

Congress' 4-month budget delay leaves several bills at a standstill

By Jim Abrams
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

WASHINGTON (AP) — This winter's harsh flu outbreak is passing without the \$50 million lawmakers promised for expanding future vaccine production. Millions of federal workers are seeing slimmer than expected paychecks. Initiatives for fighting global AIDS, wildfires and terrorism have been threatened.

The reason: Congress is nearly four months late in finishing the government's budget.

Most federal agencies are still operating at 2003 spending levels, depriving them of about \$6 billion in increases slated under the 2004 spending plan. That's not a lot when \$373 billion is at stake, but it has put some projects on hold or in doubt.

On the first day of the new congressional session Tuesday, the Senate again failed to overcome Democratic-led resistance to the package combining seven still-unfinished spending bills — out of the 13 Congress must pass for the fiscal year starting last Oct. 1.

But at the same time, they said they would not try to delay it any more beyond next week after Republicans and the White House threatened to hold the 2003 spending levels in effect through September.

"The consequences of delay on this bill are real and the dangers are great," Senate Appropriations Committee Chairman Ted Stevens, R-Alaska, said last month in a futile attempt to end Democratic opposition.

Repercussions are already hitting close to home. Without a new budget, civil servants have received only a 2 percent pay raise this year rather than the 4.1 percent in the legislation. Since Jan. 1, members of Congress have received a 1.5 percent increase over their \$154,700 salaries of 2003, rather than the 2.2 percent boost they'll get once the Senate sends the last piece of the budget to the White House and President Bush signs it.

As for the flu, the spending bill would set aside \$50 million to diversify the manufacturing base for vaccines — too late for the current flu season when vaccines were sometimes scarce but a possible help for fighting future outbreaks.

Veterans Affairs Secretary Anthony Principi said it "would be absolutely disastrous" if VA health care programs don't get their \$3.1 billion increase, to \$28.6 billion, under the 2004 bill.

He said doctors at VA hospitals already are leaving at a rate of 1 percent a month and his department is having a hard time replacing them. Until the increase comes, veterans already waiting months for an appointment are at risk of facing longer delays as well as slower responses to their disability claims.

It will even be harder to find space in VA cemeteries at a time when 1,800 veterans are dying every day, he said.

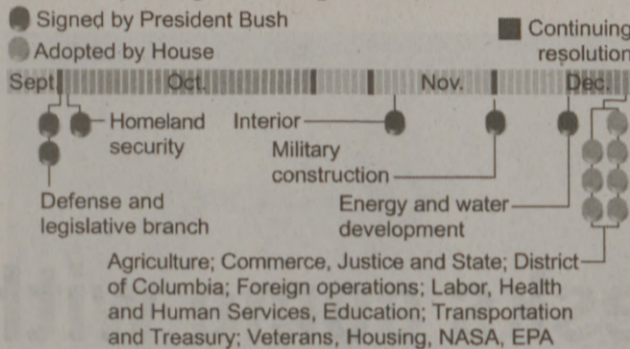
Many agencies manage to make do by shifting money and priorities. Stevens warned that the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention could be deprived of money needed to combat emerging infectious diseases such as SARS and monkeypox, but CDC officials gave assurances that their work in these areas is not being impeded because of the budget fights.

In some instances exceptions are made to the 2003 budget ceilings. Labor Secretary Elaine Chao said \$50 million promised to

Impasse stalls seven spending bills

Senate Democrats have stopped a measure on seven spending bills that finance most federal agencies. Five continuing resolutions have extended the bills beyond the start of the budget year, effectively blocking civil servant pay raises and new programs.

Status of spending bills through Dec. 9, 2003



SOURCE: Congressional Quarterly

AP

the states in 2004 to retrain workers displaced by foreign trade competition would go out as scheduled.

C. Todd Jones, associate deputy secretary for the budget in the Education Department, said money for special education and disadvantaged students typically doesn't go out until July 1, so there has been little impact so far from Congress' inaction even though both programs will get big increases once the last budget piece is in place.

