

Democrats agree to increase military and border spending while cutting food stamps

By Barry Grey
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Republican and Democratic congressional leaders announced an agreement late Sunday on a \$1 trillion omnibus spending bill to fund the federal government for the remainder of the 2017 fiscal year, which ends September 30. The measure is expected to be passed later this week by both houses of Congress and signed into law by President Donald Trump, averting the threat of a government shutdown at midnight Friday.

Despite Republican control of both the House of Representatives and the Senate, Trump and the Republicans are dependent on the Democrats to supply the margin needed to pass the measure, particularly in the narrowly divided Senate, where it would take eight Democratic votes to end debate and bring the measure to the floor for a final ballot.

This underscores the reactionary role of the Democrats in backing a bill that grants Trump's demands for a significant increase in military spending as well as funds to further militarize the US-Mexico border, while slashing the food stamp program and the Department of Education.

Last week the Democrats made a show of opposition to Trump by refusing to include in the bill \$1 billion to go toward the construction of his border wall, while making it clear they supported additional funds to strengthen existing border barriers and increase surveillance, including by means of drones. The administration withdrew its demand for funds earmarked for the border wall in return for an agreement from the Democrats to support \$1.52 billion in additional border funding as well as \$15 billion more in military spending.

A bipartisan stop-gap measure was passed on Friday to extend funding of the government for one week so as to provide sufficient time to work out the details of the final 2017 budget agreement. Republicans and

Democrats on the House and Senate appropriations committees negotiated throughout the weekend and announced a deal late Sunday.

To secure passage, Trump dropped his demand for money earmarked for the border wall as well as \$18 billion in non-defense domestic cuts. These include a wish list of reactionary measures such as cuts to so-called "sanctuary cities" (cities that refuse to allow their police to function as de facto immigration police), massive cuts to the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and defunding of Planned Parenthood. Trump also dropped his demand for funds to establish a new deportation force.

He agreed to include \$295 million to prevent the Medicaid program in Puerto Rico from going bankrupt. Republican as well as Democratic leaders agreed to allocate \$4.6 billion to permanently extend health benefits to 22,000 retired Appalachian coal miners and their families, who faced the immediate termination of their benefits. The deal also includes an additional \$2 billion in disaster money for states.

However, the Democrats accepted a 1 percent cut to the EPA, reducing the agency's budget by \$80 million. They also agreed to cut the Education Department by \$1.2 billion.

Most cruel of all is a cut of \$2.4 billion to the food stamp program, which was already heavily cut during the Obama administration. The justification given for slashing the program, relied upon by more than 45 million Americans, one in seven, was "declining enrollment."

Other reactionary provisions include an extension through 2019 of a private school voucher program in Washington, D.C.'s school system and a continued ban on federal funding for abortions as part of the federal Employee Health Benefits Program.

Republicans hailed the agreement as a down payment on Trump's demands, incorporated into his proposal for fiscal year 2018, which begins October 1, for a massive \$54 billion increase in the Pentagon budget to be paid for with brutal cuts in domestic social programs.

Vice President Mike Pence praised the deal in an interview Monday on "CBS This Morning," saying, "It will avert a government shutdown, but more important than that, it's going to be a significant increase in military spending."

Republican House Speaker Paul Ryan said the bill "acts on President Trump's commitment to rebuild our military for the 21st century and bolster our nation's border security to protect our homeland."

Democratic leaders presented the deal as a victory over the Trump administration. House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi congratulated the Democrats for eliminating "more than 160 Republican poison pill riders" and temporarily blocking funding for Trump's "immoral and unwise border wall."

Senate Minority Leader Charles Schumer issued a statement Sunday night declaring the budget deal to be "a good agreement for the American people" and touting the fact that it excludes funding for an "ineffective" border wall.

"Early on in this debate," he added, "Democrats clearly laid out our principles. At the end of the day, this is an agreement that reflects those principles."

And so it does. These principles support a \$137 million increase for Customs and Border Enforcement, bringing funding for the Gestapo-like border police to \$11.4 billion. It includes money for 100 new Immigration and Customs Enforcement officers and 5,000 more detention beds. It also pays for 10 more federal immigration judges to speed up the deportation of undocumented workers.

The Democrats' principles also sanction eight-figure funding increases for the FBI, the Drug Enforcement Administration and the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms.

For the US war machine, the Democrats have sanctioned an immediate increase of \$12.5 billion, to be followed by an additional \$2.5 billion once the administration presents to Congress its plan to fight ISIS.

Included in the bill's allocations for military

hardware are:

- * \$21.2 billion to procure 13 Navy ships
- * \$8.2 billion for 74 F-35 aircraft
- * \$1.1 billion for 14 F/A-18E/F Super Hornet aircraft
- * \$1.2 billion for 62 UH-60 Blackhawk helicopters
- * \$702 million for 145 Patriot MSE missiles
- * \$1.8 billion for 11 P-8A Poseidon aircraft
- * \$2.6 billion for 15 KC-46 air tankers
- * \$1.3 billion for 17 C/HC/KC/MC-130J aircraft

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