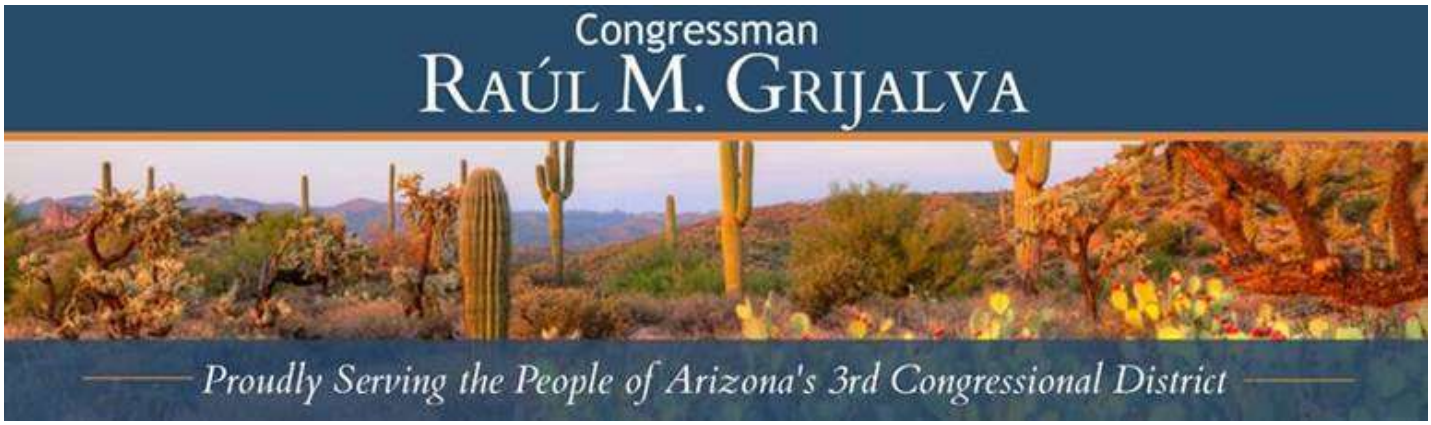

FEDERAL GOVERNMENT SHUTDOWN:

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

During a federal government shutdown, authorities will still enforce laws, respond to emergencies, maintain our nation's defense; however, a shutdown -- even a partial one -- will significantly affect our daily lives.

A federal government shutdown distresses the entire nation, but it particularly affects the significant number of individuals in Arizona's 3rd congressional district who rely upon or work in federal service. Being proactive and well informed is critical. Federal employees, retirees, and service members should consult with your management, understand guidelines, call banking institutions, and start preparing as soon as possible.

Depending on the length of federal employees' furlough, issues like automated bill payments, retirement benefits, health care services, or pre-scheduled travel plans may develop into significant issues.

The Office of Personnel Management's (OPM) website provides general guidance, but individuals should review the Office of Management and Budget's Contingency Plan web page, which compiles agency guidance in the event of a federal government shutdown.

Consequently, I compiled this information to help you plan accordingly. It is the best available during a fluid and unacceptable situation. Please visit my website for updates and remember to contact federal agencies directly regarding specific issues. To assist, here are answers to some basic questions:

Office of Congressman Raúl M. Grijalva – 101 W Irvington Rd, Bldg 4, Tucson, AZ 85714
(520) 622-6788
https://grijalva.house.gov/

Will unemployment benefits continue during a federal government shutdown?

- Yes. Unemployment compensation is a federal-State program administered by State agencies. During a short-term, federal government shutdown, there should not be an interruption of benefits; however, there might be a delay in processing new applications. For more information visit https://des.az.gov/about-des/welcome-to-des or call (602) 364-2722.

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

- Possibly. Federal employees may be eligible for Unemployment Compensation for Federal Employees (UCFE). States contribute to UFCE under the same terms and conditions as regular state unemployment compensation. For more information regarding your eligibility for UCFE call (602) 364-2722.
- Additional information is provided by OPM at unemployment insurance guidance.

Will federal employees receive pay for furloughed days?

