

It's All Politics

THE GOVERNMENT SHUTDOWN

Trickle-Down Stories: How The Shutdown Feels Across America

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By Liz Halloran



A sport fishing guide in the Florida Keys protests the closure of Everglades National Park waters for fishing as part of the U.S. government shutdown.

Joe Skipper/Reuters/Landov

Most Americans say they aren't directly affected by the shutdown. But some pockets of society, beyond furloughed federal workers and their families, are being severely hit.

We used NPR's social media network to ask about the impact and were deluged by messages from people who are worried and scared, especially veterans and the disabled, and many others who are angry and frustrated.

Small-business owner Michelle Detry in Albuquerque, N.M., says her consulting operation is "being decimated" by the shutdown. Students like Paul Nooney at the College of St. Rose in Albany, N.Y., say they can't get research done or financial aid forms completed because government databases — from the Census Bureau and Internal Revenue Service to the National Science Foundation — have gone dark.

As for those who live paycheck-to-paycheck waiting tables, caring for children or providing adventures to tourists at the nation's shuttered national parks? Some face potentially devastating damage to their wallets.

Here are individual stories from across the country:

Background Check Bottleneck

Emergency medical technician Jennell Leveque is among those who have been unable to start new jobs because background checks, including fingerprint scans, aren't being processed by federal agencies. The company that hired her in Santa Clara County, Calif., "can't clear me until the government goes to work and does the background checks," she says. "I was on my last day of training after being unemployed for far too long, and now, because of the government, I still cannot earn a living."

Mission Failure

A rocket launch scheduled at the Spaceport in Truth or Consequences, N.M., was to be a grand experiment monitored by a documentary crew with cameras in the spaceship, and watched in classrooms by high school students. "This experiment was to verify that we could be able to send and receive [tweets] and other Wi-Fi capabilities during space launches that are going to take place more frequently from the Spaceport here in southern New Mexico — if Virgin Galactic has their way," filmmaker Philip Lewis told us. But the rocket touchdown area was going to be on federal land. Experiment aborted.

Career Program For Blind Suspended

For more than four decades, the World Services for the Blind in Little Rock, Ark., has partnered with the IRS to provide unique career training for blind or visually impaired adults, Melanie Jones of World Services tells us. Classes are on hold because the instructors work for the IRS, and a dozen currently enrolled students from around the country are sitting tight, waiting to hear when and if their program will resume. Jones sent us a YouTube video of the empty classroom hallways. She titled it, "It's Too Quiet Up Here."

Booze Backlog

"None of our spirits formulas or labels are getting approved!" Sarah Manski of Ascendant Spirits Inc. in Santa Barbara, Calif., lamented in a note to us. She was one of

a number of brewers and distillers who told us the shutdown means that the federal Alcohol and Tobacco Tax and Trade Bureau, which handles such applications, isn't open for business. "Everything has come to a screeching halt," says David Monahan of Feisty Spirits Distillery in Fort Collins, Colo., "and our new product releases for the holidays is in jeopardy."

The Arts Go Dark

Tourists in Washington know that productions at the historic Ford's Theater have been suspended because of the shutdown, but innovative productions in other parts of the country have been scuttled, too. That includes the We Players performance of *Macbeth* planned for staging at San Francisco's Fort Point, a Civil War-era fortress under the Golden Gate Bridge. We Players, says artistic director Ava Roy, has worked since 2008 with the National Park Service, staging *Hamlet* on Alcatraz Island, and *The Odyssey* and *Twelfth Night* on historic ships. "We had to cancel numerous shows, which affects over 1,000 ticket holders and could easily mean financial collapse for our small, nonprofit arts organization," Roy tells us.

War Re-Enactors Shut Out

Adrienne Robertson, who works at the Library of Virginia in Richmond, says that beyond the potential of feeling the shutdown squeeze at work, she worries what will happen to Civil War re-enactors like her, who are in the middle of a cycle of 150th anniversary celebrations. "The closed parks mean a lot of commemorative events either will not happen, or will be severely underplayed," Robertson says.

Agricultural Uncertainty

What is this seed? How many people live in this county? What is the official definition of "free range" eggs? These are the kinds of questions Nicole Sanchez says she routinely gets as an area extension agent who works with commercial fruit and vegetable growers, and a local farmers market, in North Carolina. "There have been a wide variety of questions that I have not been able to answer for my clients because of the shutdown," Sanchez says, mainly because websites like the one run by the U.S. Agriculture Department are shut down. "I have been very frustrated with this situation because it seems so unnecessary to shut down websites during this fiasco," she said, adding that she understands it's to prevent furloughed employees from doing work.

Fledgling Aviators Grounded

Did you know that the University of North Dakota has one of the largest collegiate flight schools in the country? Troy Merritt at the university says that students wanting to obtain the required certificates and ratings before getting their degrees in aviation have to take written exams issued by the Federal Aviation Administration. "Due to the government shutdown, we are not allowed to take these tests, and, as a result, the

issuance of these airman certificates has been halted," Merritt says, adding that research he's been doing for an advanced aerodynamics class also has been hampered by the shutdown of NASA's website.

Telemarketer Bonanza

Brendan Bell of Elk Grove, Calif., tells us that he's seen a spike in telemarketing calls since the government shutdown. When he went online to list his number with the federal do not call registry, he found this notice: "Due to the Government shutdown, we are unable to offer this website service at this time. We will resume normal operations when the government is funded."

Less-Healthy Eating

You could say this could count as a ripple-down effect: James Erard, whose wife is a furloughed National Institutes of Health primate behavior researcher, has turned her off-work attention to baking — "practicing for the holidays," she's told her spouse. Erard, of Frederick, Md., reports: "My consumption of baked goods has increased exponentially."

Final Words

We'll give these to Christopher Dupee of Vermont:

"Of course the shutdown affected my life. The people I elected to act in my best interests have shirked their responsibility completely. The worst part of this is I have no recourse. I cannot fire my representatives. I cannot hold anyone liable in court. I can only wait until November and hope enough other people are as angry about this as I am."

The next congressional election is November 2014, when all House seats and a third of the Senate seats are up.