

[By Jennifer Steinhauer](#)

Several Republican senators said Thursday that they had crafted legislation that would replace large planned cuts to defense programs with reductions in other areas. The proposed cuts resulted from last year's failure of a bipartisan panel to determine ways to reduce the deficit.

Senators Jon Kyl and John McCain of Arizona, Lindsey Graham of South Carolina, John Cornyn of Texas, Kelly Ayotte of New Hampshire and Marco Rubio of Florida propose replacing \$110 billion in across-the-board federal spending cuts for 2013 with a freeze in federal employee pay through 2014, all toward avoiding approximately \$500 billion in cuts the Pentagon means to spread over 10 years.

The bill also seeks to restrict federal hiring to only two employees for every three leaving, until the size of the federal government workforce is reduced by 5 percent.

"Defense Secretary Leon Panetta has called the cuts to defense spending 'devastating,' likening them to 'shooting ourselves in the head,'" the senators said in a joint statement, adding, "As Congress considers funding for the next fiscal year, we should at least be able to agree to one year in targeted spending reductions, instead of the draconian, across-the-board cuts resulting from sequestration."

As part of legislation last year to raise the debt ceiling, a Congressional committee was charged with finding \$1.2 trillion in deficit reductions.

Because the group failed to come to an agreement, under the legislation automatic cuts were triggered across-the-board – known as sequestration – split evenly between security and nonsecurity programs. Several Republicans and a smattering of Democrats in the House and Senate have vowed to undo the defense cuts, which they argue would threaten national security.

Many of the members seeking to unravel the sequestration voted for the bill that created it, though some were wary of this outcome all along and rejected the legislation. For instance, Mr. Kyl, one of the most vocal critics of the cuts, voted for the bill that dictated them and served on the failed deficit committee that triggered them, while Ms. Ayotte voted against the bill.

"Defense is not the cause of our fiscal crisis," Ms. Ayotte said. "I was very clear on my position from the beginning. I feel affirmed with my decision to vote against the bill."

The Republican senators may have trouble stirring up agreement from across the aisle; Senator Harry Reid of Nevada, the majority leader, has been cold to the idea of undoing the cuts, as has President Obama. Representatives Peter Welch of Vermont and George Miller of California sent a letter on Thursday signed by 125 other House Democrats to the White House in support of Mr. Obama's threatened veto of any legislation to roll back defense cuts.

Further, many Democrats have pressed for new revenues to off-set any cuts to the Pentagon that are reversed. On Thursday, Senator Patty Murray of Washington, who also served on the failed deficit committee, said in a statement: "This plan isn't about avoiding sequestration, it's about avoiding having millionaires pay their fair share. If Republicans are serious about replacing the automatic spending cuts, then they are going to need to work with Democrats to find an equal amount of balanced deficit reduction that doesn't simply increase the pain for the middle class."