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WHITE HOUSE TO PLAY UP HOMELAND SECURITY ROLE

By Byron Tau
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The White House, in a standoff with Congress over funding the Department of Homeland Security, will try to keep the heat on lawmakers this week by playing up the department's role in combating terrorism and violent extremism.

The Obama administration this week is holding a three-day summit on international and domestic efforts to combat violent extremism, with speakers including President Barack Obama, Secretary of State John Kerry and Homeland Security chief Jeh Johnson. The event comes after gruesome executions by Islamic State militants and attacks in Paris and now Copenhagen.

Congressional Republicans have tried to tie Homeland Security funding to a rollback of some of Mr. Obama's domestic immigration policies. With Congress having left town for a 10-day recess, lawmakers have only a handful of working days to resolve the funding impasse before the department, known as DHS, runs out of money on Feb. 27.

A shutdown wouldn't affect many of the core functions of the department, which guards the nation's borders and enforces immigration law, but thousands of employees classified as nonessential would be furloughed. The department's 200,000 essential employees, including border-patrol agents, customs officials and Transportation Security Administration screeners, would be working without a paycheck, at least for the time being.

House Speaker John Boehner said over the weekend he is "certainly" willing to allow funding to lapse in less than two weeks over the immigration question. The Ohio Republican called on Senate Democrats to act on funding legislation the House passed this year and saying that his chamber wouldn't bring up an alternative plan.

"The House has acted," Mr. Boehner said Sunday on Fox. "We've done our job. Senate Democrats are the ones putting us in this precarious position."

Senate Democrats have blocked the House bill in repeated procedural votes, saying they are holding out for funding legislation without any immigration provisions. The White House has threatened to veto any bill that unwinds Mr. Obama's immigration measures.

"We shouldn't be playing politics with the agency's funding," Sen. Jeanne Shaheen (D., N.H.) said in a statement Monday.

GOP leaders set up the standoff over Homeland Security in December when they extended the agency's funding only through February, while funding the rest of the government through September. Many conservatives hoped holding up approval of department funding would keep Mr. Obama from enacting his plan to offer millions of illegal immigrants a haven from deportation and a chance to apply for work permits.

Administration officials have said a funding lapse would imperil the livelihoods of federal law enforcement over a political dispute. "I don't see exactly how Congress is going to resolve this," White House Chief of Staff Denis McDonough said on CBS on Sunday.

But, he said, "law-enforcement officials associated with defending our borders, protecting us against cyberattacks, defending our airports and making sure that airlines and aviation security is upheld" shouldn't have to work without pay.

A senior administration official on Monday described this week's summit as a chance to have a nonpartisan conversation around crucial security issues. "DHS is an important player and has been a strong partner in these efforts," the official said.