

Ike aid slips away as U.S. House rejects extension

Ike aid slips away as House fails to grant extension

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GALVESTON — Scores of social service agencies will stop offering health, counseling, transportation, housing and other services today to Hurricane Ike victims after the **U.S. House of Representatives** failed to pass a bill extending the deadline for Texas to use \$94 million in unspent federal disaster funds.

"All the availability of the services will stop," said **Joe Compian**, a board member for Gulf Coast Interfaith who lobbied feverishly for the legislation. Social service agencies will begin laying off employees today, Compian said.

A Senate bill to extend the deadline introduced by U.S. Sen. **John Cornyn** passed by unanimous consent late Wednesday and was sent to the House where it was expected to pass by unanimous consent as well.

But U.S. Rep. **Sheila Jackson Lee**, D-Houston, said that the Republican leadership in the House killed the bill by saying that they hadn't had time to read it. "I am absolutely surprised about that," Jackson Lee said, because the bill had bipartisan support.

The bill would have extended for one year the Sept. 30 expiration of a one-year social services block grant. Both houses adjourned early Thursday and are unlikely to return until after the Nov. 2 election.

Jackson Lee said she would urge **Health and Human Services** Secretary **Kathleen Sebelius** to take administrative action to keep money flowing to Texas social service agencies until the House could reconvene. The **House Democratic** leadership is committed to taking up the issue again, she said.

"The main thing I want to give the community is hope," Jackson Lee said.

Cornyn's office said Texas would lose \$94 million in unspent social security block grant funds. The money was part of a \$600 million grant in 2009 to help disaster afflicted states, including Missouri, Illinois and Louisiana.

But social service agencies complained that red tape at federal and state levels kept them from receiving the money for six months, so they only had six months to spend the one-year grant.

Social service agencies also complain that the deadline falls just as the need for services is increasing. They said deadlines for similar grants to Hurricane Katrina affected areas were routinely extended.

Twelve counties in the Houston area received about \$94 million. Social service agencies in Galveston and Brazoria counties, hard-hit by Ike, banded together and received about \$33 million in social service block grants.

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