

Trump Doubles Down on Threat to Close Border

By Kenneth T. Walsh

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White House advisers are reaffirming that President Donald Trump will close all or parts of the U.S. border with Mexico this week if Mexico's government doesn't move aggressively to stop undocumented migrants from crossing into the United States.

And Trump is turning up the pressure in other ways, as the State Department announced Saturday that the United States would cut off millions of dollars in aid to three Central American countries--El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras--because they aren't doing enough to stop undocumented people from traveling through Mexico and crossing the U.S. border.

Trump declared a national emergency at the southern border February 15 because so many migrants were crossing over. Trump is seeking more funding for a proposed wall between the United States and Mexico despite congressional opposition. He says he will build key parts of the wall unilaterally, by using executive authority, if Congress won't go along with the spending levels he seeks.

Critics of Trump's approach are zeroing in on his Central America funding cuts. The critics say this money helps reduce the root causes of migration by financing local programs that create jobs, fight poverty and ease violence.

Sen. Patrick Leahy, D-Vt., vice chairman of the Senate Appropriations Committee, said it was "foreign policy by tweet" and showed that Trump doesn't understand that the funds for the three Central American countries can actually help alleviate the immigration problem.

Critics also say closing the border would quickly hurt American consumers and businesses, and damage the economies of the United States and Mexico, while having a questionable effect on limiting the flow of migrants to the United States.

But Trump has a different, more hard line view, arguing that the border situation has become a crisis that demands bold action such as the border closing and the funding cutoff. White House aides restated this position last weekend.

Trump added in remarks to reporters Friday night, "I've ended payments to Guatemala, to Honduras and El Salvador. No more money is going there any more. We were giving them \$500 million. We were paying them tremendous amounts of money, and we're not paying them any more because they haven't done a thing for us."

Acting White House Chief of Staff Mick Mulvaney told CNN Sunday, "If we're going to give these countries hundreds of millions of dollars, we would like them to do

more....That is not an unreasonable position. We could prevent a lot of what's happening on the southern border by preventing people from moving into Mexico in the first place."

USA Today and other news organizations are reporting another surge of migrants along the Texas border with Mexico Border Patrol officials said there would probably be more than 100,000 apprehensions and encounters with migrants in March, the highest monthly total in more than a decade, USA Today said.

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