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Budget Deal Leaves Both Sides Unhappy

The debt ceiling and the 2012 budget are the next battlegrounds

By [ALEX M. PARKER](#)
Posted: April 11, 2011

As the clock ticked towards midnight on Friday, a government shutdown appeared all but inevitable. But in a [development](#) which seems straight out of a political thriller, a deal was approved which averted a government shutdown at the last moment. The deal, which will cut \$38 billion from current [spending](#) levels, leaves both sides feeling as if they've given up too much. But while liberals hoping to preserve [government services](#) for the needy and conservatives hoping to scale back the role of the federal government are both frustrated and a bit disillusioned with the process, neither side seems angry enough to instigate a full-scale revolt. [[Vote now: Who won in the 2011 budget compromise?](#)]



It hasn't been approved yet, as federal funding is now authorized through a stopgap measure which easily passed [Congress](#) on Saturday morning to give lawmakers time to pass a permanent deal to fund the government until the end of the fiscal year on September 30. In addition to cutting \$38 billion from current spending levels the deal also forbids the District of Columbia from using its own money to provide abortions to its residents. [[Check out a roundup of political cartoons about the budget and the deficit.](#)]

[Republicans](#) came away from the deal with many legislative victories. The newly elected freshmen Republican lawmakers, who ran on campaigns of slashing government spending, can now tell their constituents that they've delivered on their promises. In the end, Republicans were able to leverage even more spending cuts than the initial spending levels set by House Budget Committee Chairman [Paul Ryan](#), who originally recommended \$33 billion in cuts. (After a rebellion from more conservative House members, the appropriations committee raised that figure to \$61 billion.) Social conservatives also scored a modest victory with the D.C. abortion rider.

But the deal has also left many conservative activists and analysts feeling pessimistic about the possibility of further budget cuts. Shortly after the deal was reached, the Tea Party Patriots, one of the largest groups identified with the conservative Tea Party movement, issued a press release blasting the bill, but fell short of condemning the [GOP](#) leadership. "Most people are just frustrated based on the size [of the cuts]," says Mark Meckler, co-founder of the group, noting that during the past week the debt rose by \$54 billion—more than the amount of the cuts in the budget deal. But Meckler credited Republicans with reversing a trend towards increased spending. "Now there is actual significant and substantive debate about how much should we cut from the budget." Tad Haven, a budget analyst with the libertarian Cato Institute, echoed those concerns. "In the vast scheme of things, it's pretty insignificant," Haven says. "I think it shows the difficulty of going forward in getting cuts, and a reduction in government." [[Check out a roundup of political cartoons on the Tea Party.](#)]

But [Democrats](#) don't feel that they gave away the store to Republicans. Although the level of cuts was closer to the level Republicans wanted, the [White House](#) and Senate Democrats were able to spread those cuts throughout government spending, rather than the concentrated focus on domestic discretionary spending which the GOP had originally requested. And Democrats were able to approve a deal without any riders affecting national policy, which had been one of the largest sticking points between the two sides. Democratic staffers circulated a memo which outlined all of the proposals which Republicans weren't able to get enacted, including a rider to defund [healthcare reform](#), to slash federal spending for family planning, and to include cuts to transportation programs which Republicans originally defended.

4/12/2011

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This budget debate is likely only a first step as [Congress](#) continues to debate federal spending, and the role of the government. In the upcoming months, there will be even more contentious debates over whether to raise the federal debt limit, and over the 2012 budget.

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