

Trump demands five percent budget cut from each Cabinet department

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President Donald Trump announced at a Cabinet meeting Wednesday that he would be requesting a five percent cut in the budget of each department for the 2020 budget, which is due to be submitted to Congress early next year.

Speaking to Cabinet secretaries at a meeting in the White House, he stated, “There are some people here at the table, I’m not going to point you out, but there are some people that can do substantially more than that. Because now that we have our military taken care of, we have our law enforcement taken care of, we can do things that we really weren’t in a position to do when I first came.”

Translated from Trump’s bluster into plain English, the president is declaring that now that Congress—Democrats as well as Republicans—has approved a record military budget, as well as tax cuts for the rich, it’s time to cut spending for everything else.

Trump’s proposal comes amid the most rapid growth of the federal deficit since 2012. In fiscal year 2018, the deficit rose to \$779 billion—an increase of 17 percent over the previous year—according to figures released by the Treasury Department on Monday. The last time the deficit was this high was in the aftermath of the Great Recession, when the federal government was busily funneling money to the banks.

In 2018 too, handouts to the wealthy are responsible for the soaring deficit, in this case the \$1.5 trillion tax cut for corporations and the wealthy enacted last December.

The White House has defended the proposal for across-the-board cuts, even though budget analysts have said that the cuts would not make much of a dent in the deficit, while devastating many federal agencies and programs. From Trump’s standpoint, the deficit is

a positive political factor because it can be used to generate a crisis atmosphere to justify cuts to social programs.

The budget Trump submitted to Congress last year proposed the dismantling of 62 different federal agencies. Congress refused to adopt the plan, instead sending a \$1.3 trillion budget, which he grudgingly approved. He stated, after signing the budget, that he would “never sign another bill like this again.”

On Wednesday, Trump reiterated his support for increasing military spending at the expense of domestic programs, claiming that before he took office, “The military was falling apart, it was depleted, it was in very bad shape.”

Most of the federal government, about three-quarters, has funding secured until the end of September 2019. The departments of Agriculture, Justice, Transportation, and Homeland Security are among the agencies whose funding will run out on December 7. Congress is currently discussing budgets for those agencies in an attempt to stave off a partial government shutdown.

The House of Representatives approved \$71.8 billion and the Senate approved \$71.4 billion for the Departments of Transportation and Housing and Urban Development. This would amount to more than \$1 billion above current spending for each department; it amounts to more than \$23 billion over the Trump administration’s proposals.

The Department of Veteran Affairs has a budget of about \$200 billion for fiscal year 2019. Included in that budget is a paltry \$200 million for suicide prevention programs, \$400 million to address the growing scourge of opioid addiction, and \$8 billion for mental health care services. The cuts proposed by Trump will cut deeply into these programs, leaving the human costs of

permanent war largely unaddressed by the government that has caused those wars.

Trump's professed concern about the federal deficit is laughable given the massive tax breaks he pushed through on behalf of corporations and the wealthy. The Congressional Budget Office attributes most of the growth in the deficit to these cuts. While most analysts agree that the proposal is "aspirational" and will be rejected by Congress, it is yet another signal that, in the face of continued attacks upon working-class living standards, military funding will continue to increase while social programs will remain under attack.

Military spending for 2019 is projected to be nearly \$900 billion, counting both the regular Pentagon budget, the Overseas Contingency Operations slush fund that pays for wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, and the "war on terror," and the nuclear weapons programs of the Department of Energy. Last year, \$700 billion was budgeted for the Pentagon alone.

Democrats have used the growing deficit to attack Trump, but Obama himself approved higher military budgets, and military spending has increased steadily year after year. Republicans have, in turn, blamed Democrats for using military spending as leverage to maintain social spending, but again, Obama oversaw and approved cuts to programs such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, once known as food stamps) during his two terms. Funding for SNAP sits at \$84 billion for fiscal year 2019, a fraction of military spending.

Trump's demands may not be fully met, but they set down a marker for the next Congress, pushing the official budget debate even further to the right, setting the stage for even greater attacks on the social programs on which workers and these families depend.

The deficit is predicted to reach \$1 trillion by this time next year. Neither Democrats nor Republicans have acknowledged the main drivers of the deficit—ceaseless warfare coupled with bailouts for Wall Street. Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, in a statement October 16, called the deficit "very disturbing" but suggested that spending on entitlement programs like Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid was to blame.

He added that these programs could only be cut with the cooperation of the congressional Democrats, which might even be facilitated by the Democrats winning

control of the House of Representatives. "I think it's pretty safe to say that entitlement changes, which is the real driver of the debt by any objective standard, may well be difficult if not impossible to achieve when you have unified government," he told Bloomberg News.



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