

## Congress Dithers About Unpopular Cuts

With Christmas days away, and the American people opposed to a plan to give tax breaks at the expense of the needy, Congress has gone into recess without reaching a decision on how it will restore order to the federal government's financial affairs.

Congressional leaders are pursuing a rarely used process called "budget reconciliation". This process, last used in 1996, has special rules forbidding filibusters and limiting the power of the minority party. It is designed to "reconcile" expensive and ongoing programs with the reality of limited funds so that future generations are not saddled with a growing burden of debt.

For the first time in history, this Congress plans to use reconciliation in a way that would increase the debt passed on to our children. After adding up all that Congress wants to save at the expense of people living near the edge and then subtracting all that Congress wants to give away as tax breaks to upper-income people, the federal government would need to borrow even more money under its reconciliation plan than it borrows now. Support for spending cuts has evaporated as the public has become aware that Congress is using reconciliation to push through more tax cuts for the wealthy.

When Congress returns to work in 2006, the debate will resume around proposed spending cuts.

**Food Stamps.** The House wants to cut back the Food Stamp Program, the Senate is trying to say "no". Both of Pennsylvania's senators, Rick Santorum and Arlen Specter, are on record opposing any food stamp cuts. Contrary to earlier fears, Congress is no longer considering a plan to block grant the Program to the states.

**Health Care.** The House wants to require individuals enrolled in the Medical Assistance Program to pay for health services through co-payments and/or premiums. The Senate is opposed to that plan and is looking for savings elsewhere.

**Childcare.** The House wants to use more of the available childcare money for families receiving TANF cash assistance payments. That would leave less childcare money for non-TANF families that need a subsidy to cover childcare costs. The Senate wants to avoid deciding this for now.

If you are concerned about these issues, contact your representatives.