



Trump presses for border wall as federal shutdown goes to 3rd week

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With the windows of the Oval Office as a backdrop, President Donald Trump lashed out at Democrats, blaming them for the partial shutdown of the federal government and demanding they pass a budget with nearly \$12 billion in additional spending for the Department of Homeland Security, including \$5.7 billion slated for his long-promised border wall.

Describing the situation at the border as a "growing humanitarian and security crisis," Trump used his bully pulpit Tuesday night to press for the spending, which has remained stalled since agreements between the White House and Congress collapsed last February, and again in late November.

"This is a humanitarian crisis," Trump said. "A crisis of the heart and a crisis of the soul." And, he said that the federal government remains closed "for one reason and one reason only: because Democrats will not fund border security."

Trump also argued that Democrats, including Chuck Schumer, once "supported a physical barrier" in the past. "They changed their mind only after I was elected president," Trump said.

Following the president's speech, House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and Senate Minority Leader Schumer gave their own retort to the president's arguments, with the top Democratic senator arguing that the president was governing by "temper tantrum."

"The fact is President Trump has chosen to hold hostage critical services for the health, safety and well-being of the American people, and withhold the paychecks of 800,000 innocent workers across the nation—many of them veterans," Pelosi said. She added the president had promised to keep the government shutdown for "months or years."

"That's just plain wrong," she said.

Last year, Democrats agreed to give the White House \$1.2 billion for border barriers, but this year, Democrats have repeatedly refused to include additional spending, leading to the shutdown that began on Dec. 22.

Since Trump took office, DHS has yet to build new barriers along the border, though it has announced plans to begin projects in California, Arizona and Texas in February 2019. This includes the bulldozing of land in the National Butterfly Sanctuary along the Rio Grande River, as well as projects to install new barriers near Yuma and Lukeville, Ariz.

The White House's new proposal includes \$211 million to hire another 750 Border Patrol agents, another \$675 million for screening technology at U.S. ports, another \$571 million for 200 more ICE agents and staff, along with \$563 million to hire 75 additional immigration judges.

The plan also wants \$4.2 billion to expand detention capacity to 52,000 beds, likely including new family detention facilities.

In his speech, Trump harkened back to language that he repeatedly used during the 2016 election, including themes of immigrant criminality, including offhand references to Ronil Singh, a police officer in Newman, Calif., who was shot and killed in late December, and the murder of Kayla Cuevas, a 16-year-old girl whose murder by members of MS-13 became a touchstone of Trump's rhetoric in 2016.

"Day after day, precious lives are cut short by those who have violated our borders," he said.

"Democrats in Congress have refused to acknowledge the crisis. And they have refused to provide our brave border agents with the tools they desperately need to protect our families and our nation," Trump said.

Last week, Trump brought out members of the National Border Patrol Council, which took the unusual step of endorsing him for president in 2016, to argue for the wall during a short statement in the White House briefing room.

"You can tell them about the importance of the wall," he said. "They basically said — and I think I can take the word 'basically' out — without a wall, you cannot have border security. Without a very strong form of barrier—call it what you will—but without a wall, you cannot have border security. It won't work."

During that event, Art Del Cueto, a vice president of the NBPC and an agent with the BP's Tucson Sector, said that they were "extremely grateful" to the president for pushing border security.

"It has nothing to do with political parties," Del Cueto said. "You all got to ask yourselves this question: if I come to your home, do you want me to knock on the front door? Or, do you want me to climb through that window?"

Wasting no time, Trump's campaign website immediately began soliciting funds for the "Official Secure the Border Fund" which goes straight into the coffers for Trump's reelection campaign.

Reaction

Among those critical of the speech was U.S. Rep. Raúl Grijalva. The Tucson Democrat, a leading liberal in the House, has not only voted against the president's plans to build new border barriers, but joined the Center for Biological Diversity in a lawsuit with the aim of forcing Homeland Security officials to review the environmental impact of new barriers.

"The only crisis at the border is the one manufactured by Donald Trump, whose draconian policies of family separations, tear-gassing migrant families, and attempting to ban migrants from seeking asylum have created an unprecedented crisis at the border," Grijalva said. "Now, he has signaled a willingness to forgo Congress, declare an emergency, and use the military to build his monument of hate at our southern border."

"The myth of the insecure border is one of the greatest and most dangerous falsehoods promulgated by the Trump Administration, and is about as factual as his claims that Mexico will pay for his border wall," Grijalva said.

During his speech, Trump said that the border wall would "very quickly pay for itself" arguing that the wall and associated spending would stop illegal drugs.

"The cost of illegal drugs exceeds \$500 billion a year — vastly more than the \$5.7 billion we have requested from Congress," he said

"The wall will also be paid for, indirectly, by the great new trade deal we have made with Mexico," Trump claimed, referencing the administration's negotiations for the U.S.-Mexico Trade Agreement, a Canada-less version of NAFTA.

Grijalva said that the southern border "is already secure," and that any additional funding should "prioritize hiring more asylum and customs officers, modernizing our ports of entry, and working towards family-centered immigration reform."

"The fact that conversations are underway by Trump administration officials to declare a national emergency for Trump to build a wall and bolster his fragile ego are simply ridiculous," Grijalva said. "The only national emergency that merits immediate attention is the unhinged President who currently occupies the White House and refuses to put forth policy solutions that are grounded in facts."

"President Trump's primetime tirade today once again highlights his preference for showy displays over substantive policy solutions and reveals an alarming commitment to perpetuating lies and fear mongering in order to secure funding for his border wall vanity project," said Marielena Hincapié, the executive director of the National Immigration Law Center. "While Trump angrily spouts lies about a false crisis that his administration manufactured at the border, he is recklessly disregarding the very real impact of his actions on the lives and livelihoods of not only border communities, but all who call this country home," she said.

