

With the government shutdown Trump's back is now against the wall

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In allowing federal employees and contractors to twist in the wind while he keeps the government shut down in an attempt to extort out of Congress a wall that makes no sense, Donald Trump is, if in a weak bargaining position, at least in his natural element. To date, 3,500 lawsuits have been filed against him for nonpayment. Among these are numerous claims made on behalf of the working men and women he claims to represent, from plumbers to painters to dozens of bartenders and waiters at his luxury resorts. He has been repeatedly cited for violations of the Fair Labor Standards Act for failing to pay overtime or minimum wage. He's used to being a deadbeat. He simply has no conscience about the matter.

Unlike Democrats, Republicans have to deal with the hardcore Trump base. And Trump is defending the wall not because of expert advice, but because right-wing commentators Ann Coulter and Rush Limbaugh warned that his base would desert him if he failed to keep his promise to build it. Of course, his promise that Mexico would pay for it was broken long ago.

So in a last-minute Hail Mary strategy, Vice-President Mike Pence and White House Press Secretary Sarah Sanders were trotted out to make the false claim that terrorists have been attempting to cross the Mexican border at the rate of 10 per day, to a total of 4,000 in 2018. NBC News subsequently obtained U.S. Customs and Patrol data for 2018, which shows that the agency stopped only six people at the border who were on the government's database. Things that could get you on this include simply knowing someone or having a family member whose activities are considered dangerous, even if that person is just an activist. And the 4,000 actual terrorist suspects stopped in 2018 were overwhelmingly in airports, which are now much less secure and more congested because employees are calling in sick rather than working for free.

Trump has latched on to the opioid crisis as another excuse for having a wall. But the bulk of opioids are coming from China through northern states like New Jersey, delivered in bulk air and sea shipments, not by human mules with packs on their backs running across the U.S./Mexico border in desert terrain.

Fear-mongering about crime committed by immigrants is a staple of White House propaganda. But the libertarian Cato Institute examined data from the Texas Department of Public Safety on 2015 criminal convictions. It found that undocumented immigrants were 56 per cent less likely

to be convicted of crimes than native-born citizens, and documented immigrants, 85 per cent less likely. The only crimes undocumented immigrants were more likely to be involved in were gambling, kidnapping, smuggling and vagrancy. But these activities are such a small per cent of overall crime, they affect the rates very little, if at all.

The journal Criminology published two studies showing no corresponding increase in crime with increasing numbers of immigrants, documented or otherwise. In fact, one study showed that states with more undocumented immigrants had lower crime rates than states with fewer of them. Critics will, of course, say that one crime committed by an immigrant is one too many. By that logic, American males, who account for the vast majority of violent crime, including almost 90 per cent of homicides, should be closely watched, if not banned outright.

Apprehensions at the southern border are now at a 40-year low. Mexico is no longer the top country of origin for immigrants to the United States. And immigrants who do come from there are more likely than not to be college graduates with strong English-language skills.

It's no surprise that Trump lives in fear of his base dwindling. It's pretty much all he has left. Republican Senators, in spite of his base, are beginning to distance themselves from him, and Democrats are solidly united in opposition to his policies. Should he take the foolish step of trying to declare border crossings to be a national emergency, Dems will immediately take him to court, where he will have little chance of providing a basis for his claim.

Polls show that only Republican voters support the wall; 66 per cent of independents and 84 per cent of Democrats oppose it. These are major voting blocs, and likely they will be bolstered in 2020 by the over 800,000 government employees whose lives he is now tampering with on a whim.