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Biden infuriated by Ukraine impasse but Republicans refuse to bend over border

Байден розлючений тупиковою ситуацією з допомогою України, але республіканці відмовляються переступати кордон

На думку старшої американської політичної репортерки «The Guardian» Джоан Е. Гreve, неприйняття законопроєкту про Україну відображає тенденцію «Америка насамперед», що росте серед республіканців, і прагнення до ще більш суворої безпеки кордонів. Коли росія вперше вторглася до України у лютому 2022 року, допомога Києву була двопартійним проєктом. У травні 2022 р. пакет допомоги Україні на суму 40 млрд дол. пройшов через Палату представників із голосами 368 проти 57 та в Сенаті із голосами 86 проти 11. Джоан Е. Гreve зазначає, що раніше демократи контролювали обидві палати, наразі республіканці мають незначну більшість у Палаті представників. Ця нова сила надала їм сміливості наполягати на тому, щоб будь-яке додаткове фінансування для України також включало надійні заходи щодо забезпечення безпеки кордонів. Демократи вважають, що відправка фінансової допомоги союзникам США таким, як Україна, приносить користь всій країні і, отже, не має бути областю зіткнення між двома сторонами.

<https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2023/dec/07/biden-ukraine-funding-bill-mexico-border>

Failure to pass Ukraine bill reflects growing ‘America first’ trend among Republicans – and a desire for even stricter border security

It is an astonishing bit of horse-trading over Ukraine that has left Democrats infuriated, even baffled. After Senate Republicans blocked a supplemental funding package on Wednesday to aid the country in its fight against the Russian invasion, demanding tough new southern border controls in exchange, the chamber’s leading Democrat took to the floor.

Calling it “a sad night in the history of the Senate”, Chuck Schumer bemoaned the vote as a disappointing reflection on the country, a step away from letting Vladimir Putin “walk right through Ukraine and right through Europe”.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskiy meets with President Joe Biden at the White House in Washington
Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskiy walks down the White House colonnade to the Oval Office with U.S. President Joe Biden during a visit to the White House in Washington, September 21, 2023. Doug Mills/Pool via REUTERS

Senate Republicans block funding bill that included aid for Ukraine and Israel

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“Republicans just blocked a very much needed proposal to send funding for Ukraine, funding for Israel, humanitarian aid for innocent civilians in Gaza, and funding for the Indo-Pacific,” Schumer said.

“If there is a word for what we most need now, it is to be serious.”

The 49-51 vote reflected a growing trend in Congress that has become a source of distress for the White House. When Russia first invaded Ukraine in February 2022, aiding Kyiv was a bipartisan project. In May of that year, a \$40bn Ukraine aid package sailed through the House with a vote of 368-57, and the Senate with a vote of 86 -11.

But as the war has stretched on, more Republican lawmakers have turned against aid to Ukraine, embracing Donald Trump's "America first" approach to foreign policy. When the House voted in September on a bill to provide \$300m to train and equip Ukrainian fighters, a majority of Republicans – 117 members – opposed it.

Republicans also now have more power in Congress than they did when the war in Ukraine began. Although Democrats previously controlled both chambers, Republicans now hold a narrow majority in the House. That new strength has emboldened them to insist that any supplemental funding for Ukraine also include robust border security measures, many of which are unpalatable to Democrats.

The standoff comes at a dangerous point in Ukraine's fight against Russia. The White House has warned that the US is "out of money and nearly out of time" to assist Ukraine, suggesting the Russian military will soon gain ground in the war without another infusion of funding for Kyiv.

Democrats and Republicans have been negotiating over a potential compromise on border measures to get the aid package across the finish line, but those talks stalled out over the weekend. On Wednesday Joe Biden accused Republicans of negotiating in bad faith.

"Republicans think they can get everything they want without any bipartisan compromise. That's not the answer," Biden said. "And now they're willing to literally kneecap Ukraine on the battlefield and damage our national security in the process."

I think I'm going to demand that we pass an assault weapons ban or I won't fund Ukraine
Chris Murphy

Despite the stark rhetoric, Republicans have presented a united front in their demands for more severe changes to immigration policy. Even Republican lawmakers who remain strongly supportive of additional Ukraine aid, such as the Senate minority leader, Mitch McConnell, have embraced this stance. On Wednesday, McConnell joined his 48 Republican colleagues in opposing the motion to advance the aid package, and he rejected Schumer's exhortation to "get serious" about threats to democracy.

"It is profoundly unserious to pretend that national security priorities don't include securing our nation's borders, to warn about borders in jeopardy and not start with the one that's being overrun here at home," McConnell said on Thursday. "I'm not in need of any lectures about on the gravity of the challenges facing national security today."

The gridlock has angered and at times perplexed Democrats. In their minds, sending financial aid to US allies such as Ukraine benefits the entire country and thus should be an area of common ground between the two parties. But the recent negotiations appear to have reframed Ukraine aid as a Democratic priority that can only be achieved through concessions to Republicans, specifically on the issue of immigration. That shifting dynamic has not escaped the notice of some frustrated Democrats on Capitol Hill.

"I think I'm going to demand that we pass an assault weapons ban or I won't fund Ukraine," Senator Chris Murphy, a Democrat of Connecticut, told HuffPost. "I guess that's how things get done around here."

Despite that frustration, Biden appeared open to continuing negotiations on Wednesday, saying he was willing to make "significant compromises on the border" to advance the aid package.

McConnell similarly described Wednesday's failed vote as "a new opportunity to make real progress on legislation that addresses urgent national security priorities".

Schumer also appeared prepared to reopen negotiations on Wednesday, even as he implored Republicans to "come up with something serious instead of the extreme policies they've presented thus far".

"This is a serious moment that will have lasting consequences for the 21st century. If Ukraine falls, Putin will not stop there. He will be emboldened," Schumer said.

"Western democracy will begin to enter an age of decline if we aren't willing to defend it. This Senate – this Republican party – must get serious."