

# Senate GOP Falls Short in Bid To End Regulatory Bill Debate

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Senate Republicans last night failed in an initial attempt to curtail debate on controversial legislation to curb the government's regulatory powers, prompting a final push by Democrats to scale back some of the bill's most stringent provisions.

The vote was 48 to 46—12 short of the 60 that Republican leaders need to force the bill to final passage and to a conference with the House, which adopted an even tougher bill earlier this year to cut back on government rule-making affecting health, safety and the environment.

But Democrats expressed doubts about how long they could continue to hold out for concessions, indicating they were even uncertain about whether they could prevail in a second attempt today to limit debate and force a final vote.

Before the second showdown over cloture, as the limit on debate is called, the Senate will vote on a less restrictive alternative bill, supported by most Democrats and a handful of moderate Republicans. Even its supporters say the alternative, sponsored by Sens. John Glenn (D-Ohio) and John H. Chafee (R-R.I.), probably will not pass.

Democrats hope nonetheless to make a strong enough showing to prod Republicans to accept changes in the legislation, which would require federal agencies to justify their rules with extensive cost-benefit and risk-assessment analyses and create new opportunities for regulated industries to challenge regulations within government and in court.

Among the provisions Democrats hope to scale back are those dealing with industry challenges, including what Sen. John F. Kerry

(D-Mass.) described as the bill's "88 new opportunities for lawyers to dream up ways to go to court" to delay or kill regulations.

If the Democrats fail, they are counting on President Clinton to veto the legislation to force Republicans to compromise. Many top administration officials are urging a veto if the bill is not substantially changed.

Despite Democrats' less-than-optimistic view of their prospects, Senate Majority Leader Robert J. Dole (R-Kan.) grew increasingly testy yesterday about the bill's progress, assailing what he described as "distortions" and "horror stories" and suggesting that regulatory reform could fail if critics continue to oppose cloture.

As a sweetener to win support in yesterday's vote, Dole had offered to protect the Glenn-Chafee alternative from procedural challenges that might arise after cloture is invoked, but the offer appeared to have little effect.

Dole said there are more than 260 amendments pending to the legislation and added, "It's worse than a tax bill."

In yesterday's vote, five moderate Republicans—Chafee and Sens. William S. Cohen (Maine), Mark O. Hatfield (Ore.), James M. Jeffords (Vt.) and Arlen Specter (Pa.)—joined most Democrats in opposing cloture. Three Democrats voted to limit debate: Sens. Claiborne Pell (R.I.), J. Bennett Johnston (La.) and John Breaux (La.). Johnston is a co-sponsor with Dole of the bill.

Five of the six absentees, including Sen. Howell T. Heflin (D-Ala.), are declared supporters of the bill. But, even with their votes, the bill would still be seven votes short of the required number. However, some of the Democrats who voted with their party today support the basic outlines of the legislation.