

STATE

Roy defends vote against back pay for federal workers

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WASHINGTON — Chip Roy is not sorry.

In one of his first acts in Congress, the freshman GOP lawmaker from Hays County voted “no” Friday on a bill guaranteeing back pay to federal workers hit by the partial government shutdown. He was one of only seven members of the House, all Republicans, to oppose the measure. It passed the Senate unanimously. And President Donald Trump has said he will sign it.

But to Roy, a conservative purist, the bill just affirms what happens anyway — federal employees typically receive back pay after government shutdowns end — and the bill does not actually help any of the workers, including those in the 21st Congressional District he represents, right now. It does, however, give them a federal guarantee that they will be paid.

Roy blames the Democrats for the shutdown and says he supports bolstered border security.

“I was on the floor and I looked at it,” he said of the Government Employee Fair Treatment Act, which would apply to any shutdown, not just the current one. “It was clear to me the bill would perpetrate shutdowns. What it does is provide cover to politicians. It’s a ‘get out of jail free’ card for politicians. I voted against politicians giving themselves cover.”

And attacking business as usual is what Roy said he was elected to do. That is no comfort to federal workers in his district and opened Roy, who won an open seat in November by less than 3 percentage points, to hot takes on social media.

“Roy’s the only Texan who voted against back pay which indicates he’s got a lot to learn,” said Eddie Walker, who lives in Roy’s district and is president of a local unit of the National Treasury Employees Union. The furloughed workers, who include more than 5,000 IRS employees working in Austin, didn’t know if they would receive back pay, Walker said. “That bill takes a lot of pressure off people,” he said.

Nine Cabinet departments and several smaller agencies are operating without pay while Trump and congressional Democrats and Republicans are at an impasse over funding a border wall.

IRS collections worker Greg Roberts, who lives in South Austin, said the legislation “is a step in the right place.”

“The shutdown itself is a problem,” he said, saying that the impact hit him Monday when the city of Austin cut off power and water to his rental property for non-payment under a payment plan for work done on water pipes in October. “My life has been turned off,” he said, as he and his fiancée scrambled to make arrangements.

Roy, a former top staffer to U.S. Sens. Ted Cruz, R-Texas, and John Cornyn, R-Texas, as well as Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton, said that the bill will invite other shutdowns because lawmakers will not feel the pressure to act and can point to the legislation as a feel-good measure. “When these guys don’t feel the pain, they don’t do their jobs,” Roy said of his colleagues.

“I cannot in good conscience perpetrate in Washington the things I ran against,” he said.