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[International Herald Tribune, November 1999]

—THE NEW YORK TIMES.

Too Much Compromise

President Bill Clinton paid a regretably high price to win the House Republican leadership's assent to give almost \$1 billion in back American dues to the United Nations. Last weekend, White House bargainers agreed to new statutory language restricting international family planning assistance that the administration had firmly and rightly resisted in the past. Understandably, advocates for women's health and reproductive choice, even including Vice President Al Gore, beamed that damaging concession and questioned its necessity.

Nevertheless, House approval of the UN arrears payments, assuming that final details of the agreement can be worked out and sold to the Republican rank and file, will be a significant achievement. Failure to pay these assessments had undermined the United Nations' finances, weakened American influence there and put Washington's voting rights in the General Assembly at risk. The United States cannot exercise global leadership unless it honors its financial obligations. Nor can Washington reasonably expect other countries to consider congressional demands for lower American dues assessments in the future until it pays off most of the dues it already owes.

To get the UN money approved, the White House compromised on an important issue of principle, and may have encouraged radical anti-abortion

crusaders to expand their assault on abortion rights. Under the newly agreed language, foreign family planning organizations that spend their own money to provide abortions or lobby for less harsh abortion laws will now be legally ineligible for American assistance.

As part of the compromise, the administration won the right to waive this restriction if it chooses. But even with the waiver, no more than \$15 million in American assistance can be given to organizations engaged in abortion services or lobbying. That is about the amount that such groups got last year.

The practical effect of these restrictions is likely to be small, at least for as long as the Clinton administration is in office and invokes the waiver provision. But there is no disguising the political victory it hands the anti-abortion crusaders in the House who were willing to hold American foreign policy, to their ideological agenda. Although part of only a one-year spending bill, the language is likely to reappear in future years unless a majority of House members vote to exclude it.

Senate Republicans, including committed abortion foes like Jesse Helms, behaved more responsibly than their House colleagues on this issue. But the House obstructionists held firm, faced down the White House and walked away with a disturbingly large share of what they wanted.

—THE NEW YORK TIMES.

would rally public support. Now comes George W. Bush's campaign team, to try where Madeleine Albright and Sandy Berger have failed.

The Bush camp has not spelled it out yet, but preparations for and delivery of the Texas governor's first major defense and foreign policy speeches point toward a simple, straightforward sentiment as the Campaign 2000 message: Big is good, little is bad.

There is a hidden danger for the candidate in the Bush campaign's decision to stress big ideas and keep little details like the Indian prime minister's name for later study. The changing world that Mr. Bush would lead is not so easily compartmentalized or put on hold.

In his first major foreign policy address, scheduled for

Democratic Party as a whole of three main shortcomings:

- The Clintonites did not spend enough on a military that consumes more taxpayer dollars than all other major industrial powers combined. A GWB White House will spend more bucks to make the U.S. bang and shield bigger.

- Mr. Clinton committed the U.S. military and national prestige to a series of little conflicts that had little to do with U.S. interests. The roll call of the littles will include Haiti, Bosnia, Somalia, Kosovo and East Timor. (Iraq seemingly gets a free pass on this score, perhaps due to the progenitor of Desert Storm.)

- Mr. Clinton neglected or actively antagonized America's European allies and Japan by putting priority on chimerical alliances with China and with

Bush will concentrate on, ting the traditional alliance right early on, and will also construct new relationships with China, Russia and India, the three bigs of the future.

As core ideas for the campaign and for governing, there is merit in each of these, particularly No. 3. Mr. Clinton's decision not to go to Europe in his first year in office and his lack of regard for Japan's role in Asia are now recognized as serious errors even by officials deeply involved in those policies.

But to establish credibility, Mr. Bush will need to avoid rewriting history and strategy in his campaign criticisms, especially when it comes to Bosnia and Kosovo.

Mr. Clinton crafted his flawed "lift and strike" Bosnia policy, which created much of his early and bitter conflict with Britain and France, under the

The Women Most in Need Lose Again

By Ellen Goodman

BOSTON — When I grow up I want to be single-minded. It makes life so much easier. You can stake out a position which is, as my father used to say, unencumbered by facts. You can talk about the one hand without worrying about the other hand. I think of this as the Chris Smith advantage.

