

The present shutdown is erratic and unusual, as this is the first time ever since Jimmy Carter’s presidency saw a similar shutdown even when both the houses of Congress and the executive branch was being controlled by one party, the GOP. Precisely, Senate needed 60 votes to pass the chamber to avoid a filibuster, which means that Republican majority needed as many as more than a dozen of Democrats to vote in favor of their plan. Previous hopes for a bipartisan deal were ripped when Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell and Speaker of the House Paul Ryan would not agree to bring the bipartisan deals to the floor without President Trump’s approval. By this time, you would have been confused “What is really going on in America?” “What is a Government shutdown?” “Did this ever happen before?” “When will things turn to normalcy?” Except for the last question you can find answers to all your questions in this article. And for that last question, only President Trump and Congress will have to find the answer, the sooner the better for America, writes **Shiva Shankar Pandian***

OMG! I knew this could happen. The world’s strongest nation is shut down. I have seen a lot about this in a “Doomsday Preppers” episode years back. Ohh, wait. “The Purge movie”, Shut the doors and windows, Where’s my chainsaw? And to people wishing that Americans should have built an underground shelter and started hoarding supplies, hold your horses.

To an outsider like us, an American government shutdown looks like the beginning of the end of the world. To the citizens of America, this is far from what we fear. Technically speaking, the government or the administration has not ground to complete halt. Indispensable services like national security, public safety, hospital/medical, mail, tax collection will continue to operate as usual. Only the non-essential department staffs will be furloughed or placed on short-term unpaid leave, yes even NASA will be closed (don’t worry if there are any NASA astronauts enjoying life in orbit will be taken care of). Some tourist places like National Zoos may remain closed. (Trump administration is planning to keep national parks open with rangers and security guards on duty).

Departments like Education, Energy (functions that oversee the safety of the nation’s nuclear arsenal, dams and transmission lines will remain open), Environmental Protection Agency, Food and Drug Administration, Health and Human Services, Housing and Urban Development, Internal Revenue Service, Labor etc. will face a shutdown.



A sign announces that the Statue of Liberty is closed to the US government shutdown:
Image ABC NEWS

So what is a Government Shutdown?

In American politics, a government shutdown occurs when the Congress and the President fail to pass appropriations legislation to fund government operations and its agencies. If this happens, Anti-deficiency Act (initially passed in 1884) amended to its current form by the 97th United States Congress in 1982 call for the federal government to begin a "shutdown", and the affected activities undergo a furlough not only in federal level, shutdowns have also occurred at the state and local levels of government. For instance, New Jersey and Maine saw a shutdown in 2017, similarly Illinois in 2015, Minnesota in 2011, Michigan in 2009 and the list goes on.

To put in simple words, every year the Congress has to pass certain legislation on a budget to fund the government and its activities. Routinely, the Congress does this by September 30 (end of financial year in the U.S.) for the following financial year. When this doesn't happen, then the Congress is empowered to enact a continuing funding resolution. If the Congress can't agree on one, it forces a shutdown. This can be a signal for us that there is a deadlock in the budget process. Locking horns.

Those people in the Congress can never agree on anything, like never. And now they're going to watch all the animals at the National Zoos starve to death. So mean. Those cute and poor pandas! Why couldn't they just arrive at a deal? Please don't worry, panic, not Panda lovers, the animals especially the pandas in the zoos will be fed, as usual, those are essential? Isn't it?

Did shutdowns happen before?

I think this shutdown thing has never happened before. I would have heard about the zombies. People loading guns and chainsaw for zombie hunt. Embrace the truth, there won't be any zombies. Not this time (anyways I can't assure you). This has happened a lot in American political history. OH. I mean the shutdown thing. Not the Zombie thing.

During Ronald Reagan's presidency, there were three funding gaps leading to shutdowns lasting nearly a day or less. Again a funding gap in 1990 during the George H. W. Bush

administration caused a weekend shutdown.

During the Bill Clinton’s presidency, there were two full government shutdowns during 1995 and 1996 lasting around 5 and 21 days respectively, based on the disagreement on whether to cut government services, leading to furloughs and significant disruption.

During Barack Obama’s presidency, a government shutdown occurred during October 1 to 16, 2013, led to more than 800,000 federal employees being furloughed. The major dispute was the Republicans’ desire to delay or defund the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act.

