

Business

'Very possible' shutdown could last into new year, White House budget director Mick Mulvaney says

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December 23 at 12:30 PM

The partial government shutdown may last through the New Year and into January when Democrats take control of the House, White House budget director Mick Mulvaney said Sunday.

"It's very possible that this shutdown will go beyond the 28th and into the new Congress," Mulvaney said on Fox News Sunday.

Mulvaney put the onus on Democrats, saying the White House is now offering to open the government for less than the \$5 billion in funding for a border wall President Trump had previously demanded.

The White House offer to Democrats on Saturday was \$2.5 billion for border security, including new fencing and \$400 million for Trump immigration priorities, according to a Democratic aide who spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss private deliberations. A spokesperson for the Office and Management and Budget did not immediately respond when asked to confirm the specifics of the offer.

Democrats have criticized plans like the \$400 million for broad use as "slush funds," and the offer left the two sides far apart.

Democrats have refused any new money for a wall along the U.S.-Mexico border, which Trump during his campaign promised would be paid for by Mexico. Democrats argue the wall would be immoral and ineffective in preventing undocumented immigrants from crossing the border.

"There is frankly no path towards him getting \$5 billion in American taxpayer money to meet his campaign promise of a big, beautiful wall with Mexico," said Sen. Chris Coons (D-Del.) on CBS's "Face the Nation."

Coons suggested Trump accept \$1.3 billion for border security — the existing level which doesn't include any new money for building a border wall.

"There is a path towards our responsibly appropriating about \$1.3 billion for border security; I'll remind you, the administration hasn't spent yet the \$1.3 billion we appropriated this year. I think the president simply needs to hear, 'yes,' and we all need to move forward."

Shortly before the shutdown began, the Senate agreed to a bipartisan deal that would keep the government open through Feb. 8 but deny Trump any new wall money, keeping the Department of Homeland Security's

border security funding at the current level of \$1.3 billion.

Lawmakers were initially hopeful Trump would take that deal, especially after he suggested the wall could still be built by the military. But that strategy faced high legal hurdles, and after a backlash some of Congress's most conservative members and typically Trump-friendly media outlets and pundits, the president torpedoed the deal and resumed his demand for more than \$5 billion in wall funding.

Sunday's statements further entrench both sides in an impasse that led large portions of the government to shut down at the start of Saturday.

But Mulvaney also acknowledged that Trump's approach to the presidency played a role in shuttering federal agencies and sending workers home on furlough just before Christmas.

"This is what Washington looks like when you have a president who refuses to sort of go along to get along," Mulvaney said.

The House and Senate have been sent home until Thursday, after several hours of fitful negotiations at the Capitol on Saturday yielded no result. But Mulvaney indicated little optimism that there would be any deal to reopen the government before the new Congress convenes on Jan. 3.

The likely incoming House speaker, Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.), has already said she intends to pass a spending bill to reopen the government as soon as she takes control of the House majority. It would provide \$1.3 billion for border security, a level Democrats have endorsed and that would contain no new funds for building a wall.

Mulvaney said Sunday that the White House made an offer on Saturday between \$1.3 billion and \$5 billion, and "the ball is in their court."

Democrats have firmly opposed any new money for Trump's border wall. Pelosi says the wall is "immoral."

Mulvaney played down the impacts of a shutdown, noting that the federal government is effectively closed until Wednesday anyway because of the Christmas holiday. He said that paychecks will go out on Dec. 28, the next federal pay period. "I want everybody to understand no one is working without getting paid," Mulvaney said.

The next pay period affected is Jan. 11.

Some 400,000 federal workers are expected to be furloughed under the shutdown that affects about 25 percent of the government that Congress funds — including the Homeland Security Department, and the Justice, Interior, Agriculture and Housing departments, among others.

The rest of the government — including the Pentagon — have already been funded through September under spending bills Congress passed earlier in the year and the president signed.

The government also went into brief partial shutdowns in January and February, making this the third partial government shutdown of 2018.

12/22/2018
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When ABC's Jonathan Karl reminded Mulvaney of Trump's campaign promise that Mexico would pay for the wall, Mulvaney said the technical process cannot work so easily. He tried to argue that the renegotiated trade deal among the United States, Mexico and Canada could generate revenue to the U.S. Treasury.


"You could make an argument Mexico is paying for it in that fashion," Mulvaney said, without offering specifics. He added, "We really think we're in a good place in terms of getting the wall built and also getting Mexico to participate in our border security."

There is no mechanism for direct payments from Mexico's government to the U.S. government for a wall in the trade agreement.


Trump on Sunday continued his public press for the wall, writing on Twitter that a "Wall or Barrier" is the only effective way to stop undocumented immigration — a claim many border experts have contested.

"Drones and all of the rest are wonderful and lots of fun, but it is only a good old fashioned Wall that works!" he wrote.


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