



Senate kills five budget proposal in a single day

by [Susan Ferrechio](#) *Chief Congressional Correspondent*

posted 16 hours ago at 6:23pm

The Senate on Wednesday was poised to block debate on five different federal budget proposals, including President Obama's and the House GOP's own conservative road map for cutting the nation's soaring debt.

Senators, who last approved a budget in 2009, rejected the five plans following hours of debate that highlighted the deep divide between the Republicans and Democrats on how to resolve the nation's growing spending imbalance.

The nation could reach the current \$16.4 trillion debt limit by February 2013, and the two parties are already bickering over whether to raise it again without making budget cuts. Wednesday's partisan banter in the Senate, meanwhile, underscored a deepening dysfunction in Congress that threatens to prevent lawmakers from ever agreeing on a plan that would eventually balance the nation's budget.

Lawmakers acknowledged Wednesday that election-year politics made both parties reluctant to institute the painful reforms needed in the tax code and entitlement programs to shore up the budget.

But Sen. Joseph Lieberman, I-Conn., who is retiring, said Wednesday he fears that Congress won't be able to deal with those issues even after the November election.

"I know everybody says we are going to come back here after the election and there is going to be a burst of courage, I guess, because the election is over," Lieberman said. "What I'm sort of hearing in the wind around here is don't count on it."

Republicans offered four of the five budget proposals, including a revised version of Obama's \$3.8 trillion budget request, a move Democrats denounced as a political tactic before helping to defeat it 99-0.

"This is not the president's budget, so of course we are not going to support it because it is not what the president proposed," said Sen. Kent Conrad, D-N.D.

Democrats, particularly vulnerable senators facing re-election in swing states this fall, are reluctant to back Obama's plan because it includes tax increases.

Democrats, meanwhile, offered a vote for the House Republican budget authored by Rep. Paul Ryan.

That \$3.53 trillion proposal includes an overhaul of Medicare that would ultimately raise the age of eligibility, a provision some GOP lawmakers, including Sen. Scott Brown, of Massachusetts, were reluctant to back just months from a pivotal election. Ryan's plan was rejected 58-41.

"It comes down to political considerations and message-sending headed into November," explained Tad DeHaven, a budget analyst for the Cato Institute, a libertarian think tank. "It's up to voters to decide in November how they feel about these messages."

Three other GOP budget proposals, authored by Sens. Rand Paul, of Kentucky, Pat Toomey, of Pennsylvania, and Mike Lee, of Utah, also were defeated Wednesday. Paul's budget plan, the most austere of the three, would have cut federal spending by \$11 trillion and balanced the budget in five years, in part by eliminating the departments of Energy, Education, Commerce and Housing and Urban Development.

Toomey's plan would take 11 years to balance the budget, in part by converting Medicaid into block grants for states, which would discourage growth.

Lee's proposal would balance the budget by 2017. It calls for replacing the current tax code with a 25 percent consumption tax.