Lorella Praeli, a spokeswoman with the American Civil Liberties Union also said that there was a humanitarian crisis at the border, "one of this administration's own making."

"Its manufactured security emergency isn't credible," Praeli said, adding that Trump and Homeland Security Secretary Kirstjen Nielsen "have lied about border statistics and conditions, continued to push narratives that are proven false, and egregiously distorted realities."

"Their denial of the humanity and rights of immigrants is driving this administration's policy agenda, and it is killing people," Praeli said.

The idea of a crisis on the border has been at the center of the Trump administration's rhetoric for months, as DHS and the Justice Department sought one move after another to block people from entering the country along the nation's borders without authorization.

In June, just as the administration's separation of families was soundly rejected, both politically and legally, Nielsen told reporters in Nogales, Ariz. that she would end "lawlessness."

"Right now, as we stand here, illegal aliens, drug smugglers, human traffickers continue to cross our borders illegally because they can, because they do not face any consequences, but that will

end," Nielsen said within a few hundred feet of the metal bollard fence. "We are taking steps to end this lawlessness," she said.

Former Attorney General Jeff Sessions, who was sacked by Trump following November's election, called the border "ground zero" in the administration's fight against groups like MS-13.

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In a speech at the Mariposa Port of Entry, Sessions said that "It is here, on this sliver of land, where we first take our stand against this filth,"

Crisis? Or not.

However, even as Trump administration has used the language of crisis, data from U.S. Customs and Border Protection and U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement shows the situation on the border is more complex.

During a press conference, White House Press Secretary Sarah Sanders said Friday that CBP intercepted nearly 4,000 known or suspected terrorists last year "that came across our southern border."

However, her statement conflates several different issues at once.

In a report from ICE's Enforcement and Removal Operations, the agency noted that someone can be both a "known or suspect gang member" and a "Known or Suspected Terrorist."

"These populations are not mutually exclusive, as an alien may be flagged as both a known or suspected gang member, and a KST."

ICE said that in the fiscal year of 2018, ERO removed 45 people it called KSTs, and nearly 5,900 gang members.

The agency has also muddied the waters when it comes to people the agency flags as "Special Interest Aliens."

As DHS wrote this week, the designation "does not mean that all SIAs are 'terrorists,' but rather that person's "travel and behavior" could indicate "a possible nexus to nefarious activity" which may include terrorism.

"The term SIA does not indicate any specific derogatory information about the individual – and DHS has never indicated that the SIA designation means more than that."

For example, in November 2015, U.S. Border Patrol agents in Sonoita, Ariz., apprehended five Pakistani nationals and one man from Afghanistan, along with two smugglers. As John Lawson, a spokesman with CBP at the time, wrote:"As standard procedure, agents processed the six individuals and checked their identifies against numerous law enforcement and national security related databases. Records checks revealed no derogatory information about the individuals."

As the State Department bluntly put it, "There are no known international terrorist organizations operating in Mexico, no evidence that any terrorist group has targeted U.S. citizens in Mexican

territory, and no credible information that any member of a terrorist group has traveled through Mexico to gain access to the United States."

And, while the administration has argued that there's a crisis, several metrics from CBP show that border apprehensions represent a declining number of people attempting to cross the U.S.-Mexico border without authorization.

In the agency's own Border Security Metrics Report, published in May 2018, the agency shows that estimated "unlawful entries" declined from 1.8 million in the fiscal year of 2000 to 168,000 in 2016, a 91 percent decrease, even as the agency has grown by leaps and bounds from around 9,200 agents in 2000 to 19,828 agents in 2016.

"These facts suggest that USBP detects an increasingly comprehensive share of all attempted unlawful border crossers," the agency wrote.

Moreover, the agency's own data also shows that fewer criminals are picked up by either the Office of Field Operations, which runs the nation's ports, or by Border Patrol. From 2016 to 2017, the number of "criminal aliens" encountered by OFO declined about 25 percent, while the number of criminal aliens countered by Border Patrol declined around 28 percent.

Similarly, from 2014 to 2017, apprehensions of people identified as having "gang affiliations" declined nearly 48 percent. So, far in fiscal year 2018, CBP has said that nearly 730 people were identified as belonging to one of 32 gangs, far above 2017's number of 536, but below 2014 when 1,034 people were believed to belong to a street gang.

Moreover, older statistics also show that the agency's language about a crisis due to the increased number of families and children—called Family Units, or Unaccompanied Minors respectively by the agency—may not hold.

In 2010, the agency said that around 31,000 juveniles, or kids 17 years old and under, were apprehended by Border Patrol agents, down dramatically from 2005, when the agency dealt with 114,222 kids alone. In 2014, the number rose to 107,613, and DHS responded by opening up processing centers for young migrants, including one in Nogales, Ariz.

As David Bier, an analyst with the Cato Institute put it, "While the large numbers of children are certainly alarming, it is incorrect that it is the largest number ever. President Bush's administration apprehended more children with far fewer resources."

However, the shift in country of origin, along with rules about how ICE can handle children due to a decades-old class action lawsuit, complicates how quickly the agency can deport incoming migrants.

In the fiscal year of 2017, the agency said that it apprehended 41,035 children, now classified as unaccompanied minors, and nearly 76,000 family units. This represents nearly 40 percent of all apprehensions along the U.S.-Mexico border.

After a sudden overall in apprehensions along the border the next year, the agency has said that in October and November, roughly 10,000 kids traveling without their parents, and nearly 103,000 people traveling with families, nearly all of them from Central America who are seeking asylum.