

Shortly after returning from their retreat, House Republicans will vote on Wednesday to raise the debt ceiling without matching spending cuts — a proposal that represents both a concession and a new legislative strategy for them.

The fact that House GOP leaders have scheduled a vote on the controversial bill in less than a week since the idea surfaced signifies that they have an unusual amount of confidence in their 233 members. That's despite the fact that Republicans have hardly been able to pass a single piece of important legislation without Democratic support.

GOP leaders feel confident they will be able to pass the bill, which suspends the debt ceiling until May 19, while trying to force the Senate to pass its budget. The legislation doesn't specify the amount by which the debt ceiling will be raised, a tactic that might be aimed at shielding lawmakers from the criticism that they're accruing billions of dollars in new debt.

The bill also attempts to force both chambers to pass a budget by April 15. If they don't, members of Congress will not be paid.

The measure — a mere 4½ pages long — is an attempt to sweep away the debt ceiling as a legislative issue until Washington resolves two other thorny problems: government funding and automatic spending cuts dubbed the sequester.

The goal, according to lawmakers, is to use the three months after the debt ceiling is lifted to tangle over long-term fiscal policy with the Senate and the White House. But it's unclear whether President Barack Obama would ever agree to a short-term debt ceiling hike, something he has previously fiercely opposed.

In a hopeful sign for Speaker John Boehner (R-Ohio), Majority Leader Eric Cantor (R-Va.) and Majority Whip Kevin McCarthy (R-Calif.), some of the House Republican Conference's most conservative lawmakers say they're going to support the legislation.

The GOP's three-day retreat last week in Williamsburg, Va., helped corral support from them.

“Let’s spend the next 90 days having [a discussion about long-term fiscal policy],” said Rep. John Campbell (R-Calif.)

, a conservative on the House Budget Committee who will support the debt ceiling deal.

“How much debt are we going to ring up? I’m sure the president would like a four-year extension. So how much debt are we going to ring up in the next four years? What do you plan to do Mr. President, and what are your proposals? And the Senate, what are yours?”

The short-term debt hike is certainly a sea change for Republicans, some of whom were urging default unless Democrats agreed to massive spending cuts. Boehner labored for months during the 2011 debt ceiling negotiations to match what has become known as the Boehner Principle — that any debt ceiling hike should be matched with commensurate spending cuts or reforms.

“I think it’s always been a good idea to realize that when we write a check, we should cover it,” said Rep. Darrell Issa (R-Calif.), chairman of the Oversight and Government Reform Committee, who plans to support the bill. “And we write a check when we pass a budget. We write a check when we appropriate.”

Trying to force the Senate to pass a budget is a principal objective here, lawmakers say. Senate leaders, like Sen. Chuck Schumer (D-N.Y.), say the chamber will pass a spending plan this year, but as of Monday afternoon, there was no decision whether the Senate would take up the bill if it passes the House.

“At some point, some group is going to care about the deficit and the debt that’s not the Republican Party, and as long as the only group in town who really seems to care about the debt is the Republican Party, we’re never going to get anything accomplished,” said Rep. Jack Kingston (R-Ga.), who is likely to support the legislation but noted that there is no alternative.

The larger question is whether Senate Republicans will support the bill if it comes up in the

Senate.

Sen. John Thune (R-S.D.), chairman of the Senate Republican Conference, refused to say whether he supported the legislation proposed by Boehner and backed by Budget Committee Chairman Paul Ryan (R-Wis.).

“Well, we’ll see. It depends on what comes over,” Thune said. “If it’s just a clean extension, and it’ll be interesting to see what the leader in the Senate decides to do with it, but I think that in terms of what they’re trying to accomplish here, is to put the focus on the lack of a budget in the Senate for the past three years, I think that’s what we need to be focused on. And so if taking the whole debt limit debate off the table, at least temporarily, eventually we get back and we’re going to have to have this fight anyway, but to get us focused on what we’re going to do to address the debt, I give them credit for sort of some pretty strategic thinking.”

Not all Senate Republicans are looking to hold their fire. Sen. Orrin Hatch (R-Utah) said plainly: “I’m going to support the speaker of the House.

“I think he’s got a very tough job,” Hatch said. “He’s doing a great job, and without him we’re never going to get anything done. I also support our leader in the Senate. He’s doing a great job, [Senate Republican Leader Mitch] McConnell is a very sharp guy, and so is the speaker. And I think the president would be well-disposed if he just got in and really worked with them instead of just laying down gauntlets. He indicated today that he’s going to start taking that approach, not just my way or the highway.”

Senate Democrats seem open to the House GOP leadership’s plan. Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid (D-Nev.) issued a positive statement last week. And rank-and-file lawmakers seem moderately supportive.

“It’s a step; I think it’s a step in the right direction,” said Sen. Debbie Stabenow (D-Mich.). “For stability in the economy, it should be longer. But, you know, I think it indicates that they understand that would be devastating to our economy.”

House Democrats, though, have signaled they won't back the bill.

“Frankly, I think one of the things the Republicans are looking at now, and one of the reasons they've moved on the debt — not very far — I think it's a tactical change, not a substantive change — is that they are hearing the American public say we don't like the opposition for opposition sake,” House Minority Whip Steny Hoyer (D-Md.) said. “We need to get to compromise.”

If the House is unable to pass the bill, it could be problematic for Cantor: He is slated to speak in Davos, Switzerland, at the World Economic Forum on Friday afternoon where he'll discuss “how can governments put economies onto a path of stable growth and higher employment.” He's slated to speak alongside renowned economist Joseph Stiglitz and others on Friday.