

**Foes decry 'wrong direction'**

January 29th, 2003

By Jill Zuckman

Chicago Tribune

WASHINGTON -- Democrats took a dim view of the nation's condition Tuesday and its prospects for the future under President Bush's leadership, creating a sharp contrast with Bush's resolutely positive posture during his annual address to Congress.

"The question for Americans is: Are you better off today than two years ago? And the answer is a resounding no," said Rep. Jan Schakowsky (D-Ill.), citing high unemployment, rising poverty and millions without health insurance.

Congressional Democrats from across the country targeted Bush's handling of the economy and Iraq-- two major themes of Bush's speech--and accused the administration of underfunding its own "Leave No Child Behind" education-reform law.

Mostly, Democrats seized on the economy, which they perceive as Bush's biggest vulnerability. In the official Democratic response to the president's State of the Union address, Washington Gov. Gary Locke said that "in too many ways, our country is headed in the wrong direction," and that the economy is limping along.

"Two years ago, the federal budget was in surplus," Locke said. "Now this administration's policies will produce massive deficits of over a trillion dollars over the next decade."

Locke noted that Democrats have their own plan to jump-start the economy with \$100 billion in tax relief and investments targeting the middle class. Bush's plan, by contrast, he called "upside-down economics," saying it would create "huge, permanent deficits" while benefiting people who earn more than \$300,000 a year.

Overall, Democrats, showing a new combativeness since the midterm elections, launched a

broadly coordinated response that was under way well before Bush's speech Tuesday night. On Friday, they released an 83-page report critiquing Bush's policies; on Monday, they issued a "pre-buttal" to the State of the Union address.

Shortly before the speech, Democrats released a document cataloging past State of the Union promises by Bush. The report, called "All Hat No Cattle," included a dictionary definition for promise--"to pledge to do, bring about, or provide"--and threw in a Mexican proverb, "Between the word and the deed lies a big trench."

In last year's State of the Union, for example, Bush said, "We will expand patrols at our borders." But according to the Democrats, Bush's budget never provided money for those patrols.

On education, Democrats said Bush has not lived up to his funding commitments in the new education-reform law. His first budget after the bill was enacted proposed \$22.2 billion for education--a reduction of \$90 million from the year before and \$7 billion less than Congress authorized, Democrats contend.

Throughout the Capitol, Democrats repeated the same set of statistics as they blasted Bush's handling of the economy: 2 million private sector jobs lost since Bush took office, a \$400 billion deficit, a million people without unemployment insurance.

Democrats also expressed anxiety regarding Iraq and possible war.

Sen. Edward Kennedy (D-Mass.) said after the speech that Bush "did not make a persuasive case that the threat is imminent and that war is the only alternative." As a result, Kennedy said, he would introduce a resolution requiring Bush to present "convincing evidence of an imminent threat" before sending troops to fight Iraq.

In a floor speech Tuesday, Sen. Barbara Boxer (D-Calif.) said Bush should give UN inspectors more time and provide inspectors with U.S. intelligence.

Iraqi President Saddam Hussein "is boxed in," she said. "He can't put a big toe outside that country. He can't do anything to harm us. And so I believe therefore that we have time to avoid the devastation of war."