

# Budget crisis has returned

In two weeks the federal government will run out of money. To avoid that, Congress needs to pass a short-term extension to continue federal funding past Oct. 1. It also needs to pass a measure raising the federal government's debt ceiling by mid-October. If

it doesn't, it's estimated that the Treasury Department would not have enough cash coming in to pay all the country's bills in full sometime between Oct. 18 and Nov. 5. In addition, failure to raise the debt ceiling would result in the country defaulting on some of its financial obligations.

One would think with such a dire picture staring Congress in the face it wouldn't be too difficult to pass either a funding extension or a measure raising the debt ceiling. Experts, however, are not optimistic that either one is possible.

A group of conservative Republicans in the House wants to tie the entire \$986 billion annual operating budget to a provision to defund Obamacare. Rep. Tom Graves, R-Georgia, introduced such a bill last week and his stance is simple: either defund Obamacare or House Republicans will shut down the government by not passing a spending bill or raising the debt ceiling.

This isn't the first time Congress has been on the brink of disaster on budget issues. That's how sequestration came to be and the mandatory federal budget cuts that took effect earlier this year.

**■ At issue:**  
Congress is facing yet another deadline to fund the federal government or let it run out of money. Can a last-minute compromise be reached to keep the government operating as usual or will a shutdown turn everything upside down?

But when push came to shove, Congress reluctantly agreed to a continuing spending resolution and raising the debt ceiling to keep the government going. Whether or not that happens this time is anyone's guess.

What's involved here is the same old political brinkmanship that has plagued Congress for the past few years. Both sides have their heels dug in on their respective sides of the line and refuse to budge until the last minute when they are finally forced to compromise to avoid a disaster.

There are those in Congress and elsewhere, however, who are concerned that a last-minute compromise may not happen this time. If House Republicans can round up enough votes to block passage of a continuing funding resolution bill and also a bill to raise the debt ceiling, they can, as threatened, shut down the government. And if the president keeps his promise to refuse to negotiate on extending the debt ceiling, then a shutdown becomes even more likely.

The president said if Republicans force a shutdown it would be the "height of irresponsibility." But if that happens he has to accept his share of the blame, too. After all, refusing to negotiate extending the debt ceiling is just as stubborn as the Republicans' insistence on defunding Obamacare. Passing an extension to continue federal funding is a must as is raising the nation's debt ceiling. Congress and the president both need to step away from their respective lines in the sand and do what's right for the nation, not their political futures.

## Today in History

### Today's Highlight in History:

On Sept. 18, 1862, President Abraham Lincoln signed a commission naming Rabbi Jacob Frankel of Rodeph Shalom Congregation in Philadelphia the first Jewish chaplain of the U.S. Army.

### On this date:

In 1759, the French formally surrendered Quebec to the British.

In 1793, President George Washington laid the cornerstone of the U.S. Capitol.

In 1810, Chile made its initial declaration of independence from Spain with the formation of a national junta.

In 1850, Congress passed the Fugitive Slave Act, which created a force of federal commissioners charged with returning escaped slaves to their owners.

In 1927, the Columbia Phonograph Broadcasting System (later CBS) made its on-air debut with a basic network of 16 radio stations.

In 1931, an explosion in the Chinese city of Mukden damaged a section of Japanese-owned railway track; Japan, blaming Chinese nationalists, invaded Manchuria the next day.

In 1947, the National Security Act, which created a National Military Establishment, went into effect.

In 1961, United Nations Secretary-General Dag Hammarskjöld was killed in a plane crash in northern Rhodesia.

In 1970, rock star Jimi Hendrix died in London at 27.

In 1975, newspaper heiress Patricia Hearst was captured by the FBI in San Francisco, 19 months after being kidnapped by the Symbionese Liberation Army.

In 1981, a museum honoring former President Gerald R. Ford was dedicated in Grand Rapids, Mich.

In 1990, the city of Atlanta was named the site of the 1996 Summer Olympics.

Ten years ago: Hurricane Isabel plowed into North Carolina's Outer Banks with 100 mph winds and pushed its way up the Eastern Seaboard; the storm was later blamed for 30 deaths.



# The seduction by Syria

Cal Thomas

Columnist



Expecting Syria to live up to an agreement between Secretary of State John Kerry and Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov for the cataloging, inspection, removal and eventual destruction or sequester of chemical weapons is a subtle seduction.

Why would a dictator like Bashar al-Assad relinquish his most potent weapon in the midst of a civil war? President Obama and his sycophants claim it was the threat of military action against Syria that focused Assad's mind. That hardly seems credible after Kerry's promise that any U.S. missile strike would be "unbelievably small."

Tyrants have a poor record of living up to agreements. One hates to resurrect Adolf Hitler, but the Munich Agreement of 1938 serves as one of many examples. The agreement gave Nazi Germany the Sudetenland region of Czechoslovakia, as long as Hitler agreed not to attempt to annex any other land. Hitler broke the pact in 1939 when he invaded Poland. Also in 1939, Germany and the Soviet Union signed a nonaggression treaty known as the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, ensuring that the Soviet Union would stay out of the European war. That lasted until 1941 when Hitler invaded Russia.

At the Yalta Conference in February 1945, Soviet General Secretary Joseph Stalin promised free elections in Poland, but soon broke that promise, leading to the Cold War.

