

Opinion: What did we learn from the shutdown?

By Patrick Stelmach

Government is simply a word for the things we decide to do together. And if there is one lesson that the recent 16-day government shutdown taught us, it is this: there are a lot of things we Americans have decided to do, together, and people were angry when these things were taken away.

Michelle Langbehn and hundreds of other cancer patients were heartbroken when they were denied potentially life-saving treatment protocols after the shuttering of the National Institutes of Health. World War II veterans rebelled when they couldn't visit the monuments in Washington. Wildland firefighters were justifiably upset when they were forced to work, putting their lives in harm's way, without pay. And it all had a ripple effect – when Yosemite National Park was closed, when spending by government agencies ground to a halt, when thousands of federal workers in Rep. Tom McClintock's district were, in effect, furloughed, it drained \$24 billion out of the U.S. economy, according to the S&P index.

This all supposedly was a fight over Obamacare, but actually it was about much, much more. The conflict centered on a fundamental question: What is the rightful place of government in our lives? During the shutdown, several competing philosophies emerged.

One philosophy, embraced by Rep. McClintock and the Tea Party faction of the GOP, held that government has no role in our lives, save for the bare essentials (and even those were threatened by the shutdown). And they were willing to sacrifice our economy to get their way. It is a shame that Rep. McClintock voted no on the measure to end the government

shutdown and to avoid default, after seeing weeks of demonstrations outside his office calling for a budget deal.

The day before the vote, Oct. 15, Michelle Langbehn and California Fair Share delivered the petition signed by over 140,000 Americans urging Congress to end the shutdown and help her fight cancer. Michelle shared her inspirational story and said, "I stand here as a voting American whose voice is being ignored. We, the citizens, are the losers. We voted for politicians, like Tom McClintock, who shut down the government and put American lives at risk. We deserve better."

The second philosophy, and one that we at California Fair Share believe in, along with most Americans, is pretty different: Let's do all we can for an economy that works for all of us, and that gives the most people a chance at a fair shot at a good life. And a shutdown that nearly destroys all progress toward this goal is almost antithetical to this philosophy.

Is there any question that this second approach is embraced by the majority of Rep. McClintock's constituents? Consider that after the rise of Sen. Ted Cruz and after the Tea Party overran Republican leadership in the House, an NBC/Wall Street Journal poll found that only 24 percent of respondents held a positive view of the GOP -- the lowest such finding in the poll's history.

And now, government is up and running again, much to the relief of Californians who want to take their families camping in Yosemite and small-business owners, from Truckee to Oakhurst, who rely on the outdoor recreation community for their livelihoods.

But the budget fights are not over. Government is only funded until January, and the issue of the debt ceiling will return a month later. Now is a good time for all of us to reflect on the proper role of government in our lives and our priorities

as a nation, and, most importantly, how we might align these two things.

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