

## Fund the Government: Shutdowns Harm Us All

The moral obligation of any country is to care for their most vulnerable populations. With the U.S. facing the real threat of a government shutdown in just a few weeks, that responsibility is being put to the test. While shutdowns have occurred in the past, they have been mostly brief. But when shutdowns last more than a few days, the consequences for the nation and its most vulnerable communities are painful. Our government is heading towards that crossroad where we will have to make a moral choice.

### The Looming Threat

The current federal government fiscal year ends on September 30. If Congress fails to pass legislation authorizing funding for FY 2024 by that deadline, the government will shut down. It will take strong bipartisan cooperation for a 2024 appropriation bill to pass by the end of September. Leaders of both parties in the Senate have worked cooperatively to reach spending agreements on all Appropriation bills. The House, however, led by their most conservative Members, has failed to reach a consensus among even Republican members on 11 of 12 bills and House and Senate versions of the bills are vastly different. With a deadline of September 30 looming, time is running out to avoid a shutdown.

Past Congresses who were at an impasse at the fiscal year deadline staved off shutdowns by passing a temporary agreement to maintain funding while further negotiations took place, known as a “continuing resolution” or “CR.” Typically, a CR continues government operations at the current year’s funding levels for a period of weeks, or even months, until Congress can agree on a new budget. Although Congressional leaders have talked about a new CR, even this temporary solution is in jeopardy this year.

There are ominous signals of an imminent shutdown, and that it could well be worse than the past. The Freedom Caucus, an extremist minority in the House of Representatives, is demanding drastic cuts to the federal budget — some cite \$100 billion in reductions as their bottom line, along with a range of measures to harshly curtail immigration and federal diversity protections. Their open threats would hold the government hostage with a shutdown next month if they do not get their way on both their demanded budget cuts and immigration and “culture war” restrictions.

One Freedom Caucus representative, Dan Bishop of North Carolina, predicts that it is “implausible” that legislators can avoid a shutdown. He insists that he will not even vote for a CR unless harsh immigration restrictions are included and Homeland Security Secretary Mayorkas is removed, “or something damn close to that.” Rep. Bob Good of Virginia - a fellow Freedom Caucus Member - has even predicted that if the federal government shuts down, “most Americans won’t even miss” it. **He could not be more wrong.**

## The Painful Impacts of a Government Shutdown

The harms of a government shutdown will begin within days of its inception, and they will mount over time. **The burden of those harms will fall most heavily on nation's most vulnerable communities**—Black, Brown and white families living at or near poverty, individuals with disabilities, low-wage workers employed by the government or its contractors, and anyone needing immediate government assistance.

Some programs deemed necessary to national security or safety can continue to operate, including hospital and emergency medical care, air traffic control, disaster aid, border and other law enforcement, and power grid maintenance. Others with “mandatory” funding sources can continue to provide regular benefits, including Social Security, Medicare, Medicaid, and SNAP, but with service cuts and lapses over time. Many other federally programs will be threatened quickly.



### Immediate Threats to Vulnerable Communities

**For families and individuals already living at or near poverty, a shutdown can be devastating.** Among the range of critical supports that likely must curtail operations within weeks of a shutdown are:

- **WIC**, the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children, will almost immediately lack funds to pay for essential milk, formula, and other nutrition for new parents and their babies and toddlers.
- **TANF**, the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families Program, will have to cease or limit its supports to low-income families and children as soon as individual states' willingness or ability to cover lost federal funds dries up.
- **Head Start** programs will close, unless private philanthropy or state and local governments step up to continue them.
- **Veteran Services** will be impacted. While veterans' cash benefits and hospital services can continue during a shutdown, vocational rehabilitation and counseling, educational programs, and other needed non-medical veterans' services will cease.
- **Many low-wage federal workers** and employees of federal contractors will be furloughed immediately and plunged into financial crisis. While federal employees have later been paid retroactively for their lost wages, contract workers who provide housekeeping, maintenance, food service, and other low-wage services to government agencies are unlikely to ever recoup their losses.

- **Congress must not harm our most vulnerable brothers and sisters because of the malicious whims of extremists in the House.**

## Harms of a Long Shutdown

If a shutdown drags on for weeks, **those who depend on mandatory funding supports will begin to suffer, with our nation's most vulnerable families and individuals again hit hardest.** Over time, a shutdown can produce direct and indirect harms from the end of operations at key agencies. The following are among the critical services that will likely stop for the duration of a long shutdown and produce onerous delays and backlogs even after it ends:

- **Issuance of new social security cards** and assistance with the range of other social security issues
- **Social security disability application** decisions and appeals, which are already subject to unacceptably long delays
- **Processing of applications for Medicaid and SNAP** for families and individuals facing financial crises
- **Issuance of tax refunds** that have been delayed and other assistance to taxpayers
- **Veteran disability application** decisions and appeals
- **Workplace and mine safety inspections** and enforcement that are needed to protect vulnerable workers
- **Food and Drug safety inspections** by FDA and Department of Agriculture essential to safeguard the public's safety
- **National Institutes of Health (NIH) enrollment** and new NIH grant program patient enrollment and treatment
- **Enforcement of labor laws** that protect against violations of the nation's most basic minimum wage, overtime, and child labor laws
- **Federal protections against discrimination** on the basis of race, gender, nationality, religion, and other factors in the workplace and in education

## The U.S. Cannot Afford a Shutdown

Our Catholic Social Justice tradition is clear: "Justice for all means that those struggling to escape poverty have the single most urgent economic claim on the conscience of the nation." **The harms of a shutdown, and their undue burden on vulnerable communities, are obvious and unconscionable.**

For NETWORK, along with faith communities nationwide, it is clear that **Congress must keep its most fundamental promise to our people:** to enact a fair and just budget that allows the nation, including its most vulnerable families, to thrive — and to urgently prevent a damaging shutdown as it works to fulfill that promise.

"We know that love makes families and friendships flourish; but it is good to remember that it also makes social, cultural, economic, and political relationships flourish, allowing us to construct a 'civilization of love,' as St. Paul VI loved to say and, in turn, St. John Paul II. Without this inspiration the egotistical, indifferent, throw-away culture prevails — that is, to discard anyone I do not like, whom I cannot love or those who seem to me as not useful in society."

— Pope Francis