

Democrats maneuver to slow balanced-budget amendment

WASHINGTON (AP) — In a prelude to the coming battle, Republican efforts to pass a balanced-budget amendment to the Constitution slowed Tuesday as it was attacked by a lone Democratic senator calling it "a hoax" on the American people.

Invoking an obscure Senate rule, Sen. Robert C. Byrd of West Virginia forced the Judiciary Committee to suspend its work in mid-session.

Backers of the amendment said they would try again Wednesday. And even longtime opponents conceded that Republicans in both houses likely will command the two-thirds support needed to send the measure — a key component of the GOP "Contract With America" — to the states for ratification.

passed master at using the Senate's arcane rules to his advantage, vowed to keep up the fight. "I may be run over by the streamroller but I don't propose to get out of its way or just jump upon it and ride along with it."

The struggle contrasted with the overwhelming bipartisan support behind what was certain to be the first piece of legislation to clear the new Congress.

A final House vote was expected shortly on a bill to place Congress under the same workplace rules it imposes on private businesses. The Senate passed the measure 98-1 last week, and a similar measure previously cleared the House unanimously.

The balanced-budget amendment is the linchpin of GOP ef-

forts to shrink government and cut spending. Public opinion polls show strong support for the concept after a quarter-cen-

dren are being shackled with an insurmountable burden" of debt, said Senate Judiciary Committee Chairman Orrin Hatch, R-

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tury of unrelieved red ink. Republicans are hoping that once enacted, the amendment will provide the discipline needed to force lawmakers to make the politically difficult cuts.

"Our children and grandchild-

ren are being shackled with an insurmountable burden" of debt, said Senate Judiciary Committee Chairman Orrin Hatch, R-

Utah, as he convened the abortive session. Many Democrats are likely to wind up supporting the measure. But in the political maneuvering underway, the White House and Democratic leaders

in Congress are demanding that Republicans specify the cuts they envision to wipe out the deficit. Their hope is that the voters will recoil when they contemplate reductions in programs such as Medicare, education, the environment and health.

"Not discussing the options with the American people is like a suitor telling his prospective bride, 'Marry me and I will make you happy,'" Byrd said. "But when she asks what he has in mind, he simply answers, 'Trust me, baby, you don't need to know the details.'"

"Why go through all these motions, why go to all that extent to fool the American people and to perpetrate on the American people a hoax?" he added.

To stall the Judiciary Committee's work, Byrd invoked a

rarely used Senate rule that denies committees the right to meet after the full Senate has been in session for two hours.

Hatch appeared unperturbed at Byrd's maneuver. But Republican patience was wearing thin as Byrd and other Democrats also slowed progress of legislation on the floor designed to shield the states from costly new requirements imposed by Washington. "We have what we know as 'Byrd-lock,'" said Majority Leader Robert Dole of Kansas.

In general, the balanced-budget amendment making its way through the House and Senate call on the president to submit a deficit-free spending plan annually, beginning in 2002. Deficit spending would be barred, except by three-fifths votes of both houses.

Olive oil linked to breast cancer

□ Researchers find that Mediterranean women less likely to develop cancer.

WASHINGTON (AP) — Scientists have long been aware that Mediterranean women develop breast cancer at one-half to 60 percent the rate of American women.

Now they say the reason may be the use of olive oil.

A new study "gives additional momentum" to findings in animal tests that olive oil, alone among fat types, helps protect against breast cancer, said Dr. Dimitrios Trichopoulos of the Harvard School of Public Health, author of the study.

He doesn't want to sound alarmist. "We should be a little more careful in advising women what to do unless we are first absolutely convinced," he said in an interview Tuesday. "We are not at that stage yet."

But, he said, the findings provide "an explanation for the paradox that Mediterranean women consume plenty of fats, and yet they have only 50 or 60 percent of the risk of breast cancer, compared with other women."

The researchers analyzed questionnaires ad-

ministered to 820 women newly diagnosed with breast cancer and an additional 1,548 cancer-free women whose age and area of residence paralleled those of the women with the disease. All the women were in Greece, where olive oil is widely used in cooking.

The researchers found that women who consumed olive oil more than once a day had a 25 percent lower risk of cancer when compared to women who ate olive oil less frequently.

Trichopoulos said part of the reason olive oil is better for the body is that it is less easily oxidized than polyunsaturated fats and contains plenty of antioxidant vitamins and other components including Vitamin E. He was quick to add: "We don't know whether this factor or another, as yet-unidentified factor, is essential."

The analysis, published in this week's Journal of the National Cancer Institute, said the data came from one of the largest studies that have examined the role of diet in the cause and origins of breast cancer.

A number of studies, including the new one, show that vegetables and fruits protect from cancer of various types.

"Rather than feeling hopeless against these cancers, at least we do know vegetables and fruits in this order and vegetables prepared in olive oil may actually provide an easy and rather pleasant way of reducing risk," he said.

Supreme Court to rule on affirmative-action programs

WASHINGTON (AP) — Special federal help for companies owned by minorities unlawfully steals business from white-owned companies, the Supreme Court was told Tuesday in a key showdown on affirmative action.

The potential stakes are enormous. The court's ruling, expected by July, could affect billions of dollars worth of federal contracts. Perhaps at stake also is the future of all government affirmative action, some of it aimed at making up for past societal bias against women.

The court hasn't handled a major affirmative-action dispute since 1990, and its membership today is far more conservative. Serving as a backdrop are the 1994 election results, a rightward turn many commentators attribute to the festering anger of one group of voters — white males.

"That's an impermissible racial stereotype ... that they (racial and ethnic minorities) need the help,"

Denver lawyer William Perry Pendley argued in behalf of a white businessman challenging the affirmative-action program. He said his client "cannot compete on an equal footing" because of it.

Under one of the many affirmative-action programs required by Congress, the Transportation Department's Central Federal Lands Highway Division gives contractors on federal projects a 1.5 percent bonus if at least 10 percent of their subcontracts go to "disadvantaged business enterprises."

Gonzales Construction is Hispanic-owned and fits the Small Business Act's definition of a disadvantaged business. Adarand, run by Randy Pech, a white man, does not.

Pendley said Pech's company bids on every guardrail contract in Colorado, but in the past has lost 12 such contracts to higher-bidding minority-owned companies.

He said the problems faced by minority-owned firms have little

to do with race, but more to do with their size. Such problems are shared by small, white-owned businesses such as Adarand, Pendley argued, adding, "race-neutral solutions are called for."

Solicitor General Drew S. Days III countered by saying the focus of the affirmative-action program is social and economic disadvantage, not race. A minority company can lose its status as a disadvantaged business by reaching "a level of economic take-off," he said.

Justices Ruth Bader Ginsburg, David H. Souter and Stephen G. Breyer, all of whom have joined the court since its last major affirmative-action ruling, appeared most sympathetic to Days' contention that Adarand had not linked its lost contract to the racial presumption.

Chief Justice William H. Rehnquist and Justices Antonin Scalia and Anthony M. Kennedy appeared most hostile to Days' arguments.



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