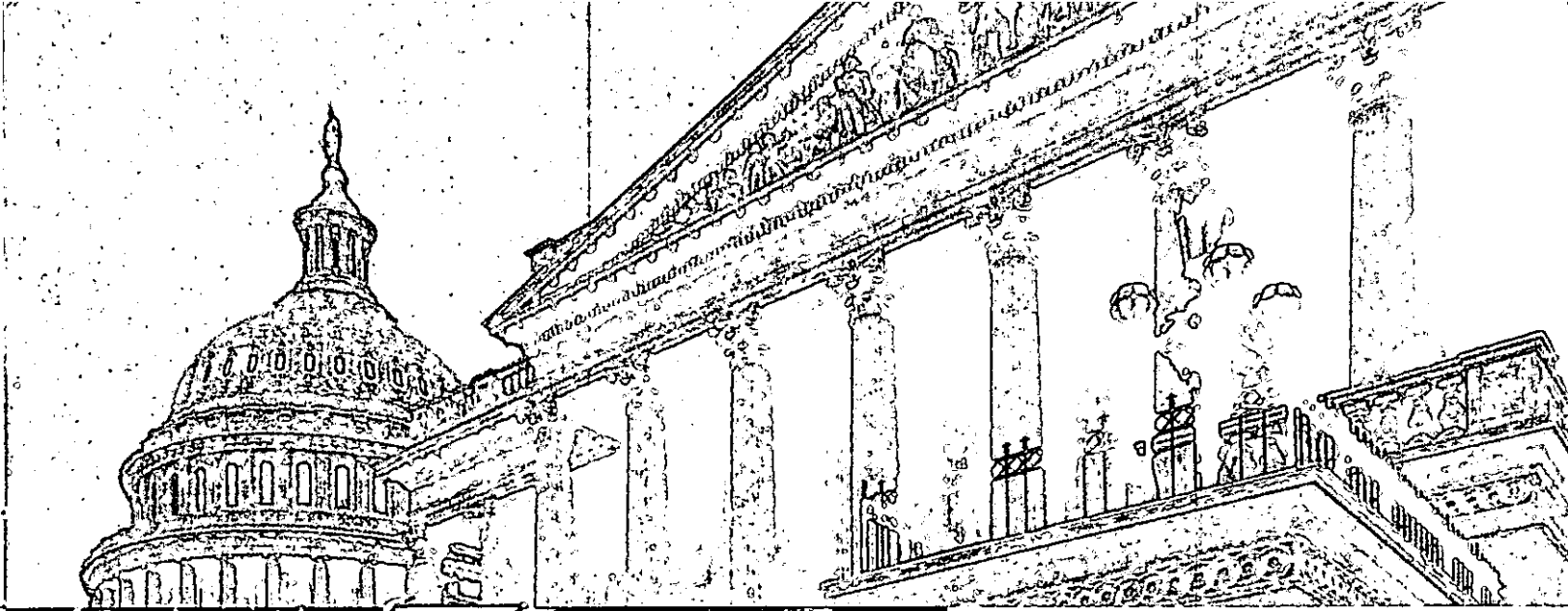


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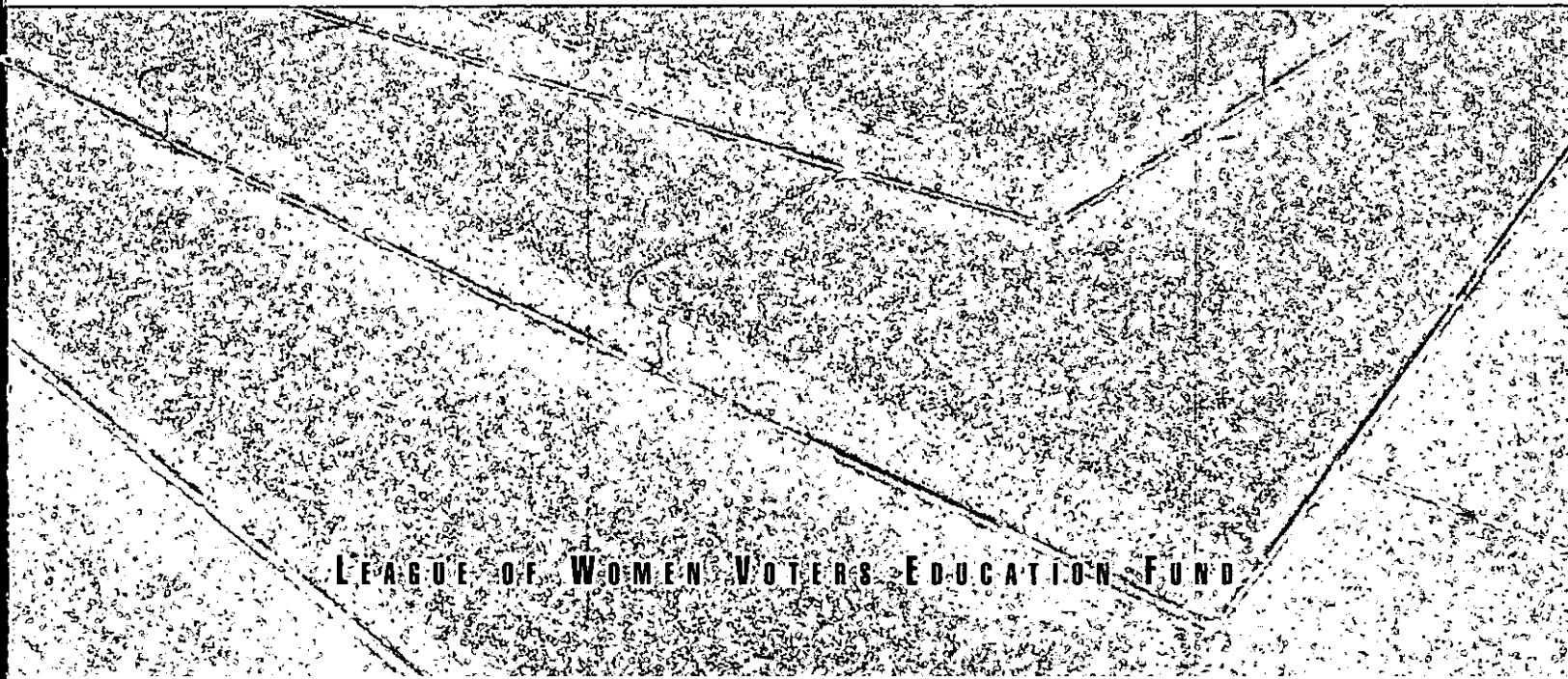


