

Trump's wish: My kingdom for a wall

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A common American idiom is "Up against the wall," meaning "my situation is desperate." And that is where President Donald J. Trump found himself as the government shutdown he initiated turned catastrophic. Indeed, the fate of his presidency seems to be hanging on the dynamics of the moment.

Turning a bit more literary we might evoke Act V, Scene IV of William Shakespeare's "Richard III." King Richard, his horse slain, finds himself in battle fighting on foot and exclaims loudly:

"A horse! A horse! My kingdom for a horse." Indeed, horseless, the king himself ends by getting killed in the dramatic denouement of the play.

Trump, for his part, must be ready by now to scream, "A wall! A wall! My kingdom for a wall!"

Our 45th chief executive got himself and the entire country into a royal social meltdown with his insistence on \$5.7 billion in congressional funding for 200 miles of wall along our southern border.

Having gone through a full two years of his presidency without being able to get his GOP mates in the Senate and the House, both of which they controlled, to cough up the money, Trump bet the ranch he could get the Democrats to do it.

He thus singlehandedly furloughed 800,000 federal employees in a massive (though partial) government shutdown, which he said would continue until Congress voted to build the wall. Worse for his own fate, he told the nation in a televised Oval Office meeting with Democratic leaders that "I will do this on my own - and I'm not going to blame you."

As federal workers started showing up at food pantries and begging banks not to foreclose on their mortgages or landlords to "give me a little time for the rent," polls showed support for Trump - and the wall - dropping markedly.

This may be a damned if you do, damned if you don't juncture for Trump. Faced with massive costs to the U.S. economy and potential paralysis of the nation's airways due to air traffic controllers working without pay, the president caved to the Democrats and reopened the government without a penny for his wall.

Rightwing media darlings such as Ann Coulter on Fox News and Rush Limbaugh on the radio had said openly if Trump buckled, "His presidency is over."

For his part the beleaguered chief executive said that the government could be shut down again after 21 days unless a deal was struck to ensure funding for a border wall. If Congress wouldn't

vote for the funds, he said he would "declare a national emergency" and commandeer funds from the military and elsewhere in federal budgets.

The wall, in any event, is almost transparently a bad idea. The conservative CATO Institute termed the wall "fatally flawed" and also "a colossal waste of taxpayer dollars."

The conservative National Review political journal editorialized against the wall, saying it would occasion many battles with private landowners over eminent domain issues. Lawsuits to secure buildable land could be time-consuming and costly.

Another stalwart voice of opposition is Texas Republican congressman Will Hurd, whose district includes the U.S.-Mexican frontier. He called the wall "the least effective method of securing the border."

Walls, after all, can be hurdled, pierced, dynamited, tunneled under or otherwise circumvented. Hurd said technological surveillance, including cameras and drones, and increased border control manpower would be far better uses of the billions Trump wants to spend.

Left-leaning pundits have dubbed the wall "a monument to bigotry." The wall, they say, announces in harsh tones that America does not welcome brown-skinned immigrants. The suggestion is that the wall's value to Trump and his supporters may be more symbolic than real.