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## **Senators reach debt deal: Agreement will raise U.S. borrowing limit, end shutdown**

Lori Montgomery, Paul Kane and Debbi Wilgoren, The Washington Post  
October 16, 2013

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Senate Majority Leader Harry M. Reid (D-Nev.) and Minority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-Ky.) announced a bipartisan deal on Wednesday to raise the debt limit through Feb. 7 and end the 16-day-old government shutdown.

The bill must be passed by both the Senate and the House of Representatives, and signed by President Obama, and it is unclear whether all that can happen before the Treasury Department exhausts its borrowing power Thursday.

It avoids any major changes to Obama's signature Affordable Care Act, a major victory for Democrats and a repudiation to House and Senate Republicans who for weeks tried to use the threat of a shutdown and potential default to force changes in the health-care law.

Passage of the bill would mean that the government can reopen, and hundreds of thousands of federal employees can return to work. It also means that the Treasury Department can continue to borrow money in order to pay the government's bills.

But the bill's timeline sets up another potentially bitter showdown over spending cuts and entitlement programs that will unfold in the halls of Congress over the next four months.

"After weeks spent facing off across a partisan divide that often seemed too wide to cross, our country came to the brink of a disaster. But in the

end, political adversaries set aside their differences and disagreements," Reid said on the Senate floor. "What we've done is send a message to Americans ... and in addition to that, to the citizens of every country in the world, that the United States lives up to its obligations."

In addition to lifting the \$16.7 trillion debt limit, the emerging measure would fund the government through Jan. 15, delaying the next threat of a shutdown until after the Christmas and New Year's holidays. It would set up a conference committee to hammer out broader budget issues, such as whether to replace deep cuts to agency budgets known as the sequester with other savings.

In a small Democratic concession on the Affordable Care Act, Republicans got additional safeguards to ensure that people who receive subsidies to buy health insurance are, in fact, eligible.

"Republicans remain determined to repeal this terrible law," McConnell said in announcing the agreement alongside Reid. "But for today - for today - the relief we hope for is to reopen the government, avoid default and protect the historic cuts we achieved under the Budget Control Act.

"This is far less than many of us had hoped for, frankly. But it's far better than what some had sought."

At the White House, press secretary Jay Carney endorsed the Senate compromise: "The president applauds Leader Reid and Minority Leader McConnell for working together to forge a compromise and encourage Congress to act swiftly to end the shutdown and protect the full faith and credit of the United States."

As part of the agreement, Reid said, Senate and House leaders would appoint representatives to "a budget conference committee that will set our country on a long-term path to fiscal sustainability."

He said the panel, to be chaired by Sen. Patty Murray (D-Wash.), head of the Senate Budget Committee, and Rep. Paul Ryan (R-Wis.), chairman of the House Budget Committee, would be tasked with producing a "negotiated budget resolution" in December that would avoid help prevent the frequent budget crises that have occurred in recent years.

Committee members "must have open minds," Reid said, and "be willing to consider every option, no matter how painful to their own political ideas and even to their own political parties."

In negotiating the compromise legislation, Democrats dropped their demand to delay a new tax on existing health-insurance plans, a change intended to benefit organized labor. And Republicans backed off their push to deny the Treasury Department flexibility to manage the nation's books after Feb. 7, an aborted attempt to ensure that the short-term extension of the debt limit doesn't somehow drag on into the spring.

Sen. Lindsey O. Graham (R-S.C.) said the looming debt deadline -- after a bitter, weeks-long standoff -- meant that Republicans had little or no leverage.

"This package is a joke compared to what we could have gotten if we had a more reasonable approach," Graham said. "For the party, this is a moment of self-evaluation, we are going to assess how we got here. If we continue down this path, we are really going to hurt the Republican Party long term."

The financial world, which has been carefully watching the chaos on Capitol Hill, and U.S. markets rose Wednesday amid reports of the deal. The Dow Jones industrial average, the Standard & Poor's 500-stock index and the Nasdaq each were up more than 1 percent.

Markets had closed down Tuesday, when the inability of House lawmakers to forge their own bill left Washington lurching toward the borrowing deadline with no clear plan for avoiding a government default. Fitch Ratings, the third-largest credit-rating agency, took a step toward a potential downgrade of the government's AAA rating. Fitch warned that "political brinksmanship and reduced financing flexibility" were elevating the risk of default.

