

Deal Reopens US Government, Extends Debt Limit

From VOA Learning English, this is In the News.

Late Wednesday night, the United States Congress approved a deal to end a partial government shutdown. The deal also increases the nation's debt limit. President Obama signed the bill into law shortly after midnight. The shutdown lasted 16 days and affected hundreds of thousands of federal employees. It was the first shutdown in 17 years.

However, the deal to reopen the government will only pay for operations through January 15. And it only extends the debt limit until February 7. Extending the debt limit will let the government borrow enough money to pay for programs already approved by Congress.

The Treasury Department said the limit needed to rise by October 17 so that the United States could borrow enough money to pay all its bills.

Congresswoman Ileana Ros-Lehtinen announced the results of the vote in the House of Representatives.

"On this vote the yeas are 285, the nays are 144, the motion is adopted."

The pressure had been on House Speaker John Boehner. Earlier in the day, Mr. Boehner talked about what Republicans had been seeking. He spoke to radio station WLW in his hometown of Cincinnati, Ohio.

“We have been locked in a fight over here, trying to bring government down to size, trying to do our best to stop Obamacare. We fought the good fight, we just did not win.”

The shutdown began October 1 after House Republicans linked passage of a spending bill to an effort to block the health care law.

Republicans hold the majority in the 435-member House. But the bill passed mostly with the votes of Democrats. Fewer than 90 Republicans voted for the bill. And none of their leaders came to the House floor to speak in the final debate. Democrats supported the bill after Speaker Boehner agreed to allow a vote without changing Obamacare.

Earlier the Senate passed the same bill by a vote of 81 to 18, with strong support from Democrats and Republicans.

Hours after signing the bill into law, President Obama noted “there are no winners here.”

“The last few weeks have inflicted completely, unnecessary damage on our economy. We don't know yet the full scope of the damage, but every analyst out there believes it slowed our growth. We know that families have gone without paychecks or services they depend on. We know that potential home buyers have gotten fewer mortgages and small business loans have been put on hold. We know that consumers have cut back on spending and that half of all CEOs say that the shutdown and the threat of shutdown set back their plans to hire over the next six months.”

Congress agreed to pay government workers for the time away from their jobs. But economists say some businesses affected by the shutdown will not be able to recover their losses. For example, the shutdown closed national parks. That cost nearby businesses when people canceled park visits.

As part of the deal, House and Senate leaders have appointed a joint budget committee to negotiate a compromise spending plan. The goal is to reach an agreement by December 13.

President Obama says, “We've got to get out of the habit of governing by crisis.” He says with the shutdown over, attention should now turn to long-term budget concerns and issues like passing an immigration reform bill.

And that's In the News from VOA Learning English. I'm Steve Ember.