Senate Democratic leader seeks to protect Special Counsel Mueller, not DACA immigrants

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Senate Minority Leader Charles Schumer said Sunday that the Democrats would seek to introduce a provision to protect Special Counsel Robert Mueller, who heads the Justice Department's Russia investigation, to the budget resolution that is under consideration by Congress.

"The most important thing Congress can do right now is to ensure that Special Counsel Mueller's investigation continues uninterrupted and unimpeded," he said in a statement issued by his Senate office. "No one—whether it be administration officials, Republicans or the president himself—should get in the way and undermine the investigation, and so Democrats will seek to add protections for Mueller in the ongoing budget negotiations."

Schumer was responding to press reports claiming that President Donald Trump had decided to fire Mueller last June and was dissuaded from the action only when his White House counsel, Don McGahn, threatened to resign rather than transmit the order to the Justice Department.

Schumer, the most powerful congressional Democrat, made his statement only six days after he agreed to drop any reference to protecting young immigrants from the same budget resolution, capitulating to the White House and congressional Republicans in the standoff that produced a two-day partial shutdown of the federal government.

Under terms of the deal Schumer struck with Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, the Democrats agreed to abandon their filibuster and permit a short-term budget resolution to pass Congress, ending the shutdown and authorizing federal spending through February 8.

This was in return for a promise by McConnell to permit a vote on a stand-alone immigration bill that would address the fate of 800,000 young undocumented immigrants brought to this country as children, who have been protected from deportation under the Obama administration's Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program. Trump rescinded the executive order that established DACA, giving Congress until March 5 to take action on the issue.

The promise from McConnell was completely meaningless, since it in no way guarantees any action to legalize the DACA recipients even if the Senate were to pass such a bill. The House of Representatives will not even take up a DACA bill without the support of the White House, according to House Speaker Paul Ryan, while Trump has insisted that any DACA bill must include a raft of repressive and anti-immigrant measures, including his infamous wall along the US-Mexico border.

The Democrats are well aware that the only way to obtain DACA relief is to tie it to the budget resolution, which the House must pass and Trump must sign to fund the federal government for the remainder of the current fiscal year. Schumer's declaration that protection for Mueller should be inserted into the budget resolution, after having just agreed that protection for DACA recipients will be taken out, is a clear indication of the real priorities of the Democratic Party.

The Democrats have focused all their energy on the anti-Russia campaign, in part to pressure the Trump administration to embrace the more hard-line policy towards Moscow initiated by the Obama administration

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in its second term, in part to divert mass opposition to the Trump administration in a right-wing, nationalistic and militarist direction.

Taking the measure of the Democrats, Trump outlined a revised immigration deal Wednesday and Thursday in a series of tweets and an appearance before reporters at the White House. While offering a protracted "path to citizenship" for undocumented immigrants brought here as children, as long as 12 years, his plan barred those immigrants from obtaining legalization for their own parents and older, non-DACA siblings, who would be deported.

The White House plan would provide $25 billion for the wall and other border security measures, including electronic monitoring, drones and an army of new immigration agents. It would also end the "diversity lottery," which awards some visas to immigrants from countries in Africa and Asia demonized by the president, and it would impose other restrictions on legal immigration. One immigration rights group estimated that the plan would cut legal immigration by nearly 300,000 a year.

The American Civil Liberties Union denounced the White House plan as "a hateful, xenophobic proposal that would slash legal immigration to levels not seen since the racial quotas of the 1920s." A spokeswoman for United We Dream, one of the organizations of DACA recipients, called it "a white supremacist ransom note."

But the two leading organs of "liberal" public opinion, the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post*, published editorials urging Democrats to take the deal being offered by Trump. The *Times* wrote that "every now and then President Trump emits a sensible idea." It argued that "a solution must be a balance between offering many of the undocumented immigrants and their families—and the Dreamers—a way to legalize their presence, and increasing border security."

The *Post* editorial declared that Trump's plan "contains the elements of an imaginable deal." It continued, "Legislators who want to get to yes should seize on those elements and start working." It urged Congress to "welcome Mr. Trump's proffer of a 10- to 12-year pathway to citizenship for the estimated 1.8 million undocumented young immigrants enrolled in or potentially eligible for Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals," and concluded bluntly that there was a deal to be made along the lines of "dreamers for the wall."

Congressional Democrats were more cautious than the newspaper editorialists in their initial statements, but it is clear they are moving in that direction, and the momentum behind a "wall for DACA" deal is expected to accelerate after the formal release of the administration's immigration proposal, initially set for Monday, the eve of Trump's State of the Union speech.

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