



Wyoming congressional delegation blames Democrats for Trump's emergency declaration

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One said the action set a “bad precedent.” Another acknowledged the move would inevitably face opposition in the courts. A third, today one of the GOP’s most vocal presences in Washington, fully supported the President of the United States in what some fear might be a precedent-setting example of executive overreach.

All three members of Wyoming’s congressional delegation, however, affixed blame for the situation on one group: Democrats, who – after weathering a government shutdown over the issue – have so far refused to fully appropriate the funds for a border wall that President Donald Trump has made a cornerstone of his national security policy.

As the U.S. House voted Tuesday to overturn a national emergency declared by Trump over appropriations for a wall on the U.S.-Mexico border, Wyoming’s delegation in Washington – Sen. Mike Enzi, Sen. John Barrasso, and Rep. Liz Cheney — had varying perspectives on whether or not the president was acting within his bounds.

Trump’s border wall has been a point of contention since it was first floated as a centerpiece of his platform during his 2016 presidential campaign. Groups like the Cato Institute and local news outlets like the El Paso Times have argued the premise for the national emergency — the crisis on the border – is based on exaggerated crime statistics and hyperbolic anecdotal evidence. Others with more sympathetic perspectives, like the Migration Policy Institute, have said in the past that the effectiveness of border walls are mixed at best, often resulting in a fundamental shift in how border crossings are undertaken.

Most recently, 25 former members of Congress urged lawmakers to push back against the president’s national emergency declaration, which have in the past often been prompted by pressing national security threats. Despite independent research and what has been seen on the ground and in communities on the border, the federal government and backers of the president’s policies have constructed a narrative emphasizing an urgent need for the border wall, despite a demonstrable decrease in undocumented immigration into the United States.

In the weeks leading up to a vote on the federal budget in December, the Department of Homeland Security released a sparse statement on border fence construction, claiming that border apprehensions in those sectors had decreased 90 percent, though border walls and fencing have been shown to only divert border crossing traffic, and that increased levels of success are achievable only when other components — like surveillance, personnel and access roads — are incorporated into border security.

The GOP's communications strategy on border security – of which Cheney has been a chief architect – has largely focused on anecdotal evidence of a border crisis. House and Senate Republicans have sought to highlight the movement of migrant “caravans” approaching through Central America and play up serious crimes committed by undocumented immigrants – a strategy employed by Cheney in her role as House Republican Conference Chair – despite most serious research showing the per capita crime rate for undocumented immigrants is actually significantly lower than that of native-born Americans and has decreased steadily since the 1990s.

Rep. Cheney told the Star-Tribune in a statement that the executive branch was well within its authority to declare a national emergency, saying that the Democrats' refusal to appropriate Trump's full allotment for a border wall put national security at risk.

“President Donald Trump was acting within his constitutional authority when he declared a national emergency to secure our southern border,” Cheney said in a statement Monday. “The Democrats' refusal to engage in good-faith negotiations forced the president to make this move in order to provide necessary resources to build the wall and stop human trafficking, drug smuggling, and criminal illegal immigration. The Democrats are continuing to play political games with the security of our nation. My top priority will always be to protect the safety and security of all Americans.”

Both Cheney and Barrasso have sought to drum up support for the president's wall, both in Washington and in the court of public opinion. While Cheney has spearheaded communications for the wall both on cable television and in directing the party, Barrasso – a voice close to the president – has spoken numerous times on the floor of the Senate in support of the wall.

“The funds Congress approved provided a down payment on border security,” he said. “The president has made a compelling case for more. Partisan Democrats ignored security experts and blocked the president's full funding request for border barriers. Now the president is doing what he said he would do, even though he knows his decision will wind up before the courts and Congress. Congress should listen to the experts and do what's right to secure our border and protect our citizens.”

While still placing the blame on Democratic members of Congress, Enzi was the sole member of the Wyoming delegation to express some reluctance at the declaration of a national emergency to override the federal appropriations process, saying through a spokesman he was still reviewing the emergency declaration to understand the scope of its implications.

“Senator Enzi is disappointed that House majority and Senate minority leaders put the president in a position where he believed he had no other choice but to attempt to secure the border through an emergency declaration,” Max Donofrio, a spokesman for Enzi, said in a statement. “That is the way an executive approaches things, but as a legislator, Senator Enzi has concerns this could set a bad precedent.”