

[By Elise Foley & Zach Carter](#)

The White House and Congressional Democrats are urging House Republicans to support a "clean" bill to raise the nation's debt ceiling rather than using the legislative vehicle to tackle policy. On Monday, fresh off the budget fight, Press Secretary Jay Carney offered the first preview of the White House's position on the preeminent issue facing government in the months ahead.

"We cannot play chicken with the economy in this way. It's just too darn risky. It's not appropriate," Carney said during a Monday briefing.

Carney's remarks and posturing was echoed by Rep. Peter Welch (D-Vt.), who is circulating a letter to Congressional Democrats asking them to oppose GOP efforts to use the debt ceiling vote for policy gains.

"There's a growing awareness that we can't mess with the debt limit," Welch told HuffPost. "If we try to leverage politics out of the debt limit, we're putting a gun to the head of the very fragile economy."

Treasury Secretary Tim Geithner said the government will reach its congressionally authorized debt limit by May 16 in a letter sent to Congress last week. The government would have until early July before the country would default on its loans, Geithner said.

To avert a default and raise the debt ceiling, there will likely be a showdown between House Republicans, Senate Democrats and the White House similar to the fight over funding the government, which was resolved on Friday with Democrats agreeing to swallow \$38 billion in cuts.

Congress controls the government's purse-strings, and must authorize the amount of debt the Treasury Department can take on. Congress raised the debt ceiling seven times under

President George W. Bush, but the matter has become contentious in recent months as federal budget issues have dominated Capitol Hill. The amount of government debt will continue to increase even if federal spending is radically reduced, as Treasury bonds that have already been issued accrue interest. If Congress does not raise the debt ceiling as that interest accumulates, the government will be forced to default on its debt, which would almost certainly spark global economic unrest.

Although most Republicans acknowledge the debt ceiling does need to be raised, House Republican leaders said on Sunday they hope to address other issues, such as spending caps or changes to entitlement programs, with the pending legislation.

"There comes at times leverage moments, a time when the president will capitulate to what the American people want right now," Majority Leader Eric Cantor (R-Va.) said on "Fox News Sunday." "They don't want to raise taxes, they don't want borrowing to continue out of control."

Speaker John Boehner made a similar statement in an interview on Fox News later in the day.

"We're just not going to do the typical Washington thing, roll over, increase the debt limit without addressing the underlying problem," he said.

If the House GOP successfully adds policy changes to the debt ceiling bill, they could find support in the Senate, where Republicans have similar plans to leverage the debt limit to achieve other goals.

Carney did not say whether the president would veto a bill that raised the debt ceiling if it included other measures.

Welch said he hopes the president will keep other issues out of the debate, arguing they can be addressed during debate over the 2012 budget.

"I'd caution him against linking things directly to the debt limit," he said. "The debt ceiling is in a category of its own. It is not at all about incurring new obligations."

Welch's letter was also originally signed by Reps. Lloyd Doggett (D-Texas), Earl Blumenauer (D-Ore.), Rush Holt (D-N.J.) and David Price (D-N.C.). About 20 other Democrats had signed on by mid-morning. Welch said he hopes to create a strong stance within the Democratic caucus against the Republican effort to add other issues to the debt limit vote.

"They're calling this a leverage moment; in fact it's an adult moment, to use Boehner's terms," he said. "Even creating the significant possibility that we'll default on our loans could be disastrous."