



# On The Debt Ceiling, Revisiting The Record

***Obama And The Top Democrats Of 2013 Should Listen To Their Own  
Advice From Years Past***

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**WOULD OBAMA AND THE DEMOCRATS OF TODAY HAVE NEGOTIATED WITH  
OBAMA AND THE DEMOCRATS OF ONLY SEVERAL YEARS AGO?**

***President Obama***

**In 2007, Sen. Obama Did Not Vote During The Vote To Raise The Debt Limit.** ([H.J. Res. 43, Roll Call Vote 534](#),  
Adopted 53-42: R 26-20; D 26-21; I 1-1; Obama Not Voting)

**In 2006, Then-Sen. Obama Voted Against The Senate Resolution to Increase The Debt Ceiling.** ([H.J. Res 47](#): Adopted 52-48: R 52-3; D 0-44; I 0-1, 3/16/06, Obama Voted Nay)

- **Gross Federal Debt At The Time Was Just \$8.3 Trillion, Compared To \$16.7 Trillion Today.**  
("The Debt To The Penny And Who Holds It," [U.S. Treasury](#), Accessed 10/4/13)

**Then-Sen. Obama Said "The Fact That We Are Here Today To Debate Raising America's Debt Limit Is A Sign Of Leadership Failure."** SEN. BARACK OBAMA: "Mr. President, I rise today to talk about America's debt problem. The fact that we are here today to debate raising America's debt limit is a sign of leadership failure. It is a sign that the U.S. Government can't pay its own bills. It is a sign that we now depend on ongoing financial assistance from foreign countries to finance our Government's reckless fiscal policies. Over the past 5 years, our federal debt has increased by \$3.5 trillion to \$8.6 trillion. That is 'trillion' with a 'T.' That is money that we have borrowed from the Social Security trust fund, borrowed from China and Japan, borrowed from American taxpayers. And over the next 5 years, between now and 2011, the President's budget will increase the debt by almost another \$3.5 trillion." (Sen. Barack Obama, [Congressional Record](#), 3/16/06, p. S2237)

- **Obama Said "Interest Payments Are A Significant Tax On All Americans—A Debt Tax That Washington Doesn't Want To Talk About."** SEN. BARACK OBAMA: "And the cost of our debt is one of the fastest growing expenses in the Federal budget. This rising debt is a hidden domestic enemy, robbing our cities and States of critical investments in infrastructure like bridges, ports, and levees; robbing our families and our children of critical investments in education and health care reform; robbing our seniors of the retirement and health security they have counted on. Every dollar we pay in interest is a dollar that is not going to investment in America's priorities. Instead, interest payments are a significant tax on all Americans—a debt tax that Washington

doesn't want to talk about. If Washington were serious about honest tax relief in this country, we would see an effort to reduce our national debt by returning to responsible fiscal policies." (Sen. Barack Obama, [Congressional Record](#), 3/16/06, p. S2237)

- **Obama Concluded By Saying "America Has A Debt Problem And A Failure Of Leadership. Americans Deserve Better. I Therefore Intend To Oppose The Effort To Increase America's Debt Limit."** SEN. BARACK OBAMA: "Increasing America's debt weakens us domestically and internationally. Leadership means that 'the buck stops here.' Instead, Washington is shifting the burden of bad choices today onto the backs of our children and grandchildren. America has a debt problem and a failure of leadership. Americans deserve better. I therefore intend to oppose the effort to increase America's debt limit." (Sen. Barack Obama, [Congressional Record](#), 3/16/06, p. S2237)

#### **In 2006, Then-Sen. Obama Decried The Vote To Increase The Debt Limit As "A Sad State Of Affairs."**

OBAMA: "We are voting on the budget today. It's a sad state of affairs. We just voted to increase the debt limit. The U.S. total debt at this point exceeds \$8 trillion. That's 8 trillion with a 'T.' So we've got to get our fiscal house in order here in Washington. I'm not sure it's going to happen under the current leadership in Congress." (Sen. Barack Obama, [Remarks On 21st Century Schools](#), Washington, DC, 3/16/06)

#### ***Vice President Biden***

**In 2007, Then-Sen. Biden (D-DE) Did Not Vote During The Vote To Raise The Debt Limit.** ([H.J. Res. 43, Roll Call Vote 534](#), Adopted 53-42: R 26-20; D 26-21; I 1-1; Biden Not Voting)

**In 2006, Then-Sen. Biden Voted Against The Senate Resolution To Increase The Debt Ceiling.** ([H.J. Res. 47](#); Adopted 52-48: R 52-3; D 0-44; I 0-1, 3/16/06, Biden Voted Nay)

