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**NINA MOINI:** President Donald Trump has signed off on a massive increase in funding for US immigration enforcement. The legislation, called The Secure America Act, was approved by Congress last week after a standoff between lawmakers. Democrats said they didn't want to give more funding to the Department of Homeland Security after the killings of Renée Good and Alex Pretti in Minneapolis this winter.

But those negotiations fell apart, and now \$70 billion will go to ICE and Border Patrol. Supporters say the investment will help the federal government enforce immigration laws and secure the border. Critics argue it gives too much power to the agency and not enough oversight. To help us understand what's in the bill and what this funding could mean moving forward, we're joined by Heidi Altman, Vice President of Policy at the National Immigration Law Center. Heidi, thanks for your time today.

**HEIDI ALTMAN:** Thanks for having me.

**NINA MOINI:** So looking at exactly what Congress passed and what President Trump signed last week, can you give us the bird's eye view of what all of this money is for?

**HEIDI ALTMAN:** Sure. Well, the first thing I'll say is that this money comes through a non-traditional funding mechanism from Congress. So usually when Congress gives federal agencies money, there's some guardrails attached to it, some mechanisms to make sure that there's some oversight of how the money is spent. And very alarmingly, that's not the case here. So this is almost \$70 billion with really no guardrails, no basic civil rights protections or mechanisms for accountability from Congress.

It's money for enforcement, surges of enforcement, arrests into our cities we've seen in Minneapolis and Los Angeles and elsewhere, funding for detention and billions of dollars that can go to local law enforcement agencies to work with federal immigration enforcement in a way that we know fuels racial profiling and other unconstitutional police practices.

**NINA MOINI:** So let's break that down a bit. How does this compare with what ICE and Border Patrol have historically received from Congress? I know you mentioned it's a different set of guardrails or no guardrails from your perspective. How does that differ? I mean, we hear these terms or these numbers like 70 billion. It's hard for everyday people to really put that into perspective of what that really means, that additional funding. It sounds like it's enough funding here to get the agencies through 2029 and then some. How does it compare with more traditional funding?

**HEIDI ALTMAN:** Absolutely. I think none of us can really comprehend what these kinds of dollars mean. Right? So between this bill and a bill that was passed last summer, also through this same budget process, ICE and CBP Border Patrol now have about eight times their usual annual funding. So the way we've been thinking about this is basically Congress has just over the past year, handed these agencies essentially a blank check to implement the agenda, Stephen Miller's agenda that is designed to inflict terror on immigrant communities.

And we see that they have the kinds of money that is allowing them to bring new military-grade equipment into civil immigration enforcement in our neighborhoods, the kind of money that is allowing them to pay way above market value for warehouses that they plan to use to jail our immigrant neighbors. So basically, Congress has just sort of handed over these funds, again, without guardrails. And there's enough money there to make their pursuit of really making life quite difficult for immigrant communities in the United States, essentially unlimited in terms of resources.

**NINA MOINI:** Is it your understanding that the push for more deportations and securing the border is working from the administration's standpoint, because more people are choosing to self-deport or more deportations are happening. What is your response to people who say, well, the Republicans and President Trump have said they wanted to secure the border. They wanted to have many deportations, as many as possible, it sounds like, and that is what they're delivering based on what voters wanted.

**HEIDI ALTMAN:** Well, I would ask, at what cost and what it means to the nature and fabric of our society for that to be a laudable goal. So when you look at actual evidence-based investigations into what it means to have immigrants in our communities in the United States, we see that immigrants revitalize our communities, communities with large immigrant populations are, by and large, safer. Border communities are known to be safer. And so this idea of quote-unquote "self-deportation" really relies on a very vicious assumption that if our government makes life essentially untenable for people trying to support their families and their loved ones in the United States, that will leave-- that they will choose to leave.

And if that's successful, that to me says something very, very frightening about the nature of our government and our society, not something for anyone to be applauding.

