

Trump: Shutdown could last for 'months or even years'

Weekend talks set for aides, officials

By CATHERINE LUCEY, LISA MASCARO AND JILL COLVIN
Associated Press



AP Photo/Manuel Balce Ceneta

President Donald Trump speaks during a news conference in the Rose Garden of the White House after meeting with lawmakers about border security, Friday in Washington.

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump declared Friday he could keep parts of the government shut down for “months or even years” as he and Democratic leaders failed in a second closed-door meeting to resolve his demand for billions of dollars for a border wall with Mexico. They did agree to a new round of weekend talks between staff members and White House officials.

Trump met in the White House Situation Room with congressional leaders from both parties as the shutdown hit the two-week mark amid an impasse over his wall demands. Democrats emerged from the roughly two-hour meeting, which both sides said was contentious at times, to report little if any progress.

The standoff also

prompted economic jitters and anxiety among some in Trump’s own party. But he appeared in the Rose Garden to frame the upcoming weekend talks as progress, while making clear he would not reopen the government.

“We won’t be opening until it’s solved,” Trump said. “I don’t call it a shutdown. I call it doing what you have to do for the benefit and the safety of our country.”

Trump said the hundreds of thousands of fed-

eral workers who are furloughed or working without pay would want him to “keep going” and fight for border security. Asked how people would manage without a financial safety net, he declared: “The safety net is going to be having a strong border because we’re going to be safe.”

Democrats, on the other hand, spoke of families unable to pay bills and called on Trump to reopen the government while negotiations continue. Senate

Democratic Minority Leader Chuck Schumer said, “It’s very hard to see how progress will be made unless they open up the government.”

Friday’s White House meeting with Trump included eight congressional leaders — the top two Democrats and Republicans of both chambers. People familiar with the session but not authorized to speak publicly described Trump as holding forth at length on a range of subjects but said he made clear he was firm in his demand for \$5.6 billion in wall funding and in rejecting the Democrats’ request to reopen the government.

Trump confirmed that he privately told Democrats the shutdown could drag on for months or years, though he said he hoped it wouldn’t last that long. Said Trump: “I hope it doesn’t go on even beyond a few more days.”

House Democrats muscled through legislation Thursday night to fund the government but not Trump’s proposed wall. However, Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell has said those measures are

non-starters on his side of the Capitol without the president’s support.

A variety of strategies are being floated inside and outside the White House, among them trading wall funding for a deal on immigrants brought to the country as young people and now here illegally, or using a national emergency declaration to build the wall. While Trump made clear during his press conference that talk on DACA (the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program) would have to wait and that he was trying to negotiate with Congress on the wall, the conversations underscored rising Republican anxiety about just how to exit the shutdown.

Seeking to ease concerns, the White House sought to frame the weekend talks as a step forward, as did McConnell, who described plans for a “working group,” though people familiar with the meeting said that phrase never actually came up. Trump designated Vice President Mike Pence, Homeland Security Secretary Kirstjen Nielsen

and adviser Jared Kushner to work with a congressional delegation over the weekend.

Some GOP senators up for re-election in 2020 voiced discomfort with the shutdown in recent days, including Cory Gardner of Colorado and Susan Collins of Maine, putting additional pressure on Republicans.

But with staff level talks there is always an open question of whether Trump’s aides are fully empowered to negotiate for the president. Earlier this week, he rejected his own administration’s offer to accept \$2.5 billion for the wall. That proposal was made when Pence and other top officials met at the start of the shutdown with Schumer.

During his free-wheeling session with reporters, Trump also wrongly claimed that he’d never called for the wall to be concrete. Trump did so repeatedly during his campaign, describing a wall of pre-cast concrete sections that would be higher than the walls of many of his rally venues. He repeated that promise just days ago.

Debate about the wall obscures other struggles at the border

By COLLEEN LONG AND ELLIOT SPAGAT
Associated Press

SAN DIEGO — In Washington, it’s all about the wall. At the border, it’s only part of the story.

Border authorities are struggling with outdated facilities ill-equipped to handle the growing increase in family migrants, resulting in immigrants being released onto the streets every day. The immigration court system is so clogged that some wait years for their cases to be resolved, and lacks funding to pay for basic things like in-person translators. An increase in sick children arriving at the border is putting a strain on medical resources.

But the Washington debate

has focused almost exclusively on the \$5 billion in wall spending that President Donald Trump wants. Other proposals being discussed keep the rest of the Homeland Security department funding at existing levels.

