

# Looming Government Shutdown: What a Way to Run a Country

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Americans get the best democracy money can buy. The best, brightest and most honorable are excluded. Rare exceptions prove the rule.

Washington is dysfunctional, out-of-control, corrupt, lawless and self-serving. Both parties represent two sides of the same coin.

At the same time, each one jousts with the other. They do it for political advantage. Self-interest is the coin of the realm.

Ordinary Americans lose out. No one in Washington represents them. America is a democracy in name only.

Calling it that is a convenient illusion. Numerous examples explain. A looming government shutdown approaches. What a way to run a country. More on what doing it means below.

The last one occurred in late 1995/early 1996. Most people don't remember. The world didn't come to an end.

Government shut down after Clinton vetoed a Republican-sponsored spending bill.

Non-essential federal workers were furloughed. They were out from November 14 through November 19 and from December 16 until January 6.

A temporary spending bill resumed normal operations from November 20 through December 15.

Twenty-eight days were adversely affected. Republicans wanted deeper budget cuts than Democrats.

A 2010 Congressional Research Service report explained what happened. Several hundred thousand federal workers were furloughed.

According to the White House Office of Management and Budget, the cost was at least \$1.4 billion.

Economically it hardly mattered. Ordinary people felt it most. Payments to veterans were suspended. National parks were closed.

An estimated 200,000 passport applications weren't processed. Visa application processing was suspended.

Airlines and other tourism related businesses lost millions of dollars. About 20% of Washington area contracts were impacted.

So were health services, environmental cleanup, law enforcement and public safety.

A September 2013 [Congressional Research Service \(CRS\) report](#) is titled “Shutdown of the Federal Government: Causes, Processes and Effects.”

The Antideficiency Act (ADA) dates from 1884. Updating amendments followed. The legislation prohibits Congress from incurring obligations or appropriating funds in excess of amounts available.

Federal agencies must stop operating when budgeted dollars run out. So-called “exempted activities” aren’t affected. They include the military and other sectors affecting national security.

Some consequences of shutting down government remain unclear. According to CRS:

“Programs that are funded by laws other than annual appropriations acts – for example, some entitlement programs – may, or may not, be affected by a funding gap.”

“Specific circumstances appear to be significant. For example, although the funds needed to make payments to beneficiaries may be available automatically pursuant to permanent appropriations, the payments may be processed by employees who are paid with funds provided in annual appropriations acts.”

On or around October 17, America reaches its debt limit. If Congress fails to raise it, the Treasury runs out of money. According to CRS:

“In a debt limit impasse the government no longer has an ability to borrow to finance its obligations.”

“As a result, the federal government would need to rely solely on incoming revenues to” do so.

“If this occurred during a period when the federal government was running a deficit, the dollar amount of newly incurred federal obligations would exceed the dollar amount of newly incoming revenues.”

“In such a situation, an agency may continue to obligate funds, because it has budget authority available for obligation, provided that appropriations are in place.”

“However, the Treasury Department may not be able to liquidate all obligations that result in federal outlays, due to a shortage of cash, which may result in delays in federal payments and disruptions in government operations.”

On September 20, the [Washington Post](#) headlined “Wondering about a government shutdown? First thing to know: It all won’t disappear.”

If Capitol Hill and Obama don’t agree by midnight September 30, “much of the federal government is set to run out of money (by mid-October), and large functions of the federal world could shut down Oct. 1.”

WaPo discussed “basics of what a government shutdown might look like.”

(1) Who’s at fault? It depends on your political persuasion.

America’s fiscal year ends on September 30. Under current budget law, Congress must approve 12 appropriations bills.

“It almost never happens” on time. Over the past 17 years, “Congress did not meet its statutory deadline for approving the spending bills.”

Confrontation today is over Obama’s Affordable Care Act (ACA). On Friday, the Republican controlled House approved a stopgap funding bill.

It excludes ACA funding. Democrats control the Senate. They passed legislation including it.

Unless one side blinks, nonessential government operations will cease on midnight Monday night. They’ll remain nonoperative until both parties resolve budget impasse disagreements.

(2) Has Washington prepared to shut down?

“Yes. The Obama administration told agencies this week to begin planning for a partial shutdown.”

