

Big tax cut on agenda for Clinton

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Clinton proposed a \$350 billion tax cut Thursday night as he offered the final agenda of his presidency.

The president offered a litany of initiatives, many of them sure to be rewritten or ignored by Congress.

His tax cut proposals were intended primarily to promote educational opportunities and expand health insurance and child care for lower- and middle-income Americans.

The initiatives included relief from the "marriage penalty" — an idea first championed by Republicans — and a new program of retirement savings accounts.

Clinton's tax program includes marriage penalty relief, tax deductions of up to \$2,800 annually per family for college tuition and fees and retirement savings accounts for low- and moderate-income families.

He also proposed steps to encourage charitable giving.

The president's tax package joined a mix of proposals urged by Republicans and Democrats as both sides battle for control of Congress and the White House.

Smarting from Clinton's veto of their \$792 billion tax-cut package last year, House Republicans are drafting their own version of educational tax breaks and marriage penalty relief this year. Presidential candidates have their own proposals, too.

Rep. Bill Archer, R-Texas, chairman of the Ways and Means Committee, called Clinton's tax cuts too limited.

"We think all Americans deserve tax relief, not just the handful the president picks," Archer said.

The president's tax package would cost \$350 billion over 10 years.

However, his plan envisions cutting that price tag by \$100 billion by closing tax havens, shelters and loopholes. Congress has previously rejected many of those ideas on grounds they are tax increases.

There were no major foreign policy announcements, although Clinton urged Congress to give



PRESIDENT BILL Clinton delivers the State of the Union address Thursday. Clinton proposed more than \$350 billion in tax cuts, lowering the national debt, spending increases in education and increased gun control laws.

Mark Wilson/Newsweek

China permanent normal trading relations with the United States. He also asked for \$1.6 billion for Colombia to fight narco-traffickers.

Clinton said the United States must help Russia and China become strong, prosperous democratic nations.

"Both are behind, held back from reaching their full potential — Russia by the legacy of communism, economic turmoil, a cruel and self-defeating war in Chechnya; China by the illusion

that it can buy stability at the expense of freedom."

Clinton also:

■ Called anew for Medicare to include a prescription drug benefit and to let people as young as 55 buy Medicare coverage — this time with a 25 percent tax credit.

■ Called for doubling spending for after-school and summer school programs and to expand the Head Start program for needy children to cover 950,000 children.

■ Offered tax breaks for col-

lege, costing \$30 billion over 10 years.

■ Expanded the earned income tax credit for the working poor by \$21 billion and offered a tax credit for long-term care costing \$27 billion.

■ Proposed a 10-year, \$110 billion proposal to provide health coverage to the parents of children protected by the state Children's Health Insurance Program. If approved, it would be the largest increase in health coverage in 35 years.

Clinton speech criticized

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all the answers, but that's not the case," Barrett said.

Hagel said the government couldn't fix every problem in society by adding more federal programs.

Kerrey said Clinton mentioned many positive aspects of society in his speech.

"There's plenty to feel good about: Crime, welfare and unemployment are all down," Kerrey said.

Kerrey said Clinton was "very inspiring" in key moments, but Hagel disagreed.

"His rhetoric does not match his actions of the past seven years," Hagel said.

Kerrey said he was grateful Clinton acknowledged problems facing family farmers because of their great contributions to the economy, but Hagel thought the president didn't focus enough on agriculture.

"He spent more time talking about Third World relief than agriculture," Hagel said.

Clinton also encouraged the addition of 3,000 charter schools, which are non-traditional public schools that use different teaching methods.

Terry said this won't affect Nebraska because charter schools aren't allowed in the state.

"This stood out to me because (Nebraska) isn't going to be able to help with this," Terry said.

In other proposals, Clinton announced his support of \$1 billion in tax incentives for drug-makers to develop vaccines for malaria, tuberculosis and HIV/AIDS.

The president addressed the issue of education and announced a proposal that would include tax deductions of up to \$2,800 annually per family for college tuition and fees.

Clinton also announced his support of stricter gun control laws, which would require handgun purchasers to obtain a state license showing they have passed a background check, as well as completing a training course or exam.

Hagel said he was pleased Clinton mentioned the enforcement of gun control laws but did not like the president's new proposals.

"He just wants to take guns away from people," Hagel said.

