

# The Washington Times

## **'Huge' differences remain for budget negotiators**

*\$4 trillion separates the two plans*

By: Jacqueline Klimas -November 18, 2013

Congressional negotiators have about a month to write a compromise federal budget, but it's a difficult task when the starting points — the plans passed earlier this year by House Republicans and Senate Democrats — are \$4 trillion apart.

That's the difference in 10-year deficit totals between House Budget Chairman Paul Ryan's plan, which imposes deep spending cuts to reach balance in a decade, and Senate Budget Chairwoman Patty Murray, whose 10-year plan includes higher taxes and spending and never reaches balance.

And even in the short term, Senate Democrats' plan would spend \$184 billion more than the GOP in 2014 alone.

"There are huge differences in the two budgets, differences in priorities, differences in approaches, which is why I think there's a growing consensus that the budget negotiations will focus primarily on trying to address some of the near-term differences with a special focus on trying to at least partially replace the sequester," said Rep. Chris Van Hollen, Maryland Democrat and ranking member of the budget conference committee. "By narrowing the scope of the challenge, we may be able to make some progress, but it's even too early to tell there."

The 29-member bipartisan budget conference committee is working to come up with a blueprint for 2014, which would allow the spending committees to go back and write bills to keep the government open past mid-January, when existing funding runs out.

Republicans have said tax increases are off the table, while Democrats have ruled out any major entitlement reform, essentially ruling out the hope of reaching a "grand bargain."

Negotiators are focusing on a top-line discretionary spending number for 2014 and a possible fix to the sequesters, but Republicans on the House Appropriations Committee asked Monday for a firm 2015 budget number as well.

"Failure to agree on a common spending cap for FY 2015 will guarantee another year of confusion," appropriations Chairman Harold Rogers and his 12 subcommittee chairman said in a letter to budget negotiators.

Mr. Rogers, Kentucky Republican, also said he would like to see a final budget agreement by Thanksgiving, but he needs one by Dec. 2 or else Congress could face another government shutdown in January.

Potentially a bigger problem than the large gaps in numbers is that the two budgets don't seem to be working to accomplish the same goal. The Republicans' plan will balance the budget by 2023, while Democrats' plan will yield deficits for each of the next 10 years.

"That shared vision has been completely lost now, and I think it's because the Democrats have moved to the left. They don't even believe in balancing the budget anymore," said Chris Edwards, editor of DownsizingGovernment.org at the Cato Institute.

Mr. Van Hollen, however, pointed out that the House GOP budget only balances because of the Affordable Care Act. While the budget plan does away with Obamacare, it still keeps the tax increases President Obama imposed to pay for the new health spending, and it continues the president's cuts to Medicare.

Without these, the House budget would not balance and would still be \$400 billion short by 2023, Mr. Van Hollen said.

"Their budget only comes into claimed balance as a result of a law which they're working to repeal," he said.

Part of the larger problem is that compromise has an "evil connotation" in Washington, said Andrea Kupfer Schneider, director of the Dispute Resolution Program at Marquette University Law School. The two sides don't just have differing goals, but they also have different motivations and value systems, which makes negotiation difficult, she said.

"If you don't believe the other side is willing to listen to your arguments on the merits in any way, or if you don't think there's any room for negotiation or finding a middle ground because they're not interested in any middle ground, people tend to pull away from the entire negotiation process," she said.

In her negotiation classes, Ms. Schneider advises people to persuade someone using their own point of view: a teenager, for example, asking for a later curfew by demonstrating responsibility to his parents rather than saying that all his friends are doing it.