

Clinton signs historic, controversial line-item veto legislation

■ **BILL:** The President promises to cut the fat from Washington's budget

WASHINGTON (AP) — In a dramatic shift of purse-string power, President Clinton signed a line-item veto bill sought by presidents since Ulysses S. Grant. He promised unprecedented scrutiny of "the darkest corners of the federal budget."

But opponents accused Congress of surrendering a precious piece of its constitutional prerogative to spend the people's money. Federal employees immediately filed a court challenge.

Tipping his hat to Republican and Democratic predecessors, Clinton kept four pens used in Tuesday's signing and dispatched them to former Presidents Reagan, Ford, Carter and Bush — all of whom had pleaded for the power to slash specific provisions from spending bills.

"Their successors will be able to use this power that they long sought to eliminate waste from

the federal budget," said Clinton, who won't be able to use the line-item veto unless re-elected.

The bipartisan bill will be a fixture in the presidential election, with Clinton and Senate Majority Leader Bob Dole both claiming credit. "It will help put Washington on a pork-free diet," Dole said Tuesday.

Clinton, who seldom used the line-item veto as Arkansas' governor, noted that 43 of the nation's 50 governors can carve away at budget bills. "They have used it well and without any upsetting of the constitutional framework," Clinton said.

Under the new law, presidents can sign spending bills and — within five days — cancel specific items, including appropriations, narrowly targeted tax breaks covering 100 or fewer people and new or expanded entitlements.

It does away with a requirement, in place since the nation's founding, that a president must approve or reject legislation in its entirety.

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— Bill Clinton
President

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However, Congress still gets the last word on spending. A line-item veto can be overridden by a two-thirds vote of both houses of Congress.

The bill, part of the GOP "Contract With America," passed Congress easily despite a rich history of failure. Congress has jealously guarded its spending powers, turning back more than 200 attempts in the last 120 years to give presidents a line-item veto.

Rep. Marge Roukema, R-N.J., said the bill will prompt "more partisan bickering, legislative horse-trading and even more pork-barrel spending."

She noted that a line-item veto can be sustained with the support

of just 34 senators. "In the real world of Washington politics, this gives the president a new tool to punish and reward lawmakers by threatening to line-item veto spending in their districts," Roukema said.

Federal judges are concerned the courts would have no recourse if the president vetoes their budget. The judges say that would improperly weaken the judiciary's standing among the federal government's three branches.

And a federal employees union said it fears "a hostile president" will veto pay raises for bureaucrats. The National Treasury Employees' Union filed suit in U.S. District Court, calling the

law "a device that subverts the Constitution's separation of powers."

Clinton said Congress' power to override line-item vetoes will protect against a president abusing the new tool. Presidents also will be wary of the public scrutiny that comes with the issuance of a veto, he said.

Seated at his desk flanked by bill supporters, Clinton said, "For years, presidents of both parties have pounded this very desk in frustration at having to sign necessary legislation that contains special-interest boondoggles, tax loopholes and pure pork."

Ronald Reagan made the same case more than 10 years ago. Pleading for a line-item veto, he said, "Then I'll make the cuts; I'll take the responsibility — and the heat ... and I'll enjoy it."

Clinton has long supported the measure. But as Arkansas' governor, he used a line-item veto just nine times in 10 years — a period in which about 2,500 spending bills crossed his desk.

Georgia attorney general tells universities to abandon affirmative action

■ **DISCRIMINATION:** Recent court decisions have also ruled that race should not alter standards

ATLANTA (AP) — In the wake of recent federal court rulings limiting affirmative action, Georgia's attorney general has directed the state university system to abandon admission policies that give preference to minorities.

In an unsolicited letter Monday to University System Chancellor Stephen Portch, Attorney General Michael Bowers said each state college and university should eliminate policies that use separate standards for minorities.

"The message is: If you use race to

determine who is admitted to Georgia institutes of higher learning, you need to revise them," said Bowers on Tuesday.

University system officials were unsure how many of the state's 34 colleges and universities use race in deciding among applicants. There are 206,000 students in the system.

Portch said in a statement that one of the missions of the university system is to make public colleges as accessible as possible to minorities.

"We are committed to providing a level playing field ... aimed at ensuring that all Georgia students can come to our colleges and universities with an equal opportunity to succeed," he said.

Bowers, a Republican who has been

mentioned as a possible gubernatorial candidate in 1998, said he was prompted to write the letter by court rulings declaring affirmative action unconstitutional.

The most recent came on March 18, when a federal appeals court struck down the University of Texas Law School's affirmative action admissions plan, saying it discriminates against non-minority applicants.

In that ruling, the 5th Circuit U.S. Court of Appeals said affirmative action plans are justified only in very narrow circumstances as a remedy for past discrimination.

Bowers also cited a Supreme Court ruling last June that imposed significant lim-

its on affirmative action. The court ruled 5-4 in a Colorado case that the federal government is bound by strict standards in offering special help to minorities seeking remedies against discrimination.

Although the court did not address education, the new standard was not limited only to programs involving contract set-asides or hiring quotas. The court appeared to be abandoning aspects of its last two major affirmative-action holdings, both of which were victories for civil rights advocates.

Last year, at the urging of California Gov. Pete Wilson, the University of California Board of Regents voted to dismantle affirmative action admissions policies. The change will take effect in 1998.

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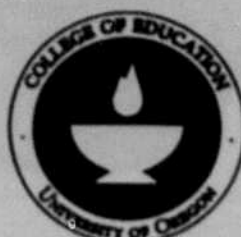
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