

US Senate Democrats agree to massive boost in military spending

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Senate Democrats on Wednesday agreed to a bipartisan two-year budget deal boosting defense spending by \$160 billion, well above what the Trump administration requested in its budget proposal. The agreement demonstrates that the Democrats, no less than the Republicans, support preparations for new and more bloody wars, including with major nuclear-armed powers such as Russia and China.

The deal comes within the context of the recently released National Defense Strategy and Nuclear Posture Review, which declare that the new axis of American military strategy is preparation for “great-power competition,” i.e., world war. The documents single out Iran, North Korea, China and Russia—three of which are nuclear-armed—and outline a plan for the development of so-called “low-yield” nuclear weapons to be used in battle.

The budget deal also includes some \$120 billion in additional domestic spending, of which \$20 billion is earmarked for infrastructure and \$6 billion for the opioid crisis. Bloomberg News reports, “The deal would be at least partly paid for by cuts to mandatory spending programs elsewhere in the budget, according to the Republican summary.”

The agreement does not provide protection for some 1.8 million young undocumented immigrants who are enrolled in or eligible for the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program. This program is slated to end March 5 due to President Donald Trump’s rescinding of it last fall. The 800,000 DACA enrollees, having given the government their names and addresses and admitted that they are undocumented, are threatened with being deported en masse starting in less than a month.

The budget plan, agreed to by Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell and Minority Leader Charles Schumer, demonstrates that both big business parties agree on military escalation and further attacks on immigrant rights. From start to finish, the budget negotiations have been a cynical charade in which two right-wing parties determine how best to fund US imperialism, deport immigrant workers and attack vital social services.

The right-wing character of the Senate deal is underscored by the fact that Defense Secretary and retired General James Mattis is a major supporter. Mattis appeared before the House Armed Services Committee on Tuesday, where he warned against passing repeated continuing resolutions instead of a full budget. He spoke not as a supplicant, but rather as a commander addressing his subordinates, issuing Congress its marching orders to end the uncertainty and get on with the business of approving a huge increase in the Pentagon budget.

Mattis told the committee: “Should you stumble into a year-long continuing resolution, your military will not be able to provide pay for our troops by the end of the fiscal year, not recruit the 15,000 Army soldiers and 4,000 Air Force airmen required to fill critical manning shortfalls ... and delay contracts for vital acquisition programs necessary to modernize the force.”

After Senate leaders announced the agreement, Mattis praised it at a news conference in the White House briefing room, where he repeated almost verbatim his warning to the House Armed Services Committee. He also reiterated that he was providing the White House with options for a military attack on North Korea.

The \$80 billion in additional military spending per year surpasses Trump’s budget request for the fiscal year, which asked for an added \$54 billion, itself a 10 percent increase. The legislation provides \$700 billion for defense programs in 2018 and \$716 billion in 2019.

It also includes some \$80 billion for disaster relief from the hurricanes and wildfires that have devastated Puerto Rico, Texas, Florida and California, months after the disasters occurred. This entirely inadequate amount will do next to nothing to aid the hundreds of thousands of people who lost their homes and possessions or build the infrastructure needed to minimize the impact of future natural disasters. Some 40 percent of Puerto Ricans are still without power, suffering for months in the longest and biggest blackout in US history.

The Senate deal also extends the deadline for lifting the

nation's debt ceiling from next month to March 2019.

It is well understood by both parties that the increase in the budget deficit resulting from the new spending, most of which is for the military, will be used as a pretext to cut major domestic programs and entitlements such as Medicare, Medicaid and Social Security.

The deal comes less than two days before the deadline to pass a continuing budget resolution. If neither a full budget nor a stopgap measure is passed by 12:01 a.m. Friday, the government will shut down, during which "non-essential" services will be suspended and hundreds of thousands of federal workers will be furloughed.

The Senate is expected to pass the budget today, after which the House must pass it before it can go to Trump for his signature. Although the Republicans have a majority in both houses of Congress, a group of ultra-right budget-hawk Republicans organized in the Freedom Caucus is expected to vote against the deal, necessitating Democratic support.

House of Representatives Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi announced that she and many other Democrats would not support the Senate budget deal unless House Speaker Paul Ryan pledged to allow a discussion on a bipartisan immigration deal including protection for DACA recipients following any extension of spending to keep the federal government open.

Pelosi took to the House floor in a political stunt, speaking for eight hours on her demand that Ryan agree to discuss immigration reform. Ryan has said that he will debate immigration legislation only if it is supported by Trump, who has proposed a draconian 12-year-long citizenship process for DACA-eligible youth, coupled with his border wall and other measures to militarize the US-Mexico border, along with drastic cuts to legal immigration.

The Democrats broadly support this agenda, as indicated by immigration bills introduced in both houses of Congress and co-sponsored by Democrats and Republicans.

Pelosi's speech and declared opposition to the Senate deal plumb new depths of cynicism, even for the Democratic Party. Pelosi worked with Schumer on the spending bill for weeks, according to CNN.

Last month, the Democrats forced a partial government shutdown, supposedly to demand that any budget resolution include protection for DACA youth faced with deportation in a matter of weeks. In less than three days, the Democrats agreed to reopen the government and decouple immigration from the budget on the basis of McConnell's promise to discuss immigration reform. Now, Pelosi is demanding in the House what Schumer settled for in January in the Senate—a worthless promise, this time from Ryan.

Any immigration bill eventually passed by both houses and signed by Trump will provide for a buildup of

Immigration and Customs Enforcement agents and Border Patrol police; an expansion of immigration courts and jails; further curtailment of due process rights for immigrants; an end to the diversity lottery system, which permits entry by a small number of immigrants from African countries and other underrepresented regions; and abolition of the right of legal immigrants to petition to bring their parents and other family members to the US. It will effectively sanction Trump's policy of terrorizing undocumented immigrants and deporting them en masse.

Pelosi's stunt is an effort to provide political cover for the Democrats' support for this right-wing immigration policy and promote the illusion that Democratic Party defends the Dreamers.

For his part, Trump, emboldened by the Democrats' capitulation, said on Tuesday that he would favor a shutdown if it could result in his xenophobic immigration policies being implemented. "I'd love to see a shutdown if we don't get this stuff taken care of," Trump said at a White House roundtable.

The Democrats' agreement on a right-wing budget plan is part of their broader collaboration in implementing Trump's social and economic agenda, including his tax cut for the rich. The contrast between this and their escalating conflict with the White House over the investigation by Special Counsel Robert Mueller into fabricated charges of Russian meddling in the 2016 election campaign and continuing subversion, and collusion by Trump officials and the president himself, underscores the entirely right-wing basis of their opposition to the administration.

Aligned with the dominant sections of the intelligence/military complex, the Democrats' opposition is focused on differences over US imperialist foreign policy. In the political warfare between equally right-wing factions within the ruling class and the state, they speak for the camp that demands there be no retreat from the belligerent anti-Russia policy of the Obama administration.



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