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House Rebukes G.O.P. Leaders Over Spending

By ROBERT PEAR and JENNIFER STEINHAUER

WASHINGTON — House Republican leaders suffered a surprising setback on Wednesday when the House rejected their version of a stopgap spending bill, leaving unclear how Congress will provide money to keep the government open after Sept. 30 and aid victims of a string of costly recent natural disasters.

The 230-to-195 vote came after fiscally conservative Republicans joined an overwhelming majority of Democrats in opposing the legislation. As it became clear that the bill was going down, a number of Republicans changed their votes from yes to no.

The unexpected outcome illustrated how the intense fiscal fights of recent months had transformed the politics of disaster relief, which in the past has typically been rushed out of Congress with strong backing from both parties. Democrats remained nearly united against the measure because they saw the amount of disaster assistance — \$3.65 billion — as inadequate, and they objected to the Republicans' insistence on offsetting some of the cost with cuts elsewhere.

The vote also showed the Republican leadership's continuing struggle to corral the most conservative members of the caucus, as more than 40 Republicans rejected the measure because they did not

believe it cut spending enough.

The setback on a bill that only a week ago seemed headed for easy passage came just hours after Representative Eric Cantor, the Virginia Republican and majority leader, joined other top Republicans in predicting that the House would pass it.

The result could give new power to Senate Democrats to shape the legislation, which would finance government operations from the start of the fiscal year on Oct. 1 until Nov. 18. The Senate last week passed — with support from 10 Republicans — a bill that would provide nearly twice as much money as the House for assistance to victims of floods, hurricanes, wildfires and tornadoes.

What was also clear is that a mild charm offensive, led for two weeks by House Republican leaders eager to tamp down rancor on Capitol Hill, was no match for the deep philosophical differences between the parties.

The House vote sent Republicans scrambling for another approach to passing a bill to keep the government open. House and Senate leaders hope to settle the matter this week since Congress is not scheduled to be in session next week.

With so many conservatives balking at the House bill, Republican leaders said they needed support from Democrats to pass it. But few Democrats were willing to assist the Republican leadership after this summer's standoff over raising the federal [debt limit](#).

In the end, 6 Democrats joined 189 Republicans in voting for the bill, while 48 Republicans crossed the aisle to vote against the bill, which was also opposed by 182 Democrats.

Democrats objected to a provision that would finance disaster aid by taking money from a loan program that encourages production of energy-efficient cars. Democrats said this program had helped create 40,000 jobs and could yield many more.

Having failed to pass any of the 12 regular annual spending bills, Congress needs to approve some type

of temporary legislation to continue government operations beyond Oct. 1. Congress is considering whether to pass a giant omnibus spending bill to finance federal agencies for the remainder of the fiscal year after Nov. 18.

Both parties said they were determined to avoid a government shutdown on Oct. 1. But it is unclear how they will resolve their differences.

Senator Charles E. Schumer of New York, the No. 3 Senate Democrat, said after the vote that House Republicans should take up and pass the Senate's disaster relief bill, providing more money with no offsets. "The only thing left for them to do is to treat the disaster victims fairly," he said.

The message from the more conservative wing of the House is that there should be more spending cuts in the bill than offered. But to cut more could violate the spending agreement with Democrats devised as part of the recent debt-ceiling agreement, and the Senate would be unlikely to vote for a new bill with more cuts, setting the stage for an impasse.

If House Republican leaders try to pick up Republican votes with deeper cuts in spending, Mr. Schumer said, "it will not get anywhere, and they will risk shutting the government down."

The House bill would have provided \$3.65 billion for disaster assistance and would have offset \$1 billion of the cost by cutting the auto technology program. The Senate-passed bill would provide \$6.9 billion, none of it offset by cuts elsewhere in the budget.

Senate Democratic leaders said that the House sum was wholly inadequate, and that Congress should not have to offset the costs.

"We are not going to cave in on this, because it's a matter of principle," said the Senate majority leader, Harry Reid, Democrat of Nevada.

Democrats and Republicans agree that such assistance is one of the government's main responsibilities, but disagree over how much of the cost can be anticipated and how much, if any,

should be offset.

Mr. Cantor said Congress would eventually provide all the money that was needed. But, he said, Republicans are determined to be “prudent shepherds of taxpayer dollars.”

Representative Rob Woodall, Republican of Georgia, said Democrats were trying to blow past spending limits set in the debt-ceiling law signed last month by President Obama.

Representative Bill Pascrell Jr., Democrat of New Jersey, denounced the Republicans’ determination to offset some of the cost of disaster relief.

“This is an absolute disgrace,” Mr. Pascrell said. “We are all Americans. We need to help our brothers and sisters who are hurting right now.”

The House and Senate bills would replenish the disaster relief fund of the Federal Emergency Management Agency, which is running out of money.

Representative John B. Larson of Connecticut, the chairman of the House Democratic Caucus, said, “Storm victims are being held hostage to the conservative ideology” of Republican lawmakers.

Representative Robert B. Aderholt, Republican of Alabama and an architect of the House bill, said, “While Congress has an undeniable obligation to thoroughly address our nation’s disaster relief needs, we can no longer afford to simply throw money at calamities and then ask the hard questions later.”

The House Democratic leader, Nancy Pelosi of California, said it was rather late to start insisting on offsets to pay for disaster relief. “We never paid for tax cuts for the rich,” Ms. Pelosi said. “We never paid for the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq.”

But the chairman of the House Appropriations Committee, Representative Harold Rogers, Republican of Kentucky, said that offsets to pay for emergency spending were nothing new. They have been used in half of 30 emergency spending bills passed in the last 10 years, he said.



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