

The Clinton Presidency, 1993–2001

President William Jefferson Clinton compiled a mixed record during his two terms in office. He achieved limited political victories at home and abroad, but the economy prospered, even boomed, under his stewardship. Toward the end of President Clinton's second term, the budget was in surplus for the first time in decades, and the government was paying down its multitrillion-dollar national debt. But although Clinton could point to prosperity at home and a successful foreign policy abroad, his administrations were marked by intense partisan rancor. In 1994, the Republican Party took control of both the House and Senate and effectively blocked many of the president's initiatives, while putting forth its own vision for America (Document 30-8). Clinton was reelected in 1996 and in Document 30-9 he provided an alternative vision to the Republican plan.

During his time in office, President Clinton, and his wife, Hillary Clinton, were subject to continuous investigations by Congress for alleged wrongdoings. In September 1998, Kenneth Starr, the special prosecutor who was investigating an Arkansas real estate development deal (known as Whitewater), reported that Clinton had lied to a federal grand jury when questioned about his sexual relationship with Monica Lewinsky, a White House intern. While this affair was not an abuse of executive power, the Republican-controlled House subsequently impeached him, but the Senate acquitted Clinton. His job approval ratings remained high, but many Americans were embarrassed and embittered by the scandal.

30-8 Contract with America (1994)

In 1994, the Republicans captured the House of Representatives (for the first time since 1952) and the Senate (control of which they had lost in 1986). The *Contract with America* had provided the Republicans with a single campaign tract for midterm House races across the nation. That representatives Newt Gingrich (Georgia) and Dick Armey (Texas) were prominent among the drafters of the contract reflected the southernization of the Republicans' congressional delegation. As late as 1960, Republicans held no Senate seats and only 7 of the 106 House seats from the eleven former Confederate states. In 1998, Republicans occupied 15 of the 22 seats in the Senate and 71 of the 125 in the House from these states (see text pp. 948–950).

Gingrich and Armey, already prominent in the House, rose to power following the GOP victory—Gingrich as Speaker, Armey as majority leader. Gingrich did not enjoy success for long. Early in 1999, he resigned from the House.

Source: Republican National Committee, *Contract with America: The Bold Plan by Representative Newt Gingrich, Representative Dick Armey, and the House Republicans to Change the Nation*, Ed Gillespie and Bob Schellhas, eds. (New York: Times Books, 1994), 1–11. Reprinted with the express permission of the Republican National Committee.

The Contract's Core Principles

The Contract with America is rooted in 3 core principles:

ACCOUNTABILITY

The government is too big and spends too much, and Congress and unelected bureaucrats have become so entrenched to be unresponsive to the public they are supposed to serve. The GOP contract restores accountability to government.

OPPORTUNITY

The American Dream is out of the reach of too many families because of burdensome government regulations and

personal responsibility.

contract restores a proper balance between government and

personal responsibility from families and individuals. The GOP

RESPONSIBILITY

Bigger government and more federal programs usurp per-

1. THE FISCAL RESPONSIBILITY ACT
 A balanced budget/tax limitation amendment and a legislative line-item veto to restore fiscal responsibility to an out-of-control Congress, requiring them to live under the same budget constraints as families and businesses.

2. THE TAKING BACK OUR STREETS ACT
 An anti-crime package including stronger truth-in-sentencing, "good faith" exclusionary rule exemptions, effective death penalty provisions, and cuts in social spending from this summer's "crime" bill to fund prison construction and additional law enforcement to keep people secure in their neighborhoods and kids safe in their schools.

3. THE PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY ACT
 Discourage illegitimacy and teen pregnancy by prohibiting welfare to minor mothers and denying increased AFDC for additional children while on welfare, cut spending for welfare programs, and enact a tough two-years-and-out provision with work requirements to promote individual responsibility.

4. THE FAMILY REINFORCEMENT ACT
 Child support enforcement, tax incentives for adoption, strengthening rights of parents in their children's education, stronger child pornography laws, and an elderly dependent care tax credit to reinforce the central role of families in American society.

