

The Republican-led House Rules Committee late Monday approved a rule for a massive Hurricane Sandy relief package that shuts out most GOP proposals to pare back the size of the bill.

The main bill provides \$17 billion in relief, and an amendment made in order would add another \$33.7 billion, for a total of \$50.7 billion.

Late last week, Republicans offered amendments that would trim the bill significantly, but few of those were made "in order" by the Rules Committee on Monday. For example, Rep. Tom McClintock (R-Calif.) proposed amendments that would have slashed \$22 billion from the total package, but none of them were accepted by the committee.

And Rep. Paul Broun (R-Ga.) proposed several amendments that would have cut more than \$300 million from the bill. House Rules made just one of these in order — to cut \$13 million in funding to "accelerate the National Weather Service ground readiness project."

All told, Republican amendments were made in order that would cut less than \$200 million from the \$50.7 billion package. One of these, from Rep. Bill Flores (R-Texas), would cut \$150 million for Regional Ocean Partnership grants.

Another amendment made in order, from Rep. John Fleming (R-La.), would cut nearly \$10 million from the Fish & Wildlife Service. And one from Rep. Jeff Duncan (R-S.C.) would cut \$1 million for the Legal Services Corporation, which provides legal aid to low-income Americans.

Preventing votes on the larger proposals to cut back the size of the bill reveals the ongoing split within the Republican Party about whether disaster aid should be off set. It is also likely to draw anger from conservatives later in the week, when the bill is considered. Just a few weeks ago, 67 House Republicans voted against a \$9.7 billion Sandy aid bill because they believed it would allow the National Flood Insurance Program to go deeper into debt without any reforming of the program.

McClintock told The Hill last week that he and many other Republicans believe this week's Sandy relief bill is filled with expensive items that are not critical to providing relief for victims of Sandy.

"These disaster bills are becoming pork spending," he said. "There's lots of spending in these bills that has nothing to do with the disaster."

The only chance Republicans will have to mitigate a significant piece of the bill is by voting for an amendment from Rep. Mick Mulvaney (R-S.C.) that was made in order. His language would require a 1.63 percent cut to discretionary programs to make up for the \$17 billion in spending in the main bill.

During the Rules Committee hearing, Republicans and Democrats indicated support for keeping away the bigger amendments that might have complicated passed in both the House and the Senate.

"I am requesting an appropriate rule for this legislation to ensure swift passage," House Appropriations Committee Chairman Hal Rogers (R-Ky.) said. "Hurricane Sandy has brought much of the Northeast region to its knees, and, as it has been in the past, it is once again our duty to help our people and their communities get back on their feet in a timely fashion."

Rep. Nita Lowey (D-N.Y.) said she worried about holding votes on GOP amendments that she said would be seen as a "poison pill."

"I am deeply concerned the rule will make in order so many as to constitute filibuster by amendment, or any number of small reduction amendments making for death by a thousand cuts," she said. "I ask the Committee not to propose a rule that hinders swift House passage of a bill the Senate can pass and the President can sign."

The House will start work on the Sandy package Tuesday by taking up the rule for the bill, but might finish the bill by Wednesday. Other amendments made in order by the Rules Committee are from:

Jon Runyan (R-N.J.), to clarify that money in the bill for fisheries can be used by states that were hit by Sandy and suffered a fisheries disaster in 2012;

John Campbell (R-Calif.) and Earl Blumenauer (D-Ore.), clarifying the use of federal funds for Corps of Engineers construction projects;

Nydia Velazquez (D-N.Y.), increasing the Community Development Fund by \$25 million, and offsetting that increase elsewhere in the bill;

Tim Huelskamp (R-Kan.), requiring FEMA to disclose all disaster relief grants;

Dan Benishek (R-Mich.), to restore a requirement that local investments are required in Historic Preservation Grants;

Rob Bishop (R-Utah), to prohibit the government from acquiring any more federal land under the bill; and

Velazquez, to increase funding for the National Cemetery Administration by \$1 million.