House Passes GOP Plan to Avert Government Shutdown

Measure, which extends funding into next year, relies on heavy Democratic support

By Katy Stech Ferek
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WASHINGTON—House lawmakers approved a Republican plan Tuesday that would continue funding federal agencies until early next year, a critical step in averting a partial government shutdown, with House Speaker Mike Johnson (R., La.) relying heavily on Democratic votes to get his bill across the finish line.

The 336-95 vote exceeded a two-thirds threshold required under a special procedure employed by Johnson to sidestep internal GOP disagreements. The measure still requires approval from the Democratic-controlled Senate, where the leaders of both parties have signaled support but timing was uncertain.

The bill's passage showed many lawmakers had little appetite for brinkmanship just ahead of their Thanksgiving break, opting for a "clean" measure that extends funding at current levels but pushes off fights over issues including border security, federal spending levels and Ukraine funding. Just ahead of the vote, House Democratic leaders threw their support behind the measure, saying it avoided "harmful cuts and…extreme right-wing policy riders."

The short-term proposal would extend government funding at current levels for some federal agencies until mid-January and for others, including the Defense Department, until early February, while lawmakers work on fiscal full-year funding plans. Lawmakers missed their initial annual deadline of Sept. 30 to finish that work, prompting the need for an initial extension to Nov. 17 and now another one.

In remarks Tuesday before the vote, Johnson said he was no fan of short-term spending patches—called continuing resolutions or CRs—and acknowledged the bill didn't contain GOP policy wins. But he said the measure's passage would avert a shutdown, give the party more time to pass conservative full-year spending plans and prevent House Republicans from being jammed by Senate Democrats' own budget ideas.

"I believe that we can fight on principle and do these things simultaneously," Johnson said. "When you have a small majority, it requires some things are going to have to be bipartisan."

House Republicans, said Rep. Chuck Fleischmann (R., Tenn.), "all agree we need to get the federal government on a more fiscally responsible path, but lengthy government shutdowns don't save money."

The House currently has 434 members—221 Republicans and 213 Democrats. The bill needed the support of 290 lawmakers to reach the two-thirds threshold. All but two Democrats—Reps. Jake Auchincloss of Massachusetts and Mike Quigley of Illinois—voted in favor of the measure. Among Republicans, 127 voted in favor and 93 against. Three lawmakers, including former House Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D., Calif.), didn't vote.

"We do not want to stand for shutdowns and showdowns," said Rep. Pete Aguilar (D., Calif.), the chairman of the House Democratic Caucus. "That's just not who we are.'

Democrats are nevertheless concerned that while Johnson pushed a stopgap measure to avoid an immediate shutdown, he is also advancing full-year spending bills that would impose cuts for fiscal 2024, making some Democrats hesitant to throw their weight behind the continuing resolution. Democrats say Republicans should stick to the terms of the June debt-ceiling deal, agreed to by President Biden and former Speaker Kevin McCarthy (R., Calif.), that laid out spending levels for the fiscal year.

"Our caucus still has questions about what that path ahead is," Aguilar said.

Some Republicans complained the measure lacked border-security provisions or immediate spending cuts they favor. Some also reject short-term spending patches on principle.

Rep. Chip Roy (R., Texas), a leader of the hard-right House Freedom Caucus, said he couldn't back a measure that lacked even incremental spending cuts and didn't address border concerns.

"Mike's a good friend, and I like him, and we'll keep working together going forward," he said of the speaker. "All I'm saying is, right now, I oppose this measure. I think it's a mistake."

The group put out a statement Tuesday saying it opposed the Johnson plan.

The subdued tone on the spending bill came amid various blowups around Capitol Hill, adding to a sense that members were eager to get out of town for break at the end of the week.

At one point, Rep. Tim Burchett (R., Tenn.) chased down McCarthy, accusing him of deliberately elbowing him in the back as the men were passing in a hall way.

"Hey Kevin, you got any guts?" yelled Burchett, who is one of the eight Republicans who voted with Democrats to oust McCarthy from the speakership. McCarthy denied he elbowed him. McCarthy's chief nemesis, Rep. Matt Gaetz (R., Fla.) immediately filed an ethics complaint against him.

Over in the Senate, during a committee hearing, Sen. Bernie Sanders (I., Vt.) admonished Sen. Markwayne Mullin (R., Okla.), who has trained in mixed martial arts, for challenging a witness to a fistfight.

"You're a United States Senator!" Sanders said. "Sit down please!"

"It's time to pass the CR and get the hell out of here," said Sen. Kevin Cramer (R., N.D.). "Wouldn't that be nice? Everybody can calm down."

Typically, bills need to pass a party-line procedural hurdle, known as the rule vote, to get to a final vote. Some House Republicans, breaking with decades of precedent, have used the step as leverage by refusing to vote for the rule unless they first received concessions. Facing that prospect, Johnson instead moved to pass the bill Tuesday under suspension of the rules, a fast-track process that skips the rule vote but requires a two-thirds supermajority. It is the same process that McCarthy used in September to pass a short-term spending patch—before [his ouster just days later](#).

The measure now must pass the Democratic-controlled Senate before heading to the White House.

Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer (D., N.Y.) said he was "pleased that Speaker Johnson seems to be moving in our direction by advancing a CR that does not include the highly partisan cuts that Democrats have warned against." Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell (R., Ky.) said he supported the House GOP proposal and predicted it would pass on a bipartisan basis.

"It's nice to see us working together to prevent a government shutdown," McConnell said.

For the Senate to pass the bill before the Friday deadline, all 100 senators must agree to fast-track it. Senate GOP leaders said they were cautiously optimistic that an agreement would be reached in time, and it would pass easily.

A White House official said Tuesday that Biden would sign the bill if it came to his desk.

on House Democrats came with some risk for Johnson, who was elected to the speakership less than three weeks ago. McCarthy was removed last month after he endorsed a temporary spending bill that passed with more Democratic support than Republican votes.

Rep. Juan Ciscomani (R., Ariz.), said he didn't see an appetite from Republicans to try to oust Johnson.

"Johnson is leading. That's what McCarthy did," he said. "And when you lead, you're going to make decisions [where] you're going to try to bring both sides together and not bleed too many on either side to move it forward, and probably nobody's totally happy with it."

Johnson's proposal shelved for now several priorities that congressional leaders have said they want to pass as soon as possible.

Lawmakers from both parties have said they want to pass billions of dollars for Israel's military in its fight against Hamas, and Democrats and some Senate Republicans led by McConnell also want to send more money for Ukraine in its battle against Russia. The White House proposed a $106 billion supplemental bill that includes funding for Israel, Ukraine and Taiwan as well as the border and some domestic projects.

Many Republicans said they wanted tougher anti-immigration rules at the U.S.-Mexico border—not just money—to slow the number of migrants who are crossing.

Paul Kiernan, Ken Thomas and Lindsay Wise contributed to this article.