

# House GOP Budget Plan Protects Pentagon, Cuts Social Programs

**BY ANDREW TAYLOR**  
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Moving to protect the military from a crippling wave of budget cuts next year, a key House committee voted Monday to cut instead food aid, health care and social services like Meals on Wheels.

The measure would require federal employees to contribute more to their pensions, saving taxpayers more than \$80 billion over the coming decade, while illegal immigrants would be denied tax refunds from the \$1,000 per-child tax credit. There's no companion legislation moving in the Democratic-controlled Senate, and the proposal doesn't stand a chance of making it to President Barack Obama's desk for signature.

But the vote was a symbolic swipe at Obama in an election year focused on the economy.

The cuts approved by the Republican-controlled Budget Committee total more than \$300 billion over the coming decade. The panel approved them on a party-line 21-9 vote; the full House is scheduled to vote on the measure on Thursday.

The proposed reductions in the bill are but a fraction of those called for in the broader, non-binding budget plan that passed the House in March. They are aimed less at taming trillion dollar-plus deficits than preventing the Pentagon from absorbing a 10 percent, \$55 billion automatic budget cut in January because last year's deficit "supercommittee" couldn't reach a deal.

The Obama administration and lawmakers in both parties warn the defense cuts would harm readiness and weapons procurement, and reduce troop levels.

One-fourth of the House GOP spending cuts come from programs directly benefiting the poor, such as Medicaid, food stamps, the Social



**Price**

Services Block Grant, and a child tax credit claimed by working immigrants.

Federal workers would have to contribute an additional 5 percent of their salaries toward their pensions, while people whose incomes rise after receiving coverage subsidies under the new health care law would lose some or all of their benefits.

The automatic spending cuts, known as a "sequester," would strike domestic benefit programs as well, including a 2 percentage point cut from Medicare payments to health care providers and a \$16 billion cut to farm subsidies. The GOP measure would leave those cuts in place.

The sequester required by the supercommittee's failure would abruptly wring about \$110 billion in new spending from next year's budget. But the upcoming GOP measure is more gentle in the near term, cutting deficits this year and next by less than \$20 billion — though the cuts add up to more than \$300 billion over the coming decade.

"The question is whether or not to just let the sequester occur ... or whether to be more targeted, reasonable and responsible," said Rep. Tom Price, R-Ga. "The last thing we want is those kinds of reductions in defense spending."

Some of the cuts may or not be realistic, though, despite the seal of approval of the respected Congressional Budget Office. Particularly dubious is \$22.5 billion in savings claimed by repealing new "orderly liquidation" authority awarded to the Federal Deposit Insurance Corp. to prevent the failure of large financial firms from endangering the economy. Costs would be offset by assessments on other institutions over subsequent years.

The cuts are likely just a sample of what's in store next year from Republicans if Mitt Romney wins the White House and the GOP takes back the Senate. Romney promises much tougher cuts to domestic programs and an even bigger boost in the Pentagon's budget, while the House GOP budget promises sharp cuts to Medicaid and a dramatic overhaul of Medicare for future beneficiaries.

To GOP lawmakers, steps like blocking states from gaming food stamp eligibility rules to boost benefits or trying to stop illegal immigrants from claiming tax refunds of up to \$1,000 per child are simply no-brainers. For instance, the GOP measure would more strictly enforce a requirement that most food stamp beneficiaries have assets of \$2,000 or less.

"We propose to stop fraud in the food-stamp program by ensuring that individuals are actually eligible for the taxpayer benefits they receive," said Budget Committee Chairman Paul Ryan, R-Wis. "That shouldn't be a partisan issue. That ought to be a common sense issue."

But Democrats say Republicans are unfairly targeting the poor and vulnerable. They believe that legislation to prevent the Pentagon cuts should include tax increases that strike wealthier people.

Top Budget panel Democrat Chris Van Hollen of Maryland said the food aid cuts would mean 280,000 children would lose free school lunches and 1.8 million people — out of 46 million currently covered — would lose food stamp benefits while large agricultural businesses would continue to receive lucrative subsidies. The GOP plan would carve 4 percent from projected food stamp spending over the coming decade, including repeal of a 2009 benefits boost under Obama's economic stimulus measure that currently awards an additional \$57 a month to a family of four.

# President's Vague Gay Marriage Stance Under Renewed Scrutiny

**BY JULIE PACE**  
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Barack Obama's election-year vagueness on gay marriage is coming under fresh scrutiny.

Education Secretary Arne Duncan broke ranks with the White House on Monday, stating his unequivocal support for same-sex marriage one day after Vice President Joe Biden suggested that he supported gay marriage as well.

Obama aides worked to manage any political fallout. They said the back-to-back remarks by two top administration officials represented personal viewpoints and were not part of a coordinated effort to lay groundwork for a shift in the president's position. Obama aides also tried to use the latest flare-up in the gay-marriage debate to shine a light on GOP rival Mitt Romney's history of equivocating on some gay-rights issues, an attempt to turn a potential political problem into an opportunity.

Obama, who supports most gay rights, has stopped short of backing gay marriage. Without clarification, he's said for the past year and a half that his personal views on the matter are "evolving."

The White House held firm on Monday to that position, which polls show puts the president increasingly at odds with his party and the majority of Americans on gay marriage. But with Biden and Duncan's comments reinvigorating the debate, Obama is likely to face renewed pressure to clarify his views ahead of the November election.

Throughout his first term, he has sought to walk a fine line on same-sex marriage. He's trying to satisfy rank-and-file Democrats by supporting a range of gay rights issues without alienating crucial independent voters who could be turned off by the emotional social issue.

The president's aides acknowledge that his position can be confusing. In states where gay marriage already is legal, the president says married gay couples should have the same rights as married straight couples. But he does not publicly support the right of gay couples to enter into a marriage in the first place.

Duncan, a longtime friend of the president as well as a member of his Cabinet, made clear Monday that his position on gay marriage was not in lockstep with the White House. Asked in a television interview whether he believed gay couples should legally be allowed to marry, Duncan said simply, "Yes, I do."



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