

Sample Affirmative Case

AFF Case: Pass the End Government Shutdowns Act

I. Introduction

The year was 2019, and our country was experiencing a federal government shutdown.

As CBS News reported from Ogden, Utah, on January 15th of that year,

"City of Ogden, Utah, feels shutdown strain with thousands of furloughed workers," By Carter Evans, January 15, 2019 / 7:05 PM EST / CBS News. Accessed Apr 11, 2025.<https://www.cbsnews.com/news/ogden-utah-feels-the-strain-of-the-shutdown-with-thousands-of-furloughed-workers/>

"Ogden, Utah – A welcome sign here says, 'It pays to live in Ogden.' But that's wishful thinking these days, considering how thousands of federal employees haven't been paid in weeks because of the government shutdown.

Emalee Rausch is among those who haven't gotten a paycheck. Now, she's making food deliveries in a car with a broken heater so she can afford to buy her own groceries. She said she's only making about one-fourth of her paycheck.

Rauch normally works for the IRS, which along with the U.S. Forest Service, employs some 5,000 federal workers in downtown Ogden. At lunchtime, the streets and restaurants used to be packed.

Anna Davidson said business at her restaurant is down by half. She's already slashed employee hours and is now covering payroll with her personal savings."

Because government shutdowns hurt hard working Americans like Emalee Rausch and Anna Davidson, my partner and I stand **Resolved: The United States Federal Government should significantly reform Congress.**



II. Facts

Let's begin with some facts. You can write the first one down as...

Fact 1: Congress controls the budget

In 2024, the Center of Budget and Policy Priorities stated on October 28th of 2024 (The Center on Budget and Policy Priorities is a nonpartisan research and policy institute that focuses on analyzing the impact of federal and state government budget policies, particularly on how they affect low- and moderate-income individuals and families, with the aim of ensuring their needs are considered in policy debates.) Center of Budget and Policy Priorities, "Policy Basics: Introduction to the Federal Budget Process" (Accessed February 24, 2025) <https://www.cbpp.org/research/federal-budget/introduction-to-the-federal-budget-process>

"No single piece of legislation establishes the annual federal budget. Rather, Congress makes spending and tax decisions through a variety of legislative actions in ways that have evolved over more than two centuries. The Constitution makes clear that Congress holds the power of the purse, giving it authority 'to lay and collect Taxes, Duties, Imposts and Excises' and specifying that 'No Money shall be drawn from the Treasury, but in Consequence of Appropriations made by law.' In short, federal taxing and spending requires legislation that is enacted into law."

The Constitution makes clear that Congress alone has the power to appropriate federal funds. But the process often involves division and disagreement, and sometimes funds don't get approved in time to keep the government operating. This leads us to...

Fact 2: Lack of a budget leads to shutdowns

When Congress can't agree on the budget before it is due, the government shuts down.

David Wessel, a senior fellow in Economic Studies at Brookings stated on March 23rd of 2024.

(David Wessel is a senior fellow in Economic Studies at Brookings and director of the Hutchins Center on Fiscal and Monetary Policy, the mission of which is to improve the quality of fiscal and monetary policies and public understanding of them. He joined Brookings in December 2013 after 30 years on the staff of The Wall Street Journal where, most recently, he was economics editor and wrote the weekly Capital column. David is the author of two New York Times best-sellers: "In Fed We Trust: Ben Bernanke's War on the Great Panic" and "Red Ink: Inside the High Stakes Politics of the Federal Budget." His most recent book is "Only the Rich Can Play: How Washington Works in the New Gilded Age," the story of Opportunity Zones. He has shared two Pulitzer Prizes, one in 1984 for a Boston Globe series on the persistence of racism in Boston and the other in 2003 for Wall Street Journal stories on corporate scandals. David is a member of the Bureau of Labor Statistics' Data Users Advisory Committee. He also has taught in the Dartmouth Tuck School of Business Global 2030 executive education program and in the journalism program at Princeton University. A native of New Haven, Conn., and a product of its public schools, David is a 1975 graduate of Haverford College. He was a Knight-Bagehot Fellow in Business and Economics Journalism at Columbia University in 1980-81.)

The Brookings Institution, "What is a government shutdown?" (Accessed February 24, 2025)

<https://www.brookings.edu/articles/what-is-a-government-shutdown-and-why-are-we-likely-to-have-another-one/>

"Under the Antideficiency Act (initially passed in 1884 and amended in 1950), federal agencies cannot spend or obligate any money without an appropriation (or other approval) from Congress. When Congress fails to enact the 12 annual appropriation bills, federal agencies must cease all non-essential functions until Congress acts. This is known as a government shutdown. If Congress enacts some but not all of the 12 appropriations bills, only agencies without appropriations have to shut down; this is known as a partial shutdown. What happens when that occurs? During shutdowns, many federal employees are told not to report for work, though under a 2019 law they get paid retroactively when the shutdown ends. Government employees who provide what are deemed essential services, such as air traffic control and law enforcement, continue to work, but don't get paid until Congress takes action to end the shutdown. All this applies only to the roughly 25% of federal spending subject to annual appropriation by Congress."



