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Budget & Finance

Senate, House Pass Measure to Avert Government Shutdown

by [Naomi Jagoda](#)

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WASHINGTON — The House and Senate approved a measure on Wednesday that would avert a federal government shutdown and fund federal departments and programs through Dec. 11.

The Senate passed the "continuing resolution," an amendment to H.R. 719, by a vote of 78 to 20 on Wednesday morning. The House passed the measure by a vote of 277 to 151 that afternoon.

The votes came on the last day of the federal government's 2015 fiscal year. The CR now heads to President Obama's desk. Without a funding measure in place by the end of Wednesday, there would be a government shutdown.

The CR also would extend the Internet Tax Freedom Act's moratorium on state and local governments' taxing of Internet access through Dec. 11. Absent action, the moratorium would expire on Oct. 1. State government groups wanted Congress to extend the ITFA only if it also passed legislation to allow states to require out-of-state online retailers to collect their sales taxes, but that didn't happen.

Separately from the CR vote, the House on Wednesday voted to make an "enrollment correction" to the CR that would prohibit funding to Planned Parenthood or its affiliates for one year unless they agree not to perform or fund abortions. The enrollment correction will not endanger the enactment of the CR. The Planned Parenthood measure will go to the Senate, which is not expected to pass it. The Senate failed to advance a CR that included the Planned Parenthood provision last week.

Ahead of the Senate vote on the CR, Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., told colleagues that he hopes the Senate can pass the appropriations bills. The Senate Appropriations Committee's fiscal 2016 financial services appropriations bill would keep the funding level for the Securities and Exchange Commission constant and would provide less funding for the Internal Revenue Service than it received in fiscal 2015. The White House has threatened to veto the bill.

Senate Minority Leader Harry Reid, D-Nev., said that Democrats and Republicans should work together now, rather than in December, to repeal sequestration spending caps and "build a long-term, bipartisan funding bill." Doing so would allow the Senate to then turn its attention to other issues, such as the debt ceiling and a long-term highway bill, he said.

The top Democrat on the Senate Appropriations Committee, Barbara Mikulski of Maryland, also said she hopes that Congress can work on a budget deal that cancels the sequester. She wants a deal that would raise the discretionary spending caps equally for defense and non-defense spending.

"The budget deal will give us a framework for an omnibus funding bill that invests in America, protecting national security, rebuilding our physical infrastructure, creating jobs for today and jobs for tomorrow, and meeting our compelling human needs," she said in a statement after the Senate passed the CR.



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