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Leaving to Fail Another Day

The Republican-led Congress is limping into recess decidedly laurel-free, still consumed with its retrograde struggle over just how much more of a tax cut the wealthiest Americans need as the nation plunges into a decade of deepening budgetary pain. In midnight maneuvering, the leaders used a parliamentary snooker strategy to try to outflank Senate resisters who want to halve President Bush's fiscally destructive 10-year plan for \$726 billion more in tax cuts.

That half-loaf goal of a maximum cut of \$350 billion is harmful enough in the face of spiraling deficits, vital program cuts and government borrowing that will hobble future taxpayers and business growth. Yet the latest budget scheme, barely approved in narrow votes, authorizes Congress to bloat the cut back up to \$550 billion when the actual tax-cut bill is written next month.

Two Republican senators who have been stalwart in their insistence on a slightly more rational figure, Olympia Snowe of Maine and George Voinovich of Ohio, were accused by Democrats of caving in to fierce party pressure in finally voting for a budget resolution allowing the higher figure. But they insist that they have won leadership commitments to stand fast at \$350 billion when the two houses begin jockeying over the official tax bill in a few weeks.

Their task may become even harder then if the president returns to his domestic agenda with fresh clout, arguing that a victory in Iraq must be followed by the deepest possible tax cut.

Republican leaders endlessly criticized the Senate's failure to come up with a budget plan last year, when the Democrats were in charge, and they were crowing at having accomplished the deed themselves.

But the budget they passed is an act of transparent procrastination. It endorses the president's determination to cut the flow of revenue further at a crucial time of need. Costs remain open-ended on priorities like the war and pacification in Iraq. The new budget plan falls well short of election-year promises in such vital domestic needs as education, child care and even domestic security. The plan lacks far more than the precise size of another tax cut. It leaves taxpayers facing a decade of underfinanced programs and irresponsible deficits, and a government floating further adrift on hundreds of billions more in borrowed money.

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