

FLOOR SPEECH
IMPACTS OF FEDERAL SHUTDOWN ON NEW MEXICO AND INTERIOR BILL PROGRAMS
January 8, 2018

Mr. President. I rise to call on the President to stop holding the government hostage and trying to force taxpayers to pay for his border wall. A wall that would be ineffective and wasteful and that is rejected by the American people.

President Trump said he is “proud” to shut down the government. He is proud to force hundreds of thousands of people across this country to miss their hard-earned paychecks. Proud to shutter critical services. Proud to try and extort the American people into paying for a wall they don’t support.

This Trump shutdown is nothing to be proud of. It is a national disgrace. It is time to end this recklessness. Today, I join with my Democratic colleagues in calling on Republican leaders to do their jobs -- and reopen the government. Right now.

The American people don’t support Trump’s border wall and they don’t support this Trump shutdown. The funding bills being held up and used by the President as a bargaining chip have broad bipartisan support. Democrats in both chambers want to pass these appropriations bills now.

But as Democrats stand ready to re-open the government, President Trump plans to address the nation tonight -- to tell us again why he is “proud” to keep the government shut down.

Tonight, we’ll likely hear more bizarre talk about what we need at the border from a president who doesn’t know the first thing about the border. Once again, we will likely hear blatant lies about immigrants, about our border, and about our border communities.

The American people are tired of this President's assault on the truth. They are tired of having their lives, and livelihoods, caught up in this President's inability to rise to the office that he holds. No address from the Oval Office will change that.

We need the Republican leadership in this chamber to muster the political will to stand up to the President, and get Federal employees back to work and critical services restored.

We are now on day 18 of this shutdown -- the second longest period that the government has been shuttered since 1980. And we've already begun to see real-life consequences for families all across the nation.

My home state of New Mexico is one of the states that is being hit the hardest by the President's temper tantrum. By his act of political extortion.

In New Mexico, roughly 5,800 Federal workers are either furloughed or working without pay.

These aren't just numbers. These are real people. Real people, wondering how they will make their mortgage or rent payments, or feed their families.

A federal employee from Albuquerque wrote to my office to tell me how this shutdown is affecting her and her family.

She wrote to me to "go on record that I am not one of the Federal employees the President is touting... as wanting to be out of work, without a paycheck, until he gets his wall."

She had an important message for the Republican leadership of the Senate: "The Senate does not work for the President -- it is supposed to represent the citizens of the United States... Federal employees do not want to stay out of work; we want to go back to work and get paid." She ended: "This is not our fight, just his."

Economic anxiety is pervasive in all corners of the State. In fact, New Mexico was recently ranked as the most vulnerable to the impacts of the shutdown, because of our significant Federal workforce and the importance of the federal government to our economy.

As ranking member of the Subcommittee on the Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies -- I am acutely aware how the lapse in appropriations is affecting the agencies funded in our bill -- and the services they provide. These include the Department of the Interior, the Environmental Protection Agency, and the Indian Health Service.

And as the ranking member of the Senate Indian Affairs Committee, I am especially cognizant of how this shutdown is hurting Native communities. For tribes across Indian Country, the shutdown consequences are particularly dire after more than two weeks without federal funds.

Simply put -- tribes report that federal programs critical to health and public safety are grinding to a halt and lives are endangered.

In New Mexico, the shutdown has left the Mescalero Apache Tribe's reservation -- which is larger in size than the entire city of Houston, Texas -- with only **one** on-duty police officer. That would be unacceptable even under normal circumstances.

But due to a huge winter storm that left my state under heavy snowfall and sub-freezing temperatures -- that lone officer is responsible for not only responding to domestic violence and child welfare, but also snow-related accidents and emergencies across 720 square miles. All because furloughed road crews aren't clearing snow and ice on the reservation roads. One elder has already died because he was unable to make it to dialysis. Sadly, Mescalero's experiences are not uncommon.

The Yurok Tribe of California will soon have to close its courts -- curtailing the Tribe's efforts to reign in the opioid epidemic.

Urban Indian Health Programs in Baltimore and Boston are days away from closing completely – leaving Native families in these cities without support.

The Yankton Sioux Tribe in South Dakota was just informed that its Indian Health Service unit must begin reducing services.

And the 276 Tribes that depend on the USDA's Food Distribution Program on Indian reservations – a program that feeds nearly 100,000 American Indians and Alaska Natives – are faced with re-living the 2013 shutdown crisis when food rotted in locked warehouses while hungry families gathered outside.

All because the President and some extreme members of his party refuse to do their job and keep the government open. It is disgraceful. And it is dangerous.

And every day the President continues to treat Tribal health and public safety programs like hostages for political gain endangers families across Indian Country.

The United States has trust and treaty obligations -- obligations that tribes obtained in exchange for ceding millions of acres of land.

The consequences of the President's patent disregard for these obligations -- that can't be fulfilled during a shutdown -- are real.

The consequences of the Senate Majority Leader's inaction are real.

And, the consequences of Republicans' unwillingness to stand up for the Tribes in their States – to stand up for basic humanity and common sense – are real.

