

House approves spending bill in effort to avoid government shutdown during pandemic

The House voted 359-57 to approve the stop-gap measure.

The House easily passed a temporary government-wide funding bill Tuesday evening in a bipartisan effort to keep the government funded through the beginning of December.

The House voted 359-57 to approve the stop gap measure that will keep the government open through December 11. 56 Republicans and Rep. Justin Amash, I-Mich. voted against the measure, while Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, D-N.Y., voted present.

Agreement on the bill came after considerable behind-the-scenes battling over proposed add-ons. The final agreement gives the administration continued immediate authority to dole out Agriculture Department subsidies in the run-up to Election Day. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif., retreated from an initial draft that sparked a furor with Republicans and farm-state Democrats.

Instead, in talks Tuesday, Pelosi restored a farm aid funding patch sought by the administration, which has sparked the ire of Democrats who said it plays political favorites as it gives out bailout money to farmers and ranchers.

MNUCHIN, PELOSI HAVE 'INFORMAL AGREEMENT' TO GO FORWARD WITH GOVERNMENT FUNDING PACKAGE, SOURCE SAYS

In return, Pelosi won COVID-related food aid for the poor, including a higher food benefit for families whose children are unable to receive free or reduced lunches because schools are closed over the coronavirus. Another add-on would permit states to remove hurdles to food stamps and nutrition aid to low-income mothers that are more difficult to clear during the pandemic.

The deal permitted the measure to speed through the House after a swift debate that should ensure smooth sailing in the GOP-held Senate before next Wednesday's deadline. There's no appetite on either side for a government

shutdown.

The measure is the bare minimum accomplishment for Capitol Hill's powerful Appropriations committees, who pride themselves on their deal-making abilities despite gridlock in other corners of Congress. It came after bipartisan negotiations on a huge COVID-19 relief package imploded and appear unlikely to be rekindled — especially since the death of Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg has upended U.S. politics.

"We need to keep the government open but we also need additional COVID relief for the American people," said Rep. Debbie Wasserman Schultz, D-Fla.

GOP-LED SENATE EYEING NEW 'TARGETED' COVID BILL

The legislation — called a continuing resolution, or CR, in Washington-speak — would keep every federal agency running at current funding levels through Dec. 11, which will keep the government afloat past an election that could reshuffle Washington's balance of power.

The measure also extends many programs whose funding or authorizations lapse on Sept. 30, including the federal flood insurance program, highway and transit programs, and a long set of extensions of various health programs, such as a provision to prevent Medicaid cuts to hospitals that serve many poor people.

It also finances the possible transition to a new administration if Joe Biden wins the White House and would stave off an unwelcome COVID-caused increase in Medicare Part B premiums for outpatient doctor visits.

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The underlying stopgap measure deals with the 30% of the federal government's day-to-day budget that goes to Cabinet agency operations funded by Congress each year. The annual appropriations process broke down in the Senate this year and it's unclear but probably unlikely that the \$1.3 trillion in agency spending bills will be enacted this year, even in a post-election lame duck session, especially if Biden is elected to replace Trump.

In the past, both Democrats and Republicans have sought to use government funding deadlines and must-pass temporary funding bills as leverage to try to win concessions elsewhere on Washington's agenda. Such efforts invariably fail.

Republicans in 2013 used it in a failed attempt to prevent implementation of the so-called Obamacare health law, and Senate Democrats returned the favor in 2018 in a futile effort to force debate on permitting immigrants brought into the country illegally as children to remain in the U.S.

The Associated Press contributed to this report.

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