

Don't Touch Our Pay, House Republicans Say

Hill Checks Protected During Budget Fight

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By Larry Margasak
Associated Press

House Republicans have offered an abundance of proposals in their drive for a balanced budget agreement, but giving up their paychecks apparently isn't one of them.

While the partial government closure will leave some 760,000 federal workers with pruned paychecks, House GOP leaders repeatedly have rebuffed attempts to halt congressional pay during a shutdown.

House Majority Whip Tom DeLay (Tex.), the third-ranking House Republican, offered these reasons for the opposition in a recent CNN appearance: Balancing the budget "has nothing to do with our pay"; Democrats were "demagoguing" the issue by trying to change the subject from a balanced budget; and, as a member of Congress, he was a "constitutional officer," not a federal employee.

Rank and file House lawmakers—Republican and Democrat alike—are paid \$133,600; Speaker Newt Gingrich (R-Ga.) gets \$171,500; Majority Leader Richard K. Armey (R-Tex.) gets \$148,400, as does Minority Leader Richard A. Gephardt (D-Mo.).

Although some federal employees make more than \$100,000 a year, the norm is the same as "most working Americans, the majority of whom live paycheck to paycheck," said John Koskinen, deputy director of the Office of Management and Budget.

President Clinton, who makes \$200,000 a year, has not given up his pay, though his aides have said for days that his staff was researching whether forsaking his salary would be constitutional.

Three times, the Senate unanimously approved language that would decree—during a full or partial shutdown—that no paychecks go out to the 435 House members, the 100 senators or the president.

Five times, Rep. Richard J. Durbin (D-Ill.) said he tried to get the House to consider the proposal and was rebuffed by Republicans—especially in the leadership-controlled Rules Committee.

"I think the Republican leadership is very two-faced," said Sen. Barbara Boxer (D-Calif.), the chief Senate sponsor of the legislation. "They want

federal employees and contractors [serving the government] to sacrifice themselves on the altar of their balanced budget plan, but are not willing to sacrifice themselves on that altar."

"It's cowardice on their part for them to put the paychecks of a lot of innocent people on the line and refuse to put their own paychecks on the line," Durbin said.

In addition to Durbin's rejection in the Rules Committee—the gatekeeper panel that decides which bills and amendments go to the floor—the Boxer proposal was deleted by a

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House-Senate conference from legislation to abolish the Interstate Commerce Commission.

When DeLay was asked on CNN's "Talk Back Live" on Dec. 19 whether he would support congressional pay cuts during a shutdown, he told the audience participation show: "No, I would not. I am not a federal employee. I am a constitutional officer. My job is in the Constitution of the United States.

"I am not a government employee. I am in the Constitution."

Boxer has introduced another version of the legislation to answer congressional critics who said stopping their pay could treat members of Congress more harshly than other federal workers. The latest bill would treat lawmakers the same as the most adversely affected federal employee.

"If they lost a week's pay we would lose a week's pay," Boxer said. "If their pay was delayed, our pay would be delayed."

FOR MORE INFORMATION 

To read why Gingrich is urging GOP members to avoid foreign trips during the impasse, see *Digital Ink*, The Post's on-line service. To learn about *Digital Ink*, call 202-334-4740.