

US budget charade causes government shutdown

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The annual back-and-forth budget charade between Democrats and Republicans dragged on late into the night on Friday when Senate Republicans failed to secure enough Democratic votes to pass a four-week federal funding extension. As a result, what has been called a “government shutdown” went into effect at 12:01 AM Saturday morning.

Talks between congressional Democrats, Republicans and President Trump will continue this weekend over protection for 800,000 recipients of the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program, increased spending for border militarization and deportation roundup squads, disaster relief, and funding for most federal agencies. Whatever deal emerges from the kabuki theater in Washington will shift the entire framework of American politics further to the right.

Knowing that their so-called “continuing resolution” was doomed to fail in the Senate, House Republicans cynically added an extension of the Child Health Insurance Program (CHIP) while excluding DACA protection in order to blame Democrats for prioritizing “illegal immigrants” over US citizen children. Five Senate Democrats voted for the Republican measure, including Doug Jones, whose victory in last month’s Alabama Senate race was called “a triumph for decency and common sense” by the *New York Times* editorial board.

Politico reported that Democrats made a counterproposal Friday that included an additional \$50 billion in military funding in exchange for protection for DACA recipients as well as already agreed-upon increases for border militarization. Republicans called this right-wing proposal a “nonstarter.”

Late Friday afternoon, Senate Minority Leader Charles Schumer (Democrat of New York) visited the White House for a parley with Trump, his old friend

and benefactor. Schumer said he “made some progress” with Trump during the meeting. Trump called the session an “excellent preliminary meeting” in which he and the Democratic Senate leader were “working on solutions for security and our great military.”

Whatever is taking place behind closed doors, the American people will never hear the half of it. The Democratic demands likely center around foreign policy and increased surveillance of social media, two themes that are technically not related to the budget debate. Republican Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell spoke some truth when he said of the Republican proposal, “Its content is bipartisan; there are no provisions that my Democratic friends oppose.”

Schumer and the Democrats want to shut down government operations over the weekend when the impact on Wall Street will be negligible in order to posture as defenders of DACA beneficiaries. A CBS poll released this week showed that 87 percent of Americans want a pathway to citizenship for these young people.

The phony character of the Democratic Party’s position is revealed by the fact that US stock indexes rose Friday, with the Nasdaq and S&P 500 reaching new records even as the likelihood of a deal declined throughout the day. Hank Smith, co-chief investment officer at Haverford Trust, said, “I would characterize a shutdown as just the kind of political news that the market has demonstrated, over the past year, a willingness to ignore.” In other words, there is no question that the two parties will reach an agreement favorable to Wall Street.

In contrast to the presentation in the bourgeois press, many functions of the US government do not shut down during a budget impasse. Immigration agents and border patrol will continue to round up families for

deportation, American warplanes will carry out their sorties over Middle Eastern countries, and the National Security Agency will continue its mass surveillance of the American and world population.

However, some 850,000 federal workers, many of whom are mid- and low-level domestic agency staff, as well as janitors, cafeteria workers and other service employees will stop receiving paychecks. These workers do not always receive back pay for furloughs and many face economic devastation as a result of even a brief shutdown.

Over 60 percent of Centers for Disease Control employees will be furloughed in the midst of the worst flu epidemic in years. Members of Congress, however, will be paid for days the government is technically closed down.

The short-term continuing resolution would have been the fourth extension of the government funding deadline since September. At each stage, the Democrats have failed to secure protection for DACA recipients, who are spending the weekend in a profound state of anxiety. One DACA recipient posted on a popular Facebook page for young immigrants that she has “lost sleep over this issue with DACA and the votes and Congress etc... Here we are stressing about something that is totally out of our hands. What really matters is our happiness. I’m tired of feeling sick, tired of losing sleep over this whole situation.”

The Democrats have already made clear that they are willing to support construction of a border wall and massive expenditures for militarizing the border as part of a deal that includes extensions for DACA recipients. Last week, Bernie Sanders declared, “I don’t think there’s anybody who disagrees that we need strong border security. If the president wants to work with us to make sure we have strong border security, let’s do that.”

The assurances by Sanders and the Democrats of support for added security comes as videos published this week by the pro-immigrant No More Deaths organization showed border guards pouring out over 3,500 gallons of water left by rights groups in the harsh borderlands desert. In the last 20 years, up to 27,000 immigrants have died of dehydration, starvation, heat stroke and hypothermia while attempting to escape the violence and poverty in Mexico and Central America.



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