

US congressional leaders announce \$1.7 trillion budget deal for 2024

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On Sunday, US House and Senate leaders announced they had agreed to a 2024 budget proposal that would total nearly \$1.7 trillion, including a record \$886.3 billion for the military.

While the Pentagon will be flush with cash, the non-defense discretionary spending agreed to by both parties, and endorsed by President Joe Biden, is \$772.7 billion. This means the US government is to spend over \$100 billion more on the military than the combined amount for departments that provide K-12 education; low-income housing assistance; nutrition assistance for young children, families and the elderly; financial aid for college students; public health programs; science and medical research and other social needs.

The proposed budget does nothing to address the social crisis in America that has led to falling life expectancy, record homelessness and increased hunger.

An analysis of the budget deal by *Roll Call* notes that the framework provides “a very slight overall increase in non-defense funding, about 0.2 percent above the previous year,” while military and “security-related spending would rise by nearly \$28 billion, or more than 3 percent.”

Despite the flat-lining of social spending, coupled with an increase in military and border police funds, the far-right Christian-evangelical House speaker, Mike Johnson, is fending off attacks from a fascistic faction of House Republicans for agreeing to the budget.

In a letter to the House Republican conference on Sunday, Johnson said the agreement included an additional \$16 billion in spending cuts that he had negotiated. These include \$6.1 billion in pandemic aid and \$10 billion from the IRS. The trimming of the IRS is part of an ongoing effort by the Republican Party to erase some \$80 billion in funding, spread out over 10 years, that had been appropriated to allow the agency to

go after sophisticated and wealthy tax cheats.

Johnson told Republicans that the budget “will not satisfy everyone, and they do not cut as much spending as many of us would like.” He claimed nevertheless that it was “the most favorable budget agreement Republicans have achieved in over a decade.”

In a Fox News appearance Tuesday, Johnson said the budget was a “step in the right direction” and amounted to “the first reduction in non-defense spending in many years.”

While the Senate and House leadership have agreed to the broad “top line” budget proposal, the actual text of the bill has yet to be written and likely will not be available until next week. The House only resumed on Monday, while the Senate returned to work on Tuesday.

If the budget or a separate continuing resolution (CR) is not passed by January 19, there will be a partial government shutdown. Under the stop-gap spending bill passed before the Christmas recess, funding for the departments of Agriculture, Transportation, Energy and Veterans expires on January 19, while funding for Commerce, Justice, Defense, Homeland Security, Labor, State, Interior, Financial Services and other agencies expires on February 2.

Last Friday, *Roll Call* reported that during a breakfast hosted by the *Christian Science Monitor*, White House Office of Management and Budget Director Shalanda Young expressed doubt that an agreement would be reached before the first, January 19, deadline.

On Sunday night, shortly after the budget figure was released, the House Freedom Caucus tweeted that the budget was “even worse than we thought,” and a “total failure.” The caucus’ X/Twitter account reposted a December 29, 2023, statement that read, in part, “[W]e are extremely troubled that House Republican

leadership is considering an agreement with Democrats to spend even higher than the modest \$1.59 trillion statutory cap set six months ago by the Fiscal Responsibility act.”

Several Republicans inside and outside the Freedom Caucus have already indicated they will vote against the deal. Speaking on CNN Monday evening, the Freedom Caucus policy chair, Rep. Chip Roy (R-Texas), said he wished “Speaker Johnson weren’t doing this,” and added that he was “very disappointed.”

Roy said there needed to be “some real conversations this week about what we need to do going forward.” Asked by CNN host Kaitlin Collins if those conversations included moving to vacate the speakership, Roy replied, “That’s not the road I prefer. I didn’t prefer to go down that road with Speaker McCarthy.”

He continued: “We need to figure out how to get this all done together. But it isn’t good and there’s a lot of my colleagues who are pretty frustrated about it, so we’ll see what happens this week.”

In an interview on the Steve Deace Show, Roy added, “I’m leaving it (vacating the speakership) on the table. I’m not gonna say I’m gonna go file it tomorrow night. I’m not saying I’m not gonna file it tomorrow. I think the speaker needs to know that we’re angry about it.”

While Johnson will have a hard time wrangling votes from Freedom Caucus members, the Democratic Party leadership has already voiced its support for the proposal, meaning Johnson will have to rely primarily on Democratic votes to pass a budget that prepares for world war, guarantees further social cuts and funds savage attacks on immigrants.

In a joint statement released Sunday, Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer (D-New York) and House Minority Leader Hakeem Jeffries (D-New York) said the framework agreement “clears the way for Congress” to “address many of the major challenges America faces at home and abroad.”

The statement called on “both sides” to “work together in a bipartisan way and avoid a costly and disruptive shutdown.” The Associated Press reported that in a call to Democrats, Schumer stressed that it was “a good deal for Democrats and the country.”

In a statement released by the White House, Biden said the 2024 budget proposal “reflects the funding levels that I negotiated with both parties and signed into

law last spring.”



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