

Trump not 'thrilled' with border deal but leaning toward it

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Under mounting pressure from his own party, President Donald Trump appeared to be grudgingly leaning toward accepting an agreement Tuesday that would head off a threatened second government shutdown but provide just a fraction of the money he's been demanding for his Mexican border wall.

Trump said he would need more time to study the plan, but he also declared he was not expecting another

shutdown this week-end when funding for parts of the government would run out. He strongly signaled he planned to scrounge up additional dollars for the wall by raiding other federal coffers to deliver on the signature promise of his presidential campaign.

"I can't say I'm happy. I can't say I'm thrilled," Trump said of the proposed deal. "But the wall is getting built, regardless. It doesn't matter because we're doing other things beyond what



Trump

we're talking about here."

Accepting the deal, worked out by congressional negotiators from both parties, would be a disappointment for a president who has repeatedly insisted he needs \$5.7 billion for a barrier along the U.S.-Mexico border, saying the project is paramount for national security. Trump turned down a similar deal in December, forcing the 35-day partial shutdown that left hundreds of thousands of federal work-

ers without paychecks and Republicans reeling. There is little appetite in Washington for a repeat.

Lawmakers tentatively agreed Monday night to a deal that would provide nearly \$1.4 billion for border barriers and keep the government funded for the rest of the fiscal year, which ends on Sept. 30.

The agreement would allow 55 miles of new fencing — constructed using existing designs such as metal slats — but far less than the 215 miles the White House demanded in Decem-

ber. The fencing would be built in Texas' Rio Grande Valley.

Full details were not expected to be released until Wednesday as lawmakers worked to translate their verbal agreement into legislation. But Republican leaders urged Trump to sign on.

"I hope he signs the bill," said Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, who joined other GOP leaders in selling it as a necessary compromise that represented a major concession from Democrats.

Appropriations Committee Chairman Richard Shelby, R-Ala., expressed optimism Trump would be on board.

"We believe from our dealings with them and the latitude they've given us, they will support it," he said. "We certainly hope so."

Others were less upbeat. Sen. John Cornyn, R-Texas, who traveled with the president to a rally in Cornyn's home state Monday night, said, "My impression flying back with him from El Paso last night is that he thinks it's pretty thin gruel."

Senate backs major public lands bill

By MATTHEW DALY
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The Senate on Tuesday approved a major public lands bill that revives a popular conservation program, adds 1.3 million acres of new wilderness, expands several national parks and creates five new national monuments.

The measure, the largest public lands bill considered by Congress in a decade, combines more than 100 separate bills that designate more than 350 miles of river as wild and scenic, add 2,600 miles of new federal trails and create nearly 700,000 acres of new recreation and conservation areas. The bill also withdraws 370,000 acres in Montana and Washington state from mineral development.

The Senate approved the bill, 92-8, sending it to the House.

Lawmakers from both parties said the bill's most important provision was to permanently reauthorize the federal Land and Water Conservation Fund, which supports conservation and outdoor recreation projects across the country. The program expired last fall after Congress could not agree on language to extend it.

"The Land and Water Conservation Fund has been a pre-eminent program for access to public lands" for more than 50 years, said Sen. Maria Cantwell, D-Wash. The program has supported more than 42,000 state and local projects throughout the U.S. since its creation in 1964.

The hodgepodge bill offered something for nearly everyone, with projects stretching across the country.

Even so, the bill was derailed last year after Republican Sen. Mike Lee objected, saying he wanted to exempt his home state of Utah from a law that allows the president to designate federal lands as a national monument protected from development.

Lee's objection during a heated Senate debate in December forced lawmakers to start over in the new Congress, culminating in Tuesday's Senate vote.

Sen. Cory Gardner, a Colorado Republican who clashed with Lee on the Senate floor, said the vote caps four years of work to reauthorize the Land and Water Conservation Fund and protect public lands.

Sen. Lisa Murkowski, R-Alaska, who chairs the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee, said the bill enhances use of public lands and water, while promoting conservation and sporting activities such as hunting and fishing.

She and other senators called the Land and Water Conservation Fund one of the most popular and effective programs Congress has ever created. The program uses federal royalties from offshore oil and gas drilling to fund conservation and public recreation projects around the country.

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