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Ryan for the Defense

By [STEPHEN MOORE](#)

A big fiscal battle comes to a head on Thursday when the House votes on whether to wall off military spending from scheduled spending cuts.

"We shouldn't be cutting national defense spending and imperil our security to meet arbitrary caps," complains House Budget Committee Chairman Paul Ryan. Under the budget deal last year, military spending could be cut by about \$55 billion next year.

Mr. Ryan and most other House Republicans want to replace those cuts to the Pentagon with reductions in long-term entitlement spending. Democrats in the Senate, led by Patty Murray of Washington, are insisting that that would break a bipartisan deal. They want the cuts to take place and hope the scheduled cutbacks will force Republicans to agree to raise taxes. That is the gamble that Democrats took when they agreed to the automatic cuts—half from defense and half from discretionary spending—and Republicans are blinking before even the first round of cuts have been ordered.

One complaint that House Republicans make is that defense is less than 25% of the budget but absorbs half of the automatic cuts. The House Budget Committee has charts showing that national defense is a smaller share of the budget today than at almost any time in history. Mr. Ryan wants to use food stamps and Medicaid reform savings over 10 years to "buy down" some of the defense cuts. Politico reports that some hawkish Democrats are open to this, but they want taxes put on the table.

One problem for Republicans is that many conservatives favor the sequester process as the only way to get real and sustained cuts in spending. Dan Mitchell, a senior fellow at the Cato Institute, argues that "a sequester of defense and domestic spending is a much better way to cut the deficit than raising taxes. Republicans would be dumb not to take the spending cuts." Tea party leaders, whose members are angry over the debt, also say they want to see cuts immediately.

Right now it appears that one year of automatic pilot cuts may take place with savings of about \$100 billion in 2013. After the elections, the next president and Congress are likely to override the 2012 debt ceiling bill's future cuts with a new budget pact. Of course, all of this fiscal show-and-tell is meaningless in the event of a national security emergency, when Congress would quickly pass a supplemental spending bill to give more money to the Pentagon.

"There must be a better way to do this than a sequester," says Mr. Ryan. But the reason there is a sequester is that the two parties aren't even close to agreeing on a "better way."