

Trump aide threatens “national emergency” decree on border wall

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Appearing on “Fox News Sunday,” White House Chief of Staff Mick Mulvaney said President Trump would use emergency powers to build a wall on the US-Mexico border if Congress continued to block funding in budget talks soon to take place in a bipartisan congressional conference committee.

The committee, consisting of top Appropriations Committee members of the House and Senate, from both big business parties, is to begin work shortly with a deadline of February 15, under the terms of a continuing resolution passed by the House and Senate by voice vote and signed into law by Trump Friday night, ending the partial shutdown of the federal government.

The committee will review the overall budget of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), now topping \$49 billion, to determine how much funding, if any, should be directed to the building of a fixed structure along the 243 miles of border, mainly in Texas, designated by the White House as its top priority for wall construction. That stretch of wall alone will cost \$5.7 billion, according to DHS estimates.

In his remarks Friday announcing that he was backing down on his refusal to sign a continuing resolution temporarily funding the government without the \$5.7 billion in money for the border wall, Trump said that if Congress did not agree on the wall money by February 15, he would either force another government shutdown or declare a national emergency and use other government funds to build the wall.

By Sunday morning, however, the White House seemed to have dropped the threat of a second shutdown in favor of the more politically incendiary step of declaring a national emergency, which would be the first time this was done by a president seeking to accomplish a policy objective in the face of

congressional opposition.

All previous emergencies have been declared in response to natural disasters, terrorist attacks or other military and foreign policy contingencies, but not because of political disagreements between the legislative and executive branches.

Mulvaney, who is both the director of the Office of Management and Budget and acting chief of staff, said of funding for the border wall, “It’s still better to get it through legislation. That’s the right way to do it.” Then he added, “At the end of the day, the president’s commitment is to protect the nation, and he’ll do it either with or without Congress.”

Trump, blasted by ultra-right media pundits on Fox News and talk radio for his “cave” to the Democrats on the federal shutdown, seemed to be compensating with vitriolic tweets over the weekend. In one particularly hysterical declaration, he claimed that illegal immigration had cost the United States nearly \$19 billion so far this year, and that the cost Friday alone was more than \$600 million. He further claimed that there were “at least 25,772,342 illegal aliens” in the United States.

Trump gave no source for any of these figures, which were derived either from fascistic social media sources or his own nightmarish imagination.

The Democratic side of the conflict within the US ruling elite was dominated by effusive praise for Pelosi’s “victory” in the confrontation with the White House, celebrating her alleged toughness and expertise.

The *Washington Post*, in its news columns, wrote that the federal shutdown “ended with the House speaker winning an unmitigated victory and reviving her reputation as a legislative savant.” The *New York Times* added that Pelosi “solidified her position as a powerful leader of her caucus during the shutdown fight.”

One of the most gushing salutes to Pelosi came from Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, a member of the Democratic Socialists of America, who tweeted, “I will tell you something most of the country probably already knows: @SpeakerPelosi does not mess around.”

But these tributes seemed mainly to serve as camouflage for efforts by congressional Democrats to devise a method of delivering wall funding to Trump without calling it by its right name.

Speaking on “Meet the Press,” Representative Hakeem Jeffries, a member of the House leadership team, said: “Now, in the past, we have supported, as you know, enhanced fencing. And I think that’s something that’s reasonable that should be on the table.” He added that Democrats wanted to make sure “that there’s a bill that comes to the floor that’s evidence-based in terms of securing our borders.”

The most right-wing Democrat in the Senate, Joe Manchin of West Virginia, appearing on “Face the Nation” on CBS, reminded his audience that Senate Democrats had overwhelmingly supported \$44 billion for “border security” in a 2013 immigration bill that was blocked by Republicans in the House of Representatives, a figure eight times as large as the \$5.7 billion demanded by the Trump White House.

There will be other factors at play during the three weeks of bipartisan talks on the border wall. Pelosi has indicated that Trump’s State of the Union speech, once scheduled for January 29 but blocked by the Democrats because of the federal shutdown, would be the subject of further negotiations with the White House. It was not clear whether the speech would be postponed until after the February 15 deadline.

The House Armed Services Committee is scheduled to hold a hearing Tuesday, its first of the new congressional session, on the Trump administration’s justification for deploying 5,000 US troops along the US-Mexico border. Committee Chair Adam Smith (D-Washington), said that one witness at the hearing will be Air Force General Terrence O’Shaughnessy, commander of the US Northern Command, who directs military operations within the continental United States.

The Pentagon recently authorized the troop deployment along the border to continue through September 30, the end of the current fiscal year, but there is nothing for the soldiers to do since they are

barred by the *posse comitatus* law from engaging in law enforcement activities, which includes the operations of the Customs and Border Protection agency.



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