

How Do We Balance The Budget Now?

When the Supreme Court declared a key provision of the Gramm-Rudman-Hollings balanced budget law unconstitutional, it was a major setback in our attempt to balance the budget. The court's decision was not unexpected, though, and many of us in Congress are now working to keep the country on a path to a balanced budget.

The provision of Gramm-Rudman that was struck down involves the U.S. Comptroller General's participation in the process of making budget cuts. The law said the Comptroller General would order automatic across-the-board budget cuts if the President and Congress could not agree upon cuts.

By a 7 to 2 vote, the court held that bringing the Comptroller General into the budget cutting process violated the constitutional principle of separation of powers.

The Constitution gives responsibility for implementing spending decisions to the Executive Branch and the Legislative Branch is responsible for setting budget priorities. The Comptroller General is director of the General Accounting Office, a body of Congress which oversees the efficiency of federal programs. He is appointed by the President but can be dismissed by Congress. It is around this congressional dismissal power that the court's decision hinged.

Outgoing chief Justice Warren Burger, who wrote the opinion of the court, says the dismissal power made the Comptroller General "subservient" to Congress. Justice Byron White, writing in the minority, criticized the decision, calling the dismissal argument a technicality.

The rest of Gramm-Rudman was left intact, however, and now it is up to Congress and the President to live up to the budget balancing goals of the law. Both the Office of Management and Budget in the White House and the Congressional Budget Office will still calculate how much spending must be reduced to reach the deficit cuts mandated by the law.

Congress will then have to face the law and pass budget cuts that will reduce the deficit. If this is not done, the Congress will have to face the American people, admit that it has broken the law and cannot balance the budget.

This means Gramm-Rudman is still a powerful weapon for fighting the deficit, and those of us in Congress who support it will be fighting to keep our nation on its path to a balanced budget.

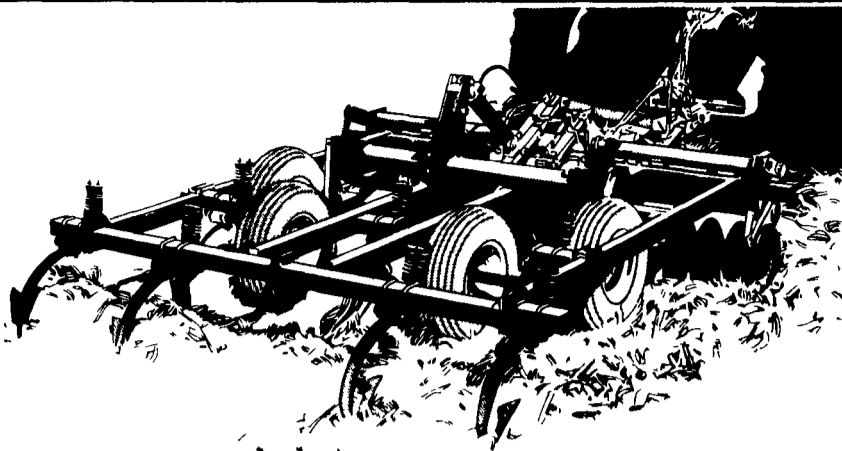
("Capitol Comments" by Congressman Bob Walker)

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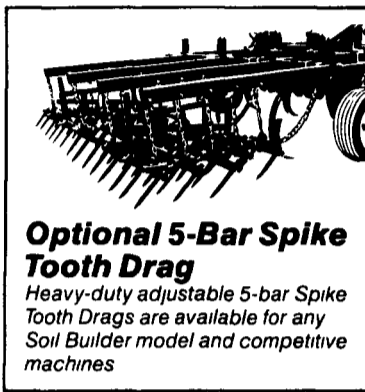
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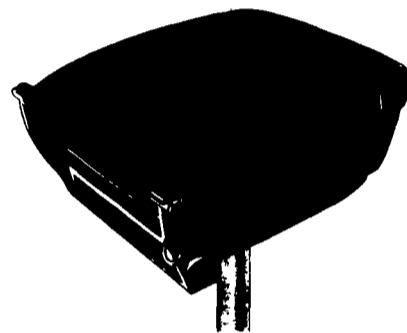
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