



CONGRESSMAN JOHN LEWIS  
SERVING THE 5<sup>TH</sup> CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT OF GEORGIA

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## FEDERAL GOVERNMENT SHUTDOWN: FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

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During a federal government shutdown, laws will still be enforced, emergencies will be responded to, and our country will maintain its defense; however, a shutdown will significantly impact our daily lives.

I am providing this information to help you plan accordingly. It is the best available in a fluid situation. Please [check back](#) for updates, and remember to contact federal agencies directly regarding specific issues.

During a federal government shutdown, [many agencies and services](#) – including the U.S. Congress -- are impacted. The [Congressional Research Service prepared a report](#) that outlines the causes and effects of a federal government shutdown.

Federal employees and contractors should review the Office of Personnel Management's (OPM) website and their respective agency's guidelines on government shutdown procedures and policies. [Everyone should review the White House Agency Contingency Plan web page which provides guidance in the event of a federal government shutdown.](#)

Depending on the length of a possible furlough, issues like automated bill payments, retirement benefits, health care services, or pre-scheduled travel plans may develop into significant issues. Being proactive and well-informed is critical. Meet with your management, understand the guidelines, call your banking institutions, and start preparing ahead of time. Here are some answers to some of the most basic questions:

### **Will unemployment benefits continue during a federal government shutdown?**

- Yes. Unemployment compensation is a federal, State program administered by State agencies. In Georgia, the first 14-20 weeks of unemployment are State benefits. In most cases, if there is a short-term, federal government shutdown, unemployment benefits should not be interrupted, but individuals should check with their State agencies for information about their specific concerns.

### **I am a federal employee. Am I eligible for unemployment benefits?**

- Yes, furloughed federal employees are eligible for unemployment benefits. Benefits are administered by State agencies. Please remember that unemployment benefits are distributed weekly, but you must be out of work for a pay period to prove loss of benefits. Also, you cannot receive both unemployment benefits and a federal salary. Please check the Georgia Department of Labor [website](#) for eligibility requirements and application procedures.
- The [U.S. Department of Labor](#) and [OPM](#) issued general guidance.

### **Will federal employees receive pay for furloughed days?**

- Unsure. I cosponsored bipartisan legislation, H.R. 3223, the Federal Employee Retroactive Pay Fairness Act, and I am fully committed to federal employees being paid retroactively after the government resumes operations. This is what happened after the 1995 and 1996 government shutdowns. Many Members continue to ask the Republican Leadership to pledge to not further punish federal employees; so far, they are noncommittal.
- Federal employees should also look to OPM and your agency guidelines for answers to this question.

### **I am a government contractor. What should I expect?**

- If you are a government contractor, you should discuss with your management how their government contract is structured. Unfortunately in the 1995 and 1996 shutdowns, contractors were not compensated. Today, there are many more contractors and different types of contract agreements than there were in 1990s. Regardless, you should start researching and planning now.

### **Will I receive my [Social Security](#) payments?**

- Yes. Social Security checks will continue to be processed and mailed, but new claims may not be processed, and questions and inquiries may not be answered due to furloughed staff.
- Social Security [Online Services](#) will remain open. You will not be able to request new or replacement Social Security cards, replace your Medicare card, or secure a proof of income letter from the Social Security Administration.

### **Will [Veterans and military hospitals](#) continue to operate?**

- Yes. VA hospitals will probably remain open, but there may be service or benefit cuts.
- Similarly, the Military Health System (MHS) will continue to operate, as will the private sector under TRICARE. Patients should contact their hospitals or clinics to confirm appointments. There may be delays scheduling new appointments.
- Please note, however, that certain VA hotlines will cease to function.

### **I am a veteran and/or military retiree. Will I receive my pension?**

- Payments for the month of October are scheduled to be delivered on October 1, 2013. If the shutdown is prolonged, there may be delays in processing future benefits and new claims since VA staff may be furloughed.
- Additionally, the approaching October 17<sup>th</sup> debt ceiling deadline will also affect the availability of funds to pay retirees.

### **What about my Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) claim?**

- The EEOC staff will not answer questions or respond to correspondence. Mediations and public events will be cancelled.
- The EEOC will request litigation extensions from federal courts. Unfortunately, it is not known whether the courts will grant these requests.
- Federal sector hearings will be cancelled, and federal employee appeals of discrimination complaints will not be decided.
- [Charges must still be filed](#) within requisite deadlines, but they will not be investigated until the government reopens. Keep copies of all submitted paperwork, and ensure delivery receipt.
  - The address for the Atlanta Office is Sam Nunn Atlanta Federal Center, 100 Alabama Street, SW, Suite 4R30, Atlanta, Georgia 30303. The phone number is 1-800-669-4000.
- To inquire about the status of an existing charge, email [info@eoc.gov](mailto:info@eoc.gov).

**I am a disabled veteran. Will I receive my benefits on time?**

- Claims processing and payments in the compensation, pension, education, and vocational rehabilitation programs are anticipated to continue through late October. However, in the event of a prolonged shutdown, claims processing and payments in these programs would be suspended when available funding is exhausted. There may also be delays in processing of new claims for disability compensation, and VA staff may be furloughed.
- Please note that certain VA call centers and hotlines will cease to function.

