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It May Be a 'Budget Battle,' but Some Skirmishes Have Little to Do With Money

By **JENNIFER STEINHAUER**

WASHINGTON — There are fights about money and fights about ideas, and the battle over a spending plan to keep the government open is increasingly centered on the latter.

The frenetic negotiations to avert a government shutdown seem largely focused not on dollars and cents, where the two sides are not all that far apart, but on policy issues, primarily [abortion](#) and environmental regulations, that defy easy compromise.

"We've been close on the cuts for days," [Harry Reid](#), the Democratic Senate majority leader, said Thursday, adding, "The only things — I repeat, the only things — holding up an agreement are two of their so-called social issues: women's health and clean air."

Speaker [John A. Boehner](#) begged to differ, saying that Democrats and Republicans were far apart in every way. After a meeting on Thursday at the White House, Mr. Boehner said, "When I see what the White House has to offer today, it's really just more of the same."

As both sides waged war in the Senate and House, and via news releases and Twitter feeds, hundreds of supporters of [Planned Parenthood](#) rallied in the capital to oppose cuts to their programs, which have become a focal point of Republican policy riders.

Policy provisions tend to worm their way into any spending bill; indeed, some of the provisions Republicans are seeking to undo became law through spending measures passed by Democrats a few years ago.

But the debate over these measures is different in a few significant ways. The House Republican proposals are numerous and sweeping, and would essentially rewrite broad areas of policy. And they are attached to a document that is meant not simply to pay for government services, but avoid a shutdown, which raises the stakes of the debate

considerably.

Further, it is a difficult proposition to come to an accord over social issues that have been publicly debated for decades in a divided government with each side under pressure from its ideological wing.

On Thursday, Republicans passed a one-week spending bill — one almost surely destined to fail in the Senate — that featured one of the key provisions they are seeking.

The measure would reinstate a policy, scotched a few years ago by Democrats, that prevented the District of Columbia from using locally generated taxes to provide financial help to poor women for abortions. (The use of federal funds for abortion is already prohibited.) Because this law was on the books for years — passed by Democrats as a rider to unrelated bills — it has perhaps the best chance of surviving in any spending compromise.

Republicans also seek to prohibit payments for abortions overseas — a measure known as the “Mexico City” policy that was overturned by an executive order from Mr. Obama. Another rider seeks to end the United States’ contribution to the [United Nations Population Fund](#), which focuses on reproductive health.

Finally, rather than cut all federal funds for Planned Parenthood, House Republicans would like to take the money given to it and other family planning organizations and give it to state health departments to spread at their discretion.

Presumably, states controlled by Republican legislatures would choose not to give that money to Planned Parenthood. This rider has become a major sticking point, as it is a priority for House Republicans and inflames Democrats.

“I am really stunned, and I am angry as a woman,” said Senator [Patty Murray](#), Democrat of Washington, “that we have come to this after weeks of negotiating on numbers, where we have in principle an agreement on numbers, that there are those in the [Republican Party](#) in the House who are willing to shut down the government, take people’s paychecks away from them, because they want to deny women access to health care in this country.”

Republicans are also seeking to undo years of environmental regulations, greatly restricting the [Environmental Protection Agency](#)’s authority to regulate greenhouse gas emissions. House Republicans are broadly seeking to match a Senate bill offered by Senator [Mitch McConnell](#) of Kentucky, the Republican minority leader — one that failed in that chamber —

to prohibit new greenhouse gas regulations and suspend others.

While Democrats have criticized the Republicans for attaching the social policy riders to the short-term spending bill, it is hardly an unprecedented practice. In 2009, the Democratic-controlled Congress passed the same sort of spending bill, known as a continuing resolution, which was signed into law by Mr. Obama with a host of amendments designed to set policy.

That bill eliminated the so-called D.C. Opportunity Scholarships program, a voucher program for public school students here. The program is beloved by Mr. Boehner, who sponsored a bill this year to revive it.

That bill also provided money to support repeal of Mexico City abortion policy that Republicans now seek to reinstate, created a mechanism for the government to provide federal health benefits for same-sex partners of federal employees and eased restrictions on American travel to Cuba.

“[President Obama](#) and Democratic leaders were for these types of policy restrictions before they were against them,” said Kevin Smith, a spokesman for Mr. Boehner. “Simply put, they have supported hundreds, if not thousands, of them during their time in Washington.”

Democrats counter that they did not use such riders as a sword over the heads of Republicans during talks to keep the government from shutting down.