The Virgin Islands Consortium

Longest Gov't Shutdown In U.S. History Ends As Trump Signs Six-Week Funding Bill

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The most protracted government shutdown in the history of the United States came to an end late Friday after President Donald Trump signed a temporary spending bill that funds the government for a few weeks. The move will pay some 800,000 federal employees retroactively and end what has been a painful few weeks for many. The partial shutdown lasted for a record 35 days.

But the spending bill signed by Mr. Trump does not include funding for what caused the shutdown in the first place: a wall along the U.S./Mexico border to halt the flow of illegal immigrants into the country. Mr. Trump is still demanding his $5.7 billion request to build the steel wall, and he explained in a twitter post that the short-term funding of the government will allow both Republicans and Democrats to sit at the table for negotiations.

"I wish people would read or listen to my words on the Border Wall. This was in no way a concession. It was taking care of millions of people who were getting badly hurt by the Shutdown with the understanding that in 21 days, if no deal is done, it's off to the races!" Mr. Trump wrote on Twitter, his favorite medium of communication.

> https://t.co/RUFlgMxOUq
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> — Donald J. Trump (@realDonaldTrump) January 25, 2019

Mr. Trump praised Americans who work for the federal government who had endured the 35-day shutdown. He said they have shown "such extraordinary devotion in the face of this recent hardship." He added, "You are fantastic people, you are incredible patriots, many of you have suffered far greater than anyone but your family would understand."

The move alleviates the fears of damage a further protracted shutdown would cause to the Government of the Virgin Islands and its tens of thousands of people who rely on federal aid. For example, roughly 25,000 Virgin Islanders territory-wide depend on food stamps for meals.

In a statement on Friday, Delegate to Congress Stacey Plaskett lampooned President Trump and Republicans, stating that it was sad that it took so long for them to come to their senses.

"After the longest shut down in history, I am pleased that the government will reopen and federal employees will be paid. The solution to the Trump Shutdown has always been simple: reopen the government, pay federal employees, and then begin a period of constructive negotiations on border security. It is sad that it took 35 days of inflicting pain and misery on Americans for President Trump and Republicans to come to their senses and agree to this solution, but it is better late than never," the delegate to Congress said.

She added, "I look forward to working with my colleagues across the aisle and across the Capitol to craft a funding bill for the Department of Homeland Security that provides smart, effective solutions for border security while staying true to our values as Americans."

Following Mr. Trump's signing of the bill, House Speaker Nancy Pelosi held a press conference with Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer, where she said her talk relative to a border wall has been clear. Even so, Democrats have spoken about increasing funding for alternative ways of protecting the border, which includes a mix of wall, smart technology including drones, and increased patrols. The rhetoric will help both the president and Democrats save face and move forward with protecting the border, as Mr. Trump recently endorsed the approach. "We do not need 2,000 miles of concrete wall from sea to shining sea — we never did," Mr. Trump has said.

The spending bill will also allow Mr. Trump to deliver his State of the Union Address, albeit not on the original Tuesday date.

“The State of the Union is not planned now,” Ms. Pelosi said during the Friday press conference. “When government is open we will discuss a mutually agreeable date.” Earlier this week Ms. Pelosi rescinded her invitation to the president to come to the House chamber until the government was reopened.

Analysis from ratings agency Standard & Poor’s found that the United States economy lost at least $6 billion in the five weeks the government was partly shuttered.