

Chief of staff says Bush likes compromise Senate debates new budget plan

WASHINGTON - Senate leaders sought swift approval Wednesday for a \$250 billion deficit-reduction plan that would double gasoline taxes, cut Medicare benefits and mildly boost income taxes on the wealthy.

The measure includes a broader-based tax increase than the soak-the-rich House version that President Bush has said he will veto.

Democratic Budget Committee Chairman James Sasser, D-Tenn., said, "We tell the American people that there will be some sacrifice in this package. But we tell them at the same time that it will be fair."

And the White House said the Senate version could form the basis for ending the government's long budget stalemate.

"The White House is ready to receive the bipartisan package similar to the Senate package," said Bush's chief of staff, John Sununu. "Get it to the president's desk, and he'll sign it."

Bush has tried to keep the pressure on by threatening to shut the government down again Saturday unless Congress sends him a compromise budget he can accept. Without emer-

gency legislation, federal authority to spend money expires that day.

Acting one day after the Democrats pushed a bill much tougher on the rich through the House, Senate leaders chose to face Election Day just three weeks off with a proposal bearing all the marks of a political compromise.

There would be limits on deductions for people with incomes exceeding \$100,000, but no boost in tax rates for the rich as the House approved. The 9-cent-a-gallon gasoline tax would be doubled, but the earned-income tax credit for the poor would increase, too.

The package would shave about \$250 billion from the federal deficit over the next five years by raising \$142 billion in new taxes and paring Medicare, farm support and other benefit programs. Savings in other bills — mainly defense cuts — would bring total deficit-reduction to about \$500 billion, including \$40 billion in the budget year that started Oct. 1.

Bush had threatened to veto the House bill because of its increase in the upper bracket income tax rate. Though administration officials ob-

jected to some provisions in the Senate version, Sununu said in an interview on NBC-TV the president liked the compromise.

Despite the plan's powerful supporters, the Senate's Democratic and Republican leaders spent the day defending their plan from lawmakers unhappy for regional or philosophical reasons.

Western senators complained that the higher gasoline tax would be a severe blow to states such as theirs, where people routinely drive long distances. Others insisted that the bill's overall tax package was unnecessary, that spending should have been cut more deeply instead.

"Grab your wallets and run for cover because Congress is getting up a head of steam to raise your taxes," said Sen. Steve Symms, R-Idaho.

"I believe the deficit of the United States is so serious that it isn't a Democratic issue or a Republican issue or the president's issue," said Sen. Pete Domenici of New Mexico, the budget panel's ranking Republican. "The people want us to do something."

British foreign secretary fails to persuade Israel to cooperate with U.N.

JERUSALEM - Britain's foreign secretary said Wednesday that Israel was playing into Iraqi hands by rebuffing a U.N. inquiry into the Temple Mount killings.

Foreign Secretary Douglas Hurd said he has not succeeded in persuading Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir and Foreign Minister David Levy to accept the U.N. delegation.

"I think that Saddam Hussein would be very pleased if the (U.N.) Security Council now stopped concentrating on Kuwait and began to concentrate on Arab-Israeli," Hurd told reporters, referring to Iraq's 12-week-long occupation of Kuwait.

"And that is why I'm anxious that the government of Israel should find some way of receiving... the secretary-general's mission," he said.

Hurd also criticized the Palestine Liberation Organization for supporting the Iraqi president, saying the action set back chances for a Palestinian dialogue with the Israelis.

"I think the PLO has made a serious mistake in this respect," he said.

The foreign secretary said he didn't see a chance for progress in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict until the Persian Gulf crisis was resolved. He suggested, however, that once Saddam was out of Kuwait, there would be greater pressure on Israel to accept compromises.

"We need to prevent Saddam Hussein from strutting up and down as if he was the only person who remembered the Palestinians," Hurd said. "It is necessary to say that here is unfinished business to which

we must return."

Hurd said he was very disappointed that Palestinians from the occupied West Bank and Gaza Strip refused to attend a scheduled meeting Wednesday.

The Palestinians said they were angered by statements attributed to Hurd in the Israeli media that Britain ruled out a role for the PLO in peace talks and opposed creation of an independent Palestinian state.

Hurd said remarks he made in private meetings with members of the Israeli parliament, or Knesset, were misquoted.

"It's obviously inconceivable that I would use a private meeting in the Knesset to announce a major change in British policy. It's an absurd proposition," an angry Hurd said.

He said that while Britain does not urge creation of a Palestinian state, it would not oppose such an entity should that be the outcome of negotiations between Palestinians and Israelis.

Hurd said Israel was harming itself by refusing to allow a U.N. delegation to investigate the killings of 19 Palestinians at the Temple Mount on Oct. 8. Police opened fire after Palestinians on the Temple Mount, known to Arabs as Haram al-Sharif, threw stones at Jews at the nearby Western Wall.

Hurd, who is ending a weeklong Middle East tour, said Israeli acceptance of the U.N. delegation would allow the Security Council to shift its attention back to the gulf. "That's an interest which Israel, Britain, the whole international community, should share," he added.



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Baker opposes Congress vote on Gulf combat

WASHINGTON - Key senators on Wednesday demanded the Bush administration seek the approval of Congress before sending U.S. troops into combat against Iraq, but Secretary of State James A. Baker III resisted.

Baker promised only further consultations as he confronted a bipartisan demand for decision-sharing from members of the Foreign Relations Committee.

"We should not have a constitutional argument over whether or not the President as commander-in-chief has authority to commit forces," Baker said in an effort to end the debate.

Besides, Baker said, a vote on Capitol Hill could tip off Iraqi President Saddam Hussein about a pending military operation or even cause the White House to abandon that option.

But only two members of the committee, Sens. Rudy Boschwitz, R-Minn., and Daniel P. Moynihan, D-N.Y., supported the administration in its insistence that consultation with Congressional leaders was sufficient.

Typical of the demand was an assertion by Sen. Paul S. Sarbanes, D-Md., that "consultation is not enough."

The disagreement, mostly under wraps until now, is rising to the surface as Congress prepares for a year-end adjournment.

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