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GOP freshmen force \$61 billion in cuts

By Andrew Taylor

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WASHINGTON — The GOP-run House, jolted by freshmen determined to drive down the deficit, axed \$61 billion from hundreds of federal programs while shielding coal companies, oil refiners and farms from new federal regulations.

Passage early Saturday of the \$1.2 trillion bill, covering every Cabinet agency through Sept. 30, when the current budget year ends, sent the measure to the Senate, where it faces longer odds, and defied a White House veto threat.

The largely party-line vote of 235-189 was the most striking victory to date for the 87 freshman Republicans elected last fall on a promise to attack the deficit and reduce the reach of government. Three Republicans joined Democrats in opposing the measure.

“The American people have spoken. They demand that Washington stop its out-of-control spending now, not some time in the future,” Rep. Tim Huelskamp (R-Kan.) said.

The legislation imposes severe spending cuts on domestic programs and foreign aid. Targets include schools, nutrition programs, environmental protection, and heating and housing subsidies for the poor.

The measure faces a rough ride in the Democratic-controlled Senate. That was the case even before late GOP amendments pushed the bill further to the right on health care and environmental policy.

Senate Democrats are promising higher spending levels and are poised to defend President Obama’s health-care bill, environmental policies and efforts to overhaul financial services industry regulations.

Changes rammed through the House on Friday and Saturday would shield greenhouse-gas polluters and privately owned colleges from federal regulators; block a plan to clean up the Chesapeake Bay, and bar the government from shutting down mountaintop mines it says cause too much water pollution.

In almost every case, the measure sides with business groups over environmental activists and federal regulators.

“This is like a Cliff Notes summary of every issue that the Republicans, the Chamber of Commerce, and

the [free market]CATO Institute have pushed for 30 years,” said Rep. Edward Markey (D-Mass.) “And they’re just going to run them through here.”

Treasury Secretary Timothy Geithner, attending a meeting of finance ministers and central bankers in Paris, expressed hope that over the long term, Democrats and Republicans would find a way to cut spending and reduce long-term deficits.

But he said the House-passed measure “would undermine and damage our capacity to create jobs and expand the economy.”

Wide differences that don’t seem likely to be bridged soon will mean that lawmakers face the prospect of a temporary spending bill when the current one expires March 4.

Senate Democrats and House Speaker John Boehner (R-Ohio) are maneuvering for political advantage in anticipation of talks on a short-term extension.

Democrats say Boehner’s insistence that any measure carry spending cuts amounts to an ultimatum that could threaten a government shutdown. Such an impasse played to the advantage of Democratic President Bill Clinton in his battles with Republicans in 1995-1996.

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