

Shutdown vote leaves Democrats bitterly divided, Schumer under fire

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The Senate averted a federal government shutdown full of political and practical unknowns. But the decision to back the GOP funding bill has left a party still reeling from Donald Trump’s 2024 win even more rudderless and divided.

House Democrats are taking shots at Senate Democrats. A fired-up base feels enraged and is flooding senators’ phone lines. And Senate Minority Leader Charles E. Schumer (D-New York) has emerged as the lightning rod absorbing the party’s anger, with some of his key allies standing silently by while he’s attacked.

“I knew when I made this decision, I’d get a lot of criticism from a lot of quarters,” Schumer said in an interview. “Let’s face it, the House was in a much easier position. They could vote no on the [funding bill] without shutting down the government. The Senate, we can’t do that.”

Schumer, who has led the Senate Democratic caucus for eight years, defended his decision [to vote for the GOP funding bill](#) as the best way to fight Trump’s sweeping plan for downsizing the government, saying a shutdown would be “DOGE on steroids.” He said the same activists who are “vexed” now would be pleading with Senate Democrats to reopen the government a few weeks into the shutdown, once it became clear Trump and Elon Musk’s U.S. DOGE Service were taking advantage of the closure to make even deeper cuts.

“There’s no off-ramp,” he said of a shutdown in a GOP-controlled Washington.

But Schumer’s explanation has done nothing to stem a fierce tide of criticism from House Democrats — including talk of a primary challenge — and pushback from within his own chamber that has weakened one of the Democratic Party’s few visible leaders.

In a stunning rebuke, Schumer's former leadership counterpart, Rep. Nancy Pelosi (D-California), publicly urged Senate Democrats to vote against their leader on Friday.

"Democratic senators should listen to the women," Pelosi said in a statement, referring to Patty Murray (Washington), the top Democrat on the Senate Appropriations Committee, and Rosa DeLauro (Connecticut), the top Democrat on the House Appropriations Committee, both of whom opposed the bill. "This damaging legislation only makes matters worse."

A 'Hobson's choice'

After House Republicans passed a continuing resolution to fund the government [with just one Democratic vote on Tuesday](#), Schumer and Senate Democrats felt torn between two awful options. They could back a Republican funding plan crafted without their input, or trigger the first government shutdown since 2019, potentially handing Trump the power to determine which government employees are essential and nonessential, which could help Trump further cut the federal workforce and dismantle government agencies.

In grueling and tense internal lunch meetings, Senate Democrats battled the choice out, with the caucus deeply divided over the best course forward, according to interviews with half a dozen people with knowledge of the meetings who spoke on the condition of anonymity to describe private conversations. Many argued that the continuing resolution, which allows the government to spend at previous levels through September and lacks congressional spending directives, would give Trump a freer hand to withhold funds to crucial programs. It was time to show some backbone and fight, some argued. Others believed a shutdown was an unthinkable bad option.

But one emotion cut across all the factions — growing anger over what some lawmakers saw as a lack of a coherent, caucus-wide strategy on how to approach the funding battle from Schumer.

Lawmakers as diverse as Sen. Michael Bennet (Colorado), who is relatively moderate, to Murray, who is more liberal, expressed frustration with Schumer's strategy. They were upset that they did not discuss their plan as a group until Tuesday, when they walked through the choice they faced, even though it had been clear this funding deadline had been approaching for weeks.

“I’ve never seen anything like it in the time I’ve been in the Senate toward any leader on our side,” a senior Democratic aide said of the frustration now facing Schumer.

But in the interview, Schumer brushed back criticism that he should have planned earlier for the possibility that Speaker Mike Johnson (R-Louisiana) would have enough votes to pass the funding bill in the House, and begin crafting a unified message on it earlier.

“We had hoped that maybe Johnson couldn’t get the votes,” Schumer said. “But when he did ... it put us in a very, very tough place.”

