

[By Peter Schroeder](#)

A group of House Democrats accused Republicans of having "weaponized" the debt ceiling Wednesday, and are pushing to abolish it.

The lawmakers blasted GOP members as taking the economic wellbeing of the nation hostage to achieve political victory, and are hoping to scrap the debt limit once and for all as a danger looming over the economy.

"The Republicans have chosen to exploit the routine necessity of raising the debt ceiling as a means of blackmailing the American people in order to impose an extremist agenda," said Rep. Jerrold Nadler (D-N.Y.), a leading sponsor of the measure abolishing the ceiling.

The bill is almost surely doomed in the House, which is led by Republicans adamant on extracting spending concessions in exchange for a vote to hike the nation's \$16.4 trillion borrowing limit.

The lawmakers agreed that both parties have made political hay out of votes to raise the debt ceiling in the past — even President Obama voted against raising the limit in 2006 as a senator. But they maintained that the fight over raising the limit in the summer represents a new watershed on the issue, as some Republicans legitimately opposed raising the debt limit without major spending concessions.

Rep. Peter Welch (D-Vt.) said Republicans had made the limit into an "economic weapon of mass destruction."

"They're serious about it. The question with the Republicans is not whether they have the power to plunge Americans into default, it's a question of whether they have the restraint not to do it," he added.

"The debt ceiling has been a harmless exercise in minor political propaganda from time to time," said Nadler. "But they have...weaponized the debt ceiling and made it into an active threat to the American economy."

Rep. Jim Moran (D-Va.) called the debt limit an "archaic quirk" and a "legislative relic" whose usefulness is long gone and should be erased.

Beyond using the limit as a way to extract concessions, Democrats also blasted GOP priorities, calling them misguided for the economy. They vowed to fight against any attempt to cut into safety net programs like Social Security and Medicare.

"We're beyond cutting fat. We're cutting bone, we're cutting vital services," said Rep. Keith Ellison (D-Minn.).

The nation reached its borrowing limit on Dec. 31, and the Treasury Department is currently employing "extraordinary measures" to buy time for Congress to raise it. Treasury Secretary Timothy Geithner has warned lawmakers that the government will no longer be able to meet all its obligations as soon as mid-February.

Republicans, led by Speaker John Boehner (R-Ohio), are likely to push for the same policy as the last time the debt limit emerged, which is to get an equal amount of spending cuts for any boost to the borrowing limit. Meanwhile, President Obama has said he will not negotiate with Republicans over hiking the limit — the same position he originally staked out in the last fight.