

Thomas vote to come up Friday

Vote will end week of confirmation hearings

NATIONAL WASHINGTON (AP) — The Senate Judiciary Committee announced Wednesday night that it will vote Friday on the heavily debated nomination of federal appeals Judge Clarence Thomas as an associate justice of the Supreme Court.

of concealing his views during a week of Senate hearings.

Supporters countered that the critics are merely concerned that confirmation of Thomas, who rose from poverty in the rural South to graduate from the Yale law school, would reinforce the court's conservative majority.

Committee Chairman Joseph Biden (D-Del.) set 10 a.m. EDT for the vote on the 43-year-old conservative, accused by critics

Judiciary Committee approval would send the nomination to the Senate floor for a vote on

confirmation.

If confirmed, as critics concede is likely, the former chairman of the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission would become the second black to serve on the high court, succeeding the retiring Justice Thurgood Marshall.

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NATIONAL BRIEFS

Congressman offers resolution for inquiry at bank

WASHINGTON (AP) — Speaker Thomas S. Foley made an unusual appearance on the House floor Wednesday to head off a Republican attempt to make political hay with the rampant check-bouncing reported at the House bank.

Rep. Toby Roth (R-Wis.) was prepared to offer a resolution calling for an official inquiry to identify, at least to House officers, the biggest abusers. But he stopped short after Foley delivered a strongly worded address.

"Members will have the same rights, no more and no less, than any other member of the public," said Foley, adding that actions he ordered Tuesday included a halt to the free overdrafts.

Foley announced then that he had ordered an end to the free overdrafts and loose check-cashing privileges at the House bank. He told reporters a system similar to that of a commercial bank would be set up, including penalties for bounced checks, but the details had not been worked out.

"Members should be on notice that I have told the bank that there will be no exceptions to this rule," Foley said on the floor, and bank employees who grant such exceptions would be fired.

Mysterious cracks found in space shuttle Atlantis

CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla. (AP) — Space shuttle workers removed thermal seals from Atlantis' wings for inspections Wednesday after mysterious cracks were found in some of the protective gaskets.

NASA officials said it's too soon to say whether the problem will delay a military mission by Atlantis in November.

Technicians discovered the cracks during routine inspections of Atlantis in the hangar.

Workers pulled off three of the 44 reinforced carbon seals Tuesday to check for damage from the ship's last flight, in August. All three had hairline cracks, said NASA spokesman Mitch Varnes.

Five more seals were pulled off, and four of them were cracked, Varnes said. Shuttle managers decided Wednesday to remove all the seals to check for further damage.

The seals - 22 per wing - serve as expansion joints for the reinforced carbon panels that protect the leading edge of the shuttle wings against the intense heat of atmospheric re-entry.

"The issue is not at this point so much a safety issue," Varnes said. "The concern is how did these happen and why are we only seeing them now."

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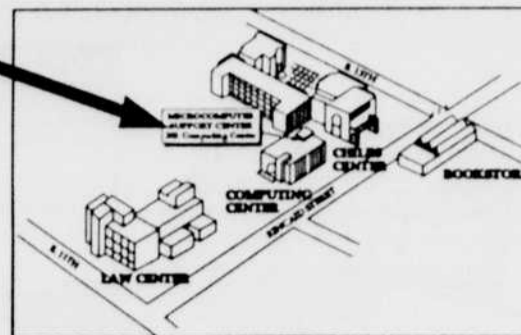
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