Are shutdowns that normal?

Since 1976, when the current budget process was framed, there have been 18 gaps in budget funding, eight of which led to federal employees being furloughed. Prior to 1990, funding gaps did not always lead to government shutdowns, but since 1990 the practice has been to shut down the government for all funding gaps. (So Sad)



Government shutdown lincoln memorial | Image Business Insider

This happens only in America, Trump’s own country?

This is why many love America. Anything can happen. Like President Trump getting to White House. Trust me there are many unique things to American politics.

These type of shutdowns practised in the U.S. are near to impossible in other democracies including India. Under the parliamentary system, like we have in India and in most European nations, the executive and legislative are not that separate as it is in the U.S. (Looks like Americans have taken Montesquieu’s spirit much serious), funny things apart, with parliament designating all executive officials called ministers, and usually a fresh election will be triggered if a budget is failed to pass. And in many other non-parliamentary democracies, a strong executive branch typically has the authority to keep the government functioning even without an approved budget. Well, this is America, again. Anything happens.

What is the politics behind the present shutdown?

On January 19, voting begun in U.S. Senate on a continuing resolution. Unfortunately, it couldn't get the 60 necessary votes. Republican majority (51) was unable to convince enough Democrats to vote in favour. Democrats wanted the bill to protect immigrants eligible for Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals. If Congress doesn't develop a permanent fix, Trump's immigration plan would end the program in February.

Many Republican Senators wanted a permanent budget instead another continuing resolution. Some Democrats also wanted to aid Puerto Rico and increase the funds being spent on the opioid epidemic. Needless to say, the deadlock is no surprise.

Whenever the Senate does approve a bill, it will send it back to the House for final approval. Then it goes to the president for signature. The two houses of Congress could not agree on the budget for the fiscal year 2018. For the above-mentioned whys and wherefores, the budget process broke down over increases in defence versus nondefense spending. (There are several other reasons, but they would complicate this article's intention to stay simple)

Who will get affected due to this shutdown?

Well today, no one seems affected as it is a weekend. The situation will turn quite serious on Monday. The people who will face immediate effect are the employees who are to be furloughed, and those who use the services that won't be available from now on. As the shutdown remains, agencies may use up any excess or saved funds, after that more services will start to close.

Will the employees be paid during the furlough?

Funny question. The entire reason for them being furloughed is that there are no funds at disposal as of now. These employees will now be placed on a temporary unpaid leave, but considering the previous occurrences, it appears they may eventually get some money back after the deadlock is resolved. For example, during the end of the previous government shutdowns, Congress passed measures to ensure that all unpaid workers received a retroactive pay.

Wait, what about the White House? Is the White House down?

“Down” is a huge word or expectation dear Channing Tatum fans.

Trump administration said more than a thousand of the 1,715 staff at the White House would be furloughed as a result of the shutdown.

Defense Department announced that the shutdown would not affect the U.S. military’s war in Afghanistan or its operations against Islamist militants in Iraq and Syria. All 1.3 million military personnel on active duty would continue on duty status, but civilian personnel in nonessential operations would be furloughed.

What about the Gun lovers?

The shutdown will affect the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives, meaning if people wanted a gun permit, they will have to wait until the shutdown is over.

Will the American Economy get toppled?

Yes. Oh not toppled as of now. It will get affected. According to experts, if the present shutdown continues beyond a fortnight, it will definitely affect the economy. That’s because the government spending is, itself, a component of the U.S. GDP (it contributes 18 percent of economic output).

What about Social Security, Medicare, Obamacare, and payments?

These essential services are part of the mandatory budget. These programs are never shut down because their funding is automatic and independent. As they were created by separate Acts of Congress. The budget for these programs estimates how much it costs to keep those programs funded. The only way Congress can cut funding is by eliminating or changing the program with a separate amendment.

(P.S: There is a more to discuss more on the politics angle, but if done, most netizens will scroll and skip the article, so considering the greater good. I’ll finish everything here.) Oh, I missed a serious question left unanswered.

While in the meantime, all Americans can just break the law free of any consequence and don’t have to go work? Ohh please stop thinking like James DeMonaco. To those who love to see those. You will have to wait until the release of The Purge: The Island this year.



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