

If you're sitting around wondering what is happening in the Senate, (a) you need to get a life, and (b) here's a handy-dandy overview.

We begin with the rule that spending measures have to originate in the House, so to start a bill like our Ukraine funding measure in the Senate you need to bring a House-passed measure to the Senate Floor. The first step is to proceed to that House-passed measure.

A group of Republicans objects to all this, so the Majority Leader had to file cloture on that motion to proceed to the House-passed measure, requiring 60 votes. Getting cloture on that motion was our first vote, 67-32.

Cloture rules require thirty hours of post-cloture debate, so that debate took place, and then after that came the actual vote to proceed, which only required a simple majority, cloture having been invoked. That passed on Friday 64-19.

But the bill we moved to is not the one we want to pass, so we had to substitute in the text that we wanted.

That too required cloture (filed Friday), which requires an "intervening day" (yesterday) before the vote, as well as the thirty hours after. That second cloture is what we voted on today, 67-27.

In the meantime, one Senator today tried to send the bill to committee, taking it off the Floor and everybody back to square one, but that measure was tabled by simple majority vote.

That was the first vote today; then immediately came the 67-27 cloture vote regarding the substitute language.

Now we have thirty more hours to burn, setting up a vote Monday evening, by a simple majority, to actually effect the substitution of the text of our Ukraine measure for the original text of the House-passed bill.

Monday's vote will be the actual vote substituting in our Senate language. Then we have to pass the bill with the new language.

So a third cloture may be required, with another intervening day, and another vote over 60, and another thirty hours of debate. So this could take a while.

Much of this procedure is swept aside by agreement, but a group of Senators is so opposed to the bill that they won't allow unanimous consent to any departure from these procedures. That agreement is often achieved by agreeing to a schedule of amendment votes.

Feelings are running so high within the Republican conference, that Republicans have so far been unable to agree on any amendment, let alone a schedule of amendments that can accelerate the schedule. So here we are.