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FEATURED

# Shutdown's impacts begin to hit Southern Maryland

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Legislators couldn't reach a compromise last week to avoid a government shutdown.

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The effects of the federal government shutdown are already impacting Southern Maryland, where a disproportionate number of residents are employed by the federal government due to the proximity of Washington, D.C., as well as the large Navy base in St. Mary's County.

The federal government so far this fall has been unable to approve a budget for the next fiscal year, leading to a shutdown that started Oct. 1.

The Democrats and Republicans could not come to a budget agreement because of planned cuts to health care. Republicans think the Democrats want to use health care funding to help undocumented immigrants, which Democrats and others say is patently untrue.

Undocumented immigrants are not eligible for federal health insurance programs, including Medicaid, but Medicaid may offer reimbursements to help cover emergencies for undocumented immigrants who would otherwise qualify for the program, in the same way it does for U.S. citizens.

“The Big Beautiful Bill,” passed earlier this year, does reduce these reimbursements, which accounted for less than 1% of Medicaid spending in past years.

Essential services like Social Security and Medicare are still operating but are working at minimal capacity as the shutdown continues.

The first missed paycheck for federal employees will be Oct. 24 and the first missed paycheck for the military will be Oct. 15.

Local elected officials on both sides of the aisle have condemned the shutdown and the likely economic and social impacts it brings to local communities.



“[President Donald] Trump and Republicans have driven the nation into a partisan government shutdown and are holding the American people and our federal employees hostage,” Sen. Chris Van Hollen (D-Md.) said. “Team Maryland will continue to stand with our dedicated federal civil servants and fight to restore government funding with a responsible agreement that holds the President accountable to the law and prevents massive spikes in Americans’ health care costs.”

St. Mary’s County Commissioner Eric Colvin (R) at the board’s Tuesday meeting called the government shutdown “ridiculous” and “unacceptable” and criticized the federal government’s inability to create a budget that would suit the state’s needs.

“Mr. President, at least get a continuing resolution. Let’s get something done,” Colvin said.

**FURLOUGHS BEGINS**Some federal employees, including many who work at Naval Air Station Patuxent River, are continuing to work due to available funding, at least for now.

However, others are already without work or pay.

Ahead of the shutdown, National Active and Retired Federal Employees Association President William Shackelford wrote a letter to U.S. senators warning of the impact a government shutdown would have on the state of Maryland.

“A lapse in appropriations will force millions of federal workers to go without pay, shutter critical agency operations, harm the national economy and burden the American people in every congressional district,” Shackelford wrote.

According to the letter, the 2018-2019 shutdown, which lasted over a month, affected the economy with a cost of \$11 billion.



Following the shutdown, Maryland's federal delegation members held a press conference to show their support for federal employees and call for solutions.

"It is no surprise that Republicans have shut down the government to allow Trump and his administration to continue decimating the federal workforce, disrupting the vital services our government provides, and gutting health care coverage for millions of Americans, many of whom are Marylanders in the Fifth Congressional District and beyond," Rep. Steny Hoyer (D-Md.) said. "My colleagues in the Maryland delegation and I will not sit silently as Trump devastates our state and the American people."

According to Gov. Wes Moore (D), Maryland receives over \$370 million from the federal government, and without an approved budget, health care and food assistance programs may suffer.

"A shutdown means wages lost. A shutdown means programs shuttered. A shutdown means projects scrapped. We are all disappointed by this outcome," Moore said during an address on Oct. 1.

Sens. Chris Van Hollen (D-Md.) and Angela Alsobrooks (D-Md.) hosted a telephone town hall on Tuesday evening in collaboration with Rob Shriver, an expert on federal employees' rights from Democracy Forward.

Van Hollen and Alsobrooks condemned Republicans for voting four times to keep the government closed and discussed how the shutdown will affect federal employees. Thanks to legislation passed in 2019, federal employees are guaranteed backpay during a government shutdown; federal contractors, however, are not. Democrats are currently working on legislation that would protect federal contractors.

A statement from the seven-member Maryland Freedom Caucus, which is chaired by Del. Matt Morgan (R-St. Mary's) and includes Del. Mark Fisher (R-Calvert), criticized the state's Democratic representatives in Congress for voting "to shut the government down."



“Gov. Wes Moore runs to a microphone instead of leading. Federal workers need Sens. Alsobrooks and Van Hollen to vote to reopen the government, not demand taxpayer-funded health insurance for illegal immigrants. Marylanders deserve leadership, not political theater,” the statement read.

Undocumented immigrants are not eligible for federal health insurance programs.

**UNIONS RESPOND** On Oct. 1, around 80 to 90 employees at the base’s Solomons Annex received furlough notices that would go into effect this week, according to Jeremy Leissner, president of IAM Local 4, Patuxent River.

The union represents about 1,500 members from the Navy base and its Solomons Annex, Charlotte Hall Veterans Home, and William W. Winspisinger Education and Technology Center who work a range of employees and industrial jobs, from the dietitians to the aircraft mechanics to janitorial staff.

They may at first go to a 50% work reduction where half of the employees work one week, the other half work the next week as long as funding lasts.

On Oct. 3, IAM learned that V2X, its largest contract on Naval Air Station Patuxent River, would start seeing the effects of the shutdown. Government officials told the company that initially there was only enough money to get the group paid through Oct. 9, though later they were informed that some emergency funding was found to get the group to the end of the month.