- After the 1995, 1996, 2013, and 2018 government shutdowns, federal employees received compensation.
- When the full government operations recommence, 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?

- This is unclear. If you are a government contractor, you should discuss with your company's management how their contract is structured. The fate of a government contractor depends largely on the agency with which their company contracts.
- Today, there are many contractors and different types of contract agreements. Unfortunately, in many previous shutdowns, contractors did not receive compensation through retroactive legislation.

Will I receive my Social Security payments?

- Yes. The Social Security Administration will continue to process and mail checks. Congress already funded the agency for fiscal year 2019.
- Individuals should check Social Security Online Services for updates.

Will Veterans and military hospitals continue to operate?

- Yes. VA hospitals will remain open. VA operations will continue unimpeded.

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

- Yes. Congress fully funded the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs for fiscal year 2019.

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

- Yes. Congress fully funded the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs for fiscal year 2019.

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

- Yes. Congress fully funded the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs for fiscal year 2019.

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?

- Yes. Congress fully funded the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs for fiscal year 2019.

I am on Medicare. Will I still be able to see my doctor?

- Yes, existing Medicare patients can still see their health care providers, and those providers will continue to submit bills and receive payment for their services.

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 into February.
    - The Child Nutrition (CN) Programs, including School Lunch, School Breakfast, Child and Adult Care Feeding, Summer Food Service and Special Milk will continue operations at least until February.

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

- In the event of a federal government shutdown, the EEOC staff will not answer questions or respond to correspondence. Mediations and public events will be cancelled.
- EEOC litigation will be suspended unless needed on an emergency basis or if a continuance has not been granted by the court. 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.
- Petitioners must file charges within requisite deadlines, these time limits may not be extended because of the shut-down; however, investigations will not resume until the federal government reopens. You should keep copies of all submitted paperwork and ensure delivery receipt.
    - The address for the Arizona Field Office is 3300 North Central Avenue, Suite 690, Phoenix, AZ 85012-2504.

- Once the government reopens, phone service will resume:
  (VOICE) 1-800-669-4000 or 602-640-5071
  (TTY) 1-800-669-6820
  (ASL Video Phone) 1-844-234-5122

- To inquire about the status of an existing charge, you may email info@eeoc.gov, but there is no definitive response timeline.

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

- Yes. According to the OPM, federal retirees under the Civil Service Retirement System (CSRS) and Federal Employees Retirement System (FERS) will continue to receive their scheduled annuity payments on the first business day of the month. Effective on January 1, 1987, FERS includes most federal employees; the CSRS system generally covers federal workers hired before 1984.

Will my mail delivery continue?

- Yes. The U.S. Postal Service is self-funded, and 500,000 employees will continue to deliver your mail.

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

- Yes. You should always submit your grant application ahead of the deadline. Grants.gov is operational; however, there may be limited staff to provide assistance depending on the agency.
  - The Grants.gov Contact Center phone number is 1-800-518-GRANTS, and email Support@Grants.gov.

Are federal courts still open?

- Yes, but there may be limited operations. Federal courts have enough funding to operate through January 18, 2019.
- This means, that unless otherwise advised, all proceedings and deadlines remain in effect as scheduled, but you should check the local court or office for information specific to your needs.
- 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.

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

- The partial government shutdown affects the SBA. Delays are possible, but you should immediately contact your lender. 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. A shutdown will likely result in a suspension of many small business services support services; consequently, businesses seeking SBA loans should contact their lender immediately as SBA support services are likely to be suspended during a shutdown.
- A short-term government shutdown should not affect loans from the Office of Disaster Assistance.

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

- The Department of Veterans Affairs is operational, but there have been reports of minor delays in receiving discharge documentation necessary to process loan applications.
- Please check with the Phoenix Regional Office for the most recent updates. The VA Home Loan hotline number is 1-888-768-2132.

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

- No. Most loss mitigation for homeowners facing foreclosure (including FHA loan modifications, FHA-HAMP, etc.) will continue. You should contact your lender, who will make the decision about foreclosures.
- 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.

