

Democrats, Republicans resume talks on right-wing budget deal

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The US Congress resumes work Tuesday with only four days to avert a partial shutdown of the federal government. Funding authorization for all federal agencies has been extended to the night of Friday, January 19 under a continuing resolution passed by Congress last month.

Congressional Republicans, who control both the House of Representatives and the Senate, have said they expect another short-term continuing resolution to be passed before the Friday deadline, but it is not at all certain that this will take place. Backroom talks between the top Republican and Democratic leaders—House Speaker Paul Ryan, Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi and Senate Minority Leader Charles Schumer—have been continuing, although there have been no public talks between the congressional leaders and the Trump White House for more than a week.

There are deep divisions in the Republican caucus, particularly in the House, and any continuing resolution will require significant Democratic Party support to pass in both the House and the Senate, where the Republicans have a narrow 51-49 majority and lack the 60 votes to overcome a filibuster.

Ryan and House Majority Leader Kevin McCarthy said another month-long continuing resolution was needed because there was not enough time to deal with all of the issues that now surround the budget legislation. McCarthy reportedly told a closed-door meeting of the Republican caucus that it would take until the end of the month to reach a bipartisan agreement on the key issues, including spending, immigration, disaster relief and health care.

One step involves raising caps on spending for the military and for domestic social problems, set in a series of bipartisan deals during the Obama

administration, most recently in 2015. The Trump administration has proposed a major increase in military spending, to more than \$700 billion annually. The Democrats are not opposed to the additional funding for the Pentagon, but demand an equivalent boost in spending for domestic social programs.

A faction of the House Republican caucus, including the entire Republican membership of the House Armed Services Committee, is opposed to any further continuing resolution for military spending, because the one-month duration makes it impossible for the Pentagon to award lucrative long-term contracts, particularly for the huge sums required to buy new warplanes, warships, tanks, artillery and other heavy equipment. They want to pass a full-year appropriation for the Pentagon rather than a short-term fix.

Their opposition gives the Democrats leverage in the negotiations, since Ryan would require substantial Democratic support to pass a continuing resolution over the opposition of 40-50 Republicans, given that he has only a 23-seat majority in the House.

Some Democrats, for their part, are threatening to oppose any continuing resolution that does not contain full funding for the Children's Health Insurance Program, whose authorization expired last October 1, as well as disaster aid for Puerto Rico and restoration of DACA protection for 700,000 young immigrants brought here without documents by their parents.

Ryan has insisted that DACA should be kept separate from the continuing resolution, and that Congress should pass stand-alone legislation before the March 6 deadline set by Trump when he rescinded the executive order by Obama that established the program. Meanwhile, the talks on that issue have been overshadowed by the international uproar over Trump's racist diatribe against immigrants from

“shithole” countries like Haiti and Africa.

There is an enormous degree of posturing by the Democrats, who fully support the military budget and American military aggression around the world, while favoring a foreign policy that targets Syria and Russia for immediate military confrontation ahead of Trump’s preferred targets, Iran and North Korea.

The Democrats have effusively proclaimed their support for so-called “Dreamers,” the young immigrants temporarily protected under DACA, although the Obama administration carried out more deportations during its eight years in office than all previous US administrations combined. The Democrats are also prepared to provide tens of billions for increased “border security,” provided only that the resulting combination of fencing, drones, sensors and Border Patrol police is not called a “wall.”

In what amounts to a political stunt, Representative Al Green of Texas, a member of the Congressional Black Caucus, has announced he will force a vote this week on impeachment of President Trump, this time for his racist comments about Haitian and African immigrants. A previous impeachment resolution from Green attracted the support of only 58 members of the Democratic caucus, with 126 Democrats and 264 Republicans opposed, when it came to a vote last month.

In the event that Congress fails to pass a continuing resolution by Friday midnight, sections of the federal government deemed “inessential”—many domestic services, national parks, federal buildings—will shut down, with only skeleton crews in place. The core functions of the capitalist state, particularly the military and intelligence agencies, will continue operating without interruption, but most workers will receive no paychecks until a subsequent congressional action authorizes the funds.



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