It remains unclear whether the legislation can become law before the government exhausts its borrowing power Thursday, leaving Treasury Secretary Jack Lew with just \$30 billion in cash and a fluctuating flow of incoming tax revenue to pay the nation's bills. While Lew is unlikely to begin missing payments immediately, independent analysts say he would run short of funds no later than Nov. 1.

Sen. Ted Cruz (R-Tex.), who staged a 21-hour filibuster earlier in the process, told reporters immediately after the deal was announced that he would not attempt further delays. "Of course not, never had any intention to delay this vote," he said, while making clear that he would vote against the legislation. "Delaying this vote would not accomplish anything."

Sen. Richard J. Durbin, the Senate's No. 2 Democrat and chief vote counter, predicted that the package would easily pass the Senate with support from both parties. In the House, Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.) has pledged the support of all 200 Democrats, meaning House Speaker John A. Boehner (R-Ohio) would have to supply at least 17 votes.

Democrats say there are enough Republicans who will vote with them to pass the bill, and conservative Rep. Jim Jordan (R-Ohio) acknowledged that it appeared likely that the House would approve the Senate deal using mostly Democratic votes.

"It seems to be where it's headed," Jordan said Wednesday, adding that he and other conservatives will remain strenuously opposed.

Before the bill was announced, Democrats -- and some Senate Republicans -- were urging Boehner to draft the emerging Senate deal into legislation and let the House vote on it before the Senate takes up the bill. Such a scenario, which could speed passage, is still possible, but no decision has been made.

Passing the Senate bill before the Senate had even taken a vote would amount to a complete capitulation to the upper chamber, the latest embarrassment for Boehner in a speakership riddled with dark moments.

"This should not be about someone's speakership. This should not be about the next election," Sen. Lisa Murkowski (R-Alaska), a member of the bipartisan group of senators that helped draft the Senate bill, said on the "Today" show Wednesday morning. "This is about the future of our country."

## **Administration Revises Timeline for Plutonium Disposition Review**

Douglas P. Guarino, Global Security Newswire

October 11, 2013

[LINK](#)

WASHINGTON -- The National Nuclear Security Administration is backing away from statements it made earlier this month indicating that an assessment of its options for disposing surplus weapons-grade plutonium would not be complete until the spring of 2014 -- a date observers said could have caused further construction delays at a controversial reprocessing facility in South Carolina.

Construction of the mixed-oxide fuel fabrication facility has been slowed since the Obama administration announced in April that it was reassessing its options for disposing of the plutonium. The MOX facility would convert the material into fuel for nuclear power plants, but a series of delays and cost overruns prompted the administration to study whether there are more efficient options.

A contracting notice the agency made public on Oct. 4 said it expected the assessment to be finished in mid-fiscal 2014, or spring of the calendar year. Such timing could have meant funding cuts for MOX construction would remain in place an additional year, given that the administration's annual budget proposal typically is released earlier in the year, Tom Clements, of the watchdog group Friends of the Earth told Global Security Newswire.

However, the administration on Thursday released a revised version of the notice that omits any information pertaining to when the assessment will be finished. An Energy Department official told GSN Friday that the prior statement suggesting the review would not be complete until mid-fiscal 2014 was made in error. The official, who was not authorized to discuss the issue and asked not to be named, said the assessment would likely be completed sooner, possibly before the end of 2013.

Like the earlier version, the revised notice announces the extension of a contract to do work on a supplemental environmental impact statement for plutonium disposition which originally had been scheduled for release earlier this year. Anne Harrington, deputy NNSA administrator for defense nuclear nonproliferation, told GSN in August that the agency would not release the environmental document until after it completed the assessment of disposal options.

Similarly, the earlier version of the contract notice released Oct. 4 cited the ongoing review as one reason why work on the environmental impact statement would continue into 2014. However, the revision issued Thursday says the contract extension "is not associated with the Department's assessment of alternative plutonium disposition strategies."

According to the unnamed Energy Department official, this language in the revised notice is not meant to contradict Harrington's prior statement. The source acknowledged that the two items are related in the sense that, if the ongoing assessment causes the administration's preferred option for plutonium disposition to change, the environmental impact statement would have to reflect that change.

The language in the revised notice is instead meant to indicate that the contract extension itself is not directly dependent on the assessment of options, the Energy Department official said.

The notice extends the contract for work related to the environmental impact statement until November 2014. The statement itself is expected by April 2014, according to the revised notice.

### **Security contractor at SRS furloughs some employees**

Tiffany Takahashi, WFSB

October 11, 2013

[LINK](#)

Aiken County, SC (WFXG) -

Some security employees at the Savannah River Site are on furlough due to the government shutdown.

