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Other responsibilities will include providing routine consulting support by email or phone, or on a face-to-face basis, and additional projects as assigned.
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Nation & world briefing

Republicans eliminate low-income tax credit

James Kuhnhenn
Knight Ridder Newspapers (KRT)

WASHINGTON — With the stroke of a pen, President Bush this week speeded up tax cuts for middle- and upper-income taxpayers, but Republican congressional tax writers put the brakes on a provision that would have sent more money to millions of low-income working families.

The decision not to speed up that benefit, overlooked in the rewriting flurry that preceded the tax cut's passage last week, created a furor Thursday, with Democrats demanding an immediate adjustment.

The proposal in question would have allowed certain low-income families to receive bigger child tax credits. If they pay little or no taxes because their incomes are too low, the government sends them a check for the child credit.

Under the 2001 tax-cut law, families with incomes of less than $110,000 were entitled to up to $600 in credits per child, and in 2010 the credit would rise to $1,000. The new law accelerated the $1,000 credit to take effect this year. But as tax writers in the House of Representatives and the Senate worked to fit the tax-cutting bill into a $350 billion package, they jettisoned language that would have allowed low-income families to benefit from the accelerated credit.

"The unfairness of this omission in a bill that provides tax breaks of some $93,000 per year to millionaires is particularly stark," Senate Democratic leader Tom Daschle wrote in a letter Thursday to Bush.

The White House defended the decision, arguing that tax cuts should benefit taxpayers, not low-income families who pay little or no taxes. White House spokesman Ari Fleischer said that under the new tax reduction, 3 million people who used to pay taxes no longer will have to pay. He questioned whether those individuals should get even more, in the form of a child tax-credit payment.

"That, in the end, is a redistribution of income; that is public assistance above and beyond what people pay in their income taxes," he said.

Low-income families aren't entitled to a full tax credit. Their portion is calculated on the basis of earnings above $10,500. The 2001 tax cut based the payment on 10 percent of earnings above that threshold. For instance, a family with earnings of $15,000 would receive a payment based on 10 percent of $4,500, or $450.

Under the 2001 law, the percentage of earnings formula would grow to 15 percent in 2005. The law Bush signed Wednesday accelerated the expanded child-tax credit but didn't increase the percentage of earnings formula.

Bottom line: Even though most families are now entitled to up to $1,000 per child, a family making $15,000 will still only get $450. If the percentage rate also had increased, this family would have been entitled to $675.

The Center for Budget and Policy Priorities, a liberal Washington research center, estimates that nearly 12 million families won't be eligible for an enhanced child credit payment.

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Rumsfeld is trying to make foreign policy, officials say

Joseph L. Galloway
Knight Ridder Newspapers (KRT)

WASHINGTON — President Bush, Secretary of State Colin Powell, national security adviser Condoleezza Rice and other top officials are spending hours coping with frequent, unsolicited attempts by Defense Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld to make foreign policy, according to senior administration officials who are directly involved.

The officials said Bush himself had to quash a Rumsfeld proposal last month to send Deputy Defense Secretary Paul Wolfowitz to South Korea to announce that the United States was pulling American troops off the Demilitarized Zone that separates North and South Korea.

The announcement, involving no prior consultation with allies, would have come on the eve of new South Korean President Roh Moo-hyun's first official visit to Washington.

The officials, who spoke only on the condition of anonymity, said such a move would have embarrassed Roh and sent the wrong signals to North and South Korea about the steadfastness of the U.S. commitment to defend South Korea.

From his first days in office, Rumsfeld has inundated Washington with a blizzard of memos regarding foreign policy, not usually the responsibility of a defense secretary.

"There are literally thousands of them," said one frequent recipient of Rumsfeld's foreign policy ideas and advice. "The theme is control. He wants everyone to have to play on his field."

In an April 29 memo addressed to Bush, Cheney and Powell, Rumsfeld suggested that the administration launch information operations to destabilize the communist regime of North Korean dictator Kim Jong Il. It was an idea that skeptics elsewhere in the administration dismissed as unlikely to make a dent in so rigid and secret a government.

April was a banner month for "Snowflakes" and "Rummygrams," as the defense secretary's classified and unclassified memos are called.

Rumsfeld's frequent foreign-policy forays, with Vice President Dick Cheney supporting some of them behind the scenes, are driving Powell and his aides to distraction, the officials said. The secretary of state and former chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the senior officials said, has kept his nose out of Defense Department business.

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