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Obama Plans to Use Week to Press Economic Case

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WASHINGTON — With Congress pushing to complete a budget plan this week that reflects the cost-cutting priorities of the new Republican majority, [President Obama](#) plans to devote much of his week to laying out an alternative approach that would increase spending on domestic programs such as education and health care.

Mr. Obama met at the White House on Monday with school leaders from cities across the nation to discuss the need for education investments and reforms, arguing that spending reductions that Republicans want would be harmful for students.

“This is a monumental task, and it requires resources,” Mr. Obama said after meeting with representatives of the [Council of the Great City Schools](#), an organization representing urban public schools. “All that is dependent on a budget and approach at the federal level that says we care about all kids, and not just some.”

If the Republicans’ budget does not invest in education, he added, “then we’re going to have to have a major debate.”

On Wednesday, Mr. Obama will go to Cleveland for a speech on his economic agenda, pressing his case that at a time of financial recovery, the government must do more to spread prosperity to middle-class Americans who have seen few of its benefits.

The events constitute Mr. Obama's effort to frame the budget debate to his advantage at a time when Republicans, working to create their first fiscal blueprint in nearly a decade, are struggling to present a unified front and a cohesive agenda.

They present an opportunity for the president to portray Republicans as shortsighted and even meanspirited as he looks ahead to battles over whether and how to replace a decade-long set of spending caps and cuts known as sequestration.

In his budget plan unveiled last month, Mr. Obama proposed raising the caps in the fiscal year beginning in October by about \$75 billion — split evenly between military and domestic programs. It was an attempt to lay the groundwork for a spending deal between Republicans, many of whom support raising national security spending, and Democrats who, like Mr. Obama, believe that any increase to such spending must be paired with an increase for domestic programs.

Republicans have pledged to present a plan that balances the budget within a decade, so many of them are loath to lift spending limits that are in line with their goal of reining in the size of government. But some Republican defense hawks, like Senators John McCain of Arizona and Lindsey Graham of South Carolina, advocate raising national security spending, even if they have to agree to domestic spending increases in the process.

The White House is trying to capitalize on those divisions.

“On the eve of the release of the Republican budget, the question is whether Republicans will put aside ideas of the past — letting go of a strategy that focuses on tax cuts for the wealthy and deep cuts to investments in the middle class — and instead join the momentum around middle-class economics,” Brian Deese, a senior adviser to Mr. Obama, [wrote](#) Monday in a blog post.

Mr. Deese said that Republican leaders had been mired in “defensiveness and disarray” since taking control of Congress.

Three months into the new Republican majority, the White House sees the budget debate as a ripe opportunity both to press Mr. Obama's priorities and to keep Republicans on the defensive on budget matters, hoping that they feel compelled to respond to the president's policy prescriptions.

One official called this week's budget maneuvering a “target-rich” environment, acknowledging that Mr. Obama's team was relishing watching Republicans try to make the difficult fiscal decisions they used to deride Democrats for failing to make.

Mr. Obama, at his meeting on Monday, sought to put the onus on Republicans to answer his call for more educational resources, arguing that his policies have yielded higher reading and math scores and improved graduation rates.

“The idea that we go backwards on that progress — in some cases for ideological reasons, as opposed to because of what the evidence says — that’s not the kind of legacy we want to leave for the next generation,” the president said. “I’m going to continue to fight to make sure that this progress continues.”

Even though Republicans control both houses of Congress, Mr. Obama is using the considerable tools at his disposal to try to build public support for his own agenda. Just as Republicans were preparing to unveil a budget that would propose to repeal Mr. Obama’s signature [health care law](#), the administration released new figures showing that 16.4 million Americans had obtained [health insurance](#) since it took effect.

The growth of health care costs has slowed over the same period.

“This progress is scrambling traditional cost-versus-coverage debates that said we had to choose between providing more Americans with the economic security of affordable health care and constraining health care costs,” Mr. Deese wrote.