Government Shutdown Conversation: Broken Down

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STAKEHOLDER TABLE OF CONTENTS:

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*Ideally this would take the form of a more interactive short script form of an interactive blog post

The 2018/2019 U.S. government shutdown spanning from December 22, 2018 to January 25, 2019 was the longest in history at 35 days. Though it is fair to say that the majority if the country were relatively unaffected by the shutdown, it generated a lot of different discourse from those select stake holders and the news outlets that were relaying the story. Here are some key dialogues that have emerged for those of us who were unaffected in our day-to-day lives.

Based on my analysis of news articles the main stake holders can be broken down into 2 main groups:

- o Politicians
- o Federal Beneficiaries: Workers/Food stamp recipients

President Trump

The government shutdown began and ended with President Donald Trump. Beginning as a reaction to not receiving Congress approval for funding to build a wall at the United States/Mexico border. The discourse that he puts forth can be traced through press conferences, statements, and tweets. Trump's rhetoric focuses heavily on his knowledge of his audience and how to incite their emotions, appealing heavily to pathos (a rhetoric strategy which is based in emotion), to convince them of his position. He is motivated by his intent to please as the president, especially with the 2020 election fast approaching. The patrons of the republican party have brought border protection into the forefront of their policy priorities. As the president of the United States, and the beacon for the republican party, Trump is using rhetoric that promotes crowd pleasing. Such as contradictions to his former stances, only becoming very passionate about the wall when he has seen the positive response it has generated. Within his Twitter account he often brings in smaller goings on, to distract from larger topics at hand.

The media will take every opportunity to make a joke at the expense of a politician. President Trump is especially targeted because of his own use of Twitter and being such a notable figure globally. These jokes often take the form of memes. Memes take on discourse of informality and poking fun at a harsh topic as a means of coping.

Politicians

This group is where a large amount of the conversation about the government shutdown has stemmed from. Some of the most notable discourse surrounding the government shutdown has come from the floor of the [Senate](). In this TIME video, senators from both republican and democratic parties discuss the effects of the government shutdown as they see it. The purpose of the video itself was to keep the public informed on the happenings within the senate. The way that senators speak on the senate floor is very formal and highlights their appeal to ethos and logos. They speak to what they know which emphasizes the audience, general American population's, willingness to trust that they are making agreeable arguments.

A specific senator's speech blew up during this period of senate floor debate, Michael Bennet's 25 minute ["Takedown of Ted Cruz"]() was a viral sensation. Huffington Post reported on the Twitter storm in response to the video. News platforms articles and tweets emphasized how he is normally mild-mannered, which seems to work to give his passionate outburst of dialogue towards Senator Cruz concerning the government shutdown a very emotional and personal credit. His word choice of "crocodile tears" highlights his view of Senator Cruz's attempts at resolution to be a charade. The use of "medieval" to describe the border wall seems to work to draw a comparison to the barbaric nature of the wall, both structurally and conceptually. He also cites specific examples of teachers, students, "his state," etc. to play on the emotions of annoyance, anger, and passion that he is feeling as well as what he perceives may make others feel the same way.

The most outward pushback that President Trump received from a politician during the shutdown was from Nancy Pelosi, the speaker of the House. She was very outward in her efforts to block the state of the union until the government shutdown ceased, stating that "[Democrats will block President Donald Trump from giving his State of the Union in the House chamber until the government is open]()." This phrasing, specifically repeated in the CNBC article, seems to emphasize the unity of the democratic party against the wishes and actions of President Trump.

Opposingly, the Republican senator of South Carolina, Lindsey Graham, has been vocal with news networks and on his Twitter page in his support of President Trump's policies and decisions. [The Western Journal]() released an article about Lindsey Graham's statements towards Democrats post-shutdown. He emphasizes the gravity of President Trump's willingness to compromise on the issue of immigration, specifically border control/DACA. He speaks heavily from opinion, but he relays information that came from another source, following the argument style of President Trump.

"If the Democrats do not work with us, the biggest losers, in my view, are gonna be the TPS/DACA recipients because this president will secure our border through executive action."

Lindsey Graham ✔
@LindseyGrahamSC

Democrats' hatred of President @realDonaldTrump resulted in them missing a great opportunity to provide more border security and a better life for DACA/TPS recipients.

Sad and stupid.

8:08 AM · 2/12/19 · TweetDeck

2,506 Retweets 688 Likes

There are a lot of rhetorical strategies at play in this statement. Graham begins by creating an us and them divide with the statement "if the democrats do not work with us." He then appeals to audience pathos by alluding to his sympathy for TPS/DACA recipients. This may be even more impactful discourse than it would be from a democratic senator, because as a republican there is a predisposition among their party not caring for migrant communities. Finally, he ties the argument back to his main point that no matter the pushback from the democratic party, President Trump will continue fighting for the border wall. It is implied that in the end he will get it, even if it requires "executive action.

