

Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid has announced that the Senate might abandon the Small Business Innovation & Research bill (SBIR) as the legislation has become bogged down with unrelated amendments which have slowed its progress through the chamber.

The SBIR legislation is an eight-year reauthorization of innovation and technology programs and typically enjoys broad, bi-partisan support. In March the reauthorization was brought up for consideration on a vote of 84-12.

However, since that time, under an open amendment process both Republican and Democratic senators have offered a myriad of unrelated amendments focusing on varying issues such as environmental regulation, military involvement in Libya, credit card fees “swipe fees”, and stopping the implementation of the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (PPACA) until the various federal court cases are resolved. These amendments have brought the legislation to a halt and jeopardized its chances of being voted on.

One other area of contention is an amendment filed by Sen. Olympia Snowe (R-ME) that would require judicial reviews of new regulations and their effects on small businesses. Majority Leader Reid has objected to this amendment, and suggested that he would pull the bill from the floor if it is adopted.

One option for Majority Leader Reid is to file for cloture on the legislation, a procedural move that would cut off debate on unrelated amendments. However, a cloture motion requires 60 votes and will take up several days of the Senate’s time. Doing so would also violate an agreement between Reid and Minority Leader McConnell that allows for an open amendment process.

The Senate is scheduled to reconvene May 2nd. If Reid decides to abandon the SBIR bill, the Senate would move on to consideration of a proposal to curtail tax breaks for oil and gas companies. Additionally, Reid has indicated he would like the Senate to vote on the House-passed fiscal 2012 budget resolution.

The House is considering its own version of the SBIR reauthorization entitled “*Creating Jobs through Small Business Innovation Act of 2011*” introduced by Congresswoman Renee Ellmers (R-NC).