

Three amendments prevent progress on Senate small-business bill

By Josiah Ryan - 04/13/11 05:00 PM ET

Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid (D-Nev.) said Wednesday afternoon that a disagreement on just three amendments has halted progress on the Small Business Administration (SBA) funding bill, which has been stalled on the floor for almost four weeks.

“There is no reason why we should have not been able to do something in the last few days, but that’s where we are,” said Reid.

Although the SBA funding bill is non-controversial, senators from both parties have taken advantage of the open amendment process to file more than 125 amendments — of which only about 20 are germane.

The only way to avoid time-consuming votes and allow the bill to proceed is to convince senators offering them to combine or drop their proposals.

The three amendments holding up the bill, according to Reid, are:

- Sen. Kay Bailey Hutchison’s (R-Texas) proposal to delay the implementation of the healthcare reform law until a final resolution is reached in pending lawsuits;
- Sen. John Cornyn’s (R-Texas) plan to form a bipartisan commission to improve oversight of government spending, and
- Sen. Bernie Sanders’s (I-Vt.) proposal to establish a point of order against any effort to reduce benefits paid to Social Security recipients, raise the retirement age or create private retirement accounts.

“I think they [the amendments] are offered in good faith, and I think we should be able to get votes on them even though they have nothing to do with the legislation,” Reid said Wednesday.

To further complicate matters, Reid says other senators are now demanding votes on their own pet amendments as part of a deal.

“Others have now come into the fray, and it’s making it very difficult to get votes on these three amendments,” said Reid. “It’s unfortunate, but that’s where we are.”

The Small Business Reauthorization Act, or S. 493, would provide funding for the Small Business Innovation Research program and the Small Business Technology Transfer program, which Democrats say would create jobs.

The Senate is scheduled to begin a two-week holiday starting at the end of this week. Leaders hope to complete work on the small-business bill as well as finalize the fiscal year 2011 budget before that break begins.