

Amid Biden impeachment inquiry, Hunter Biden indictment, Trump indictments

US careens toward government shutdown

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The crisis of the political system in the US reached a new level of intensity over the past week, with Republican House Speaker Kevin McCarthy's announcement Tuesday of an impeachment inquiry against President Joe Biden, the announcement Thursday by a Justice Department special counsel of a criminal indictment against Biden's son, Hunter, and the growing prospect of a shutdown of the federal government when the current fiscal year ends on September 30.

This takes place in the run-up to the 2024 presidential election, in which the leading Republican candidate, Donald Trump, is under federal and state criminal indictment for his attempt to overturn the 2020 election. The presumptive Democratic candidate, Joe Biden, is unpopular, visibly fragile if not senile, and focused on escalating the war against Russia and preparing for military conflict with China, two nuclear powers. This is coupled with mobilizing the trade union apparatus to suppress a growing rebellion by the working class.

To pay for the current and looming wars and shore up the world position of the US dollar, the American ruling class must brutally increase its exploitation of the working class, destroy millions more jobs, and gut what remains of basic social programs on which hundreds of millions of workers and young people rely.

It is not accidental that the escalation of the US political crisis coincides with the United Auto Workers' calling of a mini-strike against the Detroit Three automakers. Working directly with the auto bosses and the Biden administration, UAW President Shawn Fain is desperately trying to block an all-out strike by 150,000 US autoworkers, who are furious over the deliberate undermining of a serious fight by the union bureaucracy.

On Tuesday, September 12, the day the House returned from its summer recess, McCarthy bowed to the demands of the fascist House Freedom Caucus and Trump, announcing the launching of an impeachment inquiry into alleged corrupt relations between President Biden and his son, Hunter. The latter's shady and lucrative business dealings in both Ukraine and China while Biden was vice president are well known, as is Biden's assistance in the efforts of Hunter to trade on his father's position to win clients and amass consulting fees. Still, despite months of investigations by House Republicans, no hard evidence has been put forward showing that the senior Biden personally profited from his son's operations or was directly involved. Just two weeks ago,

McCarthy, lacking sufficient support among House Republicans to obtain a vote for an impeachment inquiry, had said he would not announce one on his own. But that is precisely what he did last Tuesday.

Within minutes of McCarthy's announcement, Rep. Matt Gaetz of Florida, a leader of the Freedom Caucus, gave a speech from the House floor calling the impeachment inquiry a mere "baby step" and threatening to lodge a "motion to vacate," which would trigger a vote to remove McCarthy from the Speaker's chair. Gaetz reiterated his caucus's demands for trillions in cuts in social programs and a de facto ban on asylum seekers. He added demands for limits on Ukraine war funding, as well as non-compliance with the special counsel's prosecution of Trump for attempting to overthrow the 2020 election, which he called "election interference" by Biden's Justice Department. Unless McCarthy acceded to these demands, Gaetz said, his caucus would vote against a continuing resolution for short-term funding for the federal government and precipitate a shutdown on October 1.

In an interview Tuesday on MSNBC following his speech from the House floor, Gaetz echoed the concerns of Wall Street over the explosive growth of the US national debt and government deficits and channeled their demands for unprecedented cuts in social spending. He said:

We are about to hit the moment in time where we are going to run \$2 trillion annual deficits at a time when much of the world is de-dollarizing, from BRICS to the African Union to more energy being sold in the yuan due to the energy deal between Iran and Saudi Arabia. So as the world de-dollarizes, I think that it's really dangerous for us to be running up these deficits. If Speaker McCarthy brought us individual spending bills over the year, he would not be facing the challenge.

When the 118th Congress opened last January, Gaetz and company blocked McCarthy's election as House speaker until the 15th ballot. With the Republicans holding a mere five-vote majority in the House, the Freedom Caucus exerted and continues to exert leverage all out of proportion to its actual support in the

population.

The Freedom Caucus fascists extracted pledges from McCarthy in return for allowing his elevation to Speaker, including holding separate votes on all 12 individual appropriations bills for the federal government instead of an omnibus bill, a budget blueprint that would use fiscal 2022 as its starting point, a vote on term limits, plum committee assignments for Freedom Caucus members, further militarization of the US-Mexico border and a balanced budget vote. These demands add up to the evisceration of public health, education, nutrition, housing and anti-poverty programs, which have already been starved of funds under Democratic and Republican administrations alike.

