U.S. cuts millions in aid to Central America, fulfilling Trump's vow

BY CHRISTINA MCDOWELL DEVINE
Updated 2:00 PM ET, Wed, 19 Sep 2018

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Washington – Fulfilling President Trump's vow, the U.S. government will withdraw millions of dollars in aid to Central America, the State Department said Tuesday. Lawmakers urging the administration to withdraw aid to Central America and instead offer equivalent assistance to the national security, deep-rooted problems that have caused migration. Officials said the administration will work with Congress to reprogram these funds to other priorities in the Western Hemisphere.

A State Department official said $432 million in aid allocated to fiscal year 2017 will continue, while $181 million would be withheld until the U.S. is convinced that Central American governments have taken steps to address the underlying causes of migration. The approximately $181 million allocated for fiscal year 2018, the official said, would be reprogrammed to "other priorities in the Western Hemisphere." The official said the decision was made in consultation with Congress.

Fiscal year 2017 and fiscal years 2018 and 2019 will also be conditional, the official said. Funds allocated to fiscal years 2017 and 2018 to help governments in the region combat corruption will be cut off if such action is not taken by the end of fiscal year 2019.

The announcement drew quick condemnation from congressional Democrats.

"Cutting off desperately needed aid to Central America's poorest countries will only exacerbate the root causes," Democratic Sen. Catherine Cortez Masto said in a statement. "The U.S. is at our best when we work together with our partners in Central America to address and unscrupulous children being brought to our borders."

The State Department said some of the funds would be reprogrammed to be used for disbursed if those countries take steps to address the root causes of migration to the U.S. and the southern border, which reached a 12-year high last month.

Earlier this month, through a close to impose tariffs on Mexican goods, Mr. Trump also threatened to cut off aid to Central America if the governments in the region failed to stem the flow of migration to the U.S. Last month, the administration deploy of thousands of National Guard troops to the Mexico-Guatemala border, while the U.S. Agency for International expanded the "Remain in Mexico" policy, which requires asylum seekers to remain in Mexico while their cases are adjudicated in the southern border.

Christina Ruffini contributed reporting.

First published on June 27, 2018 / 5:00 PM

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