
Greenstein: Policymakers Must End Government Shutdown as Harmful Effects Grow

CBPP tonight released a statement from Robert Greenstein, president, on the need to re-open the federal government:

With the government shutdown in its third week, President Trump saying he’s “prepared” for it to last months if not years, and the human harm growing by the hour, congressional leaders have a responsibility to step up and find a clear path toward a resolution — starting with Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell.

The Trump Administration scrambled before the Agriculture Department announced today that it can pay SNAP (food stamp) benefits in February. It did not address what would happen in March; and at some point in coming months, these benefits apparently will end if the shutdown drags on. If that happens, millions of poor children, seniors, and others will face hunger and hardship. It’s also unclear how long other key federal nutrition programs, such as school lunches and breakfasts and the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC), can keep providing food assistance to children because federal funding for those programs is running out as well. These programs appear to be safe through February but not necessarily beyond that.

In addition, the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) apparently mismanaged contracts with owners of more than 1,000 apartment buildings who receive federal subsidies so that they can provide apartments at affordable rents to roughly 70,000 low-income households. HUD did not renew these contracts on time in December when it had the available federal funding and now, due to the funding lapse, it doesn’t know if it currently has the resources to renew them. Last week, HUD sent letters to the landlords whose contracts expired in December with the intention (according to a HUD spokesperson) of trying to persuade the building owners not to evict the tenants. HUD has also indicated that it can’t renew the numerous additional contracts coming up for renewal in January and succeeding months unless the shutdown ends.

Moreover, if the shutdown drags into March, *all* rental subsidies under the nation’s largest rental assistance program will end, leaving an additional 2.2 million low-income households receiving housing vouchers without the means to pay rent. That could lead hundreds of thousands of private owners to begin evicting low-income households. State and local public housing agencies also wouldn’t receive any federal funding starting in March to operate more than 1 million public housing units.

Meanwhile, based on [news reports](#), many federally backed mortgage applications have been delayed, trash and overflowing toilets are [soiling national parks](#), Securities and Exchange

Commission investigations of securities violations have stopped, the Commerce Department is no longer processing requests for exemptions from the President's tariffs, 800,000 federal workers — about half of whom are working, and many of whom earn modest wages and live paycheck to paycheck — will miss a paycheck in the coming days, and federal contractors may [start laying off](#) employees.

The President apparently thrust the government into the shutdown without adequately understanding the consequences and without appropriate planning. Each day, the Administration seems to discover another serious problem — problems that ultimately can't be addressed by administrative band-aids as the shutdown wears on.

Now, with regard to the leaders on Capitol Hill who need to step forward, let's remember how we got here.

The President and congressional leaders of both parties reached agreement in December on a continuing resolution (CR) to keep the government open, and the Senate passed it without dissent on December 19. After fierce criticism from right-wing pundits that the CR didn't include the Trump request for border-wall funding, however, the President reversed himself and blew up the deal.

Now, the House has again passed legislation to reopen the government that is virtually identical to the bills that the Senate Appropriations Committee earlier approved on a broad bipartisan basis. But Senator McConnell says he won't bring this legislation to a vote because the President opposes it. In fact, he says he won't bring any shutdown-related legislation to the Senate floor that the President doesn't support.

In the days ahead, the House will try another approach — to consider and pass the Senate-approved versions of four major appropriations bills that the Senate earlier passed, as a package, *by a 92-6 vote*. That package includes the bills to fund HUD; the Departments of Agriculture, Interior, Transportation, and Treasury; a host of independent agencies; and the District of Columbia government. But, though the bills in this House package will be *virtually identical* to those that the Republican-controlled Senate has already approved overwhelmingly, Senator McConnell is expected to prevent them from coming to a vote as well.

This stand-off must not continue. Millions of people — from vulnerable poor children and seniors to federal employees all across the country who live paycheck to paycheck — are suffering, or soon will be. We call on senators of both parties (as Senator Chris Van Hollen has proposed) not to consider bills related to other business until Senator McConnell permits a vote on bills to reopen the government and bills to maintain various government programs and functions. And we'd remind lawmakers that if Congress passes such legislation and the President vetoes it, they could override his veto with two-thirds votes in the House and Senate and reopen the shuttered government agencies.

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