

DRIVERS BEWARE



STAFF PHOTO BY SCOTT ROBERSON/roberson@thejournalnet.com

Bradley Gontermen of New Whiteland lost control of his car Tuesday evening while traveling north on Honey Creek Road near the Woodfield subdivision. Gontermen left the road and got stuck on the guide wires of a utility pole.

GOP struggles with an increasing deficit

By ANDREW TAYLOR
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

WASHINGTON

It's a busy, unhappy budget week on Capitol Hill. At a time when Republicans are eager to prove their mettle on spending restraint, their deeds are falling far short of their election-year promises.

The House is poised to pad the deficit by passing \$91 billion in debt-financed funding for the war in Iraq and for hurricane relief, while the Senate is working on a budget plan shorn of tax and spending cuts wanted by President Bush.

By week's end the Senate must vote on permitting the federal debt to grow by \$781 billion to avoid a disastrous government default. The measure would allow the debt to grow to almost \$9 trillion, \$3 trillion more than when Bush took office.

"We've been hit with unexpected challenges, a recession, 9/11, homeland security, the war on terror, Katrina," Majority Leader Bill Frist told the GOP faithful in Memphis.

"But they're not justification for a one-way ticket down a wayward path of wasteful Washington spending."

Election-year political concerns

have forced Budget Committee Chairman Judd Gregg, R-N.H., to drop Bush's proposal to shave \$36 billion from Medicare over five years from his plan. But fellow Republicans agitated for more funding for defense, veterans benefits, education, health research and border security.

Senate debate began Monday, but it's not certain that GOP leaders can muster enough votes for Gregg's bare-bones budget plan.

Bush's proposed cuts on domestic Cabinet department budgets have GOP moderates like Arlen Specter of Pennsylvania threatening to oppose the budget altogether.

Specter chairs the Appropriations subcommittee that funds education and health programs. He is pushing to add \$7 billion to the budget to bring such funding back to the levels of two years ago, and he's threatened to oppose the budget altogether over Bush's cuts to programs like education and health research.

"We have done more than cut the fat. We have done more than cut through the muscle. We have done more than cut through to the bone," Specter said.

"We have cut into the marrow. It is that serious."

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• Gabehart

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only goes from home and to work during his 60-day sentence.

Gabehart faces no disciplinary action from the mayor. A longtime friend, Mayor Charles Henderson testified on Gabehart's behalf that he had suggested Gabehart consider suing the city council because the director's pay was decreased two years ago.

Gabehart oversees the city's engineering, sewer and street departments.

The director of operations position does not list any educational requirements, such as a high school diploma or college education.

Most supervisor positions that report to the director of operations, such as the city engineer, require college degrees. Job requirements say nothing about criminal records.

Gabehart said he did not finish high school because he always put work first, and he entered the field of auto mechanics.

He received advanced training in new technology during the early 1980s, which made him marketable enough to pursue a job with the city.

The mayor said he hired Gabehart based on his experience and merits, but most city council members question how Greenwood can have such a senior employee who has not graduated high school or earned his GED.

"I'm embarrassed for the city, that we would hire a person without even a high school diploma to do a job where he supervises engineers," council member Bruce Armstrong said.

Henderson created the director of operations position three years ago and hired Gabehart for the job.

Gabehart was director of fleet maintenance at the time and showed potential by bringing up ideas that had nothing to do with fleet maintenance, Henderson said.

Gabehart was hired because of his good work record with the city and experience as a Whiteland Town Council mem-



ARMSTRONG



BLESS



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ber, Henderson said.

Henderson testified at Gabehart's hearing as a friend, not the mayor. He said Gabehart has improved since the 2004 arrest.

Council member Bill Bless said the mayor had every right to appear in court to support his friend because everyone has that right and responsibility to the people they care about.

But even when testifying as a friend, the mayor is still the mayor, Armstrong said.

In this case, he said, the mayor crossed the line by saying publicly that Gabehart should sue the city.

Some council members are concerned that the mayor would advise someone to sue the city, especially since the court battle would involve taxpayer money.

"He's being too much 'Norm's friend' and not enough 'the mayor,'" Armstrong said.

Henderson said Gabehart had been punished enough for his actions by the court and the city. And he was speaking to Gabehart as a friend, which he says he has a right to do. He said he does not regret what he told Gabehart.

City council members voted two years ago to reduce the director of operation's salary but said it had nothing to do with Gabehart personally.

In fact, when council member Jessie Reed suggested a private session to discuss the position's salary, other council members made it clear they were discussing the position and not the person.

Councils are allowed to meet privately to discuss performance of individual employees but must meet in public to discuss position salaries.

Council member Keith Hardin has said the director of operations is an extra level of government that the city does not need.

The mayor is delegating responsibilities to Gabehart, such as supervising department leaders, which should be the mayor's job, Armstrong said.

Gabehart is not facing disciplinary action for his arrests.

The cost of the city's auto insurance has not increased specifically because of Gabehart's driving record, according to the city attorney and clerk treasurer's offices.

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