

Congress: Enact the Prevent Government Shutdowns Act

Dear Members of Congress:

We, the undersigned, and the millions of Americans we represent, urge you to include the **Prevent Government Shutdowns Act** (S.2721/H.R.5130) in upcoming must-pass legislation. The possibility of federal government shutdowns leads to unproductive brinkmanship, undermines sound budgeting, degrades trust in our institutions, and threatens service continuity to the American people.

Congress did not create the possibility of shutdowns. In 1980, the Carter Administration unilaterally re-interpreted a 19th Century law to create shutdowns. That became the pretext for administrations to make up distinctions between “essential” and “non-essential” activities despite a lack of statutory basis.

The risk of shutdowns forces Congress to negotiate stopgap continuing resolutions. That distracts Congress from simply finishing new appropriations legislation each year.

Delayed appropriations gives agencies final spending allocations months into a fiscal year instead of well in advance. This leads to budget bloat and waste. In addition, new appropriations bills are not enacted in time to rescind, and when prudent, reappropriate funds that would otherwise expire.

Too often, appropriations bills collapse into large packages that give most members of Congress no chance to shape or even to review. Other policies are included – or not – based on the decisions of only a handful of members.

Congress can have a more-bottom up, deliberative, efficient, and timely budget process. Adding the Prevent Government Shutdowns Act to the next possible legislative vehicle would be an important step forward.

At the end of a fiscal year, the Prevent Government Shutdowns Act would keep Congress in session until appropriations bills are enacted. Meanwhile, programs would carry on under prior funding levels to avoid disrupting services for the American people.

Automatic continuing appropriations were standard for the federal government until the Carter Administration’s power grab. Wisconsin and Rhode Island have done likewise for generations. North Carolina took shutdowns off the table in its 2016 budget bill, which has minimized the effects of conflict between the legislature and the governor on the people. The Kansas Legislature adopted it earlier this year to strengthen the legislative branch’s role in budgeting.

Automatic continuing appropriations advance inclusive, effective, legislature-driven budgeting.

We urge Congress to enact the **Prevent Government Shutdowns Act** as soon as possible. It would strengthen America’s fiscal democracy, help Congress succeed, and support a more timely and effective appropriations process. Americans deserve a government that works.

Sincerely,

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