

Senate Democrats considering nuking filibuster for debt limit bills

WASHINGTON — Senate Democrats, looking for a way to raise the debt limit without Republican support, are considering changing the chamber's rules and allowing the debt limit to be increased with a simple majority, creating a new carve out for the filibuster.

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Creating a new exception to the filibuster is gaining support among Senate Democrats, four sources with knowledge of the discussion told NBC News. All asked to speak anonymously to detail closed-door discussions.

Congress has until Oct. 18 to raise the limit, or the Treasury says the U.S. may no longer be able to meet its financial obligations.

The filibuster has become the target of liberal activists, who say that the Senate rule that requires 60 votes to pass most pieces of legislation is standing in the way of Democrats' enacting sweeping pieces of legislation, including expanding government programs, enacting gun control and climate measures. Moderate Senate Democrats have opposed getting rid of the filibuster.

The debt ceiling has become latest flashpoint in Congress, with an approaching deadline and partisan fighting over how it should be lifted, even if both Republicans and Democrats say it should be raised.

Sen. Joe Manchin, D-W.Va., who is one of the strongest supporters of keeping the filibuster, was asked about the potential of changing the rules.

"We're not going to default," he told reporters on Tuesday. "I just know that there's enough people here that will not let this country fall to default."

Senate Majority Whip Dick Durbin, D-Ill, said Democrats "ought to have that conversation" about changing the filibuster rules to raise the debt limit.

Sen. Jeff Merkley, D-Ore., said Tuesday that Republicans were setting the house on fire and using the filibuster to block firefighters from putting it out. "It could destroy our credit, jobs, and family savings. We must reform the filibuster," he said on Twitter.

Sen. Schumer calls for debt limit to be addressed by the end of the week

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Senate Republicans say that Democrats should use a rule known as reconciliation to raise the ceiling without Republican support — a complicated process that could require hundreds of votes. It is the same process Democrats are currently using to try to pass a massive social safety net bill that could cost as much as \$3.5 trillion.

But Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer on Tuesday ruled out using that process for the debt limit increase.

"We do not have the luxury of using a drawn out, convoluted and risky process," Schumer told reporters.

Schumer warned that the United States is getting "dangerously close" to hitting the debt limit, which would lead to a default on the nation's debt.