

US House Approves \$9 Billion Cuts to Public Broadcasting and Foreign Aid

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The US House of Representatives has passed a controversial bill authorizing President Donald Trump's request to slash approximately \$9 billion from public broadcasting and foreign aid budgets. The move, which marks the first successful presidential rescissions request in decades, passed with a narrow 216-213 vote in the House, following a 51-48 Senate approval. The legislation now awaits Trump's signature to become law.

The package targets \$1.1 billion allocated to the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB) over the next two budget years, alongside nearly \$8 billion in foreign aid programs aimed at addressing humanitarian crises such as drought, disease, and political instability. House Speaker Mike Johnson, a Republican from Louisiana, championed the cuts, stating, “We need to get back to fiscal sanity, and this is an important step.”

The decision has sparked fierce debate. Republicans argue that the reductions address wasteful spending and align with a broader agenda to prioritise American taxpayers. “The money we’re clawing back is the people’s money. We ought not to forget that,” said Virginia Foxx, Republican chair of the House Rules Committee. The White House has further contended that public media exhibits political bias and represents an unnecessary expense, while foreign aid cuts would encourage other nations to take greater responsibility for global humanitarian efforts.

However, opponents, including all Democrats and some Republicans, have raised alarms over both the substance of the cuts and the precedent they set. The CPB funds over 1,500 local public television and radio stations, as well as national programming through National Public Radio (NPR) and the Public Broadcasting Service (PBS). Rural lawmakers, in particular, expressed concerns about the impact on local stations. Senator Lisa Murkowski, a Republican from Alaska, highlighted their critical role, noting, “These stations are not just your news — they are your tsunami alert, your landslide alert, your volcano alert.” Her comments came shortly after a 7.3 magnitude earthquake off the Alaska Peninsula underscored the importance of local public broadcasting in issuing tsunami warnings.

The foreign aid reductions include \$800 million from emergency shelter and family reunification programs for refugees, \$496 million for food, water, and healthcare in disaster-stricken regions, and \$4.15 billion for initiatives to strengthen economies and democratic institutions in developing nations. Critics argue these cuts could diminish America’s global influence, with Democratic leader Hakeem Jeffries asserting, “This is not an America first bill. It’s a China-first bill because of the void that’s being created all across the world.”

The process itself has drawn scrutiny. The rescissions package, triggered by a formal White House request, required only a simple majority in the Senate, bypassing the usual 60-vote threshold for most legislation. This allowed Republicans to pass the bill along party lines, despite opposition from Senators Murkowski and Susan Collins of Maine. Senate Armed Services Committee Chairman Roger Wicker, while supporting the bill, cautioned against

making such processes routine, citing insufficient transparency from the White House on the specifics of the cuts.

Kate Riley, president and CEO of America's Public Television Stations, criticised a last-minute deal to repurpose some Interior Department funds for Native American public radio stations, calling it "at best a short-term, half-measure that will still result in cuts and reduced service." Meanwhile, Russ Vought, director of the Office of Management and Budget, defended the package in a recent breakfast with reporters hosted by the Christian Science Monitor, describing it as a sign of "enthusiasm" for fiscal discipline. He hinted at further rescissions packages to come, acknowledging the \$9 billion cut was modest due to anticipated congressional resistance.

The bill's passage follows another Republican-led initiative to enact Trump's tax and spending cut bill, which the Congressional Budget Office projects will add \$3.3 trillion to the US debt over the next decade. Democrats, including Jeffries, have accused Republicans of hypocrisy, arguing that the rescissions package does little to address genuine fiscal responsibility. They also warn that the cuts undermine bipartisan legislative norms, ceding excessive spending power to the executive branch.

As the UK's Labour government faces its domestic challenges, the US developments serve as a reminder of the complexities of balancing fiscal priorities with public and international responsibilities. The cuts, while framed as a victory for fiscal conservatism, raise questions about their long-term impact on both local communities and America's global standing.