

Tue January 15, 2019 12:43 PM

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## V.I. and P.R. Reps Fight Diverting Recovery Money for Trump Wall

By Source staff - January 14, 2019

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Delegate to Congress Stacey Plaskett (File photo)

Congressional Delegate Stacey Plaskett (D-VI) and Puerto Rico's Resident Commissioner Jennifer Gonzalez Colon (R-P,R) plan to introduce a joint letter to the Trump White House opposing any attempt to strip storm-recovery money from the Army Corps of Engineers to fund President Donald Trump's proposed border wall.

The partial shutdown of the federal government entered its 25 day

Tuesday – the longest shutdown in U.S. history.

In a televised meeting Dec. 11 with House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi (D-CA) and Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer (D-NY), Trump said he would be "proud to shut down the government for border security," vowing he would not sign a continuing resolution to fund a quarter of the government unless Congress included \$5 billion for the wall that played a prominent role as a chant in his pre-election campaign rallies.

Then administration officials signaled Trump would sign the spending measure, but on Dec. 19, when the GOP controlled U.S. Senate passed appropriations keeping the government open until February, Trump said he would not sign it. Dec. 20, the lame-duck outgoing GOP-controlled House of Representatives passed appropriations with Trump's requested funding and took no further actions on the budget. Dec. 22 the government partially shut down. Jan. 3, the new Democrat-controlled House passed appropriations bills to reopen the government, but without wall funding. As many as a dozen Republican representatives joined in voting for the bills, and several GOP senators have joined Democrats in calling for the Senate to pass appropriations to reopen, leaving wall funding for later.

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But Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-KY) has refused to allow votes on appropriations bills without the \$5 billion in Trump wall money, saying he won't allow a vote on any proposal that Trump will not sign. Trump has remained defiant, saying the government will remain shut down for months if eh doesn't get his wall funding.



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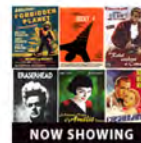
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Since then, Republicans and Trump administration officials have floated several ideas for spending the money without Congressional approval, including declaring the border wall campaign promise to be a national emergency and diverting disaster relief funds under the president's emergency powers.

"We are opposed to this approach, without question. These funds were approved by Congress and the White House specifically for the recovery, and it is simply improper for the president to now siphon off the funding to the wall - a fifth century solution to a modern-day challenge," Plaskett said in a statement Monday. The Army Corps of Engineers has maintained a presence in the territory since the 2017 hurricanes, working on various initiatives from rooftop programs to shoreline cleanup and restoration.



Contractors install roofing material for Project Blue Roof in this Florida photo from the Army Corps of Engineers. Emergency recovery programs such as this could suffer under a suggestion that Trump use the money for his proposed border wall.

Plaskett said the impact of the continued government shutdown will worsen as not only federal employees are being affected but recipients of programs such as food stamps, farmers seeking loans or businesses that rely on federal workers for continued success.

"The longer the shutdown goes, the deeper the effect," Plaskett said.

She also said federal emergency workers who continue to work in the Virgin Islands on the post-hurricane effort however are not affected as funding for the response and recovery is not impacted by the lapse in federal appropriations.

Plaskett said she believes Trump must come to the realization that the southern border wall is not the solution to the immigration challenges we face.

"The wall is an age-old solution. He must abandon this notion of holding the operations of the federal government hostage to secure funding for an inefficient solution," Plaskett said. "We must reopen the federal government while providing a meaningful response to the immigration and border security challenges we face. Our conversation with the White House will continue in opposition to the wall and in opposition to the continued shutdown of the government."

Plaskett accused the president of holding American federal workers hostage to press for the fulfillment of campaign rhetoric. This weekend Plaskett briefed Gov. Albert Bryan Jr. on her efforts and the continued work of her congressional colleagues toward resolving the impasse with Trump.

In a news conference a week ago, Plaskett identified programs and services that could be adversely impacted by the ongoing partial federal government shutdown. They include but are not limited to: the issuance of Social Security checks, taxpayer assistance, passport processing, park service operations, school lunch program and food stamp issuance, TSA operations at major airports, federal law enforcement operations, Coast Guard programs and initiatives, USDA programs and loan applications centers.

"I want to hear from our residents about just how the shutdown is affecting their lives. Visit [plaskett.house.gov](http://plaskett.house.gov) and complete the survey. It is important that we know how the government shutdown is affecting all facets of the lives of our residents," Plaskett said.

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