Summertime Struggles Loom for Congress as Budget Talks Stall

Does another federal government shutdown loom?

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It's been another week of stalling on federal funding here in Washington, with only 81 days remaining until the end-of-the-fiscal-year deadline that, without congressional and presidential action, will shut down the federal government. As previously reported, legislators and administration officials are in discussions on total government spending levels for fiscal year 2020. A deal between White House officials, Senate Republicans, and House Democrats still has not been reached, and although the House has proceeded with assumed spending levels and passed ten out of twelve appropriations bills, Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-KY) is keeping his chamber from considering any funding bills until an agreement is made on what the President would sign into law.

Representatives still face challenges and significant political reckonings in passing their remaining two spending bills funding the Legislative Branch and Homeland Security agencies of the federal government, each coming with their own set of controversies and negotiations. Legislators will need to debate whether they include a cost-of-living wage adjustment for Members of Congress, a politically unappealing topic for most members, in passing the Legislative Branch bill. The bill was set to be part of an early June spending package, which also funded most domestic HIV spending through the Department of Health and Human Services, but was pulled for further discussions before votes.

The Homeland Security bill is also expected to stall the House's appropriations work, as agencies under the Department, including Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and Customs and Border Patrol (CBP), face increasing scrutiny for perpetrating human rights abuses at the southern US border. And these issues are merely a portent of what's to come in reconciling spending bills with the GOP-controlled Senate, which will likely not support any measures for administration oversight that the House Democrats might manage to get through their chamber.

While the House is not expected to vote on these two spending bills until after Congress' August recess, Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-CA-12) has agreed that a deal on the budget caps and debt limit should be reached before lawmakers leave Washington for their summer. Leaders in both chambers are pushing for a two-year agreement on spending caps and the debt limit.

Check back in frequently to AIDS United’s policy update for the latest in federal funding and policy impacting those living with and vulnerable to HIV.

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