

# THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

## MCCONNELL TRIES NEW TACTIC IN HOMELAND SECURITY FUNDING FIGHT

By Kristina Peterson and Andrew Grossman  
February 23, 2015

Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell said Monday he planned to bring up a bill targeting President Barack Obama 's recent immigration policy, separating it from the Department of Homeland Security funding that Republicans have tried to use as leverage in the immigration fight so far.

The move appeared unlikely to defuse the standoff that has paralyzed Congress for weeks, with the agency's funding set to expire on Friday at midnight. Mr. McConnell (R., Ky.) didn't say how he planned to address Homeland Security funding, leaving open the question of whether Congress will reach a deal to keep the agency running.

A lapse in funding for DHS would force tens of thousands of border guards, Secret Service agents and airport-security officers to work without pay; stall distribution of money for rebuilding after natural disasters; and stop analysis of threats from terrorism and storms alike, agency officials said Monday.

"A shutdown of Homeland Security would have serious consequences and amount to a serious disruption in our ability to protect the homeland," Homeland Security Secretary Jeh Johnson said Monday at the headquarters of U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, before a backdrop of dozens of agency officials and uniformed personnel.

Yet because many of the department's workers are needed to protect lives or property, they would still be required to work during a shutdown, even though they wouldn't get paid. About 85% of Homeland Security's roughly 226,000 permanent employees are considered essential, a category that requires them to show up whether the department is funded or not.

The House last month passed a bill extending the agency's funding through September and rolling back a series of Mr. Obama's immigration policies. Senate Democrats have blocked that measure in four different roll-call votes, most recently on Monday evening.

"The new bill I described offers another option we can turn to," Mr. McConnell said Monday evening. "It's another way to get the Senate unstuck from a Democrat filibuster and move the debate forward."

Until now, most Republicans have said they would only extend the department's funding if they can block the implementation of Mr. Obama's November decision to shield millions of illegal immigrants from deportation.

But Democrats are unlikely to agree to vote on the new bill unless they have an iron-clad guarantee that it would be accompanied by full funding for Homeland Security, said a Senate Democratic aide. Unless Mr. McConnell has full consent of all 100 senators to speed up proceedings, a first procedural vote couldn't occur until Friday at the earliest.

"It's becoming clear Sen. McConnell realizes he must separate himself from the far right, but the bottom line is this proposal doesn't bring us any closer to actually funding DHS, and Republicans still have no real plan to achieve that goal," Sen. Charles Schumer of New York, a member of Democratic leadership, said Monday night.

If Mr. McConnell were to bring up a funding measure that doesn't block Mr. Obama's immigration program, it would face opposition from conservatives, who view the funding as the leverage needed to force Democrats to make concessions on immigration.

Many Senate Republicans said they expect the chamber will end up passing a short-term bill, to buy more time to work out the issue in negotiations or in the courts. But even that could face high hurdles passing the House. Some House GOP aides said they expected funding would lapse at week's end.

Republicans said they relished the prospect of having Democrats vote specifically on the president's November executive action. Some Democrats have criticized the president for sidestepping Congress on immigration, but so far Senate Democrats have blocked all measures yoking efforts to undo it with Homeland Security funding.

In the event of a lapse, Customs and Border Protection personnel would still staff border checkpoints. The Secret Service would still guard the president and his family. Transportation Security Administration officers would continue to monitor metal detectors at airports. But none would be paid for performing those duties.

The Citizenship and Immigration Service, which administers the controversial immigration program, is funded largely by fees paid by those applying to change their immigration status, so the bulk of that office's employees would stay on the job and still receive paychecks.

In a letter to employees Monday, Mr. Johnson said Homeland Security's component agencies were preparing for a shutdown and would soon begin informing staff about their plans. Still, he called such an event unlikely.

The expected lack of immediate reductions in law-enforcement presence made some Republican lawmakers question how serious a shutdown would be.

"Is it worth shutting down DHS? It's not clear what the impact is, because there are a lot of things supposedly funded anyway. The impact may be smaller than we think," said Rep. Thomas Massie (R., Ky.), before Congress went on recess earlier this month. Lawmakers return to Washington this week.

Some functions would halt if funding runs out. Many administrative workers would be furloughed, preventing payments to vendors and for reconstruction from natural disasters, such as superstorm Sandy. Training would be put on hold.

Customs and Border Protection Commissioner Gil Kerlikowske said newly hired agents and officers undergoing training would be sent home. When that happened during the 2013 government shutdown, some took new jobs and didn't return. And some Homeland Security components, such as the Domestic Nuclear Detection Office, which manages efforts to detect and respond to nuclear incidents, would see all but a handful of their employees furloughed.

Federal Emergency Management Agency Administrator Craig Fugate disputed the notion that, because the vast majority of his department's employees would remain on the job, operations wouldn't be affected. FEMA wouldn't be able to respond to disasters unless life or property was in danger, he said. Training for first responders would be canceled and, in many cases, wouldn't be rescheduled.

The threat of any effect on Homeland Security's operations has prompted some Republicans to try to find a way to keep money flowing to the department – especially after a Texas judge's decision last week to halt Mr. Obama's immigration program. On Monday, the administration asked the judge to stay his injunction until an appeals court hears the case.

"In light of the threats America faces – from Islamic terrorists to cyberattacks – the political impasse on DHS funding must end," Senate Homeland Security Committee Chairman Ron Johnson (R., Wis.) said Monday. "Responsible members of both parties must work together to find some way to fund DHS without further delay."

Homeland Security officials also are worried money might come in the form of another temporary measure that just extends current levels of funding for a few weeks or months, instead of a regular appropriations bill. Such funding, they said, makes it impossible to adjust to new needs, like more security for the Southern border and extra hiring of Secret Service agents in preparation for the 2016 presidential campaign.