



Written by [Raven Clabough](#) on December 17, 2010

Reid Concedes to Republicans on Spending Bill

Yesterday night, Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid reluctantly pulled the 1,900 page \$1.1 trillion omnibus bill laden with earmarks that would have funded the federal government through September 2011 from the Senate floor. Aware that the bill would face tremendous opposition and delays, Reid instead announced that he would work with Republican leaders on a smaller, short-term budget to avoid what would have become a government shutdown.



Reid's decision came just in time as the federal government has been operating under a stop-gap measure that expires at the end of today.

Reid's announcement came shortly after Republicans demanded a full reading of every single paragraph of the 1,900 page \$1.1 trillion omnibus spending bill. The reading was estimated to last approximately 50 hours.

The Republican strategy, led by Senator Jim DeMint of South Carolina, was intended to run out the clock on the lame-duck session. Since the bill is so long that it took the Government Printing Office two days to print it, the reading would have certainly cut into the limited time remaining before Christmas break.

If they bring this up, they're going to read it. It'll take them a day or two to read it, said DeMint. Again, were trying to run out the clock. They should not be able to pass this kind of legislation in a lame-duck Congress.

In an effort to waste as little time as possible, Senate clerks were scheduled to read the overwhelming bill in rotating shifts, allowing breaks for water and throat lozenges only, in order to keep legislative business in progress.

At the same time Senators were deliberating on the spending bill, they were also debating the New START treaty. [The Hill](#) reported that the Senate was expected to take up the omnibus spending bill on a separate and parallel track.

Sen Jon Kyl contended it was absurd to rush both the Treaty and spending bill through the Senate concurrently: To suggest that we can dual-track an issue as important as the funding of the government with this almost 2,000 page, \$1 trillion-plus bill at the same time that we are seriously debating the START treaty is a fantasy.

Emphasizing that the Senate has already spent a year and a half reviewing the treaty, Senate Foreign Relations Committee Chairman John Kerry opposed delaying movement on the START Treaty. "If you have new senators coming in, you can hear the cries right now: We havent had time to do this, we dont know the treaty backwards and forwards, we have to take hearings, we have to have more briefings. The really appropriate question is not Why not wait? Its Why delay? remarked Kerry.



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At the same time, Kerry opposed delaying passage of the omnibus bill to focus on the START debate. He asserts that the Senate has the necessary 67 votes to ratify the treaty if Republicans are permitted enough time to debate and offer amendments to it.

Meanwhile, if Reid would have continued forward with the spending omnibus bill, and therefore the full reading of the bill, legislative business would not have resumed until late on Saturday in order for the staff to have enough time to read the 1,900 page bill aloud.

Republicans asserted that the bill was too large and significant to pass in a hurry. Instead, Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell proposed an alternative one-page continuing resolution that would fund the government through February 18 at current levels, allowing the 112th Congress an appropriate amount of time to debate spending legislation. The swearing in of members of the 112th Congress is scheduled for January 4.

Politico contends that McConnells proposal was provoked by embarrassment:

McConnell, embarrassed by reports on his own earmarks in the omnibus, went to the Senate floor Thursday to propose a one page, "clean" two month extension of the current stop gap funding resolution that has kept the government funded since Oct. 1. And as if caught with their hands in the cookie jar, he and other top Republicans vowed to do everything in their powers to kill the omnibus square themselves with their tea party backers.

Bowing to Republican opposition, Reid indicated that he would work with Senator McConnell to finalize such a measure.

However, he did not miss the opportunity to lash out at the Republicans. Fox News reports, Reid, in announcing his decision, lashed out, saying that he had the support of the nine GOP senators needed to pass the measure, but suddenly that support evaporated.

Fox News explains the sudden change of heart. A McConnell aide said the leader worked the phones for days, pressing his members to quash the bill. Republicans had strongly condemned the \$1.27 trillion omnibus spending bill, which would fund the government through September 30, for its \$8.3 billion worth of earmarks though some of those earmarks belong to Republicans.

Some lawmakers continue to defend the use of earmarks.

Republican Senator Robert Bennet of Utah remarked, If you look up earmark in the dictionary, it means to designate or set aside. It is not in addition to. If the Congress does not exercise its constitutional authority to designate where the funds will go, the administration will usurp that authority and you will get every bit as much pork barrel spending.

Bennett's stance is diametric to that of Tea Party activists who helped to bring Republicans their historic victory in the 2010 midterm elections. Bennett was ousted by Tea Party activists during the GOP primaries and likely did not care to address Tea Party concerns, but he does have support from a strange corner, constitutionalist Representative Ron Paul, whose position was made clear [by a spokeswoman](#):

Paul spokeswoman Rachel Mills said he thinks Washington already extracts too much money from his constituents, and part of his job is to work hard in Washington, D.C., to get that money back to those constituents in any form that he can. She said Paul also believes that earmarking is more transparent than the regular budget process because you know exactly where the money goes and that it doesn't affect the total amount appropriated by one dime.



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McConnell responded Reid's verbal attack, He doesn't have the vote. And the reason he doesn't have the votes is because members on this side of the aisle increasingly felt concerned about the way we do business.

Reid angrily declared, This action taken by my friends on the other side of the aisle is going to cause people to lose their job.

Politico reports, however, that Reid has no one to blame but the Democrats: Democrats have only themselves to blame for failing to pass any of the 12 annual appropriations bills that fund the day-to-day operations of the government.

The Republican resistance to the spending bill now places President Obama in a difficult position. Since the short-term spending resolution will fund the federal government through February, the risk of repeating the 1995 government shutdown, which took place under President Bill Clinton, remains high if Obama elects to veto the new spending bill in February, and would take place just as Obama is trying to hammer out his new budget of 2012.

It seems a great deal of uncertainty plagues the start of 2011.

Photo of Harry Reid: AP Images



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