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House passes stopgap funding to avert federal shutdown

By Felicia Sonmez

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The House on Tuesday approved a stopgap measure that would keep the federal government funded through March 18 and cut \$4 billion in spending by targeting programs that President Obama has already marked for elimination.

The proposal, which passed the House on a 335-to-91 vote, now goes to the Senate, where it is expected to pass easily. The Senate has set a vote on the bill for 11 a.m. Wednesday; Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid (D-Nev.) said on Tuesday that Senate Democrats support the measure.

Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-Ky.), addressing reporters in the Capitol shortly before Reid's news conference, said that Senate Republicans are also behind the House's short-term proposal.

If Congress does not pass a funding resolution by Friday, the federal government would be forced to shut down. But the apparent agreement between the two chambers makes that unlikely in the short term.

All but six Republican House members voted in favor. Among the Republicans opposing it was Rep. Steve King (Iowa). King tweeted Tuesday afternoon that he would vote no because it would not eliminate funding for the national health care law and would not include an amendment proposed by Rep. Mike Pence (R-Ind.) that would bar federal funding of Planned Parenthood.

The other five Republicans opposing the measure were Reps. Louie Gohmert (Texas), Justin Amash (Mich.), Michele Bachmann (Minn.), Ron Paul (Texas) and Walter Jones (N.C.).

House Democrats were divided on the measure: 104 Democrats backed it while 85 opposed it. Two members of Democratic leadership, Democratic Caucus Chairman John Larson (Conn.) and Minority Whip Steny Hoyer (Md.), voted yes; House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi (Calif.), Assistant Minority Leader Jim Clyburn (S.C.) and Democratic Caucus Vice-Chairman Xavier Becerra (Calif.) voted against it.

Ahead of the final vote, Democrats offered a motion that would have ended subsidies to oil companies. The measure failed on a 176-to-249 vote, with all but 13 Democrats voting in favor and all Republicans voting "no".

"Democrats are committed to fiscal responsibility and to ensuring that government lives within its means," said Pelosi spokesman Drew Hammill before the vote on the Democratic motion. "With Big Oil raking in record profits, this is a smart cut that lives up to that standard."

House Republicans hailed Tuesday's vote and urged the Senate to pass the measure; they also made the case that momentum for further cuts is on their side.

"I urge the Senate not to make any changes to this [resolution] and pass it in its current form to keep the government functioning as we work on a permanent measure to cut spending," House Majority Leader Eric Cantor (R-Va.) said. "Furthermore, now that Congressional Democrats and the Administration have expressed an openness for spending cuts, the momentum is there for a long-term measure that starts to finally get our fiscal house in order."

A longer-term agreement is a more difficult challenge: The House last month passed a measure that would trim \$61 billion over the seven months that remain in this fiscal year, while the Democrats who control the Senate reject that level of cuts as draconian.

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