

# WSJ Print Edition

*My plan would establish multiyear spending cycles to avoid the constant appropriations drama.*

## End Government Shutdowns Forever

By Ron Johnson

The U.S. has experienced three government shutdowns since I entered the Senate in 2011. During that time Congress has passed 55 continuing resolutions and increased or suspended the debt ceiling 12 times. The national debt has grown during those 14 years from \$14 trillion to \$37 trillion. In 2019 I supported a bill that would have done away with government shutdowns forever. It passed the committee I chaired 12-2, but never passed either chamber of Congress.

With another shutdown looming, I've introduced an even simpler bill, the Eliminate Shutdowns Act, that could end the drama and uncertainty of Congress's budgetary dysfunction. Some argued the 2019 bill would lead to higher spending and prohibit consideration of other measures until appropriations bills were passed. Those were legitimate concerns. My new bill simply provides for automatic two-week rolling continuing resolutions for any department for which an appropriation bill or longer-term continuing resolution hasn't been passed. This would keep spending flat by prorating the previous year's spending level.

This simple bill could be a game changer. With government funding and functioning assured, Congress would no longer have to spend weeks and months arguing over how to keep government departments open after failing to pass appropriation bills. Appropriations for individual departments would no longer be held hostage until a deal is done for all.

Instead, Congress could focus on areas of agreement, pass those appropriations, and then horse-trade on areas of disagreement. There would be no artificial deadlines,

only the pressure of working with the other side to fund each other's priorities. It's impossible to say exactly how this would play out, but could it be any worse than the current situation?

One outcome might be bipartisan reform of the budget and appropriations process. It is clearly broken and needs repair. There have been good proposals over the years, but the partisanship involved in annual funding fights makes it impossible for them to get traction.

Converting to multiyear funding cycles is my main priority. We should admit that Congress simply isn't capable of passing 12 individual appropriation bills each year. Instead we should draft, debate and pass six two-year appropriations on a rotating basis every year. In the nonappropriation year for a particular account, the relevant committees can conduct oversight. It might even be worth considering four three-year appropriations, allowing two years of oversight for each account.

The fighting over funding fiscal 2025 lasted six months. No one can predict how long we will be at loggerheads trying to fund 2026. With Democrats demanding spending that increases 10-year deficits by \$1.5 trillion as their price for a fourweek continuing resolution, a shutdown seems all but certain. At least this time a Republican administration will manage the shutdown in a way that minimizes harm to the nation. Democrats take the opposite approach, looking for ways to inflict as much pain as possible for political advantage.

Fortunately, this turmoil can be avoided permanently by passing the Eliminate Shutdowns Act. Anyone voting "no" is voting to continue budgetary chaos and should be held accountable by the American people.

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