

[By Jeremy Herb](#)

House Democrats on Thursday panned Republican efforts to change the automatic cuts to defense spending, beginning a contentious debate that's set to play out over the next year.

Sens. John McCain (R-Ariz.), Jon Kyl (R-Ariz.), Lindsey Graham (R-S.C.) and Kelly Ayotte (R-N.H.) said Wednesday they will propose legislation early next year that would stop sequestration defense cuts, while House Armed Services Committee Chairman Buck McKeon (R-Calif.) introduced a bill to kill the first year of cuts to both defense and non-defense spending.

House Democrats responded Thursday with a letter signed by 92 members supporting President Obama's veto threat if Congress tries to avoid the \$600 billion in defense cuts without replacing them.

Just as the debate in the supercommittee stalled over raising taxes, the fight over changing the defense cuts will be waged over how to mix spending cuts and raising revenues to cut \$1 trillion from the budget.

Rep. Peter Welch (D-Vt.), who circulated the letter, acknowledged that many Democrats agree the automatic defense cuts should be lessened, but said that new revenues had to be included in the conversation.

"There are folks in both parties who are raising legitimate questions about what's the proper level of spending for defense," Welch said at a press conference Thursday. "If you want to protect a program, whether it's infrastructure or defense, there's a way to do it. It's to advocate for an all-in-it-together approach that includes revenues."

Sens. Graham and Kyl said Wednesday they believe Democrats would support their plan to change the sequestration trigger.

But Democrats accused them of trying to go back on a deal they agreed to in the August deal to raise the debt-ceiling. They said revenues have to be on the table for any changes to sequestration.

"You can't protect people who make more than \$1 million a year and protect the Pentagon at the same time," said Rep. George Miller (D-Calif.).

The Democrats' press conference, attended by Miller, Welch, Rep. Chris Van Hollen (D-Md.) and Rep. Emanuel Cleaver (D-Mo.), was scheduled two hours before McKeon is set to explain his bill, which would reduce the federal workforce by 10 percent through attrition to stave off the first year of sequestration cuts.