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GETTING INTO ISSUES

YOUR GUIDE TO THE 1996 ELECTIONS



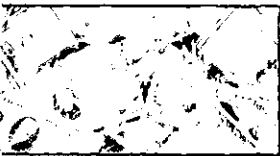
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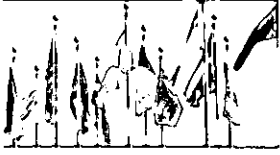
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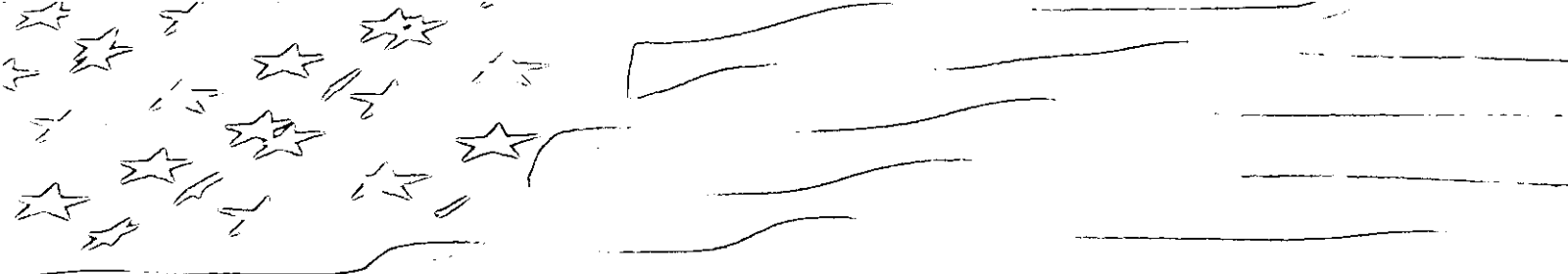
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I N T R O D U C T I O N

Every candidate has a theory on what the 1996 election is about. Some say it's about leadership. Others say character is the issue. And still others say the election is about fundamental human values -- decency, honesty, right and wrong.

The 1996 election is about all of these things, to be sure, but it is issues that matter most. The individuals we elect to the presidency and the Congress make important decisions about our taxes, our health care, our jobs, our education and much more. As voters, we have a right to know how the candidates would handle these decisions once in office, and a responsibility to

ourselves and our families to make our opinions known.

In this guide to the 1996 elections, you will find background information on the issues and the choices that will confront our national leaders in the months and years ahead. You will also find questions that will help you decide how you feel about the issues so you can judge the candidates' positions for yourself.

Remember: Voting is never a perfect match. The key is to select the issues that matter most to you and then to pick the candidate or candidates who you feel would make the right decisions most often.

DEBATING THE ROLE OF GOVERNMENT

The biggest issue in the 1996 election is not the economy or health care or any other individual priority. It is, very simply, the role of the U.S. government in solving problems at home and abroad. While many people see a need for an active federal government that sets national standards to protect people and the environment, others say we should trust state and local governments and the private sector to arrive at their own answers.

Supporters of broad limits on the power of the federal government say a one-size-fits-all approach doesn't work in our large and diverse society. According to this view, federal rules can actually hurt the ability of state and local governments to act on state and local priorities. And businesses that spend too much time and money trying to comply with requirements from Washington wind up spending too little on the things they need to do to compete.

Opponents of a full-scale shrinking of the federal government argue that the private sector and state and local governments don't have the resources or the will to take on national problems. Advocates of this view point to the success of landmark laws from child labor protections and Social Security early in the century to the civil rights laws and environmental regulations of the 1960s

and 1970s. All passed with support from both Republicans and Democrats, these laws responded to problems that were national in scope, protecting people and communities from poverty and harm.

Virtually everyone acknowledges that there is plenty of room for the federal government to cut programs and personnel. Most everybody also agrees that there is room for flexibility in federal government programs -- for example, by allowing states to experiment with innovative solutions to poverty and other problems.

What people do not agree on is where the cutting and the allowances for flexibility should end. Now, both political parties are looking to the November election for guidance from the voters about the proper role and responsibilities of the federal government.

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

What is the proper role of the federal government? Do we need national standards to influence state and local government actions and guide individual and business behavior? If so, in what instances are national standards most important?



THE FEDERAL BUDGET

Decisions about the ultimate role of the federal government have an obvious impact on how much money it needs to collect and spend. The more responsibilities we assign to Washington, the more we will have to pay in federal taxes. And the more we take responsibilities away from the federal government, the more we will save -- although local and state taxes will probably rise to pay for the programs and the problems that are passed along.

THE ISSUES

The United States began running large budget deficits in the 1980s, when a combination of tax cuts and increased spending on the nation's defense widened the gap between what the federal government takes in every year in taxes and other income and what it spends.

