

Democracy Dies in Darkness

D.C.

House votes for \$1 billion in D.C. cuts while seeking to avert shutdown

It is unclear what additional avenues remain for D.C. to advocate for a reversal of the cuts as the bill heads to the Senate.

Updated yesterday at 9:37 p.m. EDT

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By [Meagan Flynn](#)

House Republicans passed a spending bill Tuesday that, in seeking to avert a government shutdown, also would blow a more than \$1 billion hole in D.C.'s budget, city officials said, as GOP lawmakers did not heed warnings from virtually the entire D.C. government that the impact on the nation's capital would be “devastating.”

The Republican spending bill, which heads to the Senate, would treat D.C. as a federal agency and force the city to revert to its 2024 spending levels for the rest of the fiscal year, until October — effectively undoing D.C.'s \$21 billion 2025 budget. D.C. Mayor Muriel E. Bowser (D) and almost every city lawmaker warned Monday that this would likely require significant, immediate cuts to every area of D.C. government, including law enforcement and schools.

The impact is so drastic that Bowser questioned whether it was a mistake — a “\$1.1 billion mistake,” she said — and called on federal lawmakers to make a simple change to resolve it, by restoring a long-standing provision allowing D.C. to continue spending its current budget. Republicans did not do so.

“The proposed one billion [dollar] cut to DC’s budget is senseless, reckless and would have devastating consequences for our nation’s capital, impacting public safety, education, and essential services,” a spokeswoman for Bowser’s office said in a statement. “We will continue to fight tirelessly in the Senate to ensure the District can continue to operate under our congressionally approved FY25 budget.”

On the House floor Tuesday, Del. Eleanor Holmes Norton (D), the District’s nonvoting House representative, called the action an “unprecedented budget substitution” that would sow chaos for the city and its public services without any discernible benefit for the federal government. She and D.C. officials have stressed that the cuts forced by the spending bill — called a continuing resolution — would not save the federal government money, impacting D.C.’s local budget raised by local taxpayers. Congress has final say over D.C.’s budget..

“The CR is an act of fiscal sabotage against D.C., and is an abuse of power over a disenfranchised jurisdiction — the consequences be damned,” she said. After the vote, she said in a statement she would “do everything in my power to prevent its passage in the Senate.”

D.C. Council Chairman Phil Mendelson (D) said that, after city officials’ warnings, “I’m disappointed that the House leadership chose to ignore the facts.” The money D.C. will be forced to cut, he said, will simply sit in the local treasury.

“Do they not care that we will have to furlough police, firefighters and teachers?” Mendelson said. “And for what purpose? The dollars will simply collect to pay the police, firefighters and teachers, but will not be able to be spent.”

Mendelson said officials will now turn their attention to the Senate. It is unclear what additional avenues remain for D.C. to advocate for a reversal of the cuts. With a government shutdown on the line and a clock running out, the stakes become more challenging for federal lawmakers, who do not always prioritize helping D.C. in these situations. Congress has until Friday to pass a bill averting a shutdown.

The drastic action is a departure from the way Congress has handled D.C.’s budget for two decades. It came as a shock to the D.C. government after the bill’s introduction Saturday, giving the city only days to digest the possibility that they would have to immediately cut more than \$1 billion to comply if it became law. They said the cuts will likely lead to layoffs across government, touching public safety, education, public works, public transportation, sanitation and more.

By comparison, D.C. officials last week were fretting over a \$1 billion deficit projected to hit the city budget over the next three years — due largely to the outsize impact the federal workforce cuts will have on the city’s economy, leading Moody’s to begin a review of the city’s AAA bond rating. Cutting the same amount in only half a year, because of additional federal choices outside the city’s control, will feel more like cutting \$2 billion, said Mendelson. Washingtonians, he and the mayor said, will feel the pain in hits to everyday services.

“There’s no way to cut that kind of money in the time that we would have in this fiscal year,” Bowser said, without affecting police, without affecting teachers, without affecting “some of the basic government services that allow us to keep our city clean, safe and beautiful.”