Schumer suggested that he and House Minority Leader Hakeem Jeffries (D-New York) were on the same page on the low odds of Johnson passing a funding bill on his own. “I talked to Hakeem regularly, and he was very hopeful that it wouldn’t pass, and he was very hopeful that he could get all the Democrats, and I’m glad he did,” he said.

Jeffries said multiple times, including Friday afternoon, that he and Schumer “had repeated and private conversations throughout the week” and that “those conversations will remain private.”

A Jeffries spokeswoman declined to comment on the private conversations but noted that his office was consistent in relaying to the Senate that Johnson would be able to pass the funding bill without relying on Democratic votes after Trump successfully twisted enough arms to help House Republicans pass their budget plan on a party-line basis in late February.

Dozens of House Democrats slammed Schumer in a letter on Friday. “If Republicans in Congress want to pass this bill, they should do so with their own votes,” Rep. Derek Tran (D-California) and 65 other House Democrats wrote in the letter. “However, since they cannot, Republicans must work with Democrats to pass a clean” funding bill.

So far, Schumer’s own senators are declining to criticize him, even as they forcefully argue for a different strategy.

“I remain convinced this was the moment for us to have a fight and to make it clear that we’re going to stand up to President Trump,” Sen. Chris Coons (D-Delaware) told reporters. “But there are differences of opinion in my caucus, and I respect those who have reached a different conclusion.”

In remarks to reporters Thursday night, Schumer said he faced a “Hobson’s choice”: an apparent decision that’s really no choice at all. “The bottom line is, you have to make these decisions based on what is best for not only your party but your country,” Schumer said. “I believe that my members understand that I came to that conclusion and respect it.”

‘Guts and Courage’

In a further twist of the knife for Schumer on Friday, Trump praised him for backing the funding measure.

“Congratulations to Chuck Schumer for doing the right thing — Took ‘guts’ and courage!” Trump wrote on his Truth Social platform.

The trolling message only further angered House Democrats, who are incensed at Schumer for fracturing Democrats in Congress as they try to use this moment of leverage to fight back against Trump, according to more than a dozen lawmakers and aides, many of whom spoke on the condition of anonymity to detail private discussions from their retreat in Leesburg, Virginia.

Just one House Democrat, Rep. Jared Golden (Maine), voted for the Republican funding bill [when it passed the House on Tuesday](#). Jeffries told colleagues moments after Schumer announced his decision Thursday evening that they should be proud of voting against the bill in a split between him and Schumer, according to multiple people who attended a House Democratic dinner in Virginia.

“When Donald Trump wakes up in the morning and says, ‘You’re doing the right thing, Senate Democrats,’ we don’t feel that is the right place to be,” Rep. Pete Aguilar (D-California) told reporters Friday morning.

Some House Democrats continued to call and text senators Friday to try to persuade enough of them to vote against the bill.

“Anyone who votes for this bill on the Senate side is going to be complicit in transferring a whole bunch of power from Congress to the executive branch, and authorizing Trump and Musk to not even spend what we just appropriated in this bill,” Rep. Ted Lieu (D-California) told reporters Friday morning.

When asked by CNN about some of her colleagues who have encouraged her to challenge Schumer in a primary, Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (D-New York) declined to answer, saying she was focused on marshaling support against the funding measure.

Democrats have criticized the Republican funding bill for including \$13 billion in cuts to nondefense spending, including cuts to international peacekeeping, mental health and substance abuse treatment and workforce training. It would also trigger an immediate \$1.1 billion cut to D.C.’s budget because Republicans left out language typically included in such bills, although the Senate passed a bill Friday that would nullify the cut if it passes the House and Trump signs it.

In the Senate, some Democrats said they worried about what this not-so-strategic retreat could mean for the next time they have a moment of leverage.

“Lots of us have worried that once you give in the first time, it’s hard to fight back the second time — but hopefully we will,” said Sen. John Hickenlooper (D-Colorado), who voted against the Republican bill.

Still, Hickenlooper declined to criticize Schumer. “He knew how he was going to get attacked and he still made the decision,” Hickenlooper said. “He deserves our respect.”