

House highway bill threatens balanced budget

WASHINGTON (AP) — The House neared passage Wednesday of a \$217 billion spending bill that would shower states with highway projects but raise questions about whether the commitment to a balanced budget has given way to old-fashioned pork barrel politics.

The six-year spending bill, expected to pass overwhelmingly Wednesday evening, was touted as salvation to the nation's crumbling bridges, overtaxed mass transit systems and dangerous highways.

It would create hundreds of thousands of high-paying construction jobs.

"This is a bill that is good for all America for all time," said Rep. James Oberstar of Minnesota, ranking Democrat on the Transportation Committee.

But it also exceeds the sum of last year's balanced budget deal set aside for transportation projects by \$26 billion, prompting concern that, on the verge of the first bal-

anced budget in three decades, Congress was already slipping back into its old spending ways.

"I simply do not feel we have the money," said Rep. David Obey of Wisconsin, ranking Democrat on the Appropriations Committee. He said it was "spectacularly irresponsible" that neither the Senate, which approved a \$214 billion bill a month ago, nor the House had specified how it would pay for the extra spending.

The White House has expressed concern about the spending level.

"We urge both the House and the Senate to pause and take a deep breath and consider how we're going to pay for this," said Office of Management and Budget Director Franklin Raines.

The House bill calls for spending some \$180 billion on highway building, \$36 billion on mass transit and \$1.6 billion on the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration.

Transportation Committee

Chairman Bud Shuster, R-Pa., a longtime champion of highway spending, insisted that all the project money would come from the tax Americans pay at the gas pump.

"The cold hard fact remains we are simply spending the revenue coming in. This is honesty in budgeting."

The problem is that the highway trust fund is calculated as part of the general budget, reducing the deficit. Taking it off-budget, as the Shuster bill calls for, would require finding additional savings to keep the budget in balance.

Fiscal conservatives have also criticized Shuster for setting aside 5 percent of the money, more than \$9 billion, for 1,463 projects that individual lawmakers requested for their districts.

Republicans were given 55 percent of the money and Democrats 45 percent, and the complaint, strongly denied by Shuster, was that pork barrel politicking decided who got what.

California neighborhood plagued by bombings

FREMONT, Calif. (AP) — Mohan Sharma is baffled by a series of bombings that have targeted the quiet and scenic neighborhood where he is building his \$2 million dream house.

There have been three bombings since Sunday and two more explosives were found before they went off.

No one has been hurt, but the attacks have made residents scared and angry in this town 30 miles southeast of San Francisco.

"I don't know why they'd target anyone here," Sharma said Wednesday. "Some lunatic is just disrupting the peace of this community."

Fremont's tranquility was shattered early Sunday morning when a firebomb exploded at the house of Police Chief Craig Steckler.

The blast ripped a 10-foot-wide

hole in the roof and porch on fire.

That afternoon, the sor as police chief, Bob Wasserman, found an explosive in a brown door. It was safely dis-

Sunday evening, bombs stuffed into a ripped through a newly

A 17-year-old girl the time and escaped

On Monday evening, acting on a phone tip, a bomb hidden in a house under construction.

The bomb squad

The last bomb was backpack left hanging town's water tower. The not damaged.

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