

January 16, 2019

As leaders representing a broad array of religious beliefs and faith traditions, we write urging you to immediately end the partial government shutdown. The consequences are dire for millions of individuals and families, especially those facing poverty and food insecurity. As the shutdown continues, access to nutrition assistance, housing programs, Indian Health Services, and other critical programs grows in ever greater jeopardy. Preventing struggling families from accessing these basic services because of demands for an ineffective border wall is beyond reckless governing; it is simply immoral. In Proverbs (31.9) we are reminded of our responsibility to “Speak up, judge righteously, champion the poor and the needy.” We implore you to immediately reopen the government without exacerbating immigrant detention or border militarization.

Rev. Paula Clayton Dempsey, Director, Partnership Relations, Alliance of Baptists:

“We don’t have an immigration crisis. We have a crisis of injustice. We don’t need a medieval wall to keep out invaders; we need to improve our social safety net for our citizens and immigrants alike. Our public servants should not be used to make political points. The important work they do, the critical services they provide, should not be arbitrarily stopped, as this causes real harm to real people. We need to open the federal government and shutdown injustice.”

Rev. Dr. Jeffrey Haggray, Executive Director, American Baptist Home Mission Societies:

“While widespread doubts have been expressed by many in national leadership concerning whether border security has risen to the level of a crisis, we know for certain that closing the federal government is creating a very real crisis and national emergency for federal workers and countless Americans who rely upon our federal government to function fully and properly. The President should end the shutdown immediately.”

Rev. David Beckmann, President, Bread for the World:

“The shutdown has caused immediate hardship for many hundreds of thousands of people who work in the government and businesses that relate to the government. It has also interrupted public services and stalled international aid. If the shutdown continues, money for food and other assistance will run out, driving millions of Americans into hunger. With just a fraction of the \$5.7 billion dollars the President proposes for the border wall, we could more effectively address the current border management problem and double U.S. support for programs that are reducing hunger and violence in the Central American countries from which most of the migrants are fleeing. The Bible repeatedly calls on us to welcome the stranger, share bread with the hungry, seek justice and defend vulnerable populations. The Senate must pass legislation to open and fully fund the federal government immediately and negotiate humane and effective ways to address immigration.”

Rev. Sèkinah Hamlin, Director, Faith & Credit Roundtable of the Center for Responsible Lending:

“As people of faith, we are quite concerned over the protracted government shutdown, and particularly over continued, if not intensified efforts of bad financial actors to prey upon individuals and families during perhaps their most dramatic and profound times of financial need. Leviticus 25:35-37 gives wise and just counsel to people in government and civic realms: ‘If your brother becomes poor and cannot maintain himself with you, you shall support him as though he were a stranger and a sojourner, and he shall live with you. Take no interest from him or profit, but fear your God, that your brother may live beside you. You shall not lend him your money at interest, nor give him your food for profit.’ Predatory payday lenders, some of the most visible bad financial actors, are still in 34 states in our

country, presenting payday loan products that average 391% APR. As we have evidence that shows the debilitating impact of such loans on American families, we are convinced that the longer this shutdown exists, the more vulnerable American families will be at risk of debt traps that cause multi-year financial hardship, pain, and misery. This is not God's vision of how we are to live. Thus, we demand a swift end to the government shutdown."

Rev. Reggie Smith, Christian Reformed Church in North America:

"As a leader of the Christian Reformed Church in North America, I express deep frustration at the Trump administration's fear mongering and creation of a 'crisis' at the border which further stigmatizes our immigrant, refugee, and asylum seeking neighbors. In its third week, the government shutdown has had innumerable ripple effects on the lives of ordinary, hard working Americans, including the furloughing of TSA agents and prison guards, the shutdown of several national parks, the FDA stopping its routine inspection of food items, and millions of Americans left in limbo as they wait for paychecks and public benefits. Illegal border crossings have decreased in recent years, and efforts to strong arm the American people to support a border wall are financially and morally irresponsible. Our scriptures remind us to act justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with God and I now ask you to immediately reopen the government without exacerbating immigrant detention and border militarization and stand up for the American people affected by this shutdown."

Rev. John L. McCullough, President and CEO, Church World Service:

"Congress must not allow the Administration to continue to hold the nation hostage while it seeks to spread misinformation and harm vulnerable families pursuing their legal right to seek safety in the United States. Our government betrays America's values when it holds up humanitarian funding for people in need here and abroad. Militarizing our border, turning back asylum seekers, and breaking the law by failing to process families seeking protection contravene our moral and legal obligations. Church World Service calls on Congress to practice good governance and responsibly fund the federal government through legislation that provides critical assistance for families in need and cuts funding for deportation, detention, and border militarization. We urge Congress to call on the Administration immediately cease its inhumane and illegal treatment of asylum seekers."

