

# The Shoe's on the Other Foot, and Democrats Don't Like It

Democrats in Congress are learning the hard way that the games they used to play when they were in charge weren't much fun for Republicans.

Now that the shoe is on the other foot, they're complaining. Particularly when it comes to being forced to vote on matters they find entirely unpalatable—such as approving the waiver for retired Gen. James “Mad Dog” Mattis to be nominated as secretary of defense—as attachments to “must-pass legislation.”

Tuesday, House Republicans introduced a “continuing resolution” (CR)—a short-term spending bill to keep the government operating in lieu of a budget—the included the waiver. In doing so, Democrats sat in a position they've often put Democrats: vote to allow Mattis' nomination to proceed, or vote to shut down the government at Christmastime.

Currently, due to a 1940s-era law, retired military members must have been out of uniform for seven years before they are able to assume a civilian leadership role in the government. The antiquated law beckons back to a time when military leaders served one purpose: winning wars.

Today's military leaders do much more than that.

The last military general to receive a waiver from Congress to serve in a civilian leadership capacity was Gen. George Marshall. He retired as Army Chief of Staff in 1945, and two years later, President Harry Truman tapped him to be his secretary of state. He also served as secretary of defense for a year, beginning in 1950.

The waiver attached to the CR would change the waiting period

to three years, but only for Mattis. It still requires 60 votes to pass in the Senate, but by attaching it to the CR, Republicans have all but assured its passage, lest Democrats follow up their humiliating electoral losses in November with a government shutdown in December.

House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.) expressed her anger Tuesday afternoon with a statement on behalf of the House Democratic Caucus. It's as precious as you might imagine:

Civilian leadership of the military has been a cornerstone of our democracy since the founders, and for good reason. In the whole history of the Department of Defense, the only defense sSecretary ever given a waiver was then-Secretary of State, General George Marshall—who was provided an individual waiver in a stand-alone bill approved by the Congress.

The American people are entitled to regular order and thoughtful scrutiny of nominees and any potential waivers.

Brushing aside the law that enshrines civilian control of the military—without discussion, in a massive must-pass funding bill—would set a terrible precedent. It is troubling that Republicans are working so hard to shield President-elect Trump's choice for secretary of fefense from the scrutiny and debate of Congress and the American people.

President-elect Donald Trump got into the matter, somewhat, by pulling another of the Democrats' favorite plays: revealing a big-name Democrat endorsement for Mattis. Former Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta spoke about his former general in glowing terms in an interview with one of Democrats' favorite newspapers, *The Washington Post*.

"It's important that the Congress in the process of providing that waiver makes sure that Jim Mattis understands that he has to play a role not just on the military side, but also on the

civilian side. I think he does," he said, adding later, "Sometimes his attitude rubbed some people in the White House the wrong way, because he was aggressive. It never made him hesitate to keep saying what he believed was necessary. You wanted Jim Mattis in the room, because he speaks truth to power." {eoa}