

WASHINGTON WATCH

A funny thing happened on Capitol Hill recently — Congressional Republicans put forward a budget plan that reduces the tax burden on middle-class parents by \$500 per child.

To some, this action may not seem like news. Republicans, after all, are known for waxing eloquent about “family values” and “low taxes.”

Junior Leadership

But the truth is, Republican leaders in Washington have often failed to match their high-powered rhetoric with concrete action. While junior members like Rep. Frank Wolf (Va.) and Sen. Dan Coats (Ind.) have long encouraged their colleagues to make pro-family tax relief a priority, the GOP leadership in both Houses has been slow to respond.

Indeed, the March 10 House vote rejecting the \$500 children's tax credit represents the first time since 1986 that GOP Hill leaders have actually pushed onto the floor of the House or Senate legislation offering significant per-child tax relief to struggling middle-income parents.

Republicans lack the votes to pass a \$500 children's tax credit on their own. So far, President Clinton and Democratic leaders in Congress have shown no interest in helping them do so.

No-budge Budget Committee

In fact, House Budget Committee Democrats not only opposed the overall GOP budget plan (which contained the \$500 credit), but they also unanimously opposed a tax relief amendment to their own budget proposal. This amendment would have replaced increases in government spending on social programs with a new children's tax credit.

In essence, House Democrats took the position that new spending on government programs is more important than freeing parents to be

GIVING PARENTS CREDIT

more involved in childrearing by easing their tax burden.

The Democrats' position is consistent with what Congress has done for several decades. In 1950, median-income

REDISCOVERING PRO-FAMILY TAX RELIEF

couples with two children sent the federal government one of every fifty cents earned. Today, they send one of every four.

But the Democrats' position is inconsistent with current public opinion. In a recent poll commissioned by the Family Research Council, 68 percent of the adults surveyed said that the best way to improve the lives of children is to “strengthen the role of parents.” Only 26 percent said to “expand government programs that provide services to children.”

Moreover, the Democrats' position is inconsistent with some of the President's own recent rhetoric about the

importance of strong families. It also runs counter to his memorable campaign promise of middle-class tax relief.

Half a Loaf Is...

Indeed, the \$500 tax credit now being championed by the House GOP is actually a scaled-back version of the \$1,000 children's tax credit recommended by the 1991 National Commission on Children (a bipartisan panel whose membership included then-Gov. Bill Clinton of Arkansas). It is several hundred dollars less than the \$800 per-child credit promised by then-candidate Clinton in 1992.

The FRC poll suggests that opponents of the credit could pay a political price now that the GOP has rediscovered the issue — especially if those opponents have flip-flopped on a popular promise.

In 1992, George Bush paid dearly for breaking his “no new taxes” pledge. Pollster Richard Wirthlin believes the 1992 Bush campaign also suffered from its failure to link the “family values” theme with specific policy proposals like pro-family tax cuts.

Whether the President and credit opponents on Capitol Hill will pay a similar price may depend on whether credit advocates have the will to turn it into an election-year issue.

Whatever happens, this much appears certain: unless Congressional Democrats embrace the idea, America's overtaxed parents will have to wait at least another year for some long-overdue tax relief.

What You Can Do

1. Contact your member of Congress and find out how he voted on the budget plan sponsored by Rep. John Kasich (R-Ohio), which included a \$500 children's tax credit.
2. Contact your Senators and urge them to support a children's tax credit of at least \$500.

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