Mr. President, we are talking about people's lives—and the fundamental obligation of our Nation to honor its commitment to Native Americans. It's really that simple. And that pressing. The impacts of the Trump shutdown are far and wide. There are thousands of stories across the nation. Let me tell you another one from my home state of New Mexico.

A local Santa Fe small business -- a construction company, Sarcon Construction Corporation -- is ready to begin an \$8.4 million dollar project to build two new hangars at the Santa Fe Municipal Airport. This 32,000 square-foot project will generate \$650,000 dollars in local tax revenue, and it will employ 75 to 100 people. Many of those people are literally unemployed now. Waiting for this project to begin. This project is a big deal for my home city of Santa Fe.

But do you know why the project is stalled? Sarcon can't get the necessary approval from the Federal Aviation Administration -- because of the Trump shutdown. The FAA personnel responsible for approval are furloughed.

This shutdown has real consequences for real people -- especially for people like those unemployed New Mexicans ready and eager to work -- but unable because of our President's tantrum.

The President says he can "relate" to federal workers who can't pay bills during the shutdown. But in the next breath he blithely assumes they will "make adjustments," and be fine. As he has demonstrated time and time again, this President cannot and does not relate to the struggles of every day Americans who are hurt by his policies.

He cannot and does not relate to federal employees who live pay check to pay check, or Santa Fe construction workers who wait anxiously to get back to work. He has shown us time and time again -- that his policies and behavior are heartless. And that he is unfit for the office that he holds.

I'll say it again: the President told the American people, on camera, that he is "proud" to shutdown the federal government. The responsibility falls squarely on him. And now on his Republican collaborators in the Senate.

And the impacts reach every corner of our nation. His shutdown has already had real impacts on our nation's public lands -- including our most iconic national parks.

Many national parks — like Bandelier National Monument and Valles Caldera National Preserve in New Mexico — remain closed. Restrooms have been closed for two weeks, trash has accumulated, and roads have not been plowed getting plowed.

For two weeks, we have heard horror stories of poor sanitation and public safety issues at national parks because of the shutdown -- including overflowing toilets, vandalism and other resource damage.

In Big Bend National Park, good Samaritans had to help rescue a hiker who fell and broke his leg while hiking on Christmas Eve because of the lack of emergency services.

The effects have been so devastating, in fact, that — in a legally questionable move — this Administration just made the unprecedented decision to dip into parks' entrance fees to fund basic services at a handful of parks across the country. Fees that Congress authorizes the Park Service to collect to pay for deferred maintenance projects and other critical needs — not to take the place of appropriated funds.

We still don't know which parks will be affected by the Administration's decision, but I fully expect this "band-aid" approach to fall far short of protecting our treasured natural resources . . . or restoring services to the public in a meaningful way.

It's merely a cynical attempt to get the problems caused by the President's shutdown off the front page of the newspaper. If we want to reopen the parks, there's a simple solution: pass the Interior Appropriations bill without delay, and we can reopen the entire national park system.

In the meantime, re-opening some park sites—but not others—won't help many gateway communities that depend on parks and public lands to provide needed revenue, and are facing economic crisis as this shutdown wears on.

The National Parks Conservation Association estimates that visitors spend an average of \$20 million dollars per day in January in nearby communities.

That's real and vital revenue.

In New Mexico alone, national parks generated more than 1,700 jobs in 2017 and created more than \$140 million dollars in economic output for my state.

I can tell you that New Mexico can't afford for these sites to be closed.

And it's not just the parks that are at risk. Fire prevention programs funded by the U.S. Forest Service are being deferred during the shutdown, despite a record-breaking fire season.

Environmental protection programs are suffering. EPA has halted most activities related to hazardous waste cleanups under its national Superfund program. Enforcement activities against polluters have ground to a halt, as have Federal permitting efforts. States aren't receiving funds to operate their regulatory programs.

And even our nation's cherished national museums are shuttered. On January 2nd, the Smithsonian ran out of funds and closed its doors -- preventing more than 110,000 visitors a

day from accessing its prized collections. Its next door neighbor, the National Gallery of Art, is also closed -- leaving school groups, families, and everyday citizens out in the cold.

M/M President, again, there is a simple solution to stop this damage. All we have to do is pass an appropriations bill and reopen the government.

So I want to end where I began: The President has nothing to be “proud” of here. President Trump needs to stop holding Federal programs hostage to his demands for a wasteful, ineffective, and destructive wall and end this shutdown now.

We can do it easily. The Senate can immediately take up and pass H.R. 21 -- the appropriations bill passed by the House last week.

This should cause no controversy. These are bills drafted by Republicans with broad bipartisan support.

In fact, the Interior bill is the **exact same legislation** that was passed by this chamber by a vote of 92 to 6 -- last August. A margin that would override a veto of the bill, I might add.

I call on Leader McConnell and the members of his party to let us get to work.

We need to do what’s right . . . and immediately take up and pass the House bill. Today. There’s no reason why this shutdown must go on one day longer. The lives and livelihoods of every day Americans hang in the balance.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.