

Schumer Will Clear the Way for G.O.P. Spending Bill, Breaking With His Party

Many Democrats had agitated for the party to hang together and block the measure in defiance of President Trump, but the leader said doing so would prompt a shutdown that would only empower Mr. Trump.

**By Carl Hulse and Catie Edmondson
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Senator Chuck Schumer of New York, the minority leader, broke with his party on Thursday and lined up enough Democrats to advance a Republican-written bill to keep federal funding flowing past a midnight Friday deadline, arguing that Democrats could not allow a government shutdown that many of them have demanded.

During a private luncheon with Democrats, Mr. Schumer stunned many of his colleagues by announcing that he planned to vote to allow the G.O.P. bill to move forward, and indicated that he had enough votes to help Republicans break any filibuster by his own party against the measure, according to attendees and people familiar with the discussion.

It was a turnabout from just a day earlier, when [Mr. Schumer proclaimed that Democrats were “unified” against the legislation](#), and a remarkable move at a time when many of the party’s members in both chambers and progressive activists have been agitating vocally for senators to block it in defiance of President Trump.

In a speech hours later on the Senate floor, Mr. Schumer announced his plan to vote to move forward with the Republican measure, which would fund the government through Sept. 30. He argued that if Democrats stood in the way, it would lead to a shutdown that would only further empower Mr. Trump and Elon Musk in their bid to defund and dismantle federal programs.

“The Republican bill is a terrible option,” Mr. Schumer said in his evening speech. “It is deeply partisan. It doesn’t address far too many of this country’s needs. But I believe allowing Donald Trump to take even much more power via a government shutdown is a far worse option.”

In a shutdown, Mr. Schumer said, “the Trump administration would have full authority to deem whole agencies, programs and personnel nonessential, furloughing staff with no promise that they would ever be rehired.”

He also warned that if the government closed, Mr. Trump and Republicans would have no incentive to reopen it, since they could selectively fund “their favorite departments and agencies, while leaving other vital services that they don’t like to languish.”

His announcement came little more than 24 hours before a shutdown deadline. If Congress fails to approve legislation extending federal funding, it will lapse at 12:01 a.m. on Saturday.

In a meeting with reporters after his remarks, Mr. Schumer declined to confirm that he had sufficient Democratic votes to move the legislation past procedural hurdles, saying that senators were making their own decisions. But other Democrats said they were confident that he had the backing to push the measure forward.

Senate Republicans are expected to need the support of at least eight Democrats to steer around a filibuster. Other than Mr. Schumer, only one Democrat, Senator John Fetterman of Pennsylvania, has said he will support the bill.

Mr. Schumer has long seen responsibility for government shutdowns as a political albatross. But many Democrats on Capitol Hill have refused to go along with the stopgap spending measure, regarding it as their only leverage against Mr. Trump. All but one House Democrat voted against the plan on Tuesday, and many of them, along with their colleagues in the Senate, have spent the last few days pressing to hold firm against it to challenge the president.

Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez of New York said on CNN that it would be a “mistake” for Mr. Schumer not to block the bill.

“I hope that individuals that are considering that reconsider it,” Ms. Ocasio-Cortez said. “I genuinely do. I don’t think it’s what New Yorkers want.”

In lengthy closed-door group discussions over the past three days, Senate Democrats have agonized over how to handle the spending bill, which would keep government funding largely flat over the next six months.

Many of them described an impossible choice between two evils: supporting a bill that would give the Trump administration wide latitude to continue its unilateral efforts to slash government employees and programs, or a shutdown that would also give Mr. Trump and his team broad leeway to decide what to fund.

Several Democrats — including both centrists and progressives — declared that they could not back legislation that would give that kind of power to the president and Mr. Musk. They groused that Republicans had unilaterally drafted the legislation and refused to consider any changes to win their votes, essentially daring them to take the blame for a politically toxic shutdown.

“What everyone is wrestling with is that either outcome is terrible,” said Senator Martin Heinrich of New Mexico. “This president has put us in a position where, in either

direction, lots of people's constituents are going to get hurt and hurt badly. So people are wrestling with what is the least worst outcome."

Thursday's session was particularly emotional, stretching on for two hours and at times growing heated. At one point, Senator Kirsten Gillibrand of New York could be heard through closed doors shouting, "This will not be a normal shutdown!"

Senator Mark Kelly of Arizona, who had widely been seen as one of the Democrats who might be willing to join Republicans to overcome a filibuster, announced that he would oppose the measure, adding that his decision was the most difficult call he had made since he was elected five years ago.

"That is a calculation I've been struggling with for days — weeks, in fact," he said. "It's a tough call, and that's why we spent a lot of time talking. That's one of the challenging things on either path: There's a lot of unknowns out there."

But he added that Mr. Musk "had been wreaking havoc on our government," and said that the Republican-written bill, drafted in consultation with the White House, "is designed to give him more influence, more power."

"This is not the way we should be funding the government," Mr. Kelly said.

Republicans sought to escalate the pressure on Democrats to relent and end the spending fight, and warned on Thursday that the moment for making a decision was at hand.

"As the expression goes, it's time for Democrats to fish or cut bait," said Senator John Thune, the South Dakota Republican and majority leader. "Democrats need to decide if they're going to support funding legislation that came over from the House or if they're going to shut down the government. So far it looks like they plan to shut it down."

At the same time, residents of the District of Columbia were [protesting on Capitol Hill](#) to demand that Senate Democrats block a spending bill that would amount to a \$1 billion budget cut for the District over the next six months. Crowds of school-age children carried signs made with crayons and colored markers, [one of which read](#), "You cut my dad's job and now you want to cut my school," punctuated by four sad faces.

Some Democrats said they were still trying to assess whether the best approach to reining in Mr. Trump was defeating the spending plan or allowing it to become law.

"We are intent on stymying and stopping the slide toward Trump's tyrannical and autocratic power, which is happening in real time and inflicting harm on real people," said Senator Richard Blumenthal, Democrat of Connecticut, who said he would vote to block the spending bill. "I'm respectful of my colleagues who have a different opinion with the same goal, which is to prevent unchecked and unbridled dictatorial power for President Trump and Elon Musk."