

U.S. government comes to a standstill

By Lori Montgomery and Paul Kane, Washington Post

The U.S. government began to shut down for the first time in 17 years early Tuesday, after a Congress bitterly divided over President Obama's signature health-care initiative failed to reach agreement to fund federal agencies.

Hours before a midnight deadline, the Republican House passed its third proposal in two weeks to fund the government for a matter of weeks. Like the previous plans, the new one sought to undermine the Affordable Care Act, this time by delaying enforcement of the "individual mandate," a cornerstone of the law that requires all Americans to obtain health insurance.

The new measure also sought to strip lawmakers and their aides of long-standing government health benefits.

The Democratic-led Senate quickly rejected that plan on a party-line vote. Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid, D-Nev., urged House Speaker John Boehner, R-Ohio, to abandon the assault on the health-care law and pass a simple bill to keep the government open. Otherwise, Reid warned, "the responsibility for this Republican government shutdown will rest squarely on his shoulders."

Boehner refused to yield. He called instead for a special committee to meet in the coming days to resolve differences between the two parties, leaving in limbo the fate of millions of federal workers and the services they provide.

Shortly before midnight, the White House budget office issued a memo instructing agencies to "execute plans for an orderly shutdown due to the absence of appropriations."

The impasse means 800,000 federal workers will be furloughed Tuesday. National parks, monuments and museums, as well as most federal offices, will close.

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