatives deal with the symptoms of unwanted immigration. The proposed North American Free Trade Agreement, with its promise of raising Mexican living standards, could represent a start in dealing with the causes.
Americans have always treated their borders more as a threshold than a moat, consistently accepting large numbers of foreigners who arrive here seeking the opportunities that elude them at home. But as the number of economic migrants and political refugees grows, taxing our ability and willingness to absorb them, popular sentiment has turned stingy. Economic woes have likewise contributed to the urge to pull up the gangplank.

But Bill Clinton has resisted that sentiment, even as he has asked for tools to solve the real problems posed by the tide of supplicants. In his $172 million plan for immigration, announced last week, he has kept the door to the outside world open, while proposing prudent ways to increase our control over whom we admit.

The United States, he recognizes, has both an interest in the enrichment provided by immigrants and a right to set reasonable terms for entry. The latter means dealing more effectively with asylum-seekers and illegal immigration.

Political asylum, offered to victims of persecution, is oversubscribed and often abused. Since the mid-1980s, the number of applicants has risen fivefold, creating a huge backlog and putting a crushing burden on the Immigration and Naturalization Service. All asylum-seekers must be given a fair chance to prove they qualify as refugees (as distinct from ordinary immigrants, who are admitted separately), which can take months. Most don’t qualify and many disappear into the undocumented population. Clinton wants to provide more INS officers for such cases, while speeding up the process of resolving claims, with quick deportation for those who don’t qualify.

Illegal immigration has brought in some 2 million undocumented foreigners in the last decade. Clinton hopes to reduce it by toughening criminal penalties for smugglers and by spending $45 million to hire and train 600 INS agents and acquire advanced equipment for monitoring the border. The only bad idea here is a proposal to combat smugglers by confiscating their assets and prosecuting them under racketeering laws—two tools that have generated too much abuse already.

But the President has struck the right balance between openness and control, declaring that “we want to stop illegal immigration so that we can continue opening our country to legal immigration.” He has the right spirit and the right measures.

Sealing the borders: A start

It should be possible for this country to deal humanely and fairly with legitimate seekers of political asylum, and at the same time exercise tighter control over its borders — the world’s most porous. As a start, Congress should thoroughly debate President Bill Clinton’s proposals to curb illegal immigration and people-smuggling, and weed out those who seek to abuse U.S. asylum policy.

While some of Clinton’s measures have alarmed civil libertarians, and the whole package does not go far enough for those on the other side who believe immigration policy should be more closely controlled, the president’s plan to beef up staffing of both the asylum division of the Immigration and Naturalization Service and the Border Patrol.

Critics long have contended the INS simply lacks the number of officers required to do an adequate job. The White House seeks to add 600 people to the Border Patrol and would double the size of the asylum staff to more than 300. Given the documented growth in illegal immigration and the fact that many unlawful entries are undetected, such expansion is long overdue.

Where Clinton could antagonize advocates for immigrants’ rights is in proposals to speed up reviews of applications for asylum, and to screen out and quickly send back those deemed fraudulent. Civil libertarians worry that asylum officers handling with such cases will act arbitrarily.

Such concerns are legitimate and should be fully addressed in Congress. But so too should those of Americans who live in those cities and states that are favored destinations of illegal aliens and whose education, health and welfare systems are strained to the limits.

Congress will have to tread carefully. It must not pander to those whose inclination to indulge in ethnic and religious stereotypes was stimulated by the bombing of the World Trade Center and revelations of other alleged anti-American plots linked to Middle Eastern terrorist groups, and who would use asylum law. Due process should still prevail.

But Congress should also recognize that taking advantage of U.S. liberalitv — or slack enforcement of immigration laws — has been developed into an art form by, among others, those who traffic in human cargo and exponents of violent political philosophies inimical to order and stability in the United States. Driving the former out of business, and keeping the latter at a safe distance, are worthy goals. Clinton’s plan should be the basis for a vigorous discussion of ways to fix the problem.
Control of our borders

Not many legislative packages championed by President Clinton come adorned with the conspicuous bipartisan support that his immigration reforms received last week. This exception to the rule is a measure of the consensus across the land that our borders and the procedures for handling new arrivals have become too porous.

This does not mean, as Mr. Clinton was wise to point out in unveiling his program, that his administration is backing away from the fundamental concept of America as a melting pot. Legal immigration to the United States will and should continue at its current high level, "enriching and strengthening this country," in the president's words.

However, the president and his supporters must draw the line when it comes to labor racketeers and political schemers who would take advantage of deficiencies in our laws and enforcement procedures to line their pockets, as in the case of the Chinese human cargo smugglers, or relocate their holy wars on our shores, as in the case of the firebrand Egyptian cleric, Sheik Omar Abdul-Rahman.

The Clinton proposals should give the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) and its allied agencies a broader range of tools to police illegal entries.

Immigration authorities ought to be armed with anti-racketeering statutes to combat traffickers in illegal aliens. Our consulates overseas and our immigration personnel working at gateways around the world should be equipped with the technology to identify and weed out known undesirables such as the sheik. The overstretched Border Patrol can surely use the 15 percent increase in personnel and an infusion of high-tech detection equipment (although our long border with Mexico would be far less violated if the Mexican economy generated more jobs, but that is a function of another Clinton objective, the North American Free Trade Agreement).

Not all the INS difficulties will yield easily to the mere expenditure of funds. Attorney General Janet Reno has observed publicly that, judging from her own experience as a U.S. attorney in Miami, the INS is sorely in need of a management review and overhaul. That ought be a top priority of Vice President Al Gore, currently assigned to the task of "reinventing" the federal government.

By far the most controversial of Mr. Clinton's immigration reform proposals is to reduce the time given to weighing requests for political asylum and any appeals that might follow. Currently, the process seems open-ended and much abused by foreigners who find all manner of dodges to prolong their stays here. Mr. Clinton would cut the procedure's duration to a matter of days by doubling the number of hearing officers and streamlining the bureaucratic steps.

While well-intended, the reduction is excessive. Genuine political refugees often come to the United States without documentation. Many would need more than the few days that Mr. Clinton's proposal would allow them so they could collect their thoughts and any supporting evidence they could lay their hands on in order to make an effective case for themselves.

Surely a fairer yet still expeditious time frame can be worked out, one that is more in keeping with America's cherished tradition of making room for the persecuted of the world.
The immigration problem

Reforms are needed, but not the ones being proposed.

There's wide agreement that some of the nation's immigration practices are in need of change. But it's not necessarily the immigration laws that are the problem. It's the failure of the Immigration and Naturalization Service to properly enforce them. With a backlog of 275,000 people seeking asylum, the agency needs not only better management but better staffing.

President Clinton's $172.5 million initiative to curb illegal immigration would fix only some parts of the problem while raising serious humanitarian concerns over others. Sadly, the whole package has the ring of political pandering to the current wave of anti-immigrant sentiment.

Behind the proposed changes are public outrage over lax immigration enforcement, which allowed a suspect connected to the World Trade Center bombing into the country, and the Chinese immigrant-smuggling ring broken when a freighter ran aground in New York in June carrying 200 illegal Chinese immigrants. Those cases merit concern, but not overreaction.

Most worrisome from a human-rights perspective is a process proposed for screening candidates for asylum, which would be so streamlined that refugees could get only a cursory examination of their cases, and might be returned to countries where they face persecution. A single, prompt interview on arrival would replace the variety of hearings and appeals currently in place. It would be impractical for the newly arrived to get legal representation. And those denied asylum would have no real appeal mechanism. Though the existing method is inefficient, at least it has provided for a more thorough review. Increased staffing alone would reduce the time lag.

The exploitative role played by traffickers of illegal aliens should be addressed, and imposing stricter criminal sanctions against smugglers of aliens is fine, but what about those being smuggled? Would they be immediately deported or given a chance to make their case? That has not been made clear.

And is the addition of agents to patrol borders going to make any real dent in illegal immigration?

Finally, increased State Department involvement with ticket agents at foreign airports adds a level of oversight that could become another bureaucratic nightmare at a time when the INS is already unable to carry out its mission properly.

The changes raise as many questions as they would answer. Reforms are needed, but not these.
A Week in Lebanon

The scale of Israel's response to terrorist attack has now itself become an international issue, obscuring in some quarters the original provocation by Hezbollah guerrillas. And with reason: The Israelis, to protect their own borders, have killed 100 and more Lebanese, purposefully displaced hundreds of thousands and shot up whole villages. The immediate purpose is to put the guerrillas out of business. The avowed larger concept is to create such an immense internal crisis in Lebanon as to finally compel the Arab side—if not weak Lebanon, then strong Syria—to leash Hezbollah. But the operation involves attacks so disproportionate and harsh as to stir misgivings and criticism from the best foreign friends of Israel, including the United States, and even from members of Israel's governing coalition.

The first priority is a cease-fire. Whether it is open or tacit is not so important as that it register a commitment by Syria to contain Hezbollah. This terrorist organization is commonly referred to as a client of Iran. In fact, it lives and acts on the sufferance of Damascus. Its arms arrive from Syria, and its bases sit in the Syria-controlled Bekaa valley. Since it is isolated among Arabs for its radical ideology and opposition to peace, it simply could not exist in Lebanon without the comforts of Hafez Assad's patronage.

In the past, Syria had the Moscow connection that let it resist Israeli pressures and American entreaties to restrain the Lebanon-based guerrillas dependent on Damascus. But with the Moscow connection gone and with Hafez Assad now counting on Washington to help him reclaim the war-lost Golan, new possibilities arise. This is the theory, at any rate.

Whether it works requires momentum to be restored to the Washington-sponsored Middle East peace talks. Clinton administration officials have been clumsy in their attempts to traverse tricky political terrain—slow to identify Syria's link with Hezbollah, for instance. But they still have time to exploit the diplomatic openings provided by the Lebanon disruptions. Syria needs to be coached to tie up Hezbollah. Israel needs to accept that its exposure to guerrilla rockets does not give it an unrestricted right to disrupt Lebanese civilians—or to remain in occupation of southern Lebanon. In the peace talks these understandings can be knit into concrete commitments. Warren Christopher, heading for the area, has his work cut out for him.

The Next Move Is Syria's

Will Damascus now move to eliminate the threat from Hezbollah?

Civilians from among the half-million or more driven from their towns and villages by last week's ferocious Israeli bombardments of southern Lebanon have begun returning, in many cases to scenes of appalling destruction.

The brief conflict between Israel and the 5,000 irregulars of the radical Iran-backed Hezbollah movement of Lebanese Shiites for now seems to be over, thanks in part to efforts led by Secretary of State Warren Christopher, who is back in the region to promote the peace process. Whether the border will remain quiet depends largely on whether a third party—Syria—decides that it should be.

Syria won some unusual praise from President Clinton last week for its part in getting Hezbollah to halt its rocket attacks on northern Israel, reportedly by stopping new shipments of Iranian-supplied weapons for Hezbollah from moving across its territory. Now comes the real test of Syrian intentions. Will it act further to disarm and neutralize Hezbollah, as all the other militias that kept Lebanon in anarchy for 15 years have been neutralized, or will it allow the radicals to rearm and to continue goading Israel into the kind of massive retaliation whose chief victims are innocent civilians?

