

## WASHINGTON AND THE WORLD

## Opening salvo fired at affirmative action

By Judi Hasson  
USA TODAY

The House faces a showdown today in the first battle over affirmative action this year: ending a tax break aiding minority broadcasters.

GOP leaders propose eliminating millions of dollars in tax breaks for companies selling media properties to minorities. They want to use the savings to pay for a health insurance tax break for the self-employed.

Democrats and minority broadcasters are fighting the proposal.

"What is it all about?" says Rep. Charles Rangel, D-N.Y.

"African-Americans, Asians, Hispanics, they don't get a chance to project their image on TV."

GOP leaders say the move is not aimed at minorities but at providing a subsidy for health care.

But a memo to GOP leaders from strategist Bill Kristol says it is a key step in attacking affirmative action:

It "represents a strategically intelligent first step in ... a rollback of the massive system of



AP

**RANGEL:** Minorities 'don't get a chance'

Republicans say the government could save \$1.6 billion over five years by eliminating the minority broadcasters' tax break. Critics say large media

racial preferences and set-asides that has come to infect federal law and American life over the past 25 years."

While affirmative action is not part of the Contract with America, GOP leaders say they'll take a hard look at the government-mandated preferences.

companies use minorities to get tax breaks.

The GOP wants the money to be used to give the self-employed a 25% tax deduction on health insurance expenses. There are an estimated 3 million small-business owners.

"It is high time to stop ... this highly irregular practice," says Rep. Bill Archer, R-Texas, head of the House Ways and Means Committee.

But others call the proposal a GOP attack on minorities.

"It is the first salvo in the attempt to turn the clock back," says David Honig of the Minority Media and Telecommunications Council. "Before we had

this policy, minorities owned virtually no radio and TV stations."

If it passes Congress, the proposal could kill a plan by Viacom Inc., the entertainment and media conglomerate.

Viacom wants to sell its cable TV system for more than \$2 billion to a minority enterprise. Viacom would receive a \$400 million tax break.

Ari Fleischer, spokesman for the House Ways and Means Committee, says the tax break isn't about affirmative action but about a "revolving door filled with taxpayer cash."

► Affirmative action, 1A, 3A