People whose only scruples are keeping themselves in power are not about to honor agreements that could take that power away. Assad has been called a "war criminal." He fits the definition, having reportedly slaughtered more than 100,000 Syrians, allegedly including more than 1,400 with chemical weapons. Millions more have fled the country. Assad has no future outside Syria, other than exile, a jail cell or the gallows.

It is conceivable Assad might move some of his chemical weapons to hiding places in other countries, or within Syria. Could the United States through satellite technology and other means discover such subterfuge, as it did when Soviet missiles were detected entering Cuba 50 years ago? Perhaps, but remember that Iraq's Saddam Hussein used chemical weapons against his Kurdish population. After the first Gulf War in 1991, when Iraqi forces were evicted from Kuwait, Saddam put on a public display in which at least some of his chemical weapons arsenal was destroyed.

In 2003, when President George W. Bush ordered an invasion of Iraq on the pre-

text that Saddam had weapons of mass destruction and was attempting to acquire more, none were found. Do we really believe Hussein destroyed them all?

According to a report in the Lebanese daily Al-Mustaqbal, reprinted in Sunday's Jerusalem Post, Syria moved "20 trucks worth of equipment and material used for the manufacturing of chemical weapons into neighboring Iraq." If true, that would have been the day after the agreement between the U.S. and Russia was announced. The Iraqi government denies it is assisting Syria in hiding chemical weapons. Who can be believed in the murky Middle East?

"Trust, but verify" was the slogan used by the Reagan administration when it came to promises made by the Soviet Union. That mantra should be updated in any dealings with Assad, as well as Iran: "Don't trust and verify."

The Obama administration is attempting to sell this deal with Russia as if it were on a par with the surrender documents ending World War II. As evil as those regimes were, the cruel dictators in the Middle East are at least their equals. That is why they can't be trusted to live up to any promise not in their own interest. Unless, of course, they are forced to do so through more international pressure than they are currently receiving and with a credible military option that is something larger than "unbelievably small."

# A good day for Watertown residents

I hope you read yesterday's *Public Opinion* editorial.

For those of us in the news business, and me in particular, this was a big, BIG day!

I have already heard from a few folks about the passage of the new city ordinance which requires committees established by city ordinance to be open to the public, publish/post an agenda 24 hours prior to the meeting and keep minutes of any meetings ... and the comment has been the same: "What will you write about now, Mark?"

The answer: "I am sure I'll find something, just not that meeting anymore."

I must have referenced that ill-fated August 10, 2007, secret (and in my mind, illegal) meeting of the Watertown City Council finance committee more than a dozen times since that day. And editorials, which I helped write, included another dozen or so references.

I participated in multiple state-level open government task forces since that time where I referenced this secret meeting in attempts to influence changes in state laws on open meetings and keeping of minutes.

I presented the case for sanctions against the City of Watertown to the state's Open Meetings Commission (November 2007), arguing the city violated the spirit of South Dakota's open meeting's laws when five of the council, and the mayor, voted 5-1 at a city committee meeting held in secret. But, the OMC ruled the city had not violated state law, and we lost.

Mark S. Roby

Publisher



I know some (I can think of current and former elected city officials, to name a few) who are really tired of us – me – harping over this secret meeting and all that it entails (in their view, making a mountain out of a molehill).

And I recognize their view; I just don't agree with them.

If a city committee can meet in secret once, then what prevents them for doing so again ... and again ... and again? And even if this "current" council refuses to meet in secret, what prevents a future council from doing so? Will our city ever have a financial problem or even crisis again that could be the cause for the next secret meeting, as it was the one held in August 2007?

And that is really the rub. Why this newspaper, and me personally, spent a lot of time discussing those events and pushing for changes in state and local law. We all know organizations, and especially governments, have an insatiable appetite for money (revenue) to feed the beast. They also like to do things behind closed doors so they can hash out their arguments which will defend their decisions.

And that's the reason this newspaper spent a whole lot of time and energy fighting to get permanent change – a new

law/ordinance – which requires committees of city government to meet in the open, after posting an agenda (24 hours notice) and to keep minutes of what was discussed and voted upon – so the public (that's you and me) knows what is going on and has a chance to participate in those discussions.

You heard it again Monday night, the same (lame) argument for not making this change: "We almost always meet in public, post an agenda and keep minutes" (of committee meetings). And that is "almost" true. But there is still one exception to that comment: the Aug. 10, 2007, city finance committee meeting where no agenda has ever been posted, no one from the public was invited, and no minutes have ever been produced. The fact remains, it was a secret meeting where elected members of our city government voted 5-1 to fund city operations on the backs of our independent municipal utilities' revenue.

And that, ladies and gentlemen, is why we fought for change, and why we – and me personally – applaud the mayor and city council for the vote on Monday night. The matter of whether or not committee meetings are open is closed. The public and our elected city leaders won. In fact, I'm proud to say, because we are a home-rule charter community, Watertown's open meetings laws are stronger, more open, than South Dakota's state laws on this matter.

Today is truly a great day for open meetings and bringing more "sunshine" to local government in Watertown.

On the left... **Doonesbury Flashbacks**

Doonesbury - by Gary Trudeau

Mallard Fillmore by Bruce Tinsley

On the right...

