

Senate passes massive 2-year budget deal

The legislation lifts the debt ceiling for two years and raises spending \$320 billion over current levels.

By [BURGESS EVERETT](#) and [JOHN BRESNAHAN](#) 08/01/2019 02:50 PM EDT



"This is the deal President Trump is waiting [for] and eager to sign into law," Sen. Mitch McConnell said before the Senate voted to advance the budget deal. | J. Scott Applewhite/AP Photo

The Senate passed a two-year bipartisan budget deal and sent it to President Donald Trump's desk for his signature, putting an end to the threat of a debt crisis this fall and easing the path toward funding the government past Sept. 30.

The vote was 67-28, with a majority of Senate Republicans supporting the measure. Trump and Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-Ky.) had been lobbying GOP senators hard the past several days to gain their approval, and their efforts paid off Thursday morning.

The bipartisan package — hammered out in negotiations between Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.) and Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin — raises spending \$320 billion over current levels, lifts the debt ceiling for two years and sets a course for funding the government without the fiscal brinkmanship of recent years, such as last winter’s 35-day partial government shutdown over Trump’s border wall project.

McConnell also repeatedly hailed the Democrats’ concession that they would not insert “poison pill” policy language into individual appropriations bills this fall. That leaves in place the Hyde amendment provision banning federal funding for abortions, for instance, which McConnell cited as a major win.

“This is the agreement the administration has negotiated,” McConnell said on the floor Thursday morning. “This is the deal the House has passed. This is the deal President Trump is waiting [for] and eager to sign into law. This is the deal that every member of this body should support when we vote later this morning.”

Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer (D-N.Y.) pointed out that agreement ended the automatic “sequester” created by the 2011 Budget Control Act, which mandated \$125 billion in automatic spending cuts this year without congressional action.

“For too long, the arbitrary, draconian limits of sequester have hampered our ability to invest in working Americans and in our military readiness. This deal ends the threat of sequester permanently,” Schumer said.

But there was significant opposition to the two-year agreement, especially among Republicans and conservative outside groups. Sens. Mitt Romney and Mike Lee of Utah, Mike Braun of Indiana, Pat Toomey of Pennsylvania, Ted Cruz of Texas, Josh Hawley of Missouri, Marco Rubio and Rick Scott of Florida, and Rand Paul of Kentucky were among the legislation’s detractors.

“For all the reasons political you needed to get this done, one of the core

reasons I ran was fiscal integrity. They knew from the get-go where I was going to be,” Braun said. “Five out of seven freshmen were talking about the same thing: fiscal integrity. It just put a marker out there.”

Romney and Scott joined with Democratic Sens. Joe Manchin of West Virginia and Tom Carper of Delaware in a joint statement asserting that “as former Governors, we were responsible for setting a budget each year that was fiscally responsible to fund our priorities. That’s why today, we, as U.S. Senators, cannot bring ourselves to vote for this budget deal that does not put our country on a fiscally sustainable path.”

But McConnell and Senate GOP leaders — with help from Trump, Vice President Mike Pence and newly confirmed Defense Secretary Mark Esper — had pushed to get a majority of their members to support the legislation after roughly two-thirds of House Republicans opposed the budget deal that was approved by the Democratic-controlled House last week. Trump is “taking names” and watching who votes against the legislation, a Republican said on the condition of anonymity.

Majority Whip John Thune of South Dakota, who pressed senators to pass the legislation, said senators headed “for the door” when they saw him coming because of his urgent work to whip up support. Sen. Chuck Grassley (R-Iowa) has been one of the Republicans targeted by GOP leaders to support the bill. He said after a sustained effort by Thune: “The only person that kept asking me ‘til I said ‘yes’ or ‘no’ was Thune,” Grassley said. He decided late Tuesday to support the proposal.

Grassley — along with Joni Ernst of Iowa, Mike Crapo of Idaho and Dan Sullivan of Alaska — proved to be the tipping point for undecided Senate Republicans. Once leadership got the support of that bloc of votes, it was able to ensure a GOP majority for the legislation: Thirty Republicans ended up backing the measure on the critical procedural vote and 29 on final passage.

The bill’s proponents on the Republican side have been touting the increase

in defense spending as worth the compromise with Democrats over domestic spending. They said there's no alternative now that the House has left town, and the budget deal is far better than the alternatives of automatic budget cuts or stopgap spending bills.

“We're going to avoid this sort of nonsense we've had in the past with shutdowns and brief continuing resolutions,” said Sen. Roger Wicker (R-Miss.), who has been advocating for his colleagues to support the legislation. “In the end there will be enough members to do the responsible thing.”

Most Senate Democrats supported the legislation, though five opposed it, including presidential candidates Michael Bennet of Colorado and Amy Klobuchar of Minnesota plus Manchin, Carper and Jon Tester of Montana. Presidential candidate Kirsten Gillibrand supported it; the other four senators running for the White House missed the vote.

“Our debt is not skyrocketing because we are spending it on things we need like updates [to] infrastructure or investments in education — it's skyrocketing because of irresponsible spending,” Tester said.

The Senate also took up an amendment on a Paul amendment to cut and cap spending and balance the budget. It failed to get 60 votes, but allowed conservatives to express their frustrations with the \$1 trillion budget deficit.

McConnell didn't take any chances as the vote turned to crunch time. He told senators to stick around until the vote closed, informing them that the chamber wouldn't adjourn until something passes to lift the debt ceiling and deal with the budget.

After passing the budget, most senators immediately headed to the airport to return home for the summer, ready for a break from Washington, from each other, and from the media.

"Good afternoon. And I feel really bad that I will not be wishing you good

afternoon for another five weeks," Schumer told reporters at the top of a press conference Thursday.

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