

# US budget deal could ease uncertainty over science spending

Tentative agreement would ease the mandatory spending caps known as sequestration.

**Chris Cesare**

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Leaders in the US Congress and President Barack Obama have agreed on a deal that could avoid a December showdown over government funding — and a possible shutdown.

Struck on 26 October, the deal would raise mandatory spending caps for two years in exchange for cuts to several social programmes and other offsets. The agreement must be approved by the Senate, the House of Representatives and Obama to take effect.

The deal paves the way for an agreement on a full-fledged budget before a short-term spending bill expires on 11 December. Obama had previously threatened to veto any spending bill that did not increase spending caps and avoid the mandatory cuts known as sequestration.

The House of Representatives passed the deal on 28 October, and a vote in the Senate is expected soon.

## Even split

The deal would raise caps on defence and non-defence spending by US\$25 billion each for fiscal year 2016, which began on 1 October. That could be good news for science agencies, says Joel Parriott, the director of public policy at the American Astronomical Society in Washington DC. “I’m hopeful given our champions on both sides of the aisle,” Parriott says.

Much research funding comes from the non-defence, or discretionary, budget. But it is not yet clear how the extra \$25 billion would be split among all discretionary programmes, including those that fund scientific research and development.

Those negotiations will happen behind closed doors, says Jennifer Zeitzer, the director of legislative relations at the Federation of American Societies for Experimental Biology in Bethesda, Maryland. She adds that should the bill pass, lawmakers will have a little more than a month before the December deadline to hammer out how the money will be allocated to various agencies.

With increased budget caps, the US National Institutes of Health (NIH) could stand to win big. The Senate’s fiscal year 2016 spending bill had called for a \$2-billion increase in NIH funding.

The deal comes less than a month after legislators passed a short-term spending bill on 30 September, hours before the government would have shut down because of a lack of funds. Although that bill remains in effect, a spending agreement made before 11 December would override it.

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