

Tax cut pushed through House

Plan would ease wage-increase burden; Clinton vows veto

WASHINGTON (AP) - To soften the impact on employers of a \$1 increase in the minimum wage, Republicans pushed a \$122 billion tax cut through the House on Thursday despite a vow by President Clinton to veto it and grumbling from conservatives about the whole package.

Votes on alternative minimum-wage proposals were planned later in the evening. GOP leaders made the tax measure part of the wage package to deny Democrats a stand-alone wage bill, which has strong support from Northeastern Republican moderates who want to defuse it as a campaign issue in the November elections.

"The question is whether we take a thoughtful approach and a balanced approach, or whether we have an ill-conceived bill foisted upon us," said Rep. Rick Lazio, R-N.Y., a main sponsor of the GOP bill.

The House voted 257-169 to pass

the tax bill, two-thirds of which consists of cuts in estate taxes. It will be combined with legislation that would increase the \$5.15-an-hour minimum wage by \$1 over two years or a version that would increase the wage by \$1 over three years.

Even if the bill meets Clinton's wish for a two-year wage boost, the president repeated Thursday he would veto the measure if it included large tax cuts. Clinton contends the tax relief disproportionately benefits the wealthy and would consume a chunk of the projected budget surplus that could be used to shore up Social Security and Medicare.

"Once again, the Republican leadership has derailed what should be a simple vote on the minimum wage with a maximum of political maneuvering," Clinton said. "Congress should send me a bill I can sign, not one I have to veto."

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Republicans, however, contended the tax package would offset the costs to business of raising the minimum wage, which many in the GOP view as a job-killer and hindrance to new investment or expansion.

"Our point is simply, let's find some tax relief to cushion the blow," said Rep. Rob Portman, R-Ohio.

Much of the debate centered on the estate-tax cuts. Costing \$78.6 billion over 10 years, they were portrayed by Democrats as a giveaway primarily for people with incomes over \$319,000 a year. Democrats were prevented from offering their own, small-

er tax package for small business.

"We're not fighting any tax relief. We're fighting for the right kind of tax relief," said Rep. Sander Levin, D-Mich.

GOP sponsors said current estate taxes actually prevent small businesses and family farms from being passed down to heirs and require costly tax planning simply to ease the impact.

"The real issue is, who are the heirs?" said House Ways and Means Committee Chairman Bill Archer, R-Texas. The tax cut, he added, "is not going to benefit the people who died."

McCain, Bradley drop out of election

■ Democrats unify, but Republicans 'need time to think.'

WASHINGTON (AP) - Falling as swiftly as they soared, John McCain and Bill Bradley abandoned their presidential races Thursday and chided their triumphant rivals on the way out.

"Millions of Americans have rallied to our banner," McCain said as both candidates sought to leverage the support they had earned.

The Arizona senator pledged to press his case for political reform and warned that Republicans will "slip into the mists of history" without it. McCain, who pulled swarms of Democrats and independents into GOP contests, offered nominee-in-waiting George W. Bush his "best wishes" - but not his endorsement.

An hour before McCain bowed out, Bradley told reporters he would support Vice President Al Gore, but he also accused his fellow Democrat of "distortions" in their primary fight. "I hope that he will run a better

campaign in the general election," said the former New Jersey senator, who was unable to win any primary or caucus.

Still, it was a triumphant day for the political establishment that backed Bush and Gore, both of whom vanquished their rivals after stiff challenges. "When you do battle with entrenched power ... it's very difficult," Bradley said.

Within minutes of McCain's announcement, Bush's team was reaching out to McCain intermediaries in an effort to mend fences.

The rivals themselves spoke briefly by telephone but settled nothing.

"John needs some time to think, and I need some time," Bush said.

Said still to be seething at the Texas governor, McCain is in no hurry to make peace. He planned to take a week's vacation before determining what leverage he has with Bush and what he might want to achieve with it, said a McCain adviser.

McCain knows he is not bargaining from a strong position, but the

adviser said his boss wants to keep his signature issue - campaign finance reform - on the political agenda somehow.

With that goal in mind, McCain quit the race but didn't shut down his campaign - a technicality that keeps his options open in case he wants to make things uncomfortable for Bush, who needs McCain's endorsement to unify the party.

McCain's options, according to the adviser, include: barnstorming the country to promote campaign finance reform, leading a platform fight at the Republican National Convention or even mounting a third-party presidential bid. Aides say the last option is remote.

McCain himself has ruled out bolting the GOP and said Thursday: "I love my home."

He did, however, leave himself a loophole by saying in his departure speech that the party deserves "the allegiance of none" if it doesn't embrace campaign finance reform.

One of McCain's top supporters said he urged the senator to let go of the enmity he feels toward Bush.

"I hope that he will run a better campaign in the general election."

Bill Bradley

former presidential candidate

"There's no question that there's some bitterness there and some anger," said Nebraska Sen. Chuck Hagel.