Hezbollah, like its sponsors in Tehran, bitterly opposes Arab-Israel peace efforts, and its provocations aim at subverting that process. Syria, whose 40,000 troops in Lebanon give it a decisive voice in that country's affairs, is a key participant in the peace talks. Syria is beholden to Iran, an enemy of Damascus' ideological enemy, Iraq. But its primary national goal is to regain sovereignty over the Golan Heights, which it lost in the 1967 war. The key to that goal lies in making a full peace with Israel. Such a peace almost certainly will require Syria to eliminate the threat from Hezbollah.

The Beirut government, certainly with Damascus' approval, now says it will soon deploy Lebanese armed forces in the south. The aim—at least the hope—is to extend the so-far nonexistent authority of the central government into that area and so undercut the radicals. If Syria helps out, that could happen. And if it happens, the peace process will get a nudge forward.
Don’t allow extremists to derail peace process

At first glance the outbreak of intense fighting in southern Lebanon between Israeli forces and Arab guerrillas severely threatens the fragile Middle East peace process. Yet it could provide the very catalyst needed to advance the stalled talks.

Secretary of State Warren Christopher wisely cut short his Asian trip to return to Washington for discussions on this critical development. His planned trip to the region next week is needed now more than ever.

Advancing the peace process by getting the two sides to move beyond their old positions would have been difficult enough without renewed fighting. But if Mr. Christopher can convince the sides to 1) focus on their common goal of reaching a mutual peace and 2) isolate those forces hostile to the peace process, then the pace of progress can be stepped up.

The pro-Iranian Hezbollah and the Syrian-backed Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, whose attacks against Israeli forces in their self-declared security zone prompted the strong response, have vowed to kill the peace process. The Israeli action certainly plays into their hands. The longer the Israeli assault lasts the more that becomes the case. The government of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, criticized for wanting to give away too much at the negotiating table, will no doubt use this show of force for domestic gain, as well as to send a message to Arab capitals.

At the same time Lebanon and Syria contributed to the outbreak of fighting by turning a blind eye to the activities of the militant groups. Their tacit support of these groups has prolonged the violence. Yet both have an interest in reining in these extremists. Hezbollah, in particular, inspired by the Iranian revolution, wants to make Lebanon an Islamic state. But to an extent, these extremists also serve both governments’ interests in opposing the Israeli presence in Lebanon and the Golan Heights, which Syria desperately wants back, so neither government has been willing to act against them.

Both sides use these extremist groups as pawns and therefore afford them the status capable of derailing the peace process. If a mutual peace is the common goal of Arabs and Israelis, that must change. Mr. Christopher should impress upon all parties that continued U.S. involvement is contingent upon more serious commitments to achieving a negotiated peace.

Christopher saves his peace mission

Secretary of State Warren Christopher worked the phones assiduously from Washington late last week to put out the latest fire in the Middle East. Christopher and his boss, President Clinton, deserve credit for prevailing upon the leaders of Syria, Lebanon and Israel to restore a measure of calm to the always-volatile region.

Before a cease-fire took hold late Saturday, there had been a seven-day paroxysm of violence triggered when Israel, fed up with having its northernmost communities rocked by Iranian-backed terrorists, struck back with an oversized military assault on villages there.

The outbreak of hostilities threatened to upset the U.S. secretary of state’s plans for a peace mission to spark interest in the next round of the 21-month-old Middle East peace talks.

Fortunately, the cease-fire permitted the trip to proceed, and on Monday Christopher was in Egypt doing what diplomats frequently must. He was putting the best face on a situation that is, to put it mildly, less than ideal.

Following a meeting with President Hosni Mubarak, Christopher said the new tension over Lebanon could inject “a new burst of energy” into peace-promotion efforts, and that he wanted “to capitalize on the tragic situation in Lebanon, to use it to remind the parties how important it is to move forward with the peace talks.”

In view of the many wars in the Middle East and years and years of intercommunal friction, it would seem that the case against enmity and for amity should have been clear long, long ago. But not to everyone, and certainly not to the Party of God (Hezbollah) adherents whose only policy is terrorism—terrorism which Israel feels compelled to counter, albeit overaggressively at times. The result can be a crisis like last week’s, which cannot but hurt the search for a live-and-let-live Middle East.

For all that, however, Secretary Christopher’s very presence in the Middle East has to be interpreted as an encouraging sign. It means that the absolutely vital, if seemingly Sisyphean, task of brokering a settlement is continuing.
ISRAEL

Attacks went too far; U.S. must press harder for peace

International law recognizes the right of nation-states to defend themselves. As such, Israel's military response to attacks on its soldiers and other citizens was understandable at first. Hezbollah and Islamic Jihad in Palestine, both radical Islamic fundamentalist guerrilla groups, claimed responsibility for the attacks on Israelis. Both are opposed to the Middle East peace process, which contemplates the acceptance of Israel's right to exist by its neighbors, and are trying to derail those negotiations.

But the counterattack went on far too long, especially given the military imbalance in the region that so favors Israel. Israel has frighteningly close to accomplishing the Arab radicals’ goal for them.

The Israeli operation was widened to include the intentional displacement of civilians, ostensibly to get at the guerrillas. At least 100,000 of Lebanon’s people — 500,000 persons — have become refugees as a result, and Israel now has expanded its occupation of land in southern Lebanon. Rather than a new bargaining chip, the move may constitute a new irritant.

All this adds up to the scope duration of the Israeli offensive having transformed it into something that is no longer understandable or justifiable. And it was patently unwise.

Israel’s demand that Lebanon curb the guerrillas supposes that the Lebanese central government, such as it is, could control the guerrillas. That is debatable.

The more important conceptual problem is that Israel’s latest military operations, like its expulsion earlier this year of Palestinians it accused of being members of Hezbollah, comes awfully close to confronting on small extra-territorial guerrilla groups a standing role in decisions about the region’s future that they do not merit.

It should instead be obvious that the better and more useful response is a comprehensive peace settlement that addresses the legitimate needs and rights of the populations from which such groups come. Wors just makes more guerrillas.

The Clinton administration appears to recognize that the United States has a special responsibility to get its ally to come to its senses. If the fighting resumes despite a tentative U.S.-brokered cease-fire agreement, the United States may have to get a good deal tougher about the matter than administration officials have yet recognized.

When U.S. Secretary of State Warren Christopher arrives in the region, he will have a tough job ahead of him in trying to back all the parties off the hostile positions they feel obligated to take in reaction to the latest cycle of death.
Today's debate is on MIDEAST FIGHTING and whether the U.S. has a role in searching for peace.

U.S. must stay involved in Mideast diplomacy

By backing moderates, the USA is pushing Arabs and Israelis closer and reducing risk of war.

Detente — a Cold War word that describes a state of reduced tensions between enemy states — is being rediscovered in the tempestuous Middle East.

Last week, for instance, Syria and Lebanon worked to help shield the regional peace process from the provocations of Islamic fundamentalists they ordinarily support. That's a welcome hint that the process will continue and the USA's ongoing involvement might yet produce real dividends.

The provocations themselves are an old and irritating story. Every time the peace talks show promise, Hezbollah, a militant Muslim terrorist group, attacks Israel, hoping to start a fight that will derail the process.

Hezbollah tried it again last week, firing artillery and rockets into Israel from southern Lebanon. Despite a truly vicious Israeli response, however, Syria and Lebanon joined Secretary of State Warren Christopher to keep the flare-up from poisoning the peace process.

But detente — the easing of tensions — is a long way from entente — a cooperative agreement between governments. And Christopher arrives in the Mideast today not to urge the talks along, but to urge that they not expire.

The talks come as Israel and the Arab world are growing closer — in part because the extremists who oppose the peace process pose a threat to all the region's governments.

Without the Soviet Union, many Arab leaders see future economic health tied to improved relations with the West, which fundamentalists won't tolerate. For its part, Israel recognizes that its security depends on good regional ties. Result: Two passionate enemies are newly willing to give peace — or at least mutual accommodation — a chance.

This softening marks real progress. Hezbollah can provoke Israel but can't rely on its supporters for back-up. In exchange, Israeli leaders now drop faint hints about the conditions under which they might withdraw from the occupied zone in south Lebanon.

The result is an opportunity that diplomats in Jerusalem, Damascus, Beirut and Washington dare not squander.

Christopher's mission, 7A

Stay out of Mideast mess

There's little we can do to bring peace, and our meddling turns U.S. citizens into targets.

Secretary of State Warren Christopher has jetted off to the Mideast for yet another attempt to bring peace to one of the world's most unstable regions. Alas, his task has been complicated by the Israeli shelling of Lebanon, which has created up to a half-million refugees.

Christopher might be able to do some good if he were going as an honest broker. But the USA has consistently backed one of the region's prime antagonists, Israel. Whether or not that policy has enhanced our national interest, it certainly has undermined the ability of Washington to promote peace.

In fact, our meddling has actually spread the conflict — to the USA. Support for Israel has made this nation a target of terrorists: intervention in Lebanon a decade ago cost the lives of hundreds of Marines. The gulf war left the region as unstable as ever while forcing Washington to provide a potentially permanent garrison in Saudi Arabia.

Still, some observers hope the future will be different. If only the secretary could jump-start the stalled peace talks.

Sure. All Christopher has to do is eliminate ethnic and religious antagonisms dating back thousands of years. Presumably like he's done in Bosnia and Somalia.

It is hard for many Americans to admit, but there is very little that we can do to bring peace to the Mideast or elsewhere. While our attempts to solve such problems usually fail, our unwanted meddling often turns American citizens into targets.

With the end of the Cold War, the USA can freely disengage from the world's intractable conflicts. Washington should concentrate on protecting the people of this country.
Ross, Still Bobbing and Weaving

You'd think that by now Ross Perot could keep a few basic facts in his own head. We're not asking for much, just a few numbers that would help ordinary folks understand how he intends to do the one thing he says Bill Clinton can't do, which is to bring the budget deficit to zero. After all, this is a man who's been talking economics day and night for two years, usually with a pointer and charts. But without the charts, Mr. Perot can't remember a thing.

The funny thing about those charts is that they're never there when somebody else wants to consult them. They're always within easy reach when Mr. Perot wants to show the weaknesses in Mr. Clinton's ideas. But ask him a pointed question about his ideas and darned if he didn't leave his charts back on the kitchen table.

Mr. Perot's charts first mysteriously disappeared in May on the "Today" show. Bryant Gumbel tried to pin him down on what he'd cut to balance the budget. Mr. Perot said: "If I had known you wanted them, I would have brought my charts."

Last Sunday, on "Meet the Press," Mr. Perot brought the charts he wanted but not the charts anyone else wanted. At the beginning of the show he said Congress should forget the Clinton deficit-reduction plan because it wouldn't do the job, "and I got the charts here to show you."

His interrogators wanted to know what Mr. Perot would do differently — specifically, how he would carry out his 1992 campaign pledge to cut $141 billion from Medicare and Medicaid. "Well," he replied, "if you had told me that you wanted that, I would have come in with a very detailed list and given it to you. I don't have the list with me."

