Shutdown 'solution' a non-starter

BY JUSTIN BOGIE
Heritage Foundation

There have been 21 government shutdowns since the first one in 1976. What if America never had to deal with another one?

Some lawmakers think they have a solution: "automatic continuing resolutions." Auto-CRs could keep the government open even if Congress can't pass spending bills.

In the aftermath of the longest shutdown in U.S. history, that probably sounds like a great idea. Auto-CRs would protect federal workers from policy battles and prevent stops in government services such as national park and museum closures.

But if Congress no longer had to pass annual funding bills to keep the government running, what would the long-term policy consequences be?

Auto-CRs could cause Congress to cede more of its power of the purse, for one thing. They could also increase spending, and make the appropriations process more dysfunctional.

Yet since the last shutdown ended, three separate bills have been introduced in the Senate to provide for an auto-CR as a means for Congress to punt on its budget obligations.

The concept of auto-CRs is not new. Prior to 1980, most federal functions continued to operate during a funding lapse. However, in 1980 and 1981, two opinions issued by the U.S. attorney general determined that agencies that continued to operate in absence of funding were violating the law.

Congress has attempted to pass several auto-CR mechanisms since the early 1980s, though only one short-term auto-CR for national defense was ever enacted.

There are some potential positives to having an auto-CR. But there are just as many downsides.

First of all, auto-CRs could cause Congress to relinquish more of its power of the purse. Over two-thirds of the federal budget is already made up of spending that is not subject to the annual appropriations process.

The remaining third of the budget is determined by Congress, though some control over that portion has already been given up to federal bureaucrats through unauthorized appropriations. Having an auto-CR in place would mean that, at least for some period of time, Congress gives up control over the last piece of spending it manages from year to year.

Second, auto-CRs could actually create more dysfunction in the spending process. Under current law, Congress is supposed to pass all spending bills individually and before Oct. 1 each year. That hasn't happened in 25 years. Knowing that the government won't shut down if bills aren't passed could give Congress even less incentive to enact spending bills, prioritize resources, and provide oversight over how money is being spent.

The results could be bad news for taxpayers, because a third downside is increased spending. With an auto-CR in place, it could mean that Congress turns to uncapped emergency spending to boost funding outside of the normal appropriations process.

There is no clear definition of what "emergency" spending is, so Congress can appropriate emergency funding for any purposes deemed too important to wait until the next regular appropriations bill. To avoid spending caps, Congress could simply let an auto-CR go into effect and then pass an unlimited amount of emergency funding to supplement the continuing resolutions spending levels.

If Congress was forced to stay in session when a milestone is missed, or if lawmakers' pay or travel budgets were restricted, those penalties could motivate Congress to finally follow the law.

Instead of taking the easy way out and deferring spending battles, Congress should follow the law and enact budget and appropriations bills on time.

Justin Bogie is a senior policy analyst in Fiscal Affairs in the Grover M. Hermann Center for the Federal Budget at The Heritage Foundation.

Love never arrives too late

BY GINA BARRECA
Hartford Courant

On the front of the first Valentine's Day card I ever received was the following: "Before I met you, Valentine, I didn't know what love was." On the inside of the card: "Now it's too late."

I didn't realize at the time that the smart-alecky tone embodied by that initial billet-doux would, for the next five decades of my life, shape and reflect my understanding of romance and love.

I talk for a living, but it's still hard to talk about love, especially when it's officially mandated by the calendar. (Men, of course, think Valentine's Day is a woman-dated occasion.) It's hard to talk about love because most of the time, we have no idea what we're talking about. We mutter; we fumble; we blush; we purchase plush toys. None of it makes sense.

And I say this as a woman who loves her spouse and is loved by her spouse. We've been married to each other for 28 years. We are still figuring out what love means and are still having fun gathering information on the topic.

For Michael, love means shoveling the walk, dealing with the taxes and taking the garbage to the dump. It means being happy to see me when I come back from having given a talk on the other side of the country, even if he has to wait at the airport because the plane is late, which it inevitably is. It means making me laugh. Love means not giving me a cookbook as a gift, which he did on our first Valentine's Day together and never, ever did again.

For me, love means cooking fabulous food that we both eat together almost every night ("fabulous" can mean seared sea scallops with lobster or a grilled cheese sandwich). Love means keeping the cats fed, their boxes clean and their fur shiny so that when they sit on his lap in the evening – preferring him to me as they do – they are ideal creatures. It means not being bitter that, even though I do all that work, the cats prefer him to me. It means learning how to identify makes and models of cars, both foreign and domestic, going back to 1957, when Michael had a Chevy of which he still dreams.

One of our ways of saying "I love you" is to say "Be careful driving." I'm not kidding. "Careful driving" is the intimate phrase we whisper in each other's ears before going to sleep. It has nothing to do with that Chevy, either. We also say "I love you," because they're important words, even if we're still figuring out the meaning.

