

EQ-1989-SC County - Rebuilding

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Earthquake relief package OK'd

WASHINGTON (UPD) — The Senate yesterday approved an enlarged disaster aid package of 3.45 billion intended for earthquake-stricken California and victims of Hurricane Hugo.

The relief package dovetails a 2.85 billion assistance measure approved by the House Tuesday, but includes \$600 million more in disaster loan authority for the Small Business Administration.

It also goes further in waiving a number of statutory restrictions on the use of federal dollars set

aside for the repair of highways and bridges damaged by natural disasters.

The measure cleared the Senate on a 97-1 vote, with Sen. Gordon Humphrey, R-N.H., casting the lone dissenting vote.

The measure now goes back to the House for approval, but Senate aides said House leaders were agreeable to the changes.

Sen. Robert Byrd, D-W.Va., chairman of the Senate Appropriations Committee, said, "I am advised that the president will

sign the measure."

The disaster relief is being considered as part of a stop-gap spending bill to keep the federal government functioning while Congress finishes work on several stalled appropriations bills. Congress faces a midnight deadline for completion of the so-called continuing resolution.

Senate action on the bill came eight days after Northern California was rocked by Oct. 17 earthquake, which measured 7.1 on the Richter scale.

Overall, the Senate-passed measure calls for a \$1.1 billion increase in disaster aid administered by Federal Emergency Management Agency; \$1 billion more for the emergency highway repair fund; \$1.1 billion in new money or lending authority for the SBA disaster loan fund; and \$250 million in additional discretionary spending for the president.

The legislation is aimed at California as well as areas wracked by Hurricane Hugo, but most of the money is expected to go to earthquake recovery.

An amendment sponsored by Sens. Alan Cranston, D-Calif., and Pete Wilson, R-Calif., and adopted by the Senate by voice vote addressed a number of concerns expressed by California

lawmakers about the House-passed bill.

The amendment extends from 90 days to 180 days the period during which the California can receive full federal reimbursement for the cost of repairs to highways and bridges damaged by the quake.

It also waives a requirement that the money for emergency repairs will be charged against the state's general allocation of federal highway funds in the future. In addition, an exception is made for the quake-damaged San Francisco Bay Bridge to the prohibition on spending emergency repair funds on toll roads and bridges.

The House bill already contained another key provision waiving a statutory spending cap of \$100 million per disaster from that fund.

Although the Senate package goes further than the House bill, California officials estimate they ultimately will need \$4.1 billion in federal money for the earthquake recovery effort.

Rep. Vic Fazio, D-Calif., a leading advocate for additional disaster aid to California, estimated that overall damage in his state would run at least \$7 billion, with transportation accounting for at least \$1 billion of the total.

