

A series of measures proposed Thursday by House conservatives to shrink the federal deficit included several that would fall heavily on the federal workforce.

The Republican Study Committee, who unveiled the plan, called their proposal the "Spending Reduction Act of 2011," and they said it delivers on campaign promises to cut non-defense spending from the federal budget.

It would extend President Obama's pay freeze on federal employees from two years to five, cut the civil service by 15 percent through attrition over a decade, and prohibit federal workers from serving as union officials on government time. The lawmakers claimed these and other changes they proposed would help eliminate \$2.5 trillion in spending over that 10-year period.

Republicans have already moved this month to reduce congressional salaries by 10 percent and force federal workers to take two-week furloughs.

These latest proposals face an uphill battle to become law, however. They would have to pass the Democratic-controlled Senate and be signed by Obama, and it is not even clear whether they are supported by House Speaker John A. Boehner (R-Ohio), who has set a more modest target for reducing the federal budget.

Nevertheless, the Study Committee, which represents about 70 percent of House Republicans, intends to push a debate over whether shrinking the country's public sector is the best way to grow its private one.

"I've got to believe that even public workers understand the looming crisis," said Rep. Joe Walsh (R-Ill.), a freshman. "Private companies do this all the time. The public sector will have to go down the same road everybody needs to go down."

Rep. John Campbell (R-Calif.) compared the plan's strategy to cut the number of federal jobs to letting go 50 of the 300 employees of a private company in order to save the rest.

"I have empathy for federal workers, but we can't just exempt them from the actions we're taking," Campbell said. "We're heading off a cliff."

Democrats and public employee unions responded to Thursday's proposals with frustration, warning of dramatic cuts in services and an erosion of their quality.

"Even if drastic reductions such as these are ultimately not enacted into law, proposals like these get in the way of vital agency recruitment and retention efforts," Colleen M. Kelley, president of the National Treasury Employees Union, said in a statement.

John Gage, president of the American Federation of Government Employees, urged lawmakers to "slow down and carefully consider the ramifications that these kinds of broadside attacks will have on the effective and efficient operation of government."