

Some wisdom from “Yertle the Turtle”:

I am Yertle the Turtle. Oh, marvelous me, for I am the ruler of all that I see.

Your majesty, please. I don't like to complain, but down here below, we are feeling great pain.

THE REPUBLICAN SELF-IMPOSED GOVERNMENT SHUTDOWN

(Ms. BROWN of Florida asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend her remarks.)

Ms. BROWN of Florida. Mr. Speaker, I would like to discuss how the Republican self-imposed government shutdown is affecting our Nation's veterans. Just yesterday, VA Secretary Shinseki testified in the Veterans Affairs' Committee, and he put several points straight ahead.

If the shutdown continues, there will be over 3.8 million veterans who will not receive disability compensation payments. That means they will not get their checks in the mail by November 1.

315,000 veterans and over 200,000 surviving spouses or dependents will not see their pension payments.

Education payments to more than half a million veterans using the GI Bill will end.

It is really very shameful that the Republicans are doing this to our veterans—over \$6 billion in benefits. Nearly 5 million veterans and their families will not receive their pension payments.

Shame on the Republican House of Representatives.

THE INDEPENDENT BUDGET,
A BUDGET FOR VETERANS BY VETERANS,
October 3, 2013.

House Speaker JOHN BOEHNER,
Longworth House Office Building,
Washington, DC.

Senate Majority Leader HARRY REID,
Hart Senate Office Building,
Washington, DC.

House Minority Leader NANCY PELOSI,
Cannon House Office Building,
Washington, DC.

Senate Minority Leader MITCH MCCONNELL,
Russell Senate Office Building,
Washington, DC.

DEAR SPEAKER BOEHNER, LEADER REID, LEADER PELOSI AND LEADER MCCONNELL: On behalf of The Independent Budget—co-authored by AMVETS, Disabled American Veterans, Paralyzed Veterans of America, and Veterans of Foreign Wars—we would like to express our tremendous disappointment that Congress' inability to pass a full annual budget has led to a government shutdown. Your failure is already causing real harm to the brave men and women who have served and sacrificed for this nation.

The current government shutdown has stopped work on the more than 250,000 Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) disability claims that are awaiting adjudication; compensation, pension and education benefits are in jeopardy of not being paid; Vocational Rehabilitation offices are working with reduced staffs; and the Department of Labor's VETS programs and federal employment OneStops are closed. These are real impacts on veterans, many of whom are struggling to transition back into civilian life.

Furthermore, funding the operations of the VA through short-term continuing resolutions (CRs) or other stop-gap measures are not acceptable solutions. Typically, short term CRs don't take into account the effects of inflation or increased demand for VA benefits and services. CRs also prevent VA from starting or expanding critical programs and disrupt or delay vital new research and construction projects.

As the leaders of Congress, we call on you to immediately take all actions necessary to give final approval to legislation providing the full year's FY 2014 appropriation for all veterans programs. Our organizations and the millions of veterans we represent will no longer tolerate Congress leveraging veterans' health and wellbeing to achieve unrelated political ends.

In order to prevent future disruptions to veterans' programs, we also urge you to approve legislation that would extend advance appropriations to all VA discretionary and mandatory appropriations accounts. Advance appropriations have shielded VA health care from most of the harmful effects of the current government shutdown as well as prior continuing resolutions. Now Congress must provide the same protections to all remaining discretionary and mandatorily funded veterans programs, including disability compensation processing and payments. There are currently bills pending in both the House (H.R. 813) and the Senate (S. 932) that could be quickly amended and approved to achieve this goal.

Both government shutdowns and continuing resolutions represent failures in leadership. Congress' obligation to veterans does not start in the eleventh hour of a national crisis; you have an obligation to pass a timely, sufficient budget for all veterans programs, benefits and services.

On behalf of our organizations and all of America's veterans, their families and survivors, we call on you to work together to immediately approve a full year's appropriation for all veterans programs, and subsequently to approve pending legislation to extend advance appropriations to all VA discretionary and mandatory funding. Anything less is unacceptable to the men and women who have served this nation in uniform.

Sincerely,

STEWART M. HICKEY,
National Executive Director,
AMVETS.

GARRY J. AUGUSTINE,
Executive Director,
Disabled American Veterans.

HOMER S. TOWNSEND, JR.,
Executive Director,
Paralyzed Veterans of America.

ROBERT E. WALLACE,
Executive Director,
Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States.

[From ABC News Chicago—Associated Press,
Oct. 9, 2013]

2013 GOVERNMENT SHUTDOWN COULD HIT MILLIONS OF VETS, VA CHIEF SAYS

WASHINGTON.—The government shutdown is having a big impact on the country's military. One problem—funding the death benefit of military families—has been solved. Another issue—veterans benefits—could turn into a massive headache later this month.

VA hospitals, like Jesse Brown on the West Side, are open during the government shutdown. But veterans are concerned that disability and other checks could be in jeopardy.