**In 2004, Sen. Joe Biden Did Not Vote During The Vote To Raise The Debt Limit.** ([S. 2896, Roll Call Vote 213](#), Adopted 52-44: R 50-1; D 2-42; I 0-1; Biden Not Voting)

**In 2003, Sen. Joe Biden Voted Against Raising The Debt Limit.** ([H.J. Res. 51, Roll Call Vote 202](#), Adopted 53-44: R 50-2; D 1-43; I 1-0; 5/23/03; Biden Voted Nay)

**In 1984, Sen. Biden Voted Against The Senate Resolution to Increase The Debt Ceiling.** (H.J. Res. 654, Roll Call Vote #290: Rejected 14-46: R 13-18; D 1-28; Biden Voted Nay, 10/11/84)

- **At The End Of 1984, Gross Federal Debt Stood At Just \$1.6 Trillion.** ([Office Of Management And Budget](#), Accessed 9/30/13)

**In 1984, Biden Said He Was Voting Against Increasing The Debt Limit Because The House Denied Giving Any Legislative Concessions As Part Of The Increase.** SENATOR JOE BIDEN: "Mr. President, earlier today, we sent to the House of Representatives a bill that would have required that, before any further increases in the national debt could be approved next year by Congress, Congress would first have had to act upon a budget freeze to halt the upward climb of our astronomical deficits. In the meantime, the Senate withheld action on the House-approved increase in the debt ceiling. It was my hope that the other body would approve our amendment, which would have held down the size of the increase in the debt to \$1.730 trillion, rather than the full \$1.824 trillion called for in the House bill. There would then have been a vote on a budget freeze when the lower limit was reached sometime in April 1985. Unfortunately, the House of Representatives has not seen fit to agree to vote on a budget freeze early in 1985. Nor has it agreed to lessen the size of the debt ceiling. Under those circumstances, I cannot agree to vote for a full increase in the debt without any assurance that steps will be taken early next year to reduce the alarming increase in the deficits and debt. The national debt has now doubled in the past 4 years. Under this proposal, it will be \$1.824 trillion by the end of fiscal year 1985. Despite the much-advertised down payment on deficit reduction adopted by Congress this year, deficits will climb from

\$180 billion in fiscal year 1985 to well over \$200 billion by fiscal year 1989.” (Sen. Joe Biden, *Congressional Record*, 10/11/84, p. 32415)

- **Biden: “Under Those Circumstances, I Must Express My Protest Against Continually Increasing The Debt Without Taking Positive Steps To Slow Its Growth.”** BIDEN: “We cannot allow this to continue. ... The Senate agreed to our proposal. But the House of Representatives will not go along. Under those circumstances, I must express my protest against continually increasing the debt without taking positive steps to slow its growth. Therefore, I am voting against any further increase in the national debt.” (Sen. Joe Biden, *Congressional Record*, 10/11/84, p. 32415)

### ***Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid***

**In 2006, Sen. Harry Reid (D-NV) Voted Against The Senate Resolution to Increase The Debt Ceiling.**

([H.J. Res 47](#): Adopted 52-48: R 52-3; D 0-44; I 0-1, 3/16/06, Reid Voted Nay)

**Reid Said In 2006 That “Given The Explosion Of Debt In Recent Years... The Future Of Our Economy And Our Nation Is At Stake.”** SEN. HARRY REID: “Given the explosion of debt in recent years, it is long past time for Washington to change the course and adopt a new fiscal policy. After all, the future of our economy and our Nation is at stake.” (Sen. Harry Reid, *Congressional Record*, 3/16/06, p. S2235)



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**Reid Said “Under The Circumstances, Any Credible Economist Would Tell You We Should Be Reducing Debt, Not Increasing It.”** SEN. HARRY REID: “After all, I repeat, the baby boomers are about to retire. Under the circumstances, any credible economist would tell you we should be reducing debt, not increasing it.” (Sen. Harry Reid, *Congressional Record*, 3/16/06, p. S2235)



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**In 2003, Sen. Reid Voted Against Raising The Debt Limit.** ([H.J. Res. 51, Roll Call Vote 202](#), Adopted 53-44: R 50-2; D 1-43; I 1-0; 5/23/03; Reid Voted Nay)

### *House Minority Leader Pelosi*

**In 2006, Rep. Nancy Pelosi (D-CA) Decried A “Debt Ceiling Of \$9 Trillion.”** “But part of the Democrats' plan is a call to require fiscal responsibility, following pay-as-you-go rules that prevent deficit spending. And they note that it is under a Republican president and Congress that the federal deficit has soared to new levels. ‘This is the path we were on when President Clinton was president, and we would have been debt free as a nation if we had stayed on that course of pay-as-you-go, no deficit spending, debt free as a nation in 2008,’ Pelosi said. ‘Instead, we have a debt ceiling of \$9 trillion.’” (Jill Zuckman, “Democrats Promise ‘A New Direction For All Americans,’” [Chicago Tribune](#), 6/15/06)

