

Mick Mulvaney finds himself in middle of another shutdown

By ANDREW TAYLOR

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WASHINGTON (AP) — Mick Mulvaney stormed Washington as a tea party lawmaker elected in 2010, and he hasn't mellowed much as director of the Office of Management of Budget at the White House.

In both spots, he's been at the center of a government shutdown. But this time he is arguing against it and is faulting Democrats for seeking to use the very kind of leverage he tried to utilize in 2013.

Then a congressman, Mulvaney was among a faction on the hard right that bullied GOP leaders into a shutdown confrontation by insisting on lacing a must-pass spending bill with provisions designed to cripple President Barack Obama's signature health care law.

Then, the fast-talking South Carolina Republican downplayed the impact of a government shutdown, noting that critical government services would continue and Social Security benefits would be paid. He said about 75 percent of the government would remain open, and he noted that Congress arranged for the military to continue to get paid.

“In many ways, then, this is a government ‘slowdown’ more than it is a ‘shutdown,’” Mulvaney said back in 2013, though he added, “I know that is not much consolation for folks who are personally affected.”

Mulvaney voted against legislation to reopen the government and was unapologetic over his role as a ringleader in 2013, saying the GOP’s political beating — and eventual retreat — was the product of bad messaging.

Now, as the federal official in charge of managing government operations during the lapse in funding, Mulvaney is taking steps to ameliorate the shutdown, giving agencies more flexibility to remain open by using, for instance, previously appropriated money to keep their doors open. He accused the Obama White House of purposefully closing high-profile federal sites to reap political gain. The Trump administration will do what it can to keep national parks open and accessible, he said.

“We are going to manage the shutdown differently. We are not going to weaponize it,” Mulvaney said Friday. “We’re not going to try and hurt people, especially people who happen to work for this federal government.”

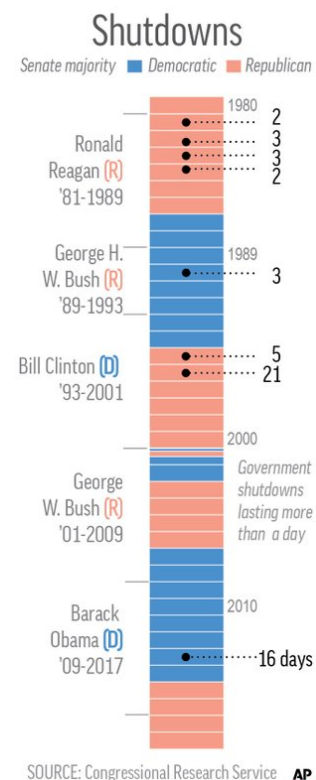
Mulvaney is quick-witted and possesses a disarming frankness, and he’s not afraid of being impolitic, even as he has risen to a Washington power post.

For instance, on Friday, just hours before the shutdown began, Mulvaney told conservative radio host Sean Hannity, “I found out for the first time last night that the person who technically shuts the government down is me, which is kind of cool.”

Mulvaney isn’t apologizing for the shutdown tactics he employed in 2013, saying he opposed that year’s stopgap spending measure because it funded agencies that were implementing “Obamacare.” But he is blaming Democrats for trying to use the same kind of leverage now that he failed to exploit back then.

“When Republicans tried to add a discussion about Obamacare to the funding process in 2013, we were accused by Nancy Pelosi and Chuck Schumer of inserting a non-fiscal — a non-financial — issue into the spending process in order to shut the government down,” Mulvaney said. “How is that not exactly what is happening today?”

On Sunday, he defended himself against accusations of hypocrisy in his attacks on Democrats over the government shutdown, given his own role at the center of the



SOURCE: Congressional Research Service AP

2013 shutdown.

“Everything that was in the bill Democrats support and have voted for previously,” Mulvaney said on CNN’s “State of the Union.” “This is pure politics.”

He reiterated that the administration won’t negotiate with Democrats on immigration or a longer-term spending bill until they vote to reopen the government.

“They need to open the government tonight or tomorrow and then we can start talking,” Mulvaney said on CNN.