



A hallway outside the U.S. Senate chamber sits empty at the U.S. Capitol in Washington, Sept. 30, 2025, in the hours before a government shutdown. (OSV News/Reuters/Jonathan Ernst)



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A government shutdown jeopardizes the health and stability of millions of families across the United States, especially the poor, Catholic organizations warned as the federal government shuttered Oct. 1 in a high-stakes standoff between congressional Republicans and Democrats.

Groups such as the Catholic Health Association and Catholic Charities USA called on lawmakers to fund the government and extend health and safety-net programs that millions of Americans rely on.

"The ripple effects of inaction extend across the economy, deepening hardship for those already most vulnerable," Mercy Sr. Mary Haddad, president and CEO of the Catholic Health Association, said in a prepared statement.

Referring to the shutdown as "the latest episode of crippling partisanship" in Washington, D.C., Catholic Charities USA President and CEO Kerry Alys Robinson said the reverberations from the shutdown would be felt "far beyond" the halls of power in the nation's capital.

"Government shutdowns take a particular toll on the most vulnerable among us, from hungry children and parents living paycheck to paycheck to seniors struggling to afford medications and groceries," Robinson said.

On Tuesday night, all but two Democrats (alongside one independent who caucuses with Democrats) in the U.S. Senate voted against a short-term funding bill to keep the government open. That denied Republicans, who hold the majority, the parliamentary threshold needed to advance their funding proposal, which triggered the shutdown at 12:01 a.m.

Negotiations stalled as Republicans rejected a Democrat counteroffer to extend expiring health insurance subsidies for Americans who rely on the Affordable Care Act's insurance marketplaces for health care coverage. Democrats also sought to roll back Republican cuts to Medicaid and other government programs.

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On Oct. 1, two votes to reopen the government failed to garner the 60-vote threshold needed to advance the measures in the U.S. Senate. Lawmakers voted 55-45 on a GOP-led funding bill and 53-47 on a Democratic measure that would link funding the government to their health care priorities and limit the White House's ability to claw back federal funding.

Lawmakers on both sides of the aisle made cable news appearances throughout the day on Oct. 1, blaming their political opponents for the stalled negotiations. No clear path or off-ramp for either side emerged as Democrats and Republicans dug in on their respective positions.

Network, the lobby for Catholic social justice, said in a statement that the partisan gridlock was yet the latest example of Congress "ignoring the struggles of millions of people in the U.S. who risk losing their health insurance due to increasing costs."

"Health care is a human right, and members of Congress chose to shut down the federal government rather than protect affordable health care," Laurie Carafone, Network's executive director, said in the statement. She added that her organization supports a bipartisan funding bill that protects health care access for Americans.

"With Affordable Care Act enrollment beginning in less than a month, there is no time to waste," Carafone said, adding that the average premium for marketplace enrollees with financial assistance — \$460 per month in 2025 — will jump to \$1,087 per month in 2026.

"In Mississippi and Alaska, premiums will increase by over 300 percent," Carafone said. "That puts lifesaving care out of reach for millions and raises healthcare costs for all."

Haddad, of the Catholic Health Association, said federal lawmakers need to fund the government in order to preserve critical health programs.

"This includes extending essential telehealth flexibilities, preventing harmful Medicaid cuts to safety net hospitals, addressing the disproportionate burden of payments carried by hospitals serving underserved communities, and extending enhanced premium tax credits that are vital for millions of working Americans to purchase affordable health insurance for themselves and their families," Haddad said.

"Failure to act — whether by not funding the government or by allowing critical health programs to lapse — will result in higher health care costs, the loss of coverage for millions, and damaging disruption to the delivery of care in underserved American communities," Haddad added.

The disruption to the federal government also threatens other critical services such as food assistance and housing for people in need, said Robinson of Catholic Charities USA.

"If leaders from both parties do not put an end to this unnecessary shutdown as soon as possible, even more Americans will fall into poverty, and the recovery from this setback could take months or even years," Robinson said.

In the meantime, Robinson said that Catholic Charities agencies across the country will "continue to do their best to fill in the gaps and provide life-giving, compassionate aid to those suffering most in their communities."