“A memo issued to agencies said that ‘prudent management requires that agencies be prepared for the possibility of a lapse.’ “

“Federal managers must review which of their employees would be essential and required to come to work, and which would be non-essential and sent home during a shutdown.”

Hundreds of thousands of federal employees will be furloughed. They’ll remain out until budget impasse squabbles are resolved.

(3) “Does the entire government close?” Exempted activities aren’t affected. Certain agencies will continue operating with unpaid staff.

According to the Office of Management and Budget, they include employees who:

- “Provide for national security, including the conduct of foreign relations essential to the national security or the safety of life and property.
- Provide for benefit payments and the performance of obligations under no-year or multi-year contract or other funds remaining available for those purposes.
- Conduct essential activities to the extent that they protect life and property.”

Agency managers must decide who works and who doesn’t. Borders will still be patrolled. VA hospitals will keep providing healthcare services. They’re skimpy during normal times.

Mail will be delivered.

(4) What about Social Security payments and safety net protections?

They're mandatory obligations. At worst, payments will slow. They'll still be made. Beneficiaries won't lose out.

(5) Will federal workers and contractors be paid? Working staff will receive retroactive salaries once normal operations resume.

Congress must decide if furloughed employees will get lost pay. In past shutdowns they did. It's no guarantee they will this time.

They can't substitute vacation time or other paid leave. They can't work voluntarily. Doing so is prohibited.

(6) What about past shutdowns? Between 1977 and 1980, six occurred. From 1981 - 1996, nine followed.

Current budget battles suggest more to come. Things may get uglier than earlier. In 2013, no appropriation bills were enacted.

As of midnight September 30, the entire federal government will be unfunded. For how long remains to be seen.

A greater issue is the looming debt ceiling. If it's not raised, the Treasury runs out of money. It's usually routine to fund it.

Perhaps this year will be different. By mid-October we'll know. It bears repeating. What a way to run a country. Given the bipartisan criminal class running things, it doesn't surprise.

(7) Weren't many federal employees furloughed earlier this year?

Almost half of them were for short periods. Doing so followed automatic sequestration cuts. The Defense Department furloughed about 650,000 civilian employees. They were out for six days.

Pay for federal workers was frozen three years ago. They've been cheated out of what they rightfully deserve.

Obama ordered it. He wants social America destroyed. He's going all out to assure it. He prioritizes neoliberal harshness.

He supports capital's divine right. He supplied trillions of dollars of public money to make more of it. He's done it at the public's expense.

He's dismissive of vital safety net protections. Let 'em eat cake is official administration policy.

Limitless funding for monied interests and imperial wars alone matter. Ordinary Americans lose out. They're increasingly on their own sink or swim.

(8) Will Obama, Congress and political appointees keep working?

Yes. They're exempt from furloughs. Some White House and congressional staffers aren't. It's up to their bosses to decide.

In past shutdowns, America's judiciary had enough funding for two weeks. If Washington shuts down longer this time, federal courts won't resume operations until budget impasse disputes are resolved.

(9) How do shutdowns end?

Congress and the White House must decide. No legal time limit is mandated. Public pressure works best.

When politicians feel heat, they react. It remains to be seen what happens this time.

Perhaps voters one day will catch on. Throwing out bums for new ones doesn't work.

Voting Republican or Democrat is like choosing between death by hanging or electrocution. Either way you're dead.

Each party replicates the other. Disputes are solely for political advantage. Public interests don't matter.

Democracy in America is a convenient illusion. It's more hypocrisy than real. Rogues, scalawags, and criminals run things. Ordinary people lose out altogether.

Things are worse now than ever. America's on a fast track toward tyranny and ruin. It's being thirdworldized. Bipartisan complicity assures it.

Change more than ever is needed. Regime change begins at home. Electoral politics doesn't work. Washington is too pernicious, corrupt and dysfunctional to fix.

It's way too late for scattered reforms. Change requires bottom up action. Ordinary people have enormous power.

Key is using it. It takes more than marches, rallies, slogans or violence. It takes sustained commitment.

It takes withdrawing cooperation. It takes breaking entrenched rules. It takes challenging reprisals. It takes resolve.

It takes ordinary people deciding enough's enough. Same old, same won't be tolerated.

Hardship and discontent motivate people to act. Doing so disruptively works.

What better time than now to say no more. What better time to stay the course. What better time to demand real change. Nothing less is acceptable.

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