“I got a little money saved up, but a lot of guys here live from check to check, month

to month, that's going to be the hard part,” said Jesus Lebron, Vietnam Vet and Purple Heart recipient.

“I think very few of us are prepared for this—we just have to weather that storm,” said David Brewster, Vietnam War veteran.

Vets are worried after the VA secretary testified on Capitol Hill Wednesday, warning politicians that the shutdown has slowed the process for disability claims—and the impact could be widespread.

“It's over 5 million individuals who will be involved. This is serious. And I'm hoping the leadership of this committee will help us resolve it,” said Eric Shinseki, VA secretary.

Shinseki broke down the numbers like this: 3.8 million vets will not receive disability compensation; 315,000 vets and 202,000 surviving spouses or dependents will see pension payments stopped. And because of that, vets are disappointed with elected officials.

“We put our butts on the line. I would like to see them put their butts on the line,” said Leonard Soria, Vietnam War veteran.

In the meantime, the caskets of 4 fallen soldiers killed in Afghanistan arrived at Dover Air Force Base on Wednesday afternoon. Their families scrambled to raise money for funerals because they did not immediately get the \$100,000 death gratuity because of the government shutdown.

“She sacrificed for the country, for her family. Why wouldn't that be taken care of? There is no excuse,” said Alexandra DiBella, friend of Army 1st Lt. Jennifer Moreno.

Late this afternoon, Congress took action to fix that problem by approving the death gratuity. That impacts 26 families who have had loved ones die since the shutdown.

It's important to note, however, that all VA hospitals will remain open during the shutdown.

In all, more than \$6 billion in benefits to about 5 million veterans and their families would be halted with an extended shutdown.

In some areas, like health care, there have been few adverse effects. Health care services are funded a year in advance. In others, such as reducing the claims backlog, Shinseki noted that the backlog has increased by 2,000 since the shutdown began Oct. 1.

At the end of September, the disability claims backlog stood at 418,500, a drop of about 31 percent over the previous six months.

Shinseki drew comparisons to the last shutdown in 1996, a time of sustained peace. The current shutdown occurs as the war in Afghanistan is in its 13th year and as hundreds of thousands have returned from Iraq. They are enrolling in VA care at higher rates than previous generations of veterans.

“They, along with the veterans of every preceding generation, will be harmed if the shutdown continues,” Shinseki said.

Rep. Jeff Miller, the Republican chairman of the committee, questioned whether the Obama administration had been forthcoming enough in letting veterans know the impact of the shutdown. For example, VA's initial guidance did not mention any impact on payments to veterans or the processing of their benefits, although it was updated before the shutdown began.

Miller said a statement by President Barack Obama made it unclear about whether veterans would be able to continue getting counseling for PTSD. They can, at any VA health care facility.

“We've had some difficulty in the last couple of weeks getting good information about VA's contingency plan and the effects a lapse in appropriation would have on veterans,” Miller said.

Shinseki said the VA has confronted “unprecedented legal and programmatic questions” and would do its best to keep lawmakers informed.

The House has passed legislation that would provide veterans disability, pension and other benefits if the shutdown is prolonged. But the White House has urged lawmakers not to take a piecemeal approach to continuing government services.

Shinseki made that case as well, saying it's not the best solution for veterans. He noted that even if the VA were fully funded, some services to veterans would suffer.

He said the Labor Department has largely shut down its VETS program, which provides employment and counseling services to veterans. The Small Business Administration has closed 10 centers focused on helping veterans create and operate businesses. And the Housing and Urban Development Department is not issuing vouchers to newly homeless vets, though those already receiving the housing aid will still get it.

White House spokesman Jay Carney said Wednesday that veterans had done their job and that it was time for Congress to do its job.

Mitch McConnell's spokesman, Don Stewart, noted that the senator pushed for a vote on House-passed legislation that would protect disability benefits, but Majority Leader Harry Reid objected.

"Maybe Carney should give him a call," Stewart said.

The shutdown has disrupted the generally bipartisan workings of the veterans committees in both chambers.

"Do you think Senator Reid doesn't like our veterans or the VA in particular?" Rep. Tim Huelskamp, R-Kan., asked Wednesday.

"Personally, I think he very highly values veterans," responded Shinseki, the only Cabinet member to testify before a congressional committee since the partial shutdown began. "As to why we are unable, Congress is unable to do its business, I will leave to the members to discuss."

Meanwhile, some Democrats said a GOP bill passed last week that would continue to fund disability payments didn't include money for such things as medical or prosthetic research and no money to maintain national cemeteries or various construction projects.

"I keep hearing the Senate, the Senate. I put the responsibility directly in the House. We could pass a clean (continuing resolution) and you wouldn't be sitting here," said Rep. Corrine Brown, D-Fla. "I don't blame the Senate. I thank God for the Senate."

