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BATTLE OVER THE BUDGET: THE OVERVIEW; CONGRESS CANCELS PLAN TO TAKE OFF FOR THE WEEKEND

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Despite signs on Friday that Congress and President Clinton were making progress on reopening Government offices, neither side reported getting any closer to agreement today and lawmakers were forced to put off plans to go home for the weekend.

In the early evening, Republicans sent the White House a new proposal. But when Senator Bob Dole of Kansas, the majority leader, was asked whether he thought the President would accept it, he said, "I doubt it."

In the House, where members had been promised that they could leave by 2 P.M., solid Democratic opposition to adjournment embarrassed Republicans into staying. The final vote was 361 to 32. The Senate was in recess for much of the afternoon, waiting for Senator Dole to return from a brief Presidential campaign appearance in Florida.

After the House vote, Republicans did not resume business but called an indefinite recess; later, they said it would last until Monday. Democrats stayed, shouting, "Work, work, work," then held a two-hour rally, although Republicans turned the television cameras off and ordered the House restaurant to close.

Representative Lloyd Doggett of Texas said: "There are countries in this world where the mikes are turned off and where the plugs are pulled on television. But have you ever known something like that to happen on the floor of the House of Representatives?"

Negotiations between the Administration and Republican leaders broke down on Friday night. President Clinton said in his radio address today that "it looks like this chance to reopen the Government may be slipping away."

Both sides said they still wanted to talk, but neither would give any ground publicly on the terms of an agreement to balance the budget.

Speaker Newt Gingrich, at a Capitol Hill news conference this morning, insisted that "there is no compromise on seven years and on having an honest number, scored an honest way." He complained that the Administration was hedging its commitment to a timetable and economic analysis.

Leon E. Panetta, the White House chief of staff who had negotiated on Friday night with Republican leaders, said this afternoon: "The President urges the

Congress, and will request the Congress, to stay in session in order to get this work done. This is not a time to leave on recess. This is not a time to cut out of this town while we are trying to resolve a very real crisis in this country."

While last week Mr. Clinton canceled a state visit to Japan because of the impasse, Senator Dole and other Republican Presidential hopefuls managed quick trips to Orlando, Fla., for a campaign straw poll.

The centerpiece of Republican plans -- the bill that would balance the budget in seven years, cut taxes and curb spending on Medicare and Medicaid -- did not win final passage because of a dispute that erupted when Representative John L. Mica, Republican of Florida, used a disparaging term in referring to the President. A final vote is now planned for Monday.

Before the adjournment motion was defeated, the House voted for a limited spending bill that would reopen for the entire fiscal year offices that deal with Medicare, Social Security and veterans claims. The vote was 416 to 0. A senior White House aide said that was already being done administratively, so Mr. Clinton would probably sign that bill.

In an interview with NBC News, President Clinton said he was trying to find "a legal way" to send Federal employees back to work on Monday. He attributed the stalemate to "the most intransigent members of the House" and said that Senate Republicans would "resolve this on honorable terms if they were free to do it."

The rump caucus meeting Democrats staged on the House floor was one of their most united, fiery sessions of the year. Speaking only to each other and a few reporters in the gallery, they assailed the Republicans for two hours.

Representative Sam M. Gibbons of Florida said the Republican message was that "the wealthy need more help." Representative Barney Frank of Massachusetts said, "I have never seen democracy more grievously abused."

Representative John Lewis of Georgia said, "I stood up to Bull Connor in Birmingham. I stood up to Sheriff Clark in Selma. I stood up to George Wallace in Alabama. And I'm not about to run from Newt Gingrich."

When a technician turned on a microphone momentarily, Representative Bill Thomas, Republican of California and chairman of the House Oversight Committee, cried, "He's out of a job." But when Representative Harold E. Ford, a Tennessee Democrat, went up to the gallery and threw the switches, the microphones stayed on.

Twenty-eight Democrats hammered the Republicans for leaving instead of working to reopen Government offices. Mr. Gingrich dismissed their protests, saying, "They aren't helping anything; they aren't helping balance the budget. If they want to stay on the floor and make noise, then that's fine. At least it keeps them out of trouble."

Before the bedlam in the House, Mr. Clinton and the Republican leaders sought to convince the public that their dispute was serious, not petty.

Mr. Clinton said, "I know that for many people across our country, all this conflict and drama looks just like people in Washington are playing politics again. What every American has to realize is that this is way beyond politics. There are very profound fundamental issues involved. What's at stake is nothing less than two different visions of our country, and two different futures for our people."

Then he assailed the Republican budget plan because it "cuts funding for disabled children and school lunches, for Head Start for your youngest children,

for college scholarships and loans, that doubles Medicare premiums and undermines the entire Medicaid program that provides for nursing home care and home health care for the elderly, the disabled and health care for poor children."

For those reasons, he said, the bill will be "dead on arrival" at the White House.

Mr. Gingrich described the importance of the debate in even grander terms. "This is the largest domestic decision since 1933," referring to the first year of the New Deal. "I think for two generations we have borrowed our children's money. We've built up a five-trillion-dollar debt, and we are now faced with a great choice of whether we begin to move power back out of Washington, back to state and local government, back to citizens, whether we begin to move to replace the welfare state and have a work requirement, whether we in fact balance the budget, stop using our children's money and get lower interest rates through a balanced budget bonus that is very real."

Mr. Dole said: "This is a fundamental change in the direction of government, and it seems to me we are going in the right direction. You talk about welfare reform, you talk about tax cuts for families with children, saving and preserving Medicare. The big item is balancing that budget in seven years. It's a challenge and an opportunity and a responsibility we have as the majority party."

The proposal that the Republicans submitted today, to get a stopgap spending bill approved and reopen Federal offices, would require Mr. Clinton to commit himself to a seven-year balanced-budget plan, to be judged by the Congressional Budget Office.

The Administration had proposed making both the plan and the issue of how compliance would be assessed subject to "mutual agreement." The Congressional Republicans gave a little ground, saying the Congressional Budget Office should consult with the White House budget office and other Government and private experts before announcing its findings.

Democratic Congressional aides agreed with Mr. Dole's assessment that the Administration would not accept the plan when Leon E. Panetta, the White House chief of staff, met with Republicans at the Capitol on Sunday afternoon. The Senate planned a rare Sunday afternoon schedule so it could act if there was any agreement to act upon.

Mr. Dole said, "There is ample room for compromise."

Asked about the $245 billion tax cut in the Republican plan, Mr. Gingrich said that everything would be on the table, "but I also think they have to recognize that we did sign a contract that did get us elected, and we are going to keep our word."

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