

Trump signs \$1.3 trillion budget despite his late ‘disappointment’

President touts military spending, but threatens veto for lack of border wall funding

By JILL COLVIN, CATHERINE LUCEY, LISA MASCARO AND ALAN FRAM
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump grudgingly signed a \$1.3 trillion federal spending measure Friday and averted a midnight government shutdown — but only after undercutting his own negotiators and setting off a mini-panic with a last-minute veto threat. The episode further eroded the already damaged credibility of both the president and a White House staff that had assured the nation he was onboard.

Trump said he was “very disappointed” in the package, in part because it did not fully pay for his planned border wall with Mexico and did not extend protection from deportation to some 700,000 “Dreamer” immigrants due to lose coverage under a program the president himself has moved to eliminate.

But Trump praised the bill’s provisions to increase military spending and said he had “no choice but to fund our military.”

“My highest duty is to keep America safe,” he said.

The bill signing came a few hours after Trump created his latest round of last-minute drama by tweeting that he was “considering” a veto.

With Congress already on recess, and a government shutdown looming, he said that young immigrants now protected in the U.S. under Barack Obama’s Delayed Action for Childhood Arrivals program “have been totally abandoned by the Democrats (not even mentioned in Bill) and the BORDER WALL, which is desperately needed for our National Defense, is not fully funded.”

Trump’s veto threat put him at odds with top members of his administration and Republican House Speaker Paul Ryan, who had said publicly that Trump supported the bill. Advisers inside and outside the White House said they never expected Trump to go through with his threat and believed he was likely just blowing off steam.

Finally, in made-for-TV scheduling, Trump took to twitter again to announce he’d be holding a news conference to talk about the bill. The drama was short-lived: An aide told reporters the signing was on. And it was a



AP Photo/Pablo Martinez Monsivais
President Donald Trump stops to answers questions from the media after speaking in the Diplomatic Room of the White House in Washington about the \$1.3 trillion spending bill Friday. With him are Defense Secretary Jim Mattis, left, and Homeland Security Secretary Kirstjen Nielsen.

monologue by Trump, not a news conference. He answered two questions called out to him as he left the room.

Asked why he’d made the threat, Trump said he’d “looked very seriously at the veto,” but “because of the incredible gains that we’ve been able to make for the military that overrode any of our thinking.”

He warned Congress: “I will never sign another bill like this again.”

The giant spending bill, though, expires Sept. 30, and another funding measure will be needed. To boost the party-in-power’s ability to muscle its agenda through Congress, he called for an overhaul of Senate rules to allow for simple-majority votes on all bills and appealed to Congress for line-item veto power to kill specific spending items he disagrees with. The Supreme Court ruled in 1998 that a congressionally passed line-item veto was unconstitutional.

The will-he, won’t-he episode came hours after the Senate’s early morning passage of the huge spending package aimed at keeping the government open past Friday midnight.

Trump backed the bill only reluctantly, and Republican lawmakers and aides acknowledged the deal involved trade-offs for Democratic votes that were needed despite the GOP majority lock on Congress.

The president had been especially frustrated in recent days by media coverage of the bill and by conservative Republican lawmakers, some of whom had been calling to harangue him and making their cases loudly on cable news shows he is known to watch.

Rep. Mark Meadows, R-N.C., chairman of the House Freedom Caucus and a friend of the president, said in a tweet that the group would “fully support” a veto, adding that Congress should pass a short-term budget resolution while Trump and congressional leaders “negotiate a better deal for the forgotten men and women of America.”

Sen. Senator Bob Corker, R-Tenn., also egged Trump on to a veto. “Please do, Mr. President,” he tweeted. “I am just down the street and will bring you a pen. The spending levels without any offsets are grotesque, throwing all of our children under the bus. Totally irresponsible.”

Trump’s actions came after a call from Speaker Ryan. At around 9:30 a.m. Friday, Ryan encouraged the president to sign the bill, according to a person familiar with the communication, and discussed all the wins it delivered, especially for the military. The person spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss the private conversation.

New Trump order would ban most transgender troops

Associated Press

PALM BEACH, Fla. — President Donald Trump released an order Friday night banning most transgender troops from serving in the military except under “limited circumstances,” following up on his calls last year to ban transgender individuals from serving.

The White House said retaining troops with a history or diagnosis of “gender dysphoria” — those who may require substantial medical treatment — “presents considerable risk to military effectiveness and lethality.”

Trump surprised the Pentagon’s leadership in a 2017 tweet when he declared he would reverse an Obama-era plan to allow transgender individuals to serve openly. His push for the ban has been blocked by several legal challenges, and three federal courts have ruled against the ban. The Pentagon responded by allowing those serving to stay in the military, and began allowing transgender individuals to enlist beginning Jan. 1.

“This new policy will enable the military to apply well-established mental and physical health standards — including those regarding the use of medical drugs — equally to all individuals who want to join and fight for the best military force the world has ever seen,” White House Press Secretary Sarah Huckabee Sanders said Friday.

The new policy was promptly assailed by congressional Democrats and civil rights groups. House Democratic leader Nancy Pelosi tweeted, “No one with the strength & bravery to serve in the U.S. military should be turned away because of who they are. This hateful ban is purpose-built to humiliate our brave transgender members of the military who serve with honor & dignity.”

The Human Rights Campaign, the nation’s largest LGBT civil rights organization, accused the Trump administration of pushing “anti-transgender prejudices onto the military.”

“There is simply no way to spin it, the Trump-Pence Administration is going all in on its discriminatory, unconstitutional and despicable ban on transgender troops,” said HRC President Chad Griffin.

Joshua Block, a senior staff attorney at the American Civil Liberties Union LGBT & HIV Project, said the policy “effectively coerces transgender people who wish to serve into choosing between their humanity and their country, and makes it clear that transgender service members are not welcome.”

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