

U.S. Sen. Johnson: Johnson, Rep. Gallagher for the Wall Street Journal: Repeal the 1974 budget law that fuels the shutdown cycle

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WASHINGTON – On Thursday, the *Wall Street Journal* published an op-ed by U.S. Sen. Ron Johnson (R-Wis.) and U.S. Rep. Mike Gallagher (R-Wis.) summarizing the necessary actions Congress should take to stop its well-honed process of forcing through last-minute massive spending bills that [mortgage](#) our children's futures. Since the signing of the *Congressional Budget and Impoundment Control Act of 1974*, it is clear that this law has failed to bring fiscal sanity, and it is time to repeal and replace it.

The lawmakers argue for three common-sense solutions: ending government shutdowns—which works effectively in their home state of Wisconsin, consolidate committee jurisdiction, and move to biennial budgeting.

The full op-ed can be found [here](#) and excerpts are below.

“Total federal government spending was \$4.4 trillion in fiscal 2019. Four years later, in 2023, Washington spent about \$6.4 trillion. The federal debt has surpassed \$33 trillion, and the deficit for 2023 alone approached \$2 trillion. Federal spending, deficits and debt are out of control, as is the dysfunctional appropriations process that facilitates spending.

“Congress rarely passes spending legislation on time, according to Pew Research Center. Since 1974, Congress has passed all of its required appropriations bills only four times: in 1977, 1989, 1995 and 1997.

...

“The solution is to rein in the federal government’s size, but until the appropriations process is under control, that will be impossible.

“In 1974 lawmakers passed the Congressional Budget Control and Impoundment Act to bring order to the annual appropriations process. As we approach its 50th anniversary, it’s clear that the law has failed to bring order. It’s time to repeal and replace it rather than continuing this destructive cycle.

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“The first idea is to end the annual ritual of threatened government shutdowns. In Wisconsin, if legislative dysfunction precludes the funding of state government or agencies, we don’t shut them down; we keep operating them at last year’s spending levels until appropriations are passed. What could be more common-sense? Members of Congress have introduced proposals to end federal government shutdowns forever. It’s past time to pass one of those bills.

“A second idea is to move to biennial budgeting. We often hear the excuse that there isn’t enough time to pass all 12 annual appropriations bills one at a time. But many states use a two-year budget cycle. Congress each year could pass bills that provide two years of funding for six appropriations accounts while conducting oversight of the previous year’s spending on the other six accounts. This would give lawmakers time to pass bills individually and allow greater scrutiny of each account. By aligning the federal government’s fiscal year to the calendar year—it currently starts Oct. 1—Congress would have three more months to pass the appropriations bills.

“The third idea is to consolidate committee jurisdiction. When several committees claim jurisdiction over the same federal departments, agencies and legislation, it creates overlap and congressional dysfunction. This would be challenging to fix because entrenched committee chairmen would likely oppose anything that reduced their power. But aligning the full standing committees to functions and departments within the executive branch would be a major improvement over the status quo. We should also consider dissolving appropriations committees and transferring their duties to subcommittees under the properly aligned authorizing committees. Each full committee should also have an adequately staffed oversight subcommittee.

...

“The appropriations process for fiscal 2024 is already a mess. Rep. Matt Gaetz and seven other Republicans used it as an excuse to remove the House speaker. We hope that House Republicans can quickly come together and elect a new speaker who will have the entire conference’s support. But changing who sits in the speaker’s chair matters less than changing the process by which Congress conducts oversight and appropriates money to the executive branch. By committing to repeal and replace the Congressional Budget Act, Republican lawmakers can avoid further chaos while providing a path to future fiscal sanity.”