

Bill Kaplan: Trump shutdown

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The GOP is in charge of Congress and the White House, but there is still no budget plan for the fiscal year that began October 1, 2017. House Speaker Paul Ryan and Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell have abdicated their independence and institutional responsibilities. Instead, they act as toadies for Trump. Ryan and McConnell keep punting on appropriations and a budget. There have been four temporary government funding bills. And, a fifth failed last week (Washington Post). For the first time in U.S. history, one party (GOP) controlling Congress and the White House can't produce a budget. Shutdown. Chaos and dysfunction.

In November, 2016 Wisconsin Democratic state Senator Fred Risser said: "They've (GOP) got everything now, and so everything that happens they are responsible for and no one can blame the Democrats anymore They have a lot to lose." A new Washington Post - ABC News poll shows the American people rejecting schemes to shift blame to the Democrats. By a twenty percent margin, responsibility for what led to the shutdown rests with Trump and the GOP-led Congress. Why?

Trump has been talking government shutdown for a long time. In May, Trump tweeted: "Our country needs a good 'shutdown' in September to fix mess!" And, the Washington Post reported: "Trump has told confidants that a government shutdown could be good for him politically and is focusing on his hard-line immigration stance as a way to win back supporters unhappy with outreach to Democrats" (on budget, debt ceiling and "Dreamers" - brought to the U.S. illegally as children)... .

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Trump keeps moving the goal posts. Compromise and negotiation are essential to governing, but anathema to Trump. Case in point. Immigration reforms and the

“Dreamers”. At a televised session with a bipartisan congressional delegation Trump said he would sign a bipartisan deal and take the “heat” from his supporters. However, when a bipartisan plan was presented, Trump responded with racist profanities. Trump called African nations, Haiti and El Salvador “shithole countries”. And, said he preferred immigrants from Norway (white). How far we have fallen.

Washington Post conservative columnist Michael Gerson opined: “Trump makes offhand racist comments, he promotes racist stereotypes and he incites racism as a political strategy. ... Loyalty to Trump now consists of defending the indefensible. His advocates are becoming desensitized to moral corruption.” Think Ryan who murmured “unfortunate” about Trump’s comments. Or Wisconsin GOP Senator Ron Johnson who said Illinois Democratic Senator Dick Durbin threw a “hand grenade” into the White House talks by revealing Trump’s racism. Johnson thought the “passionate discussion” should have stayed “behind closed doors”. Disgraceful!

Wisconsin Democratic Senator Tammy Baldwin has a better idea: “It’s time to end the political games and work together across party lines to get the job done for the American people”. Pass a long-term budget, improve health care, including the opioid epidemic, reform immigration (border security and help the “Dreamers”) and protect pensions for regular folks.

I don’t know how the shutdown ends. Unlike Trump I am not a “stable genius”.

— Kaplan wrote a guest column from Washington, D.C., for the Wisconsin State Journal from 1995 – 2009.