

Bill Kaplan: Why is there a government shutdown?

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Trump has been threatening a government shutdown forever. In 2017, Trump tweeted: “Our country needs a good shutdown ...”. And, two weeks before Christmas Trump said: “If we don’t get what we want, one way or the other ... I will shut down the government.” He told Democratic congressional leaders: “I will be the one to shut it down. I’m not going to blame (Democrats) for it.” Another lie.

GOP congressional leaders thought they had a deal with Trump. The GOP-led Senate, by voice vote, passed a bipartisan short-term funding bill, with \$1.3 billion in border security funding. However, extremist House Republicans and so-called pundits denounced it. Why? No wall. Having failed in getting Mexico to pay for his wall, Trump wants taxpayers to pony up. Trump decided a shutdown would be good for him: Rev up his base and distract from Special Counsel Mueller’s investigation, the forced closure of the Trump Foundation, foreign policy controversies, resignation of Defense Secretary Mattis and a roller coaster stock market.

Weak-kneed departing Speaker Ryan, always a Trump enabler, complied. “Ryan ... could have forced a vote on (the) Senate-passed stopgap spending bill that would have kept the government fully funded through early February, likely passing it with Democratic support” (New York Times). Ryan declined and took the low (Trump) road. All Wisconsin GOP representatives voted for a funding bill with \$5 billion for a wall. The GOP-led Senate was told to drop dead. A shutdown ensued over Trump’s wall.

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“The arguments against a wall on our southern border are well known. It is unnecessary, wasteful and inefficient if not useless (but may do wonders for the ladder industry). ...It needlessly provokes Mexico, whose help we need against drug trafficking And, it disregards the biggest source of illegal immigrants – visa overstays” (Washington Post conservative blogger Jennifer Rubin). However, it’s good theatrics and distracts from Trump’s legal and political problems. But the shutdown creates new problems.

“Direct payments to farmers covered by payouts intended to blunt the impact of Mr. Trump’s tariff war with China (and other countries) could be delayed until government funding is restored, because the workers processing them have been furloughed” (New York Times). Then there’s Trump’s latest tweet threatening to close our border with Mexico if he doesn’t get his wall. And, earlier Trump tweeted: “I am all alone (poor me) in the White House” An enfant terrible.

Meanwhile, Wisconsin dairy farms, reeling from low prices and locked out of foreign markets due to Trump’s trade wars, are failing. “Wisconsin lost 638 dairy farms in 2018” (Wisconsin Public Radio). Closing the border with Mexico, Wisconsin’s second biggest export market, will be catastrophic. Enough incompetence and pain. Listen to Wisconsin Democratic Senator Tammy Baldwin: “The President can and should end the Trump shutdown by accepting bipartisan legislation to fund the government, including a homeland security bill that provides a smart and cost-effective border security.”

However, hard to know how the shutdown ends. Trump and many Republicans reject governing.

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