

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Senate Moves to Restore TSA Funding as Airport Disruptions Mount, Leaving ICE Out of Deal

After weeks of missed paychecks, staffing losses and growing delays at security checkpoints, the U.S. Senate approved a measure early Friday to fund TSA and most of Homeland Security while excluding ICE and some border enforcement operations.

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Long lines plagued airports across the country, including the Cyril E. King Airport pictured above, as the Senate moved to fund TSA while leaving ICE out of a broader Homeland Security spending deal.

The U.S. Senate early Friday approved legislation aimed at easing worsening disruptions at airports across the country by funding the Transportation Security Administration and most other Department of Homeland Security operations, while leaving Immigration and Customs Enforcement out of the package. The measure also excludes Border Protection funding, according to the details reported after the vote. The package passed unanimously without a roll call and now heads to the House for consideration.

The action comes after a 42-day stalemate over Homeland Security funding that left TSA officers working without pay and pushed airport operations deeper into strain during a busy travel period. More than 100 airport leaders urged Congress this week to break the impasse, warning that the operational disruptions were growing and could have long-lasting consequences.

By midweek, the impact on the screening workforce had become harder to ignore. Roughly 50,000 airport security officers had gone without pay and that 460 TSA officers had quit since the current funding dispute began. The agency was also dealing with elevated absences during spring break travel, with Reuters reporting that recent absences had climbed above 10% and helped produce waits of more than four hours at some checkpoints.

Associated Press reported that nationwide on Wednesday, more than 11% of TSA employees scheduled to work did not show up, totaling more than 3,120 callouts. AP also reported that nearly 500 of the agency's almost 50,000 transportation security officers had quit during the shutdown, underscoring the financial and staffing pressure building across the system.

The compromise approved by the Senate funds TSA and other major Homeland Security functions, including agencies such as FEMA and the Coast Guard, but does not provide funding for ICE, which remained at the center of the political standoff.

Democrats had argued for weeks that airport screening, disaster response and other core security operations should not remain stalled while broader negotiations continued over immigration enforcement. In a statement issued Friday, Senator Patty Murray, vice chair of the Senate Appropriations Committee, said Democrats had maintained there was "absolutely no reason" TSA agents' paychecks should be tied to Republican demands for additional funding for ICE and Border Patrol, adding that lawmakers were now on track to "get TSA agents paid" and "get our airports moving again."

The Senate vote does not fully resolve the larger Homeland Security funding fight. The package contains no new restrictions on immigration enforcement, even as Democrats continue pressing for guardrails on ICE operations. Senate Majority Leader John Thune said after the vote that the agreement would reopen much of the government, but that more work remained ahead.

President Donald Trump had also signaled Thursday that he would move to pay TSA agents immediately, saying he wanted to halt what he called "Chaos at the Airports." The administration said the payments would come from money in Trump's 2025 tax bill, though that step could prove temporary or unnecessary if the House approves the Senate measure and it is signed into law.

For now, the Senate's action marks the clearest effort yet to separate airport security funding from the bitter fight over immigration enforcement, as lawmakers respond to mounting pressure from travelers, airport executives and a screening workforce that has been asked to keep the nation's airports moving without guaranteed pay.

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