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## SENATE APPROVES TWO-YEAR BUDGET DEAL, STOPGAP SPENDING BILL

*Upper chamber passes breakthrough deal too late to avoid shutdown; House votes next*

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A two-year budget agreement reached by Senate leaders and the White House exposed a rift Thursday among House Democrats, whose votes will be needed to keep the government open beyond a midnight deadline.

Enough Democrats appeared ready to support the budget agreement unveiled Wednesday to prevent a shutdown Friday, separating themselves from House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi (D., Calif.) who said she would oppose the bill without a clear commitment from House Speaker Paul Ryan (R., Wis.) to hold an open immigration debate in the House.

The Senate is expected to start voting on the legislation Thursday afternoon. With support from both party leaders, the bill is expected to pass. The bill then goes to the House, which is expected to hold a vote later Thursday. It faces a tougher road there, where conservative Republicans are balking at the increased spending levels in the bill and some Democrats refused to back it without having first secured legal protections for young undocumented immigrants known as Dreamers.

The president is expected to sign the bill if it passes.

The budget deal would set the overall spending levels for the remainder of fiscal year 2018, which ends September 30, as well as fiscal 2019, but lawmakers will need several weeks to write that into detailed spending legislation to fund the government through September. Congress will still need to pass a short-term spending bill on Thursday to avoid a government shutdown when its current funding expires at 12:01 a.m. Friday.

President Donald Trump ended the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals, or DACA, program in September and gave Congress until March 5 to legislate a replacement. Starting March 5, nearly 1,000 young people a day will lose work permits and protection from deportation. Activists have pushed Democratic leaders to use their leverage over the spending bills to take a stand on immigration.

But Democrats who tried that approach last month said they had no desire to repeat the three-day government shutdown. Many said they planned to support a bill that comprised many Democratic priorities, including disaster relief aid and funding for children's health centers. Some said the immigration debate shouldn't overshadow all their other priorities.

"It is among the very toughest," said Rep. Beto O'Rourke (D., Texas) of the vote on the spending package. "You don't have a clear understanding how we'd be able to ensure that Dreamers can continue to be successful in this country and have a path toward citizenship. And on that line it isn't clear that voting 'no' gets you to that."

Mrs. Pelosi spoke for eight hours on the House floor on Wednesday, advocating for the young immigrants and setting a record for the length of the speech. She received a standing ovation when she walked into a caucus dinner Wednesday night, but some Democratic lawmakers said Mrs. Pelosi's speech may have misleadingly broadcast that their sole ambition is to resolve the immigration debate.

"It may have once again reinforced with the American public that that is our singular priority, but I think that is not really the case," Rep. Marcia Fudge (D., Ohio) said of Mrs. Pelosi's speech. Ms. Fudge said she planned to vote for the budget deal, which she said contained "almost everything that I wanted."

Democrats' votes will be needed in the House because many conservative Republicans are expected to vote against the package, which both significantly raises federal spending and suspends the debt limit through March 1, 2019. On Wednesday night the House Freedom Caucus, a group of roughly three-dozen House conservatives, took an official position against the budget deal.

"We're spending more money than we ever spent in the Obama era, said Rep. Jeff Duncan (R., S.C.), a member of the Freedom Caucus.

Democrats this week began more openly questioning the wisdom of their leaders' attempts to use their leverage on spending bills to try to secure legal protections for the Dreamers.

"We weren't going to get DACA through the budget process no matter what, so yeah we can scream and yell and Nancy can get on the floor for eight hours and I congratulate her for doing that," said Rep. John Yarmuth (D., Ky.), "but it still wasn't going to get us a resolution."

Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R., Ky.) promised an open debate over the fate of the young undocumented immigrants. Mrs. Pelosi said she wanted the same commitment from Mr. Ryan, who has said he would only bring a bill to the House floor that had President Donald Trump's support. But on Thursday, Mr. Ryan said he was confident they could find a bipartisan bill that the president would back.

"I know that there is a real commitment to solving the DACA challenge in both political parties – that's a commitment I share," Mr. Ryan told reporters, using unusually conciliatory language. "Please know we are committed to getting this done."

The funding deal congressional leaders agreed to on Wednesday would boost discretionary spending levels in 2018 and 2019 by around \$300 billion above caps set in law earlier this decade, plus another \$89 billion in relief for regions rebuilding after last year's natural disasters.

The levels represent a substantial increase over what President Barack Obama submitted in his final budget request to Congress. The current proposal would spend around 13 percent more for the current budget year that ends on Sept. 30 than Mr. Obama had proposed spending in the same year, and around 14 percent more for the budget year after that.

The budget deal would be the first agreement to lift federal spending above not one, but two sets of spending curbs agreed to in 2011, as part of a compromise aimed at ending a bruising battle over the debt ceiling.