The president slipped up in his speech by saying Vice President Al Gore has helped make communities more liberal. He meant to say livable, and the audience, Gore included, had a good laugh.

Some politicians thought Clinton's speech was a little long-winded.

His speech was his longest State of the Union address: 89 minutes, besting his 1995 record of 81 minutes. By one count, he was interrupted by applause 128 times, most of it from Democrats.

"It was just too long," Barrett said.

— LEGISLATURE —

Hearing bill sees heated debate

By Veronica Daehn

Staff writer

It took Nancy Mitchell, of Omaha, three years to convince doctors that her son, Matthew, was deaf.

No one wanted to believe her, she told the Health and Human Services Committee on Thursday.

Nine years later, she said she's still angry at the doctors who ignored her pleas.

Because her son endured the first three years of his life without hearing, he has spent the rest of his life trying to catch up, she said.

LB950 was held in committee Thursday after senators heard dozens of mothers, doctors, insurance agents and others testify for and against the bill that would adopt the Infant Hearing Act.

Under this act, all infants born in Nebraska would undergo a hearing test at birth.

Experts said hearing loss is much less detrimental if caught early on.

Mitchell said she would give anything to have those formative years back for her son.

"Even after nine years, I'm still angry

that no one would listen," she said. "Please listen today."

John Roberts, vice president for the Nebraska Association of Hospital and Health Systems, said eight Nebraska hospitals do universal screening.

Those tests cover 32 percent of the total births in Nebraska, he said.

By the end of this year, about 20 more hospitals will be screening for hearing loss.

Together, this accounts for 75 percent of statewide births.

But Roberts said the testing program should be available to all newborns in the state.

The program, he said, needs the help of the Department of Health and Human Services.

Mary Moeller, director of the Center for Childhood Deafness, said the first years of a child's life are the most crucial in language, communication and educational development.

"Hearing loss causes gaps or delays in development," she said. "These delays are preventable with early identification."

Moeller said she helped with a study on 112 deaf children at Boys Town National Research Hospital.

The results showed that there was a direct correlation between the age children were when hearing loss was discovered and the vocabulary they have at age 5.

"(Later identification) places a child at a disadvantage that might never be fixed," Moeller said. "They are always playing a catch-up game."

Tom Fortune from Lincoln Public Schools said it was not sufficient for just some hospitals to do hearing screenings. It needed to be done at all hospitals across the state, he said.

The bill states that by Dec. 1, 2003, hearing tests would be conducted on no fewer than 95 percent of newborn babies in Nebraska.

The state will achieve a 100 percent screening rate, the bill reads.

The hearing tests would be covered by health insurance.

Several insurance agents said they opposed that part of the bill.

"This is a prescription for chaos," said Tom Jenkins, a representative from Blue Cross Blue Shield of Nebraska. "We want to keep costs down for policyholders."

The bill was introduced by Sen. Dennis Byars of Beatrice.

Law & Order

Man attempts escape by crawling under car

A Lincoln man tried to escape from police by crawling under a car on Wednesday.

Officers noticed a man walk into and back out of J Ryans, 1434 N. 27th St. The man then got into the back seat passenger side of a vehicle, Lincoln Police Ofc. Katherine Finnell said.

Police noticed the man drop a plastic bag full of a white substance by the seat onto the floorboard, Finnell said.

Finnell said officers struggled to get Henry Brinkley Jr., 24, of 1924 N. 28th St., out of the car.

When Brinkley did get out of the car, he began to crawl under it.

Police found the plastic bag filled with white powder near the driver-side tire.

Brinkley was arrested for possession of a controlled substance, resisting arrest and failure to comply with an order.

Police arrest man on concealed weapon charge

Police found a little surprise in a Lincoln man's pocket after a fight Wednesday.

Titus Williams, 19, of 1001 S. 26th St. Apt. 4, was involved in a fight at 8:30 p.m. Wednesday at a convenience store, Finnell said.

Officers arrived at Super C, at 21st and G streets, to break up a fight.

Police said as officers were trying to handcuff Williams, he tried to reach into his right front pants pocket.

With the handcuffs on Williams, they found a loaded Phoenix .25-caliber semi-automatic pistol in the pocket he had been trying to reach into, Finnell said.

Officers found the serial number on the pistol had been scratched off.

Williams was arrested for carrying a concealed weapon and defacing a firearm.

Compiled by staff writer Michelle Starr