

Rand Paul drags out Senate effort to pass \$95 billion foreign aid package

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Republican Sen. Rand Paul of Kentucky speaks to reporters before a Senate luncheon at the US Capitol on December 12, 2023 in Washington, DC. Kevin Dietsch/Getty Images/File

The Senate is working to pass a \$95.3 billion foreign aid bill with assistance for Ukraine and Israel, but it may be days until a final vote as GOP Sen. Rand Paul of Kentucky is using arcane and complex chamber rules to slow down the process into the weekend.

The chamber cleared a critical 60-vote threshold to advance the bill on Thursday, and took another procedural vote Friday night. But without an agreement from all 100 senators to speed up the process and swiftly pass the legislation, the Senate is expected to work through the weekend with a final vote next week.

“I think we should stay here as long as it takes,” Paul told CNN’s Manu Raju on Thursday. “If it takes a week or a month, I’ll force them to stay here to discuss why they think the border of Ukraine is more important than the US border.”

On Friday, senators continued negotiating over amendments to the package – how many, what kind and how many votes each one would need to pass.

Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer pushed for a time agreement to speed up the process.

“I hope our Republican colleagues can work with us to reach an agreement on amendments so we can move this process along,” the Democrat from New York said. “Democrats are willing to consider reasonable and fair amendments here on the floor, as we’ve shown on many occasions in the past three years. Nevertheless, the Senate will keep working on this bill until the job is done.”

Lawmakers are moving forward with the foreign aid bill, however, after Republicans blocked a broader bill that would have combined foreign aid with a bipartisan border deal. Republicans had initially demanded that border security be part of the bill, but went on to reject the bipartisan deal amid forceful attacks on the measure by former President Donald Trump and top House Republicans.

Ahead of a final vote on the foreign aid package, a series of additional procedural votes are expected to take place, including over the weekend.

If the bill is eventually passed by the Senate, it would next go to the House, where it’s unclear when or whether Speaker Mike Johnson would hold a vote on it. Many House Republicans are opposed to further aid to Ukraine.

Senate Republicans are now divided over the foreign aid package, and some are pushing for amendments to make changes to the bill – including to add measures related to immigration and border policy.

The foreign aid package includes billions of dollars to support Ukraine and for security assistance for Israel, as well as humanitarian assistance for civilians in Gaza, the West Bank and Ukraine.

The bill includes \$60 billion to support Ukraine in its fight against Russia, \$14.1 billion in security assistance for Israel, \$9.2 billion in humanitarian assistance and \$4.8 billion to support regional partners in the Indo-Pacific region, among other provisions, according to the Senate Appropriations Committee.

Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell argued for the necessity of passing the foreign aid package on Friday, pushing back on criticism from his right flank that this aid is tantamount to charity and highlighting that the legislation will boost American defense production and boost the economy.

“I mean, quite literally, spending tens of billions of dollars here in America upgrading our capabilities, creating American manufacturing jobs, and expanding our defense industrial capacity to help us better compete with advanced adversaries,” the Kentucky Republican said. “Overall, even accounting for direct assistance sent to allies like Israel, more than 75% of this legislation is bound for investments right here in America.”

This story and headline have been updated with additional developments.