People are concerned about the deficit because the annual budget shortfall adds to the national debt and, in turn, to the interest payments we owe each year. In 1994, the government paid \$203 billion in interest on a total debt of more than \$4 trillion. The interest amount made up more than 14 percent of the total federal budget. Depending how you view it, that money is either a major drain on the U.S. economy or a big pool of dollars we could spend on priorities for the future, or both.

THE CHOICES

Both political parties now are on record as supporting efforts to bring the federal budget into balance by 2002. The budget debate has focused on four key issues in the months leading up to the 1996 elections:

Spending Cuts. Many policy makers have responded to concern about the deficit by proposing steep reductions in spending for a range of federal government programs. A comprehensive 1996 federal budget bill, for example, cut \$20 billion in federal government spending. However, the bill took a bite out of only one portion of the budget -- the 14 percent that funds annually approved domestic programs from road building and law enforcement to the Space Shuttle. Left untouched were the huge, fast-growing benefit programs that are a major cause of the nation's red ink.

Also untouched was defense spending, which accounts for nearly \$1 out of every \$5 the government

spends. Many people say there is plenty of room for significant cuts in military programs, especially now that the Cold War is over and we no longer need to spend billions building up defenses against the Soviet Union. In 1996, however, Congress approved more spending for defense than military officials originally requested.

Medicare and Medicaid Reforms. So-called "mandatory" programs account for more than \$.50 of every \$1 our government spends. These programs, sometimes called entitlements, generally make payments to individuals and families who qualify for benefits. They include Social Security, Medicare, Medicaid, veterans and farm programs, food stamps, and the nation's main welfare program, Aid to Families With Dependent Children (AFDC). According to a recent report by the U.S. Census Bureau, roughly half of American households receive some entitlement benefits.

If current policies remain unchanged, the cost of mandatory programs is expected to soar in the years ahead, as health care costs continue to rise and more Americans reach retirement. The mandatory programs that have received the most attention from lawmakers in the months leading up to the 1996 election are Medicare and Medicaid. Medicaid is the federal-state health program for the poor; Medicare covers elderly and disabled citizens.

In 1995, President Clinton vetoed a congressional budget plan that would have handed over responsibility for the Medicaid program to the states. Under the plan, the federal government would give states a lump sum of money each year, called a "block grant," to run the program. The federal government would save money under the block grant plan by putting a ceiling on annual increases in the grant amounts. A sticking point in the debate: how far the federal government can go to require that states offer certain benefits.

Another key battleground in the 1995-96 budget war was Medicare. The need for action to reform Medicare was highlighted in an April 1996 report showing that the Medicare trust fund, which pays hospital bills for people enrolled in the program, may go bankrupt as early as 2002.

Medicare and Medicaid aren't the only mandatory programs facing exploding costs into the next century. There is also trouble on the horizon for the Social Security system. The problem: The huge baby boom generation is fast approaching retirement age and will start draining the system faster than its funds can be replenished by tomorrow's workers.

Taxes. Despite all the talk about the need to deal with the deficit, candidates have suggested a wide range of proposals that would reduce taxes and make it even harder to balance the federal budget. These range from tax credits for adoption and college education expenses to reductions in taxes on investment gains. The argument for tax cuts is that they would ease the pocketbook pressures many American families are facing today while stimulating stronger economic growth.

Increasing taxes, of course, is widely considered a nonstarter in Washington, although many people have suggested that the nation's policy makers ought to do more to eliminate the many tax breaks and subsidies that benefit U.S. businesses. In 1994, the government spent approximately \$51 billion in direct subsidies to businesses and provided an additional \$53 billion in corporate tax breaks.

The Balanced Budget Constitutional Amendment. Among the strategies proposed for dealing with the federal budget deficit is the balanced budget constitutional amendment. The amendment, which would require the Congress and the President to agree each year on a budget in which revenues match or exceed spending, failed to attract enough votes on Capitol Hill in 1995 and 1996. Supporters say it is the only way to ensure that our elected leaders end the nation's deficit spending spree once and for all.

Critics say a balanced budget constitutional amendment would force arbitrary and often harsh decisions, absolving lawmakers of their responsibility to lead. In addition, many people argue that deficit spending is needed from time to time -- for example, to stimulate the economy during a recession, to meet social needs in times of high unemployment, or to cover defense costs in times of international crisis. Putting a permanent straitjacket on the nation's fiscal policy could be harmful, according to the amendment's opponents.

----- WHAT DO YOU THINK? -----

How important is it to reduce the budget deficit? What's the best way to do it? If we need to cut spending, where should the cuts come from?

How much should be done to slow the growth of mandatory programs such as Medicare and Medicaid?

Are tax cuts a good idea? If so, what's the best way to reduce taxes -- with across-the-board cuts or targeted tax credits and deductions?

What Ever Happened to Health Care?

Health care reform -- a hot topic in the 1992 presidential election and a major priority during the first two years of the Clinton administration -- has not been a high-profile issue in the 1996 contest. The reason: President Clinton's 1994 proposal for major reforms in the nation's health care system failed in the face of Republican opposition and health industry attacks.

In 1996, the health reform focus was on a congressional proposal to make insurance "portable" from job to job and to limit insurers' ability to deny coverage for preexisting conditions. The proposal would do nothing to control overall health care costs or expand health coverage to the nearly 40 million U.S. residents who are uninsured -- the two principal goals of earlier reform efforts. While health costs have moderated a bit in recent years, experts say they are still a big drain on the U.S. economy, and that major changes in our health care delivery system are needed.

Those supporting broader health care changes say the United States can't afford to neglect the needs of its huge uninsured population any longer. Many of these people are children, advocates point out, and it's a good bet they're not getting the close medical attention they need.



THE ECONOMY AND JOBS

The role of the federal government in managing the national economy and spurring income and job growth is a subject that gets new attention every presidential election year. While many people question how much Washington really can do to influence our nation's \$7 trillion-a-year economy, candidates regularly outbid one another with proposals that they say will fuel economic growth and help working families.