5. THE AMERICAN DREAM RESTORATION ACT
 A \$500 per child tax credit, begin repeal of the marriage tax penalty, and creation of American Dream Savings Accounts to provide middle class tax relief.

6. THE NATIONAL SECURITY RESTORATION ACT
 No U.S. troops under U.N. command and restoration of the essential parts of our national security funding to strengthen our national defense and maintain our credibility around the world.

7. THE SENIOR CITIZENS FAIRNESS ACT
 Raise the Social Security earnings limit which currently forces seniors out of the work force, repeal the 1993 tax hikes on Social Security benefits and provide tax incentives for private long-term care insurance to let Older Americans keep more of what they have earned over the years.

8. THE JOB CREATION AND WAGE ENHANCEMENT ACT
 Small business incentives, capital gains cut and indexation, neutral cost recovery, risk assessment/cost-benefit analysis, strengthening the Regulatory Flexibility Act and unfunded mandate reform to create jobs and raise worker wages.

harsh tax laws. The GOP contract restores the American dream.

The Contract

As Republican Members of the House of Representatives and as citizens seeking to join that body we propose not just to change its policies, but even more important, to restore the bonds of trust between the people and their elected representatives.

That is why, in this era of official evasion and posturing, we offer instead a detailed agenda for national renewal, a written commitment with no fine print.

This year's election offers the chance, after four decades of one-party control, to bring to the House a new majority that will transform the way Congress works. That historic change would be the end of government that is too big, too intrusive, and too easy with the public's money. It can be the beginning of a Congress that respects the values and shares the faith of the American family.

Like Lincoln, our first Republican president, we intend to act "with firmness in the right, as God gives us to see the right." To restore accountability to Congress. To end its cycle of scandal and disgrace. To make us all proud again of the way free people govern themselves.

On the first day of the 104th Congress, the new Republican majority will immediately pass the following major reforms, aimed at restoring the faith and trust of the American people in their government:

- FIRST, require all laws that apply to the rest of the country also apply equally to the Congress;
- SECOND, select a major, independent auditing firm to conduct a comprehensive audit of Congress for waste, fraud or abuses;
- THIRD, cut the number of House committees, and cut committee staff by one-third;
- FOURTH, limit the terms of all committee chairs;
- FIFTH, ban the casting of proxy votes in committees;
- SIXTH, require committee meetings to be open to the public;
- SEVENTH, require a three-fifths majority vote to pass a tax increase;
- EIGHTH, guarantee an honest accounting of our Federal Budget by implementing zero base-line budgeting.

Thereafter, within the first 100 days of the 104th Congress, we shall bring to the House Floor the following bills, each to be given full and open debate, each to be given a clear and fair vote and each to be immediately available this day for public inspection and scrutiny.

9. THE COMMON SENSE LEGAL REFORM ACT

"Loser pays" laws, reasonable limits on punitive damages and reform of product liability laws to stem the endless tide of litigation.

10. THE CITIZEN LEGISLATURE ACT

A first-ever vote on term limits to replace career politicians with citizen legislators.

Questions

1. How does the *Contract with America* demonize government?
2. What public sentiments does the contract capitalize on? How did those sentiments arise?
3. What are the advantages and dangers of using this kind of election strategy?

30-9 State of the Union Address (1996)

Bill Clinton

Congressional Republicans, in the majority in 1995 and 1996, soon provided President Clinton (b. 1946) with opportunities to counterattack. The temporary shutting down of the federal government during an impasse over the federal budget was blamed on the GOP. Meanwhile, Clinton moved toward the center on issues like reducing budget deficits and the national debt and reforming welfare. In doing so, he at once frustrated congressional Republicans, who felt that he was stealing their thunder, and unsettled congressional Democrats, who felt that he was abandoning their party's traditional positions. Less than ten months after delivering the State of the Union Address excerpted here, Clinton won reelection over Bob Dole (Kansas), the Senate majority leader.

Source: *Congressional Record: House of Representatives*, 104th Congress, 2nd session, 142, no. 8 (January 23, 1996), H768-H769.