McCain was the 10th Republican to leave the race. Bradley has been Gore's only challenger. They could not sustain momentum against the sheer force of their rivals' organizations.

McCain had the most potent insurgency, staggering Bush in New Hampshire and Michigan. In a testament to his drawing power, one of every four GOP primary participants had never before voted in a Republican contest.

Jurisdiction at center of Elian Gonzalez battle

MIAMI (AP) - With flag-waving demonstrators tying up traffic outside, a federal judge heard arguments Thursday on whether he has the right to second-guess the Immigration and Naturalization Service's decision to send 6-year-old Elian Gonzalez back to Cuba.

Elian's great-uncle Lazaro Gonzalez asked U.S. District Judge K. Michael Moore to order the INS to hold a political asylum hearing for Elian. The U.S. government, however, asked the judge to dismiss the case.

After the three-hour hearing, the judge gave no indication of when he might rule.

The boy's fate has been debated since November, when he was found clinging to an inner tube off Florida. His mother and 10 others drowned when their boat capsized during an attempt to reach the United States.

The INS ordered in early January that Elian be returned to his father in Cuba, a decision backed by President Clinton and Attorney General Janet Reno. The order was put on hold pending the court fight.

On Thursday, Edwin Kneedler, a government attorney, argued that Congress gave the attorney general the power to administer immigration laws, and "the decisions of the attorney general are subject to only narrow judicial review."

Attorneys for the great-uncle argued that the INS' actions are not exempt from court review, and that the agency violated the boy's rights by refusing to grant him a political asylum hearing.

"Any alien that is within the United States ... is entitled to apply for asylum, and INS is obligated to hear that claim," said attorney Linda Osberg-Braun.

Kneedler said that the boy's father opposed asylum for his son, and that his wishes should be respected over those of the boy's great-uncle.

"This is a father closely involved in the child's life," Kneedler told the judge. "This was not an absent father; this was a present father."

He said INS officials conducted a thorough investigation, which was reviewed by Reno, and found no basis for an asylum claim.



■ New York

Coming exhibit at Whitney depicts Giuliani as a Nazi

NEW YORK (AP) - An upcoming exhibit at the Whitney Museum of American Art all but calls Mayor Rudolph Giuliani a Nazi, with quotations from the mayor written in Gothic type and audio speakers playing a recording of marching soldiers.

The piece, scheduled to be featured prominently in a Whitney exhibition of new American art, was prompted by Giuliani's decision to cut off funding to the Brooklyn Museum of Art for its display of a painting of the Virgin Mary plastered with elephant dung.

The controversy led to the new piece - "Sanitation," by New York artist Hans Haacke.

■ Washington

Soy approved as meat substitute in school lunches

WASHINGTON (AP) - Tofu and soyburgers may be coming soon to school lunch menus.

What will the kids say?

"Disgusting," said Greg Dudzinski, 17, of Ripon High School in Ripon, Wis., as he toured the Capitol on Thursday. "The regular hamburgers are bad enough, so soyburgers'd be a lot worse," offered Zach Richey, 13, of Scottsboro Junior High in Scottsboro, Ala., another tourist.

But the government - hoping to reduce the amount of fat that children are eating - on Thursday approved the use of soy as a meat substitute in federally subsidized meals for schools and day-care centers. The change will allow schools to offer new soy-based products, including tacos and burgers.

■ Tuvalu

Fire in locked dormitory kills 17 teen-age girls, matron

NUI, Tuvalu (AP) - Fire swept through a locked dormitory at a high school in the South Pacific nation of Tuvalu, killing 17 teen-age girls and a matron, a radio reporter said Thursday.

The blaze was believed to have been caused by a student's candle which fell in the sleeping quarters of Motufoua Secondary School.

The victims, girls between 14 and 17 years old, were locked inside their dormitory and couldn't escape when the fire broke out late Thursday night, Radio Tuvalu reporter Diana Semi told Australia's National Nine News.

■ Russia

Data recorder examined after Thursday plane crash

MOSCOW (AP) - Investigators examined the data recorder of a passenger jet Thursday for clues to a crash that killed all nine aboard, including a prominent journalist and an oil executive.

The Thursday crash of the private Yak-40 jet at Moscow's Sheremetyevo airport dominated Russian television news programs, including speculation the crash was a terrorist act.

Nerves have been on edge since apartment bombings blamed on Chechen rebels killed some 300 people in Moscow and two other Russian cities last fall.

One of the crash victims, oil executive Ziya Bazhayev, was a Chechen. Bazhayev had been pressured by Chechen separatists to help finance their war and he "was often threatened," Alexander Zdanovich, a spokesman for the Federal Security Service, told the RTR television channel.

WEATHER	
TODAY	TOMORROW
Scattered snow showers high 39, low 26	Partly cloudy high 47, low 28

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