

Biden, Democrats approve spending bill with no funds for pandemic, \$12 billion for Ukraine war

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The Democratic-controlled Congress completed voting on a bill to authorize federal spending through December 16 and President Joe Biden signed it into law. The measure provides an additional \$12.3 billion for the war against Russia in Ukraine, but nothing for public health measures against an impending fall and winter surge of the coronavirus pandemic.

There was bipartisan support for the bill, which passed the Senate by 72–25, well over the 60-vote threshold to overcome a filibuster. However, it passed the House by a much narrower margin of 230–201, with only 10 Republicans joining all the Democrats in approving it.

Biden signed the bill into law late Friday night, just before the midnight deadline when federal government spending authority would have ended with the ending of the old fiscal year. Federal agencies had already begun activating plans for limited weekend shutdowns and then a full-scale shutdown on Monday, October 3, affecting all agencies except the vast military-intelligence apparatus.

The bill was the last piece of legislation required to pass Congress before the November 8 midterm elections, and both the House and Senate then adjourned for 38 days of uninterrupted campaigning. Some 435 House seats are at stake, as well as one-third of the Senate seats, some 34 in all. Both houses are now under narrow Democratic Party control, the House by only four seats, the Senate by the tie-breaking vote of Vice President Kamala Harris.

The bill was in the form of a “continuing resolution,” authorizing all federal agencies to continue spending at their current rate through December 16, when Congress will again have a deadline to approve 12 separate

appropriations bills—or, more likely, an “omnibus” package—or face a federal shutdown.

There were only a handful of significant additions to spending, mainly a further escalation of the US military intervention in the war against Russia in Ukraine. The resolution approves an additional \$12.3 billion in military and economic aid to Ukraine, as well as direct Pentagon outlays.

This adds to the \$54 billion already approved this year. As the *New York Times* reported, “Congress has now committed more military aid to Ukraine than it has to any country in a single year since the Vietnam War, reflecting a remarkable bipartisan consensus in favor of pouring huge amounts of American resources” into the war with Russia.

The latest \$12.3 billion includes \$5.2 billion for the Pentagon, of which \$1.5 billion is to replenish weapons supplies already shipped to Ukraine, and \$3.7 billion for future transfers of weapons and equipment. There is another \$3 billion to Ukraine to spend on military purchases, and \$4.5 billion “to maintain the operation of Ukraine’s national government,” according to a Biden administration fact sheet.

In effect, the Ukrainian regime exists as a wholly American-funded extension of the NATO imperialist military alliance. It is an independent government in name only.

To obtain enough Republican support to quash a filibuster and gain passage through the Senate, the Biden administration and congressional Democratic leaders agreed to drop their proposal for another \$22.4 billion in emergency spending on the coronavirus pandemic, expected to explode again in the colder weather of the fall and winter, as well as the spreading

monkeypox infection.

Republicans have demanded that any additional funding for COVID-19 vaccines and mitigation measures be clawed back from funds already sent to the various states for COVID-19 relief but not yet expended.

The proposal from the Biden White House was for \$22.4 billion for the COVID-19 pandemic, mainly for development of vaccines for future mutations of SARS-CoV-2, as well as \$4.5 billion for improved vaccines and treatment for monkeypox. But neither the administration nor congressional Democrats mounted any type of public campaign for the spending on the twin pandemics, in keeping with their electioneering posture that COVID-19 has become “endemic” and that the American people must learn to “live with the virus.”

Meanwhile, the daily death toll from COVID-19 remains well over 300, daily new infections are averaging over 50,000, and both figures are expected to skyrocket as colder weather drives people indoors into more confined and dangerous settings. According the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, more than 25,000 Americans have contracted monkeypox, a highly infectious and dangerous disease which can be life-threatening, especially for children, and with no known cure.

Congressional leaders of both parties praised the bipartisan consensus on more billions for the war against Russia in Ukraine. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi claimed, “This package comes at a critical moment,” citing Biden’s public promise to do whatever it takes to defeat Russia. “With this supplemental, we take another strong step toward honoring that pledge, our country’s pledge,” she said.

Senate Republican Leader Mitch McConnell said the aid to Ukraine was “literally an investment in our own national security.” He claimed that the aid would not only hinder Putin’s “capacity to threaten other targets throughout the free world... it will help deter other authoritarian regimes like China.”

Sen. John Thune of South Dakota, the Republican whip, praised the Ukrainian armed forces, saying, “if you look at what they’ve been able to accomplish, how they’ve degraded Russia’s conventional war-making capabilities, this is all in our, NATO’s and, I would argue, in the world’s best interest.”

As part of the agreement with the Republicans to pass the continuing resolution, Democratic Senator Joe Manchin of West Virginia agreed to drop his bid to include a measure to make it easier to obtain permits for energy infrastructure, as well as authorizing the construction of the Mountain Valley Pipeline to bring shale energy from his state through Virginia to the coast.

Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer agreed to the Manchin bill as part of a deal to get Manchin’s vote on the “Inflation Reduction Act” passed by Congress during the summer. Republicans wanted to punish Manchin for making that deal by blocking his reward, even though they generally support anything that favors fossil fuel energy development.

In a demonstration of the real priorities of both capitalist parties, the bill provides an insulting \$20 million in new funding for the water system in Jackson, Mississippi, which collapsed under the impact of a sudden storm deluge in August. It would also add \$1 billion to the LIHEAP program, which aids low-income households to pay their heating bills during the winter months. These bills will skyrocket under the impact of rising costs for heating oil, fueled by the war in Ukraine and more general inflationary pressures.

Only \$2 billion is added to federal programs to provide financial assistance to communities hit by natural disasters, including wildfires in the west and flooding that preceded September’s hurricane disasters in Puerto Rico and Florida.



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