

Fed employee buyout plan passes Senate

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The Senate passed legislation Friday offering \$25,000 incentives for federal employees to quit.

Legislation aimed at accelerating a quarter-million person cut in the federal work force passed the Senate by voice vote. It is slightly different from the version passed Thursday by the House, and unless the House accepts the changes, the differences will have to be worked out in conference.

Under the buyout plan, any federal worker who has worked continuously for 12 months can receive severance pay or \$25,000,

whichever is less. The Federal Workforce Restructuring Act also allows agencies to retrain workers for different jobs within the agency.

To prevent workers from taking the money and then returning to the federal payroll, the lawmakers passed an amendment saying any person rehired within five years of accepting a buyout would have to return the funds.

The Office of Management and Budget can waive that repayment requirement only if the person is the only one qualified for a job.

The Congressional Budget Of-

fice has estimated that the buyouts will cost the government \$2.1 billion this fiscal year. But the Senate measure estimates savings over five years of more than \$22 billion.

Under the Senate version, the savings would go into a trust fund to be used to finance anti-crime legislation passed last year by the Senate.

The Clinton administration, under a plan outlined by Vice President Al Gore, hopes to cut 252,000 federal jobs — reducing the work force to 1.88 million — by the end of fiscal year 1999.