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By Erin Kutz , Special To The Day

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Washington — Congress, facing the prospect of an election-year recession, passed an emergency plan Thursday that rushes rebates of \$600 to \$1,200 to most taxpayers and \$300 checks to disabled veterans, the elderly and other low-income people. President Bush indicated he would sign the measure.

But two programs left out of the Senate economic stimulus plan Thursday — extended jobless aid and more money for food stamps — would have provided bigger boosts to the economy than those left in the bill, state and national analysts said.

The Senate passed the economic stimulus plan, 81-16, late Thursday afternoon, adding to the plan rebates for 20 million seniors and 250,000 disabled veterans. An alternative plan backed by Democrats also would have provided extensions for unemployment insurance and funds for the low-income heating assistance program. A plan for increasing the food stamp program also did not pass.

House passage by a 380-34 vote came a few hours later. Still, by congressional standards, lawmakers approved the legislation with exceptional speed to jolt the weak economy. The plan, which adds \$168 billion to the deficit over two years, is intended to provide cash for people to spend and tax relief for businesses to make new investments — boosts for an economy battered by a housing downturn and credit crunch.

The economic rescue plan would speed \$600 to \$1,200 in rebates to most taxpayers and \$300 checks to low-income people, including disabled veterans and the elderly. Rebate checks could begin arriving in May. They would be based on 2007 tax returns, which are due April 15.

The vote capped more than a week of political maneuvering that ended only when majority Democrats dropped their demand that the proposal offer jobless benefits, heating aid for the poor and tax breaks for certain industries.

Those benefits are exactly what some experts believe is needed to jump start the stalled economy.

A report by Moody's economic research Web site, [economy.com](#), shows that every dollar spent on food stamps returns \$1.73 to the economy and every dollar spent on extended unemployment insurance benefits contributes \$1.64, according to a statement by the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, a non-profit organization that studies state and federal fiscal policy.

Last week, nearly 50,000 people in Connecticut requested unemployment checks, up 3.8 percent from the same period last year, according to John Toomey Jr., a research analyst with the Connecticut Department of Labor. The original Senate plan would have extended unemployment benefits for 13 weeks.

Each month 104,000 households receive food stamps in Connecticut, according to the state's Department of Social Services.

Rep. Joe Courtney, D-2nd District, said Congress could still consider extending unemployment benefits.

"Ideally, an anti-recession stimulus package should have unemployment compensation extension," he said. "That's been a tried and true method to help families and workers out of jobs get through a downturn in the economy."

About 76 percent of all people who get food stamps use them within the first week and more than 90 percent use them within the first month, according to Lucy Nolan, executive director of End Hunger Connecticut.

End Hunger outreach advocate Phyllis Cappuccio said surging fuel prices have led to an increased demand for food stamps in Eastern Connecticut and that she gets several calls a day for assistance. New London has opened four food pantries near

low-income housing developments to meet the need in other ways, she said.

“People in Connecticut, like people across the United States, are hurting as a result of Bush economic policies and need programs like unemployment insurance and food stamps to help during times of need,” said Colleen Flanagan, spokeswoman for Sen. Christopher Dodd, D-Conn.

Robert Bixby, executive director of the Concord Coalition, a non-partisan budget watchdog group, expressed concern that Senate Democrats' initial requests turned the economic stimulus plan into a gift exchange of partisan desires.

“Everyone with an interest wants to get on board because they know with a stimulus package it will go through quickly,” Bixby said.

Washington