

Ukraine war funding emerges as central issue in US budget impasse

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On Thursday, House Speaker Kevin McCarthy failed to pass a procedural measure to allow debate on a bill to fund the Department of Defense for fiscal year 2024, which begins on October 1. It was the second time this week that McCarthy had come up short in attempting to pass in the Republican-led House a defense spending bill that had been drawn up by fellow House Republicans.

The motion was defeated by a vote of 212-216, with five hard-right Republicans joining all voting Democrats to block it. The Republicans have a narrow 221-to-212 majority in the House and can only afford to lose four Republicans in a party-line vote to get measures approved by the body.

The defeat of the measure increased the likelihood of a government shutdown on October 1. McCarthy had said he would keep the House in session over the weekend to seek passage of a stop-gap spending bill to avert a shutdown, but following the failure of his defense spending measure, he sent House members home for the weekend.

Far-right Trump acolyte Marjorie Taylor Greene of Georgia spoke for a broader group of GOP House members when she said she voted against the measure because the defense bill included additional military funding for Ukraine.

The Democrats opposed the measure because the spending bill includes provisions that would attack reproductive rights for members of the military and so-called “diversity” provisions promoted by the Democrats as part of their identity politics agenda.

McCarthy had hoped to obtain passage of the defense spending bill, normally approved with little debate and on a bipartisan basis, in order to gain leverage in overcoming the opposition of Trump and his closest allies in the fascistic House Freedom Caucus to a so-called “continuing resolution” (CR) that would temporarily avert a shutdown of the federal government when funding for the current budget expires a week from today (September 30).

McCarthy has put forward a CR that would fund the federal government at a sharply reduced rate through October to keep the government running while he works to hash out a budget deal with the Biden White House and the Democratic-controlled Senate. It does not include funding for the Ukraine war.

But former President Trump, under indictment for attempting to overthrow the 2020 presidential election but holding a massive lead in the contest for the 2024 Republican presidential nomination, has publicly urged House Republicans to oppose any CR regardless of its provisions. He has a group of far-right Republicans, led by Matt Gaetz of Florida, that is prepared to do just that.

Trump, along with Gaetz and the House Freedom Caucus, are demanding that McCarthy repudiate the deal he reached with Biden in May to suspend the debt ceiling and avert a default on the US national debt, now officially at \$33 trillion. That agreement included cuts in domestic non-military spending of \$1.5 trillion over the next decade, including \$180 billion in 2024. It marked a significant step in imposing the full cost of record spending for the military and the US-NATO war against Russia in Ukraine onto the working class, in the form of major cuts in social programs.

Trump, Gaetz and company are demanding that McCarthy insist on far deeper cuts in any negotiations with the White House and the Democrats. They are holding over the Speaker’s head the threat of a “motion to vacate,” which can be lodged by a single House member and force a vote to remove the Speaker from his position.

McCarthy has already given in to most of their demands, unilaterally launching an impeachment inquiry into President Biden’s role in the corrupt business dealings of his son, Hunter, and incorporating into a revised CR proposal a reduction in non-military domestic spending to the pre-pandemic level of \$1.47 trillion, far less than the \$1.59 trillion agreed to in the debt limit deal last spring. He has also adopted their demand to include Trump-era border restrictions and anti-immigrant measures.

Trump is also calling on Republicans to use a government shutdown to demand the dropping of all criminal charges against him and the hundreds of fascist followers who stormed the US Capitol on January 6, 2021.

Prior to the House vote that blocked the defense spending bill, Trump wrote on social media:

This is also the last chance to defund these political prosecutions against me and other Patriots. They failed

on the debt limit, but they must not fail now. Use the power of the purse to defend the Country!

Even were the Republicans to pass a CR along the lines of McCarthy's proposal, it would be a dead letter in the Democratic-led Senate and would not by itself avert a government shutdown. However, McCarthy and the bulk of House Republicans want to use a CR, along with a House defense spending bill, to increase pressure on the Democrats and the White House to agree to further cuts in social spending, along with a process for attacking basic entitlement programs, such as Medicare and Social Security. Hence the inclusion in the CR of a bipartisan committee on domestic spending and debt, which would serve as a mechanism to propose even more sweeping cuts after the 2024 elections.

As the generally Democratic Party-aligned *Washington Post* wrote in a September 18 editorial on the explosive growth of the national debt (projected to reach \$50 trillion by the end of the decade):

Tackling the nation's debt burden requires putting everything on the table: tax hikes, budget cuts and reforms to Social Security and Medicare. So far, House Republicans refuse to do that—or even launch a bipartisan commission to engage in big, meaningful discussions.

But as the budget impasse deepened and a federal shutdown loomed larger this week, the issue of Washington's increasingly open war against Russia over Ukraine, and its escalation toward direct US and NATO participation, including the introduction of military personnel, rose to the forefront of the conflict within and between the two capitalist parties.

The spectacle of dysfunction and breakdown in the nation's capital coincided with the speeches of Biden, German Chancellor Olaf Scholz and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky at the United Nations and in Washington making clear that the response to the debacle of Ukraine's spring counteroffensive will be a protracted war to dismember Russia and remove the Putin regime.

Bowing to pressure from Trump and the Freedom Caucus, McCarthy refused to allow Zelensky to address a joint session of Congress, as he had done during his visit to Washington last year. And before Zelensky arrived in Washington on Thursday, some 30 Republican lawmakers wrote to the White House to oppose Biden's request for an additional \$24 billion in military and "humanitarian" funding for Ukraine.

After meeting with Zelensky in the White House, Biden pledged to immediately send more arms to Ukraine valued at \$325 million, including artillery, ammunition, anti-tank

weapons, cluster munitions, a second Hawk air defense battery and launchers and interceptors. Funds for this, however, are to come from money Congress already approved, but only until September 30.

The Democrats seized the opportunity to denounce the Republicans for jeopardizing a Ukrainian victory over Russia and undermining the US military and national security. After a classified briefing with the Biden administration's top military and security officials, Democratic Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer said: "It's very clear that if we were to have a government shutdown, or to pass a continuing resolution with no Ukraine aid, that the effect on Ukraine would be very quick and devastating."

After meeting with Zelensky on Thursday, Schumer told reporters: "I am quoting him verbatim. Mr. Zelensky said: 'If we don't get the aid, we will lose the war.' That's a quote from him."

The Republicans are no less militaristic and war-mongering than the Democrats. As far-right Senator and Trump co-conspirator Josh Hawley put it in a tweet on Thursday:

Let's not forget, Russia is a problem for us, but China is our number 1 foreign policy threat. Number 1. And we are just not being honest about that, and that's a huge, huge danger for us...

But the core of Democratic opposition to Trump and his fascist allies in Congress, as it has been from the time of the 2016 election, is not defense of democratic rights or past social reforms but differences over imperialist foreign policy, particularly in relation to Russia.

Just as the first impeachment of Trump in late 2019 centered on his temporary withholding of promised military aid to Ukraine, which cut across planning for regime-change in Russia and military conflict via the puppet right-wing nationalist government in Kiev, so today it is the Democrats who are leading the war drive against nuclear-armed Russia.

And along with the escalation of imperialist war goes evermore brutal austerity against the working class at home, as well as the intensification of attacks on democratic rights, the elevation of fascistic forces within the political system and the preparations for authoritarian rule.



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