Wackenhut Services Incorporated, the security contractor at SRS, announced Friday that some of its employees are being placed on furlough.

Company officials say the Department of Energy directed them to ramp down operations and to perform only necessary activities to keep the facility safe.

As a result of the furloughs, barricades 8 and 10 will be closed effective midnight Sunday. Company officials say employees should plan on using alternate barricades until further notice.

The affected employees will be furloughed until Congress acts on a resolution to fund the Department of Energy.

### **Pearce urges back pay for WIPP workers during shutdown**

Stella Davis, Current-Argus

October 10, 2013

[LINK](#)

Addressing their concerns over upcoming furloughs, Congressman Steve Pearce, R-NM sent a letter Wednesday to Energy Secretary Ernest Moniz, urging him to protect pay for WIPP employees and those at Los Alamos and Sandia National Labs.

WIPP is a nuclear waste disposal site located about 27 miles east of the city.

"Last weekend the House passed legislation ensuring that all furloughed federal employees will receive the certainty of back pay," said Pearce "To ensure that the thousands in New Mexico who work at DOE contractor facilities like WIPP are included in this budget certainty, I asked Secretary Moniz to act and certify the labs and WIPP will be able to provide for employees, protecting our jobs and local economies."

He said contractors, WIPP employees and the two national labs provide a vital service to the nation, and there is no reason to allow damage to the communities when it can easily be prevented.

"I ask Secretary Moniz to join us in that spirit of cooperation, for the good of New Mexicans and the nation," Pearce said.

In the letter, Pearce pointed out that the national labs and WIPP play a key role in the nation's defense and growing economy by focusing on everything from the development of weapons systems to energy efficiency studies.

"Furloughs at WIPP would have serious and lasting economic consequences for the nearby community of Carlsbad and the surrounding area,"

Pearce said. "In the spirit of HR 3223, I again ask you to certify these expenses and to guarantee any and all furloughed personnel at these critically important facilities are compensated accordingly."

Asked for a comment on Pearce's effort on behalf of WIPP employees and the national labs, Deb Gill, DOE Carlsbad Field Office public affairs manager, deferred to agency officials in Washington.

### **Oak Ridge Site Specific Advisory Board elects new officers**

Oak Ridge Today  
October 12, 2013

[LINK](#)

The Oak Ridge Site Specific Advisory Board elected new officers during its September board meeting. The officers will serve in Fiscal Year 2014.

Dave Hemelright, Bruce Hicks, and Lisa Hagy will serve as chair, vice chair, and secretary respectively. The new officers presided over their first meeting Oct. 9 at the U.S. Department of Energy Information Center

at 1 Science.gov Way in Oak Ridge.

Hemelright was the vice chair for FY 2013 and had been acting chair since his predecessor, David Martin, completed his term of service in July. He also served on the Finance and Process, Environmental Management, Public Outreach, and Stewardship committees.

Hemelright, who lives in Lenoir City, is the K-12 Facilities Specialist for Kaatz, Binkley, Jones and Morris Architects Inc., specializing in Tennessee public school planning, design, and construction. He has 20 years of construction management experience in commercial, retail, and food service construction, and 10 years in maintenance management for retail and K-12 public schools. He currently serves on the board of the Tennessee School Plant Management Association and has served on the Loudon County Planning Commission.

Hicks joined the board in July 2012 and has been an active member of the Finance and Process Committee and the Environmental Management Committee.

Hicks is the sole proprietor of MetCorps, which provides consulting services to several agencies on issues related to the ways in which components of the environment interact. He retired in 2006 from the U.S. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, where he served as director of the Air Resources Laboratory. He also worked for Argonne National Laboratory and the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organization in Melbourne, Australia. He resides in Norris.

Hagy was appointed to the board in January 2012 and has served on the Stewardship Committee.

An Alcoa resident, she is a financial services representative with First Tennessee Bank and participates in a variety of United Way activities. She has also served as a member of a professional women's organization, a domestic abuse shelter board, and the Chamber of Commerce.

ORSSAB is a federally chartered citizens' panel that provides recommendations to the U.S. Department of Energy's Oak Ridge Environmental Management Program.

ORSSAB meets the second Wednesday of each month at 6 p.m. at the DOE Information Center in Oak Ridge. Meetings of the board and its committees are open to the public, and notices are posted on the board's web site: [www.oakridge.doe.gov/em/ssab](http://www.oakridge.doe.gov/em/ssab).