On Thursday, David Weiss, the Trump-appointed US attorney for Delaware, who was elevated last month to special counsel by Biden's Attorney General Merrick Garland, announced the indictment of Hunter Biden on three felony charges related to his illegal purchase of a gun in 2018. The charges, which potentially carry substantial prison time, mean the president's son could be on trial in the midst of Joe Biden's reelection campaign. During the same period, Biden himself will likely face subpoenas and possible impeachment proceedings in the Republican-controlled House, and Trump could be on trial in either state or federal court.

The same day, at an internal meeting of House Republicans, McCarthy was blocked via a procedural vote led by Gaetz and his allies from moving to a floor vote on a Department of Defense annual defense spending bill. The \$846.45 billion bill includes a 5.4 percent pay raise for service members and a large boost to starting pay for new recruits. McCarthy, who, along with most Republican leaders, supports the war against Russia, sought to get the bill passed by the House and then proceed to a one-month continuing resolution to avoid a shutdown of the government. McCarthy's bill, in a concession to Gaetz and Trump, stripped out funding for the Ukraine war. By blocking a vote on the bill, at least for the present, the Freedom Caucus made a federal shutdown in two weeks more likely.

The Biden White House has sought "common ground" with the Republican demands for massive social cuts. The omnibus budget bill passed by Congress last December and signed into law by Biden ended an emergency increase in food stamps benefits enacted after the COVID-19 outbreak. The cut, which took effect March 1 of this year, sharply reduced benefits for 42 million Americans, all of them poor and many of them children. This was followed by the removal from Medicaid rolls of tens of millions of low income people, including millions of children, the termination of the expanded child tax credit and other stimulus programs enacted at the onset of COVID-19 and the resumption of payments on university student loans.

It is under these conditions that a far-right faction of the Republican Party, publicly supported by Trump, is seeking to engineer a partial shutdown of the government. This would not affect programs of vital concern to the ruling class, since military operations and those of repressive agencies like the FBI and CIA would not be affected nor would payments on the national debt. But all domestic social programs and regulatory agencies would be halted, although Social Security and similar benefit payments would still be made.

Whether or not a shutdown occurs or is averted by a compromise agreement that includes a short-term continuation of current funding levels, the outcome will shift the trajectory of official policy further to the right and ratchet up the attack on the social conditions and democratic rights of the working class.

The political responsibility for the outsized influence of the growing fascist wing of the Republican Party rests with Biden and the Democrats, who have systematically worked to cover up the complicity of the Republican Party, as well as sections of the military, police, FBI, financial elite, corporate media and US Supreme Court, in the attempted coup of January 6 and the ongoing conspiracy to establish a dictatorship.

Even now, with Trump and his allies in Congress seeking to shut down the government and create the maximum level of havoc in advance of the 2024 elections, the mantra of Biden and the Democrats continues to be an appeal for bipartisan unity and a "strong Republican Party" in order to conduct the war against Russia and suppress the working class at home.

The Sunday interview shows highlighted the conflicts within the Republican ranks between various right-wing factions and the desperate efforts of the Democrats to maintain an alliance with a section of the GOP so as to prosecute the war against Russia. NBC devoted the inaugural appearance of Kristen Welker as host of "Meet the Press" to an extensive interview with Trump. Asked if he backed the threat of the Freedom Caucus to shut down the government unless the FY 2024 budget includes far deeper social cuts, Trump endorsed a shutdown, saying, "I'd shut down the government if they don't get an appropriate deal."

McCarthy, interviewed on Fox News' "Sunday Morning Futures" program, moderated by the fascistic Maria Bartiromo, dared Gaetz and Co. to bring a motion to vacate, which he knows would likely fail. He said he would bring a continuing resolution agreement to the floor for a vote this coming week. Touting his record as a budget-cutter, he cited his deal with Biden at the end of May to raise the US debt ceiling, saying it included "the biggest cut in US history, nearly \$2 trillion."

Interviewed on ABC's "This Week" program, Democratic House Minority Leader Hakeem Jeffries of New York reiterated the Biden administration's appeals for bipartisan unity. Calling for an end to "partisan gamesmanship," he said, "We're going to continue to try and find common ground with the other side." Despite McCarthy's launching of an impeachment inquiry against Biden, Jeffries did not rule out supplying Democratic votes to keep McCarthy as House Speaker should Gaetz place a motion to vacate the position. Asked if he would back McCarthy, Jeffries said "no decision" had been made.



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