Rhetoric, especially within the 21st century, seems to highly value the concept of "winning." Many arguments, especially in the media, seek out a winning and a losing party. In the current polarized state of the country this black and white view is only perpetuated. Mick Mulvaney, White House chief of staff, follows this rhetorical pattern in his claims that the end of the government shutdown "does not mean a loss for President Trump." The article written on his statements seems to place emphasis on Mulvaney's optimism in this situation, "even as others doubled down on the notion that it was a setback for Trump and his policies." It is hard to determine if this angle is meant to show his commitment to the Trump campaign and willingness to look past any downfalls caused by the shutdown, or if it is meant to draw attention to naivety Mulvaney shows in not being one of the "others."

"Ultimately, he'll be judged by what happens at the end of this process, not by what happened this week,"

Government Beneficiaries

Federal Workers

A group that has widely spoken out about the impacts of the government shutdown on their everyday lives is federal workers. During the shutdown many government buildings were closed which meant over a month out of work for many, some were furloughed or temporarily laid off. Others were expected to work despite no pay during this time of the shutdown.

There were multiple viral incidences of TSA agents protesting the shutdown and calling out from work in numbers so high leading to extensive delays in airports. One of the most extreme of these cases was seen in the Orlando International Airport.

> **Tweet**
>
> **US Rep. Darren Soto** ✓
> @RepDarrenSoto
>
> Our @TSA Officers have already suffered so much during the #GovernmentShutdown. This apparent suicide only adds to tragedy experienced at Orlando Int'l. Our prayers go out to his family and coworkers after this difficult loss.
>
> TSA worker dead following jump from balcony at Orlando Internati...
> wftv.com
>
> 10:59 · 2/2/19 · Twitter for iPhone
>
> 98 Retweets 163 Likes

Another specific group of federal workers that were involved in the government shutdown discussion were prison guards. Specifically, a video posted on the CNN website of two furloughed republican prison guards and their reactions about the government shutdown. The description of the video follows:

Federal law enforcement officers Charles and Jill Gilbert, who did not receive paychecks during the government shutdown, say they support President Trump's efforts to fund his border wall.

This could be considered an example of a news media source using extreme examples to frame a group of people in a certain light. Though these are two of the many republican federal employees who were out of work (or at least pay) during the shutdown based on this video an audience could try to generalize their views to that entire population.

The news anchor alludes to discourse used by President Trump, "the president says that many of the federal workers who were not being paid for the last five weeks supported what he was doing with the shutdown." This statement seems to emphasize both the severity of five weeks without pay as well as the shutdown as a purely President Trump idea.

He goes on to asks the pair a pointed question of "… you support the shutdown even considering what it did to your family personally?" It seems to be that his discourse in this conversation is against the shutdown.

The discourse used by the Gilbert's themselves center around their beliefs as members of the republican party. Charles appeals heavily to audience pathos in his reasoning for supporting the wall stating, "if it's going to defend our country and keep illegals out, keeping people from coming in, hurting my children, that don't belong here. Yes, I'm all for the wall." Within that brief statement there are appeals to honor and nationality as well as appeals to fear and family value. Jill states that she is "certain" of another shutdown coming on February 15th. This may be her way of stating she does not believe the democrats are willing to reach a compromise with President Trump. She also draws a comparison between being a prison guard and being a TSA agent, making large implications that their jobs are much more serious and necessary because of their "clientele," and therefore they should see that pay for the time they are still having to put in, while other federal workers might not.

Food Stamp Recipients

Most of the easily accessible news coverage about the government shutdown focused on the political sphere and therefore did not include conversation about the effects on food stamp recipients. The discourse of these topic relies heavily on the appeals to pathos via sympathy for others.

In Conclusion…

Though the longest U.S. government shutdown to date has ceased there is another looming over the country going into the week that ends with February 15th. The democrats and republicans seem to be polarized on the root of the government shutdown cause, but for the most part are not on a shutdown itself. In some cases, individuals will stick with their core beliefs, despite something they believe in directly working against them. This may act as a kind of conversation framing. News outlets will also frame a piece by using select evidence to create the narrative that they desire. A government shutdown impacts many people directly, but an even larger population is impacted non-directly. The conversation around this concept is not heavily opinion based in whether it is good or bad, but rather in why the political sphere has reached this point. Finger pointing is often presented in the form of appealing to audience emotion and sense of justice.