"We're not talking about some Podding little details," complained one panelist, noting that the Medicare and Medicaid cuts represented half of Mr. Perot's proposed reductions. To which Mr. Perot replied: "If you had told me in advance that you wanted it, I would have brought my charts."

Mr. Perot has been suffering memory lapses and bristling at people who pester him for inconvenient specifics ever since he surfaced on the political scene early last year. So this latest exchange would hardly be noteworthy were it not for two stubborn and irritating facts.

The first is that he remains a figure to be reckoned with. After betraying his followers by abandoning the 1992 race in midstream, he came back and won 19 percent of the vote, partly because he had some bold ideas but largely because he served as a magnet for voters discontented with both major parties. Recent polls suggest that his following is bigger than ever.

Which leads to a more disturbing fact: Mr. Perot is shamelessly and recklessly exploiting his popularity not to advance his professed cause of deficit reduction, but to sandbag the one plausable deficit-reduction plan on the table. Mr. Clinton's program is hardly perfect but at least it has a rough coherence and at least it's out in the open.

Should it survive, it will have withstood the sort of rough-and-tumble politics that Ross Perot professes to stand above but actually fears, having shrunken from political combat at nearly every turn. Mr. Perot's plan, meanwhile, remains untested. It's still on the charts, if anyone can find them.

Perot's missing charts

Ross Perot needs to either put up or shut up. Some very serious business is being conducted in Washington right now, and there is no place for an unelected gadfly who runs off at the mouth without offering anything constructive to the process.

Over the course of his brief political career, Perot metamorphosed from refreshing iconoclast into interesting alternative. He has lately become a dangerous, if slightly absurd, spoiler. He lashes out at all around him, one-man wrecking crew on a crusade of political destruction. When asked to explain even the most basic details of his own plan, he retreats into ludicrous evasions.

On NBC's "Meet the Press" last Sunday, Perot did his best job yet of showing the American people what he really seems to be all about: demagoguery and hot air. Asked to explain specifically how he plans to cut Medicare and Medicaid by $141 billion, as he pledged to do during last year's campaign, he lashed out at the panel of reporters, accusing them of asking surprise questions.

Confronted with the fact that the health care reductions made up only half of his proposed cuts, so a question about them could hardly be a surprise, he said he would have been prepared to answer but hadn't brought his charts.

Hadn't brought his charts?

Perot has every right to attack President Clinton's deficit reduction plan. It could be understood, if not applauded, if he tried to deep-six the president even while acknowledging he had no plan of his own. But it is cynical for him to attempt to tear down the only comprehensive plan on the table while trying to deceive millions of Americans into thinking he has an alternative.

Ross Perot's intent to balance the budget may very well be the best thing for the country. But until he is willing to take his lumps in the political arena, he will come across as little more than a dangerous joke.
What Perot doesn’t know

Then there’s Ross Perot. He may be great at givin’ ‘em hell. But when it comes to giving us substance, the man is a spectacular flop.

As all America knows by now, Perot doesn’t like the president’s budget proposal. (There’s certainly enough to criticize in it.) But the populist hero is unable to outline his own deficit-reduction plan in even the broadest strokes.

His weekend performance on “Meet The Press” was painful to watch. What cuts would he make to achieve the $141 billion in Medicare/Medicaid savings his plan promises? No answer.

He thinks the Clinton program puts too much emphasis on tax hikes and not enough on spending cuts. Yet candidate Perot called for a 50-cents-a-gallon hike in the gas tax (phased in over five years), considerably more than the 4.3-cents-a-gallon the president finally settled on.

When pressed for details, the Texan had the cheek to blame his questioners for asking, “Don’t you think that it would have been responsible for you to call me and say, ‘Ross, I’m going to ask you this question, bring all your stuff’?” Perot lectured the Washington Post’s David Broder.

Excuse us, but who in his right mind would not have expected to be asked such questions? “Meet the Press” is an interview program, for crying out loud. Critics are supposed to be able to articulate their counterproposals, at least in general terms.

Perot is one of the most successful gadflies in electoral history. One in five voters pulled his lever in the last election, making him the strongest third-party presidential candidate in 80 years. But if he expects to maintain any credibility — with the media, experts, or those who think about politics more than once every four years — he’ll have to add some substance to his harping. Those who supported him in the past campaign deserve no less.
**The Vincent Foster Briefings**

IT IS IMPOSSIBLE not to sympathize with the intense desire of the Clinton White House to protect the privacy of the family of the late Vincent Foster Jr., the White House deputy counsel who apparently committed suicide. There is, as White House officials have complained, something unsuavely about the endless badgering that administration press aides have taken over what it is, finally, a personal tragedy.

But unfortunately, the matter does not end there. The White House—presumably by inadvertence rather than design—has over the last week issued a series of contradictory statements on the circumstances surrounding Mr. Foster's death. These contradictions have only fed the agitation about an event that, strictly because of the aspects of public prominence and personal mystery in the case, was bound at least to ignite widespread curiosity.

For example, Communications Director Mark Gearan insisted repeatedly that Mr. Foster "never said anything to indicate that anything was out of the ordinary to his colleagues." This is clearly not true if a whole series of reports from other White House officials is true. It now appears that many old friends were aware that Mr. Foster was depressed—even though this of course does not mean anyone suspected the depths of his despair. Similarly, White House Press Secretary Dee Dee Myers told reporters on Tuesday that she had no knowledge that a handwritten list of three doctors, including two psychiatrists, had been found in Mr. Foster's wallet. But Bernard Nussbaum, White House counsel, said on Thursday he had heard about this list.

We don't think Mr. Gearan or Ms. Myers were trying to cover up anything. But it is not helpful to the administration or to Mr. Foster's family—to send top aides out to give briefings when they have not been given much in the way of information. The contradictions so far only encourage the very sort of foolish and wild speculation with which the administration is legitimately impatient.

It is often useless, and sometimes damaging, to search for rational explanations for the act of suicide. And we do not underestimate the shock and dismay Mr. Foster's death has created inside the White House, especially for his longtime friends. This has no doubt made it harder for them to deal with the public side of this tragedy. But too much has been leaked, and the White House has shifted its ground too often to let matters sit where they now are. The administration needs to gather the facts and give an honest briefing about what it knows—and to be straightforward as well about what it may never be able to know.

**Legacy of Suspicion**

It is now nearly two weeks since Deputy White House Counsel Vincent Foster apparently took his own life with a pistol at a small National Park in Virginia overlooking the Potomac River. The likely suicide is a tragedy in the classic sense of the word: A powerful man is unnecessarily brought down by a flaw. But the handling of the incident by the White House is creating a needless legacy of suspicion in the matter of Mr. Foster's death.

There have been calls for a special counsel. That isn't necessary, and it's downright hypocritical coming from Republicans who have been arguing—up until now—that the whole idea of special prosecutors is a bad one.

But clearer lines of responsibility for this investigation need to be established within the Justice Department. And the FBI should be placed directly in charge. Thus far, the investigation has been marked by the unseemly interference, coupled with sloppiness, of White House staffers.

The inquiry was delegated not to the FBI, the federal law enforcement agency with general jurisdiction over most federal crimes, but to the U.S. Park Police, which has much less experience in this kind of investigation. Next, the White House made matters difficult for Park Police investigators. As Park Police Chief Robert E. Langston observed last week, "It's hard getting sensitive material out of them... a lot of political sensitivity has been brought into it."

On the night that news of Mr. Foster's death became known, the White House chief of staff, Mack McLarty, ordered Mr. Foster's office sealed. But the office remained open until late the following morning. Apparently some people passed in and out of the office. When the office was searched, it was by White House Counsel Bernard Nussbaum, not the Park Police or the FBI. During Mr. Nussbaum's search, he allegedly told an FBI agent who was observing to remain seated rather than attempt to "peek" at sensitive material.

Finally, the White House said the deputy counsel left no notes. Then the fragments of a note were discovered in Mr. Foster's briefcase by another member of the counsel's office after the briefcase had been searched once. But it took the White House 30 hours to turn the note over to investigators from the Park Police.

It is very likely that all of these incidents are innocent. It is likely that Vincent Foster took his own life for a variety of reasons that no one will ever be able to fully fathom. The recedes of the human soul contain forces that do not easily yield their secrets. As St. Augustine observed, "We have only a hasty acquaintance with the state of any man's conscience."

But the investigation can be put on a sounder footing. The FBI has been brought in at last because of the case, fitfully investigating bits and pieces of evidence. It should be placed in full charge with a report to the attorney general—and, ultimately, to the people. The White House has shrugged this matter in controversy. Mr. Foster's memory deserves better.
By all indications, the death of Vincent Foster, the deputy White House counsel, was what it seemed when his body was found last week in a park across the Potomac River from Washington: the tragic suicide of a man who was a close friend and associate of President Bill Clinton.

As bits of information have begun to emerge about Mr. Foster's mood during the last weeks of his life, there appears to be evidence that he was suffering from something approximating clinical depression. These indications include the discovery of a note, its contents as yet undisclosed; the fact that his physician had prescribed a medication to help him deal with depression; the fact that his wife was concerned enough about him to look for help; the fact that he had the names of two psychiatrists to whom he had been referred.

The stress of moving from a private law practice to the White House counsel's office, and dealing with the controversy and criticism that accompanied that job, might well have been more than he could bear. Depression can be readily treated if recognized and understood. But if not treated or inadequately treated, it can be devastating. Too often, people do not seek treatment for a problem that can be more than almost anyone could endure.

We are inclined to see Mr. Foster's death as a personal tragedy and no more. Still, it is important that the investigation into his death be as complete and as solid in its conclusions as it can be.

Anytime someone so close to the president dies under such circumstances, it is vital that the facts of his death be laid out, so that the country can know whether there was anything in it that went beyond personal tragedy. That is so not because of voyeurism or any intent to intrude further into the lives of a family that already has endured a terrible blow.

As Mr. Clinton said in the immediate aftermath of the discovery of Mr. Foster's body, we may never know what apparently caused him to take his life. But it is important that the Justice Department make sure that it knows as much as can be known, and that it shares what it can, so that the country can close the book on the tragedy that ended the life of so obviously talented and able a man.
Confirm, Judge Ginsburg

During the Senate Judiciary Committee vote that unanimously recommended confirmation of Judge Ruth Bader Ginsburg's nomination to the U.S. Supreme Court, Sen. William S. Cohen prematurely referred to her as "Justice Ginsburg." That slip of the tongue by the Maine Republican is understandable. Since she became President Bill Clinton's first nominee for the high court, Judge Ginsburg has commanded — and earned — widespread respect. She deserves to be confirmed overwhelmingly.

One commentator on her confirmation hearing called Judge Ginsburg a conservative liberal; that label, paradoxical as it might sound, appears to fit. In the opinions she has written as a judge and the cases she argued before that as a champiorn of women's rights, she showed a liberal's tendency to extend the protection of the law to those who need it most. But she clearly recognizes the tremendous power of the judiciary to shape society, and she is conservative in how she would use it.

