

Rep. Matt Rosendal is among Republicans blocking budget bills from advancing

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As a federal government shutdown looms, a handful of Republicans in the House are blocking spending bills. Among the most reliable disruptors is Montana Congressman Matt Rosendale. Montana Public Radio's Shaylee Ragar reports on what Montanans have to say about Rosendale's stance.

SHAYLEE RAGAR, BYLINE: For a lot of Montanans, political jockeying in Washington, D.C., is far from top of mind.

JOHN KOCH: People flat don't pay attention.

RAGAR: That's John Koch, a retired state trooper, talking about his neighbors in Lewistown. It's the geographic center of the state, but far removed from the happenings of Congress 2,000 miles away. Yet Koch says while those around him aren't paying attention to lawmakers in Washington, he is, and he wants them to tighten the federal government's wallet.

KOCH: We have got to do something dramatic to change the everyday philosophy. And this constant spending, spending, spending - you know, let's just print more money. Let's just print more money. You know, we'll all be fine.

RAGAR: That's not the way to go, he says. And that's why he admires his representative in Congress, Republican Matt Rosendale, who's defying the leaders of his own party. Rosendale, a member of the far-right Freedom Caucus, says that government spending is out of control. He wants to know the price tag of all 12 federal spending bills before the House takes a vote. And he's sticking to his demands, even if it leads to a government shutdown.

MATT ROSENDALE: We can start making the difficult decisions that people have not been willing to make for the last 10, 15 years and say we must rein in spending.

RAGAR: Earlier this week, Rosendale was one of just five House Republicans to side with Democrats against GOP leaders' proposal to fund defense spending over the next year, leading to the bill's demise. In a recent interview, Rosendale said he's prepared to continue to vote no until his demands are met. That includes his expected no vote on any stopgap funding measure to keep the government open past the end of this month.

ROSENDALE: The government continues on, business as usual. When we have these supposed shutdowns, it's more like a slowdown. And if that's what it takes in order for us to get our fiscal house in order, I truly believe that most of the people across the state of Montana would support that.

RAGAR: While Rosendale is diminishing the impact of a shutdown, rephrasing it as a slowdown, Montanans who work for the federal government could lose their paychecks, and others could be cut off from vital services down the line, like federal food assistance. That's the concern of Gayle Carlson, president of the Montana Food Bank Network. She says her group is already preparing for how to respond.

GAYLE CARLSON: The impact is pretty severe for those federal government employees, but it also impacts thousands and thousands of children in schools with child nutrition programs and young women and mothers with babies and, you know, families who are trying to provide for their households.

RAGAR: During previous shutdowns, food banks in Montana offered groceries directly to federal employees like U.S. Forest Service workers who lost pay. Other federal agencies that employ and serve thousands of Montanans, the Bureau of Land Management and the National Park Service, didn't have any information yet on what happens here if the government does shut down. But they'll likely need to have some answers soon.

For NPR News, I'm Shaylee Ragar in Helena. Transcript provided by NPR, Copyright NPR.

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