

Shutting Down the Poor

How the government shutdown disproportionately effects the most needy among us

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In The News

Who Gets Hurt When the Government Shuts Down? The people who rely on the government for food, housing, and their paychecks. By *Zoë Carpenter*, January 9, 2019

Now in its third week, the government shutdown is causing myriad disruptions to thousands of federal programs. Vital scientific research has been interrupted, unplowed and snow-covered roads have kept people trapped in their homes, bathrooms in National Parks are overflowing with human waste, and domestic-violence shelters are scrambling to make sure they can keep their doors open next month.

Although the consequences of the shutdown are sweeping—a fact that came as a surprise to Trump administration officials, according to *The Washington Post*—they are particularly burdensome for low-income Americans. Thousands of federal contractors, many of whom work in low-wage jobs cleaning, staffing, and securing government buildings, are losing weeks of wages that may never be repaid. For people who depend on food stamps and on public housing, the shutdown could become far more than an inconvenience if it stretches out for months, as President Trump has suggested it could.

If the shutdown continues into February, the food assistance that 38 million Americans rely on could run out. The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, which is administered by the Department of Agriculture, has funding only through the end of this month. USDA's contingency fund, if tapped, would cover only part of February. The agency has kept mostly quiet about the threat to food assistance and has not said when exactly the money will run out or what would be done in that event. But according to the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, families could see their benefits reduced in February and then "virtually eliminated" in March. Federal funding for the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) has already been cut off, with states left to paper over the gap.

People living in public housing are also at risk. Ninety-five percent of employees at the Department of Housing and Urban Development have been furloughed, and mandatory health-and-safety inspections of housing units are on hold until the government reopens. Funding to fix leaky roofs, boilers, and other crucial repairs may be delayed, according to the National Low Income Housing Coalition. More than 1,000 contracts for low-income housing have expired, with HUD unable to renew them while the shutdown lasts. That means that landlords aren't getting paid. According to Diane Yentel of the NLIHC, that puts 80,000 renters—mostly seniors and people with disabilities living on less than \$13,000 a year—in danger of eviction if the shutdown lasts. Another 500 contracts will expire later in January, and 550 more in February.

Meanwhile, thousands of janitors, food-service workers, security guards, and others who work for government contractors are not being paid. Unlike federal employees, who recouped back pay after previous government shutdowns and expect to do so again, contractors aren't usually paid for the lost workdays. Many of these employees earn poverty wages, and can't afford to lose weeks of income. According to the advocacy group Good Jobs Nation, 4.5 million contract workers for the government earn less than \$15 an hour. One janitor who works at the State Department told The Washington Post that just a week or two of missed wages might force her to move in with her mother in North Carolina. A contractor for the Department of Transportation had to ask for an extension on her rent payment, took extra shifts at a seasonal job, and set up a GoFundMe account. The crowdfunding site currently has over 1,000 pages regarding the government shutdown.

None of this is inevitable. The Senate could take up the spending package passed by the House last week to end the shutdown. Trump could drop his demand that funding for basic government services be contingent on money for a border wall. And Congress could ensure that any legislation to reopen the government guarantees retroactive pay not only to federal employees but also to contract workers. Democrats in the Senate and House have proposed legislation in the last week to do just that. But like everything else, it remains in limbo.

Related Article from USA Today: [66 Questions and answers about the Government Shutdown](#)

Government shutdown affecting local domestic violence shelters

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KANSAS CITY, Mo. ~ Sixteen days after the government shut down, area organizations wonder if they'll have to do the same. "The work that we do is life-saving work," MaryAnne Metheny of Hope House said. "People die if we're not here to help them." Hope House is one of the largest domestic violence shelters in the Kansas City Metro. Its shelters are still open. But the outreach programs its staff does like helping battered women and abused children navigate through the court system are in the cross hairs. Usually, hotlines are the way most of us know about domestic violence.

Confidential shelters are another. But there's another side to it, involving computers and courthouses. "Shelter is just a piece of what we do. In our outreach program, we provide court services," Metheny explained. "We're in 13 courts helping people navigate through the court process, helping people get what they need, so they can get a protection order or help them if they are the witness or the victim in a case that's going in front of the judge." Metheny said their court advocates are there to support them, to help them navigate through that process. "Those court advocates need to get paid for doing their job." But Hope House depends on government funding to pay those court advocates. It has a \$6 Million a year operating budget; roughly half of that comes from government funding. "We will start to see the money not coming in at the end of the month," Metheny said. If the government is shut down, the funding for Hope House and that staff isn't there. The other large metro shelter is the Rose Brooks Center. It has a \$6.5 Million yearly budget, and 60-70 percent of its funding is government grants. "That federal funding is vital to what we do here at the Rose Brooks Center, and it's needed for sure," Director of Marketing Scott Mason said. And the first to be impacted: those programs in the courts.

"I think it's really critical for people to understand that this is dire," Metheny Director of Marketing Scott Mason said. "If they don't figure this out, it could have ramifications across the

country for people." Both Hope House and Rose Brooks are big enough, and have enough funding, to keep their programs afloat through the month. "If this goes on for any great length of time," said Mason, "we will be feeling that impact more severely as well." Shelters at Hope House and Rose Brooks are still open, since they receive a different kind of funding. But both hope the shutdown ends soon. Otherwise, they say they'll have to get creative with their solutions to the shutdown.

