

White House Lambastes Congress; Conservatives Block U.N. Arrears Payment, Increase in IMF Credit Line

The Washington Post

November 14, 1997, Friday, Final Edition

Copyright 1997 The Washington Post

Section: A SECTION; Pg. A16

Length: 1067 words

Byline: Eric Pianin; Helen Dewar, Washington Post Staff Writers

Body

The **White House** yesterday called "utterly boneheaded" a last-minute maneuver by **Congress** that took away United Nations funds just as the administration is trying to hold together a fragile international coalition against Iraq.

Outraged **White House** officials and Democrats accused Republican leaders of undermining the president's leverage with the international community by denying the administration's request for **payment** of \$ 926 million of **U.N. arrears** and a \$ 3.5 billion **credit line** for the International Monetary Fund because of a long-festering dispute over abortion policy. But by day's end, the **White House** appeared resigned to have to again take up the matter when **Congress** returns next year.

The move came as **Congress** concluded what became a highly fractious session that produced a major balanced budget and tax cut plan but took no action on the administration's "fast track" trade negotiations legislation. **Congress** completed work on all 13 annual spending bills, including one that finances the D.C. government before adjourning for the year. In other developments:

Legislation aimed at averting insolvency by the Amtrak rail passenger system was approved by the **House** and Senate.

Both **houses** approved a bill relaxing controversial provisions of the tough 1996 immigration law that could have led to deportation of hundreds of thousands of illegal immigrants and refugees.

A bill to speed adoptions of abused and neglected children was also passed by both **houses**.

Continuing his standoff with legislators of both parties, President Clinton last night vetoed -- for the second time -- a package of 38 military construction projects that he had earlier called unjustified.

The 38 projects, with a cost of \$ 287 million, had been struck in September when Clinton became the first president to use **line-item** veto power. The administration later acknowledged that perhaps a dozen or so of the projects may have been struck on the basis of incorrect information, and pledged to correct the matter. But large majorities in both chambers voted to put all 38 projects in a single bill and send it to Clinton; administration officials said this gave Clinton no choice but to veto the whole package. **Congress** can try to override this veto with two-thirds majorities when it returns next year.

The first session of the 105th **Congress** reached its high-water mark in early August with enactment of a complex agreement with the **White House** to balance the budget by 2002, cut taxes and put the Medicare health care program for seniors on a sound financial footing for the coming decade. Gingrich and GOP leaders worked closely with the **White House** in an unsuccessful drive for passage of the fast-track trade bill. Yet much of the fall was marked by trench warfare over details of the annual spending bills.

White House Lambastes Congress; Conservatives Block U.N. Arrears Payment, Increase in IMF Credit Line

During a meeting with reporters yesterday, Gingrich graded the Congress a "B-minus" because of its failure to pass the fast-track bill and other priorities.

The past two months have been dominated by several contentious social issues, the last being abortion. The White House and House Republican conservatives led by Reps. Christopher Smith (R-N.J.) and Steve Largent (Okla.) have repeatedly fought to a standstill over the international family planning issue, and this year was no exception. The \$ 13.1 billion Foreign Operations spending bill became the backdrop for the fight over conservatives' efforts to prevent U.S.-backed international family planning agencies from using their own funds to perform abortions or promote liberalized abortion laws overseas.

The White House threatened to veto the bill if it included any of the antiabortion language. Frustrated by the administration's unwillingness to compromise, House leaders stripped the U.N. and IMF funding measures and another provision aimed at reorganizing foreign policy agencies from the bill. That move was made with the blessing of Senate Majority Leader Trent Lott (R-Miss.), and with time running out, the Senate had little choice but to accept the scaled-back spending bill.

"This is a particularly ill-timed move by Congress at a moment when we are attempting to work with the United Nations to build an international support for an appropriate response to provocations by Saddam Hussein," presidential spokesman Michael McCurry said. "It is utterly boneheaded for Congress to fail to meet the commitments that the United States has at the U.N. in terms of our arrears."

