

News Digest

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 1, 1998

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Budget surplus announced

WASHINGTON (AP) — The government will run a surplus of about \$70 billion this year, the first black-ink budget in 29 years, President Clinton said Wednesday.

Eager to claim credit, he called the turnaround after years of huge deficits "a gift-giving achievement for generations to come."

Republicans were quick to say the surplus was mostly their work, that it came about despite Clinton and that it was time to put part of the extra money back in the pockets of taxpayers.

"We stopped the flow of red ink and balanced the budget," said House Speaker Newt Gingrich, R-Ga. He accused Clinton of wanting to spend billions more on "big liberal bureaucracies."

For all the crowing about the first budget surplus since 1969, when Richard Nixon was president, Neil Armstrong walked on the moon and a can of Coke cost 15 cents, little was said about the possibility that an economic recession could wipe out projections of continued black-ink budget.

The Congressional Budget Office predicts an eye-popping \$1.6 trillion in surpluses over the next 11 years. Looming after that are potentially deep budgetary troubles because of the huge drain retiring baby boomers are expected to make on Social

Security, Medicare and other federal programs.

Appearing at a White House ceremony beside a sign flashing the word "surplus" in orange lights, Clinton said the door is now open to sustained American economic prosperity into the 21st century.

"Tonight at midnight, America puts an end to three decades of deficits and launches an era of balanced budgets and surpluses," Clinton told a handpicked audience of Democrats — including several who lost their congressional seats in 1994 after voting for Clinton's deficit-reduction plan.

"It is a landmark achievement, not just for those in this room who have played a role in it, but indeed for all the American people," Clinton said. "And it will be a gift-giving achievement for generations to come."

Clinton used the opportunity to press his top domestic priorities: setting aside the budget surpluses until Congress enacts long-term fixes to the Social Security system, resisting using the money for tax cuts and making investments in education that can be paid for without dipping into the surpluses.

"I am well aware that it is a popular thing, particularly right here, just four weeks and change before an Election Day, to serve up a tax cut — to say, well, we've got a surplus, we're going to give you some of your money back," the president said.

"*Tonight at midnight, America ... launches an era of balanced budgets and surpluses.*"

PRESIDENT CLINTON

He said people would rather preserve the surplus until Social Security funding is straightened out.

"I think most Americans would like to see the ink change from red to black and then just dry a little before we put it at risk," he said.

Republicans retorted that their plan for an \$80 billion tax cut over five years would chew up only 10 percent of the projected budget surpluses.

"The president is threatening to punish husbands and wives, farmers and ranchers, small businesses and senior citizens by denying them tax relief now," said Rep. John Boehner, R-Ohio, chairman of the House Republican Conference.

The \$70 billion surplus announced Wednesday is an estimate; the final figure will be available in mid-October.

Despite the surplus, the nation still has a \$5.4 trillion debt as a result of years of deficit spending.

Honor of Yom Kippur empties Israeli streets

JERUSALEM (AP) — Prayerful chants echoed off the yellow-pink stones of the Western Wall and the candlelit walls of countless synagogues Wednesday as Israel marked Judaism's holiest day.

Jews around the world mark Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, by praying and fasting, soul-searching, repenting and seeking God's forgiveness. The holiday began at sundown Tuesday and lasted until sundown Wednesday.

"It's the time to confess your sins right out loud," said 69-year-old Jerusalem tour guide Shmaryah Yehav. "You try to improve your communication with God and with other people, too."

Even on a day of introspection, real-world tensions intruded.

Military security was tight, the Palestinian lands were sealed off, and little progress was seen in just-finished peace talks in the United States.

In Israel proper, the holiday presented a rare spectacle: that of a frenetic country simply shutting down.

Streets emptied as people hurried home for a final pre-fast meal. For 24 hours, shops and businesses were shuttered, buses and trains stopped running, and virtually no one drove.

There were no international or domestic flights. Seaports were closed. Border crossings were shut.

News broadcasts ceased.

At the Western Wall in Jerusalem's walled Old City, Judaism's holiest site, tens of thousands of Jews gathered for prayers, swaying and chanting before the expanse of yellow stone. Prayers continued late into the night Tuesday.

The day marks something of a truce in skirmishes between religious and secular Israelis. Even though most Israelis describe themselves as secular, nearly all go to synagogue on Yom Kippur and most also fast.

Synagogues are so crowded that many require reservations, but by tradition, no worshiper is turned away.

The army, which also observes the holiday fast, insists religious observances don't compromise preparedness — a pledge that carries a special meaning this year, the 25th anniversary of the Yom Kippur war.

Israel was caught badly off guard when Arab neighbors attacked on Oct. 6, 1973, when the holy day fell that year. Almost 2,700 Israeli soldiers were slain in the 2½-week conflict, shattering the country's confidence about its military prowess.

As it normally does during Jewish holidays, Israel imposed a blanket closure on the West Bank and Gaza Strip, refusing entry to all Palestinians.

Soldiers manned roadblocks and police checked cars going into the Old City.

Demands on IRA cause impasse Sinn Fein leader says it won't affect new Assembly

BLACKPOOL, England (AP) — Gerry Adams, leader of the IRA-allied Sinn Fein party, insisted Wednesday that demands for the Irish Republican Army to start surrendering weapons should not hold up the formation of Northern Ireland's new administration.

"The time frame should not be allowed to slip," Adams told reporters after a 40-minute meeting with Prime Minister Tony Blair during the governing Labor Party's annual conference. "People should not be allowed to hardball each other or go down to the wire on this."

Blair also was meeting members of Northern Ireland's main Protestant and Catholic parties Wednesday in a bid to break the impasse over IRA weapons.

Adams wants two posts for Sinn Fein in a new multiparty administration, which will be drawn from the 108-member power-sharing Assembly set up under Northern Ireland's historic peace agreement.

April's agreement specifies that

the administration must hold a summit meeting with the Irish government by Oct. 31.

David Trimble, head of the Protestant Ulster Unionist Party and leader of the administration, is insisting the IRA start decommissioning to show the sincerity of its 14-month-old truce before Sinn Fein could assume any such posts.

Trimble says he and his Catholic deputy could meet with the Irish government, while Adams is insisting the entire administration must be appointed in time to participate in the meeting.

The peace accord calls for the IRA and the province's outlawed pro-British paramilitary groups to disarm under international supervision by mid-2000, but set no deadline for the process to start.

Underlining the huge change since the Belfast peace agreement, Adams passed through the security cordons that surround the annual gathering of Britain's governing party — once used primarily to guard against an IRA assassination attempt on Cabinet min-

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GERRY ADAMS
Sinn Fein leader

isters.

Also Wednesday, police in the Irish Republic arrested three more suspects on suspicion of planning last month's car-bomb slaughter in the Northern Ireland town of Omagh.

Since the Aug. 15 bombing, police on both sides of the Irish border have arrested 18 other people suspected of involvement in the attack that killed 29 people.


All suspects were eventually freed without charge.

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