

Democrats reject Trump proposal to fund border wall and end US government shutdown

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The longest partial federal government shutdown in American history is entering its second month with no sign of an imminent deal between Republican President Donald Trump and Congressional Democrats over funding for a wall on the US-Mexico border.

The Democrats rejected a proposal by Trump over the weekend to extend temporary protections for some undocumented immigrants in exchange for funding for increased border security, including a wall. Trump has threatened to declare a national state of emergency and deploy the military to build the wall if he is unable to reach a deal with the Democrats, who control a majority in the House of Representatives.

There are growing signs of financial distress among the 500,000 federal employees forced to work without pay and the 300,000 that have been furloughed. Without a resolution by Thursday 800,000 federal employees and approximately 500,000 contractors will miss their second full paycheck.

Free food pantries across the country have been making special appeals for donations specifically for federal employees and have held special events to deliver food supplies. A restaurant set up by World Central Kitchen to serve free meals to federal employees in Washington, D.C. served nearly 10,000 meals in its first two days of operation last week. Federal employees in Atlanta lined up in their cars Friday to receive 40,000 pounds of frozen chicken and vegetables from the Atlanta Community Food Bank. Elsewhere in the country the Foodbank of Hawaii is planning to hand out 300 emergency food bags to Transportation Safety Administration (TSA) and other federal workers in the Pacific Island state this week.

More than 1,500 GoFundMe campaigns have been set up by federal employees since the beginning of the shutdown in order to receive donations to cover the cost

of rent, food and medical bills. With 78 percent of Americans living paycheck to paycheck, increasing numbers of unpaid federal employees are also turning to pawn shops and extremely high interest pay day lenders in order to get cash to cover their bills. Such stopgap measures will not be enough for many to avoid eviction from their homes if the shutdown continues much longer.

There are however also growing signs of opposition, particularly among TSA airport security agents who are being forced to work without pay, already among the lowest paid federal employees with an average starting salary of just \$32,000 per year. The percentage of TSA workers taking unscheduled absences was up to 8 percent on Saturday, compared to just 3 percent last year. A statement released by the TSA noted that many workers report that financial restraints have kept them from getting to work.

The growing number of absences resulted in the closure Saturday of one of three screening checkpoints at BWI Marshall Airport in Baltimore, Maryland. This follows the closure of checkpoints last week in Miami, Houston, Washington, D.C.'s Dulles Airport and Atlanta's Hartsfield-Jackson, the world's busiest airport.

The continuing back and forth between Trump and the Democrats have exposed the grotesque levels of cynicism and hypocrisy on both sides.

Trump's proposal Saturday for a three-year reprieve for 700,000 immigrants brought to the US without proper documentation as children covered by the DACA program, and 300,000 immigrants protected from deportation by Temporary Protected Status, in exchange for \$5.7 billion in funding for the border wall was rejected immediately by the Democrats.

The offer was not actually a "compromise," since Trump himself is responsible for rescinding DACA and

TPS and his proposal would only temporarily undo what he did by executive order in order to extract funding from Congress for a permanent wall.

Trump used his remarks from the White House Diplomatic Reception Room to make yet another fascistic appeal to his right-wing base, smearing immigrants as “criminals, drug smugglers, gangs and traffickers.” He also attacked the Democrats as “the radical left” exclaiming that they “can never control our border. I will never let it happen.”

Contradicting his own ludicrous pretense that the Democrats are left-wing radicals clamoring for open borders, Trump noted that they had already put forward many of his proposals for border security and “all of them have been supported by Democrats in the past, including a physical barrier, wall, or fence.”

There are no serious, let alone principled differences between the Democrats and Republicans over immigration policy. The *New York Times* reported Friday that House Democrats will add an additional \$1 billion in funding for so-called “border security” into the package of bills which would reopen the federal government except for the Department of Homeland Security (DHS). This new money would cover funding for new infrastructure at ports of entry and more immigration judges to speed deportations.

A separate \$1.3 billion package of funding for DHS being proposed by the Democrats in the House would provide for more guards and technology at the border.

“People want to make sure that it’s clear that the Democrats do stand for border security, and not allow the president to determine how we talk about it,” Democratic Representative Ro Khanna from California told the *Times*. “We can’t cave to his vision for a wall, because of everything that it represents, but we also want to show that we’re for something.”

On the Sunday talk shows, Senators Kirsten Gillibrand of New York and Mark Warner of Virginia repeated the Democratic Party’s mantra that they fully support increasing border security, a euphemism for more border police, more military hardware, more prisons, more suffering and death along the border and in detention camps.

Gillibrand, who announced her 2020 candidacy for President last week, told ABC’s “This Week” that Trump’s “idea for a wall is ineffective and it’s not going to make us safer. I will support border security. I will support investment to make our country strong and safe. All Democrats care about national security and border

security.” Appearing on NBC’s “Meet the Press,” Warner declared that Trump’s proposal over the weekend was “a starting point.”

Both Gillibrand and Warner, when asked point blank if they would agree to fund a wall, avoided giving an answer and talked around the issue. Warner stressed that the Democrats were ready to negotiate, but only after Trump ended the shutdown.

Gillibrand on “This Week” boasted that the Democrats had agreed last year to give Trump all the money he wanted to “start doing the things [he wants] to do” on the border in return for legal status for DACA recipients.

A third leading Democrat, House Homeland Security Committee Chairman Bennie Thompson, was less evasive. He flatly declared that the Democrats had supported a “physical barrier” along the US-Mexico border many times in the past, and would do so again in the future. “I would not rule out a wall in certain circumstances,” he told ABC’s “This Week.”

Both sides in the political warfare in Washington are reactionary and anti-democratic. The Democrats and Republicans are appealing to different factions within the military for support. The anti-Trump factions, fronted politically by the Democrats, are using the anti-democratic methods of palace coup and seeking to whip up a McCarthyite hysteria against Moscow and “fake news,” to justify censorship and prepare the ground for war against Russia.

The working class is being used as pawns in this struggle, with the livelihoods of millions being put on the line by the shutdown and Trump’s assault on immigrants. At the same time there is growing fear of an eruption of federal workers, linking up with teachers on strike in Los Angeles, maquiladora workers on strike in Matamoros, Mexico, and autoworkers organizing to stop GM plant closures in the US and Canada.

Despite the obvious impact that action by TSA workers and air traffic controllers could have in shutting down air travel, there has been absolute silence from the federal workers unions and AFL-CIO on any action to fight back, as they seek to straitjacket the working class within the limits set by the Democratic Party and the ruling elite as a whole.



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