

One day after impeachment: Democrats back Trump trade, budget bills

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One day after the US House of Representatives adopted two articles of impeachment against President Trump, the House passed Trump's top policy priority for 2019, the US-Mexico-Canada trade agreement, by a massive bipartisan margin.

The vote was 385-41, with 193 Democrats and 192 Republicans supporting it. The USMCA, assuming it passes the Senate next year, would replace the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), which took effect under the administration of Democrat Bill Clinton 25 years ago.

The purpose of the measure is to tighten the coordination of economic and trade policy between the United States and its northern and southern neighbors, so as to constitute a stronger trade bloc directed against China in particular, as well as other capitalist rivals like Japan and the European Union.

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi announced an agreement on the USMCA last week after months of talks with US Trade Representative Robert Lighthizer, in which the Democrats pushed to make the bill more protectionist and more directed against China.

In a further display of the collaboration of the Democrats with the Trump administration, the Senate took up and passed, by wide bipartisan margins, the two budget bills approved by the House on Tuesday. The vote on the first bill, appropriating \$632 billion in domestic social spending, was 71-23. The vote on the second bill, appropriating \$738 billion in military and national-security spending, was 81-11.

The military spending bill was opposed by a handful of liberal Democrats, adopting an antiwar posture that is thoroughly insincere, since there was no chance the bill would be defeated. The domestic spending bill was opposed mainly by Republicans opposed to maintaining even the abysmal current levels of support

for healthcare, education, housing and other social programs. Four senators who are campaigning for the Democratic presidential nomination, Bernie Sanders, Elizabeth Warren, Amy Klobuchar and Cory Booker, did not attend the session and did not vote.

The passage of the trade and budget bills, by huge bipartisan majorities, confirms that on issues related to the basic class interests of the US financial aristocracy there is no difference between the two parties. Wall Street demanded passage of a full-year budget, rather than a series of continuing resolutions or a recurrence of last year's partial federal shutdown, to avoid any shock to financial markets from the federal government failing to make debt payments on time.

The trade bill also has the near-unanimous backing of the Chamber of Commerce, the big banks, and the main transnational corporations, all of whom want a stable framework for conducting production operations that are integrated throughout North America, as well as support against their corporate rivals in China and Europe.

Neil Bradley, executive vice president and chief policy officer at the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, told CBS News that USMCA is "going to provide certainty for this trading relationship," adding, "Canada and Mexico are our two largest trading partners."

The overwhelming bipartisan passage of USMCA is in sharp contrast to the narrow vote to approve NAFTA 26 years ago, when the House passed the agreement by 234-200. This reflects the growing consensus within the US ruling elite on pulling out all the stops to form an anti-China trade bloc in the western hemisphere.

In pursuit of that goal, some sectional interests were sacrificed. The pharmaceutical industry, for example, lost a 10-year protection period for a class of drugs called "biologics." As a result, the drug companies

switched their position and lobbied for the defeat of the bill, to no avail. The auto industry also balked, leading the United Auto Workers union to oppose the bill, even though the AFL-CIO, Teamsters and Steelworkers supported it.

As for the gargantuan military budget, the Senate passed the National Defense Authorization Act on Tuesday, while the House appropriated the funds the same day. Then the Senate rubber-stamped the appropriations bill Thursday with only token opposition. Both parties support the use of military force all over the world to defend the global interests of American imperialism.

The military appropriations bill, like the NDAA, allows \$1.375 billion in spending on Trump's border wall and removes any restriction on Trump's illegal and unconstitutional shifting of Pentagon funds to border wall construction.

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The differences that have led to impeachment revolve around one key area of foreign policy—confronting Russia in the Middle East, Ukraine and eastern Europe—where the military-intelligence apparatus, working through its front men (and women) in the Democratic Party, is opposing any shift from the hardline anti-Russia policy adopted during the second term of Barack Obama.

After the passage of the trade bill, Majority Leader Steny Hoyer announced that there would be no more votes in the House until January 7, 2020. In effect, the Democratic leadership has postponed submission of the articles of impeachment to the Senate, and thus the Senate trial, for three weeks.

Under the Senate rules, impeachment must be taken up by the Senate within 24 hours after the articles of impeachment are submitted, and the Senate must conduct the trial six days a week until its conclusion.

By delaying the submission, Pelosi was allowing time for the Senate to take up and pass the USMCA, although it was not clear whether Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell would do so. There is significant opposition to the USMCA among Senate Republicans who claim Trump's chief trade negotiators, Lighthizer and Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin, made too many concessions to win the support of the Democrats and the AFL-CIO union

federation.

The delay in submitting articles of impeachment is also an effort to put pressure on McConnell in the negotiations with Senate Democrats over the rules that will govern the trial of President Trump when it begins in January. Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer has demanded four top administration officials give testimony, including acting White House Chief of Staff Mick Mulvaney and Secretary of State Mike Pompeo. Trump has countered with demands for testimony from former vice president Joe Biden, his son Hunter Biden, and the CIA “whistleblower” whose internal complaint set the impeachment process in motion.

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