

Behind funding deadline theatrics, Democrats back Trump's war on immigrants, increased military spending

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26 April 2017

With funding for the federal government set to expire at 12:01 a.m. Saturday, a largely stage-managed conflict between the Trump administration and congressional Democrats over a bill to avert a government shutdown is being used by the Democratic Party as a smokescreen to obscure its support for stepped-up attacks on immigrants and a large increase in military spending.

At issue is an omnibus spending bill to keep the government running through September 30, the end of the current fiscal year. The Democratic leadership rejected an earlier demand by the White House that the measure include \$1 billion as a down payment on President Donald Trump's border wall between the US and Mexico, pledging to block a funding extension and allow large parts of the federal government to shut down unless the border wall allocation was removed. Although the Republicans control both houses of Congress, they need at least eight Democratic votes to overcome a filibuster in the Senate.

Democratic leaders are portraying their stance on money for the border wall in the budget negotiations as opposition to the administration's war on immigrants. It is nothing of the kind. It is a cynical maneuver meant to conceal their support for the further militarization of the US-Mexico border.

At a meeting Monday afternoon with reporters from right-wing media outlets, Trump indicated that he would be willing to withdraw a specific proposal for money to begin building the wall in order to obtain passage of a funding bill and avert a shutdown. This followed suggestions by White House Chief of Staff Reince Priebus on Sunday's "Meet the Press" interview program that the White House was open to

dropping spending for the wall from the measure being negotiated as long as it included additional money for border security.

"We expect a massive increase in military spending. We expect money for border security in this bill," he told moderator Chuck Todd. He was already aware that the Democrats were prepared to meet these demands.

On Sunday, House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi declared that the Democrats would not approve a penny for the border wall, which she called "immoral, expensive, unwise." At the same time, however, she and Senate Minority Leader Charles Schumer were assuring the Republicans that they would deliver the votes to include in the budget measure hundreds of millions of dollars for border security as well as tens of billions in additional funding for the Pentagon.

On Sunday morning, the day before Congress reassembled after a two-week recess, the Democrats submitted to the Republicans a compromise spending plan, including the new money for the border, minus specific funding for the wall. At the same time, the Democrats called for assurances from the White House that it would not, as threatened, terminate government subsidies paid to insurance companies to keep down premiums and other costs for consumers who buy health coverage on the Obamacare exchanges. Their proposal also included an extension of health benefits for coal miners set to expire on Saturday and an expansion of Medicaid benefits to people in Puerto Rico.

In a speech on the Senate floor, Schumer attacked the plan for a border wall, while declaring that a combination of new technology and increased border policing would be "a much more effective way to

secure the border.” He particularly boosted the idea of deploying drones to stop undocumented workers from crossing into the US.

On Tuesday afternoon, the Republican congressional leadership offered a revised funding bill that stripped out spending on the border wall but included money to repair existing fencing and install new surveillance technology.

“The fact that the wall is now off the table—Americans should breathe a sigh of relief,” Schumer declared.

The *Wall Street Journal* editorial on Tuesday acidly mocked the political theater that dominates the budget talks, writing, “[S]eemingly all of Washington is promising high drama and an epic budget battle. Don’t fall for the hype. A more accurate term for this week’s scuffle is Freud’s shutdown, because the stakes aren’t much higher than the narcissism of small differences.”

The newspaper noted that the Democrats had backed spending \$40 billion to militarize the border in the Obama administration’s failed immigration bill of 2013.

The *Washington Post* reported that plans were in place, should the two parties fail to agree on an omnibus spending bill by Friday, to quickly pass in both the House and Senate a short-term continuing resolution to keep the government running until the details had been finalized.



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