

Biden presses House Speaker for Ukraine war funding with congressional leaders at budget impasse

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US President Biden met with the four top congressional leaders at the White House on Tuesday to discuss the budget impasse that will result in a partial government shutdown beginning 12:01 a.m. Saturday if it is not resolved in the coming days.

Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer (D-New York), Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-Kentucky), House Minority Leader Hakeem Jeffries (D-New York) and House Speaker Mike Johnson (R-Louisiana) met with Biden in the Oval Office to review the issues involved in getting a deal for yet another continuing resolution to temporarily extend funding for the federal government.

Speaking to the press before the meeting, Biden made it clear that the primary objective of the White House is to secure billions in additional funding for the US-NATO proxy war against Russia in Ukraine. Those dollars—as well as billions to finance Israel’s genocidal war in Gaza and more to build up the military of Taiwan and other Asian allies of the US against China, and additional billions to further militarize America’s southern border and detain or deport asylum seekers—are included in the administration’s supplemental spending request, which is separate from the legislation required to keep the federal government running.

After stating that preventing a government shutdown was “an important problem,” Biden moved quickly to the topic of war funding, saying, “I hope we get to speak to that a little bit. And I think the consequences of inaction every day in Ukraine are dire.” He added that he had been speaking to “our G7 partners,” and they are “very concerned.”

Biden then moved on to funding for Israel’s war in

Gaza, saying, “in terms of the supplemental, we need to deal with the Israeli portion.” The president continued, “And we have to replenish the air defenses for Israel, and we have to work on making sure they don’t face the threat from ... not just from Hamas, but from Iran.”

Other than vague references to the fact that a partial government shutdown by the weekend would “damage the economy significantly,” Biden had nothing to say about the dire impact a shutdown would have on critical government services, federal employees and those who depend on government programs for basic needs.

A shutdown beginning on Saturday would impact four appropriations areas: Agriculture, Rural Development, and the Food and Drug Administration; Energy and Water Development; Military Construction and Veterans Affairs; and Transportation, Housing and Urban Development. If legislation to fund the departments is not passed before midnight Friday, a continuing resolution would have to be passed to keep the departments open.

The remaining eight appropriations areas face a shutdown one week later, at 12:01 a.m. on March 9 if no agreement is in place by that deadline.

The budget impasse has centered around demands by a group of far-right House Republicans to incorporate in any continuing resolution draconian social spending cuts and right-wing policy mandates on such things as reproductive rights that the Democrats and the White House could not support. Members of the House Freedom Caucus and political provocateurs, such as QAnon fascist Marjorie Taylor Greene (R-Georgia) have threatened to seek the ouster of Johnson as House Speaker if he agrees to a temporary budget deal with

the Democrats that fails to incorporate their demands, as was previously carried out against former Speaker Kevin McCarthy (R-California).

Johnson, for his part, is refusing to bring to the floor of the House for a vote Biden's request for tens of billions of dollars in further military aid to Ukraine, the key component of the White House supplemental funding request, despite Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell's support for the measure.

Following Tuesday's meeting at the White House, Johnson spoke to the press and reiterated his opposition to more Ukraine war funding until and unless Biden carries out unspecified executive actions to "secure the US border" with Mexico.

"When you talk about America's needs, you have to talk first about our open border," he told reporters.

On the issue of averting a government shutdown, Johnson said he was "optimistic" that a bipartisan deal could be reached before the midnight Friday deadline.

The corporate media has portrayed the White House meeting as a "gang-up" by Democrats Biden, Schumer and Jeffries together with Republican McConnell on Johnson. *The Hill* reported: "A Republican senator who requested anonymity to discuss internal strategy for avoiding a government shutdown said the objective of the White House meeting was to pile pressure on Johnson."

After the White House meeting, Schumer and Jeffries spoke to the press. They called the meeting "intense" and "productive" and claimed that "real progress" was being made. Jeffries said, "I'm cautiously optimistic that we can do what is necessary in the next day or so to close down these bills and avoid a government shutdown."

McConnell appeared separately and expressed his essential agreement with Biden, telling the press, "Not only do we not want to shut the government down, we don't want the Russians to win in Ukraine." The Republican senator acknowledged that Johnson might be removed as speaker if he adopts a position that the Democrats will support.

Behind the machinations over the budget is the deepening crisis of the entire US political system, which is wracked by internecine conflicts that arise from unprecedented levels of social inequality, escalating world imperialist war and the growth of social opposition in the working class.

Workers will bear the brunt of any, even partial shutdown of government functions. Impacted federal workers will have their paychecks delayed until after the shutdown ends. Critical employees, such as air traffic controllers, will be required to report and work without pay.

Department of Agriculture funding for SNAP (food stamps) will be disrupted, although these funds are allocated a month in advance and alternate funding sources can be used by the government to keep the program running. Experts at the Food Research and Action Center say that a prolonged shutdown would put SNAP benefits at risk.

Applications for Federal Housing Administration loans and payments for subsidized housing will be delayed in a shutdown. Veterans services, such as career counseling and cemetery maintenance, could also be impacted.

If the shutdown were to continue past the March 8-9 deadline, which would halt the remaining funding areas, the economic and social effects would increase exponentially, with Social Security, Medicare, Medicaid and the US Postal Service impacted.



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