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SENATE DEMOCRATS BLOCK GOP MOVE ON OBAMA IMMIGRATION POLICY

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Senate Democrats Tuesday blocked a House bill aimed at thwarting President Barack Obama's immigration executive action, leaving the chambers at an impasse about how to prevent the Homeland Security Department from running out of money at month's end.

In an early illustration of the limits of the new GOP majority's power in the Senate, the House immigration bill stalled on a 51-48 procedural vote in the Senate.

All Democrats opposed the bill, which would fund the Homeland Security Department through September and gut Mr. Obama's immigration policies in recent years, including his decision last November to shield millions of illegal immigrants from deportation on his own.

With the Homeland Security Department's current funding slated to expire on Feb. 27, lawmakers in the wake of Tuesday's vote scrambled to blame the other party for jeopardizing national-security funding on a day when Islamic State jihadists released a video purporting to show the death of a captured Jordanian air force pilot.

Republicans criticized Democrats for being unwilling to begin debate on the bill, passed by the House last month. It would end a 2012 program that offers safe harbor to young people brought to the U.S. illegally as children, subjecting some 600,000 people in the program to deportation.

"If the president wants Congress to pass a Department of Homeland Security appropriation bill, then he needs to talk to our friends in the minority here in the Senate who just blocked consideration of a \$40 billion Department of Homeland Security funding bill," Majority Whip John Cornyn (R., Texas) said on the Senate floor Tuesday after the vote.

Democrats said Republicans had saddled funding for Homeland Security with politically toxic measures, and even Democrats who had been critical of Mr. Obama's decision to bypass Congress on immigration opposed bringing the House bill to the floor.

"At this time when our country faces many threats, both at home and abroad, I am not willing to hold our Department of Homeland Security funding hostage over any piece of legislation," said Sen. Joe Manchin (D., W.Va.).

All but three Republicans voted to consider the House bill. GOP Sen. Mark Kirk, of Illinois, didn't vote, while Sen. Dean Heller (R., Nev.) voted no, saying the bill "only includes language that complicates the process of finding a solution" on immigration.

Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R., Ky.) voted no in a procedural move that enables him to bring the bill up for consideration again.

GOP lawmakers said they may try to vote on the House bill again to put pressure on Senate Democrats. Republicans control only 54 of the chamber's seats, and 60 votes are usually needed for bills to clear procedural hurdles.

Senate Minority Leader Harry Reid (D., Nev.) said Democrats would oppose any legislation tacking on additional immigration provisions to the bipartisan agreement reached last year on spending levels for Homeland Security in this fiscal year.

But many House Republicans said they are unwilling to simply pass a bill funding Homeland Security without a bigger fight over immigration. GOP leaders opted to split off the agency's funding last year, when Congress funded the rest of the government through September, to use it as leverage in the fight over the president's immigration policy.

With no compromise in sight, one option GOP leaders are considering is passing a short-term extension of Homeland Security's current funding for 30 or 60 days, according to GOP aides.

A short-term extension wouldn't include some new funds agreed to in the funding bill negotiated by top members of the House and Senate Appropriations committees last December.

That agreement, for instance, would fund more than 4,000 additional detention beds used to hold those who have crossed the border while they wait for court appearances, compared with an extension of current funding.

A short-term extension wouldn't include funding for new family detention facilities.

A stopgap funding measure also would exclude \$25 million dedicated toward improving the Secret Service, after an intruder was able to climb over a White House fence in September 2014, as well as another \$25.5 million for hiring and training more agents to protect presidential candidates during the 2016 election cycle – both of which are included in the Homeland Security spending agreement.

"We lose a lot of really good stuff in that bill" with a short-term extension, said Rep. John Carter (R., Texas), chairman of the Appropriations Homeland Security subcommittee.

Some Republicans said a short-term funding bill would give them more time to fight for a change in Mr. Obama's immigration policies, while others have suggested they would be willing to let the agency's funding lapse if Congress can't reverse the president's executive action.

Rep. Kevin Cramer (R., N.D.) said a short-term extension would be appropriate if the Senate can't pass legislation blocking the president's executive action before Homeland Security funding runs out. "This issue of the president's overreach, his amnesty overreach, demands more of a fight," he said.