

By: David Rogers

Plunging ahead along party lines, the House Appropriations Committee on Wednesday approved a set of Republican-backed spending targets that break with the August debt accords by demanding more than \$27 billion in additional savings from non-defense programs.

The 28-21 vote sets up a long summer of political skirmishing, all leading to what could be another government shutdown fight Oct. 1 when a new fiscal year begins and the GOP must come to terms with the White House and Democratic Senate.

"The majority is not only renegeing on an agreement. It is thumbing its nose at the rule of law," complained Rep. David Price (D-N.C.). Rep. Norman Dicks (D-Wash.) singled out the allocation for labor, health and education programs, saying it represents "a critical error" by Republicans and will require cuts of \$6.3 billion below the already reduced funding for the current year.

However spirited, the debate most resembled the Enraged preaching to the Reluctant.

It's no secret that Appropriations Committee Chairman Hal Rogers (R-Ky.) strongly disagreed with Speaker John Boehner's decision to break with the accords set out in the Budget Control Act last summer. But under pressure from the right, Boehner felt he had no choice if he was to bring along the tea party and get a budget resolution passed this spring.

To a lesser degree, elements of the same tea party forces are now evident in the Appropriations Committee itself.

Rep. Jeff Flake (R-Ariz.) joined with Democrats on Wednesday in opposing Rogers's allocations — but on the grounds that the numbers were too high, not too low. And on a 44-4 vote Flake was joined by three other conservatives in a vain attempt to cut an additional \$97 billion from the plan put forward by the chairman.

Indeed, if all four — Flake, Tom Graves of Georgia, Cynthia Lummis of Wyoming and Kevin Yoder of Kansas — had voted with the Democrats, Wednesday's tally would have been a razor-thin 25-24.

Going forward, the dimensions of the fight are best understood by comparing the House numbers with those adopted on a lopsided bipartisan vote last week in the Senate Appropriations Committee.

The House begins with a total of \$1.028 trillion for discretionary spending, \$19 billion below the \$1.047 trillion target set last summer and \$15 billion below what was enacted just months ago for the current 2012 fiscal year. Republicans would also go \$8 billion over the caps set in the Budget Control Act for defense spending, and the result would be a net reduction of more than \$27 billion from all other appropriations.

This translates into an added cut of about 5 percent, with the burden falling chiefly on a half-dozen domestic spending bills affecting nutrition programs, transportation, financial regulatory agencies, natural resources, and especially the labor, health and education bill cited by Dicks.

In that case, the House all but guarantees a veto fight with President Barack Obama, since the \$150 billion provided is about \$8.7 billion below his request and \$7.7 billion under the Senate plan. On a percentage basis, some of the largest cuts would come from the Financial Services Committee, where funding for consumer agencies and the Commodity Futures Trading Commission have been issues in the past. And in a parting shot, retiring Rep. John Olver (D-Mass.) said the GOP was at risk of turning itself into a "wholly-owned subsidiary of Wall Street."

In the case of defense and foreign aid, Rogers and Senate Appropriations Chairman Daniel Inouye (D-Hawaii) are helped by their access to additional funding for overseas contingency operations not counted under the caps.

Inouye, for example, pumps up the OCO money for the Pentagon to narrow his differences with

Rogers over defense. Rogers essentially does the reverse in the case of foreign aid, and this allows him to show large nondefense savings, while providing resources that are still within range of the Senate plan.

In fact, if added together, the total resources for these two national security bills total \$657.3 billion under the Senate plan — almost the same as the \$656.5 billion allocated under the House plan.

That doesn't mean there won't be fights, but the framework is there for an easier agreement than on the domestic side of the ledger.