Her well-aired criticism of Roe vs. Wade, the 1973 decision that established abortion rights, shows that tension clearly. No one can doubt that Judge Ginsburg is a strong advocate of a woman's right to make the intensely personal decision of when and whether to have a child. But she realizes that without popular support, such a right faces a tough road between courtroom decree and everyday implementation.

So her criticism of Roe was based not on its result but its reasoning. Instead of giving support to a process where abortion rights were winning legislative protection, the court created a medical test that prompted a never-ending series of protests and legal challenges between groups that have a hard time finding any common ground. Judge Ginsburg's critique illustrates the dangers of a court's getting too far in front of a public that may have come around on its own to a less controversial rationale.

Will Judge Ginsburg be able to impose such a moderating view on other justices? The value she places on collegiality suggests she may be able to gain allies in Justices David Souter and Sandra Day O'Connor for views that would likely be held by Justices Harry Blackmun and John Paul Stevens as well. Justice Anthony Kennedy, whose decisions drifted rightward during the court's last term, might also join such a centrist position, leaving conservatives Antonin Scalia, Clarence Thomas and William Rehnquist in a much less commanding position.

Such a result would reinforce and extend the centrist, progressive philosophy that lies at the core of the Clinton administration. Its first nomination to the court may prove to be its most important, establishing tone and direction. Judge Ginsburg should be confirmed so she can begin that task.

IN OUR OPINION

Judge Ruth Bader Ginsburg hasn't yet been confirmed as a member of the U.S. Supreme Court, and she's already done the court and nation a service. She has brought such integrity and commanding presence to this point in her life that she has won the unanimous approval of the Senate Judiciary Committee.

Republicans are struggling to rally at least nine votes against her on the Senate floor, that being the number of senators who opposed Justice David Souter's nomination during the Bush administration. That would be as inconsequential as it was in the Souter confirmation. Judge Ginsburg has become almost a consensus nominee.

Judges Ginsburg's easy dominance of the confirmation process suggests that President Bill Clinton has succeeded at taking some of the poison out of selecting a Supreme Court nominee. He did it by searching for and finding, not some left-wing counterpoint to a Clarence Thomas type, but a person who has demonstrated her skills as a judge, and her personal balance and moderation. The president seemingly tried not to advance an ideological agenda — though his nominee clearly agrees with him on abortion — in order to concentrate on finding a solid jurist.

The Judiciary Committee's vote and the expected Senate affirmation of it represent a real dividend from that approach. Mr. Clinton may not always choose such non-controversial nominees. Sometimes you need to take a risk with a particularly able but provocative candidate.

In this context, though, Mr. Clinton made a wise as well as a consensus-building choice. Judge Ginsburg has already brought credit to the president. The law and the nation are the better for what this nomination has done to take partnership and divisiveness out of the process.

Ginsburg already has helped heal selection process
Reinventing Humility

No one can quibble with the goals of Vice President Gore’s National Performance Review, which is aimed at improving government’s efficiency and accountability by—among other things—encouraging energy and initiative on the part of government employees. The project is an especially important undertaking for a Democratic administration. Democrats insist that government can make life better. But to get Americans to believe this in an era of deep public suspicion of bureaucracies, Democrats first have to prove they can make government work better.

There are large problems in the Performance Review’s self-assigned goal of “reinventing government,” and the Brookings Institution has produced a timely document aimed at getting expectations in line with possibilities. Titled “Improving Government Performance: An Owner’s Manual,” the report is sympathetic to the Gore project’s goals but warns against underestimating how hard it will be to transform government’s behavior and habits.

At times, especially in the early going, partisans of the Performance Review seemed to be promising that it would produce large cost savings—a painless road to deficit reduction. The Brookings authors—John J. Dilulio Jr. and Gerald Garvey of Princeton, Donald F. Kettl of Wisconsin—argue that while some money should be saved by reorganizing government, this should not be seen as the project’s main goal. Truly large spending reductions come only from a willingness to end large government programs. The report rightly warns against confusing disagreements “over what government ought to do” with arguments over “how well it does it.” A government that does many things better will still be expensive.

The Brookings study unmasks how contradictory public demands of government performance can be. The Gore project seems to be promising both more accountability and more freedom for government employees to be innovative and daring. But these two goals are often at war. To prove it is staying on top of what government does, Congress often focuses on “isolated horror stories,” the study notes. In doing so, it discourages government employees from doing anything outside the ordinary that would be hard to explain to a congressional committee. The Performance Review needs to encourage change not only in the bureaucracy but in congressional attitudes as well.

The Brookings study’s message is important both to the Gore project and to those who will be judging its first round of proposals this fall: Changing the way government works is a long-term task and depends on “an incremental, evolutionary, experimental approach to institutional reform.” If the Performance Review is expected to produce miracles, it probably won’t be able to produce anything at all.

Earth to vice president, etc.

Rain-forest Revisionism: So, the world’s rain forests may not be really the poor, fragile creatures that environmentalists, Hollywood types and Vice President Al Gore would have us believe they are. According to the New York Times on Tuesday, there is no such thing as a pristine rain forest. The rain forests the world over that Mr. Gore believes to have been untouched since the last Ice Age, and that should therefore remain that way till the world ends, have in fact been cleared time and again by humans since prehistoric times, burned down to make room for crops, harvested for trees, cleared for settlements.

Even the dense jungle of the Selva in Costa Rica, long held to be a fine specimen of a pristine forest, has been host to human beings for as long as 4,000 years and as recently as 300 years ago. That conclusion has been drawn by Dr. Deborah Clark of the La Selva Biological Station and will be presented today at a meeting of the Ecological Society of America in Madison, Wis. She bases her findings on the distribution of certain palm trees, harvested by settlers, and on the discovery of a stone hearth found in the forest dating back to somewhere around the birth of Christ. The good news is that rain forests are clearly capable of bouncing back on their own. The bad news is that environmentalists, Hollywood types and Mr. Gore mostly do not let scientific facts stand in the way of their opinions.
President Clinton bitterly complained this week that congressional Republicans were being obstructionists in their attempts to hold up his National Service program. He was right. That became more apparent as Senate Republicans filibustered against the bill even after the White House made concessions to address their concerns.

The president's program was a good idea when he proposed it as a candidate and it is still a good idea. Under the program, students would earn up to $10,000 in college tuition assistance in return for two years of community service. Students could also receive stipends of at least $7,400 per year and health-care and child day-care benefits. The program not only would boost community efforts on any number of social problems, it would provide needed assistance for students who would not be able to go to college otherwise.

With only minor changes, the House had the good sense to pass the bill on Wednesday. Most Senate Republicans opposed the bill because they said it cost too much and ran for too long a period. They began a filibuster last Friday. That's their right. But when the White House agreed to a compromise to scale back the program that should have been the end of it. The White House agreed to have the initial pilot program run for three years instead of the original five. Anything shorter would not be enough time to evaluate the program. It agreed to tax the stipends received by more financially able students. It also agreed to reduce the annual amounts spent on the program over the three years. Even with those concessions, a vote taken late Thursday fell one Republican vote short to end the filibuster.

Although the filibuster was finally ended Friday, it showed partisan politics at its worst, especially when you consider that a Republican supporter of the compromise bill, Sen. David Durenberger of Minnesota, called the national service measure, "the most Republican public program we have ever put forward." Apparently, some senators haven't gotten the message that the American people are fed up with gridlock. Those that insist on putting politics over good policy, should have to answer for it.

**Detroit Free Press 8/3**

National service plan is a constructive investment

After a week-long Republican filibuster in the Senate, it appears President Bill Clinton will get most of what he asked for in his national service plan.

The proposal would allow college students to earn as much as $10,000 in tuition assistance, in return for two years of community service. The measure, similar to legislation approved by the House, is set for a Senate vote today.

The president needs such a victory over a too-often partisan and gridlocked Congress. Under the Senate bill, some students could receive living allowances of $7,400 or more a year, along with health care and child care benefits. The program would cost $300 million in its first year, $500 million in the second year, and $700 million in the third — a small investment for potentially large rewards.

The president's plan had to be modified in the Senate to squeeze past Republican objections. But it has survived in recognizable form, with the apparent support of several Republicans who have agreed to break party ranks to vote for it. If this victory marks a renewal of bipartisan cooperation between Congress and the White House, that is a heartening development.

The GI Bill helped educate a generation of Americans after World War II. The White House proposal could do the same for another generation of young people — and instill in them the ideal of useful, constructive service to others.
**The Elders Nomination**

SHOULD Dr. Joycelyn Elders be confirmed by the Senate as the next surgeon general, she will acquire a title and step into a job that has been around since 1870. We note that bit of history and that she will not be the nation's chief health officer (unlike some other modern surgeons general) simply to make the point that the squabbling over her nomination has grown out of proportion to the duties she's expected to perform. As ranking officer in the Public Health Service's Commissioned Corps, she would be a key health adviser to the president and the country. Her background and professional experience qualify her. But contrary to some claims about the position, the health of the people doesn't rest solely on the surgeon general.

Some modern surgeons general were quiet crusaders who achieved a great deal. Luther Terry launched the landmark study on smoking and health and got Congress to put warnings on cigarette packs. Thomas Parran raised the roof in the late 1930s and 1940s against venereal diseases. More recently, Dr. C. Everett Koop crusaded against AIDS and smoking. But the responsibility for developing proposals that address critical health care reform issues belongs to a whole range of other administration players.

Notwithstanding the limited nature of the job, Dr. Elders has drawn heavy fire from several antibortion and conservative groups, principally for her stance on sex education, abortion and contraception. But little in the substance of her positions differs significantly from views held by most people, including us. She's hardly the radical or out-of-touch person her opponents make her out to be. But Dr. Elders does have a provocative way with words. That is what most of the fuss—and praise—is about.

Over the years, Dr. Elders, as a state official, has given as well as got in controversies about her positions and her manner of advocacy. But she has a different charge as the nation's highest ranking public health official. The federal post can be used to spur a national response to critical public health problems. It is not, however, a stage from which a surgeon general is free to put down, put off or trash segments of the American public with whom he or she disagrees. We have in mind the broadside that Dr. Elders leveled against the Catholic Church during a pro-choice rally in Little Rock last year. The Catholic League for Religious and Civil Rights said it smacked of ignorance or malice and that it was "a rank distortion of history to say that the Catholic Church was 'silent' or did 'nothing' about past instances of societal injustice." The league was right. With all her professional accomplishments, that aspect of Dr. Elders' approach to public discourse is troubling.

Dr. Koop faced similar reservations about his appointment. An active speaker on the pro-life circuit before he was nominated, he said at his confirmation hearing, "It's not my intent to use any government post as a pulpit for ideology." During his service, he was outspoken, stood on principle and did not temporize as far as his responsibilities as surgeon general went. But he didn't allow himself or his office to be captured by any cause either. And he never stooped to demagoguery. He was a good doctor for the country—and a good model for Dr. Elders.

