

October 1, 2013

Speaker of the House John Boehner
Office of the Speaker
H-232 The Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid
522 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Speaker Boehner and Majority Leader Reid:

Congress has failed to meet its appropriations deadline of October 1, leading to a government shutdown. For the past decade, not once has Congress passed all 12 appropriations bills on time, relying heavily on emergency budgeting by continuing resolution (C.R.). This trend undermines the transparency of the appropriations process and hurts Americans' ability to influence how their tax dollars are spent.

Government shutdowns and the uncertainty of crisis government-by-C.R. have many negative effects, but the damage done to the transparency of the appropriations process is possibly the most insidious. **In the interest of sound democratic process, we strongly urge you and your colleagues to recommit to an appropriations process that is open and transparent.**

Instead of taking seriously their appropriations responsibilities, the 113th Congress has been historically unproductive, both in terms of the quantity and the substance of passed legislation. Among the very few bills passed were legislation specifying the size of blank coins to be stamped into souvenirs for the Baseball Hall of Fame, the Freedom to Fish Act, and legislation renaming a bridge in St. Louis. The time spent on these less-than-remarkable accomplishments points to a lack of seriousness on the part of Congress regarding its most essential function in our system of divided government: budgeting and appropriating funds to execute the people's business.

The erosion of the regular appropriations process over time becomes glaringly obvious when the facts of the past decade are considered.

For the past 10 years:

- Every October 1 has come and gone without an actual budget in place.
- Only one year saw a budget actually made up of 12 appropriations bills (fiscal 2006).
- There were three years in which the entire fiscal year was funded with a C.R. (fiscal 2007, 2011, 2013).

This trend illustrates an ongoing departure from the right of Americans to participate in a core part of our democratic process.

Citizens need and deserve an appropriations process that is predictable and clear so they can weigh in with their priorities. The appropriations process should allow funding proposals to progress through the various appropriating bodies of the legislative branch toward final passage and resolution, providing opportunities for the public to learn about and influence the legislation along the way. Continuing resolutions cobbled together to avoid government shutdown bypass the input of citizens, and thus endanger our democratic process.

We advise Members of Congress and senators to ask themselves, “If my constituents wanted to influence the last-minute appropriations we attempted to avoid this shutdown, how would they have done so?” We suspect an answer to such a question would be hard to give.

A return to the regular federal appropriations process would not only strengthen our democracy but also help restore Americans’ faith in Congress as an institution, which is at its nadir.

The undersigned organizations strongly urge Congress to prioritize their constitutional responsibility to make appropriations and to do so in a clear, transparent and accountable process so that the American people can exercise their right and responsibility to oversee and influence how their tax dollars are spent.

Sincerely,



Jo Comerford
Executive Director
National Priorities Project



Ellen Miller
Co-founder and Executive Director
The Sunlight Foundation



Katherine McFate
President and CEO
Center for Effective Government

cc: House Appropriations Committee Chairman Harold Rogers (R-Ky.)
Senate Appropriations Committee Chairwoman Barbara Mikulski (D-Md.)
House Appropriations Committee Ranking Member Nita Lowey (D-N.Y.)
Senate Appropriations Committee Vice Chairman Richard Shelby (R-Ala.)