Eli McCarthy, Ph.D., Director of Justice and Peace, Conference of Superiors of Men:

"We must not bow to the habit of increasing suffering for some (ex. federal workers, or darker immigrants), under the assumption this may be better for others. This way of thinking pervades too much of our federal policies and political discourse. As Catholic religious men and our broader Catholic community, we have seen firsthand the stories of struggle most of these immigrants experience in their home countries. They include the violence of guns, killing, assault, rape, domestic abuse, and extreme poverty, which has been exacerbated by U.S. foreign policy in their region. They are very often fleeing these circumstances and justly seeking basic human rights. As partners with the global Catholic Nonviolence Initiative, we urge Congress to address these root causes, as well as to increase proven, humane alternatives to detention rather than increasing funding for detention beds or for new border wall construction."

Annika Harley and Amanda Robinson, Creation Justice Ministries:

"Creation Justice Ministries works at the intersection of a variety of organizations in the effort to protect and restore God's Earth. During the shutdown, the maintenance of our national parks and public lands is at risk, as well as the ability of Americans to fully experience these spaces. There are also public health concerns that increase the longer these parks go unattended. We as people of faith believe it is our

responsibility to care for God's Creation, but we cannot do it alone. We need the federal government operating at full capacity to ensure that we remain stewards of this earth.”

Rev. Dr. Ken Brooker Langston, Executive Director, Disciples Center for Public Witness (Disciples of Christ); Director, Disciples Justice Action Network:

“As Christians, people of faith, and persons of conscience, we should be tearing down walls, not building them; and, as faithful citizens, we should be putting our government to work for all our people, not closing it down and hurting workers. The real "national emergency" here is not about our borders; it's about our morals: it's about the building up of hatred and the closing down of our national conscience.”

Rev. Dr. Leslie Copeland-Tune, Director, Ecumenical Advocacy Days for Global Peace with Justice:

“This government shutdown is costly, unnecessary and unjust. It has not only impacted 800,000 federal workers and thousands of contractors, it is having a ripple effect that is reverberating in every town, city and state across America. This shut down is not making America great or safe. We're causing harm to those fleeing violence and poverty on one side of the border by making it harder for them to seek asylum, and hurting Americans on the other side of the border to play to a white supremacist ideology and foolish campaign promise. This is absurd. It is well past time for this government shutdown to end. If the president is not willing to do it, then Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell must act immediately and end this foolishness.”

Rev. Ebony Grisom, Director, Ecumenical Poverty Initiative:

“This government shutdown compromises our right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Millions of Americans alter their lives as the government lay dormant. Many households are missing meals, housing payments, medication, and other necessities as a result of the shutdown. Our poorest families are hardest hit: each passing day is more perilous than the previous. Our crisis is not at the southern border: it is in our government. We the people say enough! End this government shutdown immediately in order to form a more perfect Union.”

Rebecca Linder Blachly, Director, Office of Government Relations, Episcopal Church:

“The government shutdown has far-reaching implications for our country as it impacts the livelihoods of federal employees and their families; as well as of those relying on federal support for food, housing, medical services, and more. We urge our elected officials to begin a reasoned debate about appropriate border security while recognizing the imperative that we have a humane and compassionate immigration policy. We urge Congress and the Administration to work together to address legitimate security needs, to ensure we carry out our legal responsibility to process asylum seekers, and treat all migrants with humanity and respect.”

Rev. Amy E. Reumann, Director of Advocacy, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America:

“The cost of policy debates over funding should not ride on the backs of low-income households, federal workers and their communities. Households living paycheck to paycheck, seniors, and the most vulnerable among us cannot afford the uncertainty and lapses in services that this shutdown is bringing. Lawmakers and the Administration must hear from their constituents that closing the federal government is not an effective solution, and we must continue to build public leadership to reinforce the integrity of U.S. governance.”

Rev. Jennifer Butler, CEO of Faith in Public Life and former chair of the White House Council on Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships:

In this moment, immigrant families deserving of compassion and basic human dignity are being met with violence and vengeance at our nation's southern border. The gospel says that out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaks. Not surprisingly, the racism and deceit in President Trump's heart deluge his rhetoric. As President Trump's government shutdown denies thousands of public servants the paychecks they've earned, people of faith must denounce the president's immoral words and actions. As a pastor, I pray that the President will repent of these misdeeds, welcome and support immigrant families, and work with Congress to reopen the government immediately."

Diane Randall, Executive Secretary, Friends Committee on National Legislation:

"The government shutdown threatens millions of adults and children with unnecessary hunger and hardship as funding for nutrition assistance, housing, and other critical programs further dries up. Hundreds of thousands of civil servants are missing paychecks. The President's intransigence on building a border wall for a crisis he manufactured is preventing families and individuals from getting basic human needs. Across this country, millions of households are facing the reality that they may not be able to put food on the table, pay the rent or keep their families stable – all for a reckless demand to further militarize the border. It is irresponsible and immoral. Congress should act immediately to reopen the government."