Senators on both sides of the family planning dispute took to the floor to denounce the House.

"It is reckless for the House to do anything to undermine [U.N.] Ambassador [Bill] Richardson or Secretary [of State Madeleine K.] Albright" in their negotiations at the U.N., said Sen. Rod Grams (R-Minn.), who supports the antiabortion restriction.. He said the House action also jeopardizes U.N. management reforms.

Sen. Patrick J. Leahy (D-Vt.), a supporter of unrestricted family planning assistance, called the House action "outrageous . . . shortsighted . . . vindictive . . . inexplicable."

But House GOP leaders said they retaliated only after Clinton and his advisers refused to give any ground to settle the dispute over the family planning programs, which receive \$ 384 million annually. By limiting their final demands to restricting groups such as the International Planned Parenthood Federation from lobbying foreign countries to liberalize their abortion laws, Republican leaders sought to portray the president as a captive of abortion rights "extremists."

"They rejected any compromise . . . and they were rigid in their position and I think it was entirely driven by domestic politics," said House Speaker Newt Gingrich (R-Ga.). House Appropriations Committee Chairman Bob Livingston (R-La.) insisted, "There's plenty of money to take care of those crises, so we're not leaving the president in the lurch."

Appearing before the House Banking Committee, Deputy Treasury Secretary Lawrence Summers said the congressional action on IMF funding would not affect rescue plans already announced for Indonesia and Thailand. But he warned that it could "diminish our capacity to respond to what unpredictable future may bring." That was a veiled reference to a possible IMF rescue for Korea, where the currency has come under heavy selling pressure and banks are wallowing in a sea of bad loans.

Classification

Language: ENGLISH

Subject: LEGISLATION (91%); IMMIGRATION (90%); APPROVALS (90%); INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS (90%); LEGISLATIVE BODIES (90%); US REPUBLICAN PARTY (89%); GOVERNMENT BUDGETS (89%); US PRESIDENTS (89%); VETO (89%); APPROPRIATIONS (89%); POLITICAL PARTIES (78%); TALKS &

White House Lambastes Congress; Conservatives Block U.N. Arrears Payment, Increase in IMF Credit Line

MEETINGS (78%); TAX LAW (78%); IMMIGRATION LAW (78%); REFUGEES (78%); UNITED NATIONS (78%); INTERNATIONAL MONETARY FUND (78%); UNITED NATIONS INSTITUTIONS (78%); US DEMOCRATIC PARTY (78%); TAXES & TAXATION (77%); AGREEMENTS (75%); MEDICARE (72%); INSOLVENCY & BANKRUPTCY (70%); TAX RELIEF (68%); ILLEGAL IMMIGRANTS (65%); DEPORTATION (65%); ABORTION (55%); CHILD ABUSE (50%)

Company: NATIONAL RAILROAD PASSENGER CORP (AMTRAK) (55%); NATIONAL RAILROAD PASSENGER CORP (AMTRAK) (55%); UNITED NATIONS (94%); UNITED NATIONS (94%); INTERNATIONAL MONETARY FUND (90%); INTERNATIONAL MONETARY FUND (90%)

Organization: UNITED NATIONS (94%); UNITED NATIONS (94%); INTERNATIONAL MONETARY FUND (90%); INTERNATIONAL MONETARY FUND (90%); UNITED NATIONS (94%); UNITED NATIONS (94%); INTERNATIONAL MONETARY FUND (90%); INTERNATIONAL MONETARY FUND (90%)

Industry: GOVERNMENT BUDGETS (89%); BUDGETS (89%); INTERNATIONAL MONETARY FUND (78%); HEALTH CARE (73%); MEDICARE (72%); RAIL TRANSPORTATION (71%)

Person: BILL CLINTON (79%)

Geographic: DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA, USA (79%); UNITED STATES (92%); IRAQ (79%)

Load-Date: November 14, 1997