Federal finger pointing

No shutdown end; Dems, GOP trade blame

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WASHINGTON — First slowed, then stalled by political gridlock, the vast machinery of government clanged into partial shutdown mode on Tuesday and President Barack Obama warned the longer it goes "the more families will be hurt."

Republicans said it was his fault, not theirs, and embarked on a strategy — opposed by Democrats — of voting on bills to reopen individual agencies or programs.

Ominously, there were suggestions from leaders in both parties that the shutdown, heading for its second day, could last for weeks and grow to encompass a possible default by the Treasury if Congress fails to raise the nation's debt ceiling. The two issues are "now all together," said Sen. Dick Durbin, D-Ill.

Speaking at the White House, the president accused Republicans of causing the first partial closure in 17 years as part of a non-stop "ideological crusade" to wipe out his signature health care law.

House Speaker John Boehner, R-Ohio, gave as good as he got. "The president isn't telling the whole story,' he said in an opinion article posted on the USA Today website. "The fact is that Washington Democrats have slammed the door on reopening the government by refusing to engage in bipartisan talks."

Both houses of Congress met in a Capitol closed to regular public tours, part of the impact of a partial shutdown that sent ripples of disruption outward — from museums and memorials in Washington to Yellowstone and other national parks and to tax auditors and federal offices serving Americans coast to coast.

Officials said roughly 800,000 federal employees would be affected by the shutdown after a half-day on the job Tuesday to fill out time cards, put new messages on their voice mail and similar chores.

Among those workers were some at the National Institute of Health's famed hospital of last resort, where officials said no new patients would be admitted for the duration of the shutdown.

Dr. Francis Collins, agency director, estimated that each week the shutdown lasts will force the facility to turn away about 200 patients, 30 of them children, who want to enroll in studies of experimental treatments. Patients already at the hospital are permitted to stay.

Late Tuesday, House Republicans sought swift passage of legislation aimed at reopening small slices of the federal establishment. The bills covered the Department of Veterans Affairs, the Park Service and a portion of the Washington, D.C., government funded with local tax revenue.

Democrats generally opposed all three, saying Republicans shouldn't be permitted to choose which agencies remain open and which stay shut. As a result, all fell well short of the two-thirds majority needed for passage.

The White House also issued veto threats against the bills, drawing a jab from Michael Steel, a spokesman for Boehner. Obama "can't continue to complain about the impact of the government shutdown on veterans, visitors at National Parks, and D.C. while vetoing bills to help them," he said.

Several House Democrats used the occasion to seek a vote on a standalone spending bill, a measure that Rep. Elizabeth Esty of Connecticut said would "end the tea party shutdown." The requests were ruled out of order.



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Sebastian Ramirez of Austin, Texas, hikes out of the Bright Angel Trail in Grand Canyon National Park Tuesday afternoon. Ramirez spent the night with friends in the bottom of the Canyon at Bright Angel Campground. Beginning at 6 am, visitors were told the park was closed and they could not visit.