**A Vote for Dr. Elders**

Dr. Joycelyn Elders, President Bill Clinton's pick for Surgeon General, is over the first hurdle. Yesterday the Senate Labor and Human Resources Committee voted 13 to 4 to confirm her appointment. Next week her nomination may reach the Senate floor. Americans can consider themselves lucky if Dr. Elders leaps that second hurdle. She is the nation's First Doctor needs to be.

During her years as public health director of Arkansas, Dr. Elders forced her fellow Arkansans to take a good, hard look at the facts of life in their state, especially the facts of adolescents' lives. She spoke of the threat of AIDS, the sexual abuse of children, the necessity of sex education and of easy access to contraceptives. She fought for school-based health clinics that could dispense contraceptives on request, for AIDS prevention programs, better childhood immunization and prenatal programs. Above all, she fought for giving kids information that would allow them not only to make informed choices—but to save their lives.

As the nation's First Doctor, Dr. Elders can bring her common-sense message about sex and its consequences to all Americans. More than a million American teen-agers get pregnant every year; and a recent Government study found that 4.2 girls per 1,000, nearly twice the rate for boys, were H.I.V.-positive. More than 50 million Americans are infected with venereal diseases, and abortion rates prove too many pregnant people are unplanned and unwanted. For all such ills the best prescription is straight, strong, honest talk about the sexual preciosity of America's adolescents, and the necessity for all Americans to know how to protect themselves against unplanned pregnancy and disease. Such talk makes for good public health—and a good Surgeon General.
Japan: The Voters' Reward

Democracy is alive and well in Japan. It's only a first step, of course, but the millions of Japanese who voted two weeks ago for an end to the corrupt "money politics" of the long-ruling Liberal Democratic Party are about to get their reward.

Morihiro Hosokawa has been chosen by a wide coalition of former opposition parties as their nominee for Prime Minister. His ratification by Parliament appears to have the votes to make Mr. Hosokawa Japan's next prime minister.

Hosokawa was elected last May after a central government, is also on record in favor of decentralization and less regulation.

He refused to accept corporate contributions during his campaign for the Diet.

Some observers expect the coalition to dissolve after it passes political reforms. At the same time, they note that Mr. Hosokawa is an adroit politician who has confounded his detractors before.

Mr. Hosokawa's political future undoubtedly depends on his ability to maintain strong support. Both are experienced and agile politicians, and if their recent political conversions prove real, they could get a turn at the top later on.

Meanwhile, the LDP, still Japan's largest party, chose a new reformist leader of its own.

If the new coalition quickly crumbles, the reform ideas that won the election are poised to persist. Symbolically, at least, Mr. Hosokawa is the perfect choice. Other leading opposition contenders, like Tsutomu Hata and Ichiro Ozawa, were too recently at the center of LDP scheming to be credible exemplars of renewal. Both are experienced and agile politicians, and if their recent political conversions prove real, they could get a turn at the top later on.

Now, the relatively untested Mr. Hosokawa faces a daunting challenge. He must hold together a group of parties and personalities ranging from the aristocratic Mr. Hosokawa quit the LDP more than a year ago, before such defections were seen as a shrewd career move. He has become the personal symbol of a new, cleaner political style.

If it manages that, the coalition could attract enough independents and LDP defectors to lay the basis for a stable two-party system. Real political competition would offer the best insurance against the return of old-style corruption and give ordinary Japanese citizens maximum clout.

Washington needs to extend a supportive and understanding hand to Tokyo in what looks like an extended period of political transition. Wisely, Mr. Clinton showed a new sensitivity on his recent Tokyo trip, backing off from the harsh trade rhetoric of last spring.

Rhetorical bullying now would not only be counterproductive. It would also jeopardize a still-frail democratic renewal. That renewal represents the best long-term hope for better relations between the U.S. and Japan.

Japan's Bill Clinton

It is being said in the United States and his own country that Morihiro Hosokawa is Japan's Bill Clinton. If so, it is possible that trade relations between the United States and Japan could improve markedly if, as is generally expected, Mr. Hosokawa becomes Japan's next prime minister.

Japan's eight rebellious "Not-LDP" parties, have chosen Mr. Hosokawa, a member of the lower house of parliament or Diet, as their candidate for prime minister. The coalition appears to have the votes to make Mr. Hosokawa Japan's first prime minister in 38 years who is not a member of the Liberal Democratic Party. The election will be held in a special session of the lower house next Thursday.

Mr. Hosokawa, who is considered a political revolutionary in Japan, quit the LDP and formed the Japan New Party last May after he became convinced that the voters had had enough of the corruption and scandals in which the LDP had become embroiled.

His vision proved prescient recently when the Liberal Democratic government of Prime Minister Kiichi Miyazawa collapsed after a parliamentary no-confidence vote and the LDP lost badly in the subsequent elections.

Although some 10 years older than President Clinton, there are obvious similarities between the two leaders. Both are technocratic former governors with limited experience in the national government. At 55, Mr. Hosokawa is considered young by Japanese political standards. If elected, he will be Japan's first prime minister of a post-World War II generation. That would be another similarity he would share with President Clinton.

Perhaps most important of all, Mr. Hosokawa agrees with President Clinton that Japan would benefit from opening its markets to imports.

Mr. Hosokawa, who campaigned against the central government, is also on record in favor of decentralization and less regulation.

Mr. Hosokawa also campaigned against the excessive closeness between politics and business that has led to numerous LDP scandals. He declined to accept corporate contributions during his campaign for the Diet.

How long and successful Mr. Hosokawa's tenure as prime minister will be could well depend on how long the Not-LDP coalition holds together. Mr. Hosokawa does not have a strong political base in the Diet. His party holds only 36 seats, less than one-fifth of the coalition's strength.

Some observers expect the coalition to dissolve after it passes political reforms. At the same time, they note that Mr. Hosokawa is an adroit politician who has confounded his detractors before.

Mr. Hosokawa's political future undoubtedly depends on his ability to maintain strong popular support. If he can keep a healthy majority of the people on his side, he might be able to truly transform Japanese politics for the better.
Lessons From Mr. Major

IF PRESIDENT Clinton needs cheering up about the state of his popularity, he could send for the latest polls on British Prime Minister John Major. The Conservative leader is at rock bottom with a 19 percent approval rating. A mere 11 percent see him as a capable leader. In a special election last week, a constituency the Conservatives had held for 83 years was lost in a rout.

Though the British economy is actually improving, it's long been in the doldrums: Unemployment is still over 10 percent. In last September's round of troubles in the European currency markets, Mr. Major was seen as having made some bad choices, and Britain was forced to withdraw from the European Community's currency system. More recently, a group of rebels inside the Conservative Party have bolted on key votes about Britain's participation in the stronger version of the European Community created by the Maastricht treaty. Mr. Major is for Maastricht; the rebels (along with former prime minister Margaret Thatcher) are against.

On top of all this, Mr. Major faces persistent grumbling from full-blooded Thatcherite conservatives who see him as insufficiently faithful to her legacy. Relations between Mr. Major and Mrs. Thatcher, once warm, are now terrible.

Mr. Major, at least, has time. New elections don't have to be called in Britain until 1997, and despite Conservative grumbling, no one expects him to be ousted as leader any time soon. And he can draw at least some comfort in the fact that not all his troubles are of his own making. The Conservatives have been in power now for 14 years. They seem tired, and the voters seem tired of them. During most of last year's election campaign, much of the British electorate badly wanted a new government. But by the time voting day arrived, not enough of them could bring themselves to trust the opposition Labor Party, and the centrist third party, the Liberal Democrats, were not strong enough to win. So the Tories hung on. Fourteen years is a long time for one party to hold power.

Voters are unhappy with their governments almost everywhere—a message sent most recently by the rise of insurgents in Italy and Japan. The bad electoral mood reflects unhappiness bred by a sluggish world economy and an impatience with "isms" of all kinds, including Thatchersim and Reaganism, Conservatism and Socialism. Voters seem to sense the inadequacies of the old answers and the paucity of new ones. For incumbents such as Mr. Major, the one bit of good news is that this mass mistrust seems to embrace governing and opposition parties alike. It may simply be that this is a terrible time to be a politician.
Trouble for the Middle Class

WHEN A COUNTRY'S economy grows slowly over a period of years, as the American economy has done, people are tempted to press for laws to defend their own security. Unfortunately, most of the traditional ideas—like laws to discourage imports, or to slow down industrial restructuring—will make the economy grow still more slowly.

Speaking in Chicago at a conference on the future workplace, President Clinton once again made himself the evangelist for another and better response. He is going to have to give a great many of these speeches over the months and years ahead, for he was telling his audience that progress won't come rapidly or easily. It's a kind of politics that's going to require a lot of stamina—most of all from him, but also from the voters.

For a dozen years the country followed public policies that produced popular results in the short term, and at the end of those years it was in serious trouble. Public investment in skills and technology hasn't kept up with the need. One reason is unrestrained and continuing growth in the cost of health care, preempting steadily rising shares of state and federal budgets. Another reason is the cost of past borrowing itself, as interest costs accumulate. There won't be a dramatic new surge of public spending to make things better.

Even before Mr. Clinton came to office, a change in mood was rippling through the country. The economy's growth is being slowed because a lot of Americans, from those running big corporations to those running families, decided that it was time to pay off some of those menacing debts. The new caution has had a drastic impact on an economy accustomed to high consumption, and the adjustment is turning out to be difficult.

Paying off debt, investing in new technology, improving the schools and persuading people to keep going back to them—there's nothing very glamorous about that and nothing that offers a quick return. The only thing to be said for this line of policy is that it's right.

Over the past two decades, Mr. Clinton said in Chicago, there's been "a steady erosion in the security of average middle-class people." He reminded the businessmen in his audience that their labor forces are their most valuable assets, and their ability to compete will be heavily affected by society's ability to raise the quality of the labor that they can hire. That's a basic reality, but progress is always slow and gradual. Mr. Clinton is going to have to keep reminding the country what it's working toward and the penalties for falling short.

MONDAY, AUGUST 2, 1993 THE WASHINGTON POST
Belarus, a Model for Ukraine

The Clinton Administration is starting to make progress in disarming the new nuclear republics of the former Soviet Union. Belarus is fast becoming nuclear-free, and reaping appropriate rewards. Taking notice, balky Ukraine has begun disarming. That's reason enough for Washington to begin rewarding Ukraine as well.

True, the aging SS-19 missiles Ukraine is deactivating are fast becoming unreliable, posing more of a menace to their immediate environment than anywhere else. True, too, Ukraine says it is now disarming just one SS-19 regiment — consisting of 16 missiles, each armed with six nuclear warheads — and will disarm a second regiment in September. Until it reaches agreement with Russia and the U.S., it refuses to deactivate its more potent SS-24 missiles; it has 46, each carrying up to 10 warheads.

Despite this refusal, the U.S. is right to provide Ukraine $175 million to aid in the disarming. Astute Ukrainians know that these funds — and other desperately needed aid and investment — won't keep flowing unless Ukraine continues down the road to nuclear disarmament. And they are beginning to recognize that remaining nuclear will leave Ukraine economically deprived and politically isolated — in short, less secure.

