



## *Likely Debt Ceiling Vote Mostly Symbolic*

**A resolution to veto a planned debt ceiling hike is the first of many symbolic Kabuki dances in Congress this year**

By Alex M. Parker

January 17, 2012

Wednesday's vote in the House of Representatives to disapprove a \$1.2 trillion hike on the nation's borrowing limit is an entirely symbolic exercise, a spoonful of sugar to help conservative Tea Party members digest the bitter pill of an unpopular 2011 debt [ceiling](#) deal.

Expect the measure to provide a benchmark in Congressional behavior as the calendar creeps closer to November 2012.

With Congress bitterly divided and everyone going into campaign mode, [most political observers expect that little will be accomplished this year in D.C.](#), at least until the lame duck session concludes after the November election. There are a few things on the Congressional agenda that can't be avoided—resolving the payroll tax cut and extended [unemployment](#) insurance, which is set to expire at the end of February, as well as re-authorizing the Federal Aviation Administration. But people can , expect fights designed to help the parties to gain some steam heading into the 2012 elections, in order to put their opponents into a bad light.

"We're going to get through the large, thematic, pointless exercises," says Michael Tanner, a Congressional expert with the libertarian Cato Institute. "And then we're going to get down to the thematic exercises designed to get 30-second TV ads."

In this case, the politics of the debt ceiling disapproval vote undoubtedly help Republicans who are looking to distance themselves from a deal struck over the summer, when a real threat of national default loomed. Ultimately, Congress and President Obama agreed to a deal which extended the debt limit through 2012, while also enacting across-the-board cuts into domestic and military spending. The legislation also included automatic increases to get through all of 2012, but allowed Congress the opportunity to veto a requested debt ceiling hike by passing a "resolution of disapproval." Republicans don't control nearly enough seats in the House or Senate to enact the resolution and override a certain veto from President Obama, ensuring that the resolution has little chance of being enacted.

"This is one of the things that the Republicans wanted, that they had to ask for it in increments, so that the Republicans could go on record that they're against spending, and the president has to go on record that he wants to increase the debt," Tanner says.

The January vote on the debt ceiling is at least well-timed, in order to allow the White House a chance to avoid a more politically damaging vote later. According to officials from the White House, Obama will not have to request another debt ceiling increase until after November. A symbolic debt ceiling vote in January—when most of the nation's political eyes are on the GOP primary—is better than one during the summer, when Obama's re-election campaign is kicking into high gear.