THE ISSUES

The common theme in the economic proposals put forward by the candidates in 1996 is that many U.S. workers and their families have yet to see any real payoff from our growing economy. In the past, the link between economic growth and workers' wages was clear: incomes rose as the economy grew. But today, while corporate profits are at record levels and the U.S. economy is as healthy as it's been in years, growth in family incomes has stalled and the gap between rich and poor is growing wider.

THE CHOICES

The government can play a constructive role in increasing economic opportunity and jobs, according to many observers, by addressing a few fundamental questions about the U.S. economy. Among the key questions dividing policy makers are the following:

Is government regulation choking growth and jobs?

Congressional leaders made the scaling back of federal regulations a priority over the last two years. Their efforts were sidetracked, however, by disputes over how far to go in reducing government oversight of business and the economy.

The tactics of those promoting an antiregulatory agenda have ranged from proposals to cut the budgets of federal regulatory agencies to demands that all new laws and government regulations pass rigorous tests to justify their costs to taxpayers. Opponents of these and other ideas say they would undercut the government's ability to set nationwide standards for public health and safety and protection of the environment.

Environmental legislation has been a major battle-

ground in the fight over government regulation of the economy. In addition to their work on broad antiregulatory measures, congressional leaders have proposed major cuts in funding for government enforcement of environmental regulations. Lawmakers also have been working to overhaul many of the nation's major environmental laws in the hope of lessening their economic impact on businesses and landowners.

Opponents of proposals to limit government's role in environmental protection say they are a blatant bow to business interests and would threaten public health while turning back the clock on decades of environmental cleanup.

What can government do to reduce income inequality?

According to the World Bank, the income gap between rich and poor is greater in the United States than in any other wealthy industrial nation. While the rich get richer, many working people are struggling just to get by. Policy makers tried to respond to the issue of income inequality in 1996 by proposing an increase in the minimum wage. But many people believe that's only a first step.

During 1996, congressional leaders proposed reductions in one of the government's key programs serving workers at the bottom of the economic ladder: the Earned Income Tax Credit. Designed to add to the incomes of "the working poor," the tax credit was targeted for billions in budget savings. Supporters of reducing the growth of the tax credit program say fraud is a big problem and that the benefits often go to families with above-poverty incomes. Opponents of the cuts argue that the program has enjoyed support from both parties for more than two decades as a way to reward work and keep people out of poverty.

Efforts to reduce income inequality in the United States have not gone far in recent years because of concern that government already spends too much. But supporters say reducing inequality is a good investment that will lead to a more stable democracy and a stronger economy as poor people enter the mainstream of society.

Is the federal government doing enough to promote education and training?

Today's economy places a premium on education. The problem? Too many youngsters are growing up in poverty, attending substandard schools, or being priced out of the college market because of rising tuitions. As a result, many of the country's youngest citizens, through no fault of their own, are destined for low-skilled, low-wage jobs. They don't have opportunities to develop the knowledge and the skills they need to succeed in tomorrow's job market.

Many people say government needs to become more involved in leveling the playing field for kids from low- and middle-income backgrounds. Among the options: expanding Head Start, the popular and successful early-education program that currently serves less than half of all eligible children; expanding training and apprenticeship programs that help land high school graduates in jobs with a future; and easing the burden of college costs through tax credits, low-interest loans and other means. Opponents argue we can't afford new and expanded education and training programs in an era of tight federal government budgets.

Equal opportunity advocates also call for more federal assistance to public schools, especially those in low-income areas. Others support programs that would give parents vouchers they could use to send their children to the public or private school of their choice. The appeal of the voucher programs is that they would not require additional federal funds and would force schools to improve so they could compete for students. Voucher opponents say the programs would only worsen the problem by draining more students and resources from struggling public schools.

----- **WHAT DO YOU THINK?** -----

Will less regulation of business by the federal government strengthen the economy and create jobs? OR should government continue to play an active role in establishing and enforcing national standards for health, safety and environmental protection?

Should the federal government be doing more to try to reduce the high level of income inequality in the United States?

What's the best way to improve educational opportunity in the United States -- by putting more power into the hands of parents to choose schools OR by providing additional federal aid to public schools, especially those in low-income areas?

Do We Still Need Affirmative Action?

Affirmative action was conceived three decades ago as a way to increase economic opportunity for segments of the population that have suffered the effects of discrimination. It works by committing employers to goals and timetables for hiring women and minorities. Affirmative action also has been used to increase minority populations on college campuses.

In 1995, however, critics stepped up efforts to dismantle affirmative action programs. The Supreme Court, in a 5-to-4 decision, said that the federal government's practice of using "set-asides" to steer contracts to minorities and women could only be used in situations where there was a clear case of past discrimination. In other words, broadening economic opportunity for minority- and women-owned businesses is not reason enough for affirmative action, according to the Court.

The federal government's affirmative action efforts also have been a target in Congress. A number of senators and representatives have introduced legislation recently seeking to eliminate preferential treatment in federal contracting and other programs. Supporters of these measures say you can't end discrimination with discrimination, and that the federal government must take the lead in ending race and gender preferences once and for all.

Supporters of affirmative action, however, say racism and prejudice still infect U.S. society and put a brake on opportunity for women and minorities.

What do you think?

Is affirmative action still needed as a way to battle discrimination and assure equal opportunities for minorities and women?



THE SAFETY NET

No matter how much the federal government does to boost incomes and opportunity, there will always be people who are left out of the U.S. economy. Consider this: economists think that the current rate of unemployment in the United States -- between 5 and 6 percent -- is about as good as it gets. That means joblessness is a guaranteed fact of life for millions of Americans at a time. The number of individuals and families living in poverty -- with and without jobs -- amounts to millions more.

