

September 23, 2011 - by Donny Shaw

As expected, the Senate this afternoon voted to table (i.e. kill) the House's stopgap funding bill by a vote of 59-36. The disagreement is over a provision that would partially offset funding for the FEMA disaster relief fund, which is running dry due to all of the natural disasters we've experienced over the summer. Senate Democrats and some Republicans argue that approving disaster-relief offsets would set a bad precedent that could delay Congress from getting aid to victims of future disasters. Without the bill, FEMA will run out of funds as early as Tuesday and the entire federal government will shut down on Friday at midnight.

As of right now, the plan is for Democratic and Republican congressional leaders to negotiate through the weekend and for the Senate to come back on Monday to vote on a Reid amendment to the House bill that would eliminate the disaster fund offsets. The Reid amendment is likely to pass because just last week the Senate

voted 62-37 in favor of a stand-alone disaster fund bill with no offsets. If the Reid amendment passes, the House, which is scheduled to be on recess, will likely be called back to Washington to hold a vote on the bill as amended by the Reid amendment.

It's unclear how that vote would go down, or if Speaker Boehner would even agree to hold it. We're in the position we're in right now because of a purely ideological standoff. The disagreement is over an amount equal to about 1/10,000th of the entire spending in the bill.

This is not about substance. If Boehner brings the Reid amendment to the House floor and lets it pass with mainly Democratic votes, it will be a big political loss from his perspective. And yet it seems unlikely that Boehner could twist enough arms over the weekend to get a significant chunk of his caucus to support getting rid of the offsets.

According to a [senior House Republican aide](#), "There is no other option than for the Senate to pass our bill. That's it. That's all. There is no next step." The problem: only 36 senators support that bill.

