

Following Democrats' capitulation on border wall

Trump pushes for more anti-immigrant concessions from the Democrats

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13 February 2019

On Tuesday, President Trump said he was “extremely unhappy” with the bipartisan government funding agreement announced late Monday by congressional negotiators seeking to avert another partial government shutdown. The shutdown is set to begin at 12:01 am Saturday when stop-gap funding runs out.

Speaking to reporters during a White House cabinet meeting, Trump said of the deal, “It’s not doing the trick.” He stopped short, however, of saying he would refuse to sign legislation based on the agreement if it were passed by Congress prior to the budget deadline.

Instead, he said that he was “adding things” to the deal, and went on to reiterate his insistence that the full 200 miles of wall would be built, with or without the consent of Congress. “We’re supplementing things and moving things around,” he said. “Taking from far less important areas ... using methods other than this.”

He said he did not believe there would be another shutdown, suggesting that he would approve funding to keep the government running but allocate more money to build the wall by means of unilateral executive action. Asked if he was considering going through with his threat to declare a national emergency and order the military to build the wall—an openly dictatorial act in violation of the US Constitution’s separation of powers doctrine—Trump said: “I’m considering everything. It’s all going to happen. We’re building a wall.”

The agreement, which is supported by both the Republican and Democratic congressional leadership, represents a capitulation by the Democratic Party to Trump’s demand for a border wall between the United States and Mexico and his program of mass arrests and detentions of undocumented immigrants both at the border and in the interior of the country.

It explicitly allocates \$1.375 billion this year for new border barrier construction, specifying the use of steel slat fencing to build an additional 55 miles of wall in Texas’s Rio Grande Valley. It also increases by 5,000 over last year, from 40,000 to 45,000, the number of detention beds for immigrants seized by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), while including a funding formula that would allow ICE’s parent department, Homeland Security, to move funds around so as to increase the detention level to 58,500.

In practice, the deal gives Trump a blank check to expand the network of immigrant prisons and detention camps. A summary of its provisions drafted by Republican staffers on the Senate Appropriations Committee that was obtained by the *New York Times* states: “In short, there is more than enough flexibility for ICE to respond to any forthcoming surges in illegal immigrations and apprehensions.”

The agreement includes an additional \$1.7 billion in increased spending for the Department of Homeland Security, which oversees ICE and the Border Patrol. Part of that increase is earmarked for more sophisticated sensors at border checkpoints and more Customs officers.

One example of what these measures mean for the lives of immigrant workers, and the democratic rights of the working class as a whole, was provided by the Border Patrol’s El Paso sector, which announced Monday that its agents had taken 330 migrants into custody only hours before Trump went to the border town of El Paso, Texas Monday night to deliver another tirade against “criminal” immigrants and socialism.

The migrants were seized at the Antelope Wells entry

point in southern New Mexico, which is part of the Border Patrol's El Paso sector. US Customs and Border Protection said in a statement that the detainees consisted mainly of "Central American families and unaccompanied juveniles." It boasted that this was the 28th group of 100 or more migrants apprehended in the El Paso sector since the beginning of October.

While the border funding deal includes new money for the wall, the amount allocated falls short of the \$5.7 billion Trump has demanded. This has evoked a chorus of opposition to the deal from far-right figures who have been part of Trump's fascistic base. Fox News' Sean Hannity called it a "garbage compromise," talk show host Laura Ingraham called it a "charade," Ann Coulter denounced it as Trump's "Yellow New Deal," and Representative Mark Meadows, the head of the far-right House Freedom Caucus, rejected it and said Trump should "take executive action."

Trump's response to the agreement reflects his attempt to balance between his critics on the far right and congressional Republicans who fear the consequences of another government shutdown, while putting pressure on the Democrats to make even further concessions.

At the same time, the administration and both parties are concerned about the potential implications of a new shutdown, just three weeks after the record 35-day partial closure of government services in which 800,000 federal workers were either furloughed or forced to work without pay, generating explosive anger among families forced to make do while missing two weeks' pay.

At the end of January, the administration and Congress rushed to bring the shutdown to an end with a three-week stop-gap funding bill when sickouts by airport baggage screeners and air traffic controllers forced the temporary cancellation of flights at New York's LaGuardia Airport and slowdowns at other major hubs, threatening a total meltdown of the nation's air traffic system.

The still potent anger of workers and potentially explosive implications of another shutdown were reflected in the announcement Monday by the Association of Flight Attendants that it would hold protests at airports around the country on Saturday if the government shut down again at midnight Friday. In making the announcement, the union was seeking to

preempt and contain possible spontaneous actions by federal workers.

The union bureaucracy as well as the ruling class is also well aware of the widening strike action by Mexican maquiladora workers along the US border, who are rebelling against their unions and appealing for support from American workers.

The leaders of the Democratic side in the 17-member bipartisan House-Senate conference committee that negotiated the deal, House Appropriations Committee Chairman Nita Lowey of New York and the ranking Democrat on the Senate Appropriations Committee, Patrick Leahy of Vermont, had already capitulated on allocating money for new wall construction by the end of last week. However, they sought to give themselves a measure of political cover over the weekend by demanding a lower cap on total immigrant detention beds and on the number of detainees held away from the border, in the interior of the country. They called for a limit of 16,500 in the latter category, mainly people picked up in ICE raids, down from the present 20,000.

The Republicans called their bluff and threatened to scuttle the talks, prompting the Democrats to abandon any reduction in the level of immigrant detentions.

Nita Lowey said on Tuesday: "We came to a good compromise that would secure our border because that's the goal." Democratic Representative Lucille Roybal-Allard, a member of the conference committee whose Los Angeles district is 85 percent Hispanic, complained pathetically, "We started at zero on the wall, and we compromised a lot after that, and we are now asking them to change, too."

Mary Small, policy director at Detention Watch Network, denounced the agreement's "morally wrong and deeply harmful concessions." "In particular," she said, "this deal actually increases funding available for immigration detention by about 5,000 people per day, helping to grow the machinery of deportation and further heighten the risk faced by immigrant communities across the country."



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