News
U.S. Capitol

Visitors to the U.S. Capitol rest in the shade on Capitol Hill in Washington June 25, 2025. (OSV News/Reuters/Nathan Howard)

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After lawmakers returned to Washington from their August recess, they faced a familiar deadline: Passing legislation to fund the federal government and avert a shutdown at the end of September.

A government shutdown occurs when Congress fails to pass a budget or if that budget is not signed into law by the president. Some types of essential government services are exempt, including Social Security payments to seniors. But many other functions of government are suspended during shutdowns, such as paychecks for government workers, including members of the armed services.

Unless lawmakers reach an agreement by Oct. 1, the federal government will shut down until they do.

Both the U.S. bishops and Catholic entities that advocate for, or work with, people who are poor and vulnerable in the U.S. have generally cautioned against government shutdowns.

John Berry, national council president of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul USA told OSV News the group is "deeply concerned about the potential government shutdown and the devastating ripple effects it could have on those already living on the margins."

"Many of the millions of people we walk alongside each year — including individuals experiencing homelessness and poverty, families facing food insecurity, and those recently released from incarceration who need reentry support, and much more — rely on federal programs and partnerships to access things like shelter, nourishment, and basic care," Berry said.

A shutdown, he said, would threaten "not only their safety net, but also the stability and coordination of the nonprofits and community organizations working to support them."

"We urge our elected leaders to prioritize the dignity and humanity of the most vulnerable as they continue to shape policy and work to avoid a shutdown that could widen the gap even further between poverty and equity," he said.

Laurie Carafone, executive director of Network, a Catholic social justice advocacy group, told OSV News, "Budgets are moral documents that reflect our priorities."

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"This means our leaders in Congress must provide additional funding for the WIC program for women and their infants, food programs for elderly and disabled people, housing vouchers, and an extension of healthcare tax credits, which impact access to affordable care for 20 million people in the U.S.," Carafone said. "We urge our leaders in Congress to work together and reach an agreement that upholds the dignity, health, and wellbeing of all people, no exceptions."

House Speaker Mike Johnson, R-La., told reporters Sept. 2 that "the ball will be in their corner," referring to his Democratic colleagues, when it comes to preventing a shutdown.

"We've been moving forward on appropriations," Johnson said. "We'll be gathering steam to do that. We do not believe it's in the nation's interest to close the government down. So if (Senate Minority Leader Chuck) Schumer, and the Democrats have that in mind, I think that's deeply regrettable."

In a Sept. 2 "Dear Colleague" letter to his fellow Senate Democrats, Schumer argued, "The only way to avoid a shutdown is to work in a bipartisan way, with a bill that can get both Republican and Democratic votes in the Senate. However, as we near the funding deadline, Republicans are once again threatening to go-at-it-alone — heading our country towards a shutdown and making the health care crisis even worse."

Although Republicans control both chambers of Congress, their majorities are slim. They can afford to lose just a few of their members in the House without any Democratic support, and generally must garner some Democratic support in the Senate to pass the upper chamber's 60-vote filibuster threshold.

"With the Trump administration's attempt of the so-called 'pocket rescission', it is clear that Republicans are prioritizing chaos over governing, partisanship over partnership, and their own power over the American people," Schumer added.

In a rare procedural move called a "pocket rescission," President Donald Trump on Aug. 29 told Johnson he would cancel $5 billion in foreign aid and nongovernmental organization funding previously approved by Congress just before the end of the fiscal year. Some of those funds were for the U.S. Agency for International Development, or USAID, which the Trump administration shuttered while putting some of its remaining functions under the State Department.

Catholic Relief Services, the overseas charitable arm of the Catholic Church in the U.S., was among the Catholic entities that previously had partnered with USAID.

Sen. Lisa Murkowski, R-Alaska, also argued on the social media platform X that those cuts could jeopardize negotiations.

"The fact is, advancing the final appropriations bills and avoiding a government shutdown will require a great deal of hard work and collaboration when Congress resumes session next week," she said. "These unilateral actions by OMB only threaten the good bipartisan work that has been done in committee and on the floor, and risk throwing the entire process into chaos."

The risk to bipartisanship appeared to be confirmed in a Sept. 2 "Dear Colleague" letter by House Minority Leader Hakeem Jeffries, D-N.Y.

"House Democrats have repeatedly made clear that we are prepared to pass a bipartisan spending bill in advance of this deadline," he said. "However, any agreement must meet the needs of the American people in terms of their health, safety, national security and economic well-being. We will not rubber stamp partisan Republican legislation that hurts everyday Americans and continues their unprecedented attack on healthcare."

In the event Congress cannot reach a budget agreement, lawmakers may ultimately use a continuing resolution as a stopgap measure to avoid a government shutdown.

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