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## Budget blueprint splits state congressional delegation

Democrats mostly back Obama plan; more fights expected

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WASHINGTON BUREAU

WASHINGTON -- A \$3.6 trillion congressional spending blueprint for next year has once again exposed the sharp ideological divide between Democrats and Republicans representing South Carolina on Capitol Hill.

Democrats say the blueprint is ambitious but fiscally responsible, while Republicans argue it would impose new taxes and lead to exploding deficits.

The House and Senate versions of the blueprint -- formally called the budget resolution -- incorporate most items on President Barack Obama's spending wish list, but would approve less money than the White House recommended.

One South Carolinian, Rep. John Spratt, D-York, played a leading role in the debate, drafting the House version in his capacity as chairman of the Budget Committee.

"Our resolution supports the president's goals of putting the budget back on a fiscally sustainable path while advancing key priorities in health care, energy, and education," Spratt said after the House voted 233-196 to adopt its blueprint Thursday.

The blueprints are precursors to the actual spending bills Spratt and a few other lawmakers will craft over the next several months. Spratt said lawmakers must find ways to pay for new spending programs that avoid adding to the deficit.

But Republicans like Rep. Bob Inglis, R-Travelers Rest, argue Congress can't afford a raft of new programs at a time the country is borrowing more than \$1 trillion to pay for the bank bailout and the economic stimulus.

Congress has yet to address the biggest problem: how to fully fund three increasingly expensive programs it's required by law to pay for -- Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid, Inglis said.

Sen. Jim DeMint, R-S.C., lost his bid to add language to the Senate version of the blueprint to curb funding for politicians' pet projects -- or earmarks -- and end further taxpayer assistance to auto companies.

"We cannot tax our way out of recession, spend our way to prosperity or borrow our way out of debt," he said in a statement.

Sen. Lindsey Graham, R-S.C., successfully added language to make it harder for lawmakers to pass a proposal to limit carbon emissions -- which he called an "energy tax" -- but voted against the overall budget blueprint, which the Senate passed 55-43 late Thursday.

More fights are expected when House and Senate negotiators work on the compromise version, expected to be finished by the end of April.

Though the blueprints don't have the force of law, they provide the first look at Congress' spending priorities and lay out the legislative framework for budget discussions.

The latest blueprints pushed back on Obama's spending priorities and sought to pay for new programs with cuts elsewhere or new taxes.

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