

HOUSE DEMOCRATS UNVEIL MEASURE TO RE-OPEN GOVERNMENT

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WASHINGTON (AP) — House Democrats unveiled a package of bills Monday that would re-open the federal government without approving funding for President Donald Trump’s border wall with Mexico, establishing an early confrontation that will test the new power dynamic in Washington.

The House is preparing to vote as soon as the new Congress convenes Thursday, as one of the first acts after Democrats take control, according to an aide who was not authorized to discuss the plan and spoke on condition of anonymity.

Democrats under Nancy Pelosi are all but certain to swiftly approve the two bills, making good on their pledge to try to quickly resolve the partial government shutdown that’s now in its second week. What’s unclear is whether the Republican-led Senate, under Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., will consider either measure — or if Trump would sign them into law.

“It would be the height of irresponsibility and political cynicism for Senate Republicans to now reject the same legislation they have already supported,” Pelosi and Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer said in a statement late Monday.

The White House did not immediately respond to a request for comment. The package does not



include the \$5 billion Trump wants for the wall on the southern border.

The president told Fox News Channel in an interview Monday that he was “ready, willing and able” to negotiate. He added: “No, we are not giving up. We have to have border security and the wall is a big part of border security.”

McConnell spokesman Donald Stewart made it clear Senate Republicans will not take action without Trump’s backing. “It’s simple: The Senate is not going to send something to the president that he won’t sign,” he said.

Republican senators are refusing to vote on any bills until all sides, including Trump, are in agreement. Senators were frustrated that Trump had dismissed their earlier legislation to avert the shutdown.

House Democrats did not confer with Senate Republicans on the package, but the bills are expected to have some bipartisan support because they reflect earlier spending measures already hashed out between the parties and chambers.

One bill will temporarily fund the Department of Homeland Security at current levels, with \$1.3 billion for border security, through Feb. 8, while talks continue.

The other will be on a measure made up of six other bipartisan bills — some that have already passed the Senate — to fund the departments of Agriculture, Interior, Housing and Urban Development and others closed by the partial shutdown. They would provide money through the remainder of the fiscal year, to Sept. 30.

The House is planning two separate votes for Thursday. If approved, the bills would go to the Senate. Senate Democrats support the measures, according to a senior aide who was unauthorized to discuss the plan and spoke on the condition of anonymity.

Rep. Mark Meadows, R-N.C., the chairman of the conservative House Freedom Caucus, tweeted that without funding for Trump’s wall, the package is a “nonstarter.” He said it “will not be a legitimate answer to this impasse.”

But as the shutdown drags on, pressure is expected to build on all sides for a resolution, as public parks and museums close, and some 800,000 federal workers are going without pay.

Trump could accept or reject either bill, and it’s unclear how he would respond. The president continued to insist Monday he wants to build a wall along the U.S.-Mexico border, despite assertions otherwise of three confidants.

“An all concrete Wall was NEVER ABANDONED,” Trump tweeted Monday. “Some areas will be all concrete but the experts at Border Patrol prefer a Wall that is see through (thereby making it possible to see what is happening on both sides).”



Later Monday, Trump tweeted, "The Democrats will probably submit a Bill, being cute as always, which gives everything away but gives NOTHING to Border Security, namely the Wall."

Trump's comments came after officials, including his departing chief of staff, indicated that the president's signature campaign pledge to build the wall would not be fulfilled as advertised. White House chief of staff John Kelly told the Los Angeles Times in an interview published Sunday that Trump abandoned the notion of "a solid concrete wall early on in the administration."

"To be honest, it's not a wall," Kelly said, adding that the mix of technological enhancements and "steel slat" barriers the president now wants along the border resulted from conversations with law enforcement professionals.

Sen. Lindsey Graham, R-S.C., emerged from a Sunday lunch at the White House to tell reporters that "the wall has become a metaphor for border security" and referred to "a physical barrier along the border."

Graham said Trump was "open-minded" about a broader immigration agreement, saying the budget impasse presented an opportunity to address issues beyond the border wall. But a previous attempt to reach a compromise that addressed the status of "Dreamers" — young immigrants brought to the U.S. illegally as children — broke down last year as a result of escalating White House demands.

Graham told CNN before his lunch with Trump that "there will never be a deal without wall funding."

The partial government shutdown began Dec. 22 after Trump bowed to conservative demands that he fight to make good on his vow and secure funding for the wall before Republicans lose control of the House on Wednesday. Democrats have remained committed to blocking any funding for the wall, and with neither side engaging in substantive negotiation, the effect of the partial shutdown was set to spread and to extend into the new year.