



Budget Chaos On The Political Horizon

Housing program administrators are bracing for a possible Oct. 1 government shutdown while public housing managers -- subsidized on a calendar year basis -- begin to assess long-term possibilities of a deeper funding crunch.

The funding jitters emerge even though the initial spending blueprint crafted by the House rebuffs most of the Trump administration's spending road map and essentially gives Democrats most of the spending they sought.

The problem on the horizon: House and Senate conservatives and a president with veto pen who sought deep budget cuts to help offset the national deficit. Whether President Donald Trump is bold enough to wield a veto pen remains to be seen, but the possibility is sufficient enough to rattle nerves.

The House Appropriations HUD subcommittee spent 20 minutes mulling the FY 2018 proposal during what was billed as a late evening markup session -- Republicans coyly justifying their rebuff of the Trump proposal while Democrats mute their dissatisfaction with the handful of spending cuts their signature programs incur. The measure now goes to the full committee where the hard right GOP likely will flex its legislative muscle for deeper cuts.

Regardless of how the proposal fares on the House floor, there is scant time left to come to terms on a blueprint suitable to Democrats and Republicans, let alone the House and Senate. Too many obstacles remain for lawmakers to reach consensus even if they forego much, if not all, of their August vacation; the Senate leadership already has extended that chamber's business schedule two weeks into the traditional vacation period.

Whether House Speaker Paul Ryan (R-WI) follows suit is questionable. Ryan is battling challenges to his leadership on all fronts -- hard right Republicans within his own leadership umbrella, entreaties from the White House to get on board with Trump's agenda while House Democrats hit hard on his left flank with viable challengers in his congressional district re-election bid next year.

The real test of the administration's mettle will come at the eleventh hour if Congress fashions an omnibus FY 2018 spending plan essentially rebuffing the Trump administration's agenda.

What will Trump do? He essentially holds the trump card. Elected as an independent Republican, Trump can be selective in his campaign support for individual lawmakers and could likely make or break them next year, depending on their support of his program. Trump doesn't have a re-election worry until 2020, long after the nation's collective short-term memory recedes.

The budget strategy comes down to two options: A stopgap spending law extending to Thanksgiving or a government shutdown. Trump likely won't buy into a continuing resolution, but he certainly could embrace a shutdown with minimum consequence.

The onus of a shutdown could fall heavily on Democrats, but Republicans would not escape unscathed.

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