

Opening Statement of The Honorable James Lankford
United States Senator
U.S. House Committee on Appropriations
July 22, 2026

Chairman Cole, Ranking Member DeLauro, and distinguished Members of this Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to come here today and speak on a bill I've introduced every session since 2019, the Prevent Government Shutdowns Act. Clearly, the members of this committee are doing the work to find a solution to end government shutdowns. For that, we all owe you our gratitude.

As we all know, when a shutdown occurs, members of Congress leave on CODELs, or they travel home to be with their families, while federal workers and their families face real financial strain.

Sharee Quick is a TSA agent in Las Vegas. During the last shutdown, she showed up to work every day with no pay. She had to make decisions every week whether she should put gas in her car or pay her electricity bill. After more than 40 days without a paycheck, she was unsure whether she'd be able to pay for her essential blood pressure prescription. That happened to her because we did not work out our differences in time.

Federal workers and their families should not suffer when Congress has not finished the yearly appropriations bills. But they do. Some of you in this room may remember the December 2018 shutdown, when Congress left town for Christmas, but federal workers got lumps of coal.

We can solve this problem together. Today, I am bringing you something unique: a nonpartisan proposal.

Seven years ago, I sat down with my Democratic colleague Maggie Hassan from New Hampshire to develop a plan to end government shutdowns in a nonpartisan way. We worked alongside Representatives Arrington and Panetta to get more input and ideas. Together, over the past several years, we have made multiple changes to the bill based on input from countless members and staff from both sides of the Hill.

The bill does not solve every fiscal and budgetary problem we need to address, but it does solve one thing: it prevents government shutdowns.

Very simply, if we get to the end of a fiscal year and appropriations are not complete, an automatic continuing resolution kicks in, but Members of Congress and the White House Office

of Management and Budget have to remain in Washington, DC, in session, seven days a week. During that time, Congress cannot move to legislation other than appropriations bills until we finish our work.

My mom was a schoolteacher, school librarian, and school administrator her whole career - she would have said, “If you don’t finish your work during class, you have to stay after school until it is finished.”

The bill has been endorsed by: 60 Plus Association, Air Line Pilots Association (ALPA), America First Policy Institute (AFPI), American Association of Senior Citizens, American Federation of Government Employees (AFGE), Americans for Prosperity (AFP), Americans for Tax Reform (ATR), Association of Flight Attendants (AFA), Bipartisan Policy Center (BPC), Brotherhood of Railroad Signalmen, Center for a Free Economy, Center for Economic Opportunity for Independent Women, Committee for a Responsible Federal Budget (CRFB), Concerned Veterans for America, Federal Managers Association (FMA), International Association of Fire Fighters, International Brotherhood of Teamsters, Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America (IAVA), Jessica Riedl, Mountain States Policy Center, National Active and Retired Federal Employees Association (NARFE), • National Guard Association of the United States (NGAUS), National Taxpayers Union (NTU), National Treasury Employees Union (NTEU), Partnership for Public Service (PPS), Pelican Institute for Public Policy, R Street Institute, Taxpayers Protection Alliance, The James Madison Institute, The Libre Initiative, United Steelworkers, and the US Travel Association. More letters of support continue to come as more Americans hear about this commonsense solution.

A national poll was recently conducted on this simple idea, and it found that over 80% of people liked this concept to end government shutdowns.

It is hard to recruit new federal workers across the country when the threat of a government shutdown looms over their future. It is hard to keep great people in federal service when they have the possibility that they will occasionally have their pay held for weeks to months.

Americans expect an answer when they call a federal agency - not a delay because of a lapse in funding.

Just paying federal workers during a shutdown solves part of the problem, but it also creates many other problems. During the last shutdown, Coast Guardsmen were eventually paid but they remained unable to operate because they did not have funding for contractors or programs. Coast Guard Adm. Kevin Lunday, Commandant of the Coast Guard, testified that the Coast Guard had “over 5,000 unpaid utility bills” and providers threatened to cut off electricity and water to their Stations. The Coast Guard almost ran out of fuel; at Barbers Point in Hawaii, the gas was cut off.

This bill is a commonsense fix to a longstanding problem that the American people hate. I am here today to answer questions on this proposal, listen and challenge us to end government shutdowns forever. Thank you for allowing me to testify and I look forward to your questions and ideas.