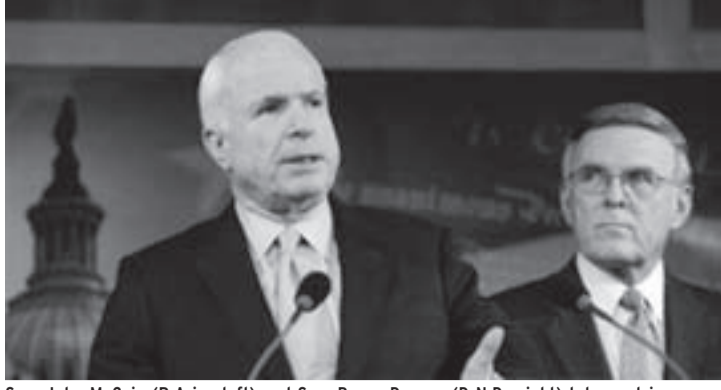


Congress passes stopgap bill to avoid shutdown

WASHINGTON—With a \$410 billion catch-all spending bill stalled in the Senate and a midnight deadline looming, Congress rushed through stopgap legislation Friday to keep the government running for another five days. The House passed the bill by a 328-50 vote; the Senate acted by unanimous voice vote. President Barack Obama will sign the measure later Friday.

The stopgap measure was needed because on Thursday, March 5, Senate Republicans unexpectedly put the brakes on the sweeping measure. The so-called omnibus bill would award domestic agencies with big spending increases and it also contains about 8,000 pet projects sought by lawmakers.

“Spending as usual with thousands upon thousands of earmarks and special projects is



Sen. John McCain (R-Ariz., left) and Sen. Byron Dorgan (D-N.D., right) take part in a news conference on Capitol Hill in Washington, Tuesday, March 3, 2009. AP Photo by Susan Walsh

temporary law that keeps the government in business, mostly at 2008 spending levels, expires.

If the larger spending bill ends up being amended by the Senate, the House would again have to act on that bill, giving Republicans more chances to launch political attacks.

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif., privately threatened to abandon the bill altogether Thursday night, infuriated that GOP leaders were stalling it even though they helped craft it and have a big stake in its passage, according to a Democratic leadership aide. The aide demanded anonymity to speak frankly about a private meeting.

Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., who has numerous earmarks for Kentucky in the bill and benefits from an increased staff allowance for Republicans, had previously praised the measure before turning against it in the wake of Obama's costly economic stimulus bill.

Senate Democratic leaders

prevailed upon Pelosi to stick with the measure for now. Letting it die would deny large spending increases for some of Democrats' favorite programs, such as food aid for children and pregnant women, in addition to billions of dollars for lawmakers' pet projects.

Amid the debate over spending, the government delivered more bad economic news on Friday—a spike in unemployment to 8.1 percent. That prompted the top House Republican to call for a freeze on spending until the end of the fiscal year and plead with Obama to veto the Senate measure. (AP)

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not what the American people expect from this Congress during these difficult times,” said Rep. Mike Pence, R-Ind.

With most Republicans denouncing the bill as too costly and a few Democrats opposing it as well, Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid, D-Nev., called off a key procedural vote—just one vote short of the 60 needed to send the measure to the White House.

Several Republicans who support the bill withheld their

support of the procedural vote to force Reid to let other Republicans offer amendments, including ones to extend a local school voucher program in Washington, DC, and to require lawmakers to approve their pay hikes instead of getting automatic cost-of-living raises every year.

With the vote postponed, both the House and Senate had to pass the stopgap spending measure by March 6 to prevent a shutdown of most domestic agencies. Midnight is when a



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11,000 Pinoy veterans applied for \$9,000 lump sum benefit from US

PAGE A1 ◀

veterans at 20,000, with 13,000 of them based in the Philippines.

The Philippine Veterans Affairs Office (PVAO) had established Fast Track Centers upon the instruction of President Arroyo to spare the veterans, many of whom are old and weak and already in their 80s, from the “physical torture and cost” of going to Manila.

Cabral said her agency provided the Fast Track Centers with wheelchairs and one set of crutches, as well as tents, folding beds, chairs and tables and assorted biscuits and bottled water for the veterans.

The Fast Track Centers are located in San Fernando, La Union; Tuguegarao; as well as in the cities of San Fernando, Pampanga; Batangas; Legazpi; Iloilo; Cebu; Tacloban; Zamboanga; Davao; Cagayan de Oro and Baguio.

US President Barack Obama had approved a \$198 million compensation package for Filipino World War II veterans.

More than 250,000 Filipinos served alongside US soldiers to defend the Philippines from the 1941 Japanese invasion and resist the subsequent Japanese occupation. ■

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