Among other consequences should the stalemate continue:

—The Food and Drug Administration says it would lose \$30 million from a proposed \$250 million prescription drug user fee program, requiring it to delay new hiring and other initiatives. A new fee program for renewing animal drugs would be postponed, and \$42 million for a new FDA building would not be available.

—Senate Majority Leader Bill Frist, R-Tenn., said the Agriculture Department's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service would miss out on \$80 million in new funding to address food safety concerns such as mad cow disease. The department had no comment.

—The FBI could lose out on hundreds of millions of dollars directed to hiring new agents and fighting terrorism.

—An extra \$1 billion to help states modernize voting equipment before the 2004 elections wouldn't be available.

—The first year of President Bush's five-year, \$15 billion plan to combat global AIDS would be underfunded by about \$1 billion.

—\$1 billion for the new Millennium Challenge Account, the president's initiative to direct aid to those countries promoting democracy and economic reforms, would be put on hold.

—AmeriCorps would have to delay enrolling tens of thousands of new volunteers, thwarting Bush's goal of reaching 75,000.

—Poorer families might have to wait longer for Section 8 rent subsidy vouchers.

NEWS IN BRIEF

Former governor faces 11-year prison sentence

SIoux FALLS, S.D. (AP) — Former Rep. Bill Janklow faces sentencing on manslaughter charges Thursday for an auto wreck that ended his 30-year political career and could send him to prison for more than 11 years.

Janklow, 64, a four-term Republican governor whose resignation from Congress took effect Tuesday, was found guilty Dec. 8 of speeding, running a stop sign, reckless driving and second-

degree manslaughter in the Aug. 16 death of 55-year-old motorcyclist Randy Scott at a rural intersection near the congressman's hometown of Flandreau.

Judge Rodney Steele can impose a sentence of anything from no jail time and no fines to a total of 11 years and two months behind bars and \$11,400 in fines.

An Associated Press review of South Dakota court records shows that most people convicted of second-degree manslaughter get at least some time behind bars.

The review found that 40 people have

been found guilty of second-degree manslaughter since 1989, and 32 of them were sent to prison or jail. The average jail term was six months; the average prison term nearly seven years. About half of the convictions involved traffic accidents.

Janklow was state attorney general and, later, governor on and off beginning in the 1970s, before being elected in 2002 to South Dakota's lone House seat. The seat will remain open until a June 1 election.

The motorcyclist's family is suing the former politician for unspecified damages.

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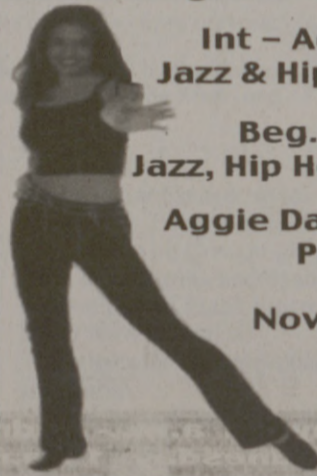
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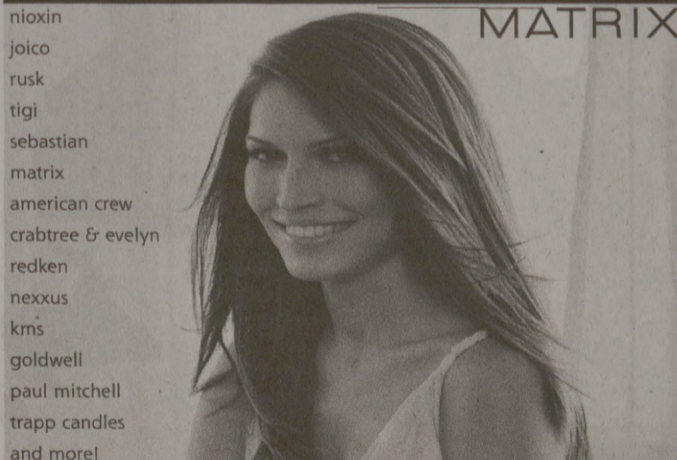
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