

House passes budget resolution to postpone federal shutdown to New Year

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On Tuesday, in an action that temporarily postpones a partial shutdown of the federal government, which had been set for Friday midnight, the US House of Representatives in a bipartisan vote passed a continuing resolution to provide funding into January and February.

As in a previous continuing resolution enacted in September, a narrow majority of Republicans was joined by nearly every Democrat. Republicans were split 127-93, while Democrats supported the bill 209-2 after the Biden White House indicated its support.

The combined result was passage by 336-95, well above the two-thirds majority required to pass the legislation under the procedure chosen by new House Speaker Mike Johnson, called “suspension of the rules.”

The legislation continues spending for departments representing about 20 percent of the federal budget until January 19, 2024. Spending for departments representing some 80 percent of the total, including the gargantuan sums allocated to the military, will continue until February 2. By then, new full-year appropriations must be enacted or spending will be cut across-the-board by 1 percent, compared to 2022, as provided for in the bipartisan budget deal approved in June to avoid a default on federal debt payments.

The bill was embraced by both the Biden administration and the Democratic leadership in the Senate, where Majority Leader Charles Schumer said a vote would be held as soon as possible. The New York Democrat said he expected the legislation to pass by a wide bipartisan majority. Both Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell and his deputy, John Thune, indicated their support.

The extreme-right Republican representatives who last month brought down the previous House speaker,

Kevin McCarthy, because of a similar bipartisan continuing resolution, said they would not carry out the same action against Johnson, although under House rules even a single representative can force a vote to oust him.

A far-right Christian fundamentalist, Johnson is viewed as “one of them” by the fascists, and his decision to accept a bipartisan deal as unavoidable under the circumstances, given that he had been in office for only three weeks. In response to an inquiry at a press briefing about his difficulties in convincing “arch-conservatives” to back the budget resolution, Johnson responded, “I am an arch-conservative.”

The main concern of all factions in Congress was to avoid an action that would halt salary payments to US soldiers and other operatives of the military-intelligence apparatus at a time when they are engaged in support for two wars, in Ukraine against Russia, and in Gaza against the entire Palestinian population.

The deal represents a temporary postponement of the factional struggle between the two corporate-controlled parties, which is reflected in the legislation. The bill is described as a “clean” continuing resolution because it contains no new policy initiatives or increases or cuts in spending levels.

The Biden administration had sought \$105 billion in additional funding, the bulk of it for the war in Ukraine against Russia, with a smaller portion devoted to aid to Israel in its genocidal war in Gaza. The Republicans had been demanding savage spending cuts to domestic social programs as well as increase in spending on military-police repression at the US-Mexico border.

The two parties agreed to set these matters aside temporarily. Schumer said that the bill to provide military aid to Ukraine and Israel would be taken up as a separate measure immediately after this month’s

Thanksgiving holiday.

There are significant divisions over policy, however. The fascist wing of the House Republicans, following the lead of ex-president Donald Trump, are opposing the aid to Ukraine, demanding instead that the European countries in NATO pay more for the war against Russia so that the Pentagon can focus on the military build-up against China across the Indo-Pacific region.

They are also demanding that substantial funds and military resources be devoted to another war—against migrants seeking to enter the United States across the US-Mexico border, driven by the combination of political violence and desperate poverty in countries long oppressed by American imperialism. Trump is making the attack on migrants a major focus of his campaign in the 2024 elections and using it to justify the mobilization of military forces within the United States, which would be thrown against his political opponents as well.

The political maneuvering around the continuing resolution is significant. On Saturday, a White House spokesman attacked Johnson’s proposal to split the extended appropriations into two batches, one expiring in January, the other in February. But the administration later declined to issue the usual “Statement of Administration Policy” on the bill, before declaring its support on Tuesday morning, a few hours before the House vote. The delay was attributed in the press to Biden’s effort to avoid inflaming the Republican extreme right, among whom administration support for legislation is a death warrant.

The ongoing tensions within the Republican House caucus were demonstrated on Wednesday when 19 Republicans, mainly members of the fascistic House Freedom Caucus, voted with the Democrats to pass a rule to begin consideration of an appropriations bill for the Commerce and Justice departments and related agencies. The vote was 225-198 to block the rule, leading the House to adjourn until after Thanksgiving.

One of the 19, Ralph Norman of South Carolina, told the press, “There is a sentiment that if we can’t fight anything, then let’s just hold up everything.” With a narrow 221-213 majority, Speaker Johnson can afford the loss of only three Republicans in any party-line vote.

Democratic Senate leader Schumer praised the

passage of the bill, saying, “For now, I am pleased that Speaker Johnson seems to be moving in our direction by advancing a CR (continuing resolution) that does not include the highly partisan cuts that Democrats have warned against.” He reiterated the determination of the Democrats and the Biden administration to pass the huge military aid bill devoted largely to Ukraine as soon as possible.



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