The current number of affected members stands at approximately 200.

Leissner said this was “just the beginning” for federal contractors and employees if the shutdown continues.

The union is working on an initiative to help federal contractors get paid, since their backpay is not protected like federal employees.



The IAM Local 4 headquarters is working with local organizations to provide those affected with information on food bank availability. About 85% of members are veterans whose disability care may be affected.

If federal employees aren't getting paid, they aren't spending money in the community, Leissner said. Then the mom and pop shops are losing money as well.

"Since Day 1 Trump has been trying to dismantle the federal government," Paul Schwartz, regional vice president for NARFE, said. "They [Trump administration] want to focus on probationary employees. The goal is to eliminate professional government workers, replacing them with political appointees, trying to whittle down government. They have not eliminated waste, fraud and abuse."

He said this could go on for a while, adding, "I don't think the Democrats are going to cave this time."

Schwartz added, "People still don't get that government is to provide services. The private sector is to make a profit."

"We are here. We do make an impact in the community," Leissner said of the union workers.

"We have plenty of active members," Mary Klausner, Calvert NARFE chapter president, said of her chapter. "This happens so often. This is going to be a long one."

Klausner noted one reason for greater pessimism in this latest shutdown is that "the House of Representatives is not even in town."

**HELP AVAILABLE** Klausner noted that in 2019 the Maryland General Assembly passed a law prohibiting a public service company from terminating electric or gas service to certain residential customers for nonpayment under certain



circumstances. The bill is an emergency measure and generally relates to “protections for government employees subject to a government shutdown.” There are sections of the bill that stay mortgage or deeds of trust on owner occupied residential properties. The employee is required to present proof he or she is a government employee and has been involuntarily furloughed from work without pay because of a government shutdown.

The bill also has a subsection providing similar protections to impacted government workers who rent residential property.

“We negotiated with all the bankers, the utility company, the landlords associations, and they’re on board,” Maryland Sen. Arthur Ellis (D-Charles) said at an event in Charles County earlier this week. “We have the resources to take care of you.”

Klausner said she would be reaching out to impacted association chapter members to make sure they are aware of the measure.

She said while the higher ranking workers impacted usually have the resources to brace for a shutdown, it is the government workers at the lower end of the pay scale who bear the brunt of a shutdown.

“Those would include clerks, entry level workers, wage grade workers, blue collar jobs,” Klausner said.

Moore assured Marylanders that he is working to guarantee that federal employees earn income and that programs such as Medicaid and SNAP will still help those in need. Furloughed federal employees can look into unemployment insurance, and financial assistance is currently being offered for employees affected by the shutdown.

Resources and more information are available at [response.maryland.gov/federalpublicservants/shutdown](https://response.maryland.gov/federalpublicservants/shutdown).



On Monday, Moore initiated a Federal Shutdown Loan Program through Maryland's Department of Labor. The program will allow federal workers to borrow a one-time, no-interest loan of \$700, which they must pay off no later than 45 days after the end of the shutdown. The loans will be offered only if the government shutdown is still occurring on Oct. 15.

**'LEVEL OF UNCERTAINTY'** "There is an administration in the White House right now that does not value government service ... and is not entirely a friend to the people and the government of Maryland," Maryland Comptroller Brooke Lierman (D) said at an event earlier in the week at College of Southern Maryland's La Plata campus. "But we have for so long really had an important partnership with the federal government."

Lierman said the federal government's investment in the state has dwindled since Trump's first term.

Maryland has lost at least 15,000 federal jobs since January, she said, adding that critical funding for health care, senior services and community programs is "being slashed."

There is housing assistance, veteran assistance and utility assistance for Maryland former federal employees, Stephen Rice, deputy secretary of Maryland Department of Commerce, said.

"We're doing what we can," Rice said. "But the challenge is we don't know how long this is going to be. We don't know the severity. We don't know the full impact."

"Charles County's local economy is dependent on the ... health and well-being of our federal government," Jim Chandler, director of economic development for Charles County, said. "It's concerning given the new uncertainties demonstrated by the federal government."



Almost 26% of employed residents work for the federal government, which is the highest in Maryland, he said. Federal wages and retiree income make up 29% of the county's adjusted gross income. "Federal employment is not just our primary base," Chandler said. "It is the economic engine that sustains our middle class stability and household health."

In February, the Charles County Department of Economic Development launched its federal transition support page, Michelle Frye, deputy director of the department, said. The page at [meetcharlescounty.com](http://meetcharlescounty.com) serves as a hub for information, updated resources that support federal government contractors and residents affected by the shutdown.

The Maryland Department of Labor has the Professional Outplacement Assistance Center to support recently separated federal employees, Ruthy Davis, director of regional workforce for Tri-County Council for Southern Maryland, said. Every Wednesday from 9 a.m. to noon they hold a virtual training for displaced federal workers. To register, email [FedWork.Transition@maryland.gov](mailto:FedWork.Transition@maryland.gov).

In addition, Southern Maryland has an American Job Center in Waldorf and California, Davis said. The centers assist career seekers looking for new or better employment and providing business support by training new workers.

"I recognize that where we are, [there] is still a level of uncertainty," Charles County Commissioner President Reuben B. Collins II (D) said. "Where we are in the process is changing day-by-day."

