



Government Shutdown Looming as Congress Navigates Spending Bill Drama

With just a few short weeks left for Congress to reach an agreement on a spending bill, experts are predicting that a government shutdown is likely to take place on October 1.

Government funding needs to be approved by September 30, and once again, lawmakers have failed to pass the necessary spending bills to pass a full budget and will have to rely on a short-term Continuing Resolution to keep the government open. But the process will not be easy as lawmakers will be grappling with a number of other major deadlines.



After the eight-week summer break, the congressional calendar is jammed with votes that are both significant and controversial. Items such as increasing the government's borrowing authority above the already absurd \$18.1 trillion cap and avoiding a federal default are among the top priorities, as well as a highway bill, numerous tax breaks, and defense policy bill that Obama has already threatened to veto.

Passing a spending bill is further complicated as lawmakers are eying the legislation as an opportunity to advance other measures.

For frustrated conservatives who have been unable to advance a Planned Parenthood defunding bill, the Continuing Resolution presents an opportunity to achieve the goal of cutting taxpayer funds to an organization that aborts infants and then treats their bodies as nothing more than profitable commodities.

Calls to cut funding to Planned Parenthood have increased after the release of undercover videos recorded by the Center for Medical Progress in which officials of the abortion giant discuss the sale of body parts of aborted babies. Critics contend that the scenes captured in the video are not only despicable but illegal if the organization was making profits on the organ sales.

While such a bill would pass the GOP-run House, Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-Ky.) has already indicated that he does not have enough votes in the Senate to pass it. McConnell has also acknowledged that President Obama would veto it. "The way you make a law in this country [is] the Congress has to pass it, and the president has to sign it," he told WYMT-TV.

"The president's made it very clear he's not going to sign any bill that includes defunding of Planned Parenthood — so that's another issue that awaits a new president hopefully with a different point of view."

Some Republicans agree, stating that they do not wish to see the GOP take the blame once again for a shutdown, as they did in 2013 when Republicans efforts to cut funding to ObamaCare resulted in a 16-day partial government shutdown. "Having charged up the hill once and been shot down, why would



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you want to do that again?" said Representative Tom Cole (R-Okla.). "I'm pretty convinced we're not going to shut down the government."

But the Republicans are not in agreement on the issue.

Representative Tim Huelskamp (R-Kan.) asserted that in the event of a shutdown, the blame rests entirely with the Democrats and the president, who are keener on paying the pro-abortion Planned Parenthood than America's troops. "Will the president shut down and defund the troops in order to fund Planned Parenthood?" said Rep. Tim Huelskamp (R-Kan.). "I don't think he's that politically stupid, but we shall see."

Representative Walter Jones (R-N.C.), another conservative, stated that he was not going to allow threats of a shutdown to force him to betray his values. "I've seen too many times up here that a threat of a shutdown is why you compromise your principles, and I am sick and tired of compromising my principles," he said.

Fox News reports that Representative Mick Mulvaney (R-S.C.) has collected signatures from 31 conservative lawmakers who have pledged to vote against any spending bill that continues to fund Planned Parenthood. Fox News observes that if Mulvaney and the 31 House conservatives are successful, Boehner will have to turn to Democrats for votes to pass a spending bill.

House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.) voiced hopes for divisions among Republicans on this issue. "If they don't have the Republican votes to pass it, then hopefully we can have some influence over what is in that CR," Pelosi said.

As noted by Fox News, there is a precedent for this: "During [House Speaker John] Boehner's speakership, the Ohio Republican has repeatedly shown a willingness to assemble a minimal group of GOPers — coupled with a large contingent of Democrats — to approve 'must-pass' measures and avert political crises."

Earlier this year, Boehner struck a deal with Pelosi to advance a bill to drive a defense spending increase and the "doc fix" through the U.S. House of Representatives.

When questioned on his decision to strike a deal with the Democrats before discussing it with members of his own party, Boehner said, "I just think that there was an opportunity that presented itself to work in a bipartisan way to find the appropriate offsets, spending offsets.... And the door opened, and I decided to walk in it. As simple as that."

Meanwhile, Planned Parenthood is certainly not the only divisive issue that could hold up passage of a spending bill, as House Democrats are demanding that the spending limits known as the sequester be lifted.

A number of experts have offered estimates on the likelihood that a spending agreement will not be reached and a partial government shutdown will take place.

Goldman Sachs, the investment banking firm, sent a note to its clients regarding the impact that a government shutdown could have on the financial markets. The note states that the chance for a shutdown is "approaching 50 percent," but added that it should not affect the financial market as it did in 2013, when it coincided with the deadline to raise the debt ceiling.

Peter Orszag, President Obama's former budget director and former head of the Congressional Budget Office, also predicts that the odds of a government shutdown are well over 50 percent, while Steve Bell, director of economic policy at the Bipartisan Policy Center, believes the odds are closer to 60 percent,



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citing the debate over the debt ceiling as another obstacle.

Still, Orszag's and Bell's predictions are lower than that of prominent budget analyst Stan Collender, who believes the chances of a shutdown are hovering at approximately 67 percent. Collender cites the debate over cuts to military versus domestic as a significant reason, though not quite as troublesome as the fight over Planned Parenthood spending and the Iran deal.

"When combined with the expected efforts to defund Planned Parenthood, [the Iran deal] will add significant highly emotional fuel to the partisan fire and make a government shutdown far more politically palatable," Collender wrote on Forbes.com.

Jim Manley, former high-ranking Democratic aide to then-Majority Leader Harry Reid, believes there is a 70 percent chance for a government shutdown, for at least a day or two.

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