

[Rep. Schakowsky Speaks on Budget Cuts](#)

Melissa Block speaks with Rep. Jan Schakowsky (D-IL) about the budget — and the possibility of a government shutdown.

Transcript:

MELISSA BLOCK, host:

And for more on the budget debate, I'm joined by Democratic congresswoman Jan Schakowsky of Illinois. She's also chief deputy whip of the House Democratic leadership. Thanks for being with us.

Representative JAN SCHAKOWSKY (Democrat, Illinois): I'm glad to be with you, Melissa. Thank you.

BLOCK: I'm curious, first, whether you support the plan that's been put out there by President Obama and Senate Democrats offering \$33 billion in cuts. Would that be acceptable to you?

Rep. SCHAKOWSKY: Well, it would be a hard pill for me to swallow, all the cuts that are in there. But I would to avoid a shutdown of the government, which would have pretty devastating effects on our economy and a lot of people who would be furloughed. I think that it would be preferable to vote for. That's my plan.

BLOCK: OK. But the \$33 billion does not seem to be flying with Republicans. We've heard that House Speaker Boehner has been floating the idea of \$40 billion in cuts, down from the 61 billion Republicans voted to approve. How does \$40 billion sound to you?

Rep. SCHAKOWSKY: We see a Republican Party right now that is really in disarray and largely holding its speaker hostage to increasing and changing demands. The agreement that was reached, the \$33 billion was originally proposed by the Republicans. And now we see that they don't want to take yes for an answer. As I said, these are cuts that are going to hurt a lot of people in the area of education. There are a number of very painful cuts in the budget and we said, OK, we will do it to avoid a shutdown of the entire government. And now the rules keep changing. They move the goal posts every few hours, it seems.

BLOCK: Worth noting, though, that Speaker Boehner has said there was never an agreement on that \$33 billion figure.

Rep. SCHAKOWSKY: Well, we all heard it and that that seemed to be agreeable, the first thing that he put on the table anyway.

BLOCK: What about the idea of stopgap measure - a Band-Aid that would cover the next couple of weeks, say, while you still wrestle with the rest of the fiscal year. Would you vote for that?

Rep. SCHAKOWSKY: Well, kicking the can down the road and each time adding more and bigger cuts - for example, another \$12 billion to get a week delay - is just a ridiculous offer. Not only is it unacceptable, but it's just impossible for us to keep proceeding this way. What they want to do is to extend the military budget for a full year and then to leave everything else just for another week. We can't continue to play that game and a game it is. This is an effort to keep backing us up, that is, to make more and more cuts that hurt more and more middle income people, lower income people who are suffering already. And it's not a feasible proposal.

BLOCK: Congresswoman Schakowsky, there's been criticism, and not just from Republicans but from some Democrats as well, that President Obama should have been more involved in this budget negotiation all along, that he stayed on the sidelines way too long. Do you agree with that?

Rep. SCHAKOWSKY: Well, you know, this is just the first, really, of battles that we're going to have. One is over the next year's budget, which is going to be serious. And also, whether or not we're going to raise the debt ceiling and that the United States of America is actually going to pay its bills. Now that we're down to the last minute here, I'm happy that the president and the chairman of the Budget and Finance Committees in the Senate have weighed in. They still are holding out their hand of compromise. But the president has said no to ideas that on their face are just - it's like, I dare you to accept this ridiculous proposal.

BLOCK: Would you have rather seen him involved earlier on?

Rep. SCHAKOWSKY: Well, I think that - I, obviously, the budget issue is one for the Congress. I think that the president did weigh in, in terms of pushing for an agreement. He did want to get into specifics because these are pieces of legislation that have to pass the Congress. But they were determined to push him too far. They did, he drew the line. I think it was in a timely way. And, you know, if we end up with a shutdown of the government, it won't be because of a lack of an effort on his part, and certainly not on our part.

BLOCK: Congresswoman Schakowsky, thanks for being with us.

Rep. SCHAKOWSKY: Thank you so much.

BLOCK: That's Congresswoman Jan Schakowsky, Democrat of Illinois.

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