

[By Brian Beutler](#)

President Obama has made it abundantly clear he will not surrender to the GOP's demands if Republicans refuse to raise the debt limit next year. Democratic leaders on Capitol Hill say they have his back.

But what about rank and file Democrats? If the GOP is serious about replaying the 2011 debt limit crisis next year, would they unite behind Obama? If House Republicans pass debt ceiling legislation which includes billions or even trillions of dollars in cuts to social programs next year, and then leave town just before the deadline, would House and Senate Dems really call John Boehner's bluff?

Early signs suggest they would.

"I don't think the country will stand for it and I think Democrats will make it clear that you cannot threaten the economy of the United States for your political purposes," Rep. Chris Van Hollen (D-MD) said in response to a question from TPM on Wednesday.

Rank and file Democrats are starting to back him up.

Rep. Peter Welch (D-VT) is circulating among colleagues a letter to President Obama, to affirm their support for his no-hostage strategy — and beyond that for him using extraordinary means to prevent the U.S. from defaulting on its debt obligations.

"We fully support your view that Congress should not 'play this game,'" the letter reads.

"Threatening default on our nation's debt is an economic weapon of mass destruction that will have immediate and catastrophic consequences for the economy as well as America's standing in the world. In the event the Speaker follows through on his reckless threat, we would support your use of any authority available to you, including the 14th amendment, to preserve America's full faith and credit and prevent further damage to our economy."

Welch has just begun circulating his letter, and has thus far gathered a dozen signatures.

The White House has all but ruled out invoking the 14th amendment to the constitution to unilaterally issue new debt in the event that the Treasury runs out of borrowing authority. But Welch's own view is that Obama wouldn't be able to take such a dramatic step until after the the country started missing payment obligations.

Conversations with top Democrats and aides all back up the idea the party will not accede to any GOP debt limit demands if current budget negotiations fall apart.

When discussing the debt limit, GOP leaders have left themselves noticeable wiggle room — perhaps enough to avoid a new round of brinksmanship next year. But a growing number of Republicans are encouraging party leaders to put the current fight over tax rates behind them, give Obama what he's asking for, then force Democrats to agree to Medicare, Social Security and Medicaid cuts in exchange for raising the debt limit early in 2013.