The Wired Word

In a recent interview with Terry Gross of *Fresh Air* on National Public Radio, law professor Alexandra Natapoff spoke about another factor that contributes to rising debt among poor people: America's misdemeanor system. In her new book, *Punishment Without Crime*, Natapoff details how the system often pushes impoverished defendants into a never-ending cycle of unpayable debt, by setting high bail to provide a revenue stream for courts, probation offices, public defenders, prosecutors or the general budget of municipalities.

"Jail fees are particularly egregious and ironic for individuals who are being incarcerated precisely because they couldn't pay their fines and fees," Natapoff said. "Once they go to jail, in many jurisdictions, the jail will then charge them a fee for having been in the jail. There are fees for the use of health care in jails, so many people forgo health care." And once individuals are jailed, of course, they cannot earn a paycheck or pay taxes which would contribute to the fabric of the community.

"When individuals are locked up because they can't pay a fine or a fee," Natapoff explained, "It's not because they're scofflaws. It's because they're poor."

More on this story can be found at this link:

['Punishment Without Crime' Highlights the Injustice of America's Misdemeanor System. NPR](#)

Personal Reflections

Personal Reflection from The Rev. Patricia Lyons, The Episcopal Diocese of Washington, January 7, 2019: "Anglican theology, natural law and even a minimally formed human conscience hold that taking hostages is always immoral. Leaving today on Amtrak to NY, I stopped in Union Station here in DC at the shoe shine stand I have visited for over 20 years. I cherish the conversations with each person – each shoe shining person or shoes being shined person. God ALWAYS comes up. Today I heard about how the service industry is being decimated in DC because of the government shutdown. All three shiners thanked me profusely for visiting their empty booth. No one – across many social classes – spends money on shoe shining when you don't know if your paycheck is coming this week. I heard of all the ways street and service workers, musicians and homeless folks selling newspapers are trying to survive this desert of consumers....pawn shops, loan sharks, same-day loans, turning tricks...all efforts to pay the rent and heat bills this month. The money lost will not ever come back. And the slavery of debt among the poor and working class spreads wider and deeper and darker. These souls are all hostages of the sin of this present political darkness. But we (3 Baptists, a Pentecostal and an Episcopalian) sang today at the shoe shine stand. We sang 'Soon and Very Soon,' 'I Love to Tell the Story' and 'Oh Happy Day,' because "The light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it." (John 1)."

Personal Reflection by The Rev. Melanie Slane: The car crash outside of church (In person sharing)

Holy Scripture

Isaiah 61:1-3

The spirit of the Lord God is upon me,
because the Lord has anointed me;
he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed,
to bind up the broken-hearted,
to proclaim liberty to the captives,
and release to the prisoners;
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour,
and the day of vengeance of our God;
to comfort all who mourn;
to provide for those who mourn in Zion—
to give them a garland instead of ashes,
the oil of gladness instead of mourning,
the mantle of praise instead of a faint spirit.
They will be called oaks of righteousness,
the planting of the Lord, to display his glory.

Proverbs 31:8-9

Speak out for those who cannot speak,
for the rights of all the destitute.
Speak out, judge righteously,
defend the rights of the poor and needy.

Psalms 82:2-4

"How long will you judge unjustly, *
and show favor to the wicked?
Save the weak and the orphan; *
defend the humble and needy;

Rescue the weak and the poor; *

deliver them from the power of the wicked.

Luke 6:34-36

If you lend to those from whom you hope to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, to receive as much again. But love your enemies, do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return. Your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High; for he is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked. Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.

Questions for Reflection

1. Is the U.S. Government responsible for protecting and providing for the rights of the poor and needy?
2. Who would be most effected if the Church shut down?
3. Should lenders have different lending policies for different socioeconomic groups? Defend your position.
4. How should Christians deal with institutions and systems that engage in predatory lending practices?

Prayers for the Journey

36. For the Oppressed

Look with pity, O heavenly Father, upon the people in this land who live with injustice, terror, disease, and death as their constant companions. Have mercy upon us. Help us to eliminate our cruelty to these our neighbors. Strengthen those who spend their lives establishing equal protection of the law and equal opportunities for all. And grant that every one of us may enjoy a fair portion of the riches of this land; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

22. For Sound Government

O Lord our Governor, bless the leaders of our land, that we may be a people at peace among ourselves and a blessing to other nations of the earth.

Lord, keep this nation under your care.

To the President and members of the Cabinet, to Governors of States, Mayors of Cities, and to all in administrative authority, grant wisdom and grace in the exercise of their duties.

Give grace to your servants, O Lord.

To Senators and Representatives, and those who make our laws in States, Cities, and Towns, give courage, wisdom, and foresight to provide for the needs of all our people, and to fulfill our obligations in the community of nations.

Give grace to your servants, O Lord.

To the Judges and officers of our Courts give understanding and integrity, that human rights may be safeguarded and justice served.

Give grace to your servants, O Lord.

And finally, teach our people to rely on your strength and to accept their responsibilities to their fellow citizens, that they may elect trustworthy leaders and make wise decisions for the well-being of our society; that we may serve you faithfully in our generation and honor your holy Name.

For yours is the kingdom, O Lord, and you are exalted as head above all. Amen.

28. In Times of Conflict

O God, you have bound us together in a common life. Help us, in the midst of our struggles for justice and truth, to confront one another without hatred or bitterness, and to work together with mutual forbearance and respect; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

The Wired Word

O God, to whom we owe the very breath we breathe, we can never repay you for your kindness toward us. We humbly accept your many blessings, thankful for your goodness. Help us to "pay forward" those blessings to others, and to owe no one anything except the debt of love. In Jesus' name. *Amen.*