

Tax glitch could cost middle class

WASHINGTON (AP) — At least 1 million taxpayers could pay higher income taxes next year unless Congress and President Clinton fix a tax code glitch that mainly penalizes middle-class Americans.

Without a deal, millions more Americans next year will have to fill out complicated, time-consuming Internal Revenue Service forms just to determine whether they should pay regular income taxes or the alternative minimum tax, known as AMT, which increases their tax burden.

The AMT was created in 1969 to ensure the wealthy did not escape income taxes through legal loopholes. It was adjusted for inflation in 1993, a one-time change that did not keep pace with the actual rise in the cost of living.

In addition, people are rushing to take advantage of personal credits, such as the \$500 per-child credit, that are counted when determining whether the tax should apply.

As a result, rising middle-class incomes and a proliferation of tax credits have forced more people to pay the AMT, which taxes income at a 26 percent rate.

Millions of middle-class people pay regular taxes at the bottom 15 percent rate, which applies to married couples with taxable incomes below \$43,000.

The Treasury Department estimates 1 million middle-class taxpayers could get stuck with a bigger AMT tax bill unless current law is changed. Among those hit hardest are families with several children and modest incomes.

"This is unfair, unjustified and inaction by this body is unreasonable," Sen. Blanche Lambert Lincoln, D-Ark., said in a recent floor speech. "Many families are not aware of the AMT."

Indeed, virtually anyone who claims new child or education credits would have to work through an IRS worksheet to determine if the AMT applies to them. The

tax could kick in if adjusted gross incomes are above \$45,000 for joint filers or \$33,750 for singles.

"Many families will not be able to deduct the full value of their child and education tax credits without reaching the AMT limits," said Sen. Dick Lugar, R-Ind.

The 10-year, \$792 billion Republican tax bill that Clinton is poised to veto includes gradual elimination of the personal AMT.

That means lawmakers and the White House must find another way if they want to change the AMT.

Last year, the two sides agreed temporarily to exempt personal credits from determining if a taxpayer must pay the AMT; that exemption has expired.

Clinton has proposed a new two-year exemption, and there appears to be broad support among Republicans and Democrats to adopt some version of that.

A one-year extension of the exemption would cost about \$700 million, according to the Treasury Department. It most likely would be part of a package of so-called "extenders" costing between \$3 billion and \$5 billion that would renew a list of expired tax provisions, including the research and development credit popular with high-tech business and manufacturers.

"On the extenders issues, you know we've got a number of things we want to get done and we'll be working with Congress to get them done," White House spokesman Joe Lockhart said Friday.

There is a slim chance that broader tax cuts could be attached to the package, but only if there is a firm agreement between Clinton and both parties. Otherwise, the measure could face a filibuster in the Senate or be subjected to numerous amendments that might sink it.

"There would have to be an absolute understanding and commitment that there wouldn't be game playing," said Senate Majority Leader Trent Lott, R-Miss.

Boycott

(Continued from Page 2)

representing 70 percent of all new admissions.

According to a report released this year by the Justice Policy Institute, a project of the Center on Juvenile and Criminal Justice, in 1996 there were 193 White American prison inmates for every 100,000 Whites; 688 Hispanic prison inmates per 100,000 Hispanics and 1,571 African-American prison inmates per 100,000 African Americans.

"This means that Blacks are now imprisoned at eight times the rate of Whites and Latinos are imprisoned at three and one-half times the rate of Whites," the report stated. It also noted that, no state government expenditure has increased as rapidly as prisons and jails.

"States around the country are now spending more to build prisons than colleges, and the combined prison and jail budgets for 1.2 million non-violent prisoners (77 percent of all prisoners are non-violent) exceeded the entire federal welfare budget for 8.5 million poor people last year," according to the report.

"We must realize that it's us dying, and it's us that they're building the prisons for."

"And young people must ask the churches why they are not involved in the movement to keep young people out of prison," Daniels charged.

"We're going to take back our children, take back the streets and stand up for equality," he said.

During the convention, the PNBC members adopted several "transformational initiatives" including support for the boycott of South Carolina where two of the organization's 2000 conferences were scheduled to be held.

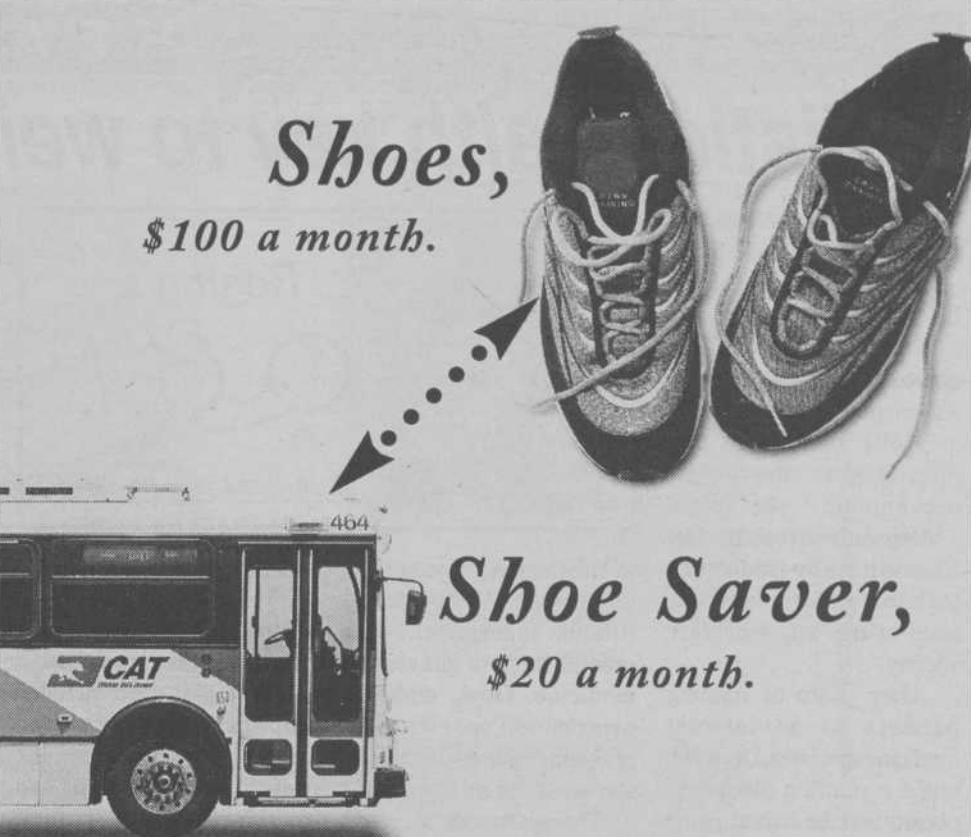
"We will join the NAACP and SCLC and others to boycott South Carolina where our annual board meeting was scheduled to be held in Myrtle Beach, and a later conference in Columbia," Daniels said.

Since the NAACP's call for a boycott of South Carolina for its continued use of the Confederate Flag—a racist symbol of slavery and inequality in America—many Black organizations have canceled planned events to be held in the state.

In addition to the various workshops, worship services and meetings, convention officers were installed for another year.

Thelma Chambers-Young was elected and installed as the youngest president of the Women's Department.

She succeeds Mildred Wormly, who gave a stirring address during the main session of the convention for the first time in the convention's history.



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