

Biden signs third continuing resolution, temporarily avoiding a government shutdown

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On Friday, President Joe Biden signed a temporary spending bill, known as a continuing resolution (CR), to prevent a partial government shutdown. Two partial shutdowns, January 19 after midnight and February 2, were looming had the CR not been signed into law.

The latest CR extends government funding at last year's spending levels to major federal departments. The Transportation, Veterans, Energy and Agriculture department will be funded through March 1, while funding for the Justice, Defense, Commerce, Homeland Security and other federal departments is extended through March 8.

The stopgap spending proposal reached Biden's desk Friday after being voted on by the Senate and House the day before. While the bill passed by large margins in each chamber, 77 to 18 in the Senate and 314 to 108 in the House, far-right Republicans, including members of the House Freedom Caucus and others aligned with ex-President Donald Trump, voted against the spending proposal.

In the House, just under half of the Republican conference, 106, voted against the bill, while all but two Democrats who voted, including all the self-styled "progressives," voted in favor. Among them are four Democratic Socialists of America Democrats.

This is the third time in four months Biden has been forced to rely on a CR to keep the government operating, as Congress has yet to pass a budget for the current fiscal year, which began on October 1, 2023. The breakdown in the legislative budget process is one expression of a more general crisis of the bourgeois political system.

If Congress fails to pass 12 separate appropriations bills pursuant to the debt ceiling agreement that was reached last year by former Republican House Speaker Kevin McCarthy and Biden, all federal government agencies, including the military, will undergo a 1 percent spending cut from 2023 spending levels.

The Biden-McCarthy debt ceiling agreement allows a tiny 0.2 percent increase in non-military discretionary spending over 2023 levels in both 2024 and 2025, while mandating a 3 percent annual increase in military spending. Following

the agreement last spring, the Jeff Bezos-owned *Washington Post* praised the social austerity flowing from the deal, citing a Congressional Budget Office projection that it would cut federal spending by \$1.5 trillion over the next decade, almost entirely from programs and services that benefit the working class. At the same time, the *Post* demanded that core entitlement programs, such as Social Security and Medicare, be slashed as well.

In line with the debt ceiling agreement, earlier this month Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer (D-New York) and current House Speaker Mike Johnson (R-Louisiana) agreed to an overall \$1.66 trillion budget framework for all the federal departments for fiscal year 2024.

In their agreement, over half of domestic discretionary spending goes to the Department of Defense, some \$886.3 billion, while the sum total of non-military discretionary spending, which includes funding for public education, low-income food and housing assistance, science research, national parks and forests, environmental protection and healthcare for veterans, is allotted only \$772.7 billion.

While the \$1.66 trillion figure has been agreed to for some time, appropriators in both parties have yet to come to an agreement on the exact allocations for each of the 12 spending bills that must be passed. Speaking to *Congressional Quarterly Roll Call* after Thursday's passage of the new CR, Sen. Susan Collins (R-Maine), ranking member on the Senate Appropriations committee, said she was "very concerned" that the figures for each of the 12 spending bills had yet to be agreed upon.

The successive CRs continue funding for federal departments at last year's spending levels. Given inflation, these extensions mean a cut in spending in real terms.

The cuts under these CRs are already threatening the health and well-being of mothers and their children across the country. In a press release last month, the US Department of Agriculture warned that the previous two CRs passed by Congress did not provide the estimated \$1 billion required by the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children, also known as

WIC, to continue providing assistance to all who need it.

Currently, the program provides food, such as milk and cheese, to some 6.7 million pregnant women, new mothers, babies and young children across the country. However, without the additional funds, the USDA warned that the equivalent of 1.5 months of benefits could be lost for *all* the program's beneficiaries, which includes *half* of all children in the US.

The USDA also warned that without increased funding, many states would implement "waiting lists" for applicants. The first people to be put on the waiting lists, per the USDA, would be postpartum mothers, followed by children aged one to five who do not have "high risk" medical issues, and then pregnant and breastfeeding women. However, the agency warned that given the shortfall, it is likely that "waiting lists would stretch across *all* participant categories," affecting "mothers, babies, and young children."

While mothers and their children are at risk of going hungry, Congress made sure that the CRs did not cause undue hardship for the Department of Defense. *Defense News*, quoting Navy Comptroller Russ Rumbaugh, revealed that the last CR had a rare "anomaly" written into it that allowed the Navy to procure a Columbia-class nuclear-powered ballistic missile submarine.

"We are fortunate that part of the Navy got one of the few anomalies—the special exceptions in the current continuing resolution—that allows us to procure the second boat of the Columbia-class," Rumbaugh said Wednesday during an online event. In 2021, the DoD estimated that each Columbia-class submarine cost over \$9 billion to produce.

Rumbaugh noted that if Congress passed the budget framework agreed to by Schumer and Johnson earlier this month, it would represent a "4.5 percent increase to the Navy budget."

Despite the fact the CRs and the Schumer-Johnson 2024 budget framework mean significant cuts in social spending, while increasing funding to the military and border police, some Republicans, including Chip Roy (R-Texas) of the House Freedom Caucus, have not ruled out filing a motion to vacate against Speaker Johnson if a budget is passed with mainly Democratic votes and over their objections. In addition to demanding major cuts in social spending below 2023 levels, Roy and his fascistic allies are demanding that any budget incorporate brutal attacks on immigrants and further restrictions on access to abortion.

Following Wednesday's passage of the CR in the Senate, Majority Leader Schumer released a statement on social media hailing the agreement as a model of bipartisanship and imploring the Senate "to move forward to the national security supplemental as soon as possible."

The \$106 billion "national security supplemental" allocates \$61 billion for the Ukrainian military, including artillery and air defense systems; \$14 billion for the genocidal Zionist regime in Israel; billions to prepare for war in the South China Sea; and billions to hire thousands more border patrol police and expand immigrant detention centers. The "big four" congressional leaders—House Speaker Johnson, Senate Majority Leader Schumer, House Minority Leader Hakeem Jeffries and Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell—met with Biden in the White House earlier this week to discuss the supplemental.

While McConnell has called for Senate passage of the supplemental request, House Republicans have rejected any bill that does not include unprecedented attacks on immigrants. Johnson emerged from the White House meeting with a pledge to maintain the House Republicans' hard line on the border, spurning Biden's arguments on the urgency of delivering a military defeat to Russia.

The White House and the Democratic Party are falling all over themselves to get a deal with House Republicans on the supplemental spending request to fund an escalation of the US-NATO proxy war against Russia. They are offering to trade the evisceration of the right to asylum and new provisions to facilitate the deportation of refugees for the \$61 billion in war funding for Kiev.

Former president and likely 2024 Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump has called on House Republicans to oppose any deal with the Democrats on immigration—a centerpiece of his fascistic election platform. Georgia Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene has warned House Speaker Johnson that if he allows a floor vote on a border deal as part of Biden's supplemental spending request—which would likely pass, largely with Democratic votes—she will immediately file a "motion to vacate" the speakership.

On Friday, *Politico* reported that the Democrats were open to saving Speaker Johnson from a far-right revolt if he allowed House passage of the national security supplemental.

The ranking member of the House Homeland Security Committee, Rep. Bennie Thompson (D-Mississippi), told *Politico*: "I think it would be a mighty pity if [Johnson] did the right thing... for us not to support him." Thompson added that, "Up to this point, he's been a fairly honest broker."



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