



Written by [Raven Clabough](#) on October 1, 2015

Shutdown Averted as Congress Passes Spending Bill

It was another near miss for Congress, as the House and Senate managed yesterday, with just hours to spare, to pass a spending bill to fund the federal government past midnight.

The legislation will provide lawmakers another 10 weeks — until December 11 — to negotiate a more long-term funding deal for the remainder of fiscal year 2016, which ends on September 30, 2016.



The “clean” spending bill, devoid of riders, passed the Senate by a vote of 78-20, and the House 257 to 151, with support from 91 Republicans, before it made its way to the president’s desk for a signature. The *New York Times* reports that House Republicans also adopted a resolution to cut funding to Planned Parenthood, though Senate Democrats are certain to block it.

The spending bill sets government operating levels at a rate of approximately \$1.017 trillion per year in discretionary spending (total spending is about \$3.5 trillion), and earmarks funds for emergency situations such as the wildfires in the West.

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Failure to pass the spending bills necessary to pass a full budget has compelled Congress to rely once again on the less pragmatic short-term spending measure to keep the government open. With this approach, lawmakers find themselves in the same position every few weeks of scrambling to avert a government shutdown. “This bill hardly represents my preferred method for funding the government, but it’s now the most viable way forward after Democrats’ extreme actions forced our country into this situation,” asserted Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-Ky.)

Some lawmakers have strongly criticized this method as being “short-sighted,” including Senate Minority Leader Harry Reid, who stated, “Dec. 11 — that means within the coming weeks we will again be negotiating with the Republicans to avoid another shutdown; we’ll also have to find a way to pay our bills.”

But according to Associated Press, President Obama and Republican leaders are hoping to rectify this problem and have open discussions on a two-year budget deal.

Senator McConnell told reporters on Tuesday,

We’d like to settle a top line for both years so that next year we can have a regular appropriations process. The president and Speaker Boehner and I spoke about getting started at our discussion last week, and I would expect them to start very soon.

Items to be discussed in those talks include operating budgets for the Pentagon and domestic agencies that are still under automatic spending cuts, the AP reports. Republicans want to see an increase in defense spending while Democrats are asking for equal relief for domestic programs.

Those talks are not likely to be completed before Boehner’s departure at the end of October.

Boehner surprised his colleagues last week with an announcement that he would resign from Congress



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on October 30. The news came as conservatives in the House threatened to oust him as speaker if the Continuing Resolution maintained Planned Parenthood's funding. Lawmakers had already reached out to Majority Leader Kevin McCarthy as a potential successor to the speaker prior to Boehner's announcement.

Meanwhile, whether budget talks between the president and Republican leaders will be successful remains to be seen. Congressional Democrats and Obama were unwilling to compromise on what was the most contentious issue in the debate on the Continuing Resolution: namely, funding for Planned Parenthood. Republicans have argued that all funding to the abortion giant should immediately be halted while an investigation is conducted into its fetal organ harvesting scheme, revealed recently through a series of undercover videos.

In the days leading up to the passage of the spending bill, Senate Republicans introduced a measure to divert the funds for Planned Parenthood to community health clinics. "For one year, it would defund Planned Parenthood and protect women's health by funding community health clinics with that \$235 million instead," Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell said in a floor statement before the vote on that legislation. "This would allow us to press the 'pause' button as we investigate the serious scandal surrounding Planned Parenthood."

But the bill failed to garner enough votes to overcome a Democratic filibuster. Democrats made it clear that they were more interested in funding Planned Parenthood than the troops overseas. And yet even as the Democrats showcased their unfailing stubbornness, they managed to hijack the narrative and paint the GOP as the guilty party hell-bent on shutting down the government.

"This government by crisis is no way to run a country," declared Reid. "Democrats have been calling for responsible, bipartisan budget negotiations for months. These negotiations could have avoided this unnecessary crisis altogether."

Republicans from the conservative arm of the party argued that the GOP cannot kowtow to the Obama administration each time it threatens a shutdown. Senator Rand Paul of Kentucky, for example, said in a Senate speech Tuesday that a partial government shutdown may be just what the GOP needs to gain leverage over Obama:

Why don't we start out with the negotiating position that we defund everything that's objectionable — all the wasteful spending, all the duplicative spending — let's defund it all and if there has to be negotiation, let's start from defunding it all and see where we get.

But it would take courage, because you have to let spending expire. If you're not willing to let the spending expire and start anew, you have no leverage.

Similarly, Senator Ted Cruz (R-Texas) has noted that President Obama "simply has to utter the word 'shutdown' and Republican leadership runs to the hills."



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