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# Senate Is Set to Extend Aid to the Jobless

By CARL HULSE

WASHINGTON — Senate Democrats are poised to break a partisan stalemate on Tuesday over extending unemployment benefits for millions of Americans who have been jobless for six months or more, but the fight seems certain to continue playing out as a defining issue in the midterm elections.

One day before a crucial procedural vote to provide added unemployment assistance through November, [President Obama](#) appeared in the Rose Garden on Monday with three out-of-work Americans to hammer Republicans for blocking the extension until now by insisting, over Democratic objections, that the \$34 billion costs of the benefits not be added to the deficit.

“The same people who didn’t have any problem spending hundreds of billions of dollars on tax breaks for the wealthiest Americans are now saying we shouldn’t offer relief to middle-class Americans,” Mr. Obama said.

Democrats have been one vote short of pushing the measure through the Senate. But on Tuesday, a new Democratic senator from West Virginia will be sworn in to succeed [Robert C. Byrd](#), who died last month, putting Democrats in position to overcome the Republican blocking tactic and bring the bill to a final vote.

As a political matter, the issue has appeal to both parties, especially in an election year in which each

party needs first to motivate its own base.

For Republicans, it provides a concrete vehicle for pushing the argument that the government's response to the [recession](#) has been wasteful and ineffective, that the growing national debt requires deep spending cuts and that Mr. Obama is guilty of ideological overreach.

For Democrats, it is an opportunity to accuse Republicans of being obstructionist and out of touch with the pain caused by an economic downturn that began on the Republicans' watch.

Mr. Obama's tough attack on Monday signaled the White House's confidence that it has the upper hand, legislatively and politically. Recent public opinion polls show that a majority of Americans favor giving the long-term unemployed more financial help even if it adds to the deficit.

"To govern is to choose, and this is a clear choice: You either support extending benefits for people who are out of work or you don't," said [Rahm Emanuel](#), the White House chief of staff. "There are obvious political ramifications to that difference."

With many voters expressing growing alarm at the mounting national debt, Republicans say that standing against an unemployment extension that would add to the deficit could energize their voters and help them regain some of the reputation for fiscal responsibility they have lost in recent years. They also accused the White House of misleading the public about the Republican position on added jobless pay.

"The president knows that Republicans support extending unemployment insurance, and doing it in a fiscally responsible way by cutting spending elsewhere in the \$3 trillion [federal budget](#),"

Representative [John A. Boehner](#) of Ohio, the House Republican leader, said in a statement Monday.

"At a time of record debt and deficits made worse by Washington Democrats' massive spending spree, that's the right thing to do and the right way to do it."

The additional money for those who have exhausted their standard 26 weeks of jobless pay has been tied up since the beginning of June but had become a growing point of contention since February when

Senator **Jim Bunning**, Republican of Kentucky, initiated a one-man **filibuster** against a temporary extension of the safety-net spending.

While Republicans eventually relented and allowed an additional month of unemployment compensation, the party began to coalesce around the position that further extensions should be paid for with offsetting cuts in other spending, leading to the current stalemate.

Most Democrats contend that deficit spending is acceptable — even, in economic terms, necessary — to help not only the jobless but also the economy as a whole. Their argument is that unemployed workers will spend all or nearly all of their benefits on goods and services that help support other jobs.

“At what point do we pivot and start being concerned about our children and our grandchildren?” Senator **Mitch McConnell** of Kentucky, the Republican leader, said Sunday on CNN. “There is no way in the world on a trillion-dollar budget this year we can’t find the money to pay for an extension of unemployment insurance, something we’re in favor of.”

Besides the support of Carte Goodwin, the West Virginian to be sworn in Tuesday to succeed Mr. Byrd, Democrats are counting on the votes of Senators **Susan Collins** and **Olympia J. Snowe**, the two Maine Republicans, to reach the minimum 60 votes needed to overcome the threat of a Republican filibuster.

To ease objections, Democrats have scaled back the unemployment proposal, which originally was to extend through December and included billions of dollars in health insurance subsidies for the unemployed.

In a floor speech Monday, Senator **Harry Reid**, the Nevada Democrat and majority leader, chastised Republicans for blocking the added unemployment benefits, noting that Republicans had voted before to treat the assistance as emergency spending that could be added to the deficit.

He also accused Republicans of being callous to the unemployed, noting that some Senate Republicans — as well as Senate candidates — have suggested that the added unemployment pay amounts to

welfare and is discouraging people from taking jobs when they can rely on the government.

“Many of my constituents take offense at these absurd allegations, and they’ve let me know about it,”

Mr. Reid said. “They’ve written or called me or pulled me aside when I see them in Nevada.”

If the Senate is successful in approving the extension, the House will have to vote on the measure before it is sent to the president, but Democrats have sufficient votes there.

The potential impact on Congressional races was evident Monday.

In one case, the Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee issued a statement noting that [Dan Coats](#), the Republican Senate candidate in Indiana, had backed Republican efforts to block the jobless pay unless it was offset with cuts elsewhere.

“Due to Republican obstructionism, over 48,000 unemployed Hoosiers have already lost their unemployment benefits,” the Democratic statement said.

Republicans fired back, criticizing Representative Brad Ellsworth, the Democratic Senate candidate, for his support of deficit spending on unemployment pay.

“Instead of making the tough economic decisions that every Indiana family and small business face each day, Brad Ellsworth has been sitting in Washington maxing out the government credit card and doing nothing to get more Hoosiers back to work,” said Brian Walsh, a spokesman for the National Republican Senatorial Committee.

*Helene Cooper contributed reporting.*



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