Thanks to timely action by the Clinton Administration, Belarus can serve as a model for Ukraine. President Clinton himself received Belarus's leader, Stanislav Shushkevich, the first chief of state of the fledgling ex-Soviet republics he invited to the White House. The Ukrainian President, Leonid Kravchuk, might take note.

Mr. Shushkevich did not leave empty-handed. He signed agreements to receive $59 million of the $65 million in aid he was promised this year. That includes a pilot project to clean up one of Belarus's missile bases and convert it to civilian use. Some of the funds will help provide housing for officers who manned the base.

That's an especially appropriate form of American aid because it helps Belarus get out of the nuclear business and turn to something more productive for its people, like rebuilding its economy.

Suppliers to Saddam

Statesmen have been steadfast, diplomats have been patient and UN arms inspectors have been resolute in their attempts to monitor Saddam Hussein's missiles and dismantle his weapons of mass destruction. Admireable as these qualities may be, the chronic mode of crisis created by Saddam's regime requires something that is much rarer in the councils of state: introspection.

If political leaders are to play the role of statesmen, they must not only cope with the consequences of past errors; they must ask themselves why those errors were made in the first place.

When it comes to Saddam's genocidal, ecocidal strutting upon the world stage, many of the countries that are now fretting about his compliance with UN sanctions are the same that lavished missile parts, machine tools, computers and billions of dollars on the butcher of Baghdad.

The story of their complicity in Saddam's quest for nuclear weapons and advanced missiles is shameful — and should be instructive. The Wisconsin Project on Nuclear Arms Control tells much of the story in a report that names the complicit companies, describes the goods and services they peddled, lists the deals they made and recounts the share of Saddam's nuclear and missile markets each eager government captured for itself.

The former West Germany cornered 50 percent of that market. Switzerland took 8 percent. Italy and France had 5 percent each. Nor was the United States guiltless. Even after the end of his war against Iran, Saddam received US tools, dual-use technologies and credits.

President Bush and Secretary of State James Baker pressured Cabinet officials to ignore banking, trade and defense specialists who warned against White House initiatives to finance and supply Saddam's military buildup. Indeed, Bush was subpoenaed to testify in a bank fraud trial in Atlanta — to tell what he might have known about a covert US policy to procure loans for Saddam and to protect the government of Italy, which controlled the implicated bank, from embarrassment.

An accounting of past blunders can be valuable as the prologue to a therapy for governments addicted to the weapons trade. The purpose of such therapy would not be simply to prevent the rearming of Saddam (although in the past two years he has been able to draw on foreign suppliers to rebuild his conventional arms industries).

The governments that nearly made Saddam's regime a nuclear power must acknowledge their shortsighted venality so that future Saddams will not be sold the materials and technology needed for nuclear warheads and the missiles to deliver them. No task is more crucial to global security. President Clinton's statecraft will be judged by his ability to make US companies and foreign states "just say no" to proliferators with hard currency.
Clinton and the Caucus

MEMBERS of the Congressional Black Caucus and the voting bloc whose interests they presumably serve on Capitol Hill have been disappointed with President Clinton's relative lack of success in appointing members of minorities to positions in his administration.

His hasty reversal July 1 of his nomination of highly regarded black woman lawyer Lani Guinier to head of the Justice Department's civil rights division - after being informed of some unorthodox opinions she espoused - still rankles among the Caucus membership and other blacks.

Caucus leaders were so disturbed by the president's reversal of the Guinier appointment that they initially refused to meet with him when he sought to appease them.

Mr. Clinton later attempted to mollify upset Caucus members by promising to name more blacks and women to high-level White House posts.

Members of the group grew significantly from 26 to 40 and added a new senator; Carol Moseley-Braun (D) of Illinois, to its ranks in last November's election.

They indicated that they would give the president a chance to make good on that pledge.

Reps. Kweisi Mfume (D) of Maryland, chairman of the Caucus, said that, although he felt the Guinier situation had been badly mishandled, he was pleased that Clinton promised to be more aware of and responsive to concerns of citizens whose concerns the Black Caucus seeks to serve.

The incident demonstrated an aspect of the Caucus itself that members would like to change: Democratic Party leaders tend to take its support for granted.

But if its membership continues to grow, the Caucus may get more attention.

One factor in its favor is that efforts to push through policies that aid black Americans give impetus to reforms sought by other minorities and by women. Another is that aggressive veteran members such as Reps. Charles Rangel (D) of New York and Ronald Dellums (D) of California are being joined by newcomers who are determined to induce reforms.

As its numbers continue to grow, the Caucus is reaching the point at which it will be able to exert more influence on the White House and congressional leaders.

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FBI INTEGRITY

Independence is crucial for bureau and new director

Because of the circumstances that created a need to appoint a new director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, there is a compelling need for Judge Louis Freeh to show that he understands that independence and integrity must be reinforced in that office.

President Bill Clinton has nominated Judge Freeh to fill the vacancy created when he fired William Sessions, the previous director. The dismissal followed a long and awkward period after the issuance of a Justice Department report, at the end of the Bush administration, citing ethical lapses by the director and his wife.

The president's decision to fire Mr. Sessions, after a lengthy and unsuccessful effort to get him to leave quietly, was generally accepted as necessary and right.

To assure the independence of the FBI, the director serves a 10-year term. To assure that he is not totally beyond accountability, he can be removed by the president.

Mr. Clinton's demonstrated reluctance to dismiss Mr. Sessions, even in the face of clear evidence that he was not leading the FBI well, shows why the law about the tenure of the director makes sense.

In answer to a question from Sen. Arlen Specter, R-Pa., about the inappropria
Welfare Reform

Bill Clinton struck a chord with voters last year when he proposed transforming welfare into "workfare," and Doug Wilder knows how to match pitch. With his Senate campaign looming, the Governor recently announced some details of the welfare reform he proposed in his State of the Commonwealth address.

"We have applied Band-Aids for years without success," Wilder said of the current system. "Radical surgery is indicated to save the patient." His preferred course of treatment: diverting federal dollars from welfare recipients to employers willing to hire them.

While we continue to support the healthy push for reform the Governor initiated in January, the recent experiences of some states suggest not all his proposals are curative. Even Lieutenant Governor Don Beyer, appointed to head the commission to oversee the program, expressed reservations. "I know, as a businessman myself, if someone offers me a $2,000 tax credit, it's not going to be enough of an incentive for me to do something I don't already want to do."

Beyer's commission should first explore why similar projects in other states have been high on dropouts and low on success. Critics say the focus on getting welfare recipients into jobs — regardless of whether they have the skills to succeed — is misguided; and the developers of this plan appear poised to repeat that mistake. Secretary of Health and Human Resources Howard Cullum has said, "We are less concerned with whether a person can name all 50 states... than whether they have the skills to land a job."

Most worrisome, Wilder's proposal will not curb the astronomical costs of public assistance as much as had been anticipated. Only 600 of Virginia's 74,000 welfare recipients will be selected for the pilot program. And because participants should be functionally literate, have a high school diploma and no children younger than school-age, only 13 percent of Virginia's welfare recipients ever will qualify as preferred participants. Cullum estimates savings of $1.4 million annually for the first eight years — a negligible percentage of the $518 million shelled out each year. One example for the commission to consider is Wisconsin's model. Under that state's WORK NOT WELFARE plan, able-bodied citizens can receive public assistance for two years in the form of an "Independence account." Within 30 days of applying for aid, a welfare recipient must be working — even if in community service — or training for a job. For every hour spent working or training, cash benefits are withdrawn from the account and paid to them. After one year, a recipient must be working (no longer training). And after the second year, cash welfare payments end.

Bill loves Rosty

If where there's smoke there's fire, Rep. Dan Rostenkowski is an ethical five-alarm fire.

The Chicago congressman is virtually certain to be indicted on charges of illegally converting House postal vouchers to cash. The allegations come from Robert V. Rota, the longtime House postmaster who now confesses he allowed the theft to go on for 20 years. Rostenkowski claims he is innocent. In the eyes of the law, he is presumed to be so.

But as we noted in an editorial last week, while he has not yet been convicted, Rostenkowski has become a symbol of moral rot. Nobody so tainted has any right to continue chairing the House Ways and Means Committee. Rostenkowski should resign that post.

Apparentiy, President Clinton disagrees.

In a Chicago fundraising speech Monday night, the president led the audience in a standing ovation to Rostenkowski. "I need Dan Rostenkowski," Clinton declaimed. "He's very important."

And just in case anybody missed the point, the Chicago Tribune reported, Rostenkowski "got another symbol of White House support: a ride back to Washington on Air Force One."

In his campaign last year, Clinton exhorted voters "to clean up Washington," calling the milking of public office for private gain a "betrayal of democracy [that] must stop." By going out of his way to embrace the contaminated Rostenkowski, Clinton contradicts every reformist sentence he ever uttered.
An independent Travelgate investigation

Remember Passportgate? How soon scandals are forgotten, even ones involving allegations of political dirty tricks, such as the accusation that Bush administration officials went through candidate Bill Clinton's passport file looking for dirt. But even though that controversy has slipped from the front pages of The Washington Post, there are still busy prosecutors going through the evidence, as an independent counsel labors on in search of indictments. Lawrence Walsh, too, is still at it on Iran-Contra.

The age of the independent counsels is over for now, thank goodness, as the independent counsel statute has lapsed in December. (Congress will probably revive it in some form, alas.) Yet the need for independent investigations has not lapsed. Indeed, given the cronynism that sometimes comes on display, the Clinton White House ought to be eager to establish public confidence in its ability to police itself. One way to do so would be for the president to ask for the appointment of an independent counsel to investigate Travelgate, the dubious firing of the entire White House travel office staff.

That is not going to happen, it seems. The Landmark Legal Foundation had asked Attorney General Janet Reno to start an independent investigation by appointing some retired prosecutor or judge to look into the affair. Though the independent counsel statute has lapsed, attorneys general have always had it in their power to name credible independent prosecutors. The Justice Department, however, now says it will do no such thing, that the investigation under way by the department will be sufficient. "The appointment of an independent counsel is reserved for extraordinary circumstances," wrote Acting Assistant Attorney General John Keeney to the Landmark Legal Foundation, "where there is a compelling reason to believe that an investigation or prosecution by the Department of Justice would be compromised by an actual or perceived conflict of interest."

Mr. Keeney has got to be kidding if he does not think there is already a strong perception of conflicts of interest in the Justice Department's handling of the case. The FBI — an arm of the Justice Department — was enmeshed in the fiasco, manipulated, it appears, into both investigations and public relations to cover backdoors in the White House. all at a time when the bureau's director was desperately trying to convince the administration that he should remain in office. The perception, at the very least, is there. The politicization of the FBI is reason enough to call for a nonpolitical investigation.

Add to that the questions that have been raised about the involvement of the Internal Revenue Service. And the initial disposition of the travel office business. By Mr. Keeney's own standards, then — "a compelling reason to believe that an investigation or prosecution by the Department of Justice would be compromised by an actual or perceived conflict of interest" — this is a case that requires independent inquiry.

The GOP malaise?

