



Written by [Michael Tennant](#) on September 8, 2017

Senate Ratifies Trump-Schumer-Pelosi Deal Hiking Debt Ceiling

After being blindsided by a deal President Donald Trump struck with congressional Democrats, the Republican-controlled Senate nevertheless approved a bill Thursday that, in addition to providing relief to victims of Hurricane Harvey, increases the federal debt limit and funds the government through mid-December.

The Senate voted 80-17 to pass the measure. The previous day, the House of Representatives had passed, by a vote of 419-3, a bill that spent half that of the Senate measure on hurricane relief and did not include the debt-limit hike. All no votes in both chambers were cast by Republicans.



That the Senate would pass a hurricane-relief bill was a foregone conclusion; that the bill might include a debt-limit increase was even a strong possibility. Congressional Republicans and Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin were hoping to lift the ceiling high enough to last 12 or 18 months, while Democrats sought a short-term increase — an idea House Speaker Paul Ryan (R-Wis.) [called](#) “unworkable” and “ridiculous” before Trump agreed to it.

However, in a Wednesday meeting with congressional leaders from both parties, Trump accepted a proposal from Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer (D-N.Y.) and House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.) to add a three-month debt-limit hike and a continuing resolution to fund the government for the same length of time to the hurricane-relief bill.

Schumer, naturally, was pleased with the agreement, saying Wednesday “was a good day in a generally very partisan town.”

Ryan and Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-Ky.) tried to put the best face on the deal, saying the president wanted “a bipartisan moment” ([Ryan](#)) and “to not create a picture of divisiveness at a time of genuine national crisis” (McConnell).

Other, more conservative Republicans — who, like Ryan and McConnell, had been caught completely off guard — chose their words less carefully.

House Freedom Caucus chairman Mark Meadows (R-N.C.) said, “Democrats got exactly what they wanted,” namely a deal that “gives them the greatest leverage in the world to get exactly what they want later.” Meadows acknowledged that the bill with the debt-limit increase is likely to pass the House, especially with Democrats on board.

Freedom Caucus member Ted Yoho (R-Fla.), asked about the pact, remarked sarcastically, “It’s great to be in the majority.”

And Senator Ben Sasse (R-Neb.) issued a terse [statement](#) saying simply, “The Pelosi-Schumer-Trump



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deal is bad.” [Bloomberg](#) noted that the Trump of 2013 might have agreed with that assessment, for at that time he [tweeted](#), “The worst negotiators in history (otherwise known as Republicans) have just offered to suspend debt ceiling for four months. Pathetic!”

Indeed, by raising the debt limit for such a short time, Trump “may have simply handed Democrats the upper hand heading into a confrontational end-of-the-year negotiation,” wrote Bloomberg. That negotiation “is expected to include Trump’s proposed border wall with Mexico and his decision to end a program that lets young undocumented immigrants stay in the U.S.”

It may also include a proposal to do away with the debt ceiling altogether. According to the [Washington Post](#), in the same Wednesday meeting, Trump and Schumer “agreed to pursue a deal that would permanently remove the requirement that Congress repeatedly raise the debt ceiling.”

Although the existence of the debt ceiling is a good thing because it reminds Congress and the American people that there are limits on how much the government should be allowed to spend, it has thus far failed to restrain federal spending because Congress — frequently after much political grandstanding — invariably increases it when it is about to be reached. Eliminating it, bad as the policy might be, would at least have the virtue of being honest about Uncle Sam’s profligacy.

Clearly, the debt-ceiling issue is not going to go quietly into the night, regardless of Trump’s artless deals. The only genuine solution to the problem, however, is neither to keep hiking the ceiling nor to do away with it but to bring spending in line with the Constitution — by, for instance, not passing hurricane-relief bills, no matter which riders are attached. Doing so would shrink the federal budget to almost nothing, at which point the debt limit would seem as unnecessary as an air conditioner in Antarctica.

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