Senate passes bill to reopen government amid Democrats' rift

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Senate Majority Leader John Thune (R-S.D.) speaks to reporters on Capitol Hill in Washington on Monday. The Senate passed legislation Monday night to end the nation's longest government shutdown, after a critical splinter group of Democrats joined with Republicans and backed a spending package. The measure now moves to the House for approval.

WASHINGTON -- The Senate passed legislation Monday night to end the nation's longest government shutdown, after a critical splinter group of Democrats joined with Republicans and backed a spending package that omitted the chief concession their party had spent weeks demanding.

The 60-40 vote, on Day 41 of the shutdown, signaled a break in the gridlock that has shuttered the government for weeks, leaving hundreds of thousands of federal workers furloughed, millions of Americans at risk of losing food assistance and millions more facing air-travel disruptions.

The measure goes next to the House, which is expected to take it up no sooner than Wednesday and where the small Republican margin of control and intense Democratic opposition could make for a close vote. President Donald Trump has indicated that he will sign it.

The breakthrough came after eight senators in the Democratic caucus broke their own party's blockade of spending legislation Republicans have been trying to pass for weeks to reopen the government, prompting a bitter backlash in their ranks.

They said they had done so after concluding that Republicans were never going to accede to Democrats' central demand in the shutdown fight -- the extension of federal health care subsidies set to expire at the end of the year -- while millions of Americans continued to suffer amid the federal closure.

"We had no path forward on health care because the Republicans said, 'We will not talk about health care with the government shut down, ' " said Sen. Tim Kaine, D-Va. "And we had SNAP beneficiaries and those relying on other important services who were losing benefits because of the shutdown."

It will still take days to reopen the government. Speaker Mike Johnson on Monday urged House members -- who have not held a vote in nearly two months as they took an extended recess during the shutdown -- to begin the process of returning to Washington "right now."

At the White House, Trump said that he approved of the

plan.

"We'll be opening up our country very quickly," he said, calling the package "very good."

While the legislation omits any mention of the tax credits, Democrats said they would accept an offer by Senate Majority Leader John Thune, R-S.D., to hold a vote on the issue later this year, when the subsidies are set to expire.

But that measure, which would require 60 votes to pass, faces long odds in the Republican-controlled Senate and even less chance of advancing in the House, where Johnson would be unlikely to bring it up amid widespread opposition in his party.

Many Democrats, including a phalanx of senators across the ideological spectrum, called that commitment woefully insufficient and angrily denounced the spending deal.

After holding his party together for 40 days in the shutdown fight, Minority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., opposed the deal made by some of his own members because, he said Monday, "It fails to do anything of substance to fix America's health care crisis."

Others argued the agreement amounted to enabling Trump's agenda and tactics, when Democrats should instead be standing up to him and Republicans.

"Trump and MAGA Republicans have been shutting down the government since Inauguration Day, gutting Medicare, Medicaid and the Affordable Care Act and engaging in the greatest health care heist in history -- all to pay for tax cuts for CEO billionaires," said Sen. Edward Markey, D-Mass. "The American people want us to stop the heist, not drive the getaway car."

The compromise measure, which was largely negotiated by leaders on the Senate Appropriations Committee, includes a spending package that would fund the government through January, as well as three separate spending bills to cover programs related to agriculture, military construction and legislative agencies for most of 2026.

The package also includes a provision that would reverse layoffs of federal workers made during the shutdown and ensure retroactive pay for those who have been furloughed.

Trump, who has repeatedly defied Congress' dictates on spending matters, said Monday that he would comply with those provisions.

"I'll abide by the deal," he said.

As many as a dozen Democrats, many centrists hailing from purple states who had been uncomfortable with the idea of backing a government shutdown, had been quietly huddling for weeks in search of an off-ramp. Several privately agreed to hold the party line until at least Nov. 1, the start date for the annual open enrollment period for people who receive health coverage through the federal marketplace, according to a person familiar with the negotiations.

But as the impact of the shutdown worsened and radiated across the nation, with flight cancellations racking up ahead of Thanksgiving travel and rising uncertainty around accessibility to food stamps, moderate Democrats were ready to break from their party. In the end, the eight who did were all senators who could afford to take a political hit; two are retiring while the other six are not up for reelection next year.

"The question was, does the shutdown further the goal of achieving some needed support for the extension of the tax credits?" said Sen. Angus King, an independent of Maine who caucuses with Democrats and voted for the deal. "Our judgment was that it will not produce that result. And the evidence for that is almost seven weeks of fruitless attempts to make that happen. Would it change in a week or another week or after Thanksgiving or Christmas? And there's no evidence that it would."

"What there is evidence of," King added, "is the harm that the shutdown is doing to the country."

In a 53-47 party-line vote, Republicans defeated a last-ditch effort by Democrats on Monday night to try to add a proposal to the spending pack-

age that would extend the credits for one year.

But the fight is far from over. Having succeeded in elevating the health care subsidies as a political issue during the shutdown, Democrats are eager to keep the pressure on Republicans to extend them or suffer the consequences from voters who polls show overwhelmingly want to see them protected.

Also rejected Monday on a party-line vote was a Democratic effort to add a provision to bar the White House from using a maneuver known as a "pocket rescission," in which the administration seeks to unilaterally cancel spending approved by Congress by making the request so late in the fiscal year that lawmakers do not have time to reject it before the funding expires. The Trump administration used that maneuver this year to cancel $4.9 billion that Congress had approved for foreign aid programs.

Senators also defeated an effort by Sen. Rand Paul, R-Ky., to remove language from the bill that would effectively ban the unregulated sale of intoxicating hemp-derived products. It was rejected on a bipartisan vote of 76-26, allowing the ban to stand.

Also tucked into the legislation was a provision that would provide a wide legal avenue for Republican senators whose phone records were seized as part of the investigation by Jack Smith, the former special counsel, into the riot at the Capitol on Jan. 6, 2021, to sue the government for at least half a million dollars each.

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