

Behind the stop-gap spending bill: Democrats to agree on border crackdown in exchange for Ukraine war funding

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Late Saturday night, President Joe Biden signed into law a last-minute bipartisan continuing resolution (CR) to fund the federal government for an additional 47 days and avoid an immediate shutdown.

Republican House Speaker Kevin McCarthy proposed the measure following behind-the-scenes talks with the White House and Democratic leaders in the House and Senate. It came after a week of futile attempts by McCarthy to pass a continuing resolution with draconian cuts in social spending and a crackdown on the Mexican border and de facto elimination of the right to asylum, but without the additional funding for Ukraine sought by the White House and the Senate.

McCarthy was blocked by a group of hardcore far-right House Republicans, backed by Donald Trump, who declared they would not support any continuing resolution, regardless of its provisions, and preferred a shutdown of federal agencies when the 2023 fiscal year expired on Sunday, October 1.

With the Republicans holding a mere 221–212 majority in the House, the group, led by Florida Rep. Matt Gaetz, controlled a relatively small bloc of votes, but enough to deny McCarthy a majority for his right-wing proposals, which were opposed by the Democrats. The group led by Gaetz demanded even deeper social cuts and opposed Ukraine war spending.

Not only the White House and Democratic lawmakers, but also a majority of Republicans opposed a government shutdown under conditions of an unprecedented coming together of crises confronting American imperialism, both at home and abroad.

This includes the military debacle in Ukraine, following the failure of Kiev’s so-called “counteroffensive,” which is driving plans to escalate the role of the US and NATO in the war. Domestically, the financial aristocracy faces a growing wave of strikes by autoworkers, screenwriters and actors, healthcare workers and others in the US.

This explosive internal social situation is compounded by an unprecedented crisis of the capitalist two-party political system in the run-up to the 2024 elections, a resurgence of the COVID pandemic and a growing economic crisis. In May, following the conflict over the US debt limit, Fitch Ratings lowered the US

credit rating, and on September 25, Moody’s Analytics indicated it would follow suit in the event of a government shutdown on October 1.

On Saturday, McCarthy switched tactics and proposed a “clean” CR that would extend current levels of federal funding until November 17 and add \$16 billion in disaster relief. Anti-immigrant provisions as well as funding for Ukraine were not included in the bill, which passed in the House by a vote of 355 to 91, with all but one Democrat voting in favor and 90 Republicans voting “no.” Later on Saturday the bill was passed by the Democratic-controlled Senate, with 88 senators, including all voting Democrats, in support, and nine senators, all Republicans, voting against.

The bulk of the mainstream press as well as the Democrats hailed the temporary budget deal as a victory for bipartisanship and a win for “moderate” Republicans over “MAGA extremists.” At the same time, they raised the alarm over the absence of funding for the Ukraine war in the bill. An earlier Senate CR had included \$6 billion in short-term funding for Kiev, but a majority of House Republicans voted over the past week against any additional funds to back the US puppet regime in Ukraine.

The *Wall Street Journal* published an article on October 1 headlined, “In US Fights Over Ukraine Aid, Allies Fear Deeper Global Harm.” Noting that Biden signed the bill to avert a shutdown despite its omission of Ukraine aid, the *Journal* quoted Lithuanian Foreign Minister Gabrielius Landsbergis as saying that “in order to win, the demand for US leadership is ever greater, especially in the scope and speed of military assistance.”

On Friday, former Secretary of Defense Robert Gates published an article in *Foreign Affairs* titled, “The Dysfunctional Superpower: Can a Divided America Deter China and Russia?” Making clear that in the proxy war in Ukraine, the US is in fact at war with Russia, and that the goal of the war must be regime-change, Gates wrote: “As long as Putin is in power, Russia will remain an adversary of the United States and NATO.”

Gates, who headed the Pentagon under George W. Bush and

during the first two years of the Obama administration, raised the explosive growth of US debt and budget deficits and called for a brutal assault on social programs:

Politicians from both parties have failed to address the spiraling cost of entitlements such as Social Security, Medicare, and Medicaid. Perennial opposition to raising the debt ceiling has undermined confidence in the economy, causing investors to worry about what would happen if Washington actually defaulted.

On Sunday, Biden released a video on social media declaring that his decision to sign the CR averting a government shutdown was conditioned by a pledge from McCarthy to obtain passage of a separate bill to provide further military aid to Ukraine. He declared:

I fully expect the speaker to keep his commitments to secure a passage and support needed to help Ukraine as they defend themselves against aggression and brutality. ... I hope my friends on the other side keep their word about support for Ukraine. They said they were going to support Ukraine in a separate vote.

Interviewed Sunday on CBS News' *Face the Nation* program, McCarthy was repeatedly pushed by moderator Margaret Brennan to affirm that he would secure a vote to provide more military aid to Ukraine. McCarthy provided assurances, but at the same time linked Ukraine aid to further attacks on migrants and the right to asylum, including the virtual closure of the US-Mexico border.

He told Brennan: "I'm going to make sure that the weapons are provided for Ukraine, but they're not going to get some big package if the border is not secure."

Elaborating on what he meant by "securing the border," he listed the completion of Trump's border wall, the reinstatement of the "remain in Mexico" policy, and unspecified changes in asylum law. Republicans also included among border provisions in CRs proposed last week the revival of Title 42, a pandemic-related emergency measure imposed in March 2020 enabling the border police to deport migrants without a hearing.

Brennan's next guest was New York's Democratic Governor Kathy Hochul, who along with New York City's Democratic Mayor Eric Adams has been leading the growing calls from Democrats for harsher measures to block the entry of asylum seekers at the US-Mexican border. Vastly exaggerating the number of migrants who are ending up in New York City, Hochul said, "The majority of them seem to be ending up in the streets of New York."

Asked by Brennan what she was calling for, the governor said:

Well, we want them to have a limit on who can come across the border. It is too open right now. People coming from all over the world are finding their way through, simply saying they need asylum. ... But there has to be some limits in place. And Congress has to put more controls at the border, and not this shutdown threat talk about eliminating positions for Border Patrol, while we actually need to double or quadruple those numbers.

Meanwhile, Gaetz, who was interviewed Sunday on both CNN's *State of the Union* and *This Week* on ABC, announced that he would go through with his threat to force a vote on removing McCarthy as House speaker next week. Gaetz attacked McCarthy as a pawn of the Democrats and denounced him, in particular, for striking a secret deal with the White House to secure passage of additional funds for military aid to Ukraine.

Underscoring the increasingly prominent role of the pseudo-left Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) in both the Democratic Party and the trade union bureaucracy, New York Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (AOC) was brought forward on CNN's *State of the Union* program to respond to Gaetz. One of the first Democratic lawmakers to endorse Biden as next year's Democratic presidential candidate, AOC has emerged as a completely uncritical flack for the White House and the party leadership.

Reflecting the further movement to the right of the Democratic Party as a whole, Ocasio-Cortez did not rule out House Democrats in one form or another helping McCarthy beat back a challenge to his speakership.

Moderator Jake Tapper cited an MSNBC interview given Friday night by fellow "progressive," Minnesota Rep. Ilhan Omar, in which she said some Democrats were discussing striking a deal to save McCarthy in return for a "power-sharing agreement."

AOC replied: "Well, I mean, I think, when it comes to power-sharing, we will discuss that as a caucus and what we would finally accept or not."



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