Okay, but does it really matter if the government shuts down? Well, the effects are actually much more far reaching than you might think. This leads us to...

III. Harms

Harm 1: Shutdowns hurt the American people by disrupting government services

The website of Congressman Salud Carbajal stated, No date given, but the article must have been published after 2018 due to context. (*Salud Ortiz Carbajal is an American politician serving as the U.S. representative for California's 24th congressional district since 2017.*) **"Government Shutdown FAQs"** (Accessed February 24, 2025) <https://carbajal.house.gov/shutdown/>

"A government shutdown, whether partial or full, impacts a variety of services and programs. During the 2018-2019 partial shutdown, the Food and Drug Administration suspended routine inspections, increasing public health risks. The National Park Service stopped trash collection and road repairs, creating unsanitary conditions and unsafe roads, while some national parks and museums closed entirely. Additionally, over 86,000 immigration court hearings were canceled, exacerbating existing backlogs. The shutdown also threatened the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families program in some states, putting low-income families and children at risk."

These disruptions have real effects across the nation. And this is just the beginning of how a government shutdown can harm American citizens. This leads us to...

Harm 2: Shutdowns harm the federal workforce

The Peter G. Peterson Foundation stated in 2023,

(The Peter G. Peterson Foundation is a nonprofit organization focused on addressing long-term fiscal challenges facing the United States, particularly related to national debt and budget deficits. It works to promote fiscal responsibility through research, advocacy, and public dialogue. The foundation aims to raise awareness about the economic impact of growing debt and encourage policy reforms for sustainable fiscal policies.)

The Peter G. Peterson Foundation, "Four Reasons Why a Government Shutdown is Harmful" (Accessed February 24, 2025) <https://www.pgpf.org/article/four-reasons-why-a-government-shutdown-is-harmful/>

"Shutdowns contribute to economic insecurity among federal workers. During the last shutdown, about 800,000 federal employees were either furloughed or went without pay. This included workers at national parks and museums, corrections officers at federal prisons, and officials from the Transportation Security Administration. The gap in pay creates an adverse situation for federal workers as about 20 percent of Americans are unable to pay their monthly bills in full and about 40 percent are unable to pay an emergency expense of \$400 or more with cash, according to the Federal Reserve. Also, shutdowns may harm recruitment and retention of quality staff. Experts interviewed by the Government Accountability Office noted that prolonged shutdowns may alter the perception of federal jobs and reduce the attractiveness of such jobs for younger workers. Such perceptions are already apparent in the federal government where, currently, just 7 percent of all permanent, full-time federal employees are under the age of 30; that age group makes up 20 percent of the broader labor market."

Government shutdowns cause unnecessary and unjustifiable pay insecurity for hundreds of thousands of federal workers—real families, real people. These individual workers are not the ones failing to pass a budget, and yet they're punished for it. But that's not all. We also see...



Harm 3: Shutdowns Are Costly

The Committee for a Responsible Federal Budget stated in 2025.

(The Committee for a Responsible Federal Budget (CRFB) is a nonpartisan organization dedicated to promoting fiscal responsibility and addressing the national debt. It advocates for policies that reduce deficits, improve government spending, and ensure long-term economic stability. CRFB conducts research, offers policy recommendations, and engages in public education to help guide decision-makers in fiscal matters.)

Committee for a Responsible Federal Budget, “Government Shutdowns Q&A: Everything You Should Know” (Accessed March 30, 2025) <https://www.crfb.org/papers/government-shutdowns-qa-everything-you-should-know>

“While estimates vary widely, evidence suggests that shutdowns tend to cost – not save – money for several reasons. For one, putting contingency plans in place has a real cost. In addition, many user fees and other charges are not collected during a shutdown, and federal contractors sometimes include premiums in their bids to account for uncertainty in being paid. While many federal employees are forced to be idle during a shutdown, they have historically received and are now guaranteed back pay, negating much of those potential savings. OMB official estimates of the 2013 government shutdown found that \$2.5 billion in pay and benefits were paid to furloughed employees for hours not worked during the shutdown, as well as roughly \$10 million in penalty interest payments and lost fee collections. Shutdowns also carry a cost to the economy. The Congressional Budget Office (CBO) estimated that the 2018-2019 shutdown reduced Gross Domestic Product (GDP) by a total of \$11 billion, including \$3 billion that will never be recovered. On top of that effect, CBO notes that longer shutdowns negatively affect private-sector investment and hiring decisions as businesses cannot obtain federal permits and certifications or access federal loans. A 2019 Senate report found that the three government shutdowns in 2013, 2018, and 2019 wasted nearly \$4 billion of taxpayer dollars.”

Government shutdowns harm individual Americans and the nation as a whole, wasting money and hurting the economy. To solve these harms, my partner and I propose the following plan.

IV. Plan

Mandate

Congress shall pass S.2041, the End Government Shutdowns Act of 2023.

This bill states that the government’s budget will continue at the same level of funding if Congress is unable to agree on a new budget or joint resolution. This process is called an automatic continuing resolution. In this bill, after 120 days of level funding, the amount will be reduced by 1% every 90 days.

Agency and Enforcement

Congress, the President, and any other necessary bodies.