The congressman from New Jersey manages to view the entire world through a single fetal lens. With unrelenting, uncompromising stubbornness, he has now managed to rewrite American worldwide die during pregnancy and childbirth every year; some 75,000 die from unsafe or self-administered abortions. But the deal hacks away at funding for these groups even if they use their own money to support or advocate safe abortion.

Ironically, one of Mr. Clinton's first acts as president was to deep-six the old gag rule, an executive order of Ronald Reagan's. Now it appears that he will be the first president who signs it into real law. Is it any wonder that Al Gore and Bill Bradley have already distanced themselves from this deal?

One has to pay one's UN bills. Those who support family planning are, of course, expected to understand. We are, in fact, always expected to understand. We are expected to be responsible, to see the big picture, while the man with the tunnel vision wins the day. O.K., the rent is overdue. First things first. But how come that always means putting the poorest women of the world last?

Washington Post Writers Group.

limiting abortion. The short answer is, well, almost nothing.

In fact, the funding that goes to international groups for family planning has greatly reduced the number of unwanted pregnancies. That translates into fewer abortions. The money also translates into fewer deaths of women, although women's deaths don't seem to come into focus on the right-to-life screen.

Some 600,000 women worldwide die during pregnancy and childbirth every year; some 75,000 die from unsafe or self-administered abortions. But the deal hacks away at funding for these groups even if they use their own money to support or advocate safe abortion.

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Ask elderly Falun Gong practitioners who were dragged by their hair from Tiananmen Square this month for example, about Beijing's adherence to the United Nations covenant on civil and

As Bill Clinton, Kofi Annan and other world leaders meet in Istanbul this week for a summit of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, they will find that Turkey's recent devastating experience may have created a turning point that pushes it toward

After Secretary of State Madeleine Albright announced the new policy, she was repeatedly asked "What if Milosevic wins?" Three times she half-answered by saying that surely the people of Serbia would "choose correctly." She found it "really, really, really hard to believe

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ALBRIGHT OFFERING TO TAKE CRITICISM FOR A DEAL ON U.N.

LATE U.S. DUES AT ISSUE

Says She'd Absorb Complaints
Over Cuts in Funds That
Back Abortion Rights

A By ERIC SCRMITT

WASHINGTON, Nov. 11 — Secretary of State Madeleine K. Albright has volunteered to be the lightning rod for criticism from abortion rights groups if President Clinton compromises with Congress on a deal to free nearly \$1 billion the United States owes the United Nations, senior administration officials said today.

As a cabinet member who supports abortion rights, Dr. Albright has urged the White House to cut a deal that some administration officials fear could strike some Clinton supporters as a retreat from the president's pledge to defend abortion rights.

Up to now, the administration has refused a demand from House conservatives, as a condition of repaying Washington's debt to the United Nations, to cut off United States financing to international organizations that promote abortion rights. The conservatives are being led by Representative Christopher H. Smith, Republican of New Jersey.

White House domestic advisers, in particular, have been loath to alienate a core Democratic constituency, women voters, by backing away from President Clinton's commitment on abortion rights abroad to resolve an increasingly embarrassing foreign policy issue.

But in recent months, Dr. Albright, a former ambassador to the United Nations, has aggressively lobbied Republican lawmakers and Mr. Clinton to resolve several issues that threaten American global leadership: the United Nations dues, debt relief to impoverished countries and foreign aid.

Dr. Albright recently told John D. Podesta, the White House chief of staff, that if services offered by abortion rights groups overseas are only minimally affected by any deal, the administration should be willing to compromise.

"If we have to move off existing law, as a woman secretary of state who knows extremely well the instinctive concerns of women's groups, she's prepared to take the heat," said a senior administration official. "She is prepared to meet with them and explain to them why this does not harm our fundamental position, but that getting the U.N. dues is critical for our national security."

The United States will lose its vote in the United Nations General Assembly if it fails to meet a Dec. 31 deadline for payments. The dispute does not threaten the United States vote or seat on the United Nations Security Council.

A White House spokesman, Joe Lockhart, declined to comment on any offer Dr. Albright had made, saying, "We're committed to paying our fair share at the United Nations by paying our back dues, and we're working very hard on a way to do that."

A State Department spokesman, James P. Rubin, also declined to comment on any offer or details of negotiations.

Lawmakers and administration officials said discussions continued today on the abortion issue, which is holding up a deal on the United Nations payments, one of the last major sticking points in a session-ending budget deal.

