

Last government shutdown offers lessons on avoiding another | Opinion



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Furloughed federal workers protest the partial government shutdown last month in Washington. In current negotiations, we can only hope our political leaders will have the good sense not to force another shutdown. writes a Nova Southeastern University professor. (Win McNamee / Getty Images)

By **Joel Mintz**

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The end of the longest government shutdown in U.S. history is an appropriate moment to consider the multiple lessons this calamitous event can teach our political leaders and the public at large.

First, the recent closure spotlighted the fact that a fully functioning federal government provides Americans with much-needed services and valuable protections against genuine risks. We clearly need the safety that stems from the work of the TSA and the nation's air traffic controllers, the multiple protections against pollution afforded by an open and functioning **EPA**, and the national security protections provided by the FBI and the U.S. Coast Guard. Among other trends, there is now also renewed recognition of the need for the Department of Agriculture and the FDA to safeguard our food and for the National Park Service to protect our treasured public lands against vandalism and trash.

Second, media coverage of the recent shutdown also vividly demonstrated that federal government workers are far from "faceless bureaucrats" that cynical conservatives often portray them to be. Rather, government employees have been revealed as dedicated, hard-working people, with worthwhile and important jobs, who need to fill their gas tanks and put food on the table as much as the rest of us do.

Third, for our elected officials, the implications of the government shutdown are equally clear. Closing the federal government was a clumsy and ineffective means of gaining political leverage. **President Trump** has been widely perceived as losing his bid to force Congress to fund a border wall. On the other hand, while House Speaker **Nancy Pelosi** and her team of House Democrats may ultimately emerge victorious in their showdown with Trump over border security, the 35-day shutdown did nothing to advance the goals and policies on which they successfully campaigned in 2018. At least in that sense, the recent closure may fairly be seen as a "lose-lose" event for both political parties.

Fourth, it is also evident that government shutdowns have significant economic consequences. The nonpartisan **Congressional Budget Office** has estimated that the recent closure cost the U.S. economy a total of \$11 billion, nearly a third of which can never be recovered. Beyond furloughed government employees, thousands of federal contractors and small businesses sustained losses that they are unable to recoup. And the confidence of both domestic and foreign investors can obviously be shaken when the U.S. government is not open for business.

Fifth, the crisis also provided a reminder that a political leader's gender is no gauge of their ability to remain resolute when facing a great challenge. Donald Trump has seemed eager to turn Speaker Pelosi into a political foil, but he paid a high price for underestimating her. That's probably good news for the several female candidates vying to run against him in 2020.

In the current negotiations toward a final budget bill, we can only hope our political leaders will have the good sense not to force another shutdown. Genuine avenues for reasonable compromise certainly exist, allowing them to strike a deal of some sort.

And if they fail at that effort because the timeline is so tight, let's hope they just enact an appropriation bill to keep the government running at full strength and then go back to the negotiating table to hammer out a deal on the issues that remain. That's the best way to prevent additional pain-without-gain for millions of Americans.

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