

Tax breaks stall minimum wage bill

Arguments over tax breaks halt a key plank of the Democrats' promise to advocate for low-wage earners

WASHINGTON (AP) — Democrats' promise of a quick increase in the minimum wage ran aground Wednesday in the Senate, where lawmakers are insisting it include new tax breaks for restaurants and other businesses that rely on low-pay workers.

On a 54-43 vote, Democrats lost an effort to advance a House-passed bill that would lift the pay floor from \$5.15 to \$7.25 an hour without any accompanying tax cut.

Opponents of the tax cut needed 60 votes to prevail.

The vote sent a message to House Democrats and liberals in the Senate that only a hybrid tax and minimum wage package could succeed in the Senate.

But any tax breaks in the bill would put the Senate on a collision course with the House, which is required by the Constitution to initiate tax measures.

In a separate vote, the Senate also effectively killed a modified line-item veto bill.

The Republican-inspired measure would have permitted a president to pluck individual items out of spending bills and submit them to Congress for a vote.

Raising the minimum wage is one of the new Democratic Congress' top priorities. The wage floor has been unchanged for 10 years. The bill would increase it to \$7.25 in three steps over 26 months.

"Why can't we do just one thing for minimum wage workers, no strings attached, no giveaways for the powerful?" asked Massachusetts Sen. Edward Kennedy, a leading sponsor of the bill.

The House passed the increase two weeks ago. Since

then, Speaker Nancy Pelosi and Rep. Charles Rangel, the chair of the tax writing Ways and Means Committee, have prodded the Senate to keep tax proposals out of the bill.

Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid of Nevada, scheduled Wednesday's vote to demonstrate the Demo-

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crats' lack of Republican support for a straight minimum wage bill without tax cuts. Every Democrat present voted to end debate and five moderate Republicans joined them.

"There seems to be agreement to raise the minimum wage," said Republican Sen.

Michael Enzi of Wyoming. "The difficulty has been how do we take care of some of the impact to small businesses that will result from this."

Reid is backing an \$8.3 billion tax package that would extend for five years a tax credit for employers

who hire low-income or disadvantaged workers. It also extends until 2010 tax rules that permit businesses to combine as much as \$112,000 in expenses into one annual tax deduction.

The cost of the proposal would be paid with revenue realized from a proposed cap

of \$1 million on executive compensation that can be tax deferred. The tax package also would end deductions for court settlements or punitive damages paid by companies that have been sued.

A vote on that package is not expected until early next week.

of Dr. King, along with her own insights and tales of her life experiences.

"If Dr. King were with us today, his focus would be on humanity. He'd be disgusted by the apathy of our nation, with those who tell us to let go of the past, with those who try to convince us that voting is a waste of time, and with the people that take the liberties that we fought so hard for, for granted," she said.

"Remember those who were shot and killed, those hanged from tree limbs, those dragged by cars through dirt roads and paved streets. That reality is our motivation. If you want power, take control of your life. Be proactive. Take advantage of your freedom. Don't be passive or indifferent, allow the world to know who and what you are."

With these statements, Evers-Williams encouraged the audience to never give up and never give in.

"Martin never gave up, Medgar never gave up," said Evers-Williams. "We could not give up. If we did, who would fight for us? Today, you're giving up. Young people throw around the word 'nigger' as if it were an endearing term or loving expression. Well, I'm here to tell you that it's not loving. It's ignorant, and it's derogatory. Men died so that we would never have to be called by that name again. I'm from a time when the word 'nigger' or even the word 'Black' would get you into a fight. We learned that Black was beautiful. But the n-

word, that word equals hate — no matter whose mouth it comes from. Young people have no dignity, no self-respect. White people gave you that name because they hated you, envied you. But when you use it, not only do you display self-hate, you allow them to win."

It's obvious that Evers-Williams is passionate about several things — the accomplishments made by the Civil Rights Movement, cultural dignity, and the direction of our African-American youth. She wants Black youth to continue the fight for freedom, the fight to preserve the legacies of their leaders, and the fight for the right to become leaders themselves.

"I'm trying to prepare our youth for this fight. When we're gone, it'll be their fight, and it's one that they're

largely unprepared for. Today, we must begin to bridge the gap between generations."

Evers-Williams, age 73, seems to have no intentions of slowing down. She said that she lives for the day when equality is free-flowing and prejudice becomes extinct.

"I live for the day when the white hoods and white cloaks are gone away, when a Black man becomes president of the United States, when men in jeans can shake hands with men in Brooks Brothers suits."

One thing is certain: Her life has not been in vain. Like many Black leaders, she fights so that others may live freely. She lives to ensure that the legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. isn't reduced to "50% off clearance sales"

at the mall or just a day off from work or school.

Evers-Williams claims that we'll never fully grasp the wisdom, humaneness and cognitive depth of Dr. King. But with a simple aphorism, she illustrated how African-Americans can better honor his legacy and the lives of other civil rights fighters.

"My grandmother would always say that God is a potter and we are the clay. God molds us. But not until we are put through the fire will we be strong, or even beautiful. While we may not possess Dr. King's brilliance, we each have the ability to be proactive.

"Any one of us could be molded into that marvelous clay pot, but it's up to each of us to decide whether or not we choose to be that strong, or that beautiful."

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Sentinel-Voice photo by Marty Frierson

Myrlie Evers-Williams, right, chats with Debra Ramos, middle, and Pamela Atkins-Giroud.

Brandy involved in fatal traffic crash

LOS ANGELES (AP) — R&B singer Brandy was involved in a four-car freeway crash last month that left a 38-year-old woman dead, authorities said Wednesday.

The cause of the mishap was under investigation, and no arrests have been made.

The 27-year-old actress-singer (full name: Brandy Norwood) was driving a 2007 Land Rover on the 405 Freeway on Dec. 30, when the collision occurred.

She failed to slow down and struck the back of a 2005 Honda at about 65 mph, according to a California Highway Patrol report.

The Honda driven by Awatef Aboudihaj, 38, hit another vehicle and then slid sideways before it struck a center divider, then was hit by an oncoming car.

Aboudihaj later died of blunt-force injuries.

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