

Uncertainty hangs over US border deal as shutdown deadline nears

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US House and Senate leaders continued work on the exact legislative language to implement the “in principle” deal reached Monday on funding more than a quarter of the federal government, two days before the 12:01 a.m. Saturday deadline for another federal shutdown.

President Trump has refused to make any final commitment to sign the funding bills into law, claiming he was waiting for the final language so the White House could determine if there were any “land mines” in the deal made by congressional Democrats to give him \$1.375 billion in funding for 55 miles of new border barriers, variously described as a “wall” and “fencing.”

Congressional Democratic leaders have sought to present their capitulation to Trump on the wall as a victory, pointing out that the amount is less than the \$1.6 billion Trump rejected in December, forcing a 35-day shutdown of the federal government. But given the passage of time since then, the \$1.375 billion actually allows a more aggressive daily spending rate on “border security” for the rest of the current fiscal year, which ends September 30: \$6 million a day compared to \$5.6 million in the legislation passed by the Senate two months ago.

More importantly, the Democratic leadership has effectively signaled that the Trump administration will be free to shift money around within the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) budget, and perhaps even from other departments, to fund the wall. In addition, they abandoned efforts to set a limit on the number of immigrants who can be detained at any one time, giving Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) a free hand to carry out mass round-ups and expand its detention of immigrants and asylum seekers, including tens of thousands of children.

White House officials, including acting budget director Mick Mulvaney, have crowed about the possibilities opened up by the legislation, claiming they will be able to come up with all the funds required for wall-building efforts over the seven months remaining in the 2019 fiscal year.

The legislative package actually consists of seven spending bills, providing a total of \$320 billion in appropriations. Only one of the bills, providing \$49.4 billion for the DHS, directly involves funds for arresting and jailing immigrants and building the wall. Workers at eight other federal departments, including Agriculture, Commerce, Housing, Interior, Justice, State, Transportation and Treasury, and numerous independent agencies, were held hostage by the Trump White House in order to force through approval of the wall on the US-Mexico border.

One part of the legislative package is a 1.9 percent across-the-board pay increase for all federal civilian workers, overriding the wage freeze announced by President Trump at the end of 2018, but still well below the inflation rate and thus amounting to an effective pay cut. Military personnel received a 2.6 percent pay rate increase for the current fiscal year in legislation that was enacted last fall.

In statements Wednesday, House Democratic leaders predicted passage of all seven bills through the House on Thursday, to be followed by votes in the Senate, presumably on Friday, in an effort to beat the midnight deadline.

House Democratic Caucus Chairman Hakeem Jeffries explicitly defended the concessions to Trump on the wall. He told reporters, “It is reasonable to support 55 miles of additional barrier in a manner that is consistent with our evidence-based approach to find common ground and improve security along our border.”

A leading Democrat on the conference committee that crafted the deal, Representative David Price of North Carolina, said, “I think it is the best possible deal we could get under the circumstances, and it’s a considerable achievement, and so I’m confidently advocating a ‘yes’ vote.”

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi emphasized that an overwhelming majority of Democrats in the House would back the deal. “We have to,” she said. “We have to. I think we’re in a pretty good place.”

Representative Tony Cardenas of California, a leader of the Congressional Hispanic Caucus, said of the deal with Trump, “It’s not where we want to be long-term, but I think it’s progress... We feel good. I feel good about it.”

Immigrants’ rights advocates were not “feeling good” about the agreement, which pours \$49 billion more into the repressive apparatus of the Department of Homeland Security.

Alex Sanchez, a leader of Homies Unidos, which advocates on behalf of Central American youth, both immigrants and deportees, told the *World Socialist Web Site*, “Immigrants have got nothing in this deal. If anything, we were sacrificed in all of this. The government shutdown put a toll on a lot of people. The Democratic compromise shows that they didn’t put the interests of immigrants at the forefront, but they have played this card for a long time.”

Sanchez pointed out that the wave of mass deportations actually began under the Democrats, with the passage of a law known as IIRAIRA in 1996 during the Clinton administration. He added, “The wall is just a barrier not to deal with the root causes of mass migration. The question no one is asking is, ‘Why are we having people flee all of these countries?’”

“The intention of building walls that extend into the harsh terrain is to cause people to die,” he continued. “This is intentional. The fact that Border Patrol and Minutemen groups are desecrating water reserves gives a clear view that this government wants us dead. It’s a way of killing us indirectly.”

In response to the effort by the Democrats to save face over their cave-in on the wall by waging a phony fight to limit the quota of beds for detained immigrants in the interior of the US to 16,000 rather than 20,000, Sanchez said, “I would like to tell the Democrats to go speak to each of the 16,000 family members. They are

using our lives to compromise and this can only be described as torture: torture to the individuals who are detained and to our families.”



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