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

- Unfortunately, the Department of Housing and Urban Development is included in the partial government shutdown, and you should contact your lender immediately.
- The Federal Housing Administration (FHA) urged mortgagees and lenders to be sensitive to approved borrowers, which includes requests for late fee waivers and the suspension of credit reporting on affected borrowers.
- FHA may have staff reductions during the shutdown; as a result, there may be a delay processing FHA-insured loans. The length of the shutdown will affect the severity of any delays.
- HUD will have a limited number of employees to answer emergency questions during a shutdown and will not be able to answer case specific questions. The HUD/ FHA Information Resources Center may be reached at (800) CALL-FHA (1-800-225-5342) or answers@hud.gov.
- If you call or email field offices or headquarters' staff, you may hear a voicemail or receive a return email indicating that the federal government is closed.

- All HUD regional, field offices, and headquarters will be closed. There will be exceptions for a limited range of activities. The HUD public resource information line is 1-866-INFO HUD (1- 866-463-6483).

I am planning to travel and need a passport. What should I expect?

- You can still apply for a U.S. passport book or passport card at all passport agencies and centers and acceptance facilities (such as U.S. post offices, libraries, or county clerk's offices) during the lapse of appropriations. If you have a scheduled appointment at a U.S. Department of State passport agency or center, please plan on keeping your appointment.
- If you need to cancel your appointment, you may do so by visiting the Online Passport Appointment System or by calling 1-877-487-2778.
- If you have a scheduled appointment at a passport acceptance facility and need to cancel your appointment, please contact the facility directly.

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 U.S. citizens living abroad should prepare for delays in any application or processing requests as staff furloughs may occur.

If I have an interview or appointment with U.S. Citizenship & Immigration Services (USCIS), should I attend? Can I still apply for a visa?

- Please know that the U.S. Citizenship & Immigration Services (USCIS) uses fees to fund many operations and expects to continue with scheduled interviews and appointments. Please call 1-800-375-5283 for additional information.
- Yes. Although the Department of Homeland Security funding lapsed, USCIS is fee-funded, so it remains open and continues to process applications. You should attend interviews and appointments as scheduled. Please call 1-800-375-5283 for additional information.

Can I use e-Verify to check the status of a potential employee?

- No. E-Verify is suspended during the shutdown.

What is happening at the airport?

- Air travel and security are impacted by the shutdown, and travelers should arrive early for any departures and prepare for delays in clearing customs.
- Air traffic controllers are working without pay, and the Federal Aviation Administration is asking furloughed aviation safety inspectors to resume their work.
- All aviation security workers – air traffic controllers, animal and plant inspectors, aviation safety experts, Customs and Border Patrol officials, and Transportation

Security Agency officers -- are working without pay.

Can I apply for TSA PreCheck, SENTRI, and Global Entry?

- Online applications for TSA PreCheck are being accepted, but the Department of Homeland Security suspended Global Entry and SENTRI applications during the shutdown.

Will I still be able to visit the national parks and monuments?

- Officials stated that the anticipated plan is to keep many national parks open for hiking, wildlife watching, snowshoeing and cross-country skiing. Open-air parks and monuments in Washington, D.C. will be open, but indoor facilities like the Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., National Historic Park, the Smithsonian Museums, and the National Gallery of Art are closed. Unfortunately, campgrounds, concessions, and other services that require National Park Service staff will not be open.

What will happen to schools – including colleges and universities?

- An extended shutdown could affect colleges, universities, school districts, and vocational rehabilitation agencies that depend on federal funds to support key services and programs. Pell Grants and Direct Student Loans should continue as normal; however, students should contact their specific college or university with specific questions about federal financial aid – including pending awards for incoming students.

It is tax filing season; what should I do?

- Internal Revenue Service confirmed that it will process tax returns beginning January 28, 2019 and provide refunds to taxpayers as scheduled.

Will failure to pay and failure to file penalties be abated during the shutdown period?

- The lapse in federal appropriations during the government shutdown did not affect the federal tax law. Individuals and businesses were required to keep filing their tax returns and making payments with the IRS. Failure to pay and failure to file penalties are charged on tax from the due date of the return until the date of payment.