

# AID PACKAGE FOR ISRAEL FAILS IN THE HOUSE, DEALING ANOTHER SETBACK TO GOP LEADERS - ASSOCIATED PRESS

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*Photo: Speaker of the Israeli Knesset, Amir Ohana, left, meets with House Speaker Mike Johnson, R-La., at the Capitol in Washington, Tuesday, Feb. 6, 2024*

A bill to provide Israel with more military aid went down to defeat Tuesday in the House, spoiling Speaker Mike Johnson's attempt to separate Israel from other national security priorities, including helping Ukraine defend itself from Russia's military invasion and deterring crossings at the U.S.-Mexico border.

The vote gave individual lawmakers another chance to show voters their support for Israel and could be used on the campaign trail to criticize those who voted against it. But it did little to generate momentum toward passage of a final emergency spending package.

It was also the second setback of the day for House Republican leaders. Just minutes before the vote their drive to impeach Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas fell short due to opposition from three House Republicans.

The House had already gone on the record in support of an Israel aid package. Johnson brought that package up in November on one of his first days as the new House speaker. The vote was in response to Hamas and other militants killing about 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and taking captive some 240 men, women and children in an Oct. 7 attack.

Last year's measure also included budget cuts to the Internal Revenue Service. This time, there were no attempts to offset the new spending, which ended up alienating some of the Republican members concerned about federal deficits. Meanwhile, Democrats largely remained opposed, concerned passage of the bill would leave no way to get Ukraine more aid. The bill did manage to gain more Democratic support than during November's vote but not nearly enough to pass.

Johnson resorted to moving the bill through an expedited process that requires a two-thirds majority for passage. That's because Republicans were unlikely to even muster the simple majority needed to set the terms for the bill's debate. Such a procedural vote is generally a routine matter, but has become problematic for the current Republican majority, which can generally afford to lose only three Republicans on party-line votes. The vote for more Israel aid was 250-180, well short of the two-thirds threshold necessary for passage.

Fourteen Republicans ended up voting against the bill, concerned about the lack of spending cuts to offset the \$17.6 billion price tag. That

compares to 204 Republicans who voted for it. On the Democratic side, 46 voted for it and 166 against.

Prior to the vote, the White House issued a statement announcing President Joe Biden's intent to veto the bill if it were to reach his desk. And Democratic leaders in both chambers said the only way forward requires a bipartisan approach.

"The time has come for House Republicans to end the political stunts and come together in support of a comprehensive approach to our national security priorities," Democratic leader Hakeem Jeffries and other members of leadership told colleagues before the vote.

The bill called for about \$17.6 billion in military aid for Israel and for the replenishment of U.S. defense systems. About \$4 billion would have gone to replenish Israel's missile defense systems and \$1.2 billion to counter short-range rockets and mortar threats. There's also funding for the procurement of advanced weapons system and to enhance the production of artillery and other munitions.

To ensure the support does not compromise U.S. readiness, it includes \$4.4 billion to replenish U.S. stocks of weapons provided to Israel. There's also \$3.3 billion for current U.S. military operations in the region.

Johnson said before the vote that since the House passed its first Israeli military aid package, the "situation has gotten much more dangerous."

"We need to stand with Israel right now and we cannot wait any longer," Johnson said.

After the vote, he said Democrats were using Israel to force through other priorities that don't enjoy the same degree of consensus.

"Leveraging Israel aid as it fights for survival is wrong," Johnson said.

Democrats said presidential politics played into the route House Republicans took in going ahead solely with aid for Israel.

"Trump doesn't want to support Ukraine, and he also doesn't want a border deal because it hurts him politically. What they get out of it is Donald Trump's approval," said Rep. Adam Smith, the ranking Democratic member of the House Armed Services Committee.

Rep. Lois Frankel of Florida was one of the Democrats who spoke in favor of the bill, saying she feared that "a divided Congress will embolden Israel's adversaries and put our own military in harm's way."

"Israel's security is our security," Frankel said.

Across the Capitol, a similar political debate took shape. Republicans overwhelmingly criticized a carefully negotiated plan unveiled over the weekend that included policies intended to curb illegal crossings with \$60 billion in wartime aid for Ukraine, plus billions for Israel and humanitarian aid for civilians in Gaza.

Republicans said the border security provisions were inadequate while Democrats said Republicans were simply afraid to buck Trump even though they had insisted earlier that border security be included in an aid package for Ukraine. The divide leaves in question whether any emergency spending package will be passed.

"We all know what's going on here: Donald Trump would rather keep the chaos at the border going so he can exploit it on the campaign trail, instead of letting the Senate do the right thing and fix it," said Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y. "He would rather let Ukraine suffer on the battle field instead of being tough on Putin."