

## House shrugs off Senate jobless bill

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The fate of expired unemployment benefits tied the Senate in knots for nearly four months.

The response in the House: a nonchalant shrug.

The bill's not high on the House agenda this week, and it won't be much higher when the House returns from a two-week recess at the end of the month.

(There is talk of amending the bill and sending it back to the Senate with provisions favored by Republicans — but even that seems to be on the back burner.

That leaves the package in limbo, even as Democrats threaten to make it an election year issue — a threat doing little to spur House Republicans to action.

“I don't think there is a great sense of pressure on our members,” said Rep. Tom Cole (R-Okla.), a House deputy whip. “The prevailing view in our conference is that there aren't adequate pay-fors and it's time for this program to come to an end.”

It's a striking position, given that six Senate Republicans joined Democrats on Monday to pass legislation that extends the jobless benefits for five months. The Senate pays for the extension largely by extending U.S. Customs fees and making changes to federal pension programs.

Some of those Republicans have urged House Speaker John Boehner to move on the legislation. But, for now, Boehner isn't budging, criticizing the way the Senate pays for the \$10 billion bill and saying the legislation doesn't do enough to create jobs.

“As the speaker said months ago, we are willing to look at extending emergency unemployment insurance as long as it includes provisions to help create more private-sector jobs — but, last week, Senate Democratic leaders ruled out adding any jobs measures at

all,” Michael Steel, a Boehner spokesperson said.

Republicans argue the Senate refused to add what the GOP calls job-creation measures before passing the bill on Monday, making them skeptical that Senate Democrats would now acquiesce.

“We have consistently said that any unemployment legislation must address job creation. If Harry Reid and Senate Democrats were serious about helping middle-class families, they would have passed the SKILLS Act over a year ago to close the skills gap and help those who are chronically unemployed get back to work,” said Megan Whittemore, a spokesperson for House Majority Leader Eric Cantor.

Democrats may not be able to push the bill across the finish line in the House, but they hope to at least be able to gain a campaign issue.

Senate Democrats opened the year with a focus on the jobless bill to highlight their election-year theme of reducing income inequality. If Republicans blocked the bill, Democrats would have an immediate example of GOP obstruction harming middle-class families.

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But that strategy was blunted when Nevada GOP Sen. Dean Heller came to the negotiating table and became the Republican point person on unemployment, crafting a compromise that attracted at least some support from both parties.

If Republicans allow the bill to stall in the House, Democrats are planning to dust off that playbook.

Democrats will launch their offensive on Tuesday at a press event with unemployed workers and labor groups blasting Republicans for their inaction. Democrats also are planning to reach out to editorial boards across the country.

“At every turn, we will be highlighting the stories of the unemployed to show that they’re just like you and me — they’re our friends, our neighbors — and urge House Republican leadership to allow a vote,” said Rep. Sander Levin (D-Mich.), who will lead Tuesday’s press conference.

Senate Democrats began criticizing the House even before the measure passed on Monday.

“We have bent over backwards to pass a strong bipartisan unemployment insurance bill that incorporates Republican ideas. If our bill was put up for a vote in the House, there is no question it would pass,” said Sen. Chuck Schumer (D-N.Y.). “The House needs to extend unemployment benefits to millions of Americans right now, without attaching extraneous issues that are merely an attempt to score political points.”

There are a handful of members from states with high unemployment who are urging Boehner to act.

Seven Republicans including Reps. Peter King of New York, Joe Heck of Nevada and Frank LoBiondo of New Jersey sent a letter to Boehner on Monday night, calling on the Ohio Republican to pass the Senate version, or a similar measure.

“There are people who are hurting. People who are seriously trying to find work and can’t. We’re blaming President Obama for the poor economy, but we should be helping the victims of that poor economy,” King said. “They didn’t cause it. We believe that President Obama’s policies are continuing it and we should help them out.”

“Sometimes, temporary assistance is needed for those who are looking determinedly for work but cannot find it. I would seriously consider any proposal to extend unemployment that comes to the House floor that is fully paid for,” Rep. Randy Hultgren (R-Ill.) said in a statement.

To even consider passing the bill, Republicans would want to add provisions that would require the construction of the Keystone XL pipeline or raise the hours required under Obamacare for employers to provide health care coverage. When the House passed the health care measure last week as a standalone bill, it won the backing of 18 Democrats.

That would kick the bill back to the Senate, where Democrats have resisted Keystone proposals along with any measure that might undermine Obamacare.

A senior Senate Democratic aide wouldn’t entertain specific scenarios involving Keystone or Obamacare but said, “If House Republicans have shifted to talking about how to pass UI instead of just blocking it, that’s progress.”

*Burgess Everett contributed to this report.*

