



Local views of shutdown hew to party lines

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January 9, 2019

As the partial federal government shutdown enters its 19th day with no end in sight, House lawmakers on both sides of the aisle continued to call for a deal to reopen government agencies and deliver paychecks to some 800,000 affected federal employees.

But they agreed on little else.

Democrats continued to accuse President Donald Trump and his Republican backers of holding federal agencies and employees hostage to their demands for a wall on the border with Mexico, while Republicans say their opponents are ignoring the need for stronger security on the southern border.

Local U.S. representatives were no exceptions.

Democrats Rep. Brian Higgins and Joe Morelle said Trump is manufacturing a crisis to push a campaign promise, and called on him to support spending bills recently passed by House Democrats.

"This shutdown has been an unnecessary crisis manufactured by the President," Higgins, D-Buffalo, said in a statement. "Today the new Democratic House showed leadership in asserting its authority as an equal branch of government. We hope the Senate joins us in standing up for federal workers and restoring an operational government for the people of this country."

"This government shutdown has created an economic crisis that lies squarely on the President's shoulders," Morelle, D-Rochester, in a statement. "Nearly one million federal workers and their families are going without paychecks while essential services to ensure the health, safety, and well-being of the American people have come screeching to a halt."

Morelle also accused Trump of "cowering behind his own wall of misinformation and misguided priorities." Critics say Trump, both in his address and past rhetoric, incorrectly links illegal immigrants to crime. Most social science research, including a 2018 Cato Institute study, show illegal immigrants commit crime at lower rates than native-born citizens.

Higgins pointed out House Democrats last week passed a spending bill that would fund every affected government agency, except for the Department of Homeland Security, through September 2019.

A separate spending bill would fund DHS through Feb. 9, to allow for further debate on border security.

Both bills passed Jan. 3 with unanimous support from House Democrats — who claimed their new majority earlier this year — and the backing of only a handful of Republicans.

"Congress has offered President Trump a clear path to reopening the government and it is his duty to join us in enacting a responsible, bipartisan solution to restore certainty and stability for the American people," Morelle said.

But Trump and Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell said any bill that lacks \$5.7 billion in border wall funding is a non-starter. Trump insists he will not accept a smaller allocation for the wall, and said Tuesday that Mexico will ultimately pay for the wall through a new trade deal between the two countries and Canada, though that deal has yet to be ratified by Congress.

Rep. Chris Collins pinned the shutdown on Democratic leaders, suggesting they were in fact exploiting federal workers for political gain.

"It's time for partisan Democrats like Nancy Pelosi and Chuck Schumer to quit using hardworking Americans as pawns as they stonewall efforts to secure the border and reopen our government," Collins said in a statement.

Collins previously backed Trump's call for a border wall, and suggested the president could force Mexico to pay for it. Speaking to CNN in January 2017, Collins said Trump "has all the cards" in funding negotiations with Mexico.

But while Collins did call for a deal that enhances border security, he made no mention of the wall — or Mexico footing the bill — in his statement Wednesday.

"Protecting American citizens should be a top priority, and it is my hope that Congress and President Trump can work together to find a bipartisan solution that effectively secures our borders and reopens the federal government in a timely manner," Collins said.

Rep. Tom Reed, who like Collins rejected House Democrats' spending bills, struck a more conciliatory tone, calling on both parties to reach a deal that enhances border security, wall or no wall.

"We need to stop fighting about a word: the wall. It's so asinine, it's so stupid," Reed said in an interview on MSNBC. "Border security, if that's the term, then let's embrace it and say, what does border security entail? It means a wall, it means structure, it means technology and it means people. Why don't we solve the problem once and for all?"

While the shutdown debate has centered on Trump's call for \$5.7 billion in wall funding — an increase of \$4.1 billion over the previous amount doled out by Senate appropriations — the White House has also called for more funding for myriad other security measures.

In a letter sent to lawmakers over the weekend, obtained by Politico, the White House also requested increased allocations of \$100 million for immigrations judges and border agents, \$571 million for Immigration and Customs Enforcement personnel, nearly \$800 million for detention beds, another \$800 million for "urgent humanitarian needs" and \$631 million for technology to intercept narcotics and weapons at legal, land ports of entry in the Southwest.

Collins also announced Wednesday he had requested his own paycheck be withheld.

“I believe it’s unfair for me to receive pay while the men and women who put their lives on the line to keep our country safe are seeing their paychecks delayed,” he said.