As Senate Passes Spending Measure, Stark Budget Views Are on Display in House

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WASHINGTON — The Senate passed a spending measure on Wednesday to keep the government financed through the end of September, resolving one contentious budget fight as Congress moved quickly to the next.

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Michael Reynolds/European Pressphoto Agency

Representative Paul D. Ryan

While the Senate dealt with the most immediate financial concerns, the House of Representatives engaged in an animated debate over the budget for the 2014 fiscal year that begins when the spending measure expires Sept. 30.

The irreconcilable views that the two parties hold on economics, public spending and the role of government could not have been in starker conflict. As House Republicans moved ahead with their latest attempt to dismantle President Obama’s health care overhaul — they voted on one measure that would do so on Wednesday and will vote on another on Thursday — Democrats were holding a news conference in the basement of the Capitol heralding the third anniversary of the law’s passage.

It was a day when members took to the microphones on the floor to make excessively partisan sound bites that seemed scripted for campaign commercials. Each side staged its own moments of political theater, forcing and casting votes designed to embarrass the other.

House Republicans brought to a vote the budget proposed last week by Senate Democrats in the hope that they could divide their opponents’ ranks and put them on record supporting its $1 trillion in tax increases. In the end, [35 Democrats voted against it and 11 did not vote at all](http://politics.nytimes.com/congress/votes/113/house/1/83). (Voting yes were 154 of them.)

Democrats then voted “present” en masse instead of “no” on a [Republican budget amendment](http://politics.nytimes.com/congress/votes/113/house/1/86%22%20%5Co%20%22Breakdown%20of%20votes%2C%20via%20Times%20graphic) offered by the most conservative members, a move that meant the measure went down overwhelmingly with Republican no votes, highlighting an internal party divide on spending levels.

The two parties spent much of the afternoon debating the budgets proposed by their most ideological members.

On one side was the plan put forward by the Congressional Progressive Caucus, which would cut Pentagon spending to 2006 levels, impose a new tax on millionaires, eliminate tax subsidies for oil and gas companies and bolster unemployment insurance.

On the other side was the budget drafted by the Republican Study Committee, which comprised the House’s most conservative members. Their plan would open the Arctic National Wildlife Reserve to oil drilling, raise the eligibility age for Social Security and Medicare to 70 and balance the budget in four short years instead of the 10 proposed by Representative Paul D. Ryan of Wisconsin, the Republican’s leader on fiscal issues.

The debate was littered with evocative metaphors, portents of doom and allegations of theft. There was even a clash over which party could be compared more unflatteringly to Europe.

Representative Barbara Lee, Democrat of California, got clever with the nickname of the Ryan budget, which Republicans have called “The Pathway to Prosperity.” Noting its cuts to aid programs designed to help the less privileged, Ms. Lee suggested a name she said was more appropriate: “The Pathway to Poverty.”

Adding a liberal twist to a favorite line among Republicans that no family would run its budget the way the federal government does, Representative Jim McDermott, Democrat of Washington, mocked the Republican approach. “I don’t know any family in America that would use their children’s lunch money to pay down their credit cards,” he said.

Representative Tom McClintock, Republican of California, said the Democrats’ budget included so much new spending that it would relegate the United States to a fate similar to Greece or, perhaps worse, Detroit.

Representative Todd Rokita, Republican of Indiana, likened the higher taxes the Democrats have proposed to confiscation of citizens’ property. The debt their budget would incur, he said, was tantamount to stealing. “When you take money from future generations, when you take money from people that don’t yet exist, with no intention to pay it back,” he said, “it’s called thievery.”

While Republicans repeatedly made parallels between the Democratic budget and the same policies that have crushed the economies of Spain, Italy and now Cyprus, Democrats were not to be outdone. Representative Chris Van Hollen of Maryland the senior Democrat on the House Budget Committee, said what was truly European was the austerity included in the Republican plan.

As the House was voting, the Senate by [a vote of 73-26](http://politics.nytimes.com/congress/votes/113/senate/1/44)passed a spending measure that caps spending for programs within Congress’s annual discretion at $984 billion. The House is expected to pass the measure as soon as Thursday, eliminating any current threat of a government shutdown.

The final Senate bill did ease the hit of the automatic cuts known as sequestration somewhat, especially those that could hurt vulnerable Democrats. For instance, an amendment adopted Wednesday transferred $55 million to federal meat and poultry inspectors from other agriculture programs to make sure food plants can stay in operation, a plan championed by Senator Mark Pryor, an Arkansas Democrat facing re-election next year.

Another amendment shifted money to hard-hit tuition assistance programs for military service members, a push championed by Senator Kay Hagan of North Carolina, another swing-state Democrat up for re-election.

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