

# The Washington Post

## President Obama seeks new version of line-item veto

Washington Post Staff Writer

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As part of what the White House called a campaign to crack down on wasteful government spending, President Obama on Monday asked Congress to grant him new powers to slice lawmakers' pet projects from congressionally approved spending bills.

Under the proposal, Obama and future presidents would have 45 days to comb legislation for pork-barrel projects they deem unnecessary and send a list of rescissions to Capitol Hill. Congress would then have 25 days to approve the entire list or reject it without changes.

The proposal is a variation on the line-item veto, which was approved by a Republican Congress in 1996 and used by then-president Bill Clinton to slice more than \$2 billion from spending bills before being ruled unconstitutional in 1998. White House budget director Peter Orszag said the new proposal would pass legal muster because, unlike the line-item veto, which "gave the knife to the president," Congress would retain ultimate control over the budget scalpel.

While Congress has traditionally been unwilling to share its constitutional powers over the nation's purse strings, a bipartisan group of lawmakers has been trying to revive the idea. Granting Obama's request could

send a message to skeptical voters that Democrats are serious about cutting record deficits, supporters said. Sen. Russ Feingold (D-Wis.) is scheduled to chair a hearing on the issue Wednesday.

Still, reaction among congressional leaders to Obama's proposal was tepid. House Budget Chairman John M. Spratt (D-S.C.), a longtime advocate of expanding presidential rescission powers, was among the few prominent Democrats to endorse the plan; Spratt announced that he would introduce it as a House bill.

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.) and Senate Majority Leader Harry M. Reid (D-Nev.) were noncommittal, with Pelosi saying in a statement that she looks "forward to reviewing" the proposal. A senior Democratic aide in the Senate called the plan's chances of passage "bleak."

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Republicans, meanwhile, mocked the idea as "a day late and a trillion dollars short," in the words of Rep. Tom Price (R-Ga.), chairman of the Republican Study Committee, who noted that the overall national debt is approaching \$13 trillion. Meanwhile, Democratic leaders in both chambers plan to ask lawmakers this week to approve two spending bills that would charge about \$200 billion more to the federal credit card. On Tuesday, Obama will travel to the Capitol to seek support from Senate Republicans for one of the measures, a \$58.8 billion package to help finance the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Some outside analysts were equally dismissive of Obama's rescission proposal. "A lot of people want to believe our looming budgetary crisis is caused by bridges to nowhere" and other pork barrel projects, said Cato Institute vice president Gene Healy. "But it's not true. That sort of thing is a rounding error" compared with defense spending and entitlement programs, he said.

To that list, others would add Obama's tax policies: A new report scheduled to be released Tuesday by the Pew Economic Policy Group found that Obama's plan to extend a series of middle-class tax cuts would add \$2.3 trillion to the national debt over the next 10 years -- saving only about \$800 billion compared with a GOP plan to extend the cuts for high-earners as well.

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