US government shutdown persists

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The US House and Senate continued to meet on Sunday, the second day of a federal government shutdown, but still failed to reach an agreement by evening.  
The US federal government defaulted into a shutdown past midnight on Friday after Senate Democrats voted down a stopgap measure to keep the government open until Feb 16, a bill that passed the House last Thursday.  
Lawmakers worked on Saturday in a move seen to end the impasse but it ended up in an escalated blame game between Republicans and Democrats.  
The key issue dividing the two parties is the fate of some 800,000 "Dreamers", or undocumented immigrants, who were brought into the US as children. US President Barack Obama established the DACA (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals) program by executive order in 2012 to protect these illegal immigrants from deportation. The Trump administration rescinded the policy last September when it expired.  
Democrats have insisted that any short-term spending bill must include protections of those immigrants. But White House spokeswoman Sarah Sanders said in a statement on Saturday that President Trump will not negotiate on immigration reform until Democrats stop playing games and reopen the government.  
Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, a Republican from Kentucky, said the Senate will vote at 1am EST on Monday on a bill to fund the government through Feb 8. There is no sign that the Democrats would accept it without a Republican commitment to deal with the immigration issue.  
Both parties want to appear strong in front of their core supporters ahead of the November midterm elections, when all 435 seats in the House and 33 of the 100 seats in the Senate will be up for grabs. Republicans now control both chambers of the Congress and the White House.  
Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer, a Democrat from New York, on Saturday continued to blame President Donald Trump for the government shutdown, saying "negotiating with President Trump is like negotiating with Jell-O."  
Schumer met Trump at the White House on Friday for a lengthy meeting. The initial hope of reaching a deal evaporated after White House officials and Trump made new demands.  
Republicans and Trump have blamed Schumer for the government shutdown. House Speaker Paul Ryan, a Republican from Wisconsin, took to the floor on Saturday. "We do some crazy things in Washington, but this is utter madness," he said.  
"The American people cannot begin to understand why the Senate Democratic leader thinks the entire government should be shut down until he gets his way on illegal immigration," Senate Majority Leader McConnell said.  
There is no sign that a deal could be reached before Monday, when hundreds of thousands of federal government employees will be furloughed.  
The federal government shutdown that started past Friday midnight coincided with the one-year anniversary of the inauguration of President Trump, who was sworn in on Jan 20, 2017.  
Due to the shutdown, Trump had canceled a trip for his anniversary gala, a fundraiser with tickets sold at and above $100,000 a pair, at his Florida estate of Mar-a-Lago on Saturday. "This is the One Year Anniversary of my Presidency and the Democrats wanted to give me a nice present," he tweeted on Saturday.  
He sent another tweet on Sunday morning, calling for Senate Republicans to go nuclear. "If stalemate continues, Republicans should go to 51% (Nuclear Option) and vote on real, long term budget, no C.R.'s!", read the tweet.  
The US president published a rare op-ed in the Washington Examiner on Saturday, touting the achievements in his first year in office.  
The past weekend also saw hundreds of thousands of people participating in the second annual Women's March across US cities and around the world, many in protest of Trump's policies.  
Unlike the 16-day federal government shutdown in October 2013 under the Obama administration, the national parks remained open this weekend, so were the Smithsonian's museums on the National Mall and the National Zoo in Washington. But the Statue of Liberty in New York was closed.  
Mick Mulvaney, director of the Office of Management and Budget, said on Friday that his agency will manage a shutdown different from the Obama administration to be "much less impactful".  
The shutdown in 2013 cost the US economy an estimated $20 billion, according to an estimate by Moody's Analytics.  
Mulvaney revealed on Saturday that Trump's planned trip to the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, next week is being assessed "on a day-by-day basis". Trump's America First policy is expected to clash with the overwhelmingly globalist view at Davos.

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