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Shutdown fatigue sets in

- By [John Zyskowski](#)
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Maybe people were busy anticipating the Thanksgiving holiday or saw fewer partisan heels being dug in. Or maybe they were just plain tired of the whole topic, but the threat of a government shutdown on Nov. 18 and the by now routine last-minute compromise that avoided it drew hardly any of the angst or attention of the year's earlier congressional budget stare-downs.

“Boring!” wrote one reader in response to a post on the FCW.com "**Management Watch**" [blog](#) by **Camille Tuutti** asking if another potential shutdown mattered.

“Shutdown threat — yawn,” another reader commented. “The public has seen the pony go over the stick many times, and it no longer is drawing a crowd.”

And yet here we go again. The funding for many agencies' operations is tied to a continuing resolution that is set to expire Dec. 16, which means that a fifth potential, if only partial, shutdown looms.

What will happen Dec. 16 is still uncertain, but much like the lead-up to the Nov. 18 deadline and eventual compromise, legislators are showing little inclination to actually halt government operations just to make a point.

“There is a concerted effort by members of Congress to get these bills done so they aren't fighting battles over this year's budget well into the next calendar year and as the election season heats up,” writes the Committee for a Responsible Federal Budget on its blog "[The Bottom Line](#).”

Even so, the next round of negotiations has the potential for controversy. The “minibus” bill that averted the Nov. 18 shutdown provides about \$130 billion for fiscal 2012 for the departments of Agriculture, Transportation, Commerce, Justice, and Housing and Urban Development. The bill also provides budgets for smaller agencies such as NASA, the Food and Drug Administration, and the National Science Foundation.

The bill funds the rest of the government with a continuing resolution only through Dec. 16. Lawmakers have left themselves with nine fiscal 2012 appropriations bills to hammer out in December.

In particular, the Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education bill and the Financial Services bill could attract controversial policy riders linked to the funding of the health care and Wall Street reform acts.

But the fear and anger that previous shutdown threats stirred are remarkably absent now. Part of the reason for the apathy might be the return to normalcy — Capitol Hill-style — of the mid-November minibus approval, in which “once again, Congress hits the snooze button,” wrote **Tad DeHaven** on the Cato Institute’s “[Downsizing the Federal Government](#)” blog. That continuing resolution is largely devoid of anything that would rein in the size and scope of the federal government. “The bill is largely business as usual,” he wrote.

The lack of shutdown-related alarm might also be a result of agency officials feeling comfortable with the plans they have made to deal with such an event, which has been threatened on April 8, Sept. 30, Oct. 4, Nov. 18 and now Dec. 16.

“There are plans in place that have made this more routine” compared to the shutdowns of 1995 and 1996, said Stan Collender, a budget expert at Qorvis Communications, in an [FCW](#) story by Tuutti and **Alice Lipowicz**.

The fear of furloughs hasn’t seemed to distress federal rank-and-file employees in significant ways either. Overall job satisfaction and commitment among government employees declined by only 1.5 percent compared to last year — from a score of 65 to 64 out of 100 — according to a Partnership for Public Service [survey](#) released last month.

Survey authors were surprised by the negligible size of that decline in the midst of possible pay freezes and furloughs, Tuutti reported in [FCW](#).