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Senate passes biggest-ever US military budget with unanimous Democratic support

On Thursday, in a bipartisan 68-31 vote, the US Senate passed the \$1.5 trillion omnibus spending package that will fund the government through September 30 of this year.



The U.S. Capitol building on Capitol Hill in Washington, Nov. 2, 2020. (AP Photo/Patrick Semansky)

The bitter partisan warfare that is blamed for blocking any measures to defend democratic rights, address the COVID-19 health catastrophe, or provide relief for working families devastated by unemployment and raging inflation dissolved when it came to giving the US war machine a massive increase. With the Biden administration and congressional Democrats leading the way, the current anti-Russia hysteria was used to push through a budget that underscores the growing risk of nuclear war.

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The omnibus bill allocates \$782 billion to the military as well as \$13.6 billion in “emergency aid” to Ukraine, of which \$6.5 billion is earmarked for military assistance. At the same time, it omits nearly \$16 billion in promised new spending for anti-COVID vaccines, drugs, testing and related public health measures.

The Senate easily overcame the 60-vote filibuster threshold and approved the bill less than 24 hours after its passage by the House of Representatives. The \$782 billion allocated for the Pentagon is roughly \$42 billion more than last year’s total and some \$37 billion more than the Biden administration initially requested. The figure is also \$52 billion more than the \$730 billion earmarked for non-defense spending.

As part of the Pentagon budget, roughly \$10.6 billion will be spent on purchasing and “modernizing” 85 F-35 aircraft, while another \$2.9 billion is allocated for the ongoing development of a new Air Force stealth nuclear bomber, the B-21. An additional \$1 billion is provided for Israel’s Iron Dome missile defense system, allowing the apartheid state to continue offensive military operations against the Palestinian people.

In a short address Friday morning, Biden hailed the quick passage of the bill, boasting of the “additional \$13.6 billion in new assistance” to the neo-Nazi-infested Ukrainian military. In his remarks and on social media later, Biden said he looked forward to signing the legislation “immediately.”

Not a single Democratic senator voted against the bill. The fake “socialist” Bernie Sanders and Massachusetts “progressive” Elizabeth Warren joined with far-right Republicans such as South Carolina’s Lindsey Graham to frame passage of the war budget as necessary to counter the authoritarian government of Vladimir Putin.

Defending the additional funding for the Ukrainian military on Tuesday, Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer declared it was necessary to “give the brave Ukrainian fighting forces... the arms they need.” He continued, “Whether it be Javelins or Stingers [anti-tank and anti-aircraft missiles] or *anything else* .” (Emphasis added)

Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell, one of 17 Republican senators to vote for the bill, said Republicans should take credit for making sure “this deal gets the job done for our armed forces.”

The Senate received the bill from the House on Thursday after it was quickly passed by the lower chamber. On Wednesday, the House held separate votes on the military spending provisions and the non-military spending provisions. This was a maneuver to allow so-called “progressives” such as New York Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and Minnesota Representative Ilhan Omar to vote against the military spending portion in the knowledge that their votes were not needed to secure its passage.

The first vote, on military spending, passed 361-69, with only 15 Democrats and 54 Republicans voting “no.” In a closer vote, the domestic funding portion passed 260-171, with 221 Democrats (Rashida Tlaib abstained) and 39 Republicans voting in support. After both parts had passed, House Speaker Nancy Pelosi stripped out the COVID-19 funding and sent the combined measure to the Senate for debate.

The collapse in COVID-19 funding, even as over 9,000 Americans succumbed to the virus last week alone, comes amid the ongoing spread of the highly infectious BA.2 variant of Omicron internationally and within the US.

White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki spelled out on Thursday what the lack of COVID-19 funding will mean in the near future: “Testing capacity... will decline this month. In April, free testing and treatments for tens of million of Americans without health insurance will end. In May, America’s supply of monoclonal antibodies will run out.”

Pelosi and other Democrats say they will introduce a measure in the House next week that would include \$15 billion for testing, treatment and distribution of vaccines. However, this stands virtually no chance of passing in the evenly divided Senate, where 60 votes are required to overcome a filibuster.

While there is “no money” for COVID-19 testing and vaccine distribution, the spending package overwhelmingly supported by the Democrats includes major increases in funding for police and border patrol forces. This includes \$100 million in new funding for Customs and Border Protection to hire more Border Patrol officers, along with an additional \$74 million to “beef up its Office of Professional Responsibility staffing,” according to an analysis by govexc.com.

The US Capitol Police department, already boasting a \$516 million budget, will receive an additional 17 percent in funding. The over \$50 million in new funding will be used to hire more officers and staff.

Included in the military portion of the omnibus budget bill is \$458 million in additional funding for Immigration and Customs Enforcement, including funding to provide “some 34,000 ICE beds—well over the 22,000 currently in use,” according to the *Hill*. Additionally, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) will see a 10 percent rise in its discretionary budget. That, together with tens of billions more in non-discretionary funding, will bring total funding for DHS this year to \$127 billion.

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