

Editorial: Government shutdown supporters out of touch

Spokesman-Review Editorial Board

Americans want to shut down government shutdowns. They've never liked them because they don't accomplish anything.

They didn't want the shutdown over the debt-ceiling dispute. They didn't want one over the Affordable Care Act. They didn't want to cut off the Homeland Security Department over the president's executive order on illegal immigration.

And now they do not want one over the issue of defunding Planned Parenthood.

Each time a rump group of House conservatives has squared off for a shutdown, the entire Republican Party has emerged with a black eye.

House Speaker John Boehner, who has greater anti-abortion credentials than any congressional upstart, is under attack because he has correctly surmised his party would get run over in a game of chicken with President Barack Obama. Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell agrees.

The House Republican caucus has been shown polls that reveal that most people have not seen the videos that sparked the latest abortion protests. Most people, the polling shows, associate the organization with women's health services, not abortions. Most people will blame Republicans for the harm to government services and the economy that would come from another shutdown.

According to a CNN poll, 71 percent of Americans want to avoid it.

Rep. Tom McClintock, a staunch conservative from California, resigned from the House Freedom Caucus on Wednesday and authored a letter that bluntly criticizes the group's stubborn insistence on scorched-earth tactics. He says the group has hindered the advance of conservative causes, not helped them.

Rep. Mike Simpson, R-Idaho, got to the crux of the matter when he told the Associated Press, "If you're pro-life, the last thing you want to do is have the focus changed to the government shutdown ... rather than the activities of Planned Parenthood. At some point in time, you've got to face reality."

Rep. Cathy McMorris Rodgers, R-Wash., recently told The Spokesman-Review's editorial board that shutdowns are not an effective way to govern. She's right.

But Idaho's other representative, Raul Labrador, was among 18 Republicans who signed a letter saying they would block any actions to keep the government running if they didn't get their wish.

Perhaps they feel they're in such politically safe districts they could withstand unpopular actions. Perhaps they reside in political cocoons so tight that broad public sentiment can't get through. But for whatever reason, they refuse to look at the larger picture.

Congress must pass a continuing resolution by Sept. 30. After that, it needs to adopt a long-range spending plan. Big issues such as transportation and the fate of the Export-Import Bank await congressional action. Tuning out everything except abortion is a sure political loser, and it would be bad for the country.

Americans want their government to stop tripping over itself. They've had it with the Keystone Kops routine. Get serious about governing or get out of the way.