

# Abortion battle could flare over amendment

By MIKE BROWN, Staff Writer

WASHINGTON — In a move likely to prompt a full-scale battle on the abortion issue, a House subcommittee apparently has dropped the controversial Hyde amendment, the long-standing ban on federally funded abortions for poor women.

The action, taken Tuesday in a closed-door meeting of Rep. William Natcher's appropriations subcommittee, sets in motion a legislative battle that is likely to end in a critical floor vote later this summer.

Natcher, of Bowling Green, who generally votes with the anti-abortion forces, yesterday refused to comment on Tuesday's meeting.

■ Slowly, a compromise on the tax bill emerges. A 5.

The 2nd District Democrat said an Appropriations Committee rule prohibits disclosure of subcommittee action until it is taken up by the full committee.

"It's embargoed — every bit of it," he said.

However, House staffers and outside groups interested in the abortion issue confirmed published reports that Natcher's subcommittee eliminated the so-called "Hyde amendment" from the annual Department of Health and Human Services funding bill.

Named after its original sponsor, Rep. Henry Hyde, R-Ill., the provision prohibits the use of Medicaid funds to pay for abortions except when the life of the mother would be endangered by continuing the pregnancy.

The restriction has been in effect since it

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## HYDE

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was adopted in 1976, despite repeated attempts by abortion-rights groups and lawmakers to kill it.

Their efforts got a major boost this year, however, with the change in administrations. President Clinton supports the ban's elimination.

Because of the White House interest, a new congressional attack on the provision was expected and Tuesday's subcommittee action came as no surprise, said Sam Stratman, a spokesman for Hyde.

The effort now will be to try to put the language back in the bill, Stratman said.

Natcher is chairman of both the full Appropriations Committee and the subcommittee that handles the Health and Human Services bill.

The full committee is tentatively scheduled to consider the bill June 24, and anti-abortion members are expected to try to restore the ban at that time.

Whichever side loses in that fight predictably will then try to get the full House to reverse the committee decision.

Douglas Johnson, legislative director of the National Right to Life organization, said he understands from people who attended the meeting that Natcher joined the panel's Republicans to support keeping the ban.

He said he was told that all or almost all of the other Democrats voted to eliminate it. The Democrats have a 9-5 majority on the panel.

Johnson said he believes the anti-abortion sentiment is stronger in the full committee and in the House. But he conceded "it's an open question" whether the subcommittee action can be reversed.

"It will be a battle," agreed Sara Pines, spokeswoman for the National Abortion Rights Action League.

She said some lawmakers who oppose restrictions on a woman's right to choose abortion nevertheless oppose using federal funds for that purpose.

But Pines, reflecting an argument



Rep. William Natcher

Information on meeting 'embargoed'

made in past congressional debates on the issue, and one certain to be made repeatedly in the months ahead, said that allowing abortions for women who can afford them and denying abortions to those who can't sets up an unfair "two-tier system."

Rep. John Edward Porter of Illinois, the senior Republican on Natcher's subcommittee, supports a woman's right to choose abortion but also supports the Hyde amendment, according to spokesman David Kohn.

Porter believes private resources are available to help poor women obtain abortions and that government should not be involved, Kohn said.