Miller said there was bipartisan support in the House for legislation that would fund the entire Department of Veterans Affairs a full year in advance so it—so it would not be subject to end-of-the-year brinkmanship. The VA had so far not endorsed the effort.

OBAMACARE AND OUR NATIONAL DEBT

(Mr. BARR asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. BARR. Mr. Speaker, in the context of the debate that is going on in the country right now about how we get our national finances in order, I think it is very important to remember that it would be unfair for future generations of Americans—for our kids and our grandkids—if we raise the debt ceiling without making the reforms necessary to get government spending under control. No one wants to default on our national debt, but no one should want to leave mountains of debt to our future children and grandchildren.

Congress must continue to focus on reforming government to avert a national debt crisis. The President says ObamaCare shouldn't be part of the discussion related to funding the government or to raising the debt limit, but ObamaCare is fundamentally connected to spending and debt. The President's signature health care law, after all, was passed through the reconciliation process, which is reserved exclusively for budget-related bills.

For those who use this special budget process to now say that it is not budget-related is very cynical. ObamaCare's projected cost has more than doubled since the President originally claimed it would reduce the deficit. It will cost this country \$2 trillion over the next 10 years. I urge everyone to remember that ObamaCare is part of the discussion about how we reduce our national debt.

IN MEMORY OF NEVADA ASSEMBLYWOMAN PEGGY PIERCE

(Mr. HORSFORD asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute.)

Mr. HORSFORD. Mr. Speaker, I come to the floor today saddened by the news that Nevada Assemblywoman Peggy Pierce has passed away.

She was the staunch liberal conscience of the Nevada State Legislature, but she commanded respect from both sides of the aisle because of her steadfast belief in her principles, because she was a hard worker and because she cared so deeply about the well-being of her constituents and the people of Nevada.

I first met Peggy before her time in the assembly, when she was a fellow organizer, helping to coordinate rapid response for displaced workers in Las Vegas after the tragic events of September 11. She was as committed to helping others then as she was in her tenure in the Nevada State Legislature.

She succumbed to cancer, but she did not lose the fight. She put her constituents before herself, and in that sense, she had always been a true public servant.

My thoughts and prayers are with her family.

You will truly be missed, my friend.

GOVERNMENT SHUTDOWN IN THE GOLDEN STATE

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 3, 2013, the gentleman from California (Mr. TAKANO) is recognized for 60 minutes as the designee of the minority leader.

Mr. TAKANO. Mr. Speaker, today, I will be hosting a number of Members from my home State of California, a State in which the population is so diverse and in which the culture is so rich that it is often described as a microcosm of America.

Every language, every nationality, every ethnicity is represented in the

Golden State—a State that is the 12th-largest economy in the world. California's economy is so big that its GDP rivals that of some full-blown, industrialized nations, including those of Australia, Spain, Mexico, and South Korea. The economy in California is crucial to the national economy.

I am here tonight with my colleagues to speak against the government shutdown that has been manufactured and orchestrated by the House Republicans—a shutdown that is harming the national economy, a shutdown that is harming the California economy and a shutdown that is harming the very communities that we represent.

In my district, the 41st District, which represents Riverside, Moreno Valley, Perris, the largest employer is March Air Reserve Base, with 8,500 people working at the base in some capacity. When the shutdown hit, 500 of these workers were affected by the furloughs. While Congress passed legislation allowing these employees to go back to work, roughly 1,000 National Guardsmen at the base still will not be able to drill this month and will not receive pay.

It is not just our servicemembers who are hurt by this reckless shutdown. Low-income children in my district are suffering, too. The Riverside County Office of Education receives Federal funding through the Head Start program in order to provide childhood development services and to promote school readiness for children under the age of 5. Because of this shutdown, the county is not able to draw down their grant money, jeopardizing these vital services for nearly 3,500 young children in my county.

About an hour east of my district is Joshua Tree National Park, where 92 park employees were given furlough notices. When the shutdown happened, park rangers were forced to notify campers that they had to vacate the park within 48 hours. There are 7,000 people a day who visit Joshua Tree National Park, and this shutdown is estimated to cost nearly \$8,000 a day.

Not just the park and its employees are going to suffer; local businesses will suffer as well. A cafe next to the park normally has a line out the door. The other day, the manager reported that the cafe made only \$39. This is a small business, Mr. Speaker.

We have to end this shutdown, not just for the furloughed public employees but for small businesses like that cafe.

I am very pleased to be joined by several of my California colleagues, the first of whom is from southern California, the distinguished gentleman, ALAN LOWENTHAL. He represents the cities of Long Beach, Garden Grove and Cypress. He sits on the Foreign Affairs Committee and the Committee on Natural Resources.

I am happy to yield to the gentleman from California's 47th District.

Mr. LOWENTHAL. Thank you, Congressman TAKANO.