Plenty of folks define love by employing the negative. Shakespeare spent a whole lot of time delineating what love isn't: "Love is not love which alters when it alteration finds"; "What is love? 'Tis not hereafter"; "Love looks not with the eyes but with the mind."

The Bible tells us that love doesn't envy, boast or keep records of wrongs, nor is it proud or self-seeking.

So what is it? It's an unbuttoning of the self. Not an unbuttoning of the clothing covering your sexy self, but the reassurance that, without any camouflage, cover-ups or compromise, you're safe. You're in the presence of another person who would rather be with you than with anyone else.

Love is a gift, and as such, it can't be earned. One of the most puzzling aspects of love is its lack of justice. It's unfair. Love can elude people who seem to deserve it while it's heaped on those who appear to ignore it, run from it, or slough it off as too restrictive.

And unlike what that original Valentine's Day card announced, I have learned that love, whenever it arrives, is never too late.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

VALUE OF THE POSTAL SERVICE

A recent letter to the editor discussed U.S. Postal Service finances and more. Given the News-Democrat's stature as a Southern Illinois news leader, I'd like to offer your readers a broader picture of the Postal Service and its value.

USPS provides metro-east residents and businesses with the industrial world's most-affordable delivery network – without a dime of taxpayer money. By law, USPS operates on earned income.

It's based in the Constitution, because the Founders understand how universal mail delivery would unite this vast country. Moreover, local post offices often are centers of civil life in small communities in Illinois and elsewhere.

USPS, the nation's largest employer of military veterans, also is the centerpiece of the $1.4 trillion national mailing industry, which employs 7 million Americans in the private sector – including 380,439 Illinoisans, fifth highest among all states.

While mail levels have dipped somewhat with the internet, the rise of e-commerce has letter carriers delivering growing numbers of packages yearly – including millions for FedEx, UPS and other private carriers.

As for red ink, here are the facts: In most recent years, USPS has earned an annual operating profit averaging $1 billion. Ninety percent of the red ink stems from a 2006 congressional mandate that the Postal Service – alone among all U.S. agencies and companies – pre-fund future retiree health benefits decades into the future, at a $5.8 billion annual cost.

With the help of Illinois' representatives in Washington to address this unique and unfair burden, the Postal Service can continue to provide folks in St. Clair County and beyond with the service they expect and deserve.

– Fredric Rolando, president of the National Association of Letter Carriers

SB 107 IS MISGUIDED

Illinois lawmakers are again using the media and fake news to pass a law that neither benefits Illinois nor addresses the real problem of violence in Illinois. According to Illinois State Police's database and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's last report, there were 799 murders in Illinois involving a firearm with only 14 involving a rifle. Rifles in general (bolt action, single shot, semi-automatic, lever action, pump action) accounted for less than 2 percent of all the firearm murders committed in Illinois. And semi-automatic rifles made up a smaller percentage of the 2 percentage. Illinois lawmakers have decided to focus on less than 2 percent of the problem and are trying to pass a law (Senate Bill 107) banning most semi-automatic rifles in Illinois. The bill is so poorly worded that it could allow Illinois to confiscate a much wider range of firearms then what the sponsors claim. Illinois lawmakers need to focus on the real problems and stop running their own agendas for their own gains.

– Mark Heffron, Trenton

AMERICANS PAYING HEFTY PRICE

Letter writer Judy Neel need not waste her breath trying to explain away the need for Donald Trump's "wall." It has nothing to do with logic as Democrats have supported funding of versions of walls for years. If it were anyone other than Trump wanting to shore up out southern border Democrats would be all in.

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, a self-appointed wall guru, recently backed using Normandy fencing. This shows that she knows about as much about effective border security as she does about World War II. Illegal immigrants are not penetrating our borders on water landing craft but on foot.

It's a crying shame that 800,000 government workers have to pay for this political bickering. Had Pelosi orchestrated her party's support for Trump's wall funding request back in December all this past and possibly future pain and suffering would have been avoided.

It's not about the money or justification. At the Oval Office meeting hosted by the president with Pelosi and Chuck Schumer in December she felt ignored and disrespected by Trump. The after effect: "Hell hath no fury like a woman scorned."

Pelosi's resistance is unfortunate since she's now gained considerable leverage in the current negotiations. She appears content to just fritter the opportunity away.

That's a hefty price to make the American people pay just to get the last laugh on Trump.

– Bill Malec, O'Fallon

BELLEVILLE NEWS-DEMOCRAT
BND
WWW.BND.COM

Your Voice. Your Choice. Since 1858.

HAVE YOUR SAY: Signed letters to the editor should be no longer than 250 words. Please include your name, address and phone number. All submissions may be edited and republished in any format and become the property of the Belleville News-Democrat.

Email: letters@bnd.com (no attachments, please) Online: www.bnd.com

Mail: Letters, Belleville News-Democrat, 120 S. Illinois St., P.O. Box 427, Belleville, IL 62222-0427.