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"Conservatives see win over schedule"

The Washington Times - July 18, 2002

by Stephen Dinan

Conservative House Republicans ended their daylong effort to halt proceedings on the conservation and public-lands spending bill, claiming victory after leaders agreed to change the schedule for considering future spending bills.

Under the agreement with Speaker J. Dennis Hastert, Illinois Republican, members of the **Republican Study Committee** agreed not to pursue hundreds of amendments to the interior appropriations bill, which could have delayed House proceedings indefinitely. In return, Mr. Hastert agreed to finish the interior plan and take up two other spending bills this week, but postpone further action until after the August recess, when the chamber will consider the appropriations bill for labor, health and human services, and education.

With that understanding, leaders passed the interior spending bill last night by a vote of 377-46. Voting against the bill were 41 Republicans, four Democrats and one independent.

The \$19.7 billion measure funds the Interior Department's agencies, the National Park Service, the Forest Service, the Energy Department's conservation programs and the National Endowment for the Humanities.

The timing of future spending bills was critical to House conservatives. The original schedule had the energy and agriculture spending bills taken up before the labor and health and human services bill. But many conservatives said the labor and health and human services bill can become bloated with spending - especially if it is taken up at the end of the process when members are more likely to agree to higher spending in order to get home to their districts and campaign for November's elections.

"The point of what we've been doing from Day One is we want to live within the budget we passed twice on this House floor, and we can't do that if you don't pass the tough bills early," said **Rep. Patrick J. Toomey, Pennsylvania Republican** and one of the leaders of the conservative holdouts.

Appropriations Committee Chairman C.W. Bill Young, Florida Republican, said he would go along with the deal, even though he wasn't part of it.

"This is a deal the speaker made, which I didn't agree to," Mr. Young said. "That is his call, not mine."

Mr. Toomey and fellow members of the **Republican Study Committee**, a group of conservatives committed to keeping discretionary spending at the \$759.1 billion set in the budget resolution that passed the House and was endorsed by President Bush, were set to offer hundreds of amendments to the interior bill. House leaders had hoped to finish the bill on Tuesday, but had to delay that after

study committee members offered two amendments that absorbed much of the day.

Both amendments - one offered by **Mr. Toomey** and the other by **Rep. Jeff Flake, Arizona Republican** - shifted money from the Bureau of Land Management.

Both were defeated overwhelmingly.

The Bush administration supports the overall House interior spending bill, though it objects to a provision that would add \$700 million for firefighting efforts, a response to the number of large fires in the West. The administration says contingency funds already are available for firefighting needs.

The House yesterday passed 234-192 a \$26 million increase *[should have read \$10 million increase to \$126 million]* in funding for the National Endowment for the Arts. Forty-two Republicans, 191 Democrats and one independent voted in favor of the measure, while 177 Republicans, 14 Democrats and one independent voted against it.

A counteramendment offered by **Rep. Tom Tancredo, Colorado Republican**, that would have stripped \$50 million from the NEA was defeated. An amendment to prohibit the federal government from approving new offshore oil drilling operations on 36 leases off California's coast was approved last night.

The two bills still scheduled for action this week are the Treasury and postal spending measure and funding for the legislative branch.

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