THE ISSUES

The federal government has managed "safety net" programs for the needy since the 1930s, when the Depression prompted widespread agreement that our nation has a responsibility to support people who hit on hard times. Playing a key role in the nation's anti-poverty efforts is Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC), a program providing cash benefits to the poor.

The number of AFDC recipients nationwide grew to a total of 14 million people in the early 1990s -- most of them single mothers and their children. The welfare population declined a bit in the last couple of years as the economy improved and more states experimented with welfare reforms. At last count, federal and state governments, which share the program's costs, were spending more than \$22 billion a year on AFDC. The government spends billions more on a range of other welfare initiatives, from food stamps and school lunch programs to a program called Women, Infants and Children (WIC), which provides funds for child care and nutrition to needy mothers.

With so many taxpayer dollars at stake, citizens and lawmakers alike have wondered for some time how we can improve welfare. While a number of states have been experimenting with promising reforms in recent years, critics say the welfare system traditionally has offered no real incentives for people to move out of poverty and into productive, paying jobs. Recent jumps in infant mortality and out-of-wedlock births among the poor have reinforced feelings that welfare isn't working -- and that the nation deserves something better.

THE CHOICES

President Clinton entered the White House in January 1993 promising to "end welfare as we know it." Most

Democrats and Republicans agree that the nation's benefit programs for the poor should be changed to encourage welfare recipients to work and to prevent dependency. But while it is hard to find defenders of the current system, finding an affordable and agreeable solution to the United States' welfare woes has posed problems of its own.

Congressional leaders have embraced welfare reform as a way to cut federal government spending. Welfare savings of more than \$50 billion represent a sizable chunk of the cuts in the Republicans' latest plan to balance the federal budget by 2002. To achieve these savings, legislation that passed the House and Senate in 1995 would replace current federal welfare programs with a lump sum of money that would be handed over to states for the general purpose of helping the poor. The bill would upend 60 years of U.S. government policy by removing the federal guarantee of assistance for poor children. In other words, states would be left to decide who gets what.

President Clinton vetoed the congressional legislation, saying it cut too deeply into the safety net and provided too little for child care, training and other programs to help people make the transition from welfare to work. Other critics of the bill said it would be foolhardy to trust states to keep welfare spending at needed levels in the face of political pressures and competing priorities. In fact, some suggested that states might enter a bidding war to offer *fewer* welfare benefits than their neighbors as a way of encouraging poor people to migrate to other states.

While the President has indicated he would support ending the federal guarantee of cash assistance for poor children, many Democrats and advocates for the poor say such a move would be morally wrong. In their own reform proposals developed over the last two years, congressional Democrats would continue the entitlement

status of welfare -- meaning benefits still would be guaranteed for individuals and families who meet certain national criteria.

Among the areas of agreement between recent Republican and Democratic plans to reform welfare is a five-year time limit on the payment of benefits to any family. Members of both parties also support requirements that welfare recipients find work within two years. And while many Democrats, like the Republicans, support the idea of providing welfare "block grants" to the states, the principal Democratic reform plan would require states to guarantee affordable child care and training to welfare recipients moving to jobs. In the Republican proposal, states were freer to use their welfare funds as they wished.

Another controversial question in the welfare debate: Should the federal government allow states to deny benefits for unmarried teenage mothers or for children born while a family is on welfare? While supporters say we should use the welfare system to encourage parental responsibility, opponents argue that such restrictions only penalize innocent children for their parents' actions.

----- **WHAT DO YOU THINK?** -----

Does the federal government have a role in guaranteeing a minimum standard of living for Americans? OR should we leave it to the states to decide who gets what?

How much should the federal government do to make sure that welfare recipients who are moving to jobs get the child care and the training they need to make the transition a smooth one?

Should states be allowed to deny benefits for unmarried teenage mothers or for children who are born while a family is on welfare?

The Abortion Rights Fight

The battle over a woman's right to abortion still rages on. While polls show most Americans support abortion rights, antiabortion forces continue to seek broad restrictions on the practice that cuts short 1.6 million pregnancies in the United States each year.

The Supreme Court affirmed the right to abortion in the 1973 case of *Roe v. Wade*; a 1992 Supreme Court ruling also upheld abortion rights. The key issue for policy makers in recent years: how far the government can go to limit abortion. Despite widespread support for abortion rights, polls show that most Americans support limited restrictions such as requiring teenagers to notify their parents before undergoing the procedure.

No one in the political debate says he or she is for abortion. Both Republicans and Democrats argue that we should do more to encourage adoption and reduce teenage pregnancies as ways to make abortions more scarce. Many lawmakers and antiabortion advocates, however, say that's not enough and are calling for more restrictions on abortion at the national and state levels, including a constitutional amendment banning the practice.

Opponents of restrictions on abortion rights say that ending a pregnancy is a woman's private decision, and that government should do all it can to make sure abortion services are available and safe.

What Do You Think?

Should the federal government get involved in making broad restrictions on abortion? OR should policy makers focus more on initiatives that might reduce the number of abortions without endangering a woman's right to choose?



CRIME AND VIOLENCE

The level of violence and crime in the United States has become a day-to-day concern for more and more of us. We worry about our personal safety and the safety of our families and communities. And we wonder what can be done to protect our children from the flood of drugs and violence in our society.

THE ISSUES

Despite recent declines in the rate of violent crime in the United States, Americans are victims of nearly 2 million murders, rapes, robberies and assaults each year. Even more alarming is the rising number of violent crimes committed by juveniles. The number of individuals 18 and under who were arrested for murder shot up by 168 percent between 1984 and 1993. With the teenage population due to grow substantially over the next ten years, experts say things will only get worse unless we start addressing some of the problems that are driving kids to violence.