“The wall is a tool. Unfortunately even if it’s implemented across the border it isn’t a solution to all the problems,” said Victor M. Manjarrez, a former Border Patrol chief with more than 20 years of experience, now a professor at the University of Texas-El Paso.

Trump has suggested migrants won’t bother to come if he gets his way, making other immigration issues less problematic. Walls and fencing currently blanket about one-third of the border — mostly built under



AP Photo/Daniel Ochoa de Olza

A migrant from Honduras passes a child to her father after he jumped the border fence to get into the U.S. side to San Diego, Calif., from Tijuana, Mexico on Thursday.

President George W. Bush — and the president wants to extend and fortify them. But contracting, designing and building new wall systems complete with updated technology could take years.

The debate overlooks major bottlenecks in the immigration system as more families and children traveling alone turn themselves in to authorities to seek asylum, instead of trying

to elude capture as almost everyone did just a few years ago. In some cases, migrants are climbing existing border fence and seeking out agents to surrender.

The backlog in immigration courts has more than doubled to 1.1 million cases since shortly before Trump took office, according to Syracuse University’s Transactional Records Access Clearinghouse. Families and children now account for about six of 10 Border Patrol arrests, but there are only about 3,300 family detention beds and the number of unaccompanied children in government care has soared under Trump.

Border crossers are stuck in short-term holding cells for days and there has been

a spike in sick migrant children, including two who died in custody.

In addition, the wall will do little to address the issue of visa overstays — when immigrants come to the country legally and remain here after their papers expire. Authorities say there were nearly 740,000 overstays during a recent 12-month period.

And border agents continue to struggle with growing numbers of children and families. Officials say they are stopping about 2,000 people a day, more than 60 percent children and families, higher than during many periods under President Barack Obama. They referred 451 cases to a medical provider from Dec. 22 to Dec. 30, more than half children.

Impeachment talk flares after Democrats take power in House

WASHINGTON (AP) — House Speaker Nancy Pelosi had only been in office for a few hours when a handful of Democrats defied her persistent calls not to begin the new Congress by talking about impeachment.

Just after Pelosi was sworn in Thursday, long-time Democratic Reps. Brad Sherman of California and Al Green of Texas introduced articles of impeachment against President Donald Trump. That evening, newly elected Rep. Rashida Tlaib of Michigan riled up a supportive crowd by calling the president a profanity and predicting that he will be removed from office.

Tension over impeachment is likely to be a persistent thorn for Pelosi, who will have to balance between a small, vocal group of the most liberal members of her caucus, who want to see Trump removed immediately, and the majority of her members who want to wait for special counsel Robert Mueller’s Russia investigation to finish. Pelosi purposely avoided — and encouraged most fellow Democrats to avoid — any talk of impeachment during the election, believing there could be backlash from voters.

While eager to paint impeachment as the Democrats’ only agenda, Trump has also expressed some worry both publicly and privately at the prospect. He has told confidants that he finds the impeachment talk somewhat unnerving, according to an outside adviser who spoke to him in recent days.

The president, who has long fashioned himself as the ultimate winner, told the confidant that he worried that impeachment, even



AP Photo/Carolyn Kaster

Rep.-elect Rashida Tlaib of Michigan is shown on the House floor before being sworn into the 116th Congress at the U.S. Capitol in Washington.

if he retained office, would be a stain on his legacy. And while he thought the impeachment would rally his own base in the 2020 election it could hurt his standing with foreign leaders as he negotiates trade deals, according to the adviser.

While many Democrats might favor impeachment, those calling for it now are largely outliers. Most Democratic lawmakers listened to Pelosi and campaigned on kitchen table issues such as health care and jobs and prefer to keep them at the forefront of the party’s focus.

Still, it will be hard for Pelosi to quiet some on her left flank who see their new majority as a direct challenge to Trump.

“Impeachment is on the table,” Sherman said. “You can’t take it off the table.”

Tlaib, who represents a liberal district in Detroit, exclaimed at an event late

Thursday that Democrats were going to “impeach the mother-----.” She didn’t back down Friday, tweeting that “I will always speak truth to power.” She added the hashtag, “#unapologeticallyMe.”

Her spokesman, Denzel McCampbell, said in a statement that Tlaib, one of only two Muslim women in Congress, “was elected to shake up Washington” and will not stay silent.

Pelosi said Friday at an MSNBC town hall said she wouldn’t censor her colleagues, and that Tlaib’s language was no worse than things Trump has said.

Still, Pelosi said she didn’t like the language and wouldn’t use it. She said, as she has many times before, that the House shouldn’t move to impeach Trump without more facts and that she believes impeachment is divisive.

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