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Senate nixes aid to UNITA, approves stopgap fund bill

By Rita McWilliams
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The Senate last night rejected a barrage of special-interest amendments — including aid to anti-communist rebels in Angola — and approved a \$489 billion stopgap bill to fund the government another year.

Divisive amendments from both sides of the aisle were staved off as the leadership kept reminding senators, who adjourned in time to attend a White House Christmas party, that the government would run out of money at midnight tomorrow if they did not act.

The House already has passed its \$480 billion version of the measure that covers funding for a majority of the government's agencies. Differences must be worked out in a conference committee.

The president had warned congressional leaders yesterday that he would veto the measure "if there is excessive spending in any area" of the omnibus spending bill. Mr. Reagan consistently has said that spending for domestic programs is too high.

The omnibus bill has been bogged down for two days with amendments that ranged from money to preserve Colorado's wilderness to reform for the U.S. military assistance programs.

Among measures lawmakers failed to attach to the bill was an amendment by Sen. Malcolm Wallop, Wyoming Republican, that would have given \$50 million to anti-communist Angolan guerrillas, the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA). The Senate, in a 56-39 vote, decided the amendment was not germane to the spending bill. But Majority Leader

Robert Dole, Kansas Republican, promised a free-standing vote on the issue before the end of the year.

In a related development yesterday, a senior State Department official, who spoke amid reports of an administration decision to aid Angolan rebels, said that after months of deadlock both the South African and Angolan governments "are showing some interest in the negotiating table."

The official, who spoke on the condition he not be identified, said

South Africa and Angola have finally responded to proposals made by would-be U.S. mediators early this year. The three countries will be continuing their diplomatic contacts this month, he said.

The Reagan administration reportedly has decided to ask Congress for \$15 million in "covert" military aid for rebels fighting Angola's Marxist government. The aid request is expected to be presented to the House and Senate Intelligence committees later this month.

The administration decision to aid UNITA is, in part, a reaction to congressional proposals that would provide either humanitarian or outright military assistance to the group.

Any aid to UNITA could make it difficult for the United States to play the role of mediator in seeking an agreement between Angola and South Africa, critics of the aid say.

In other Senate action yesterday on the continuing resolution, the Senate, on a 64-32 vote, also agreed that an amendment by Sen. John Kerry, Massachusetts Democrat, that would have prevented testing of nuclear devices in the president's proposed Strategic Defense Initiative program, did not belong on the bill.

On a 49-45, the Senate agreed that the chair had correctly ruled that it was inappropriate to attach an

amendment to create a special panel to investigate whether the government is properly handling political asylum cases. That amendment was offered by Sen. Gordon Humphrey, New Hampshire Republican, who said he would try again to get Senate approval for the panel.

The biggest amendment approved on the bill is one that may halt the sale of nuclear technology to China if the president does not certify that the communist nation will allow outside verification that it is using the materials for peaceful purposes only.

Staff writer Jay Mallin contributed to this report.