

GOP makes offer to avoid default

WASHINGTON — Republican leaders, retreating from their goal of a balanced budget deal, suggested Wednesday they would accept modest spending and tax cuts from President Clinton as the price for heading off a government default.

Although the White House showed immediate interest in the GOP offer, a Wall Street credit agency still issued a threat later to downgrade \$387 billion in government bonds if the federal debt ceiling wasn't raised.

The Republican offer and Clinton's quick embrace of it underlined a desire by both sides to salvage something from their intractable budget impasse.

Even if the two sides could shake hands on some savings, it would leave the parties' year-long conflict

over reshaping Medicare, Medicaid and welfare to be decided by the voters in this autumn's elections.

"Barring a dramatic change of heart on President Clinton's part, I don't expect us to get a seven-year balanced budget while President Clinton is in office," Newt Gingrich, R-Ga., told reporters. "But I do think you can take steps."

Gingrich discussed his plan Wednesday evening with House GOP freshmen, a large, confrontational group that has been adamant all year that they want nothing less than a seven-year budget-balancing deal.

Afterward, a leader of the first-term lawmakers, Rep. David McIntosh, R-Ind., said, "The freshmen are pretty much on board."

In the search for savings, Gingrich said he hoped the Repub-

licans and White House could agree to more than \$100 billion over seven years, plus more than \$29 billion in tax cuts for families and businesses. But he said he would be surprised if Clinton would agree to more than \$50 billion in savings.

In a letter to Clinton, Gingrich and Senate Majority Leader Bob Dole, R-Kan., called the savings and tax cuts a "down payment" on balancing the budget, and said both would be included in legislation extending the government debt ceiling.

The administration has said the government would be forced into a disruptive, first-ever default by March 1 if its borrowing authority was not extended above the statutory ceiling of \$4.9 trillion.

Treasury Secretary Robert

"I am confident that Congress will enact a straightforward debt limit increase."

ROBERT RUBIN
Treasury secretary

Rubin said he was sure the debt impasse would be resolved before March 1.

"As we have said from the very beginning, the nation's credit worthiness is critical to all of us," Rubin said. "I am confident that Congress will enact a straightforward debt limit increase. And we are prepared to work to this end."

Discharged U.S. soldier will appeal

WUERZBURG, Germany — A U.S. soldier whose refusal to serve under U.N. command was lauded by conservatives but called a potential "cancer" by the Army, was convicted of disobedience Wednesday and given a bad-conduct discharge.

Spc. Michael New, 22, is the first American serviceman court-martialed for refusing to accept foreign command on a United Nations operation.

The jury could have slapped New with a dishonorable discharge, six months' incarceration and a loss of pay. New's attorney said he thought the less-severe sentence indicated the jury believed New's concerns were legitimate.

New, a medic from Conroe, Texas, stood impassively as the seven-man jury returned the verdict after 20 minutes of deliberation.

Outside the courtroom at Leighton Barracks U.S. Army base, New smiled again when reporters asked him how he felt, but he did not answer any questions. His attorneys say he will appeal.

New's case has been championed by American conservatives who oppose placing U.S. armed forces under United Nations command. About 100 congressional representatives, including Senate Majority Leader Bob Dole, have sponsored legislation making it illegal to order an armed-services member to wear U.N. insignia.

U.N. officials in Geneva declined to comment on the case Wednesday, saying it is against policy to discuss member states' court decisions.

New's father, Daniel, said the verdict was a foregone conclusion.

"We certainly were not surprised because, frankly, no military court is qualified to rule on something of this constitutional importance," he said from Texas. "We're ready to go to federal court."

The elder New said that when his son was told he could be court-martialed and lose his benefits for refusing to wear the U.N. gear, his son replied: "If I have to go to prison, I'll go, and why would I want those benefits if I have them in a country that isn't free?"

New's mother went to Germany to plead for clemency. Her son "always loved his country," Suzanne New told the court-martial.

In December, New told the military's Stars and Stripes newspaper that the decision to reject the U.N. insignia was "pretty simple to me."

