The TRUMP SHUTDOWN

Approaching the December 21 Shutdown Deadline, Here is What Matters

President Trump has threatened to veto the year-end spending bill if it does not include $5 billion for his border wall. His latest tweets threaten a shutdown that could last “a very long time.” Lining up behind this nonsensical plan, House Republicans voted for a bill with $5.7 billion for wall-related spending, even though it is clear the Senate will not support this. The Coalition on Human Needs strongly opposes any additional funding for the wall. It does not improve national security. Bear this in mind: of the more than $1.7 billion appropriated in FYs 2017-2018 for border barriers, the Trump Administration has spent just 6 percent. That’s right: as of the end of November, they had spent less than $109 million out of two years of funding, according to a Senate Appropriations Committee Democratic staff analysis. Talking about the wall is a Trump priority; building it, not so much.

The President has said many things in the past few days, including that he would take funding from different agencies to build his wall. That would likely be illegal; and more movement of money around Homeland Security or other agencies could result in more inhumane detentions, deportations, and family separations. CHN strongly urges Congress to limit “reprogramming” of funds, to contain the Administration’s inhumane actions.
If the President and Congress cannot agree on Homeland Security funding, they should provide short-term funding for DHS until they can come to agreement, and enact the rest of the appropriations bills by the December 21 deadline.

Congress should prevent bad outcomes and let agencies do their work with adequate funding by finishing its work by December 21. The border barriers dispute is far from the only issue Congress needs to address in the next few days.

**What the Nation Needs Before the Holidays – and it’s not a Government Shutdown:**

**Enactment of the remaining FY19 spending bills:** Seven bills have not yet passed; their funding will run out this Friday if no action is taken. These cover the Departments of Interior, Agriculture, State, Housing and Urban Development, Treasury, Commerce, and Homeland Security. If the Trump Shutdown takes place, about 800,000 federal workers won’t get paid, at least until after it’s resolved – no happy holidays for them. Of those, about 420,000 would have to work, without pay, throughout the shutdown; the rest are furloughed. That’s just wrong, and expensive, too. Retroactive pay, costs of additional staff time to address backlogs, increased costs from late payments for contracted services or lost opportunities for better deals with contractors for services - these can all be avoided if the Trump Shutdown is not allowed to occur. (See CRS, *Shutdown of the Federal Government: Causes, Processes, and Effects, Updated December 10, 2018.*)

The worst outcome, outside of a shutdown, would be a full year of flat funding, and/or with failure to address the issues listed below.

**Low-income housing:** For FY19, HUD needs approximately $1.3 billion and USDA needs at least $10 million more than FY18 appropriations to maintain current program levels and renew existing housing assistance contracts, according to the National Low Income Housing Coalition. Without that funding, which would cover rent increases, the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities estimates that 50,000 – 100,000 rental vouchers would be eliminated, denying help to low-income seniors, people with disabilities, and working families with children.

**2020 Census funding:** Funding must ramp up significantly in 2019 to be ready for an accurate count in 2020. The Trump Administration has asked for an additional $1.01 billion beyond flat funding at the FY18 level. Census experts, recognizing that the Census Bureau is not now doing what it must to avoid serious undercounts of young children, Latinos, communities of color, and low-income people, have recommended $3.648 billion for 2020 Census activities in FY 2019, about $100 million more than requested by the Trump Administration.

**No citizenship question on the 2020 Census:** Including a citizenship question on the Census will discourage responses, making it more expensive to try to get an accurate count. Congress should include language prohibiting the inclusion of such a question on the decennial Census. If Congress does not act now, it may miss the deadline by which the Census Bureau finalizes printing of the Census forms. There is new evidence to confirm concerns that the citizenship question will reduce the response rate. The National Association of Latino Elected and Appointed Officials (NALEO) Educational Fund
surveyed people who had participated in a Census test-run done in Providence County, Rhode Island. About four-fifths of Non-Latino Whites (82 percent) and Latinos (78 percent) agreed that the inclusion of a citizenship question would make people afraid to participate in Census 2020.

Continued funding for Puerto Rico’s Nutrition Assistance Program: Unlike the rest of the nation, Puerto Rico does not receive nutrition assistance that responds to changes in need. Instead, Puerto Rico’s Nutrition Assistance Program (NAP) is a fixed block grant of $2 billion. After the catastrophic Hurricanes Irma and Maria, an additional $1.27 billion in federal NAP funding was provided, which will run out in March. Puerto Rico’s governor has asked the President and Congress for another $600 million in disaster NAP funding, which is estimated to extend current benefit levels for another six months. Failure to approve these funds would result in significantly reduced benefits for 1.3 million people, and deny nutrition assistance altogether to 100,000 people. Congress should include this urgently needed amount in the appropriations package along with other disaster relief.

TANF reauthorization: If Congress does not act, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) will expire. The Hatch-Wyden reauthorization proposal extends TANF for three years and makes modest improvements, allowing states to develop more effective plans enabling parents to get more education or training, providing for pilot programs to test the best ways to support parents’ work, allowing more flexible work hours and ending the higher work hour requirements for two-parent families. Congress should reject TANF plans that do not include at least this flexibility and emphasis on helping parents to get and keep better jobs.

Violence Against Women Act reauthorization: This law, providing social services and supports to law enforcement in responding to domestic/sexual violence, will expire December 21 without extension by Congress. At a time of exploding revelations of sexual violence, it would be unthinkable to allow this legislation to expire.

No tax breaks slipped in at the last minute: Special interest tax breaks don’t belong in this year-end package.