GOP WEIGHS BOOST IN DEBT

Temporary measure would buy time to avert a default

By David Espo
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — House Republican leaders are considering a short-term increase in the U.S. debt limit as a possible way to break out of the gridlock that threatens the nation with an unprecedented default in as little as a week, officials said Wednesday night.

These officials said there is far less urgency inside the leadership about ending the current nine-day partial government shutdown, which has caused inconvenience and financial concern for many individual Americans but appears not to threaten the widespread economic damage a default might bring.

The officials declined to say what conditions, if any, might be attached to legislation to raise the $16.7 trillion debt limit for an undetermined period, perhaps a few weeks or months. The GOP rank-and-file members are expected to meet and discuss the issue Thursday, before a delegation led by Speaker John Boehner goes to the White House to meet with President Barack Obama.

The officials describing the developments late Wednesday spoke only on condition of anonymity.

See DEBT, Page 3A



President Barack Obama is making plans to talk with Republican lawmakers at the White House in the coming days. PABLO MARTINEZ MONSIVAIS/AP



House Speaker John Boehner of Ohio arrives on Capitol Hill in Washington on Wednesday, the ninth day of the government shutdown. AP

DEBT

Continued from Page 1A

Obama has said he won't agree to sign a debt limit increase if conditions are attached. Republicans are demanding as yet-unspecified concessions to reduce deficits or make changes in the nation's 3-year-old health care law.

More recently, the GOP-controlled House has passed legislation to create a 20-member group of lawmakers from the House and Senate to negotiate over those and other issues. The bill makes no mention of an increase in the debt limit, but the two topics could be combined in a potential face-saving way out of the impasse.

The disclosure came as Obama met at the White House in late afternoon for more than an hour with House Democrats. He told them that while he would prefer legislation extending the Treasury's borrowing ability beyond the next election, he would also sign a shorter-term bill.

In the Senate, Democrats have proposed a no-strings-attached $1 trillion increase in borrowing authority that is designed to prevent a recurrence of the current confrontation before the 2014 elections. A test vote is scheduled for the weekend, and Republicans have yet to indicate how vigorously they might oppose it.

In addition to leadership conversations, a group of House conservatives met privately during the day for what several officials described as a wide-ranging discussion on the debt limit and the threat — or lack of it — posed by default. No consensus was reached.

The private conversations stood in contrast with political maneuvering that characterized the day at the Capitol.

The Hose passed legislation tht the Obama administraion already had rendred unnecessary — in providing death benefits to families of militar forces who die — whil Boehner and Democrat leader Nancy Pelosi met face to face — and promptly disagreed evn about which side had requested the get-togethr.

One Reublican, Rep. Mo Brook of Alabama, said a defalt wouldn't be the worst alamity to befall the contry.

"Insolvncy and bankruptcy" wuld be worse, he said, warning that that would be te result of yet another increase in the debt limitwithout measures to bring down the federal bulget deficit.

CHARITY TO PAY MILITARY DIATH BENEFITS, BRINGING HOUSE TOGETHER

There was a brief moment of unity when thelouse voted 425-0 to let the Pentagon pay death benefitso the families of fallen U.S. troops — but controversy accompanied the subject.

» Republicans said Congress had passed and resident Barack Obama had signed legislation last week to pmit the payments, but the Defense Department said othrwise. As Republican leaders were pushing toward a voteon the bill making it explicit, Defense Secretary Chuck Hgel announced a charity would pick up the death benefit cos instead.

» In a delicate minuet, Pentagon officials saidthey were not permitted to solicit the funds but could accep an offer if one were made unbidden.