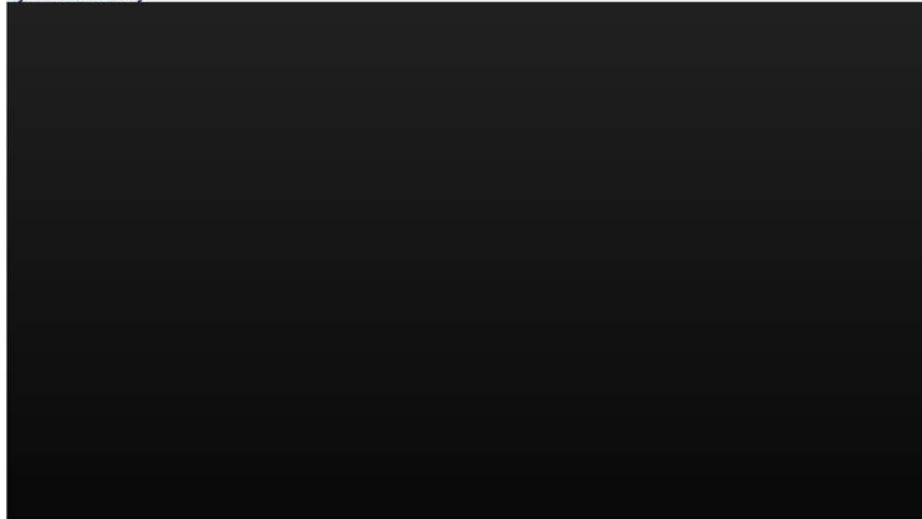




February 25, 2015, 03:20 pm

Breaking stalemate, Senate votes 98-2 to debate 'clean' DHS bill

By Jordain Carney



The stalemate over funding for the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) was broken Wednesday as the Senate voted 98-2 to proceed to legislation that would prevent a partial government shutdown.

Democrats agreed to support the DHS bill after Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-Ky.) stripped out provisions inserted by the House that would reverse President Obama's executive actions on immigration.

The only votes against proceeding to the bill came from Sens. James Inhofe (R-Okla.) and Jeff Sessions (R-Ala.).

"Democrats will support getting on the House Homeland Security funding bill. In exchange, the leader will provide the only amendment, [it] will be a clean Homeland Security funding substitute," Senate Minority Leader Harry Reid (D-Nev.) said.

Democrats had blocked the bill four times before. With a shutdown of DHS set to begin on Saturday, McConnell on Tuesday agreed to split the funding and immigration fights, as Democrats have long demanded.

Reid said earlier Wednesday that the Senate could take a final vote on the DHS bill Thursday.

"We look forward to working with our Republican colleagues in the next 24 hours to get this done. All eyes now shift to the House of Representatives," Reid said.

If the Senate passes the funding bill, as expected, it would head back to the House, where its fate is unclear.

Speaker John Boehner (R-Ohio) was silent Wednesday on the "clean" funding plan and said the House would wait for the Senate to act.

"Until the Senate does something, we're in a wait-and-see mode," Boehner said.

Several conservative Republicans have criticized the "clean" plan, with many vowing they will not vote to fund agencies that would be carrying out Obama's immigration order.

McConnell said separating the two proposals would give Democrats who have previously criticized Obama's immigration action a chance to "prove they're serious."

"Many Senate Democrats led their constituents to believe they'd do something. ... We've since heard excuses for the Democrats' refusal to do so," McConnell said. "But the time for refusal has passed."

Senate Republicans plan to bring up a separate bill that would block Obama's 2014 executive action, which would provide deferred deportations and work visas to millions of illegal immigrants.

Senate Democrats have made clear they would block motions to move to debate on that proposal, put forward by Sen. Susan Collins (R-Maine), until the House and Senate both pass funding for Homeland Security.

"We're happy to debate it. We won't put procedural barriers in the way of debating it once a fully funded DHS bill is on the president's desk to be signed. That is our view," Sen. Charles Schumer (D-N.Y.), the third-ranking Senate Democrat, told

reporters Wednesday.

— *Last updated at 4:45 p.m.*

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