

House and Senate foreign policy leaders and appropriators sent letters to the Trump administration over a foreign aid pause. | Tasos Katopodis/Getty Images

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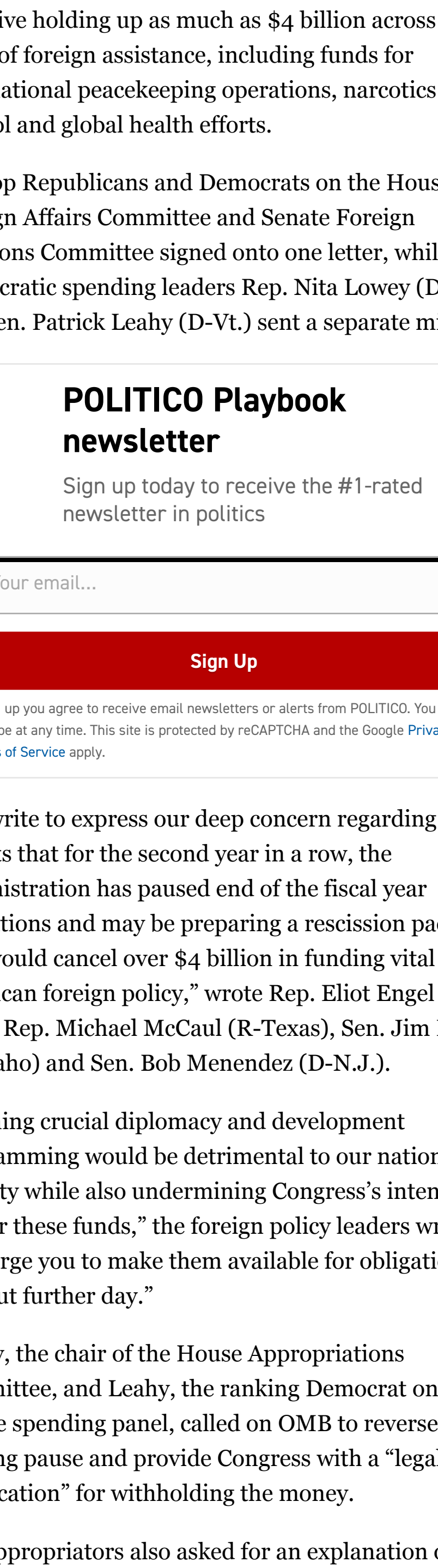
Trump’s budget office ends foreign aid pause

By CAITLIN EMMA | 08/09/2019 04:30 PM EDT | Updated 08/09/2019 09:11 PM EDT

President Donald Trump’s budget office on Friday ended its pause on several pots of foreign aid amid mounting bipartisan backlash.

A senior administration official said the funding halt, which the Office of Management and Budget requested last weekend, was “temporary.” OMB had asked for “an accounting” of billions of dollars in foreign aid that wasn’t obligated for a specific purpose and was set to expire at the Sept. 30 end of the fiscal year.

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“After receiving the requested information last night and having reviewed it, these funds are now available,” the official said.

Advocates are still concerned that the administration is planning to send Congress a package that would pull back billions of foreign assistance, however.

OMB’s action came after House and Senate foreign policy leaders and appropriators sent letters to OMB on Friday, calling on the administration to cancel the directive holding up as much as \$4 billion across 10 areas of foreign assistance, including funds for international peacekeeping operations, narcotics control and global health efforts.

The top Republicans and Democrats on the House Foreign Affairs Committee and Senate Foreign Relations Committee signed onto one letter, while Democratic spending leaders Rep. Nita Lowey (D-N.Y.) and Sen. Patrick Leahy (D-Vt.) sent a separate missive.

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“We write to express our deep concern regarding reports that for the second year in a row, the administration has paused end of the fiscal year obligations and may be preparing a rescission package that would cancel over \$4 billion in funding vital for American foreign policy,” wrote Rep. Eliot Engel (D-N.Y.), Rep. Michael McCaul (R-Texas), Sen. Jim Risch (R-Idaho) and Sen. Bob Menendez (D-N.J.).

“Slashing crucial diplomacy and development programming would be detrimental to our national security while also undermining Congress’s intended use for these funds,” the foreign policy leaders wrote. “We urge you to make them available for obligation without further day.”

Lowey, the chair of the House Appropriations Committee, and Leahy, the ranking Democrat on the Senate spending panel, called on OMB to reverse the funding pause and provide Congress with a “legal justification” for withholding the money.

The appropriators also asked for an explanation of why OMB’s order is consistent with the Impoundment Control Act of 1974, which spells out the steps that the president must take in order to pull back funds appropriated by Congress.

Last year, the Trump administration [sought to use an obscure budget tool](#) — called the power of presidential rescission — to effectively force billions of dollars in foreign aid to expire without input from Congress.

That effort proved wildly unpopular, sparking criticism from both Republicans and Democrats. The administration eventually dropped the proposal.

While Trump’s budget office has yet to announce another rescission attempt, critics fear that OMB’s recent directive signaled that’s where the administration is headed.

OMB spokesperson Rachel Semmel told POLITICO on Thursday that “it is incumbent on all federal agencies to properly use funds provided by Congress.”

She added, “In an effort to ensure accountability, OMB has requested the current status of several foreign assistance accounts to identify the amount of funding that is unobligated.”

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