

The Mexican Standoff of 2019

Government shutdown, interruption of services, government held hostage. That's the situation where 1/4 of the government's agencies/workforce or 800,000 workers are affected, and while a number of them have been deemed 'essential' and are still working for the last three weeks, they haven't been collecting a paycheck. Depending on who you talk to, there are three possible reasons for this deplorable situation. They can be: 1. the President's insistence on building a several hundred mile wall at our southern border, 2. the Democrats' wish to deny the President the fulfillment of a campaign promise or 3. the Democrats' sincere belief that a wall isn't necessary to protect us and are willing to push back on the President in order to save the taxpayer, money.

Two of those are real and one isn't. I'll leave it up to you to decide which is which. Either way, we're stuck in what can only be called a, 'Mexican Standoff.' For those of you who've never heard the term, it is not an ethnic slur. It is an appellation that has been used since the 19th century to describe an argument among two or three individuals or groups that cannot be resolved - an impasse where all parties are dug in, well-armed and are unwilling to compromise. Some historical accounts trace it back to March 19, 1876 to the newspaper the New York Sunday Mercury in which F. Harvey Smith says, "Go! We will call it a stand-off, a Mexican stand-off, you lose your money, but you save your life!" There are other sources that attribute it to conflicts in Mexico among bandits, vaqueros, charros, chinacos and pistoleros. It was a method of settling problems and proving masculinity by standing face-to-face and gambling on death with loaded guns. Both parties stood opposite each other with their guns in their holsters waiting for the right opportunity to draw and get off the first shot.

In the U.S., this behavior became known as a *Mexican Standoff*. Whichever historical reference you choose to believe, a Mexican Standoff is precisely the right term to use to describe what is happening between the President and Congressional Democrats. Each is in possession of deadly political force, is daring the other to draw, and are well aware that a wrong move will have a disastrous effect on their political fortunes. Unfortunately, neither side seems to be very concerned about the real victims. Again, there is a difference of opinion on just who the real victims of the Mexican Standoff are. If you are a Democrat, you see the 800,000 federal workers as the victims. If you are a Republican, you see all Americans as victims because of the influx of illegal aliens forcing their way across our border.

There is a third group that sees both Democrats and Republicans as victims, but thinks they have only themselves to blame for their victimhood. Furthermore, they are disgusted that either side would play politics with our national security. There are also non-human victims of this Mexican Standoff that hover over the conflict like spirits. They are: the rule of law (which should be stronger than any man-made wall or barrier on our border) and our confidence in our institutions' ability to solve such disputes.

The great Mexican Standoff of 2019 can be resolved without incurring further pain, but it would require something that is in short supply in our nation's capital....maturity. Both parties would need to come to grips with the sober reality of their positions, that they are playing fast and loose with our border security; that they are endangering their own chances at the 2020 ballot box; and that they may be turning off the very voters they need to insure that America remains a destination that any immigrant is willing to risk life and limb to reach. A cessation of hostility and intransigence can only come from the realization that we all drink from the same well. If we allow it to run dry or let it be poisoned by special interests, we all lose.

Stephan Helgesen is a former career U.S. diplomat who lived and worked in thirty different countries, specializing in export promotion. He is now a political analyst and strategist and author of over 900 articles and nine books on politics, the economy and social trends. He can be reached at: stephan@stephanhelgesen.com