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## **Senate follows House in passing stimulus bill, ready to sign**

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Late Friday night, the U.S. Senate followed the House in passing the \$787 billion stimulus bill – which is expected to be ready for President Barack Obama to sign Monday or Tuesday. Earlier Friday, the House approved the bill in a largely party-line 246-183 vote, with seven Democrats voting against the bill and no Republicans voting for the legislation. House Agriculture Committee Chair Collin Peterson (D-MN) who voted against the original House version of the bill again voted no. He joined six other Democrats who voted against the 1,071-page package of massive spending programs and tax cuts: Gene Taylor (MS), Peter DeFazio (OR), Bobby Bright (AL), Parker Griffith (AL), Heath Shuler (NC) and Walter Minnick (ID).

The day ended with 60-38 vote for the bill in the Senate, thanks to three Republicans breaking party ranks to vote for passage: Sens. Olympia Snowe and Susan Collins, both of Maine, and Sen. Arlen Specter of Pennsylvania. The yes votes would have been the same 61 votes for the Senate's original version if Sen. Edward Kennedy (D-MA) had been able to vote, but he had returned to Florida for treatment for brain cancer.

Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid (D-NV) commented after the final Senate vote that "As more Americans lose their jobs every day and carry the heavy burden of providing for their families in our distressed economy, President Obama and Senate Democrats understand that sitting idly by is not an option. That is why we have acted urgently and responsibly to turn our economy around, put people back to work and ensure middle-class families can get ahead."

Reid said the final compromise bill, despite being trimmed by some \$50 billion from earlier House and Senate versions, still reflects the "fundamental principles for this recovery plan" and "stays faithful to our values." He also said he appreciated the vital support provided by "a handful of brave Republican senators who put the welfare of American families ahead of petty partisanship."

Reid promised that "The plan we passed tonight will strengthen our economy by creating millions of good-paying jobs here at home; deliver tax relief for 95 percent of workers; and invest in America's future by fixing our communities' roads and bridges, improving

our children's education, and making our country more energy independent." He added that "Our plan also guarantees transparency and accountability to ensure that taxpayers' money is spent wisely. It is a bold and responsible plan that rejects the failed ideas that got us into this mess and will help get our economy back on track."

Notably, President Obama failed to reach his original goal of passing the bill with an 80 vote bipartisan majority in the Senate. Despite that glitch, the passage of such massive legislation just three and a half weeks after the inauguration – meeting the Feb. 13th goal Obama had set – is seen as proof that the new Obama administration has met another Obama goal: to "hit the ground running."

The stimulus bill could go down in history as a breakthrough, introducing successes matching FDR's New Deal achievements. That judgment now depends on whether the massive package of spending programs championed by Democrats, combined with adding more Republican-favored tax cuts than Democrats wanted, is able to deliver what Obama has promised: at least 3.5 million jobs within the next eighteen months.

In blasting the bill as passed by the House, House Minority Leader John Boehner (R-OH) commented that "This bill is supposed to be about jobs, jobs, jobs, and it's turned into nothing more than spend, spend, spend." Republicans speaking in both the House and Senate attacked the bill for its massive costs, charging that each job created is likely to cost hundreds of thousands of taxpayers' dollars. Yet if the American public ends up judging the stimulus bill a success, the near-solid Republican opposition could cost the Republican party public support for many years to come.

A measure of increasingly partisan divisions within Congress is that normally, gentlemanly arrangements would have been made to account for the fact that Senator Kennedy was forced to be in Florida for medical treatments and Sen. Sherrod Brown (D-OH) was in Ohio for his mother's wake Friday and funeral Saturday. But in this case, no Republicans stepped forward and Sen. Brown was forced to make a round-trip flight to cast the 60<sup>th</sup> vote late Friday night between the wake and the funeral.

A measure of the frenzied last-moment negotiations that led to the final compromise on the 1,071 page bill is that the final version included a number of hand-written changes squeezed into the margins of the printed pages – reinforcing Republican charges that nobody had actually read the entire \$787 billion package.

For details of key provisions in the final stimulus bill, click on:  
<http://www.agri-pulse.com/uploaded/02132009SW.pdf>