

The logo for 'The American Spectator' is displayed on a solid red rectangular background. The word 'The' is in a small, white, serif font above the word 'American'. 'American' and 'Spectator' are in a larger, white, serif font, stacked vertically. The 'S' in 'Spectator' is particularly large and stylized.

The American Spectator

Shutdown Artists

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Resisting the sweeping “shutdown” authority of our beloved Obama administration.

Press and pundits on the left and right seem in agreement that our government’s ongoing “partial shutdown” highlights the extensive federal presence in our everyday lives. Unsurprisingly, the current predicament provides yet another illustration of this administration’s disturbing view that its powers are boundless. In this instance, our president claims unlimited “shutdown authority” over any location or activity even tangentially touched by some part of the federal government.

Recently my wife and I have decamped from The Nation’s Only Boom Town to a splendid small city in Alabama. Along with Americans everywhere, we were regaled last week by widespread reports of the National Park Service’s unsuccessful — not to mention unseemly — efforts to exclude elderly veterans from the World War Two memorial on the public mall in Washington.

On Wednesday our local newspaper here, the *Anniston Star*, ran an editorial on the shameful event. The *Star* opined that, at the end of the day, the veterans’ ordeal would be but “a sliver” of the shutdown story. “Nonetheless,” the *Star* continued, “it is a quintessential example of how the federal government, like it or not, is intertwined into everything in our lives.” The reliably pro-Obama *Star* concluded from this observation that without this pervasive government presence, “good people suffer in various and unnecessary ways.”

The next day Tad DeHaven of the Cato Institute, which is hardly in step with the *Star* politically, wrote that although “some of the federal leviathan’s tentacles will take a brief respite” during the shutdown, “its reach into practically every facet of our lives will continue largely uninterrupted.” Mr. DeHaven and Cato differ with the *Star* on whether this is a good thing.

For several years we have seen this president and his administration stretch and even disregard the law in order, as the president himself put it, to punish enemies and reward friends. Thus, the

Internal Revenue Service has targeted critics of the president and of his administration's policies — most recently the widely admired physician Dr. Ben Carson — for audits and other intentional harassment. This comes on the heels of abusive and corrupt conduct by numerous other agencies (Solyndra, Fast and Furious, a list far too long for recitation), and at a time when the increasingly unpopular “Obamacare” program promises to take federal intrusion into our daily lives to a new level altogether.

Now, as shutdown-related political stunts occupy center stage, we see yet another brazen assertion of authority — the authority to pick and choose what to shut down, to maximize political impact (especially when accompanied by a chorus of compliant media). The potential here is breathtaking, and the administration's carefully chosen targets underscore this fact.

Consider the case of Mount Vernon. This popular historic site on the Potomac River just downstream from Washington is privately owned and operated. Mt. Vernon had announced “we're open” on its website, to make clear it was not affected by the shutdown. But some parking lots adjacent to the site, although owned by Mt. Vernon, are also maintained by the National Park Service. On Thursday, the NPS entered the parking lots to erect barriers that prevented public parking. The lots are not guarded, and the NPS had to spend time and money in order to put the physical blockade into effect. (The issue was apparently resolved and the lots, at last report, are open once again.)

Elsewhere, the NPS has ordered scores of private businesses in national parks to close. For example, the Pisgah Inn, a privately owned and operated hotel on the Blue Ridge Parkway near Asheville, North Carolina, was ordered to close by uniformed rangers. This show of intimidating force occurred notwithstanding that the NPS had declared the Parkway itself to be a “thoroughfare,” not subject to closure. The owner of the Pisgah Inn initially complied with the NPS, but reconsidered and has now defied the NPS by remaining open.

According to the *Washington Times*, an NPS spokesman said that the National Park System is “considered to be a single entity, and without an appropriation, the entire system is closed and cannot reopen until funding is restored.” The spokesman added, “We do not believe it is appropriate or feasible to have some parts of the system open while others are closed to the public.” Of course, another ranger was reported saying flatly, “We've been told to make life as difficult for people as we can.”

At the same time, amenities at military bases appear not to be subject to the “single entity” closure theory. Grocery stores at bases are closed, so that our troops are inconvenienced. But the president's golf course at Andrews Air Force Base remains open. Similar examples abound.

Noting the administration's behavior thus far, what is to prevent closure of the George Washington Parkway along the Potomac River outside Washington, or for that matter other federal highways? Given the federal government's partial funding of school lunch programs, why not order the closure of elementary schools across the land? Or the shuttering of private colleges that receive Pell Grant money? For that matter, why not blockade sidewalks along every local street subject in one way or another to federal regulation?

The “shutdown power” is limited only by one’s imagination, which brings us back to my local newspaper’s editorial observation that the federal government is “intertwined into everything in our lives.” Perhaps we should all see that the government’s pervasive presence is the problem, not the solution. We could all do with a broader shutdown, aimed at intrusive and unnecessary federal programs.