

Washington

Congress works overtime

Government paychecks stop without bill

WASHINGTON — The House and Senate worked through a deadline early Wednesday to pass an emergency funding bill that would permit the government to pay its workers during the fiscal year that began at midnight.

The House overwhelmingly approved the stop-gap legislation by a 292-100 vote an hour past midnight and sent it on to the Senate for approval.

But a possible filibuster in the Senate threatened more delays.

Although the government technically had run out of money at midnight, Congress had failed to approve permanent funding bills for the business year, most government operations were expected to continue while Congress and the president acted on the emergency measure.

President Carter said Tuesday night at a Democratic National Committee fundraiser, "Unless the continuing resolution passes this evening, the government comes to a screeching halt and all salaries stop." He stressed, "We've got to have this bill."

Because Congress delayed passing the necessary spending bills earlier this session, it was forced to draw up an emergency bill to keep the government functioning during the new fiscal year until permanent legislation can be enacted in a post-election session.

The bill got bogged down in a debate over federal abortion funds, an argument Congress has fought for the past 10 years.

Shortly before midnight the conference members finally agreed to continue current abortion guidelines that allow victims of rape and incest,

in addition to those women whose lives are at stake, to receive federal financial assistance. Individual states would be allowed to set their own minimum guidelines for abortion funding.

The House, which had wanted to drop assistance for rape and incest victims, agreed to the compromise if the victims reported the crimes within 48 hours compared to the current 60-day requirement.

Unhappy about the House's hard-line position, Sen. Ted Stevens, R-Alaska, promptly threatened to block Senate passage of the bill. "I didn't come to the Senate to be bossed by the House," he said.

The Senate had hoped to adjourn Wednesday and the House on today to allow members to campaign for re-election.

A Justice Department opinion handed down earlier this year forbids government employees of an agency that has run out of funds to report to work unless their jobs involve the protection of life or property or if they are needed to wind down the agency's operations.

Under the guise of the "winding down" loophole, the Office of Management and Budget urged federal employees to report to work Wednesday regardless of congressional action on the emergency funding.

Social Security checks, funded by a trust fund exempt from the congressional appropriations process, have already been mailed out for October, so there is no danger such benefits will be delayed.

Bill expands farmers' crop insurance

WASHINGTON — As President Carter signed into law a bill to expand federal crop insurance, Agriculture Secretary Bob Bergland announced the program would be expanded into 250 counties a year during the next five years.

One problem with the existing crop insurance program is that after 42 years it is available in only about half of the nation's counties because of slow expansion.

Carter signed the bill on Tuesday, culminating three years of negotiations to get the bill through Congress.

Bergland announced a "systematic expansion program at the rate of an additional 250 counties a year for the next five years in order to permit rapid but orderly extension of insurance coverage to farmers."

The program eventually will cover all major crops, all risks and all counties.

In 1982, it will replace the federal disaster program, which in essence gives farmers insurance with no premiums, but is limited to feed grains, wheat, cotton and rice.

In a statement, Bergland said, "I have long advocated a sound, actuarially based insurance program as preferable to the many ad hoc programs now assisting our farm producers."

He said the "programs deliver too little money to too few farmers and usually too late to be of maximum benefit."

For 1981, farmers will have to pay full federal crop insurance premiums if they elect to continue to be eligible for disaster payments, Bergland said.

In letters to be sent out shortly after planting of 1981 crops, farmers will be told about the alternative choice of federal crop insurance, under which they will receive a federal subsidy of 30 percent of premiums for coverage up to 65 percent of crop yield.

Farmers may elect to have federal insurance coverage of 50 percent, 65 percent or 75 percent of average yield.

Part of the long negotiation that preceded enactment of the new law involved meeting objections of private insurers.

Farmers will be able to buy federal crop insurance from government agents or private firms and will be able to buy part of their insurance from the government and part from private companies.

Private companies traditionally offer fire and hail insurance. Under the law, the federal government would be authorized to reinsure private insurance if private companies decided to offer all-risk crop insurance.

Some opponents of the expanded

program said it would be a mistake to expand the power and authority of the Federal Crop Insurance Corp.,

when it was under the cloud of a recent sex and personnel scandal. The Agriculture Department has

recommended firing four top officials, who were accused of sending out-of-favor employees to a Kansas City, Mo., office with nothing to do and of having sex with female employees.

United Press International

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