

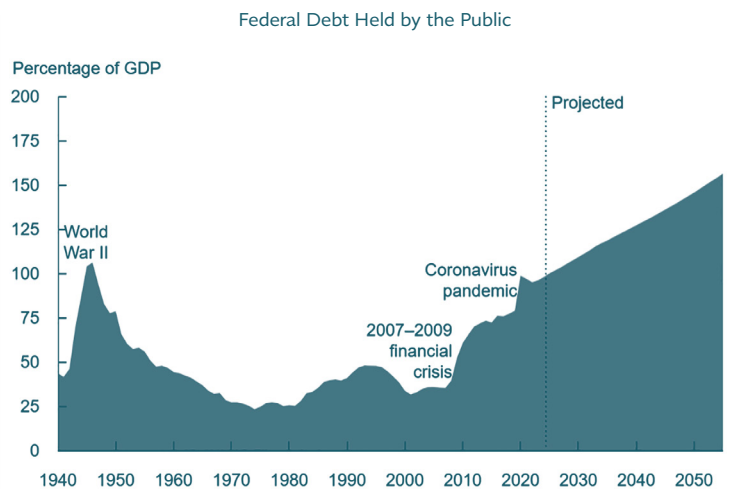
PROTECT THE CONDITIONS OF OUR PROSPERITY

# Secure America's Financial Future

Our \$38 trillion-and-rising national debt is the greatest threat to America's safety and prosperity. Excessive debt hurts America's long-term strength by stagnating our economy and limiting our ability to react to serious threats. Institutional reforms can help Congress make better budgeting decisions to control spending while growing the economy.

## THE ISSUE

CVA agrees with former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs Admiral Mike Mullen that our national debt is “the single biggest threat to our national security.”<sup>1</sup> Years of reckless overspending have increasingly crowded out investment, undermining economic strength, opportunity, and America's ability to fund a strong national defense. Since 2020, the federal debt has been larger compared to the American economy than at any point since World War II, and interest payments now exceed the entire Pentagon budget.<sup>2</sup> Congressional incentives need to change, or these problems will not be addressed before fiscal crisis strikes.



Source: Congressional Budget Office, Long-Term Budget Outlook: 2025-2055

## POLICY SOLUTIONS

### BREAK THE SHUTDOWN CYCLE

Federal government shutdowns did not exist until a Carter administration memo created them.<sup>3</sup> Nowadays, shutdown politics replaces congressional deliberation and consensus-building with government-by-crisis. U.S. debt grows faster, and the defense-industrial base suffers as a result. If the budget is late, Congress should require broad-based automatic continuing appropriations and Members should be required to stay in D.C. until they pass the new fiscal year's appropriations.<sup>4</sup>

### BETTER DECISIONS THROUGH COMPREHENSIVE BUDGETING

Congress has struggled for years to pass annual appropriations bills, which now cover only one-fourth of federal spending. Congressional committees should be able to manage all spending and revenue programs through an annual, comprehensive budget in a single bill, working within allowances for each of their portfolios.<sup>5</sup> This system would spur more trade-off-conscious debates about our national priorities, better steward taxpayer resources, and reinvigorate Congress.

## GUIDE SPENDING WITH STABLE, PREDICTABLE TARGETS

Congress needs effective, practical spending controls. Tying federal spending limits to rolling averages of prior economic growth or revenue would let Congress balance the federal budget over the medium term through more stable targets that are less volatile than annual revenues.<sup>6</sup> This approach can avoid overspending during growth or underfunding defense during recessions.

## ACCOUNTABILITY THROUGH REAUTHORIZATION

Imbalances in Social Security and Medicare drive nearly all of the federal government's long-term deficits. To delay and ideally avoid a fiscal crisis, Congress should create a fiscal commission that reviews all spending or at least major contributors to debt growth.<sup>7</sup> The commission's recommendations could give Congress time to fix its budgeting processes and adjust programs appropriately moving forward.

## CONTACT

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## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Tyrone Marshall, "[Debt is Biggest Threat to National Security, Chairman Says](#)," American Forces Press Service, DVIDS, September 21, 2011.

<sup>2</sup> Benn Steil and Elisabeth Harding, "[For the First Time, the U.S. Is Spending More on Debt Interest than Defense](#)," Council on Foreign Relations, May 23, 2024.

<sup>3</sup> Tom Shoop, "[That Time a Lawyer Invented the Government Shutdown](#)," Government Executive, October 27, 2022.

<sup>4</sup> Kurt Couchman, "[Modernizing Federal Budgeting Starts with Preventing Shutdowns](#)," Americans for Prosperity, September 29, 2025.

<sup>5</sup> Kurt Couchman, "[What Is The Comprehensive Congressional Budget Act?](#)" Americans for Prosperity, September 5, 2024.

<sup>6</sup> On designing responsible budget targets, see: Kurt Couchman, "[What Is The Responsible Budget Targets Act?](#)" Americans for Prosperity, June 21, 2023; Kurt Couchman, "[A Better Balanced Budget Amendment Can Succeed](#)," Americans for Prosperity, November 9, 2023.

<sup>7</sup> "[Bipartisan Support for a Fiscal Commission](#)," Committee for a Responsible Federal Budget, February 29, 2024.