Negotiators also faced a new environmental amendment delaying a ban on road building in national forests and a dispute over debt relief to impoverished countries. But the abortion issue could be the last issue left on the bargaining table.

"There's still a great deal of rigor on that, as regarding the question of whether or not American tax dollars should be used by the U.N. or any other agencies to lobby other nations on their abortion laws," said Representative Dick Armey of Texas, the House majority leader.

While the United States has had disputes over its debts to the United Nations for years, the issue escalated after the Republicans took control of Congress in 1994. Dislike of the United Nations by many lawmakers, and the linkage of dues to the abortion issue, has effectively thwarted any effort to pay the dues in full.

The aggressive lobbying by Dr. Albright and Richard C. Holbrooke,

the new chief United States delegate to the United Nations, to repay \$928 million over the next three years has been well known.

Making known Dr. Albright's intention to absorb the political flak of a sensitive domestic political decision serves several purposes.

It prepares abortion rights groups for a possible deal that they may not like, and that would probably affect the presidential campaign of Vice President Al Gore and the possible Senate campaign of Hillary Rodham Clinton.

It also serves to pressure wavering White House domestic advisers. And it could be intended to steal some of the limelight from Mr. Holbrooke, with whom Dr. Albright has

had a tense relationship.

Family planning groups reacted cautiously to reports of Dr. Albright's willingness to bear the brunt of any political fallout.

"Anything that will cut family planning is hardly a compromise on the issue of abortion," said Susan Cohen, assistant director of policy development for the Alan Guttmacher Institute, a research and advocacy group.

Despite declarations that a deal may be near, only a tiny number of people are intimately involved with the talks, mainly between Steve Ricchetti, a White House deputy chief of staff, and Scott B. Palmer, chief of staff for the speaker of the House, J. Dennis Hastert of Illinois.

The ingredients of a possible deal include using Mr. Smith's language but allowing presidential waivers for international organizations that provide abortions or lobby for abortion rights. Other elements of a deal would include financial penalties imposed by Congress on the amount of United States grants awarded to the foreign organizations if the waivers were used.

Administration and Congressional aides said there were other approaches under consideration that they refused to discuss.

But all sides agree that the political climate and cast of characters this year enhance the prospects of

ending a three-year battle.

This year, for instance, Mr. Clinton is free from the distractions of the Lewinsky scandal, and advisers like Dr. Albright and Mr. Holbrooke have been pushing harder to resolve the issue. That is in part because the stakes are higher.

There are also practical budget considerations for striking a deal this year. Under the 1997 balanced budget agreement, Congress can appropriate money for the United Nations without having to make cuts in other programs. Next year, that will not be allowed, making repayment in an election year much more difficult.

Republicans are also feeling some pressure. Some conservatives do not want to give Mr. Clinton ammunition to fuel his charges that Republicans are isolationist.

Senator Jesse Helms, a North Carolina Republican who opposes abortion, has quietly urged both sides to reconcile, and he called Mr. Hastert on Wednesday to offer his advice. Mr. Helms wants a deal because a Senate bill that he sponsored ties the repayment of \$928 million over three years to changes he wants at the United Nations, including reducing budgets and the United States' share of payments.

Business leaders are also weighing in with Republicans. The Business Roundtable and the United States Chamber of Commerce are pushing for a deal to pay back the dues and carry out reforms at the United Nations.

The Better World Campaign, a group financed by Ted Turner that advocates repaying the debt, has hired Haley Barbour, former chairman of the Republican National Committee, to lobby on its behalf.

It still remains unclear whether House conservatives will support a deal. Their demand is to write into law an executive order issued by President Ronald Reagan in 1984. Mr. Clinton reversed the order in 1993, shortly after taking office.

The United States has barred direct financing for abortion since 1973, but the 1984 policy, known familiarly as "Mexico City" because Mr. Reagan announced it during a United Nations conference there, denied grants to international family-planning organizations for any purpose if they promoted abortion rights.

"The last issue that we will settle, I am convinced again," Mr. Armey said today, "will be that Mexico City."

Abortion Discord Holds Up U.N. Dues and U.S. Budget

2 Sides Refuse to Yield on Core Principles

By ERIC SCHMITT

WASHINGTON, Nov. 10 — The white-hot domestic issue of abortion is holding up a deal to pay nearly \$1 billion the United States owes the United Nations, which in turn is one of the main sticking points blocking a budget agreement between Congress and the White House.

