



Rick Scott demands massive across-the-board spending cuts

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The Florida Republican senator called for a return to 2019 spending levels, which would cut funding for Social Security, Medicare, and veterans.

Republican Florida Sen. Rick Scott is calling for the United States to slash its spending back to 2019 levels in an effort to balance the budget instead of raising the debt ceiling.

The massive across-the-board cuts Scott called for would impact Social Security, Medicare, defense, and veterans' benefits, programs he claims to support. At the same time, he has supported — and celebrated — major increases in funding for defense, which would also be affected by spending cuts. Due to inflation and the changing value of money, returning to 2019 spending levels would effectively result in less funding than in 2019.

“It’s simple: If we went back to 2019 spending levels, we’d have a balanced budget,” Scott tweeted on Monday. “Instead, @JoeBiden and Democrats insist on spending more and more money every year.”

He shared a clip of a June 1 appearance on Fox News in which he made the same argument. “If we went back to a spending in 2019, we would have a balanced budget. Why don’t we do that? Why don’t we try?”

A spokesperson for Scott did not immediately respond to an inquiry for this story.

Overall federal spending has increased 40% since 2019, from \$4.4 trillion to \$6.2 trillion, according to the conservative Cato Institute’s March 2023 analysis of Congressional Budget Office data. Most of that increase is due to social safety net programs. The increased spending also includes a 70% increase in interest payments on existing national debt, which Congress can’t cut without paying down the debt.

The increased spending includes hundreds of billions of dollars in additional funding for safety net programs that are not part of the annual budgeting process, programs the Cato Institute

predicts will be the main drivers of future spending increases. The population relying on Social Security and Medicare has increased since 2019 as many baby boomers have retired, and benefit levels have been adjusted based on the cost of living.

This isn't Scott's first time calling for cuts to those programs while claiming to support them. In February 2022, he proposed a "Rescue America" plan that would have made every federal program automatically expire every five years. After criticism from Democrats and Republican Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell, Scott changed his plan to make clear that the expiration requirement would not apply to safety net programs benefiting older Americans.

"I have never supported cutting Social Security or Medicare, ever," he said in February. "To say otherwise is a disingenuous Democrat lie from a very confused president. And Senator Mitch McConnell is also well aware of that."

The spending approved each year in Congress' budget bills went up as well between 2019 and 2023: \$124 billion more for defense and \$281 billion more for everything else.

Scott himself strongly pushed for those Defense Department increases, demanding even more than President Joe Biden's administration had requested. "As Communist China escalates its threats & Americans remain stranded in Afghanistan, Democrats decide to put liberal priorities first like federal funding for abortions while barely increase defense spending by 5%," he tweeted in October 2021. "Time to stop the reckless socialist spending & protect the U.S."

When Congress passed bipartisan defense spending authorization bills in 2021 and 2022, he put out press releases claiming he had helped to secure billions more than what he called Biden's "inadequate budget request."

Scott tweeted in February of this year that he has never supported cuts to veterans' benefits and never would.

Additionally, Scott himself has frequently pointed out that \$1 in 2023 does not buy as much as a \$1 did in 2019, releasing weekly updates on what he called Biden's inflation crisis, though economic experts say the administration's policies were not a major driver of higher costs.

Therefore, any cut to federal agencies to 2019 spending levels would leave them with less spending power than they had four years ago.

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