

## **What does a “government shutdown” mean?**

A Government Shutdown means that there is a lapse in the funds appropriated to keep the federal government running.

Currently, members of Congress and the President are working to negotiate a federal budget for the remainder of fiscal year 2011. Unfortunately, these negotiations have not yet yielded a compromise. As a result, there is a probability that the government will shut down when the current temporary budget expires at midnight on Friday, April 8th.

Some of my constituents have asked what a government shutdown would mean in their lives and how vital services would be impacted. I hope you’ll find this information helpful.

## **What services will continue?**

Services that are deemed essential for the safety of human life and the protection of property will continue. This includes the armed forces, border patrol, law enforcement, fire fighting, and federal workers who provide medical care on the job. The Postal Service and the Federal Reserve, which are both self-funded, will also continue to operate.

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## **Will federal employees continue to be paid?**

In the event of a shutdown, each federal agency is required to determine which employees are “essential” and which are “non-essential.” Essential personnel are required to report for work as usual, while non-essential personnel will be furloughed. Neither group, however, will receive any pay until the shutdown ends. Additionally, neither group is guaranteed back pay when the shutdown ends, although this has occurred in the past. The budget legislation that ends the shutdown will determine whether federal employees receive back pay.

**Will air travel be affected? Will air traffic controllers and airport security officers be on duty?**

Air travel will not be affected. Air traffic controllers and transportation security officers are considered essential personnel. They will be on duty, but will not be paid until the government shutdown ends.

**What will happen to our military personnel in Iraq and Afghanistan?**

Military personnel in combat zones will be considered essential personnel. They will remain on duty without pay until the shutdown ends.

In this regard, uniformed personnel are treated no differently than “excepted” federal civilian employees who are similarly required to continue working during a shutdown but whose pay will be delayed until appropriations are enacted. If, therefore, current funding lapses on April 9 and appropriations are not approved until after April 15, military personnel would not receive a full pay check on April 15, though they may receive partial pay for days worked from April 1-8. If a lapse extends past the next payday, scheduled on April 29, no pay would be provided.

It is correct that uniformed military personnel were paid as usual during the most recent government shutdowns at the end of 1995 and in early 1996, but that is because the FY1996 defense appropriations act became law on December 1, 1995, so appropriations were available.

**What will happen to military personnel outside of combat zones and to civilian employees of the Department of Defense?**

The Department of Defense will determine which uniformed personnel and civilian employees are essential to "provide for the national security." Essential personnel will remain on duty without pay until the shutdown ends. Non-essential personnel will be furloughed.

**Will Social Security checks still go out?**

Yes, however new Social Security claims may not be processed.

**Will I still be able to see a doctor if I am covered by Medicare, Medicaid, or another federal health care plan?**

Yes. Doctors will still see you and the various federal health care systems will continue to reimburse doctors.

**Will veterans' benefits continue?**

VA hospitals will remain open, however the last government shutdown in 1996 saw many veterans' benefits cut or reduced.

**Will I get my unemployment check?**

The federal government provides money to the states to finance unemployment insurance. Depending on the length of the shutdown, the states may run out of money, which would require the state to step in and advance the money to keep their programs running. Otherwise, benefits could be stopped.

**Will federal retirees continue to receive their pensions?**

Most federal pension checks are issued electronically on the first of the month. The pension payments for May have already been authorized and will go out as planned. Thus, even if the shutdown lasts until May 1

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, payments will not be interrupted.

**I am planning to visit Washington, DC. Will the tourist destinations in Washington, DC be open?**

Unfortunately, many tourist destinations will be closed.

- The various monuments and memorials in Washington are outdoors, are not gated, and are open 24 hours a day. This should not change. However, National Park Rangers will not be on duty to give docent talks.

- The Capitol Visitor Center will be closed and all Capitol tour guides will be furloughed. Tours of the Capitol Building will not be available.

- The House and Senate Galleries will remain open to the public whenever the House and Senate are in session. This will allow the public to observe as Congress works to resolve the budget impasse.

- All White House tours will be cancelled until the shutdown ends. This includes the annual Spring Garden tours, which are scheduled for April 9-10. For updates on when White House tours will resume, I recommend calling the White House tour information hotline at (202) 456-7041 to check on the status of your tour.

- The Library of Congress will be closed; no tours will be available.
- The Smithsonian Institution will be closed. The Smithsonian includes 19 museums and galleries (most of the major museums in DC), the National Zoo, and several research facilities.

- The National Gallery of Art will be closed.

- For information about tourist destinations that will be open during the shutdown, read [this](#)

[Washington Post story](#)

**Will National Parks be open?**

No. National Parks, National Monuments, National Historic Sites, and National Wildlife Refuges will close.

**Will passports and visas continue to be processed?**

No. The State Department employees responsible for these activities will be furloughed. During the 1996 government shutdown, about 200,000 applications for passports reportedly went unprocessed and U.S. tourist industries and airlines reportedly sustained millions of dollars in losses.

**Will I get my tax refund?**

Some tax refunds will be delayed during the shutdown. The IRS will not process tax returns filed on paper during the shutdown. The IRS expects that electronically filed will be processed as usual. However, unforeseen problems could arise even with electronically-filed returns. All taxpayers will get their refunds eventually.

**Will federal courts continue to operate?**

It depends on the length of the shutdown. During past government shutdowns, courts continued to operate using funds from court fees and funds leftover from previous years. Some courts declined to start new civil trials during the shutdown. However, if there is a prolonged shutdown, the courts may run out of funds and be forced to close.

**Will Congress shut down?**

Because Congress must continue to operate in order to resolve the budget impasse, my colleagues and I will continue to work.

**Will congressional staff continue to work?**

Like other federal agencies, each congressional office will determine which staff members are essential. Each Member of Congress has the authority to make this decision for his or her staff. The Committee on House Administration has issued guidance on this issue, which states that staffers should be deemed essential if they are needed to help the Member of Congress execute his or her constitutional responsibilities, or if they are needed to protect life and property. Like other federal employees, congressional staff who are deemed essential and those who are furloughed will not be paid during a shutdown.

My offices, both in DC and in the first congressional district, will remain open.

I understand that this situation causes uncertainty for many. Please feel free to reach out to my DC office or any of my three district offices if you have further questions.

For further information, here are some additional resources:

- [U.S. Office of Personnel Management - "Guidance and Information on Furlough "](#)
- [Congressional Research Service - "Shutdown of the Federal Government: Causes, Processes and Effects"](#)
- [Sightseeing Plans in Washington, DC](#)
- [Washington Post: Shutdown Plan Details](#)