Many experts blame poverty and drug use for the high levels of violence and crime in America today. Despite federal and state expenditures of more than \$100 billion since 1981 on efforts to reduce the supply of drugs in America, heroin and cocaine are now cheaper and more available than they were when the federal government's "war on drugs" began. At the same time, drug offenses have more than doubled. Two-thirds of the nation's 1.4 million prisoners are substance abusers whose crimes are directly linked to drugs.

Another factor in the nation's sky-high crime rates is the wide availability of guns. Guns are the murder weapon of choice in almost two-thirds of homicides in the United States, with handguns responsible for half the total.

THE CHOICES

Renewed citizen concern about crime prompted the nation's elected leaders to take a fresh look at the issue in 1994. The result was a comprehensive anti-crime law that invested billions of dollars in the "three P's" in the government's crime-control arsenal: police, prisons and prevention. The bill provided \$10 billion for prison

construction projects, nearly \$9 billion to put more police on the streets, and nearly \$6 billion for a broad range of initiatives to prevent crime and violence.

The need for more prisons across the country has been fueled by an increasing number of drug-related crimes and new mandatory minimum sentences for drug offenders. Today, U.S. taxpayers spend \$25 billion yearly on prisons, or about \$20,000 per prisoner. Critics of throwing more and more money at prisons say we should invest in drug treatment instead -- and in alternative programs such as drug courts, which require intensive counseling and treatment as opposed to jail-time for nonviolent drug offenders.

The recent enthusiasm in Washington for setting mandatory minimum sentences for certain crimes while emphasizing state and local decision making in other issue areas has come under fire. In particular, many argue that harsh mandatory minimum sentences for crack cocaine -- a drug used primarily in African American communities -- are discriminatory. While policy makers in Washington argue that the crime problem demands tough national standards, others say federal officials would be smarter to leave sentencing and other matters to judges and local officials who know and understand the specifics of the cases before them.

Also up for criticism in recent months are the 1994 crime law's police-on-the-street provisions. These provide funds to help local police departments beef up "community policing" efforts, which assign officers to regular beat patrols so they can become familiar with a neighborhood and its special problems. A priority of President Clinton's, the community policing funds came under fire by lawmakers who say state and local governments should have more leeway in deciding how to spend federal anti-crime dollars.

The prevention initiatives in the 1994 law were yet another target of congressional critics. Slated primarily

for after-school and weekend programs, tutoring, social services and other efforts aimed at steering youths away from crime and violence, the funds were considered a major victory for prevention advocates. Their winning argument: prevention-oriented programs may cost money in the short run, but they can save a lot more over time by reducing juvenile crime and the costs of detention and rehabilitation. Opponents of the prevention programs call them "social pork," saying they are yet another instance of the federal government throwing money at untested answers.

Another provision of the 1994 crime bill was a ban on the manufacture, sale and possession of 19 types of assault weapons, a category of semiautomatic guns used in a small but increasing percentage of violent crimes. Enactment of the assault weapons ban followed Congress's 1993 approval of the Brady Bill establishing a mandatory waiting period so government authorities can conduct background checks on handgun buyers. In the first year of the Brady Bill alone, the measure stopped about 70,000 convicted felons from purchasing handguns over the counter, according to the federal government.

In the two years since the President signed the 1994 crime bill, various members of Congress have suggested repealing the assault weapons ban. Some policy makers also have signaled that they want to cut spending for the law's prevention and community policing initiatives. In addition, there has been a lot of talk in recent months about ways to address the problems of crime and violence that would not involve any new government spending. Among the biggies: requiring "v-chip" technology in televisions so parents can block out violent programming.

Many observers argue, however, that we will never see real progress against crime and violence until we do something about the underlying issues that contribute to the problem: poverty, declining incomes, substandard schools and housing, declining family values, and more. From this perspective, crime and violence aren't really the problem at all; they're a symptom of a lot of other problems we should be looking at more closely.

Does the Death Penalty Deter Crime?

Federal anti-crime legislation enacted in 1994 authorizes the use of the death penalty for dozens of federal crimes. Candidates regularly cite their support of capital punishment as proof of their "get tough" approach to crime and violence in society.

But is the death penalty an effective tool in fighting and preventing crime? A recent survey of police chiefs around the country suggests it's not. Asked what really works in the fight against crime, the chiefs ranked capital punishment dead last. Coming in first by a wide margin were efforts to reduce drug abuse in America. Next came strengthening the economy and creating more jobs, followed by simplifying court rules, assuring longer prison sentences, putting more police on the street and reducing the number of guns.

(Source: *On the Front Line: Law Enforcement Views on the Death Penalty*, Death Penalty Information Center, 1995)

What Do You Think?

What's causing all the crime and violence we see in American society today? And what can the federal government do to address these underlying issues?

What's the most important focus for federal efforts to control crime and violence directly -- building prisons, putting more police on the streets or investing in prevention initiatives like drug treatment and community programs for kids?

Should we repeal the 1994 crime law's ban on assault weapons? OR should we push for even more controls on guns to keep them out of the hands of criminals and children?



FOREIGN POLICY

What is the United States' role in the post-Cold War world? When and how should we take action to protect our interests around the globe? With severe budget worries and pressing needs at home, how much can our government afford to spend on defense and foreign aid? These are among the questions facing U.S. lawmakers as they try to put together a foreign policy that works in an unruly world.

THE ISSUES

The collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War have helped turn up the heat on long-simmering tensions and problems all over the globe. Three key threats have emerged on the world scene in recent years:

Terrorism: The threat of international terrorism hit home for Americans with the 1993 bombing of the World Trade Center in New York. The first major terrorist bombing on U.S. soil, the incident forced us to accept a fact that many other countries know too well by now: that terrorism can strike anyone anywhere. It also forced policy makers to revisit proposals to toughen the nation's anti-terror policies.

