

# **SENATE, WHITE HOUSE HASH OUT IMMIGRATION AND BUDGET BILLS**

San Jose Mercury News (California)

SEPTEMBER 28, 1996 Saturday MORNING FINAL EDITION

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**Section:** FRONT; Pg. 20A

**Length:** 535 words

**Byline:** Mercury News Wire Services

**Dateline:** WASHINGTON

## **Body**

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With a Monday deadline looming, Senate leaders continued to wrangle with the White House on Friday over proposed changes to pending immigration legislation and a **budget bill** containing more than \$600 billion in funds for the next fiscal year.

"I think we're about three hiccups away from an immigration deal, but anything and everything can happen," a White House official said. "There are five legislators and one White House staffer in a room. I think all of them can see the goal line."

Although details remained cloudy, Republican leaders suggested they might consider making concessions sought by President Clinton in the portion of the legislation affecting legal immigrants. The White House wants to remove a provision that would restrict public benefits to legal immigrants to a greater extent than the recently passed welfare reform bill. Clinton also objects to language raising the minimum income that citizens must earn to sponsor immigrant relatives who want to enter the country.

Although the House passed the immigration legislation this week, Clinton is attempting to alter the bill in the Senate by linking it to the year-end budget measure that lawmakers must pass before they can return home to run for re-election.

White House aides complain that after agreeing to remove restrictions on legal immigrants from their immigration bills earlier this year, House and Senate members are now trying to resurrect them during closed-door caucus meetings. "Legal immigration does not belong in an illegal-immigration bill," one administration official said.

If no agreement is reached by Monday afternoon, Senate leaders will set aside Clinton's concerns and proceed to a vote on the House-passed immigration bill late Monday or Tuesday.

On the budget talks, negotiations ground on into the night. Tired bargainers had resumed at midmorning Friday with only a few hours' sleep, after carrying the previous day's talks until just a few hours before dawn.

Negotiators were hoping for a deal that would allow the House to vote today. If that occurred, Senate Majority Leader Trent Lott, R-Miss., said a Senate vote would follow Monday.

Congress has sent President Clinton seven of the 13 spending bills required to finance government operations in fiscal 1997. Negotiators are wrapping the remaining six bills - totaling roughly \$200 billion in domestic spending and \$245 billion for the military - into one huge, must-pass package.

It would provide funds for foreign aid, federal courts and the departments of Defense, Treasury, Labor, Health and Human Services, Interior, Commerce, Justice and State.

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All sides swore they would avoid a repeat of last year's government shutdowns, politically disastrous for Republicans. But Republicans angrily complained that Democrats and the administration were overreaching, insisting on winning virtually all points.

Among the bills passed and sent to Clinton was a three-year extension of a law designed to halt depletion of the nation's fisheries. The bill, which Clinton is expected to sign, would establish management plans for determining when an area is overfished and how overfished areas should be revitalized.

## Classification

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**Language:** ENGLISH

**Subject:** IMMIGRATION (94%); LEGISLATIVE BODIES (91%); LEGISLATION (90%); US REPUBLICAN PARTY (89%); POLITICAL PARTIES (89%); US STATE IMMIGRATION LAW (78%); PENDING LEGISLATION (78%); ELECTIONS (78%); US FEDERAL GOVERNMENT (78%); TALKS & MEETINGS (78%); GOVERNMENT BUDGETS (78%); PUBLIC HEALTH & WELFARE LAW (78%); US FEDERAL GOVERNMENT SHUTDOWNS (78%); CAMPAIGNS & ELECTIONS (78%); PUBLIC FINANCE (78%); AGREEMENTS (78%); POLITICS (78%); CAUCUSES (78%); US DEMOCRATIC PARTY (78%); APPROPRIATIONS (78%); TREASURY DEPARTMENTS (77%); FOREIGN AID (73%); INTERNATIONAL ASSISTANCE (73%)

**Industry:** BUDGETS (90%); GOVERNMENT BUDGETS (78%); TREASURY DEPARTMENTS (77%)

**Person:** BILL CLINTON (92%); TRENT LOTT (58%)

**Geographic:** UNITED STATES (79%)

**Load-Date:** October 23, 2002