

WASHINGTON -- Partisan gridlock's got nothing on a few feet of snow.

Two major snowstorms in a week have paralyzed the nation's capital, leaving some Midlands lawmakers working back in their home states.

A storm Saturday dumped up to three feet of snow, and another 10-20 inches was expected Tuesday night into today, compounding problems with power outages, unplowed streets, canceled flights and closed Metrorail stations. Federal offices and schools were expected to be closed all week.

The House canceled its votes for the entire week, and Senate leaders discussed paring back their schedules as well.

President Barack Obama held a bipartisan meeting with congressional leaders Tuesday ahead of the second storm. He joked that it went so well that "I understand that (Republican Sen. Mitch) McConnell and (Democratic Senate Majority Leader Harry) Reid are out doing snow angels on the South Lawn together."

The White House decided to move a concert celebrating civil rights music from Wednesday to Tuesday to beat the next round of snow.

Reps. Jeff Fortenberry and Lee Terry of Nebraska and Steve King of Iowa, all Republicans, stayed in their home states and were planning activities there. Fortenberry, for example, was holding town hall meetings with constituents by telephone.

Terry attended a Greater Omaha Chamber of Commerce event with former Treasury Secretary

Henry Paulson and Berkshire Hathaway CEO Warren Buffett.

Rep. Adrian Smith, R-Neb., had flown to Washington on Monday to ensure that he would be there when the House convened Tuesday. After the announcement that all votes for the week had been canceled, however, Smith was stuck trying to find a flight back home.

The Senate demonstrated a little more snow toughness, voting Tuesday afternoon. The offices of Sens. Ben Nelson of Nebraska and Tom Harkin of Iowa, both Democrats, reported no travel difficulties.

But Sen. Chuck Grassley, R-Iowa, noted the bad weather in an online post early Tuesday and wrote that it had taken him 12 hours to make it to Washington. He also wrote that he slept in his office so that he could ensure he'd be on the hill for a 7 a.m. television interview.

Plows have been slow to get into neighborhood streets in the area, but Sen. Mike Johanns, R-Neb., said his residence in Arlington, Va., is along a major road.

"The plus is your street gets plowed," Johanns said. "The minus is it gets plowed into your driveway."

Press conferences, hearings and other events were scratched one after another in the face of the coming storm.

This morning was supposed to be the year's first Nebraska Breakfast, the weekly gathering of Nebraskans while Congress is in session. But the breakfast was canceled because most Nebraskans who had been expected were unable to fly in or were scrambling to get home Tuesday.

Representatives of the Nebraska Appleseed Center for Law in the Public Interest had been scheduled to testify in Washington today about safety concerns at meatpacking plants. But the

hearing was postponed.

Darcy Tromanhauser, director of Appleseed's immigrant program, said from Nebraska that the organization was excited about the opportunity to testify but that the delay was understandable with three feet of snow on the ground.

"Even here that would count," Tromanhauser said.

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