Funding

No additional funding will be needed, since the plan is purely legislative. Any costs related to the plan will be paid through normal means.

Timeline

This plan will be passed immediately upon an affirmative ballot.

The affirmative team reserves the right to clarify this plan in future speeches.

By implementing an automatic continuing resolution, we can avoid a government shutdown. Until Congress can pass the new budget, the country would simply continue to operate on the old one. The country won't be held hostage, and we will realize the following advantages:

V. Advantages

Advantage 1: The American people will benefit from continuing government services

The Committee for a Responsible Federal Budget stated in 2020, *(The Committee for a Responsible Federal Budget (CRFB) is a nonpartisan organization dedicated to promoting fiscal responsibility and addressing the national debt. It advocates for policies that reduce deficits, improve government spending, and ensure long-term economic stability. CRFB conducts research, offers policy recommendations, and engages in public education to help guide decision-makers in fiscal matters.)*

Committee for a Responsible Federal Budget, "Better Budget Process Initiative: Automatic CRs Can Improve the Appropriations Process"
(Accessed March 30, 2025) <https://www.crfb.org/papers/better-budget-process-initiative-automatic-crs-can-improve-appropriations-process>

"A government shutdown could occur at the end of this month. This year's appropriations process is at a standstill, and disagreement over further economic relief and other issues may derail even a "clean" continuing resolution (CR) extending current funding. Unfortunately this end-of-fiscal-year impasse is not unusual. Congress has only passed all appropriations bills on time 3 of the last 44 fiscal years. And in several instances – most recently between December 22, 2018, and January 25, 2019 – failure to reach agreement has resulted in a full or partial government shutdown. Fortunately, we can avoid such disruptions. In the wake of the U.S. government's most recent shutdown, bipartisan support surged for legislation to provide for automatic continuing resolutions (auto-CRs). Under current law, if Congress fails to pass new appropriations bills or a CR before the prior funding expires, parts of the government cease operations. Auto-CRs ensure that funding for programs will continue, thereby preventing such government shutdowns. Shutdowns impose unnecessary costs on the public, on federal workers, and on Congress. They are also unnecessary. Many state governments have auto-CRs. States continue to enact appropriations nonetheless, and they reap the benefits of a more coherent process. Auto-CRs have the potential to improve Congress as an institution while producing tangible policy benefits. Despite some concerns, the benefits are likely to outweigh the risks. Auto-CRs would probably have minimal influence on total spending levels and are highly unlikely to continue at length. Moreover, policymakers have tools to mitigate potential disincentives to do regular appropriations. Adopting auto-CRs is one of several important improvements to the budget process that Congress should consider."

Automatic continuing resolutions would ensure that important government services such as food safety inspections, court hearings, and assistance for needy families would continue. In addition, our plan would also ensure...



Advantage 2: The federal workforce won't be disrupted

United States Representative Don Beyer stated, *(Donald Sternoff Beyer Jr. is an American businessman, diplomat, and politician serving as the U.S. representative for Virginia's 8th congressional district since 2015.)* www.kaine.senate.gov, “Kaine & Beyer Introduce Bill to Prevent Government Shutdowns” (Accessed March 30, 2025)
<https://www.kaine.senate.gov/press-releases/kaine-and-beyer-introduce-bill-to-prevent-government-shutdowns>

“Government shutdowns are destructive for the federal workforce and the country, no good can come from them, and Congress should not allow them to happen,” said Representative Beyer. “Intentionally shuttering the government of the most powerful country on earth is foolish, weakening and embarrassing America on the world stage. It also does lasting damage to our economy and inflicts harrowing uncertainty on millions of civil servants and their families, many of whom live far from Washington. Congress should permanently take the threat of a government shutdown off the table, which is what our commonsense bill would do.”

With the threat of government shutdowns off the table, the economy would benefit as well as we can see in...

Advantage 3: Avoiding shutdowns will avoid economic damage

The Committee for a Responsible Federal Budget stated in 2020,
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Committee for a Responsible Federal Budget, “Better Budget Process Initiative: Automatic CRs Can Improve the Appropriations Process” (Accessed March 30, 2025)
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“Under current law, if Congress fails to pass new appropriations bills or a CR before the prior funding expires, parts of the government cease operations. Auto-CRs ensure that funding for programs will continue, thereby preventing such government shutdowns. Shutdowns impose unnecessary costs on the public, on federal workers, and on Congress. They are also unnecessary. Many state governments have auto-CRs. States continue to enact appropriations nonetheless, and they reap the benefits of a more coherent process. Auto-CRs have the potential to improve Congress as an institution while producing tangible policy benefits. Despite some concerns, the benefits are likely to outweigh the risks. Auto-CRs would probably have minimal influence on total spending levels and are highly unlikely to continue at length. Moreover, policymakers have tools to mitigate potential disincentives to do regular appropriations. Adopting auto-CRs is one of several important improvements to the budget process that Congress should consider.”

VI. Conclusion

Many states effectively use automatic continuing resolutions. Why shouldn't the federal government? Because we believe this commonsense policy will help the American people, we urge you to reform Congress by ending government shutdowns.

