

## House passes sweeping cuts to domestic programs

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WASHINGTON (AP) — Jolted to action by deficit-conscious newcomers, the Republican-controlled House passed sweeping legislation early Saturday to cut \$61 billion from hundreds of federal programs and shelter coal companies, oil refiners and farmers from new government regulations.

The 235-189 vote to send the bill to the Senate was largely along party lines and defied a veto threat from President Barack Obama. It marked the most striking victory to date for the 87-member class of freshmen 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," declared freshman Rep. Tim Huelskamp, R-Kan.

The \$1.2 trillion bill covers every Cabinet agency through the Sept. 30 end of the budget year, imposing severe spending cuts aimed at domestic programs and foreign aid, including aid for schools, nutrition programs, environmental protection, and heating and housing subsidies for the poor.

The measure faces a rough ride in the Democratic-controlled Senate, even before the GOP amendments adopted Thursday, Friday and early Saturday morning pushed the bill further and further to the right on health care and environmental policy. Senate Democrats promise higher spending levels and are poised to defend Obama's health care bill, environmental policies and new efforts to overhaul regulation of the financial services industry.

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 believes will cause too much water pollution, siding with business groups over environmental activists and federal regulators in almost every instance.

"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."

The gulf between the combatants ensures that difference on the measure won't be resolved soon, requiring a temporary spending bill when a current stopgap measure expires March 4. Senate Democrats and House Speaker John Boehner, R-Ohio, are already maneuvering for political advantage in anticipation of talks on a short-term extension that will be needed.

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

The Obama administration upped the ante on Friday, warning that workers who distribute Social Security benefits might be furloughed if the GOP cuts go through.

Across four long days of freewheeling debate, Republicans left their conservative stamp in other ways.

They took several swipes at the year-old health care law, including voting for a ban on federal funding for its implementation. At the behest of anti-abortion lawmakers, they called for an end to federal funding for Planned Parenthood.

Republicans awarded the Pentagon an increase of less than 2 percent increase, but domestic agencies would bear slashing cuts of about 12 percent. Such reductions would feel almost twice as deep since they would be spread over the final seven months of the budget year.

Republicans recoiled, however, from some of the most politically difficult cuts to grants to local police and fire departments, special education and economic development. Amtrak supporters easily repelled an attempt to slash its budget.

About the only victory scored by Obama during the week came on a vote Wednesday to cancel \$450 million for a costly alternative engine for the Pentagon's next-generation F-35 warplane. It was a top priority of Defense Secretary Robert Gates and passed with the votes of many GOP conservatives who opposed the \$3 billion program, more than half of the 87 Republican freshmen elected last fall on promises to cut the budget.

Democrats overwhelmingly oppose the measure and Obama has threatened a veto if it reaches his desk, citing sweeping cuts that he says would endanger the economic recovery.

"The bill will destroy 800,000 American jobs," said House Democratic Leader Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif., citing a study by the left-leaning Economic Policy Institute. "It will increase class sizes and take teachers out of the classrooms ... It will jeopardize homeless veterans, make our communities less secure, threaten America's innovation."

The Environmental Protection Agency was singled out by Republicans eager to defend business and industry from numerous agency regulations they say threaten job-creation and the economy. The EPA's budget was slashed by almost one-third, and then its regulatory powers were handcuffed in a series of floor votes.

Proposed federal regulations would be blocked on emission of greenhouse gases, blamed for climate change, and a proposed regulation on mercury emissions from cement kilns

would also be stopped. Additionally, the bill also calls for a halt to proposed regulations affecting Internet service providers and privately-owned colleges, universities for the industries that would be affected.

The 359-page bill was shaped beginning to end by the first-term Republicans, many of them elected with tea party backing.

They rejected an initial draft advanced by the leadership and produced by Rep. Hal Rogers, R-Ky., chairman of the Appropriations Committee, saying it did not cut deeply enough.

The revised bill added more reductions, and cut \$100 billion from Obama's request for the current year, the amount Republicans had cited in their campaign-season Pledge to America.

But a tea party-backed amendment to slash \$22 billion on top of the \$60-billion-plus worth of steep cuts already made by the measure failed on Friday almost 2-1.

The heavily subsidized ethanol industry absorbed a pair of defeats Saturday at the hands of its many critics, including Rep. John Sullivan, R-Ohio, who won a vote to block the EPA from approving boosting the amount of ethanol in most gasoline to 15 percent.

On other regulatory issues, foes of the EPA won a 249-176 vote to block the agency from using its regulatory powers to curb greenhouse gases. EPA has already taken steps to regulate global warming pollution from vehicles and the largest factories and industrial plants and is expected to soon roll out rules that target refineries and power plants.

The move to stop the EPA from regulating greenhouse-gas polluters came from Rep. Ted Poe, R-Texas, who said his congressional district is home to more oil refineries than any other.

"We're in the midst of a massive economic downturn and the last thing we need to do is shoot ourselves in the foot with unnecessary, expensive new regulations that are on business and industry," he said.

Republicans also prevailed in more parochial issues, with Rep. Tom McClintock, R-Calif., winning a close vote to block the government from removing hydroelectric dams on the Klamath River, while Robert Goodlatte, R-Va., won a 230-195 vote to block an EPA plan for cleaning up the Chesapeake Bay that would cut pollution from runoff from farms and municipalities throughout the Chesapeake watershed.

And Florida agricultural interests won a vote to block EPA rules issued last year aimed at controlling fertilizer and other pollutants that stoke the spread of algae in the state's waters.

On Thursday, the House voted to block regulations governing the emission of mercury from cement plants and to stop the Federal Communications Commission from enforcing proposed regulations opposed by Verizon and other large Internet Service Providers.

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