Some Republicans, it is said, are looking at the polls and fretting. They see that President Clinton has sunk significantly in the public's estimation, but that Republicans have not registered corresponding gains for themselves. Therefore the GOP's unified opposition to the Clinton economic plan and to the budget reconciliation package is not enough and may possibly be harmful.

The Republicans should relax, any of them who are actually tense over this. In the first place, let us recall the esteem in which the public holds Congress in general. When Senate Majority Leader George Mitchell and company were standing shoulder to shoulder in the road blocking all progress on George Bush's legislative agenda, such as it was, they did not exactly win over public opinion. Americans' view of Congress continued to sink like a stone. It is the misfortune of Republican members of Congress that they are, well, members of Congress, and so they share in the public disapproval directed at the institution.

As for the insults congressional Republicans suffer owing to their alleged unwillingness or inability to come up with workable solutions to national problems, they really are premature. You need the opportunity to solve problems before you can fairly be accused of having failed to do so. and the GOP must not had the opportunity. We shall see how Republicans govern when they control the White House, the Senate and the House — a prospect that is perhaps not so remote as it used to be.

In the second place, the GOP does not have a candidate for 1996 yet, nor should it. That means there is no figure around whom issues coalesce in a way that makes a direct comparison with the sitting president meaningful. The only figure on the current scene with that stature is Ross Perot. The polls do not indicate any groundswell for him, either.

The GOP has plenty to worry about. But anybody who thinks the current climate isn't full of opportunity for Republicans is mistaken.
Minority rule: Student loans

H ere is a story of how a minority works to thwart the will of the majority in the House of Representatives:

The goal of Rep. William D. Ford, chairman of the House Education and Labor Committee and a key budget conference negotiator, was to keep intact the administration's plan to take over the entire student loan business by requiring the government to guarantee companies and to create a new bureaucracy within the Education Department to do the lending directly. This was the provision the House's version of the budget bill had included. But in the context of a massive five-year budget plan — and major debate over the kind and amount of new taxes and spending reductions — direct lending barely registered as an issue on Congress' radar screen. That may be exactly what its proponents had in mind, since there is not much support for the measure in either the House or the Senate. Indeed, in the version of the bill passed by the Senate, the take-over was capped at 50 percent of lending at the end of five years.

Mr. Ford wanted the House version to prevail in conflict between the two chambers short of that goal. Moreover, his high-handed tactics have angered a number of Democrats who have supported the general thrust of President Clinton's deficit-reduction program but disagree on direct lending.

There are sound reasons not to rush headlong into direct lending, and the opposition to doing so is bipartisan. Some of them were discussed in an editorial here June 22. For all the savings anticipated, more than $4 billion over five years, are illusory; the Congressional Budget Office thinks savings of a little more than $2 billion are the most to be had. Second, eliminating the private sector essentially turns student loans into a new entitlement program. Third, direct lending means more government borrowing — about $53 billion more over five years. Fourth, proponents are oddly unforthcoming on how the loans will be collected; they clearly envision a role for the Internal Revenue Service and withholding from wages, but this in effect turns employers into loan collectors nationwide. Fifth, the GAO and others have found significant deficiencies in the ability of the Education Department to handle its current role in student loans. A survey of the most compelling, Congress has considered direct lending at length. The subject was debated as part of the reauthorization of the Higher Education Act last year. Proponents of a federal takeover of the student loan business (Mr. Ford included) had their say, and they lost. What Congress authorized instead was a four-year pilot program to see if, in fact, direct lending would be more efficient. That program reflected the majority sentiment of the 102nd Congress, and there is every indication that the 103rd shares that view. Attaching a sudden move toward direct lending to a massive reconciliation bill is little less than an attempt by a legislative minority, in concert with enthusiasts in the new administration, to thwart the will of the majority.

This did not sit well with the Senate, which modified the bill to cap the program at 50 percent. Nor were members of the House any less upset. Led by Bart Gordon, a Tennessee Democrat, in conjunction with fellow Democrat Earl Pomeroy of North Dakota and Republican Bill Goodling of Pennsylvania, opponents forced a vote June 30 on an amendment to an education authorization bill that would cap funds for direct lending through the levels specified in the Higher Education Act pilot program. Unable to defeat the amendment, most proponents of direct lending signed on. It was an effort to portray the vote as meaningless (the conference committee still superseded the 103rd Congress) and to keep the administration from having to decide the day on direct lending. It was an effort to keep on track the administration's plan to take over the entire student loan business. But Mr. Ford, would defend the House position to the last. Mr. Ford maintained that members didn't really know what they were signing, and that upon finding out, they were retracting their vote. Mr. Gordon, for his part, sought to poot-pooh the letter. He maintained that the obviously preposterous view that because the House had passed its version of the huge Higher Education Act, this constituted an explicit endorsement for direct lending — and he, Mr. Ford, would defend the House position to the last. Mr. Ford maintained that members didn't really know what they were signing, and that upon finding out, they were retracting their vote.

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SUPER COLLIDER

Don't make Schwitters a scapegoat

Since fall, there have been four audits conducted at the Superconducting Super Collider site, 12 reviews of the project, three assessments and four investigations. That's 23 separate reviews in less than a year.

The super collider administrative staff and workers have been subjected to an endless stream of questions about everything from construction costs to compliance with federal labor laws.

And what horrific fraud has been unearthed? That some money was spent on plants to brighten inexpensive warehouse-like buildings and other money was spent for a Christmas party for employees. More egregious misspending can be found in congressional postage stamp accounts.

Now, on the eve of the most important Senate vote in the Superconducting Super Collider's history, a memo has been leaked from the Energy Department official who oversees the collider recommending the firing of laboratory director Roy Schwitters and a management shake-up.

Collider project office director Joseph Cipriano, the author of the memo, concluded that the super collider will not be completed as long as the $10 billion project is under the management of Mr. Schwitters and the Universities Research Association.

According to Mr. Cipriano, morale at the super collider is very low and confidence in management has been badly shaken. The removal of Mr. Schwitters and replacement of the Universities Research Association as construction managers may be the only way to turn around current trends.

In truth, the greatest cause for morale problems is not Mr. Schwitters, but the reign-of-terror atmosphere created at the collider site by federal auditors and investigators. Many employees have told The Dallas Morning News that the hostile tone of these interrogations has been frightening.

Distribution of Mr. Cipriano's memo just days before Senate hearings on the collider are scheduled can only be seen as a crude political attempt to kill the project's funding. We would urge members of the Senate to look beyond the rhetoric, follow the scientific testimony at this week's Senate hearings and decide for themselves if project costs have been justified. The Senate owes it to the American people to concentrate on what returns the project will bring for this nation in future years.

It is expected that Energy Secretary Hazel O'Leary will recommend management changes in coming days, which could either help preserve the collider or weaken it. Sacrificing Mr. Schwitters would be unfair and unwarranted. His personal dedication, integrity and intellectual vision have been instrumental in bringing the massive project this far. He deserves an opportunity to remain with this vital project.

Yes, construction supervision can be improved, and lines of authority need to be clarified. But the goal at this point should be to fine-tune, not cripple the collider. More witch hunting and scapegoating will not be good for morale or science.
Bad Medicine

Don't just treat the symptoms; the medical liability system needs radical surgery.

The 14-percent increase in medical malpractice insurance premiums announced last week is no laughing matter for New York doctors and patients who will foot the bill.

But it's not crying time either. What it is, for sure, is a reminder of the need to overhaul the malpractice system.

This rate hike comes after four years during which the cost of coverage actually dropped by 5 percent. And although some will point to this increase as proof that malpractice awards must be capped if exploding medical costs are to be controlled, don't buy it. Declining interest rates and the associated drop in insurance company earnings are more to blame for this increase than big malpractice awards. Besides, tinkering isn't enough.

As the Clinton administration struggles to reinvent the health-care system, it's time to consider scrapping the notion of fault that drives malpractice litigation. Compensating people injured in the course of medical treatment, without requiring proof of negligence, could be a less costly way to provide financial help to afflicted people.

Although the occasional huge jury award gets our attention, the average malpractice award in New York has dropped from about $600,000 in 1989 to $540,000 in 1992. Doctors are also winning more often. And when they lose, New York appeals courts have routinely slashed big awards for pain and suffering.

But there are costs associated with malpractice claims, even those that are unsuccessful. Doctors, fearing lawsuits, practice defensively. They order tests and procedures they might otherwise decide against. And litigation costs money. Even when a doctor wins, lawyers, expert witnesses, stenographers and the like must all be paid. And then there's the cost to the public for judges, courtrooms, court officers and jurors.

A properly designed no-fault system could control those costs by eliminating much of the litigation. And unlike the current system, where a few people win big but most get nothing, benefits would be allocated more evenly, based on patients' actual damages.

Theoretically, no-fault can work. But the devil is in the details. Prickly questions of funding, cost containment, eligibility, fairness and doctor discipline must be hashed out before asking people to give up their right to sue. And should such a system ever be adopted, the next sound you'd hear would be the lawyers' wail.
In slouching toward aid for the formerly Marxist regime in Angola, the Clintonites are out to settle an old score with the Reagan Administration. This isn't a promising way to deal with one of Africa's messier ethnic conflicts.

Choosing sides in Angola's civil war made sense in the days when Ronald Reagan was arming Jonas Savimbi and his Unita rebels. Forty thousand Cuban troops and Soviet advisers were swarming over the country, and the Kremlin was pumping in a billion dollars a year in military hardware. Mr. Savimbi was helping win the Cold War.

Apparently this remains reason enough for the Democratic Party's raider elements to embrace the rival MPLA regime as the embodiment of every "progressive" virtue. Yet for the combatants, Angola's war has always been about ethnic power. In this regard, Mr. Clinton's new pals have much to answer for.

After last year's election debacle, the MPLA handed out automatic weapons to slum dwellers in the capital Luanda, and hundreds of Unita members and their ethnic kin were slaughtered. But then, through two decades of war, the MPLA was content to let the country's vast interior slide into a charnel house rather than abide any thought of sharing power with Mr. Savimbi and his Ovimbundu ethnic majority. In their seaside capital, protected by Havana's troops and rolling in petrodollars from Angola's offshore wells, the MPLA cadres were largely immune from the war's unpleasantness. If the U.S. is now to become their protector, they'll remain as intransigent as ever.

Certainly the U.S. isn't likely to achieve what the Soviets couldn't pull off: an MPLA victory. Yet this is the course being urged on the administration by members of the Congressional Black Caucus, Randall Robinson of TransAfrica, and various other solidarity groupies. It also seems to be the leaning of Tony Lake, the Africanist now running the National Security Council, and his deputy, Nancy Soderberg, a former staffer to Ted Kennedy. Last month in Moscow, the Clinton Administration gave a wink and a nod to the Russians and Portuguese to begin shipping arms to the MPLA. Edmund DeJarnette, the chief U.S. diplomat in Luanda, is enthused about getting involved, and there's talk of bringing Angolan officers over for military training.

There's already enough communal paranoia in the world, and it won't get better if the parties believe the U.S. is available to be recruited on one side or the other. Angola's war has been drained of superpower and ideological content, and the proper U.S. role today is that of honest broker.
Oh, What a Lovely Contrast This Time!