**In 2004, Pelosi Voted Against The House Resolution to Increase The Debt Ceiling.** ([S. 2986, Roll Call Vote #536](#): Approved 208-204: R 206-2; D 2-193; I 0-1, 1/18/04, Pelosi Voted Nay)

- **Gross Federal Debt At The Time Totaled \$7 Trillion.** (“The Debt To The Penny And Who Holds It,” [U.S. Treasury](#), Accessed 9/27/13)
- **Pelosi Explained Her Soon-To-Be No-Vote, Saying “We Just Can't Give A Blank Check Over And Over And Over Again To This Administration.”** “Democrats plan to use the debt limit debate to highlight the massive annual deficits run up during the Bush administration. Many will oppose the measure, especially in the House. The bill is expected to be approved anyway, with the Senate voting Thursday night and the timing of the House vote uncertain. Its defeat would threaten an unprecedented federal default and stymie the government's ability to write Social Security and other checks. ‘We just can't give a blank check over and over and over again to this administration,’ said House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif.” (Alan Fram, “GOP Election Victory Shaping Budget Bills,” [The Associated Press](#), 11/17/04)

**Pelosi Lamented A Debt Ceiling Increase Of \$2 Trillion In 4 Years. Saying These Figures Were “Absolutely Astounding.”** REP. PELOSI: “In the course of the President’s administration now, this 4 years, it will have been raised \$2 trillion. This is absolutely astounding in terms of these figures. (Rep. Nancy Pelosi, [Congressional Record](#), 11/18/04, H. 9982)



- **Pelosi Said She Will “Vote Against This Irresponsible Lifting Of The Debt Ceiling Unless There Is A Responsible Discipline Thrust Upon It Of Pay-As-You-Go Or A Plan From The President To Say How He Intends To Reduce The Deficit.”** PELOSI: “So I urge all of my colleagues to support our motion to commit which will accommodate, will give the government a chance to go forward, but also to put a limit on this profligate increase in the debt. I hope at the end of the evening, though, that everyone who stands up for fiscal soundness will vote against this irresponsible lifting of the debt ceiling unless there is a responsible discipline thrust upon it of pay-as-you-go or a plan from the President to say how he intends to reduce the deficit.” (Rep. Nancy Pelosi, [Congressional Record](#), 11/18/04, H. 9982)

## **OBAMA AND THE DEMOCRATS’ REFUSAL TO NEGOTIATE OVER THE DEBT LIMIT IS OUT OF LINE WITH HISTORY, REALITY, AND THE AMERICAN PUBLIC**

### ***History Shows That The Debt Limit Has Been A Useful Tool In Budget Negotiations***

**Since 1978, More Than Half Of The Increases In The Debt Limit Have Been Accompanied By Legislation Dealing With Other Matters.** (Justin Murray, “Votes On Measures To Adjust The Statutory Debt Limit, 1978 To Present,” [Congressional Research Service](#), 2/15/13)

**Obama Has Alleged That The Debt Ceiling Has Never Been Used As A Negotiating Tactic To Achieve Legislative Concessions.** OBAMA: “You have never seen in the history of the United States the debt ceiling or the threat of not raising the debt ceiling being used to extort a President or a governing party, and trying to force issues that have nothing to do with the budget and have nothing to do with the debt.”

(President Barack Obama, [Remarks At The Business Roundtable](#), Washington, D.C., 9/18/13)

**The Washington Post’s The Fact Checker Gave Obama Four Pinnocchio’s For The Remark.** (Glenn Kessler, “Obama’s Claim That Non-Budget Items Have ‘Never’ Been Attached To The Debt Ceiling,” [The Washington Post’s The Fact Checker](#), 9/19/13)

- **“Obama’s Sweeping Statement Does Not Stand Up To Scrutiny, Even With His Caveat. Time And Again, Lawmakers Have Used The ‘Must-Pass’ Nature Of The Debt Limit To Force Changes In Unrelated Laws.”** “Clearly, Obama’s sweeping statement does not stand up to scrutiny, even with his caveat. Time and again, lawmakers have used the ‘must-pass’ nature of the debt limit to force changes in unrelated laws. Often, the effort fails — as the GOP drive to repeal Obamacare almost certainly will. But Kowalcky and LeLoup speculate that one reason why Congress has not eliminated the debt limit, despite the political problems it poses, is because lawmakers enjoy the leverage it provides against the executive branch.” (Glenn Kessler, “Obama’s Claim That Non-Budget Items Have ‘Never’ Been Attached To The Debt Ceiling,” [The Washington Post’s The Fact Checker](#), 9/19/13)