The spread of arms: During the Cold War, the United States and the Soviet Union dominated the international arms trade. Today, however, an increasing number of nations have become "free agents" in the weapons business, shipping everything from tanks and guns to nuclear devices to eager buyers the world over. The result: less predictability, more weapons in "hot spots" for conflict, and more nations potentially able to launch chemical and nuclear attacks.

Ethnic and religious conflict: Sustained fighting among ethnic and religious groups in Bosnia led the United States to assert a leadership role in bringing the warring parties together and in organizing an international force of peacekeepers to enforce the resulting peace agreement. But in Bosnia as elsewhere, the U.S. actions raised questions about when and how the United States should get involved in faraway conflicts -- and whether it's wise to put our soldiers at risk if we aren't directly threatened.

THE CHOICES

The following are among the important foreign policy questions awaiting the nation's elected leaders in the months and years ahead:

How much is enough for defense and foreign aid?

The end of the Cold War had a lot of Americans talking about a potential "peace dividend." Without the Soviet Union to build up our defenses against, people reasoned, we should be able to shift defense dollars to domestic priorities and reduce the deficit. But while defense spending has indeed been cut in the past few years, the cuts are next to nothing compared to early estimates of what we'd save.

Spending for defense is shaping up as a major budget battleground in 1996. The White House budget for fiscal year 1997 calls for a total of \$254 billion for defense, but congressional Republicans claim that is far too low and would jeopardize the nation's security. A major sticking point: congressional proposals to boost spending dramatically on defense systems to protect the United States from missile attacks. Military and intelligence officials say the antimissile systems, which could cost tens of billions of dollars to develop, could be obsolete before we even get them up and running.

President Clinton's budget proposal also included a \$1 billion increase in foreign aid -- the money we send abroad to help other countries pay for food, roads and bridges, environmental protection, and other needs. With so many new and fledgling democracies striving to take root around the globe, the President and others argue, we should be helping them out to make sure they succeed.

Foreign aid's supporters point out that it currently amounts to less than 1 percent of the overall federal budget, a piddling amount for the world's only superpower. By spending more on foreign aid now, they argue, we will spend less on defense and other international needs down the road -- and possibly save the lives of U.S. troops we might otherwise have to send into crisis situations.

Congressional Republicans proposed spending less, not more, on foreign aid in 1996. Their complaint: It's a waste of money in these times of tight government spending.

How much should we invest in partnerships with other nations?

In a time of intense regional conflicts and civil wars, many argue, the United Nations needs a higher-than-ever level of U.S. support to protect interests we share with other nations -- and to take action at times when the United States would rather not go it alone. However, many people worry about giving too much responsibility to the world body, especially after troubled UN operations in Bosnia and Somalia.

The United States owes \$1.3 billion to the United Nations to cover the costs of recent operations. President Clinton has called on Congress to come up with the money so we can erase our debt. The President has advocated a foreign policy of "assertive multilateralism," meaning we will act alone only when vital U.S. interests are at stake. At other times, such as in Bosnia and Haiti, the President has made a point of working with other nations and organizations, principally the United Nations and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, or NATO.

But congressional leaders have refused to pay the UN bill. They criticize the United Nations as a wasteful organization with little to show for its multi-billion-dollar investments in trouble spots around the world. Some in Congress also object to placing U.S. troops under United Nations command.

Should we use our economic might to force change?

The United States has held onto its superpower status in the world not only by maintaining a mammoth military but also by remaining a tremendous economic force. In 1994, the nation exported more than \$500 billion worth of merchandise to countries around the globe. In the same year, we imported another \$670 billion in goods.

Many people say our role as an economic superpower gives us great influence. By banking on our economic might to push for free and open markets and for such important causes as human rights and limiting the spread of nuclear weapons, advocates say, we can go a long way to nurturing a stable and cooperative post-Cold War world.

Critics of tying trade to other foreign policy goals -- for example, by limiting trade with countries engaged in weapons or human rights abuses -- caution it can endanger U.S. business interests, hurt consumers and cost jobs.

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

What principles should guide decisions to send U.S. troops abroad? What would determine whether we act alone or with other nations?

What is the best strategy in the post-Cold War world -- spending more money on defense or foreign aid, or both? OR should we spend less on defense and international affairs, focusing instead on reducing the deficit and solving problems at home?

Should the United States use its economic might to push for human rights, limiting the spread of nuclear weapons and other important global causes?

The Immigration Question

America has always been a nation of immigrants. Widespread concern about jobs, the economy and the U.S. budget deficit, however, have prompted many Americans to wonder whether something should be done to limit immigration.

The House and Senate approved bills in May 1996 aimed at curbing illegal immigration and restricting access to government benefits for both legal and illegal immigrants. Approval of the measures followed California's vote in 1994 to deny all but emergency medical benefits to people who are in this country illegally. The California law, which was struck down by the Supreme Court, showed the frustration policy makers and voters feel about the flow of illegals. But opponents of restrictions on benefits for illegal immigrants and their families say denying basic services now will only cost more in the long run as immigrants' children grow up without access to basic education and health care.

Other critics say both the House and Senate bills fall short by doing nothing to place real limits on immigration. Supporters of new limits say the continuing flow of immigrants adds to taxpayer costs for education, social services and law enforcement. Others say immigrants contribute in a big way to the economy and American culture and say added restrictions would be harmful.

What Do You Think?

Should the United States do more to restrict the flow of legal immigrants into this country? How far should we go to limit the availability of government benefits to legal and illegal immigrants and their families?



GOOD GOVERNMENT

Polls show that Americans are angry and alienated, worried that government no longer responds to their true concerns. People say they're sick of politicians putting special interests first, tired of the bickering that passes for a political campaign, and fed up with the unseemly role of money in elections. Many people say the only way to shake things up in Washington is to limit lawmakers' terms in office. Others say it's time to change the way political campaigns are paid for -- and to level the playing field that now gives incumbent officeholders a considerable edge.

