

Trump administration to illegally divert an additional \$7.2 billion to border wall construction

Jacob Crosse
17 January 2020

Reports leaked to the *Washington Post* and confirmed by two sources in the *New York Times* indicate that the Trump administration is repeating last year's unconstitutional violation of the congressional power of the purse. It is invoking a mythical "national emergency" to divert \$7.2 billion dollars from the obscene \$738 billion Department of Defense budget to hasten the construction of the border wall and further cultivate his fascistic base of support ahead of the 2020 election.

Congressional Democrats gave Trump a clear path to once again circumvent congressional authority by passing the National Defense Authorization Act this past December, which provided the Trump administration with record funding for the military and stripped out language that would have barred the siphoning of funds from the Pentagon to border wall construction.

The Constitution of the United States explicitly states that, "No money shall be drawn from the Treasury, but in Consequence of Appropriations made by Law." This has become a dead letter, like many other constitutional provisions, as decades of aggressive war, years of extrajudicial assassinations, the building of concentration camps on the border, the suspending of habeas corpus, and the continued support for unlimited NSA spying and warrantless wiretapping has shown.

The funding, similar to last year, will be pulled from military construction projects such as repairing schools and water treatment centers on US bases, counter-drug insurgency operations, and the minimal funds that have been made available to the Puerto Rico National Guard for rebuilding efforts following 2017's Hurricane Maria and the recent barrage of earthquakes that have

struck the island.

While last year the Trump administration shifted \$2.5 billion from counter-drug programs and \$3.6 billion from military construction, those figures increased this year to \$3.5 and \$3.7 billion respectively. Overall, the Trump administration, with Democratic acquiescence, has allocated \$18.4 billion to the construction of a symbol to the anarchy, stupidity, and cruelty of the capitalist system.

For the 2019-2020 school year, Collegeboard.org estimated that the average US college student spends an estimated \$21,950 for four years of in-state tuition with room and board included. If the \$18.4 billion that is currently being used for "border security" were instead put towards funding higher education, some 833,268 students could attend state public colleges at no cost for the next four years. If one just allocates the funds to tuition, not including room and board, then over 1,762,452 students would be able to further their education.

According to the plans revealed to the *Post*, the additional funding would be sufficient to complete approximately 885 miles of wall by 2022. Trump has pledged throughout his presidency that by November 3, 2020, US election day, 450 miles of the wall would be complete. As of today, roughly 101 miles has been completed, nearly all of it on federally owned land. Trump is using the threat of eminent domain to intimidate landowners along the border into selling their property.

A legal barrier to the continued construction of the wall was lifted this past week by the US Court of Appeals for the 5th Circuit, in New Orleans, which overturned a ruling from a federal district court in El

Paso, Texas that had frozen the \$3.6 billion in military construction funds from last year, barring them from being used towards a purpose that had not been approved by Congress.

This ruling, along with the Democrats' complete withdrawal from any defense of immigrants' rights, has according to the *Post*, provided the administration with "additional encouragement" to continue to violate the Constitution.

There were mild grumblings about the Trump administration's actions from a few Republican Senators such as Richard Shelby (R-AL). In statements to reporters, Shelby wished that "they'd get the money somewhere else, instead of defense," before quickly adding that he "support(s) building the wall. And I support funding money directly ... to help the president."

Playing their part as a resistance party in name only, the Democrats have continued to center their so-called resistance to Trump on a right-wing anti-Russia campaign. This latest violation of the Constitution was not brought up before the committees involved in the impeachment inquiry, despite the obviousness of the transgression.

The Democrats, striking a similar tone to their GOP collaborators, once again bemoaned that the Pentagon's war machine was being denied resources; Representative Katie Porter lamented that the diversion "hurts military readiness," and that we should "stand by our troops."

In prepared statements Tuesday, three leading Democrats, House Appropriations Committee Chairwoman Nita Lowey (D-NY), Defense Appropriations Subcommittee Chairman Pete Visclosky (D-Ind.) and Rep. Debbie Wasserman Schultz (D-Fla.), all issued statements which made reference to the "further violence to the Constitutional separation of powers that is inherent to our democracy." However, their main objection was once again centered on the fact that the funding would be "forcing service members and their families to pay for his wall," while funding that was intended for "meaningful counter-drug priorities," would be neglected.

The truth is none of these funds, whether they remained in the Pentagon or were unconstitutionally shifted to border wall construction, will do anything to

help better the lives of working people either within the borders of the US, or outside of them.



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