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SPORTS, 1B



During a House Homeland Security Committee hearing, immigration officials were questioned about 5-year-old Liam Conejo Ramos, who was detained with his father by immigration officers and later released. KENT NISHIMURA/REUTERS

Deadline looming for DHS reforms

White House, Congress continue negotiations

Zachary Schermele
USA TODAY

WASHINGTON – Congress and the White House are locked in negotiations over potential reforms to the Department of Homeland Security as a deadline to shut down the agency approaches.

Lawmakers have until the end of Feb. 13, to reach an agreement or risk jeopardizing funding for the Transportation Security Administration and U.S. Coast Guard, among other divisions of the 9/11-era Cabinet agency that could be impacted by yet another lapse in appropriations.

Unlike during the record-breaking government shutdown in the fall, Trump administration officials have been engaged in the last few weeks in serious talks with lawmakers on Capitol Hill. The ongoing discussions reflect a bipartisan unease over the tactics of federal agents in President Trump's nationwide immigration enforcement surge, especially after Alex Pretti's killing by federal officers in Minnesota in January.

Last week, House and Senate Democrats released a list of 10 demands to curb DHS, which oversees Immigration and Customs Enforcement and Customs and Border Protection. Those wishes included a ban on mask-wearing for federal agents, stricter use-of-force standards and prohibiting immigration enforcement operations in "sensitive locations" such as schools and churches.

Since then, Democrats have been trying to broker a deal with their GOP counterparts and the White House, which has offered a counterproposal, according to an administration official.

The contours of the White House's offer weren't immediately widely known among lawmakers. Sen. Tim Kaine, D-Virginia, told reporters Feb. 9 he was aware of the counterproposal but hadn't seen the details. Sen. Jeanne Shaheen, D-New Hampshire, said it wasn't clear to her what kind of progress had been made in recent days among the negotiators in her party.

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Lawmakers grill immigration officials

Leaders defend tactics at committee hearing

Christopher Cann, Bart Jansen, Lauren Villagran and Zachary Schermele
USA TODAY

Sparks flew at a House Homeland Security Committee meeting Feb. 10 in a push-and-pull between lawmakers demanding answers about the Trump administration's aggressive immigration enforcement and immigration officials defending their employees' conduct.

The fatal shootings of Renee Good and Alex Pretti and agents' tactics in Minnesota have alienated a growing share of Americans and caused friction in the Republican Party. Congress faces a Feb. 13 deadline to avert a shutdown of the Department of Homeland Security, with lawmakers deadlocked over potential reforms.

Committee Chair Andrew R. Garbarino, R-New York, in his opening statement, applauded some of the Trump administration's immigration efforts but said "the credibility of these successes is on the line."

"We must take the temperature

down," he said, calling the fatal shootings of Pretti and Good "unacceptable and preventable."

Garbarino demanded "complete and impartial" investigations, criticizing officials who chose to "rush to judgment" after the shootings.

"Public trust and public safety go hand in hand," he said. "We cannot have one without the other."

In his opening statement, ranking Democrat Bennie Thompson, D-Mississippi, said DHS' "reckless, careless" acts and decision to initially block independent investigations into the deaths of Good and Pretti are the stuff of "dictatorship, not democracy."

Homeland Security Secretary Kristi Noem "has blood on her hands," he said.

He asked for a moment of silence to honor Pretti.

Todd Lyons, acting director of Immigration and Customs Enforcement, would not apologize to the families of Good and Pretti for President Donald Trump and his aides calling them domestic terrorists.

Asked by Rep. Eric Swalwell, D-California, if he agreed with the much-criticized labels, Lyons said the president and

his homeland security secretary have a "right to their comments."

However, he said, "I welcome the opportunity to speak to the family in private."

He and Customs and Border Protection Commissioner Rodney Scott committed to releasing the full reports and findings of investigations into both fatal shootings.

Pretti's killing is being investigated by the FBI, the Department of Homeland Security and the Department of Justice's civil rights division. The Department of Justice and the FBI initially declined to investigate Good's death.

Both immigration leaders then stood up for their employees, who, they said, are in danger.

Scott defended Border Patrol agents operating in the interior of the country and said they're facing "aggressive interference and intimidation."

"These attacks on federal law enforcement personnel are coordinated and well-funded," he said, echoing previous claims by Trump administration officials. "This is not peaceful protest."

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6 more suspects found in Epstein files, officials say

Bart Jansen
USA TODAY

WASHINGTON – Two House members who led the effort to force the Justice Department to release more documents about accused sex trafficker Jeffrey Epstein said they discovered at least six more suspected accomplices.

The department began Feb. 9 allowing lawmakers to review millions of records that remain confidential. Reps. Thomas Massie, R-Kentucky, and Ro Khanna, D-California, said they found

additional suspects among names that had previously remained blacked out in publicly released records.

"What we want is the men who Jeffrey Epstein trafficked women to – we want those names published," Massie told reporters. "In two hours, we found six men whose names have been redacted who are implicated in the way that the files are presented."

The revelations are part of the latest conflict between Congress and the Justice Department over the release of millions of documents about Epstein that

remain confidential. Upcoming congressional hearings and depositions will focus on what has remained secret for years.

Congress approved a law in November that directed the department to release all its files about Epstein, who died by suicide in prison in 2019 while awaiting trial on sex trafficking charges.

Lawmakers and people who accused Epstein of abuse aim to track down powerful business and political leaders who might have conspired with him other than Ghislaine Maxwell, an Ep-

stein associate serving a 20-year prison sentence.

The department has released 3.5 million documents out of 6 million. Lawmakers have pressed the department for why names other than those of people who accused him of abuse have been blacked out in the records – and why the remaining 2.5 million documents haven't been released.

The six men who Massie said were "likely incriminated" by their inclusion

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