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Senate Democrats approve Trump war budget

The US Senate passed a budget for the fiscal year beginning October 1 that includes a record \$738 billion for the military. The budget was the product of an agreement between House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and the Trump White House, reflecting bipartisan support for the American war machine.

Senate Democrats gave far more support to the Trump-Pelosi budget than Republicans, voting for it by 38-5, with four absent. Republicans divided much more closely, 30 for, 23 against, and one absent. Republicans were not opposed to the record spending on the military but objected to the level of spending for domestic social programs and the overall deficit.

If the Democrats had voted against the budget by any significant margin, it would have been defeated.

Of the seven Democratic senators running for president, four were absent from the vote, including Bernie Sanders, who declared during the Tuesday Democratic debate in Detroit that he would vote against the record military budget, but did not bother to return to Washington to cast his vote on Thursday. Elizabeth Warren, Kamala Harris and Cory Booker were also absent.

Among the three Democratic presidential candidates who did return to the capital to vote, Kirsten Gillibrand backed the war budget, while Michael Bennet and Amy Klobuchar voted against.

The Senate result mirrored that in the House, where Democrats provided a huge majority for the budget deal, 219-16, while most Republicans actually voted against the budget backed by Trump, 132-65. Among the House Democrats voting for the record war budget were Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and Rashida Tlaib, both members of the Democratic Socialists of America.

The bipartisan legislation now goes to the White House for Trump's signature. In a series of tweets over the past week, Trump has hailed the budget deal with Pelosi, singling out the record funding for the military as the principal gain made by the administration negotiating team, which was headed by Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin.

In their final statements before the vote, both Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell and Minority Leader Chuck Schumer endorsed the budget, but the Democrat was far more enthusiastic, while McConnell off-loaded responsibility for the deal onto the White House.

"In recent weeks, key officials on President Trump's team engaged in extensive negotiations with Speaker Pelosi and the Democratic House," McConnell said. "Given the exigencies of divided government, we knew that any bipartisan agreement on funding levels would not appear perfect to either side. But the administration negotiated a strong deal."

Schumer hailed the budget deal, saying, "It will strengthen our national security and provide our troops with the resources they need to do a very difficult and often dangerous job," adding, "For too long the arbitrary, draconian limits of sequester have prevented us [from maintaining] military readiness. This deal ends the threat of sequester permanently."

Speaking for the Trump administration, acting White House chief of staff Mick Mulvaney, a professed "deficit hawk" or opponent of higher spending, said on Fox News Sunday, "When the Democrats won the House, everybody knew that we would end up spending more money. So what did we get in exchange? We got more money for defense, which we think that we need. We got more money for the V.A., which we think that we needed."

The budget deal sets a top-line spending number of \$1.37 trillion for fiscal year 2020, which begins in two months, and \$1.375 trillion for the following year. This refers only to discretionary spending, the sums authorized by Congress each year. Interest payments on the federal debt and entitlement programs like Social Security and Medicare are legal obligations of the Treasury and do not require specific year-by-year authorization.

Despite Schumer's claim that the budget provides \$10 billion more in budget authority for domestic social spending than for the military, reestablishing parity between defense and nondefense items, the figures for fiscal year 2020 are \$738 billion for the military and only \$632 billion for everything else, a gap of more than \$100 billion.

The budget legislation also extends the federal debt ceiling until July 1, 2021, removing any possibility of a "fiscal cliff" in which federal debt payments are placed into question, potentially disrupting financial markets. This was Treasury Secretary Mnuchin's principal concern in the talks with Pelosi, given that the Treasury was projected to reach the current debt ceiling sometime in August, during the congressional recess.

The Democratic leadership made one more huge concession to the White House. Pelosi and Schumer agreed that for the next two years there will be no attempt to use "must pass" legislation, such as appropriations bills for the various federal agencies, to push for Democratic policy preferences like ending the Hyde Amendment, which bans the use of federal funds to pay for abortions, or forbidding the use of federal funds to build Trump's wall along the US-Mexico border.

The result of this capitulation, combined with the Supreme Court ruling last week allowing Trump to divert funds appropriated for the Pentagon to the wall construction program, is that the White House can proceed with the building of the wall as fast as contracts can be approved for construction companies that enlist in the highly profitable effort. White House officials boasted that at least 100 miles of new wall would be in place in the coming year.

The final passage of a two-year budget for the federal government, with more Democrats than Republicans supporting the deal in both the Senate and the House, demonstrates in the starkest terms the political reality confronting the working class. Workers face, not a "divided government," as the corporate media endlessly claims, but a unity government of two right-wing capitalist parties, equally opposed to the social and economic interests of working people.

The budget deal exposes the utter fakery of the Democratic presidential debates, in which right-wing candidates posture as friends of working people and opponents of Trump, while in their day jobs as senators, members of the House, governors and mayors, they empower the Trump White House and collaborate with its vicious attacks on the working class.

This de facto coalition government, with a fascistic president enabled by his Democratic partners, offers working people no prospect but military aggression overseas, attacks on

jobs, living standards and social benefits at home, and a frontal assault on democratic rights, with immigrants playing the role of guinea pigs for the treatment of the entire population.

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