

Partial federal shutdown ends with passage of budget deal between Trump and Democrats

Patrick Martin
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The second partial shutdown of the federal government in the space of a month ended in the early hours of Friday morning, after right-wing opponents sought to block a bipartisan budget deal to raise military spending by more than \$300 billion over the next two years.

The Trump White House instructed federal agencies to begin preparations for a midnight shutdown, in the expectation that there would be at least a temporary closure of some agencies. There was not be the slightest disruption in the operation of the vast military-intelligence apparatus, however, which will continue bombing, shooting and spying on much of the population of the world.

Senate action on the budget deal was delayed until after 1 a.m. Friday by the opposition of right-wing Republican Rand Paul of Kentucky, who refused to agree to the unanimous consent required to bring the agreement to a vote. In effect, Paul forced a brief shutdown for the few hours it took for the Senate to approve the measure, send it to the House of Representatives for approval, and then to the White House for Trump's signature.

There was also the possibility that the House itself might defeat the bill, with the so-called Freedom Caucus of ultra-right Republicans voting near-unanimously to oppose it. With 40 or more Republicans defecting, House Speaker Paul Ryan needed significant Democratic support to obtain a majority. In the end, while 67 Republicans opposed the deal in the House, 73 Democrats voted for it, supplying the margin of victory.

The Democratic support was spurred on by Thursday's 1,000-point crash in the Dow Jones Industrial Average. Completely subservient to Wall Street, the Democrats feared that any prolonged disruption of federal government operations could worsen the market rout.

House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi carried out a publicity stunt Wednesday, invoking an obscure House rule that allowed her to take the floor indefinitely. She

spoke for eight hours straight in support of a demand that Ryan agree to an up-or-down vote on legislation to grant legal status to 700,000 young immigrants protected from deportation under the DACA executive order, which expires March 5.

Pelosi's performance was a piece of cynical theater. She participated in the closed-door talks between Senate and House leaders: herself, Ryan, Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell and Senate Minority Leader Charles Schumer. She signed off on the agreement. She then proceeded to conduct a mini-filibuster against the agreement—which she had just approved—demanding that it should include a pledge by Ryan to take up an immigration bill.

Top House Republicans went along with the charade, allowing Pelosi to hold the floor for most of Wednesday without any attempt to end her speech. At the same time, Ryan reiterated his position that no immigration bill would be brought up for debate and vote in the House unless it was backed by Trump—who has insisted on massive funding of “border security” measures, including his wall on the US-Mexico border, as well as drastic cuts in legal immigration, as the price for legalization of DACA recipients.

There was mounting concern, as the evening wore on, that the tensions within both big business parties, between them, and between the two houses of Congress and the White House, could produce a legislative debacle that would compound the financial debacle taking place on Wall Street.

McConnell pleaded with Rand Paul, his fellow Kentuckian, to drop his one-man disruption of the planned Senate vote. “The president of the United States supports the bill and is waiting to sign it into law. I understand my friend and colleague from Kentucky does not join the president in supporting the bill,” McConnell said. “It’s his right, of course, to vote against the bill. But I would

argue that it's time to vote."

Trump tweeted his support for the bipartisan deal, highlighting the massive increase in military spending incorporated into it. The agreement includes an \$80 billion increase in military spending for the current fiscal year, which ends September 30, and an \$85 billion increase for fiscal year 2019. It also provides for \$140 billion in so-called overseas contingency spending, a special category that funds ongoing military operations in Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria and other countries targeted by US imperialism under the rubric of the "war on terror."

This \$305 billion in additional military funding dwarfs the \$222 billion in additional domestic spending, comprised of \$91 billion for disaster relief in Puerto Rico, Florida, Texas, California and the Virgin Islands, \$63 billion in other domestic spending for the current fiscal year, and \$68 billion in additional domestic spending in fiscal 2019.

The bulk of the additional domestic spending is for health care programs, including \$6 billion for the opioid crisis—a drop in the bucket—expansion of programs for veterans, a boost in spending for the National Institutes of Health, and a new authorization for Community Health Centers.

While the opposition by Rand Paul and the House Freedom Caucus was likely to be overridden, if not Thursday night then in ensuing days, their complaints have underscored the complete hypocrisy of Republican Party professions to be "fiscal conservatives." These claims of concern over the federal budget deficit, voiced by Ryan and others, were merely a screen of opposition to spending on Medicare, Medicaid, Social Security and other federal domestic programs that benefit sections of the working class.

There is no such opposition to massive spending and deficits when the lion's share of the money goes to the Pentagon, CIA and State Department, to operate the worldwide murder machine of American imperialism.

Liberals like Bernie Sanders and Elizabeth Warren voted against the bill, but they made no serious effort to oppose bloated Pentagon spending once the Democratic leadership reached agreement to combine a massive increase for the military with increases for domestic programs that do not come close to offsetting the cuts carried out over the past 17 years under the Bush, Obama and Trump administrations.

Similarly, the Senate liberals have abandoned the young immigrants covered by DACA, allowing them to become the prey of the Border Patrol and Immigration and

Customs Enforcement in less than a month.

The bipartisan deal sparked some media criticism over its breaching of the spending restraints established by the Budget Control Act of 2011, a previous bipartisan agreement between Democratic President Obama, a Senate controlled by the Democrats and a Republican-controlled House. That law established the so-called sequester, which beginning in 2013 imposed limits on domestic social spending and some military spending.

The *Washington Post* denounced what it called "a budget deal that denies reality," because the spending increases followed the \$1.5 trillion tax cut for corporations and the wealthy, leading to the prospect of trillion-dollar annual budget deficits for the foreseeable future, beginning with the current fiscal year. It chided Congress for not "reforming big entitlement programs," i.e., slashing Medicare, Medicaid and Social Security.

A former top economic adviser to Obama, Jason Furman, now a professor at Harvard University's Kennedy School, told the *Post* that the combination of tax cuts and spending increases was highly dangerous. "As a macroeconomic matter," he said, "I'm not aware of another example of this—of a country that's basically at full employment embarking on massive fiscal stimulus."

The suggestion that the United States is "basically at full employment" only underscores the social chasm between the Democratic Party, one of the twin parties of big business, and the real-life experience of tens of millions of working people, facing long-term unemployment, forcible part-time employment, and low-wage, low-benefit jobs if they are fortunate enough to find work.



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