**NINA MOINI:** To your point, many people in the Twin Cities and in the state of Minnesota saw this as a human rights, just basic decency, dignity, due process for people. And then, again, the mechanisms through which that enforcement is happening you're saying how much is too much and is that really worth it, just for the country and the fabric of the country. With so many people still reeling from what happened in Minnesota just this year, what are you expecting, or if you are expecting anything, what does this mean for the future of these types of operations, what we saw here in Minneapolis and what we're continuing to see around the country.

**HEIDI ALTMAN:** Sure. And residents of Minneapolis have had a unique and devastating viewpoint into the extent of the violence that ICE agents can bring into our neighborhoods. One thing that has gotten not quite as much notice as some of the other provisions in this bill is that there is a specific fund that ICE is supposed to use to bring enforcement into cities and states. That DHS feels aren't sufficiently cooperative with their mass deportation agenda. And so that instruction really does bring to mind what happened in Minneapolis. And we fear, risks similar surges where the administration could essentially use violent and abusive immigration enforcement as a tool of political retaliation.

**NINA MOINI:** From your vantage point, again, it's hard to know. You're not in the ground, in every single city, for every enforcement operation that takes place. But do you feel like some of the tactics that were going on in the earliest days, particularly of the surge of federal immigration agents to Minnesota, do you feel like the tactics are less harmful or better in some other parts of the country since? Because that was the argument right, from lawmakers, they said, we're not going to give you all this money with no reforms. There has to be more reform around how these operations are carried out.

And it sounds like from what we've read, those calls for reform didn't make the cut.

**HEIDI ALTMAN:** That's right. They absolutely didn't make the cut. And I think this is an interesting and important moment in terms of the Trump administration's immigration agenda, because there is a new Secretary at the Department of Homeland Security, and he has said that it's his intent to keep ICE out of the headlines. But from what we're seeing and hearing from across the country, all that means is that we need to be more vigilant with regard to civil rights abuses, because the violence is happening and the abuses are happening, but they are just happening in places where the public can't see them.

So, for example, we are seeing escalating violence and abuses in immigration detention facilities where thousands of people are held in very remote jails and prisons, and where the conditions are deteriorating at an extremely alarming rate, where you have suicide rates spiking and people going to the lengths of engaging in hunger strikes to try to get the word out about the severity of the deprivations they're facing while detained.

**NINA MOINI:** Moving forward, what would you call on Minnesotans to be paying attention to? You're talking about paying attention as much as one can to what's going on behind closed doors. But I also wonder what we might start to physically notice and see, perhaps more an influx of more staff or agents coming to the state. What would you tell people to look out for as all this money does start to trickle in?

**HEIDI ALTMAN:** Sure. Well, we're looking to see several things. We're looking to see how this plays out in terms of local law enforcement. We've already seen a dramatic uptick in local police forces partnering with ICE in ways that are extremely dangerous, and again, incentivize things like racial profiling. So I think all of our communities, we all need to be on the lookout. If you don't already know, find out what your local police, what your local law enforcement agencies policies are with regard to ICE, whether they are cooperating in any way, speak out against that kind of cooperation.

We do all need to be vigilant because in our own communities, there are still enforcement actions happening at large like that, and we fear that those could tick up, especially with recent news that the administration is unleashing investigations and enforcement operations targeting people who came to the United States as children and unaccompanied without parents. So looking out for more arrests and targeting of vulnerable communities, including children and families.

And in terms of taking action, we're all encouraging our neighbors and our loved ones to call your member of Congress and say, not one more dollar for these abuses and not just one more dollar, but as soon as the opportunity is ripe to take back these billions of dollars in funds that are going to these lawless agencies.

**NINA MOINI:** All right, Heidi, thank you so much for your time, really appreciate it.

**HEIDI ALTMAN:** Thanks for having me.

**NINA MOINI:** That was Heidi Altman, Vice President of Policy at the National Immigration Law Center.