"I am not a political person," the soldier said. "I made my decision based on my beliefs and the ideals I have been taught."

News in a Minute



Simpson speaks out in live interview

LOS ANGELES — O.J. Simpson blamed the media Wednesday night for turning many Americans against him, and expressed anger at relatives of the people he was acquitted of killing.

"I have a side of me that is very angry at Fred Goldman and the Browns," Simpson said in his first in-depth interview since the murders of Ronald Goldman and Nicole Brown Simpson.

In the live interview with Black Entertainment Television, Simpson criticized Ms. Simpson's sisters in particular, saying they "haven't been true to the memory of Nicole."

"What they've done ... has been very self-serving," he said. Asked point-blank whether he killed Ms. Simpson and Goldman, Simpson said, "No, I did not commit those murders. I couldn't kill anyone, and I don't know of anyone who was involved."

"I'm as innocent as anyone out there."

Simpson characterized his history of abusing Ms. Simpson as typical of most married couples.

"We've had plenty of arguments, which I think is true for any couple that's been together for any length of time."

Zero-calorie artificial fat approved

WASHINGTON — Americans soon will be eating potato chips made with the first zero-calorie artificial fat.

The Food and Drug Administration approved Procter & Gamble's olestra Wednesday, over the protests of some scientists who called the fake fat dangerous.

The FDA warned consumers that olestra can cause such gastrointestinal side effects as diarrhea and can literally wash out of the body certain nutrients, particularly when eaten along with that lunchtime bowl of soup or pile of carrot sticks.

But the FDA concluded that while some people will find olestra unpleasant, it is safe for the general population to eat in potato chips and other snack foods — as long as the foods bear a label warning of those side effects.

Convicted murderer executed by hanging

SMYRNA, Del. — Billy Bailey, the 49-year-old murderer of an elderly couple, climbed onto a wooden gallows and was hanged early Thursday, becoming only the third convict in the nation to be executed this way in 30 years.

Bailey closed his eyes, sniffled and said nothing before the black hood was placed over his head. His body twisted quickly in the wind once the trap door was sprung, then turned slowly beneath the 15-foot high platform in the cold night air.

He was pronounced dead 11 minutes later, at 12:15 a.m.

Bailey became the first person to be hanged in Delaware in 50 years and the third in the nation since 1965.

About 70 death penalty opponents gathered outside the prison, separated by a fence from about 20 supporters of the execution.

"I think it's really past time this should have come about. It's been too many years," said Mary Ann Lambertson, the daughter-in-law of the victims.

"I happened to be the poor soul who found the bodies, and it was a gruesome sight."

Gilbert and Clara Lambertson were murdered with a shotgun at their farmhouse in 1979. Delaware has not previously allowed family members of the victims to witness executions.

The gallows were built on the grounds of the Delaware Correctional Center 10 years ago as Bailey's first execution date approached. Appeals delayed the hanging until the U.S. Supreme Court denied a stay of execution last week.

"If I say anything, I'm going to say I hope this brings the Lambertsons some peace."

BILLY BAILEY
Convicted murderer

The state Board of Pardons on Friday rejected a commutation, and Edmund Lyons, his attorney, planned no last-minute appeals.

"Billy has found some peace in the sense of reconciling himself for what is to be," said Lyons, who visited Bailey Wednesday, along with Bailey's sister, foster sister, and a prison chaplain.

The lawyer said he told Bailey to think about his last words.

"He said, 'If I say anything, I'm going to say I hope this brings the Lambertsons some peace,'" Lyons said.

Bailey was sentenced to hang before Delaware changed its method of execution to injection in June 1986. He could have chosen to die by injection, but said he chose hanging because "the law is the law."

By coincidence, Utah is scheduled to have its first firing squad execution in 19 years early Friday. John Albert Taylor, sentenced to die for raping and strangling an 11-year-old girl, chose the firing squad over injection, the state's second method of execution since Utah outlawed hanging in 1983.

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