

As Senate votes down bills to end government shutdown

## White House readies national emergency declaration

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The Trump administration has prepared a draft national emergency declaration to bypass Congress and use the military to construct additional sections of the border wall with Mexico. The renewed threat to implement policy objectives and allocate funds without the consent of the legislative branch, if carried through, would mark a major and irreversible step towards presidential dictatorship.

In the draft declaration, Trump repeats the fraudulent pretext that some thousands of workers seeking a reprieve from poverty and violence in their home countries represent an intolerable threat to a nation of 320 million. “The massive amount of aliens who unlawfully enter the United States each day is a direct threat to the safety and security of our nation and constitutes a national emergency,” the draft states.

CNN, which obtained the draft proclamation and other related internal documents, reported that the administration has identified \$7 billion in funding for the effort. Plans were reportedly updated last week.

Earlier this month, Trump backed off from threats to immediately invoke the emergency declaration, though he never took the measure off the table. The initial response within the political establishment to Trump’s emergency proposal included concerns about the tactical implications of setting such a precedent. Republicans such as Florida Senator Marco Rubio warned of future Democratic administrations using emergency declarations to implement policies opposed by Republicans, such as gun control or climate change measures.

However, Trump’s unprecedented assertion of quasi-dictatorial presidential powers was warmly received by major media outlets aligned with the Democratic Party

such as the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post*, as well as a section of Democratic lawmakers, who presented the national emergency option as an expedient way to bring an end to the partial shutdown of the federal government.

There were virtually no expressions of principled concern from the political or media establishment over the anti-democratic implications of such an action.

Speaking from the White House on Thursday, Trump alluded to the national emergency declaration, saying, “I have other alternatives if I have to and I’ll use those alternatives if I have to.”

He added, “I’ll tell you who wants this to happen. The military wants this to happen because this is a virtual invasion of our country.”

Trump’s remarks followed the Senate’s rejection of two competing bills to reopen the government, ensuring that more than 800,000 federal workers will miss their scheduled two-week paycheck for a second time. Both Senate proposals won slim majorities but failed to obtain the 60 votes needed to overcome a filibuster and proceed to a floor vote. In largely party-line votes, the Republican-sponsored plan, which included \$5.7 billion in border wall funding, obtained 50 votes in favor and 47 against, while the Democratic-backed measure tallied 52 votes for and 44 against. It would have temporarily reopened the government through mid-February to allow for negotiations on immigration policy, including Trump’s border wall plan.

House Democrats are preparing their own offer to reopen the government. The third-ranking House Democrat, James Clyburn, said Democrats are open to fully funding President Trump’s \$5.7 billion request for border spending, albeit without any allocation for

the construction of new portions of the border wall.

“Using the figure that the president has put on the table, if his \$5.7 billion is about border security then we see ourselves fulfilling that request, only doing what I like to call using a smart wall,” Clyburn said after a Democratic caucus meeting. “These are the types of things that we are going to be putting forward.”

The proposal, which could come to the House floor as early as Friday, would include additional billions for drones and border police to hunt down migrants at the border.

With the latest offer, the bitter faction fight between Trump and the Democrats, which has held hostage the wages of 800,000 federal workers and hundreds of thousands more contractors for five weeks, is reduced to the question of whether the wall is virtual or physical.

Trump has remained adamant that the government will not reopen unless the Democrats agree first to the latter. Speaking to the press on Thursday, he indicated he would consider a “prorated down payment for the wall” rather than the full \$5.7 billion previously requested.

Democratic House Speaker Nancy Pelosi rebuffed that offer, telling the press later in the day, “The president just said that if they come to a reasonable agreement he will support it. I hope it doesn't mean some big down payment for the wall.” Her position, and that of the Democratic Party as a whole, is to end the shutdown first, by means of a short-term funding bill for the affected departments and agencies, and then negotiate on “border security”—a euphemism for the further militarization of the border and even more brutal attacks on undocumented immigrants.

Trump’s previous attempt at “compromise,” taken up in the Senate Republican’s defeated bill, offered a pause for three years on deportations for a subset of undocumented immigrant “dreamers” who entered the country as children, while sharply attacking the right of migrants to apply for asylum. The bill would have contravened international and US law, preventing Central American youth from applying at the US border and arbitrarily limiting the number of those accepted to 12,000 a year, regardless of how many claims were deemed legitimate.

Even when coupled with such savage and anti-democratic attacks, the fascistic base Trump has stoked

up for the shutdown fight is demanding he not cede an inch. “Amnesty Don Suggests Citizenship for Illegal Aliens,” read a headline Thursday in the fascistic *Breitbart News*. Right-wing pundit Ann Coulter tweeted this week, “Trump proposes amnesty. We voted for Trump and got Jeb,” referring to Jeb Bush, the former Florida governor who advocated a path to citizenship for some undocumented immigrants.

The Democratic Party’s opposition to Trump has nothing to do with a principled defense of immigrants. Their latest offer to provide up to \$5.7 billion to further militarize the border is a more than threefold increase from the Trump administration’s own formal budget request of \$1.6 billion last February. The expansion of the “virtual border wall” will undoubtedly lead to the deaths of many more migrants, who have been dying in the thousands attempting to cross to the north.

The indifference of the entire ruling class to the plight of hundreds of thousands of workers struggling to pay medical bills, feed their families and meet rent and mortgage payments without a month’s pay was summed up by Commerce Secretary Wilbur Ross Thursday morning on CNBC’s *Squawk Box*. When the one of the interviewers raised the fact that some unpaid workers are going to homeless shelters to get food, the billionaire asset stripper responded, “Well, I know they are and I don’t really quite understand why.” Ross asserted that “there really is not a good excuse” why unpaid workers should be cash strapped, noting the existence of banks and credit unions. “The idea that it’s paycheck or zero is not a really valid idea,” he said.



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