Up to now, the Republican-controlled Congress and the Clinton administration have refused to budge on what both sides consider a litmus test of their core principles. An unintended consequence is that the abortion fight is threatening to undermine the wholly unrelated issue of United States global leadership.

House conservatives, led by Representative Christopher H. Smith, Republican of New Jersey, are demanding that the United States cut off financing to international organizations that promote abortion rights overseas as the price for paying Washington's back dues.

"It's about the issue of using taxpayer money to fund abortions," said

A domestic fight with consequences for the nation's global leadership.

Michele Davis, a spokeswoman for Representative Dick Armey of Texas, the House majority leader and chief Republican negotiator on the issue.

But Mr. Clinton has rejected the unanimous advice of his foreign policy advisers to accept Mr. Smith's terms, and instead has stayed loyal to a core Democratic issue and an important Democratic constituency, women voters. He has done so even at the risk of increasing world ridicule and opprobrium that the lone global superpower was fast emerging as a global deadbeat.

"At its core, this is an issue of free speech and providing health services that affects women's lives," said Terri Bartlett, vice president for public policy at Population Action International, a research and advocacy group.

Despite carving out these hard-line positions, both the White House and Republicans on Capitol Hill said the two sides were tantalizingly close to striking a deal.

"We're very close," Senator Don Nickles of Oklahoma, the assistant Republican leader, said tonight, adding that negotiators were "tweaking" the language of a compromise whose terms he refused to discuss.

So much is at stake that neither side dared to declare victory until a final version is reached.

The abortion provision that Mr. Smith wants would write into law an executive order issued by President Ronald Reagan in 1984. Mr. Clinton reversed the order in 1993, shortly after taking office.

The United States has barred direct financing for abortion since 1973, but the 1984 policy, known familiarly as "Mexico City" since Mr. Reagan announced it during a United Nations conference there, denied grants to international family-planning organizations for any purpose if they promoted abortion rights.

Since gaining control of Congress in 1994, Republicans have tried to write the provision into law. And since 1997, Mr. Smith has pressured Republican Speaker Newt Gingrich of Georgia and now J. Dennis Hastert of Illinois to support him in attaching the abortion provision to bills that would repay the United Nations.

The most fervent supporters of this linkage are in the House. Even Senator Jesse Helms, Republican of North Carolina, who staunchly opposes abortion, disagrees with the House approach, largely because it blocks reforms at the United Nations that he wants.

A Senate bill sponsored by Mr. Helms authorizes \$926 million over three years to pay the United States arrears at the United Nations, provided the United Nations meets certain conditions, including reducing budgets and the United States' share of payments.

This year, however, many Republicans are cringing from criticism that the United States could lose its largely symbolic vote in the United Nations General Assembly if it does not

pay up.

Even *The Weekly Standard*, a conservative magazine, cautioned recently that holding the back dues hostage to the abortion language only fueled Mr. Clinton's accusation that Republicans are isolationist, and called on Mr. Smith to relent.

"We are a year away from a presidential election that may again put a Republican in the White House," said the magazine's editorial. "That president will be able to restore the pro-life Mexico City policy with the stroke of a pen."

Moreover, the editorial continued, "By seeming to be too cheap to pay our U.N. dues, Republicans will have needlessly handed the Democrats an issue for the 2000 campaign."

Both sides hold out compromises. Abortion rights groups say they would grudgingly accept a provision sponsored by Representatives James C. Greenwood, Republican of Pennsylvania, and Nita M. Lowey, Democrat of New York. The measure, which the House approved in July by a vote of 221 to 208, would cut United States financing from international organizations that lobby for abortion rights only in countries where local laws prohibit such lobbying.

"We've got problems with it," said Susan Cohen, a vice president for development at the Alan Guttmacher Institute, a research and advocacy group. "But if that's the price to pay to get the U.N. dues, we could live with it."

But conservatives reject such a compromise as toothless.

One possibility conservatives are discussing is to adopt Mr. Smith's provision, but allow Mr. Clinton to issue waivers for international organizations that provide abortions or lobby for abortion rights. If Mr. Clinton invoked such waivers, however, Congress would penalize the administration by cutting the amount of grants the United States awarded.

"Unacceptable," Representative Nancy Pelosi, Democrat of California, said today of the "double waiver" idea.

Nonetheless, many lawmakers and advocacy groups sensed a deal was near.

"This is the pressure-cooker point," Ms. Bartlett said.

The New York Times

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