White House, GOP spar over speed of stimulus

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By Ken Dilanian, USA TODAY

WASHINGTON -- Obama administration officials vowed Sunday to spend three-quarters of the president’s $825 billion stimulus package in 18 months, responding to criticism from Republicans that the money would flow too slowly to jolt the economy.

"What we're trying to do is get money out the door as rapidly as you can," Vice President Biden said on CBS' Face the Nation. A vote on the plan is scheduled Wednesday in the House of Representatives.

Republicans repeated their doubts about the plan Sunday. "I think there's a lot of slow moving government spending in this program that won't work," House Republican leader John Boehner of Ohio said on NBC's Meet the Press.

"As of now," Boehner said, "I think a lot of Republicans will vote 'no.'"

President Obama is scheduled to meet Tuesday with Republicans on Capitol Hill, his second such meeting in a week. House Republicans don't have the votes to block the plan, but Senate Republicans could, at least in theory.

Obama has said he wants broad support from both political parties.

Sen. John McCain, R-Ariz., said on Fox News Sunday that he cannot vote for the plan as written. McCain said he objects to some of the spending provisions, and he wants guarantees that Obama eventually will address the skyrocketing federal deficit.

"We all recognize that the economy is in deep and serious trouble," McCain said. "But there's a Japanese example where they tried to stimulate their economy with the wrong kinds of projects and the wrong kind of spending. It didn't help their economy."

On Saturday, the White House released new details of what it says the mix of tax cuts and spending would accomplish.

According to a document posted on www.whitehouse.gov, the plan would create or save 3 million to 4 million jobs over the next two years.

The package also calls for a $1,000 tax cut for 95% of American families. It would spend hundreds of billions on expanding sun and wind energy capacity, weatherizing federal buildings, modernizing schools, computerizing medical records, and improving roads and mass transit.

"If we do not act boldly and swiftly, a bad situation could become dramatically worse," Obama said Saturday in his weekly radio address.

To counter skepticism about potential waste, Obama said, his program "will include unprecedented measures that will allow the American people to hold my administration accountable for these results," including a website, recovery.gov, that will track projects.

Biden predicted the bill would have bipartisan support.

"On the Senate side ... a significant portion of what's in the bill already, from the outset, was placed there by Republicans," he said on Face the Nation.

Lawrence Summers, director of the White House's National Economic Council, said on Meet the Press that there were limits to how fast the government could spend money prudently.

"We're not going to rush things to the point of being wasteful," Summers said. "Speed is a crucial concern ... but these problems weren't made in a day or a week or a month or even a year, and they're not going get solved that fast."

On CNN's State of the Union, Sen. Kent Conrad, D-N.D., chairman of the Budget Committee, said he wasn't sure the Obama plan could deliver the number of jobs the president is promising.

"I don't think anybody knows. I mean, if we're just honest with people, we're in uncharted territory," Conrad said.

Even if the bill passes quickly, Biden warned, Americans should brace for tougher times.

"We're off and running, but it's going to get worse before it gets better," he said.

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