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Stimulus may ease state budget woes

Congress expected to OK bill today

By Doug Abrahms

WASHINGTON -- The final version of the \$789 billion economic stimulus bill contains a provision giving state legislatures the ability to seek billions in road, school and Medicaid funds if the governor doesn't ask for it.

Rep. Jim Clyburn, D-S.C., House majority whip, added that item in the House bill to ensure that South Carolina received the federal aid because it was unclear whether Gov. Mark Sanford, a Republican, would ask for it. That provision was included in the final stimulus bill, said Clyburn spokeswoman Kristie Greco.

Congress is likely to approve the bill today.

The measure includes \$27.5 billion for highway projects, \$7 billion to increase high-speed Internet technology in rural areas and \$54 billion to help states plug budget shortfalls. President Barack Obama's signature "Making Work Pay" tax cut was reduced 20 percent, to \$400 annually for individuals and \$800 for couples.

South Carolina's Republican Sens. Jim DeMint and Lindsey Graham oppose this stimulus bill, saying it costs too much and creates too few jobs.

Graham supports South Carolina taking the federal aid if the bill passes, while DeMint said that should be decided by the state.

Sanford opposes the stimulus bill, and the Clyburn amendment takes away authority from governors, said Sanford spokesman Joel Sawyer.

Rep. Bob Inglis, R-S.C., said he will vote against the stimulus bill but is glad Clyburn added his amendment. The bill can increase productivity in the state, he said.

"It does make sense to give the Legislature the opportunity to draw down the funds if the governor refuses to do so," he said.