David Bernstein, President and CEO, Jewish Council for Public Affairs:

"Jewish Council for Public Affairs (JCPA) strongly urges Congress and the President to immediately end this shutdown, which is now the longest in our nation's history. The longer we allow the shutdown to go on, the more dire the consequences will be for public health, safety, and well-being. Judaism teaches that we, as individuals and as a society, have a responsibility to "speak up," to "judge righteously," and to "champion the poor and the needy." This political impasse is further harming already vulnerable populations that depend on federal assistance programs, an essential part of our nation's efforts to reduce poverty. It is vital that Congress reopen the government by passing responsible, bipartisan spending bills that uphold American ideals."

Susan Gunn, Interim Director, Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns:

"Just as a wall is not a solution to the crisis of persecution and poverty that many people are fleeing when they come to our southern border, the government shutdown is not a solution to our political disagreements. The shutdown only brings misery to more people. As Catholics, we value the dignity of human life, and we value the dignity of work. This includes protection of the basic right of workers to be compensated for their contributions. We call on our leaders to find a border solution that is humane and to allow people to return to work with pay immediately."

Abby J. Leibman, President and CEO, MAZON: A Jewish Response to Hunger:

"Our tradition implores our leaders to 'judge your people with righteousness, and your poor with justice... champion the cause of the poor among the people, give deliverance to the needy...' These values are the foundation upon which this country was built, and for generations, the highest standard to which we have held our leaders accountable. Jewish tradition exhorts our leaders to elevate humanity over politics. In an argument that pits the lives and survival of real human beings against a manufactured crisis, there is no real contest—basic humanity demands that the President must re-open our government."

Jim Winkler, President and General Secretary of the National Council of Churches:

“This shutdown is a petty and cruel act which is creating significant harm for a great many people. I urge President Trump to abandon his demand for an unnecessary wall and to work with Congress to address immigration reform.”

Sister Simone Campbell, SSS, Executive Director, NETWORK Lobby for Catholic Social Justice:

“President Trump’s ego is holding the American government hostage. Millions of working families and people living in poverty are bearing the brunt of his childish demands that an ineffective wall be funded. Each day we move closer to vulnerable families losing food and rental assistance. It’s time for the President to uphold his oath and serve the nation instead of his ego. The time to reopen the government is now!”

Sister Patricia Chappell, Executive Director, Pax Christi USA:

“Catholic Social Teaching along with the Gospel are foundations of Pax Christi USA. They speak of rights and responsibilities of the human community and for the common good of all peoples. What we have witnessed in the presidential shutdown of the government is a fine example of the abuse of power and retaliation when this president does not get his way. This action has damaged and in some cases, caused irreparable harm to those at the mercy of the Federal Government for a well-earned pay check, federally subsidized programs (Supplemental Nutrition Program, Section 8) and initiatives (National Parks, Transportation Security Administration). We must stop using border security, holding poor people hostage and immigrants/refugees as an excuse to shut down the government.”

Rev. Jimmie R. Hawkins, Director of the Office of Public Witness, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.):

“It is time for the Senate to take up the House spending bills and send them to President Trump, who must sign them immediately. Shutting down the government over policy disagreements is no way to govern a nation. It is long past time that Congress and the President reopen the government without further militarization of the southern border. Real people—from federal contract workers who will not receive back pay, to SNAP recipients whose benefits are in jeopardy, to civil servants who are being required to work without pay—are suffering hardships because of this reckless behavior. Congress and President Trump must immediately reopen the government, removing this unnecessary burden from the shoulders of the American people.”

Rev. Dr. Susan Henry-Crowe, General Secretary, General Board of Church and Society, The United Methodist Church:

“We stand with all those impacted by this senseless government shutdown. It is unconscionable that hundreds of thousands of employees and contractors are locked out of their jobs, working without pay, and losing basic income because of political gamesmanship. Congress and the President must quickly agree to fund the government without further militarizing the southern border. As the ripple effects of this shutdown continue, our churches and faith communities will continue to support those struggling during this time of unnecessary uncertainty. Congress and the President must now do their job and provide funding for government operations.”

Rev. Mary Katherine Morn, President and CEO of the Unitarian Universalist Service Committee:

“Right now, thousands of people are stranded in the Mexican city of Tijuana, waiting for the chance to exercise their right to seek asylum at the San Isidro port of entry in San Diego. The President claims that the situation at our southern border is a ‘crisis of heart and soul.’ In reality it is one of his administration’s own making, and one his funding requests would exacerbate--depriving more children of their parents and erecting more walls between us. Using 800,000 federal workers as pawns in a shameful power grab is immoral and the racism underlying the president’s agenda is showing through

quite clearly. Our leaders must open their hearts to those who are harmed by immigrant detention and border militarization. We are calling on our leaders to immediately reopen the government and get to work creating sensible policies and providing needed funding that will address the real human need.”