

Clinton calls for renewal of domestic violence law

By Anne Gearan
Associated Press Writer

SANTA FE, N.M. — Family violence is still a national tragedy that ruins lives and futures, President Clinton said Monday as he pressed Congress to renew a law intended to combat domestic abuse.

"Domestic violence is not just a family problem that neighbors can ignore, not just a women's problem that men can turn away from," Clinton said. "It is America's problem."

The landmark 1994 Violence Against Women Act is due to expire Sept. 30. Legislation to reauthorize the law for another six years has broad bipartisan support, but it is held up in the last-minute crush of bills as Congress tries to meet an

Oct. 6 adjournment date.

"It is wrong to delay this one more hour," Clinton told an audience that included many women who were victims of family abuse. "Schedule the vote."

The president said the bill is being "used as a political football in Washington," as both parties jockey for advantage in the final days of the session. Republicans hold majorities in both houses, and generally control which bills come up when.

John Feehery, a spokesman for House Speaker Dennis Hastert, R-Ill., said the measure has been under consideration in congressional committees, but that a vote was expected. "It possibly might be scheduled for a vote for later this week."

In the Senate, Republican leaders floated the idea Monday of attaching the renewal of the Violence Against Women Act to a bill that would overhaul the nation's bankruptcy laws. The twinned proposals would then be appended to one of the 11 appropriations bills that Congress still must enact to keep the government in operation, under a last-ditch GOP plan circulated Monday.

Joan Entmacher, vice president of the liberal National Women's Law Center, described the idea as extortion. Women's groups fiercely support renewal of the act, but many of the same groups oppose the bankruptcy legislation because they contend it disproportionately harms women and children.

If the law is extended, it will be without a key provision allowing rape victims to sue their attackers in federal court. The Supreme Court said it is up to states, not Congress, to choose whether to protect women in that way.

Congressional Democrats tried unsuccessfully to reinstate the provision this year.

As left by the Supreme Court, the law now essentially provides a federal dispensary for a variety of grants and programs aimed at preventing family violence and helping women flee it.

So far, the federal government has spent \$1.6 billion under the law, including \$173 million being distributed this year. Clinton was announcing New Mexico's last

batch of \$1.7 million on Monday, money the White House said will go to partly to strengthen domestic violence enforcement and prosecution efforts on American Indian lands.

Later in the day, Clinton spoke at a reception that raised at least \$150,000 for the New Mexico Coordinated Campaign in Santa Fe.

New Mexico offers Democrat Al Gore and Republican George Bush only five of the 270 electoral votes needed to win the presidency, yet historically, the majority of voters in the state have picked the winner. Except for 1976 when New Mexico supported Republican Gerald Ford, the state has backed the victorious candidate since it became a state in 1912.

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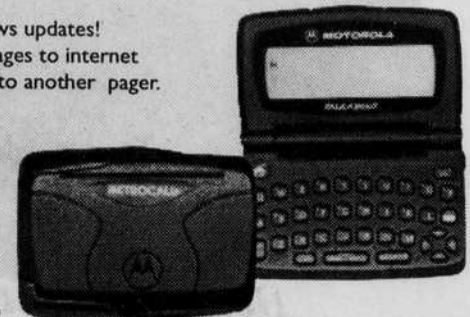
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