**I receive Veterans Affairs (VA) life insurance payments. Can I expect to receive my VA life insurance payments on time?**

- Maybe; it depends on who administers your VA life insurance program. If your VA life insurance program is administered by Prudential (that is, Servicemembers Group Life Insurance and Veterans Group Life Insurance) then you should not see any delay in the processing of your VA life insurance claim or payments.
- VA life insurance programs administered by the Department of Veterans Affairs, however, may be impacted depending upon the shutdown plan for that agency.
- It is possible the Department of Veterans Affairs may process benefit claims related to deaths so as to avoid causing grieving families any further mental anguish.

**I am a veteran student who receives benefits under the GI Bill or the Veterans Educational Assistance Program (VEAP). Will I continue to receive payments on time?**

- Maybe, depending on the length of the federal government shutdown. Veteran students receiving monthly stipends under the GI bill and who verified their enrollment at the end of September should receive their regular monthly stipend for the month of October as planned.
- Please note that the length of the federal government shutdown may delay future monthly stipends. Any educational benefits for veterans based on reimbursement (that is, by bills

sent to the Department of Veterans Affairs) may experience delays in processing and payment.

**I am a federal government retiree. Will I receive my pension?**

- Most likely, yes. If you already receive pension benefits, you should continue to receive payments. The Retirement Fund is not impacted by the lapses in Federal appropriations. Checks are mailed on the first of every month, and benefit checks for the month of October are currently scheduled for October 1, 2013.
- Please note, however, delays in processing existing payments and any new claims remain a possibility as OPM has not made or issued any definitive staffing decisions regarding essential personnel in the event of a federal government shutdown.
- Unfortunately, the approaching October 17<sup>th</sup> debt ceiling deadline will also affect the availability of funds to pay retirees.

**I'm on Medicare. Will I still be able to see my doctor?**

- Yes, Medicare patients can still see their health care providers and those providers will continue to submit bills and get paid for their services. Unfortunately, new Medicare beneficiaries might not be accepted into the program.

**I rely on food assistance programs to feed my family. What should I expect?**

- In the short term, the following programs will continue operations, but the situation may change depending on the length of the shutdown:
  - The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) will continue operations and eligible households will still receive monthly benefits for October.
  - USDA is working with WIC State agencies to use all available funding resources to provide benefits to participants.
  - The Child Nutrition (CN) Programs, including School Lunch, School Breakfast, Child and Adult Care Feeding, Summer Food Service and Special Milk will continue operations into October.

**Will my mail delivery continue?**

- Yes. The U.S. Postal Service is self-funded and will continue to deliver mail.

**I am applying for a federal grant. Do I need to meet the deadline?**

- Yes. Grants.gov is operational; however, there may be limited staff to provide assistance.

**Are federal courts still open?**

- Yes. Federal courts have enough funding to operate for two weeks. This means, that unless otherwise advised, all proceedings and deadlines remain in effect as scheduled.

- Case Management/Electronic Case Files (CM/ECF) will remain in operation for the electronic filing of documents with courts. If the shutdown continues for an extended period, the federal Judiciary system will reassess available funds and operations on October 15<sup>th</sup>.

**I am a small business person who is currently waiting on an SBA loan from the Small Business Administration. Will I still receive the money from my loan on time?**

- Maybe, but you should contact your lender immediately. If the SBA has already processed your loan guaranty then your lender should be able to disburse your loan funds to you in a timely manner. Businesses are likely to face delays if the SBA has not yet processed their loan guaranty approval. Again, businesses seeking SBA loans should contact their lender immediately as SBA support services are likely to be suspended during a shutdown.

**I am a veteran currently awaiting a VA home loan. Can I expect any delays?**

- Maybe. There may be delays in processing VA home loan applications depending on the shutdown plan for the Department of Veterans Affairs. Please check the VA website for the most recent updates. The VA Home Loan hotline number is 1-888-244-6711.

**I am in the middle of buying a home; what should I expect?**

- You should contact your lender immediately; individual lenders will decide whether or not to close.
- All 80 regional [Department of Housing and Urban Development \(HUD\) offices](#) will close.
- The Federal Housing Administration (FHA), which insures and guarantees a large number of single-family mortgages and rental and multifamily properties, will stop operations.

**I am facing foreclosure on an FHA-backed loan. Does the clock stop?**

- Most loss mitigation for homeowners facing foreclosure (including FHA loan modifications, FHA-HAMP, etc.) will continue.
- For a variety of housing questions, the HUD/FHA Resource Center: (800) CALL-FHA (225-5342), and the HUD/FHA National Servicing Center: (877) 622-8525 will be available.

**What will happen to colleges and universities?**

- Depending on how long the government remains closed, many colleges and universities will probably avoid mass layoffs. Most schools have a mix of federal, state and private funds and will have to be flexible with their revenue to keep the lights on.
- Unfortunately, colleges and universities may be in the midst of processing federal aid, and many will not be able to process awards for incoming students. Please contact your specific college or university for more information.

**I am a United States citizen living abroad. Will the local United States embassy be open?**

- Yes. United States embassies will remain open to some degree, but United States citizens living abroad should prepare for delays in any application or processing requests as staff furloughs may occur.
- If you are in the midst of immigration paperwork, U.S. Citizenship & Immigration Services (USCIS) will continue with scheduled interviews and appointments. Call 1-800-375-5283 for additional information.