



Written by [Michael Tennant](#) on May 31, 2011

Symbolic Debt Ceiling Bill Voted Down

There was political maneuvering all around. The bill was introduced by Rep. Dave Camp (R-Mich.), Chairman of the House Ways and Means Committee, who then took to the floor of the House to denounce his own legislation, saying his bill “will and must fail ... because it sends a clear and critical message that the Congress has finally recognized we must immediately begin to rein in America’s affection for deficit spending.”



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The Obama administration has for some time been requesting a vote on a “clean” bill such as this, so the GOP gave it to them. However, Republicans also handed their adversaries the means of escape in the process. First, they announced loudly that the vote was to be purely symbolic and that the bill would be defeated, even going so far as to call “Wall Street to assure them this was nothing more than theater,” [according to Politico](#). Second, they brought the bill to a vote under a suspension of rules, meaning it would come to a vote quickly and with limited debate — but it would also need a two-thirds vote in favor to pass, something that was most assuredly not going to happen with a GOP majority. Democrats were thus able to dismiss the vote as “a sham” (Connecticut Rep. John Larson), “demagogic” (Maryland Rep. Steny Hoyer), and “irresponsible grandstanding” (Maryland Rep. Donna Edwards) and to safely vote against it.

Hoyer, the House Minority Whip, had, in fact, urged his fellow Democrats to vote against the measure, recognizing that its purpose was to make them vulnerable to attacks in “political 30-second ad[s].” He, as well as House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.), did vote Nay. However, the very fact that voting in favor of the bill would have opened congressmen up to political assaults demonstrates, says *Politico*, “the peril with which they vote to pile onto the national debt without accompanying spending cuts” — proof that the debate in Washington, driven by public sentiment, has long since shifted from simply running up more debt, as Democrats obviously desire, to at least making a show of fiscal



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responsibility.

Republicans may have had another ulterior motive in bringing this legislation to a fast vote: providing cover for their own members of Congress when it comes time to vote on whatever debt limit deal the House leadership works out with the Obama administration. Chad Pergram, [blogging at FoxNews.com](#), theorizes:

By engineering a separate, unfettered vote that inevitably will fail, Republicans will have documented a vote where their members voted against hiking the debt ceiling. And if and when an agreement is reached later this summer and they vote yes, the GOP can then say to its base that it only voted for a debt limit increase because it simultaneously voted for steep spending reductions.

... A two-vote strategy is wise for Republicans. This enables them to cast a no vote and steel their resolve against a debt limit increase. And if and when there is an agreement with the White House, they can contrast Tuesday's "clean" vote against the vote where they wrangled significant spending reductions out of the Obama Administration.

And so the debt ceiling kabuki continues. Both parties are committed to plunging the country ever more deeply into debt. The only question is how much they will claim spending is being cut when the inevitable deal is announced. House Speaker John Boehner (R-Ohio) is demanding cuts in excess of the debt limit increase, but he could easily spin, say, \$3 trillion of supposed cuts over a 10- or 20-year period as a victory. Democrats could plausibly tell their base that they won the battle because most of those cuts have to be implemented by future Congresses and will, therefore, never see the light of day. Then, while both parties claim victory, taxpayers will go down to defeat once again.



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