

Nation going wrong way: Dems

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BY JIM ABRAMS

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WASHINGTON--America under President Bush has been left with fewer jobs and not enough money for security, education and health, Democrats said Tuesday in a combative response to Bush's State of the Union speech.

"In too many ways, our country is headed in the wrong direction," Washington Gov. Gary Locke said in the response from Democrats. He called Bush's plan to stimulate the economy "upside-down economics."

Locke also took issue with Bush's assertion that he doesn't need UN backing against Iraq.

"We support the president in the course he has followed so far," including working with the United Nations to insist on strong weapons inspections, Locke said.

But "we need allies today, in 2003, just as much as we needed them in Desert Storm and just as we needed them on D-Day in 1944."

Sen. Dick Durbin (D-Ill.) applauded Bush's HIV/AIDS programs and said he will support them. Overall, the president gave the nation "strong medicine on war and weak soup on the economy."

Rep. Jan Schakowsky (D-Ill.), who voted against authorizing Bush to use military force against Iraq, said, "I find the speech very scary. It sounded as though the president is on the brink of war despite the UN and all our allies saying we should continue the inspections."

On the GOP side, House Speaker J. Dennis Hastert (R-Ill.) said, "This is not the time for the timid leadership offered by the naysayers. This threat calls for the strong leadership of a resolute leader."

Rep. Phil Crane (R-Ill.) said that Bush "took an important step in further defining the serious threat" posed by Saddam Hussein.

Sen. Peter Fitzgerald (R-Ill.) watched the speech from a secret location outside of Washington, part of a new post-Sept. 11 procedure to keep some members of Congress safe in case of an attack.

"President Bush forcefully and clearly told Congress and the nation that he intends to steer a course toward domestic prosperity and one that provides continued vigilant protection of our citizens," Fitzgerald said in a statement.

AP, with Lynn Sweet contributing