

October 9, 2013

Community Statement on Shutdown of the Federal Government

My colleagues and I write as college and university leaders, concerned about the effect the ongoing political paralysis in Washington is having on our country. The shutdown of federal agencies and the potential for default if the government's borrowing limit is not raised are significantly impacting the nation's economy and the lives of many of our fellow citizens. This stalemate threatens to exacerbate the cynicism Americans already feel about the function and importance of their government.

This is a challenging time for our democratic process, a process that has served our country well for more than 200 years.

We are deeply concerned by the growing resignation of the American people to this "new normal": the idea that Washington is so broken and dysfunctional that it cannot be fixed, only ignored or ridiculed. Our democratic government is most effective when it embraces open discourse, bipartisan cooperation, and the art of compromise. These traditions have served us well since our founding and are at the heart of the success of the American Experiment.

We believe this gradual acceptance of government dysfunction should be vigorously challenged and that each college and university can play a role in doing so. We call on higher education institutions around the country to engage in conversations, lectures, and events, both on and off campus, that bring together students, business and community leaders, and the public. We should focus attention on the processes that ensure responsible government and sound budget policy.

Our nation was built upon the promise of a new form of government. Inherent in this promise is the idea of compromise and respect for the views of others. The belief in ideas and respect for conflicting viewpoints is also a core purpose of education. Together, we can and must act to ensure the current stalemate in Washington is used to renew our students' interest and commitment to democracy, rather than to discourage it.

We hope each of our institutions will make that possibility real for students and communities across the nation.

Sincerely,



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