### ***The American Public Agrees On The Need For Spending Cuts Coupled With A Debt Ceiling Increase***

**Bloomberg Headline: “Americans Reject By 61% Obama Demand For A Clean Debt Vote”** (Julie Hirschfeld Davis, “Americans Reject By 61% Obama Demand For A Clean Debt Vote,” [Bloomberg](#), 9/26/13)

**“Americans By A 2-To-1 Ratio Disagree With President Barack Obama’s Contention That Congress Should Raise The U.S. Debt Limit Without Conditions” Because Congress Lacks Spending Discipline.** “Americans by a 2-to-1 ratio disagree with President Barack Obama’s contention that Congress should raise the U.S. debt limit without conditions. Instead, 61 percent say that it’s ‘right to require spending cuts when the debt ceiling is raised even if it risks default,’ because Congress lacks spending discipline, according to a Bloomberg National Poll conducted Sept. 20-23.” (Julie Hirschfeld Davis, “Americans Reject By 61% Obama Demand For A Clean Debt Vote,” [Bloomberg](#), 9/26/13)

- **“The Poll Suggests The GOP May Have The Upper Hand When It Comes To Luring Obama Away From His Hard-Line Stance On The Debt Limit.”** “It's not unusual for Americans to favor the broad idea of spending cuts, but the poll suggests the GOP may have the upper hand when it comes to luring Obama away from his hard-line stance on the debt limit.” (Aaron Blake, “Poll: Americans Disagree With Obama's Call For ‘Clean’ Debt Limit Increase,” [The Washington Post's Post Politics](#), 9/26/13)

### ***The Reality Of Our Fiscal Nightmare***

**The U.S. Debt Stands At \$16.7 Trillion.** (“The Debt To The Penny And Who Holds It,” [U.S. Treasury](#), Accessed 10/4/13)

- **Since Obama Took Office, The U.S. National Debt Has Increased By \$6.1 Trillion.** (“The Debt To The Penny And Who Holds It,” [U.S. Treasury](#), Accessed 10/4/13)

**On The Current Fiscal Path, The U.S. National Debt Would Reach 100 Percent Of GDP By 2038, “More Than In Any Year Except 1945 And 1946.”** “The gap between federal spending and revenues would widen steadily after 2015 under the assumptions of the extended baseline, CBO projects. By 2038, the deficit would be 6½ percent of GDP, larger than in any year between 1947 and 2008, and federal debt held by the public would reach 100 percent of GDP, more than in any year except 1945 and 1946. With such large deficits, federal debt would be growing faster than GDP, a path that would ultimately be unsustainable.” (“The 2013 Long-Term Budget Outlook,” [Congressional Budget Office](#), 9/17/13)

- **“The Nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office (CBO) Warned Tuesday That The Long-Term Outlook For The National Debt Remains Dire, Despite A Near-Term Drop In The Deficit That Has Been Lauded By The Obama Administration.”** “The nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office (CBO) warned Tuesday that the long-term outlook for the national debt remains dire, despite a near-term drop in the deficit that has been lauded by the Obama administration. Federal debt held by the public is slated to rise from 73 percent of the economy in 2013 to 100 percent of gross domestic product by 2038, the CBO said.” (Erik Wasson, “CBO Projects Dire Debt Level,” [The Hill's On The Money](#), 9/17/13)

**“Because Federal Debt Is Already Unusually High Relative To GDP, Further Increases In Debt Could Be Especially Harmful.”** “The structure of the federal tax code means that revenues would also represent a larger percentage of GDP in the future than they have, on average, in the past few decades—but not large enough to keep federal debt held by the public from growing faster than the economy starting in the next several years. Moreover, because federal debt is already unusually high relative to GDP, further increases in debt could be especially harmful.” (“The 2013 Long-Term Budget Outlook,” [Congressional Budget Office](#), 9/17/13)

**Unless Changes Are Made, “Additional Spending Would Contribute To Rising Budget Deficits Starting In A Few Years, Causing Federal Debt To Swell From A Level That Is Already Very High Relative To The Size Of The Economy.”** “Barring changes to current law, that additional spending would contribute to rising budget deficits starting in a few years, causing federal debt to swell from a level that is already very high relative to the size of the economy.” (“The 2013 Long-Term Budget Outlook,” [Congressional Budget Office](#), 9/17/13)