

# Senate Approves Short-Term Spending Bill as Lawmakers Eschew Shutdown Politics

*Republicans and Democrats joined twice recently to pass a 'clean' measure. It might not happen again.*

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WASHINGTON—Congressional shutdown brinkmanship is taking a break, but it could be back with a vengeance soon.

Faced with a government-funding deadline this weekend, House lawmakers of both parties agreed Tuesday [to back a short-term Republican plan](#) that extends the status quo until early next year, rather than stage another bare-knuckle fight now over spending and policy priorities. The far-less-pugnacious Senate followed Wednesday, approving the proposal 87 to 11. The bill now goes to President Biden for his signature.

“No government shutdown, no cuts to vital programs, no poison pills. This is a great outcome for the American people,” said Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer (D., N.Y.) late Wednesday night.

Driving the detente: Many House Republicans were convinced they would be blamed for any government shutdown and suffer in the next elections, while Democrats decided to join GOP colleagues in pushing off the next big budget fight, rather than using holiday deadlines to jam through a victory. Both resolved to hold their fire for next time, with almost all House Democrats and a majority of Republicans backing the stopgap spending plan.

Crucially, conservatives—though largely opposed to the measure—were [willing to let](#) House Speaker Mike Johnson (R., La.) move it forward without threatening his job just [three weeks into his tenure](#).

“I just think that people realize it’s not a good idea,” said Rep. Mike Simpson (R., Idaho), a senior member of the Appropriations Committee, of shutting down the government. “Never good policy, never good politics.”

Rep. Sheila Jackson Lee (D., Texas) said lawmakers were “kicking the can, but thank goodness Democrats are able to say, ‘We refuse to shut down the government.’ ”

The bipartisan peace likely won’t last. A central question is whether Republicans will stand firm on their policy demands on hot-button issues such as abortion and immigration in talks over full-year funding ahead of the new January and February deadlines. House GOP lawmakers are seeking to have fiscal 2024 government funding set below the levels established in the debt-ceiling [deal struck in June](#) by President Biden and then-Speaker Kevin McCarthy (R., Calif.), a move that could prompt the White House and Hill Democrats to dig in next time around.

Johnson might be unable to deliver much, given his party’s slim majority in the House and Democrats’ control of the Senate and White House. If enough conservatives wind up disappointed, they could try to oust him, [as they did McCarthy](#) when he passed a spending bill in September on a bipartisan vote similar to Tuesday’s.

Ten months of turmoil among House Republicans set the stage for Tuesday’s compromise. The House GOP went through 15 ballots and days of grueling negotiations in January before agreeing to [select McCarthy as House speaker](#), only to oust him nine months later when he lost support from a small minority of his GOP colleagues.

While GOP critics blasted Tuesday’s bill for failing to immediately cut spending or tighten U.S. border policy, they expressed some sympathy for Johnson and said it wasn’t a statement about his leadership.

I am much more likely to give grace to Mike than I am to Kevin,” said Rep. Ken Buck (R., Colo.), a member of the House Freedom Caucus who voted to remove McCarthy.

Other Republicans cautioned that the bill just reminded members of the perils of the party’s slim 221-213 majority.

“This is an unmanageable majority right now. Effectively, there’s not a majority,” said Rep. Garret Graves (R., La.). He said some Republicans are exploiting the narrow margin for personal gain or petty grievances.

“Once again, the Republican majority needs Democratic votes to govern,” said Rep. Rosa DeLauro (D., Conn.), the top Democrat on the House Appropriations Committee.

Rep. Matt Gaetz (R., Fla.) said the only difference between the bills passed by McCarthy and Johnson was the amount of time they had to prepare them.

McCarthy had seven months, and he dragged us along, and he backed us up against shutdown politics,” Gaetz said. “Johnson has had a few weeks. We’re gonna give him the time to design his plays and run his offense.”

Switching to a different sports metaphor, Gaetz warned Johnson against trying to pass another short-term spending bill: “It’s tough to get two mulligans on the same course,” he said.

In pitching Tuesday’s legislation to lawmakers, Johnson framed it as a step toward ending what has become a Christmas tradition in Washington: passing a giant “omnibus” spending bill for the coming year. Conservatives grumble that the strategy, used for the past decade or so, doesn’t give rank-and-file lawmakers as much input as the traditional process of passing 12 distinct appropriations bills.

“We can’t bring fiscal sanity back to Congress until we reform the process,” Rep. Barry Loudermilk (R., Ga.) said. “We’re at least doing something differently now.”

Polling shows that Americans by large majorities want their lawmakers to compromise, even if it means sacrificing core values at times. In a survey taken last year, just before the new Congress convened, three-quarters of respondents in an NPR/PBS/Marist poll said it was more important for officials to find compromises to solve problems than to stand on principle. That included about two-thirds of Republicans and more than 80% of Democrats.

In a Pew Research Center poll this summer, Americans overwhelmingly said that the political system wasn’t working well, with more than 80% within each party believing that the two parties are more focused on fighting each other than on solving problems.

While the mood for compromise—or fatigue with partisan demands—might have taken hold for now, other factors could revive the brinkmanship once the next funding deadlines approach.

Most House members represent solidly Democratic or Republican districts, which creates incentives for them to show they are fighting for their party’s core values to stave off the threat of primary-election challenges from within their own party. Some 86% of Republicans and 80% of Democrats won election in 2022 by landslide margins of 10 percentage points or more.

In addition, social media and the rise of online fundraising mean that lawmakers are less reliant on party leaders for money and publicity. They can operate as their own power centers, free from the discipline that congressional leaders could once enforce on members who broke party unity.

Moderate GOP Rep. Marc Molinaro (R., N.Y.) said Tuesday's vote to avoid a shutdown was an acknowledgment of reality, even if some of his conservative colleagues don't like it.

"How do I feel about needing a bipartisan solution in a bipartisan government?" he asked. "That is the only way that anything is ever going to happen in this government."