

## House Passes Bill To Avert Shutdown

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The House passed a spending bill Tuesday to fund the government for six weeks, delaying a series of battles over spending and policy that include everything from labor law and environmental regulations to abortion and the Pentagon budget.

The 352-66 vote sent the measure to President Obama in time to avert a government shutdown at midnight. That ended a skirmish over disaster aid that seemed to signal far more trouble ahead as Obama and a bitterly divided Congress begin working on ironing out hundreds of differences, big and small, on a \$1 trillion-plus pile of 12 unfinished spending bills.

Fifty-three Republicans defected on the measure, which was calibrated to spend money at rates equal to an August budget deal between Congress and Obama that permits too much spending for many tea party conservatives.

For weeks officials fought over disaster aid after the House insisted that \$1 billion in emergency aid for victims of Hurricane Irene and other natural disasters should have been offset by cuts elsewhere in the budget. House and Senate Democrats strongly opposed the idea, particularly over House GOP cuts to a loan guarantee program that helps automakers retool factories to meet new fuel economy standards.

But a face-saving compromise last week — the Senate dropped both the \$1 billion in aid and the cuts to clean energy programs — paved the way for Tuesday's vote. Debate lasted just minutes.

"We need to keep the doors of the government open to the American people who rely on its programs and services," said the chairman of the House Appropriations Committee, Rep. Harold Rogers, R-Ky. "Furthermore, our economy cannot handle the instability that comes with the threat of a government shutdown."

A far more difficult task loomed: passing the 12 annual spending bills that lay out the day-to-day operating budgets for Cabinet agencies and departments.

On one hand, the task was made easier by the fact that the GOP-controlled House, the Democratic-run Senate and the president were in agreement on an overall \$1 trillion-plus budget for the day-to-day operations of government agencies. The August budget deal restored \$24 billion in cuts sought by Republicans in their April budget, but the overall budget "cap" remained slightly below levels for the 2011 budget year that ended Sept. 30.

Still, there remained plenty of disagreement over which programs should be increased and which should be cut the deepest.

Republicans were pressing big cuts to foreign aid and to preserve some budget gains for the Pentagon; Democrats and Obama wanted more money for domestic programs like job training, Pell Grants and heating subsidies for the poor.

To make the bills appealing to conservatives despite higher-than-hoped spending levels, House Republicans were using the bills to attack Obama's policies on health care and financial services,

environmental regulations and labor rules. GOP lawmakers also were fighting on behalf of conservative social policies such as eliminating federal aid for family planning and barring health care plans for federal workers from covering abortions.

The short-term measure set a Nov. 18 deadline to wrap up the unfinished spending bills. But it was by no means a sure thing that a bitterly divided Congress and the White House would be able to do so.

The loss of 53 Republicans on Tuesday's vote illustrated the difficult hand that GOP leaders must play in the negotiations.

That's because to pass the final legislation will require Republicans to seek support from Democrats to counter defections from about tea party Republicans.

After passing half of the 12 appropriations bills, House GOP leaders pulled the plug on floor debates on the rest, apparently because of these party divisions.

The Senate has passed a single bill, though Majority Leader Harry Reid, D-Nev., has promised additional action this month on up to three of the measures.

The likely result: a reprise of this spring's omnibus spending bill. House Speaker John Boehner, R-Ohio, was forced to drop numerous policy provisions in late-stage talks with Obama and make concessions to Democrats on spending priorities.

GOP leaders may not be in a rush to seal such an agreement, especially with Congress scheduled to work in December anyway on legislation approved by a special deficit committee that's likely to focus on benefit programs.

The final agreement on disaster relief involved giving the government's main disaster aid account \$2.7 billion, which the administration said would be enough to take care of disaster needs over the next few weeks. Several billion dollars more was on the way as part of a final agreement.