Government shutdown looms

Bickering scuttles talks between White House, GOP

November 11, 1995
Web posted at: 10:15 p.m. EST

WASHINGTON (CNN) -- At day's end Saturday, the White House and the Republican congressional leadership were no closer to solving a budget impasse that could force a partial shutdown of government services -- and cause the government's first-ever default on its debt. (245K AIFF sound or 245K WAV sound)

On Friday, House Speaker Newt Gingrich and Senate Majority Leader Bob Dole opened the possibility of high-level discussions aimed at breaking up the stalemate, but the talks disintegrated Saturday over disagreements about who would attend.

A last-minute phone call between President Clinton, Gingrich and Dole produced no results. Gingrich termed the call "a little sad," and Dole accused the president of "pulling my leg" during the Saturday afternoon conversation.

"He was, frankly, not very forthcoming," Gingrich told reporters. "Mostly a monologue on his part, apparently designed to set up his press secretary promptly rushing in and announcing his version."

White House spokesman Mike McCurry said President Clinton was disappointed that Dole and Gingrich refused to accept his condition that Democratic congressional leaders be included in Capitol Hill negotiations to end the stalemate.

"The solution to the crisis that we're in now must be bipartisan, and the president felt it was very appropriate to have bipartisan meetings on the Hill today," McCurry told reporters at a White House briefing Saturday afternoon.

But Dole would not consider including congressional Democrats in the talks. "What can they contribute?" he said.

Clinton Budget Director Alice Rivlin told White House reporters Saturday that the president would veto the GOP version of the continuing resolution because it included an increase in Medicare premiums.

"The Republicans couldn't wait to get into a budget negotiation and do the Medicare discussion in an orderly way," Rivlin said. "They attached a large increase in the Medicare premium to the (continuing resolution). The president cannot sign that."

Dole countered Rivlin's charge, saying that he offered to compromise, but that the president "didn't seem interested."
"I said, if that's a concern, we will limit it to 60 to 90 days so we can negotiate all this," Dole said.

Dole said he has concluded President Clinton does not want to resolve the crisis and would prefer to close the government. (153K AIFF sound or 153K WAV sound)

"He, in effect, said on the telephone 'get lost,'" Dole said. "That was sort of the tone of it."

He accused the president of setting him up for political gain. "I know when someone is pulling my leg on the telephone. I wasn't born yesterday," added the 72 year-old Republican presidential candidate. "I think he believes he's winning political points, and that's more important to him than whether or not the government is open Tuesday morning."

Gingrich agreed, adding, "It's a little sad to see all of this spun into political posturing by the White House." (183K AIFF sound or 183K WAV sound)

Unless the debt ceiling is raised and the president signs a continuing resolution allowing government services to go on, the federal government will be forced to furlough 800,000 employees Tuesday morning. Only those deemed essential and others in jobs that are pre-funded will continue being paid.

Related stories:

- If the budget train wrecks, who will be hurt?
- Government default could raise interest rates
- Union threatens to halt FAA, other vital services
- Nine previous federal shutdowns since 1981
- Washington Notebook: What will a shutdown mean?

More related stories:

- Budget talks break down - November 10
- Veto may cause government shutdown - November 10
- Transcript of Panetta Interview on CNN - November 10
- Congress Okays debt limit extension - November 9
- Government default could raise interest rates - November 9
- Washington Notebook: What will a shutdown mean? - August 26

Related sites:

- The White House home page
- The Republican Web Central web page
- The Democratic Party web page
- Text of H.R. 2586: Bill to provide for Temporary Increase in public debt limit
- Text of H.J. Res. 115: Bill to make further appropriations for FY 1996