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## GoFundMe Campaign to Build Border Wall Raises More Than \$12 Million

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Crowdfunding donations have paid for medical and legal bills, wildfire losses and college tuition. Now, a GoFundMe campaign aims to finance one of the most hotly debated issues in American politics: President Trump's long-promised border wall.

The campaign, called "We The People Will Fund The Wall" and launched this week by a disabled Florida veteran, had raised more than \$12.2 million from more than 200,000 people by early Friday afternoon. The goal? \$1 billion.

But the campaign's founder, Brian Kolfage — a triple amputee who served in Iraq and who ran right-wing conspiracy websites that were eventually removed by Facebook — is hoping to raise even greater sums to cover construction of a barrier between the United States and Mexico. He suggested on the GoFundMe page that if the 63 million people who voted for Mr. Trump were to each donate \$80, they would raise more than \$5 billion, the amount Mr. Trump is seeking for the wall.

"As a veteran who has given so much, 3 limbs, I feel deeply invested to this nation to ensure future generations have everything we have today," Mr. Kolfage, 37, wrote in the fund-raiser description. "Too many Americans have been murdered by illegal aliens and too many illegals are taking advantage of the United States taxpayers with no means of ever contributing to our society."

Mr. Kolfage, a Purple Heart recipient who lives in Miramar Beach, Fla., did not return several calls for comment, but wrote on the GoFundMe page that he began the drive out of frustration that Mr. Trump's signature campaign promise remained unfulfilled. "It's time we uphold our laws, and get this wall BUILT!" he wrote. "It's up to Americans to help out and pitch in to get this project rolling."

The campaign went viral as Mr. Trump appeared to back down from his threat to shut down the government unless Congress allocated \$5 billion for the wall, a capitulation that outraged his most ardent supporters and right-wing media pundits alike. The president later said on Twitter that Mexico would indirectly pay for the wall through a new North American free trade deal. But on Thursday, Mr. Trump told House Republican leaders he would not sign a stopgap spending bill to avert a shutdown if it did not include border-wall funding.

Like Mr. Trump, Mr. Kolfage has focused his wrath on congressional Democrats, whom he blames for refusing to fund the project. “They’d rather see President Trump fail, than see America succeed,” he wrote on the fund-raiser page.

Mr. Kolfage assured donors that “100% of your donations will go to the Trump Wall,” and that his team had contacted the Trump administration about securing the funds. He also wrote that he was working with a law firm to draft a contract that would “bind the government to using the funds for the border wall itself, nothing else.”

To allay any doubts, Mr. Kolfage cited the 2012 Washington Monument restoration project, which repaired earthquake damage to the 555-foot obelisk with \$7.5 million allocated by the government and a matching donation made by a billionaire to the Trust for the National Mall, a nonprofit public-private partnership with the National Park Service. If the crowdfunding project fails to reach its goal, Mr. Kolfage promised to refund every donation. “This won’t be easy, but it’s our duty as citizens,” he wrote.

But it is not that simple. The Department of Homeland Security would not be able to accept the donations without congressional approval.

“Congress would still have to enact a statute permitting this,” said David Bier, a policy analyst at the libertarian Cato Institute. “But current law prohibits the administration from taking this money and spending it, and it also violates the law to accept donations that bind the hands of the administration.”

Since Mr. Kolfage started his campaign, numerous copycats have started their own wall crowdfunding efforts. Some have raised a few thousand dollars, but most remain at \$0. It is not the first time conservatives have turned to the internet for help in paying for a physical barrier. In 2011, Arizona lawmakers started an online fund for a border fence, which was never built.

Immigration advocacy groups condemned the GoFundMe campaign, calling it a misguided venture fueled by xenophobia.

“The fund-raiser is a direct consequence of the president’s yearslong fearmongering about immigrants,” said Jonathan Ryan, executive director of the Refugee and Immigrant Center for Education and Legal Services, a Texas nonprofit known as Raices. This summer, a Facebook fund-raising campaign for the group raked in more than \$20 million from more than 525,000 people, the largest single fund-raiser in the social media platform’s history.

Dismayed by Mr. Kolfage’s efforts, a number of people started online campaigns for Raices in recent days, including one created Thursday that had raised almost \$85,000 by late Friday morning. “We’re not scared of those who would support President Trump’s racist border wall. We know it will go down as a historical blunder and, if built, a scar across our country” Mr. Ryan said in an email.

Mr. Kolfage’s viral success may stem in part from his national profile as a conservative political activist who ran political websites that were removed by Facebook in October, an action that drew the attention of Fox News.

According to his website, which describes him as “the most severely wounded US Airman to survive his wounds,” Mr. Kolfage was on his second deployment to Iraq in September 2004, when a 107mm enemy rocket shell exploded three feet away from him. One of his lungs

collapsed and three of his limbs were mangled, but medics saved his life. Despite amputations of both legs and his right hand, Mr. Kolfage completed rehabilitation at Walter Reed Medical Center in Washington in just 11 months, and he later became a motivational speaker.

In October, Facebook removed hundreds of political pages for “coordinated inauthentic behavior,” including Mr. Kolfage’s Right Wing News, he told Fox News that month. He also ran a series of affiliate websites that promoted false political conspiracy theories and racist content, according to NBC News. In the wake of the purge, Mr. Kolfage launched a website that accuses Facebook of censoring conservative views, but his GoFundMe page makes no mention of these websites.