

Trump's border threat jeopardizes \$6B for Massachusetts businesses

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REVENUE STREAM: President Trump's threat to close the U.S.-Mexico border could hurt Massachusetts, which logs more than \$6B in trade with the country. Freight trucks are seen passing through Mexican Customs last year.

President Trump's threat that he'll close the U.S.-Mexico border if Congress refuses to build a wall could have devastating economic implications even in Massachusetts — which does more than \$6 billion in trade a year with Mexico, experts said.

In his latest case of presidential brinksmanship, Trump tweeted Friday he will shut the Mexican border if Congress does not fund a border wall as the federal government continues to be partially shutdown.

"We will be forced to close the Southern Border entirely if the Obstructionist Democrats do not give us the money to finish the Wall & also change the ridiculous immigration laws that our Country is saddled with," Trump said. "We build a Wall or close the Southern Border. Bring our car industry back into the United States where it belongs. Go back to pre-NAFTA, before so many of our companies and jobs were so foolishly sent to Mexico. Either we build (finish) the Wall or we close the Border."

Mexico is Massachusetts' second largest trading partner, after Canada.

Last year, Bay State businesses exported \$2.5 billion to Mexico, according to data from the U.S. Census Bureau, though it is unclear how much of that went by truck over the border. The state also imports more than \$3.7 billion from Mexico. The bulk of the trade is in electronic components and medical devices that are both imported and exported — and are vital to the state’s hospitals, research labs and electronics industries. Massachusetts cranberry growers, meanwhile, say Mexico is one of the largest buyers outside the U.S. The state also sells more than \$50 million a year in razor blades, and imports more than \$75 million in lighting fixtures.

“The closing of the border to Mexico, depending on how it was defined, clearly affects trading relationships,” said Jim Rooney, chief executive of the Greater Boston Chamber of Commerce. “Trade between Massachusetts and Mexico is very significant.”

Robert Fisher, former director of Mexican affairs in the Office of the U.S. Trade Representative, told the Herald the economic impact would be nationwide: “You end up with a major disruption on both sides in trade. It’s about \$1.3 billion a day in land trade between the United States and Mexico in 2017.”

House Democratic leader Nancy Pelosi called the wall “immoral, ineffective and expensive,” and insisted Democrats not give in to Trump’s pressure to fund it. But U.S. Sen. Edward J. Markey (D-Mass.) said of Trump’s tweet, “This threat is as empty as the offices of federal agencies that have already been shut down because of President Trump’s hissy fit over funding for his ridiculous wall ... he cannot close our Southern border in a fit of childish rage.”

Mayor Martin J. Walsh said, “We need to get the government up and running again. The president is negligent to his duty He made it very clear in the meeting with (Senate Democratic leader) Chuck Schumer and Nancy Pelosi that he wasn’t willing to budge on any deal. Now, he is trying to blame the Democrats. He needs to his job as president — sit down and come up with something.”

U.S. Rep. Seth Moulton (D-Salem) said, “What we need is true immigration reform: a robust and secure guest worker program to support American businesses; a pathway to citizenship for those who are part of our communities but not paying taxes ... and a modern and effective enforcement system that rewards those who come here legally, not illegally.

“When President Trump and Republicans are ready to have a serious conversation about ways to actually fix our broken immigration system, we’ll be here,” Moulton said. “Until then, they need to learn the basic responsibilities of governing.”

U.S. Rep.-elect Lori Trahan (D-Lowell) said, “President Trump should be focusing his efforts on reopening the government, not playing politics. About 420,000 of the 800,000 federal workers — law enforcement and corrections officers, members of the Coast Guard, Forest Service firefighters — are working without pay.”

