

Clinton lays out ambitious agenda

The president wants to save Social Security and better military readiness

By Terence Hunt
The Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Before a Congress torn over impeachment, President Clinton offered a bold plan Tuesday to protect Social Security with budget surpluses that Republicans are eyeing for tax cuts. "First things first," Clinton insisted.

On a day of high drama that shifted from his trial in the Senate to his State of the Union address, Clinton urged spending billions of dollars for new programs in child care, education, crime-fighting, the environment and the Pentagon.

He proposed \$4.2 billion — a 70 percent increase — to reduce the threat from Russia's nuclear arsenal and redirect the work of Russian scientists from weapons to civilian research. The initiative would help finance the dismantling and destruction of warheads and dangerous materials and accelerate Moscow's withdrawal of troops stationed outside of Russia.

With the economy booming, Clinton reported, "the state of our union is strong. America is working again. The promise of our future is limitless. But we cannot realize that promise if we allow the hum of our prosperity to lull us into complacency." Excerpts of his remarks were released in advance by the White House.

Clinton's Social Security proposal sets up a monumental fight over how to protect the giant pension program and deal with GOP tax-

cutting ambitions against a background of \$4 trillion in projected surpluses over 15 years. In sharp contrast, Senate Majority Leader Trent Lott called for a 10 percent across-the-board tax cut.

The president's proposal would create new 401(k)-style retirement accounts for workers and invest some of Social Security's cash reserves in the stock market for the first time. "With the number of elderly Americans set to double by 2030," Clinton said, "the baby boom will become a senior boom."

Republicans attacked Clinton's plan to have Social Security money invested in the stock market by the government, and his lack of a tax cut proposal.

Moving from last year's call to "save Social Security first," Clinton proposed transferring 62 percent of expected budget surpluses over the next 15 years — \$2.7 trillion — to the Social Security account to keep the program solvent until 2055.

Twenty-five percent of that money would be invested by the government in the stock market in hopes of achieving higher returns.

Clinton's plan also would reserve 15 percent of the surplus — \$650 billion over 15 years — for the ailing Medicare system. An additional 11 percent of the surplus — \$500 billion — would be devoted to new government-subsidized retirement accounts, with the Treasury matching the savings of lower-income people. The rest of the surplus would go for military spending and domestic programs.

Republicans heatedly objected. "No, no, a thousand times no," said

Rep. Bill Archer, R-Texas, chairman of the House Ways and Means Committee. "If you thought a government takeover of health care was bad," Archer said, "just wait until the government becomes an owner of America's private sector companies."

Clinton's major proposals:

—\$1 billion to help about 200,000 welfare families get jobs, expanding the two-year, \$3 billion welfare-to-work program.

—\$1 billion in tax credits for businesses to encourage investment in impoverished urban and rural areas.

—A tax credit of up to \$250 per child age 1 or younger for parents who stay home to care for them.

—A \$1,000 tax credit for Americans with long-term health-care needs and family members who care for them.

—A 50-cent increase in the minimum wage in September 1999 and another in September 2000 to boost the hourly base pay to \$6.15 an hour. A similar proposal was defeated last year.

—\$12 billion to improve military readiness and modernization in fiscal 2000 — growing to \$110 billion over six years.

—\$1 billion to protect America's natural resources and acquire lands for parks, forests and wildlife protection.

—\$600 million to hire 30,000 to 50,000 more police officers, expanding on his program to put 100,000 new officers on the streets.

—\$600 million for after-school and summer-school programs, helping 1.1 million children.

Clinton defense starts with 'not guilty' plea

The prosecution was faulted and evidence fudged, defense counsel says

By David Esposito
The Associated Press

WASHINGTON — White House Counsel Charles Ruff opened President Clinton's impeachment defense Tuesday with ringing statements of Clinton's innocence, an attack on the House's "rush to judgment" and a fervent plea to the senators who will decide the president's fate: "He must not be removed from office."

Speaking so quietly at times that some senators strained in their seats to listen, Ruff declared that "William Jefferson Clinton is not guilty of the charges" leveled by the House.

Ruff spoke from his wheelchair, his pocket copy of the Constitution on a nearby table, a few hours before Clinton's delivery of the State of the Union address across the Capitol in the House chamber.

The awkward juxtaposition — a somber trial in the shadow of a moment of grand political pageantry — prompted some congressional Republicans to announce they would skip the president's speech. Many more said they would attend out of

respect for the office if not for the current occupant.

In an opening statement, Ruff offered a point-by-point rebuttal of each allegation, criticized Independent Counsel Kenneth Starr for his handling of witness Linda Tripp and accused the House of "prosecutorial... fudge" on one key piece of evidence.

"We will defend the president on the facts and on the law and on the constitutional principles that must guide your deliberations," he pledged.

On emotion, too, as he answered Judiciary Committee Chairman Henry Hyde's invocation of America's war dead in remarks last week. His father fought at Omaha Beach on D-Day, Ruff said in a chamber suddenly grown deathly still.

"He didn't fight — no one fought — for one side of this case or the other," Ruff said, his voice quavering. "He fought as all those did for our country, our Constitution."

Ruff ridiculed the House's demand for witnesses in the case, although Senate Democratic leader Tom Daschle conceded on Monday that at least some witnesses are likely to be subpoenaed. No formal decisions have been made, and the possibility of a sharp partisan battle exists in the Senate.

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