In Efforts to Avoid Another Shutdown, Congress Could Harm HIV Funding

Meanwhile, the White House scrambles to release its 2020 budget request.

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Negotiations to fund the federal government through fiscal year 2019, ending on October 1, are still under way, with the continuing resolution (CR) that is currently funding major portions of it set to expire on February 15. The impending deadline gives legislators only five working days to come to an agreement on border security that House Democrats and President Trump will all accept.

The Homeland Security appropriations conference committee members are continuing to work towards a mutually acceptable deal, but are not going to meet their own optimistic Friday deadline. Conference committee co-chair Sen. Richard Shelby (R-AL) is confident that the legislators will achieve a solution by the February 15 CR expiration, and Leader Nancy Pelosi (D-CA-12) has announced that she will support whatever deal comes from the bipartisan, bicameral committee.

Democrats have signaled they may support some funding for border fencing, but it remains unclear what Trump will consider a "win" in terms of his demands for border security funding. If President Trump hints that he doesn't support the deal, it is unlikely that Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-KY) would cross him by bringing it to the floor for a vote at all. Director of the Office of Management and Budget Mick Mulvaney has said that if the President's $5.7 billion request is not met in appropriations funding through Congress, the Office will consider executive actions to fund it.

In the aftermath of the longest shutdown in U.S. history initially caused by this funding disagreement, some members of Congress are considering legislative solutions to partisan negotiations that wouldn't shut down the government and harm the American public through the enactment of automatic continuing resolutions (CRs).

Some bids are straightforward — simply enacting automatic previous-year funding levels when appropriations negotiations stall — while some are actually just means to cut federal spending, regardless of appropriators' work or potential harm to Americans. While all are likely well intentioned to protect citizens, automatic CR proposals would disincentivize timely negotiations by giving appropriators a never-ending snooze button, which would certainly invite partisan gridlock. For the ultimate benefit of people living with and affected by HIV in the United States, AIDS United

is against the institution of automatic CRs. Click here to tell your members of Congress not to allow funding scapegoats by opposing automatic CRs.

At the same time, initial planning for the fiscal year 2020 budget is also ongoing. Parts of President Trump's 2020 Budget Request — including the message, top priorities, and summary tables — will be released with week of March 11. The rest (appendix, major savings & reforms volumes, and analytical perspectives, among other elements) will be released the following week of March 18. CQ reports that the budget request will propose higher defense spending than permitted under current budget caps, but will have non-defense discretionary spending (which covers essentially all HIV care and prevention in the US) held at the sequestered statutory cap — $55 billion below current levels.

After President Trump's recent remarks at the State of the Union pledging to end the domestic HIV epidemic by 2030, the future for HIV funding in the President's budget is uncertain. While President Trump has slashed both domestic and global HIV funding in his previous 2 budgets, the administration's unveiling of its plan to end the HIV epidemic and HHS Assistant Secretary for Health Brett Giroir's claim that there will be "substantial new funding" in the President's budget to support this plan could result in some gains for HIV treatment and prevention programs. At the same time, the Trump administration is still expected to cut funding for other programs and agencies that support general public health, meaning that this budget request will likely be at odds with any legitimate efforts to end the domestic HIV epidemic. AIDS United and 22 of our partners have called on the administration to see to it that their words are backed up by their actions, and to ensure that they appropriately support programs that will truly move us toward the end of the HIV epidemic.

Check back frequently with AIDS United's Policy Update for all the latest on HIV treatment, support, and prevention policy & funding.

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