



House Democrats Block Republicans' Push for Oversight of Ukraine Aid

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House Democrats have blocked an audit of billions of dollars of U.S. military and economic aid to Ukraine, signaling a bitter partisan fight ahead as the incoming Republican majority vows to scrutinize what it calls President Biden's "blank check" for Kyiv's war with Russia.

The measure, calling on the Pentagon and State Department to provide Congress with documents on U.S. aid to Ukraine since the Russian invasion in February, was defeated by a 26-22 House Foreign Affairs Committee vote on Tuesday. The vote blocked the bill from receiving a vote on the House floor.

Committee Chairman Gregory W. Meeks, New York Democrat, called the resolution led by Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene, Georgia Republican, an "extremist" ploy to "undermine strong bipartisan support for Ukrainian freedom and sovereignty."

"This measure plays straight, directly, to [Russian President] Vladimir Putin's hands," Mr. Meeks said. "This is not the time for us to be divided. We've held together with NATO and the [European Union] and our allies. Let's not fall into this trap."

Ms. Greene has been critical of sending U.S. taxpayer dollars to Ukraine. She argues that the funds should be put to use to secure America's southern border — a position held by a small group of Republicans since the start of the war.

Her calls for transparency are in line with the more broadly held view among Republicans that the U.S. should not continue sending "blank checks" to Ukraine.

"The resolution didn't say anything about being pro-Ukrainian war or anti-Ukrainian war. None of that language is in there," Ms. Greene told The Washington Times. "I am simply asking for an audit, which I believe the American people deserve. That's not even political."

"If the Democrats think it's extreme for the American people to have transparency about where their hard-earned tax dollars are going in Ukraine, then I think the Democrats need to consider how they're representing our country," she said. "I think it's extreme to tell the American people that they don't deserve an audit of where their money is going."

Rep. Michael T. McCaul of Texas, the top Republican on the committee and a staunch advocate for continued U.S. support to Ukraine, argued prior to the vote that support does not have to come at the expense of transparency.

“Every single U.S. dollar counts, and the Biden administration should expect the Republican-controlled majority in the House next Congress to be vigilant in demanding transparency and accountability for U.S. assistance to Ukraine,” Mr. McCaul said. “The American taxpayer deserves this.”

Ukrainian-born Rep. Victoria Spartz, Indiana Republican, said a lack of oversight on U.S. aid “could be detrimental to the long-term support of this important cause.”

“It’s unfortunate and irresponsible that Democrats in Congress are not performing one of their main functions: oversight of the executive branch regardless of who is in charge,” she told The Times.

Ms. Greene introduced the measure with 11 Republican co-sponsors last month on the heels of the White House’s request for an additional \$37.7 billion in aid to Ukraine.

The request includes \$21.7 billion in additional military aid to Kyiv and to replenish U.S. stockpiles of weapons that have been sent there.

The White House also is requesting \$14.5 billion for direct budget support for the Ukrainian government and humanitarian assistance, \$626 million for nuclear security support for Ukraine and to reduce energy costs, and \$900 million for health care assistance for Ukrainian refugees.

The latest request is on top of more than \$66 billion in economic, humanitarian and military aid to Ukraine approved by Congress since the Russian invasion. The majority of those funds, \$39.7 billion, have been allocated for security assistance.

The sum represents the largest obligation of U.S. security assistance to a single country in a single year since 1949, according to an analysis by the Center for International Policy, outpacing U.S. support at the height of the wars in Vietnam, Iraq and Afghanistan.

The \$39.7 billion in U.S. security assistance to Ukraine in just one year totals more than a third of the \$93.9 billion in assistance provided to Afghanistan throughout that 20-year war.

“We were tracking where weapons were ending up in Afghanistan,” said Cato Institute defense and foreign policy analyst Jordan Cohen. “We’re doing a very limited amount of that in Ukraine right now.”

“If we can’t tell where our weapons are going to end up, that’s a problem,” he said. “And Americans don’t want to talk about it right now.”

The Pentagon and State Department have outlined plans to track the flood of weapons and assistance provided to Ukraine. But officials acknowledge that, without a robust U.S. presence on the ground, tracking weapons shipments to the frontlines has proved to be challenging.

“We don’t know where these weapons go,” Ms. Greene said. “That just means that America is willing to write blank checks and not see where our money is spent. That’s a very dangerous place.”

Democrats argue that adding controls will slow aid to the frontlines, putting Ukraine’s ability to defend itself at stake.

Rep. Sara Jacobs, California Democrat and member of the committee, said that while she supports oversight of U.S. lethal aid, the proposal put forward by Ms. Greene is not the way to go. Ms. Jacobs said she has little doubt that Ukraine is putting the aid to appropriate use.

“I think we’ve seen the Ukrainians have huge success on the battlefield, which they wouldn’t be able to do if they were misusing what we were giving them,” she said. “It’s our job to continue making sure we’re working closely with them and doing the oversight required, which is what the Foreign Affairs Committee has been and will continue to be doing.”

Ms. Greene’s resolution comes amid fractures in both parties over support for the war effort.

In October, 30 liberal House lawmakers urged President Biden in an open letter to push more assertively for peace talks, a clear break with the president.

The lawmakers suggested that Mr. Biden would have strong Democratic support for aid to Ukraine if he followed their advice and urged the president to “pair the military and economic support the United States has provided to Ukraine with a proactive diplomatic push.”

The letter marked the first indication that unanimous support within the Democratic Party for Mr. Biden’s Ukraine policy could be at risk unless future funds come with diplomatic demands.

Rep. Pramila Jayapal, Washington Democrat and Congressional Progressive Caucus chairwoman, withdrew the letter under intense pressure from party leaders.

House Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy, California Republican, warned in October that Congress would not provide a “blank check” for Ukraine if Republicans were to win the majority in the midterm elections. Republicans take control next month.

Most Republican lawmakers, however, still support funding Ukraine, despite 57 Republicans in the House and 11 in the Senate voting against a \$40 billion aid package in May.

Mr. Cohen said those dynamics continue to be on display over what he said is a “fairly moderate position” to call for further transparency over U.S. aid.

“Because of iconoclasts like Marjorie Taylor Greene, it’s being viewed as an extreme position,” he said.