

US House Democrats reaffirm right-wing program of austerity, bipartisanship

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The 116th Congress opened Thursday with a nearly unanimous vote by the Democrats in the House of Representatives reaffirming their commitment to austerity by adopting a rules package which includes a “pay as you go” provision, requiring any increased spending on social programs or tax cuts to be offset by equivalent budget cuts or tax increases. The Democrats took control of the House for the first time in eight years following November’s midterms while the Republicans increased their majority in the Senate.

The new rules were moved by Democratic Representative Nancy Pelosi who was re-elected to the position of Speaker of the House earlier in the day, giving her effective control of its legislative agenda. Pelosi became the first woman to be elected Speaker when she held the position from 2007 to 2011. As Speaker, she is now second in line of succession for the presidency behind Vice President Mike Pence.

Pelosi’s great “achievement” in her first stint as Speaker was the 2010 passage of the Affordable Care Act, better known as Obamacare, aimed at shifting much of the burden of paying for health insurance from businesses and the government onto the backs of workers. In 2007, she worked closely with her top aides, Majority Leader Steny Hoyer and Majority Whip James Clyburn, to block any efforts to impeach President George W. Bush and ensure an unending stream of funding for the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Hoyer and Clyburn have been returned to those positions for the 116th Congress.

Pelosi’s re-election as Speaker was welcomed by President Donald Trump Thursday during an afternoon press conference called to pressure the Democrats on funding for his proposed wall along the US-Mexico border, in which he expressed his hope that they would work together on infrastructure and “so much more.”

Trump has forced a partial shutdown of the government, now approaching the third week, with 800,000 federal employees either furloughed or working without pay, over his demand for \$5 billion to fund the construction of the border wall.

The House passed two bills on Thursday which would reopen the government. However, the bills, modeled on legislation passed by the Republican-controlled Senate last year, must win Senate passage again in the new legislative session. Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell said he will not allow action on the House legislation because Trump has already declared he will not sign it since it does not include his demand for border wall funding.

While Pelosi told NBC News in an interview Thursday morning that it was an “open question” if Trump could be criminally indicted while in office or should be impeached, she has maneuvered over the last two years to suppress any efforts among House Democrats to move for impeachment. Pelosi and Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer met publicly with Trump at the White House last month in an effort to strike a deal on immigration reform where they assured the president that they supported increased border security but sought a rhetorical climbdown on his part in relation to the wall.

“I think it’ll be a little bit different than people are thinking,” Trump quipped about his relationship with Speaker Pelosi while flanked by Border Patrol union officials Thursday.

Indeed, her first speech as Speaker was an olive branch to the right-wing within her own party as well as to the Republicans in Congress, singling out for praise Republican presidents Ronald Reagan and George H. W. Bush and calling for bipartisanship, meaning an even further shift to the right by the

Democratic Party.

Pelosi was elected in a carefully orchestrated vote Thursday afternoon with the support of all but 12 Democratic representatives. The vote came after weeks of horse-trading and backroom deals in which Pelosi had to agree to a four-year term limit to win over a dozen members, mainly on the right wing of the Democratic caucus, who had threatened to block her election.

Among those who voted for Pelosi were Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez of New York and Rashida Tlaib of Michigan, both members of the pseudo-left Democratic Socialists of America faction of the Democratic Party. That they both cast their votes for Pelosi's right-wing promise of bipartisanship, and Tlaib for a rules package which commits the House to austerity, shows that their association with socialism is entirely false, meant only to misdirect youth and workers who are looking for a genuine alternative to capitalism, and trap them within the Democratic Party.

Newly elected CIA Democrats made up a significant portion of those who did not vote for Pelosi, opposing her from the right, including former CIA officers Abigail Spanberger of Virginia, Elissa Slotkin of Michigan and Afghan war veteran Max Rose of New York.

Despite the much touted "historic" character of the newly sworn-in Congress, which will see the most female and minority representatives seated in US history, all of them go to Washington, D.C., as representatives of the capitalist class and enemies of the working class. The growing number of women, African Americans, Muslims and other minorities will do nothing to push Congress to the left.

The majority of members of Congress are millionaires and those who are not are vetted to ensure they will serve the interests of the rich and are increasingly drawn directly from the military-intelligence apparatus. The non-millionaires entering Congress for the first time will find their fortunes rising quite rapidly. The median Congressperson had a net worth of at least \$1.1 million in 2015, and the figure has only continued to rise.

According to the latest data analyzed by Open Secrets, Speaker Pelosi had an estimated net worth of \$100 million in 2013. Among her declared property holdings that year were a 59,000 square foot warehouse

in San Francisco, worth between \$5 and \$25 million, and a vineyard in Napa Valley, also declared at \$5 to \$25 million. According to one admiring media profile, her main skill as a Democratic Party leader was as a fund-raiser, having raked in \$728 million for Democratic congressional candidates since 2002.



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