My duty tonight is to report on the state of the Union, not the state of our government but of our American community, and to set forth our responsibilities, in the words of our Founders, to "form a more perfect union."

The State of the Union is strong. Our economy is the healthiest it has been in three decades. We have the lowest combined rates of unemployment and inflation in 27 years. We have created nearly 8 million new jobs, over a million of them in basic industries like construction and automobiles. America is selling more cars than Japan for the first time since the 1970s, and for three years in a row we have had a record number of new businesses started in our country.

Our leadership in the world is also strong, bringing hope for new peace. And perhaps most important, we are gaining ground and restoring our fundamental values. The crime rate, the welfare and food stamp rolls, the poverty rate

and the teen pregnancy rate are all down. And as they go down, prospects for America's future go up.

We must answer here three fundamental questions: First, how do we make the American dream of opportunity for all a reality for all Americans who are willing to work for it? Second, how do we preserve our old and enduring values as we move into the future? And third, how do we meet these challenges together as one America?

We know big government does not have all the answers. We know there's not a program for every problem. We know and we have worked to give the American people a smaller, less bureaucratic government in Washington. And we have to give the American people one that lives within its means. The era of big government is over. But we cannot go back to the time when our citizens were left to fend for themselves. Instead, we must go forward as one America, one nation,

Though differences remain among us which are significant, the combined total of the proposed savings that are common to both plans is more than enough, using the numbers from your Congressional Budget Office, to balance the budget in 7 years and to provide a modest tax cut. These cuts are real. They will require sacrifice from everyone. But these cuts do not undermine our fundamental obligations to our parents, our children and our future by endangering Medicare or Medicaid or education or the environment or by raising taxes on working families.

I have said before, and let me say again, many good ideas have come out of our negotiations. I have learned a lot about the way both Republicans and Democrats view the debate before us. I have learned a lot about the good ideas that each side has that we could all embrace. We ought to resolve our remaining differences.

I am willing to work to resolve them. I am ready to meet tomorrow. But I ask you to consider that we should at least enact the savings that both plans have in common and give the American people their balanced budget, a tax cut, lower interest rates, and a brighter future. We should do that now and make permanent deficits yesterday's legacy.

Now it is time for us to look also to the challenges of today and tomorrow, beyond the burdens of yesterday. The challenges are significant. But our Nation was built on challenges. America was built on challenges, not promises. And when we work together to meet them we never fail. That is the key to a more perfect union. Our individual dreams must be realized by our common efforts.

working together to meet the challenges we face together. Self-reliance and teamwork are not opposing virtues. We must have both.

I believe our new, smaller government must work in an old-fashioned American way, together with all of our citizens through State and local governments, in the workplace, in religious, charitable and civic associations. Our goal must be to enable all our people to make the most of their own lives, with stronger families, more educational opportunities, economic security, safer streets, a cleaner environment and a safer world.

To improve the state of our union, we must ask more of ourselves. We must expect more of each other and we must face our challenges together.

Here in this place our responsibility begins with balancing the budget in a way that is fair to all Americans. There is now broad bipartisan agreement that permanent deficit spending must come to an end.

I compliment the Republican leadership and their membership for the energy and determination you have brought to this task of balancing the budget. And I thank the Democrats for passing the largest deficit reduction plan in history in 1993, which has already cut the deficit nearly in half in three years.

Since 1993, we have all begun to see the benefits of deficit reduction. Lower interest rates have made it easier for businesses to borrow and to invest and to create new jobs. Lower interest rates have brought down the cost of home mortgages, car payments and credit card rates to ordinary citizens. Now it is time to finish the job and balance the budget.

Questions

1. How did Clinton's rhetoric and proposals suggest that he was seeking the political center?
2. In what ways did Clinton seek to establish that there were differences between even moderate Democrats and Republicans?

Question for Further Thought

1. Compare and contrast the tone and proposals of congressional Republicans (Document 30-8) with those of President Bill Clinton (Document 30-9).