

## Donald Trump: 'I'll never, ever back down' on border wall'



'I said, you guys aren't into salads': Donald Trump treats the Clemson Tigers to pizzas, 300 hamburgers and 'many, many french fries' at the White House. Picture: Getty Images

Cameron Stewart, Washington Correspondent, 12:00AM January 16, 2019

Donald Trump has declared he will never back down from his border wall to protect Americans, paving the way for a prolonged deadlock over what is already the longest government shutdown.

The President said yesterday his push to build a wall along the US-Mexico border was not being driven by politics but because it was essential to keep people safe.

"When it comes to keeping the American people safe, I will never, ever back down. I didn't need this fight," he told a farmer's convention in New Orleans.

"We're dealing against people who think that if they can stop me from building a wall, they think that's a good thing for 2020. "I'm doing it because we have to do it. We're gonna have a wall, we're gonna have a barrier."

Mr Trump's determination to stand firm on his demand for funding for the wall came despite nervousness from senior Republicans about the political fallout. Senator and Trump confidant Lindsey Graham said the President had rejected his suggestion that the government be reopened now with discussions on

funding for the wall at a later date. "I did reject it, yes," Mr Trump said. "I'm not interested. I want to get it solved. I don't want to just delay it."

Democrats have refused Mr Trump's demands that they approve \$US5.6 billion (\$7.8bn) in wall funding as part of a spending bill to reopen the government.

Republicans are concerned by polls confirming a clear majority of Americans blame Mr Trump and Republicans for the shutdown.

A Quinnipiac University poll released yesterday found 56 per cent of Americans blame Mr Trump and Republicans for the shutdown compared with 36 per cent who blame the Democrats.

But Mr Trump's determination to hold firm has reportedly been strengthened by a Washington Post-ABC News poll that shows that while a majority oppose the wall, support for it has grown over the past 12 months, from 34 per cent to 42 per cent.

Mr Trump yesterday gave the strongest indication yet that he would not seek to win funding for his wall by declaring a national emergency over border security — a mechanism that would enable him to use defence funds for a wall, bypassing congress. Such a move would expose the President to accusations of executive overreach and probably be challenged in the courts: "I'm not looking to call a national emergency. This is so simple we shouldn't have to."

Mr Trump hit back at reports about his relationship with Russia, including that the FBI had investigated him for potentially acting on behalf of Moscow in his 2017 sacking of FBI chief James Comey. "I never worked for Russia, and you know that answer better than anybody," he said. "I never worked for Russia, I think it's a disgrace that you even asked that question because it's a whole big, fat hoax."

Mr Trump also said he knew nothing about a report in The Washington Post that he tried to hide notes of his meeting with Russian President Vladimir Putin from his own senior officials. "It's a lot of fake news. That was a very good meeting; it was actually a very successful meeting," he said.

Mr Trump has been increasingly angered by the intense media focus on the investigation by special counsel Robert Mueller, describing the probe as a Democrat political witch-hunt. Mr Mueller is believed to be nearing a conclusion to his sprawling 20-month investigation. Mr Trump has intensified his attacks on the Mueller probe, laying the groundwork for him to dismiss the report's findings as fake news.