



Border tear gas incident renews wall debate, but little change expected

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Arizona Republicans on Monday backed President Donald Trump's renewed demands for border wall funding after migrants were tear gassed as they tried to rush the border at San Ysidro, California, Sunday.

A showdown over border wall funding could lead to a partial government shutdown, with the current Department of Homeland Security budget set to expire next week and the current Congress only scheduled to meet for three more weeks.

But experts and advocates on both sides of the debate believe that the lame-duck Congress is unlikely to allow a shutdown to happen, and President Donald Trump is unlikely to force one.

"Trump's been calling for this border wall since he was elected, and each spending deal, he's caved in on it," said Chris Edwards, an economist at the Cato Institute. "So, he'll cave in again, in my view, and in fact he's in an even weaker position this time because of course the Democrats take over the House come January.

"I don't think that Trump has any political power here," he said.

At issue is the budget for the Department of Homeland Security, which is set to expire Dec. 7 with funding for a handful of other agencies. The House version of the budget bill includes \$5 billion for border security and the Senate has budgeted \$1.6 billion. If the two chambers cannot come to agreement on a budget, or if Trump vetoes it, the affected agencies, including DHS, could be forced to shut down.

Trump, who said earlier this month that a shutdown over border wall funding was a possibility, did not repeat those threats yesterday. But he did tweet Monday that Congress needs to fund the wall, and that he would "close the Border permanently if need be" to keep migrants that he described as "stone cold criminals" from entering the country.

He was reacting to events Sunday at San Ysidro Port of Entry, when hundreds of migrants who have been awaiting processing of asylum claims in makeshift shelters on the Tijuana side of the border tried to run through car lanes and climb a border fence. Customs and Border Protection agents responded by firing tear gas at those trying to rush the border.

"Today, several migrants threw projectiles at the agents in San Diego," CBP tweeted Sunday. "Border Patrol agents deployed tear gas to dispel the group because of the risk to agents' safety. Several agents were hit by the projectiles."

The agency also shut down all vehicle and pedestrian traffic at San Ysidro, America's busiest port of entry, until order was restored.

Trump defended the agents' use of tear gas.

"They had to use (tear gas) because they were being rushed by some very tough people," he said, according to a White House press pool report. "Here's the bottom line. Nobody's coming into our country unless they come in legally."

That was echoed by Rep. Andy Biggs, R-Gilbert, one of several House Republicans who have introduced bills to fully fund a border wall, legislation he said is urgently needed.

"The attack on our southern border by a mob attempting to enter our country illegally, in part to force us to change our laws and policies, is nothing short of an invasion," Biggs said in an editorial for Fox News.

Rep. Debbie Lesko, R-Peoria, agreed that "Congress needs to act to secure our border," which is why she backed legislation to build a wall and tighten immigration laws.

Arizona Democrats were not immediately available for comment Monday, but Rep. Ruben Gallego, D-Phoenix, said last week that a wall is not the answer.

"Democrats aren't against border security, we're also not going to throw money at a symbolic wall when we know it may not actually end up creating any level of security, when we know there's better ways to do it," he said.

Kristie de Pena, director of immigration and senior counsel at the nonpartisan Niskanen Center, said Monday that Trump is politicizing the migrant "caravans and people that are seeking asylum in a way that isn't really nearing reality."

"Anyone who is well-acquainted with the situation on the border knows that a border wall is in no way a solution to this problem," de Pena said. Instead, she called for "the resources necessary to process those asylum claims at ports of entry."

"I do know that many lawmakers, both Republicans and Democrats, really do not want to shut down the government," she said. "Many of them are having bipartisan talks about how to fund some security measures – not necessarily a border wall."

But Matthew Sussis, assistant director of communications for the Center for Immigration Studies, said it's not an issue Trump is likely to keep hammering on.

"Obviously, he campaigned on it, and I think Trump feels strongly about the wall because it was so electorally important to him," said Sussis, whose organization advocates for reduced immigration. While this might be a good time for Republicans to push on border security, he said, he sees funding a wall as unlikely in the coming weeks.

"If the past is any indicator of the future, Trump's been pretty unwilling to shut down the government," Sussis said.

Edwards said Trump might have more success if he pushed for "border enforcement" instead of a border wall, "but he seems to want to polarize the situation."

“As many people have observed for years, there should be some sort of broader immigration deal between the two parties, and it’s really a pox on both their houses that they don’t come to some kind of an agreement,” Edwards said.

“There should be a deal here,” he said. “The new Congress in the coming year will be interesting.”