

No shutdown: \$1.1 trillion agreement shows Dems' clout

WASHINGTON (AP) — Erasing the threat of a disruptive government shutdown, the White House and top lawmakers endorsed a \$1.1 trillion spending bill Monday to carry the nation through September, an agreement underscoring that Democrats retain considerable clout in Donald Trump's turbulent presidency.

Negotiators released the 1,665-page bill after Republicans dropped numerous demands on the environment, Obama-era financial regulations and abortion in marathon sessions over the weekend. The bill is slated for a House vote on Wednesday, with a Senate vote ahead of a Friday midnight deadline.

"We thought we had the upper hand because a government shutdown would be on their shoulders, and we made that clear," Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., said in an interview. "We knew that if we didn't push things too far we could get a good deal that could make us happy and that's what happened."

Trump and the White House had made concessions last week when the president relented on his demand that the measure include a \$1.4 billion down payment for his proposed wall along the U.S.-Mexico border. Trump repeatedly insisted during the election campaign that Mexico would pay for the wall, a claim Mexican officials have vigorously rejected.

Congressional Republicans and Democrats ignored Trump's proposal to cut billions of dollars from domestic programs.

Democrats boasted of money for foreign assistance and cash-strapped Puerto Rico while winning funding for favored programs like transit projects and grants for first responders. They also defied Trump on a bid to punish "sanctuary cities" and on immigration enforcement.

The White House and some top GOP allies declared victory anyway, citing billions of dollars more for the military. Trump won a \$15 billion



In this Thursday photo, Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer, of N.Y., speaks to reporters during a news conference on Capitol Hill in Washington.

down payment on his request to strengthen the military, though that also fell short of what he requested.

Vice President Mike Pence told CBS News Monday that the administration "couldn't be more pleased" and called the agreement a "budget deal that's a bipartisan win for the American people."

House Speaker Paul Ryan, R-Wis., praised the bill as well, saying it "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."

Longstanding conservative resistance to big spending bills requires the party to seek Democratic votes to pass spending bills despite the Republican majorities both houses of Congress. That made the party out of power a major player in the negotiations. The talks were also spurred by a strong Republican desire to complete unfinished business well into the fiscal year and move on to health care repeal and tax overhaul, both of which are iffy propositions.

"If nothing else, it does allow the president to have at least one major success this week, which is great," said White House budget director Mick Mulvaney. "He's going to sign his first substantive piece of legislation this week, and it's going to make dramatic increases in funding to his priorities."

Ryan's office peppered reporters' inboxes with news

releases cheerleading for the bill and GOP-won provisions such as extending a private school vouchers program for students in Washington, D.C.'s troubled school system through 2019.

Democrats had sought additional spending for nondefense accounts to match Pentagon increases above spending caps set by a 2015 budget pact negotiated with former President Barack Obama. They were forced to settle for far less with domestic increases in the 1 percent range.

The measure funds the remainder of the 2017 budget year, through Sept. 30. Capitol Hill Republicans joined Democrats in supporting increases for popular domestic programs such as medical research at the National Institutes of Health, with Sen. Roy Blunt, R-Mo., for instance, using his powerful post on the Appropriations panel to take the lead on a 40 percent boost in research on Alzheimer's disease.

Democrats stressed their efforts to protect the Environmental Protection Agency, infrastructure grants and foreign aid. Sen. Joe Manchin, D-W.Va., led the fight for a \$1.3 billion provision to preserve health benefits for more than 22,000 retired coal miners and their families, while top House Democrat Nancy Pelosi provided the muscle behind a hard-won effort to give the cash-strapped government of Puerto Rico \$295 million to ease its Medicaid burden.

Pushing for victories, Trump shows disconnect with House GOP

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump could be on the verge of marking two significant legislative accomplishments at the start of his presidency. Yet he's displayed a curious disconnect with Republicans on Capitol Hill, raising questions about how deeply he is delving into the specifics of legislative sausage-making.

In interviews and Tweets, Trump has been notably off-topic and off-message about the state of affairs in Congress.

His recent description of the health care bill suggested he was unfamiliar with how the bill addresses coverage for people with pre-existing conditions. Congressional leaders and White House aides have struggled to agree on the level of optimism and timing for a vote.

During tense budget negotiations last week, Trump was sounding off about issues — health care for miners and a finance package for Puerto Rico — that were not major points of contention in the deal, which came to together Sunday.

It all added up to a portrait of a president who, even while he's eager for legislative victories, pays little attention to the nitty-gritty details that can make or break them on Capitol Hill.

The White House on Monday struggled to explain the president's assertion that the health care bill guaranteed coverage for people pre-existing conditions.

"Pre-existing conditions are in the bill. And I mandate it. I said, 'Has to be,'" Trump said Sunday on CBS News.

The legislation being considered by House Republicans, in fact, does

"Coverage of pre-existing conditions is at the core."

— Sean Spicer, White House spokesman

not require such coverage. It would allow states to opt out of the requirement under certain circumstances — a concession that won over conservatives while alienating some moderates. Trump also asserted the bill allows insurance sales across states lines, something that's not in the bill at all.

White House spokesman Sean Spicer said that ensuring "coverage of pre-existing conditions is at the core" of the effort to repeal and replace the law. "So that is something that he is ensured is in the current bill and we'll continue to push for to make sure that coming out of the Senate and going to conference it's there as well."

The American Medical Association has said the Republican safeguards for patients with pre-existing conditions "may be illusory."

Trump told Bloomberg News in an interview on Monday that the bill was "not in its final form right now" and predicted it would be "every bit as good on pre-existing conditions as Obamacare."

House Republican leaders are hopeful for a vote on the health care plan ahead of a weeklong recess next week. But Spicer sought to tamp down expectations on Monday, telling reporters that "we're not there yet," even though the administration is "getting

closer and closer every day." Two White House officials said they expected a vote on the health care bill on Wednesday or Thursday, depending in part on the timing of the budget vote. The officials spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss internal deliberations.

White House chief of staff Reince Priebus has taken the lead in discussions with Congress on health care, traveling to Capitol Hill multiple times for discussions with leadership, as well as lawmakers in both the conservative Freedom Caucus and moderate Tuesday Group.

Legislative director Marc Short and deputy chief of staff Rick Dearborn have also been active in the discussions, according to White House officials. Vice President Mike Pence was also selling the health care plan in Congress and was inviting senators and their spouses to the Naval Observatory for a dinner on Tuesday night.

How involved Trump will be in the discussions remains unclear. But he has been sending mixed signals in his recent dealings with lawmakers.

In an interview with The Associated Press late last month, Trump surprised members of his administration and congressional leaders when he declared he would be announcing his tax overhaul proposal within days.

Democrats on Monday took a victory lap on a \$1 trillion-plus spending bill to fund the government through Sept. 30. The bill successfully avoids a government shutdown. But it includes no money for construction of Trump's long-promised wall along the U.S.-Mexico border.



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