

Biden sets aside COVID-19 funding to secure tens of billions to escalate war against Russia

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President Joe Biden on Monday called on Congress to split off additional funding for COVID-19 vaccines, tests and therapeutic drugs from a bill to authorize tens of billions more in military aid to Ukraine in the US-NATO war against Russia.

Originally, he and Democratic lawmakers had urged that Congress attach some \$10 billion in US COVID-19 funding to a \$33 billion package of military and economic aid to the Ukrainian regime, including a massive increase in large-scale weaponry and ammunition totaling \$20 billion.

But when Republicans, led by Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell, said they would not pass the package to escalate the conflict with Russia if it was linked to money, however inadequate, to deal with a new surge in COVID-19 infections and deaths, Biden made clear the priorities of the Democratic Party and the capitalist ruling class.

Washington's proxy war against Russia—an imperialist war for regime change and the dismemberment of Russia, in preparation for military conflict with China—takes precedence over and is to be paid for by the deaths of hundreds of thousands more workers in the US from the increasingly virulent and infectious virus.

The utter indifference of both capitalist parties to mass death and debilitating illness within the borders of the US exposes the fraudulent claims of a war for "democracy" and "human rights" in Ukraine. The nationalist, capitalist regime of Putin, the authoritarian product of the Stalinist dissolution of the Soviet Union, was goaded into its reactionary and ill-fated invasion of Ukraine by the United States, which had spearheaded the eastward expansion of NATO and armed its puppet government in Kiev to the teeth in preparation for the current war.

In his White House statement, Biden noted the broad bipartisan support for his plan to massively expand US arms to Ukraine and urged Congress to pass it quickly.

"Previously, I had recommended that Congress take overdue action on much needed funding for COVID treatments, vaccines and tests, as part of the Ukraine Supplemental bill," he said. "However, I have been

informed by congressional leaders in both parties that such an addition would slow down action on the urgently needed Ukrainian aid—a view expressed strongly by several congressional Republicans. We cannot afford delay in this vital war effort. Hence, I am prepared to accept that these two measures move separately, so that the Ukrainian aid bill can get to my desk right away."

In the next breath, he hypocritically called separate passage of pandemic funding "equally vital," stating that "Without timely COVID funding, more Americans will die needlessly."

Failure to pass additional COVID-19 funding, he added, would make it impossible to "order new COVID treatments and vaccines for the fall, including next-generation vaccines under development" and undermine "our supply of COVID tests."

In fact, the Biden administration told the press in a private background meeting last Friday that it anticipated 100 million new COVID-19 infections this fall and winter as a result of the spread of more infectious and virulent variants of Omicron, such as BA.2. Based on a death rate of 0.5 percent of infections, that translates to 500,000 more COVID-19 deaths in the coming months in the US, the vast majority of which would be entirely preventable.

This is under conditions where the administration and state and local leaders of both parties are ending all mitigation measures, such as mask mandates even as infections, hospitalizations and deaths are on the rise across the country. Moreover, the government is shutting down the collection of data on infections and reducing testing, so as to conceal the true scale of the pandemic.

The *Washington Post* reported on Monday that the Washington D.C. health department has not shared data with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) since April 27 on new coronavirus cases or deaths in the District. The Democratic-run District of Columbia stopped reporting daily case data on its own website two months ago. But it continued providing case counts to the CDC on a sporadic basis until the end of April. Local officials have refused to

answer questions from reporters about why.

Maryland and Virginia have recently reported rising cases, climbing 29 percent in Maryland and 49 percent in Virginia in the past week, with the highest rates in the D.C. suburbs.

Thus, the administration is prepared to jeopardize the health and lives of countless thousands of Americans—just as it guts their wages and living standards with record levels of inflation exacerbated by the war—in order to pursue the drive of US imperialism to plunder the resources of Russia and remove it as an obstacle to its violent pursuit of global hegemony. In the process, it is recklessly pushing humanity toward a nuclear World War III.

When it comes to militarism and war, there is overwhelming bipartisan agreement and legislative gridlock evaporates. Biden issued his statement on separating COVID-19 funding from military aid to Ukraine on the same day he signed the “Ukraine Democracy Defense Lend-Lease Act of 2022.” The law updates the 1941 law the US used to aid its allies in World War II. It enables the White House to move weapons and supplies more quickly into Ukraine.

Biden signed the bill at a bipartisan ceremony at the White House, which included Republican Rep. Victoria Spartz, the first Ukrainian-born member of Congress, Democratic Rep. Elissa Slotkin, a former CIA agent, and Democratic Senator Ben Cardin. The House passed the bill last month on a 417-10 vote, following an earlier unanimous vote in the Senate.

Biden and Democratic lawmakers are well aware that the prospects for getting a separate COVID-19 funding bill through the 50-50 Senate are highly questionable, given the 60-vote hurdle for overcoming a filibuster. Asked if moving the Ukraine aid on its own would hurt the chances of passing new funding to combat the coronavirus, Senator Dick Durbin, the number two Senate Democrat, said, “It doesn’t help.”

Moreover, the Republicans have demanded that any COVID-19 bill include an amendment blocking the Biden administration from lifting Title 42, a Trump era measure that mandates Border Patrol agents to summarily expel all refugees seeking asylum or unauthorized entry into the US across the border with Mexico. The order effectively abolishes the legally guaranteed right to asylum and denies migrants any shred of due process.

Biden continued the order, imposed on the pretext that it was a public health measure to combat COVID-19, even as he and the CDC openly adopted Trump’s “herd immunity” policy of ending all mitigation measures and encouraging mass infection.

However, the obvious hypocrisy of claiming the pandemic was “over” while continuing mass deportations at the border for supposed health reasons, plus the need to facilitate the

entry of Ukrainian refugees into the US, rendered Title 42 a political liability. On April 1, the CDC ordered the measure to be lifted by May 23, and Biden backed the order.

The Republicans have seized on the prospective lifting of Title 42 to ramp up their fascistic agitation against immigrants and accuse Biden of deliberately flooding the US with criminal gangs, drug pushers and carriers of disease. In response, a substantial section of Democratic lawmakers have joined with the Republicans in demanding a delay in the lifting of Title 42, and Biden himself has indicated he is inclined to comply.

Both Senator Dick Durbin and Senator Patty Murray, the third-ranking member of the Democratic caucus, said in recent interviews that they were prepared to comply with Republican demands for a vote to amend a COVID-19 funding bill to block the lifting of Title 42.

Democratic Senator Robert Menendez, who opposes allowing a vote on such an amendment, called it a “political trap” and predicted the Democrats would likely lose an immigration vote on the Senate floor.

Senator Jon Tester (Democrat, Montana), who has spoken out against the lifting of Title 42, said, “I think we should vote on the [Title] 42, and I think the White House thinks we should vote on 42.”

Virginia Democrat Tim Kaine, who was Hillary Clinton’s running mate in the 2016 presidential election, said, “Whether we should or not, I think we’re going to” cave in to the Republicans’ demand for a vote on keeping Title 42 in place.

When it comes to protecting the basic democratic rights of working people—from abortion rights, to voting rights, to the rights of refugees, to the very right to live—nothing can be done within the framework of capitalism and its political parties. It offers only war, poverty, inequality and mass death.

The fight against war must be merged with the fight against social inequality and the danger of dictatorship. The growing movement of the working class in the US and internationally must be consciously directed to the overthrow of capitalism and the establishment of socialism.



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