

Eight things the chaos on Capitol Hill isn't about

By [Steve Thorngate](#)

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So it's happened: [the first U.S. government shutdown in 17 years](#). Federal workers have been sent home without pay. Museums and national parks are closed. Any number of federal programs have ground to a halt. The debt ceiling looms—potentially [a much larger problem](#). And it's all somehow related to Obamacare. What's this all about?

Well, here are a few things it *isn't* about:

1. **Runaway government spending.** The shutdown and coming debt-ceiling fight aren't about Republicans resorting to desperate measures to stop the runaway train of federal spending. For better or for worse, [the brakes have long since been applied](#). And introducing needless chaos isn't going to help anything.

2. **Runaway budget deficits.** Yeah, [those are already going down, too](#). They're still around—hence the always-looming debt ceiling—but if you think the problem is deficits (I don't, but whatever), it's a problem that's already getting better.
3. **Hitting the debt ceiling.** We aren't about to hit the debt ceiling. [We hit it months ago](#). What we're about to hit is the point at which the Treasury can no longer move money around to make things work anyway—the point at which it can't cover for the legislative branch's irresponsibility anymore.
4. **Congressional pay.** Yes, members of Congress have [constitutionally guaranteed salaries](#), not subject to furlough like other federal employees. While that may be offensive, it's only symbolically offensive—it's a distraction from the much larger problems on Capitol Hill. And *really*, shutdown instigators, you promise to [donate your pay to charity](#)? From a friend: "Instead, why don't you learn the name of the people who clean your offices, protect your building, and cook in your cafeteria—the ones you put out of work today—and pay their bills?"
5. **Circumstances outside John Boehner's control.** It's clear that the Speaker of the House doesn't have control over his caucus. It's not at all clear that he couldn't [lead the House more effectively if he cared to](#).
6. **Bipartisan business as usual.** Yes, both parties have used the debt ceiling to make political points in the past. No, a Democratic House has [never consistently treated the debt ceiling as a piece of leverage](#) against an opposition president.
7. **Strident partisanship.** Speaking of both-sides-ism, just don't. The problem here isn't that Neither Side Is Willing To Reach Across the Aisle. It's the opposite: [a deep divide within one party](#).
8. **Stopping Obamacare.** [It continues](#). The insurance exchanges opened today, and the biggest problem so far is that [people are lining up out the e-door to participate](#).

But while even a government shutdown can't stop Obamacare in its tracks, all this brinksmanship from the congressional Tea Partiers [is indeed about the health-care law](#). Do they really think they can force Democrats to cave on funding Obamacare? Or are they just [looking ahead to future political advantages](#)? Whatever their plan is, it doesn't seem to include much actual governing. That's a problem for party and nation alike.