The situation appears to have no modern precedent, and House leadership and top appropriators have provided little explanation for why it is happening. At times they have suggested they do not intend for massive cuts and see the change only as a minor adjustment but have not clarified exactly what they do intend.

Congress has final say over D.C.'s budget. Lawmakers formally approve it in an annual spending bill — but when that gets delayed, they have routinely, over the last 20 years, added a provision to continuing resolutions allowing D.C.'s budget to move forward and continue at its current spending levels.

The problem for D.C. is that long-standing provision is missing from this continuing resolution. The special carveout for D.C. seeks to shield the city from the disruptions of national political disagreements over spending in Congress, like this one.

House GOP leadership aides said the intent of omitting the long-standing provision was to treat D.C. as a federal agency and treat all federal agencies “equally,” requiring them to spend at fiscal year 2024 levels. But D.C. is not equal to federal agencies, because unlike them, the city began its \$21.2 billion fiscal 2025 budget on Oct. 1, 2024, making it a significant disruption to revert to a different budget.

House Republicans downplayed the impact on the District. House Appropriations Committee Chairman Tom Cole (R-Oklahoma) told Democrats during a committee hearing Monday that Republicans “just don’t see it the way you do, that this is somehow some big hit.” He suggested it was mostly about inauguration funding D.C. did not need anymore, a substantially different interpretation of the effect of his bill’s changes than that of D.C. budget officials.

“We’ve not taken anything out of there that substantively affects the day-to-day operation of municipal services,” said Cole, who said Democrats were invited to give input earlier yet did not, which they denied. “This is mostly things like, we don’t have an inauguration again.”

Spokespeople for Cole and House Speaker Mike Johnson (R-Louisiana) did not respond to requests for comment seeking further clarity on Republicans’ intent.

On the House floor Tuesday, Rep. Michelle Fischbach (R-Minnesota) pointed out that if the continuing resolution failed, D.C. residents and workers would also face adverse impacts of a government shutdown. But she downplayed Democratic concerns about what will happen to D.C. if the continuing resolution passes without the fix they have asked for.

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(The Washington Post)

“My Democrat colleagues keep complaining how unfair this CR is to the D.C. residents,” Fischbach said. “But there are over 160,000 federal employees in the District of Columbia, which quite frankly is more than there should be, but you are going to make every one of their paychecks go away if you succeed in shutting the government down.”

While Congress approves D.C.'s budget in an appropriations bill — but Congress often fails to approve appropriations on time, requiring continuing resolutions.

More than 20 years ago, Congress used to review D.C.'s budget with a fine-tooth comb, and if Congress was delayed in approving it, D.C. could not begin the new budget on time and would have to wait, just like federal agencies.

But starting in fiscal year 2004, bipartisan lawmakers realized this posed a big problem for D.C. and its hundreds of thousands of residents. They started inserting a provision that allowed D.C. to start or maintain its new budget, about three-quarters of which is raised by local taxpayers.

The House passage of this continuing resolution was the first since then that omitted the provision.

While it is difficult to exactly predict how the cuts will play out given the anticipated magnitude, budget officials anticipate almost \$200 million in cuts could hit D.C. Public Schools and \$166 million at charter schools.

The D.C. police department could see \$67 million in cuts.

D.C. Water, which distributes drinking water to the city and handles the region's wastewater, anticipates \$51 million in cuts.

The Department of Human Services, which provides homeless services, \$28 million.

Jacque Patterson, an at-large member of the D.C. State Board of Education, said parents are so alarmed by the anticipated cuts to public education and potential layoffs of teachers that one told him she would take her child to sit in lawmakers' offices to spell out their fears.

“This has been one of the most disheartening displays of undemocratic behavior that I've seen in my life,” he said, adding parents “want to revolt.” “You will see the biggest resistance, if they follow through with this, from D.C. parents that you've ever seen.”

Jenny Gathright contributed to this report.

What readers are saying

The comments express strong opposition to the House Republicans' decision to treat D.C. as a federal agency and revert its budget to 2024 levels. Many commenters view this move as an unjustified attack on a majority Black and Democratic city, with some suggesting it is a strategy... [Show more](#)

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