THE ISSUES

The 1994 congressional elections were the most expensive in history. Candidates for the House and Senate raised a total of \$741 million and spent \$724 million in their campaigns. The average cost of winning a seat in the House was \$530,000. For the Senate, the average price tag on a winning campaign was \$4.3 million. Lawmakers themselves admit they're spending more and more of their time asking for money -- and less and less on the issues confronting their constituents and their country.

But it's not just the big bucks and the money chase that have people on and off Capitol Hill shaking their heads. It's also where much of the money is coming from. Picking up a growing share of the tab for congressional races in recent years are many of the same special interests that lobby lawmakers between elections. In 1994, nearly one in four dollars contributed to congressional candidates came from political action committees (PACs), which are set up by industry, unions and others with important stakes in congressional decisions.

For many members of Congress, PAC giving can account for two-thirds or more of total campaign dollars. Adding to people's concerns, PACs aren't the only source of special interest contributions to congressional campaigns. Large contributions from individuals -- many of them lobbyists or corporate CEOs with obvious policy goals -- also trouble critics of the current system. Whether it is true or not, they say, the special interest millions make it look like Congress is for sale.

Adding to suspicions that something is terribly wrong is the fact that an overwhelming proportion of special interest contributions go to candidates who already are in office, especially those whose seniority and influence on Capitol Hill can make them important folks to have on your side. Challengers in House and Senate

races were at a distinct disadvantage in the dollar department in 1994, spending less than a fourth on average than their incumbent opponents. Critics say the huge war chests built up by sitting lawmakers stifle competition and scare away potential challengers who can't afford the TV time they need to become known among voters.

THE CHOICES

Many citizens have expressed their dissatisfaction with the current state of affairs in Washington by calling for term limits for members of Congress. Supporters of the limits say they will reduce the power of incumbents, open up the system to more challengers, and return us to the days when service in Congress was considered a temporary job for average citizens.

Twenty-three states have passed term limits laws for their members of Congress, but the Supreme Court in May 1995 nullified the laws, ruling that the only way to restrict how long people can serve on Capitol Hill would be with a constitutional amendment. Responding to the Court's challenge, House and Senate leaders scheduled votes in 1995 and 1996 on proposed constitutional amendments on the issue. However, the measures came up short of the two-thirds majorities needed to approve a constitutional amendment for ratification by the states. Nevertheless, supporters said they were planning to make term limits an issue in the 1996 elections.

Opponents of term limits say we already have a great way to limit the terms of lawmakers who aren't doing their jobs -- elections. The better answer to Washington's problems, according to many people, is to change campaign finance laws to eliminate excessive spending, reduce the contributions and influence of special interests, and open congressional races to more competition.

In 1996, lawmakers were debating a number of proposals to overhaul the financing of congressional campaigns. Among the key elements of the proposed reforms:

Spending Limits. Mandatory spending limits for congressional races have been outlawed by the courts because they limit a candidate's free speech rights, but the government still can set "voluntary limits." To make the voluntary limits work, reform supporters call for offering the candidates specific incentives and benefits for staying within the limits. These could include reduced rates for television and radio advertising and savings on postage.

Many people also support offering public matching funds as an incentive for complying with campaign spending limits, a system that has proved successful in limiting spending on presidential races. Public financing proposals, however, regularly run up against concerns about the budget deficit and whether it's appropriate to spend taxpayer money on political campaigns.

Limits on Special Interest Contributions. Experts say that an outright ban on contributions from PACs would probably be unconstitutional because it would limit the free speech and associational rights of citizens. An alternative approach to limiting the influence of PACs is to set a ceiling on the total amount of money a candidate can receive from them. Reformers have proposed similar steps for limiting large contributions from individuals. Another approach would be to lower the contribution limit for PACs, which currently can give up to \$5,000 to a candidate.

Limits on "soft money." Another target of advocates for comprehensive campaign finance reform is "soft money," or funds spent by the national political parties on activities that benefit congressional and presidential candidates. In 1995, the Republican and Democratic parties raised nearly \$60 million in soft-money contributions from corporations, wealthy individuals and labor unions. The total was more than twice the amount the parties raised in 1991, the

last pre-presidential election year. Soft-money dollars, say supporters of reform, are just one more way to get around existing spending limits while covering the costs of advertising, phone banks and other efforts that help major-party candidates. Some reform proposals call for an outright ban on the use of soft money in federal elections.

Supporters of campaign finance reform also have called for: limiting personal spending on campaigns by wealthy candidates; tightening controls on "independent expenditures" by special interest groups for advertising and other activities aimed at influencing election outcomes; and requiring candidates to raise a certain amount of their campaign funds from sources within their own states or districts.

Opponents of these and other measures say we shouldn't restrict a candidate's ability to raise and spend money as he or she wishes. Indeed, some have suggested that the country spends too little, not too much, on politics and that candidates and political parties need to be able to spend more money to get disaffected voters to the polls. Supporters of reforms, however, say it is campaign spending that is making voters disaffected -- and that it is time for Congress to act, once and for all, to reduce the role of money in politics.

----- **WHAT DO YOU THINK?** -----

Are you concerned about the role of money in American politics today?

What should be the priority in reforming federal campaign finance laws -- limiting spending overall, reducing special interest contributions, or both?

Do you feel we need to amend the Constitution to place term limits on members of Congress?

It's YOUR future that's at stake in the 1996 elections -- your job, your health care, your safety, your taxes, your family.
Shouldn't you have a say? Election Day is Tuesday, November 5, 1996.

GET INTO THE ISSUES AND VOTE!



LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS

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