Federal response to flood debacle is a vast improvement

No one had to ask "Where are the feds!" when the Mississippi River overflowed, ruining crops, businesses, homes, bridges, roads and everything else in its path. To their credit, President Clinton and Vice President Al Gore have toured the devastated area and delivered help from Washington.

The President's team at the Federal Emergency Management Agency also has responded quickly and with vigor. Although FEMA director James Lee Witt has been on the job only a few months, he is scarcely new to emergency response. He directed Arkansas' office of emergency services before moving to Washington. His experience has paid off. FEMA has delivered effective emergency relief—in sharp contrast to the agency's checkered, often disappointing response after the Los Angeles riots and Hurricane Andrew.

Salvage Job: More help is on the way. On Friday the Senate Appropriations Committee approved a White House request for $4.7 billion in flood aid. Washington must respond at that level to help farmers and business owners salvage what is left of their livelihoods.

Cities also need emergency grants—not loans—to repair damaged water treatment systems, sewers, bridges, streets, schools and other elements of infrastructure. The flood has burst so many local budgets that few municipalities will be able to put up the matching funds required for federal disaster aid. Washington should waive that requirement in the hardest-hit areas.

Homeowners also need help. As many as 30,000 homes have been lost to the flood despite the heroics of volunteers who have sandbagged levees and done whatever else they could to stanch the rising waters. Unfortunately, only 15% to 20% of the houses damaged by the ravaging Mississippi River were insured; in contrast, 75% to 80% of the homes in Hurricane Andrew's path were covered, putting a lot of the rebuilding expense there on insurance companies. In the Midwest, much of the task of rebuilding will fall on homeowners who have lost everything. They will need a helping hand from Washington, and from their fellow Americans.

Charity Factor: The President recognizes that the federal government, constrained by swollen federal deficits and the nation's competing needs, cannot do everything. During a recent telethon, he urged Americans to reach into their pockets. Neighbor helping neighbor is an American tradition. More than a dozen charities, led by the American Red Cross Disaster Relief Fund and the Salvation Army, are funneling donations to the flood zones.

The floods have killed 43 people and caused more than $10 billion in damage in eight states. Those figures could grow because, after two months, the flooding continues.

After the waters finally recede, Washington will need to decide what levees to refinance, what dams to rebuild. Those decisions can be made later, after all flood victims have food, drinking water and shelter.

Washington has more work to do to provide lasting relief and to encourage reconstruction along the Mississippi. But President Clinton and FEMA deserve credit for a swift and steady response to this national emergency.
A call to Cuba

President Clinton didn’t seem to put much deliberation into his original promise to maintain the stringent American embargo on Cuba that has been in place almost from the moment Fidel Castro rose to power. The embargo became such a Cold War institution — and its prominent Cuban-American supporters became such a potent political force — that a succession of presidential administrations simply continued it without so much as a second thought.

Times have changed, though, and even many longtime supporters of the embargo on Cuba are beginning to reconsider their position in light of new political and economic conditions. Politically, Cuba no longer serves as a Soviet surrogate in this hemisphere, and Fidel Castro’s strange brand of communism has become little more than a toothless curiosity. Economically, the collapse of the Soviet Union has stripped Cuba of its primary benefactor, and the cumulative effects of the American embargo have begun to exact a terrible toll on the Cuban people.

In Washington, there are encouraging signs that the Clinton administration has now seen the wisdom of relaxing the embargo in ways that serve our government’s interests — and that meet the personal needs of thousands of Cuban-Americans and their relatives still living in Cuba.

The most important step has been the administration’s decision to permit new direct telephone links between the United States and Cuba. Until now, Americans wishing to call friends or relatives in Cuba often have been forced to go through a convoluted system in which calls were routed through Canada or some other third country. Aside from the unnecessary personal inconvenience that system has created for many Americans, it also has allowed foreign companies to reap profits that could have stayed in this country.

New communications links between the United States and Cuba would be a particularly apt way of beginning the transition to a new era.

This is only one of the many instances in which the all-encompassing embargo has proved to be counterproductive for the United States. On a humanitarian level, our government finds it harder and harder to justify a policy that denies rank-and-file Cubans access to medical and nutritional necessities. On a purely pragmatic level, the embargo provides Castro with a scapegoat for his country’s economic crisis. Once Cubans can no longer blame the United States for their problems, they may finally turn a more critical eye toward the Castro regime.

Further relaxation of the embargo on Cuba need not take place indiscriminately. Instead, each potential link with Cuba should be judged on its own merits. With Castro increasingly desperate to fill the economic and political void left by Moscow, Washington can negotiate from a position of strength.

That gradual policy change might not please the handful of politically connected Cuban-Americans who have profited from the embargo, but they are not necessarily representative of the broader Cuban-American community. There is no rational reason for Americans or Cubans to be victimized by policies emanating from a Cold War that no longer exists. New communications links between the United States and Cuba would be a particularly apt way of beginning the transition to a new era.
A Week in Review.

Ouchhh! I thought all he wanted was my 'Grey Poupon'...
• DEFICIT REDUCTION TARGET

BLAM! BLAM! BLAM! BLAM!

CONGRESS

DEPARTMENT
MOVED TO LARGER QUARTERS

DEFICIT REDUCTION

THE CLINTON BUDGET WILL PUT AN UNFAIR BURDEN ON THE VERY WEALTHY...

CANCEL THE POOL BOY ON TUESDAY...

THE HANDLER
DON'T YOU AGREE THAT A TOUGH ECONOMIC PACKAGE IS THE ONLY HOPE FOR OUR FUTURE?

AS AMERICANS OR CONGRESSMEN?

CLINTON'S DEFICIT PLAN? WHY I'M GONNA TEAR THAT THING UP...

RIP IT INTO TINY PIECES...

THEN SET IT ON FIRE!

STOMP ALL OVER IT...

and what's your plan, Mr. Perot?

I JUST TOLD YOU.
THE GOOD NEWS IS THE ECONOMY WILL IMPROVE WHEN THE DEFICIT GOES DOWN.
AND THE BAD NEWS?
VICE VERSA.

FARMLER CLINTON AND THE DEFICIT-REDUCTION EGGS

EGGS? WHO, US?
WE'VE JUMP AT THE CHANCE TO HELP YOU, MISTER.
BUT WE CAN'T PUT ALL OUR EGGS IN ONE BASKET,
DO YOU KNOW WHAT I MEAN?

RIGHT, HEH HEH, RIGHT

AVOID ALL EYE CONTACT
CLAUE

WHO'S RANKING THIS BROKEN FENCE?
YOU OR ME, CLINTON?
FILL 'ER UP.

GAS TAX

NATURALLY, IT'S MORE LIKE WATER SOUP!

EMM... WATER CRUST SOUP!

FINTON BUDGET

WATER
WHAT FEEDS THE INDEPENDENT SPIRIT OF THE WEST:

By Signe Wilkinson, Philadelphia Daily News, Cartoonists & Writers Syndicate
"WE USED THE MONEY TO CUT THE DEFICIT"

By Jeff Stahler, The Cincinnati Post. Newspaper Enterprise Association

...MAYBE IT ISN'T GRIDLOCK...MAYBE NEITHER OF THEM DRIVE VERY WELL...

Ben Sargent/Austin American-Statesman

LOBBY CLEANERS

Ben Sargent/Austin American-Statesman
"Well, if you were Gergen what would you tell McLarty to tell Clinton to tell Christopher to do?"

"Basically, I see myself coming aboard this team as a kind of Lloyd Bentsen figure."
Hen guarding a fox house

THE CLINTON DOCTRINE:

DEORE'S WORLD

MAYBE USING THE PIE CHART WASN'T SUCH A BRIGHT IDEA
"I'm warning you Serbs for the last time!"

We're weighing an option... To consider a policy... In order to mobilize a plan... Enabling us to intensify our interest... To escalate our concern...... If the U.N. should request it...
CONGRESSIONAL DEMOCRATS

Congressional Auction

Sold to the oil industry!
'A congressional district.'
MARLETTE'S VIEW

NO THANKS.
I BELIEVE I'LL
PASS ON THE
AUTHENTIC
MISSISSIPPI
MUD PIE!

Meanwhile, far outside Washington, another struggle with ROW vs. WADE goes on.
FRIDAY, JULY 30, 1993

Ross, what's my name?

Geez, if I'd known, you were gonna ask me that, I woulda brought my charts.

FRIDAY, JULY 30, 1993

Jiminy Ross Cricket, the self-ordained conscience of a nation.
IT MUST BE FRIGHTENING FOR A CHILD HER AGE TO BE PUSHED AROUND, HELPLESS TO CONTROL HER OWN FUTURE...

IT'LL PREPARE HER FOR WOMANHOOD.

EXCITING EVENTS IF CHINA HOSTS OLYMPICS

THE DISSIDENT TOSS

ELECTRIFIED FENCING

AND MANY NEW DEMONSTRATION SPORTS

NO-TRIAL-ATHALON

WASSERMAN © 1992 BOSTON GLOBE. DIST. BY L.A. TIMES SYNDICATE

Welcome to the MIDEAST

Carson - Carson cartoon series... Distributed by Universal Press Syndicate
And keep a lookout for Haitians with the Aids virus... they could destroy our country!

INS CHECK
Immigration and Naturalization Service

ATTENTION, ILLEGAL ALIENS,
INTRODUCING THE NORTH
AMERICAN FLOOD TIDE AGREEMENT.

...AND AS A CUBAN IMMIGRANT, I CAN
GET POLITICAL ASYLUM AND INSTANT CITIZENSHIP, RIGHT?
THIS NEW IMMIGRATION POLICY SHOULD STEM THE FLOW OF ILLEGAL NANNIES TO OUR CABINET MEMBERS.

SAY, I'D LIKE TO GET TO KNOW YOU BETTER, JOYCELYN... I THINK I'LL NOMINATE YOU FOR SURGEON GENERAL.

HOW IT BEGINS

"AMERICANS APPRECIATE A LITTLE GRIDLOCK."
—SENATOR ROBERT DOLE
"I TAKE IT GINSBURG'S CONFIRMATION HEARINGS WENT SMOOTHLY!..."

JUDGE GINSBURG, WHAT ARE YOUR VIEWS ON THE DEATH PENALTY?

I'M IN FAVOR OF ABORTION
MY GOD, MR. PRESIDENT!
DO YOU KNOW HOW MUCH THIS IS IN POSTAGE STAMPS?!

The Scarlet Letter
WITH DAN Rostenkowski AS CONGRESSMAN A

OH LOOK... THE NEW FBI DIRECTOR IS ALREADY HERE FOR HIS COURTESY CALL, MR. ROSTENKOWSKI.
MR. PRESIDENT, HOW IS YOUR "DON'T ASK, DON'T TELL" POLICY BEING RECEIVED?

DON'T ASK.
YOUR OLD RUBLES ARE WORTHLESS.
YOU MAY EXCHANGE THEM FOR NEW RUBLES.
EACH NEW RUBLE HAS A VALUE

OF ONE OLD RUBLE.

IS THIS THE LINE FOR TOILET PAPER?