

800,000 US federal workers hit by partial government shutdown

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In an attack on the US working population, most directly targeting the federal workforce, the Trump White House and Congress triggered a partial shutdown of the government at 12:01 AM Saturday. On the eve of the Christmas and New Year holidays, some 800,000 of the nation's 2.1 million federal employees have been hit by the failure to fund a quarter of federal departments and agencies past a midnight Friday deadline.

Of these, an estimated 380,000 are indefinitely furloughed, i.e., put on unpaid leave, and another 420,000 workers deemed essential personnel are required to work without being paid. It is unknown at this time how long the shutdown—the third just in 2018—will last, but President Trump in an early morning tweet and a bill signing event later on Friday said it would continue “for a very long time.”

There was a three-day shutdown in January of this year, followed by a one-day shutdown in February. There have been 20 federal shutdowns over the past four decades, the longest extending for three weeks in the winter of 1995–96.

The main author of the current closure of federal services is Trump. Last week he insisted that he would shut down the government unless Congress allocated \$5 billion for his wall along the US-Mexico border as part of any bill to keep the affected government departments and agencies funded.

Earlier this week, he appeared to reverse himself and signal his willingness to accept a potential deal being worked out between congressional Republicans and Democrats to temporarily extend funding without the wall money. In line with this, the Senate, by a voice vote Wednesday night, approved a bipartisan continuing resolution that would have kept the agencies open until February 8, following next month's

installment of the new Congress, with a Democratic majority in the House of Representatives.

Trump then came under concentrated attack from far-right personalities on Fox News and outlets such as *Breitbart News*, as well as the extreme-right Freedom Caucus in the House. On Thursday morning, he told congressional Republicans that he would refuse to sign a bill based on the Senate measure and would veto any bill that did not allocate \$5 billion for the wall. He accompanied this with a new round of fascistic denunciations of immigrants as murderers, drug pushers and rapists.

This was part of a calculated move to counter mounting political and legal threats associated with the anti-Russia special counsel investigation by appealing for popular support outside of the normal two-party channels, including among racist anti-immigrant elements of his base. To this end, the White House sent its fascist adviser Stephen Miller to defend Trump's ultimatum on the wall on CNN and other news channels.

At the same time, Trump sought to tap into broad anti-war sentiment by ordering the withdrawal of US troops from Syria and cutting in half the troop level in Afghanistan.

The House Republican leadership dropped its plans to push through a continuing resolution along the lines of the Senate bill and instead passed a funding extension that added \$5.7 billion for the wall and \$8 billion in disaster relief spending. This was adopted Thursday night on a near-party line vote of 217 to 185, with all Democrats voting against and eight Republicans joining them. This set the course for a shutdown.

On Friday, the Republican Senate leadership suspended voting on the House bill with the wall funding in order to continue negotiations with the

Democrats on a possible resolution. However, the House adjourned at 7 PM, agreeing to reassemble at noon Saturday, thereby foreclosing any possibility of legislation being approved before midnight to avert a shutdown. The Senate adjourned soon thereafter.

The Democrats are complicit in the shutdown. They have aided Trump's anti-immigrant witch hunt with their silence on his mass incarceration of children, his deployment of troops to the border and his illegal evisceration of the right to asylum. Last January, Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer agreed to give Trump \$25 billion to build the wall in return for protections against deportation for hundreds of thousands of immigrants who were brought into the country without documents when they were children—the so-called “dreamers” covered by the Obama administration's DACA program. However, Trump eventually rejected the deal.

Since winning control of the House in last month's midterm elections, the Democrats have repeatedly declared their readiness to work with Trump, even as they escalated the reactionary anti-Russia campaign, including their attack on Trump for his alleged “softness” toward Moscow. They agreed to give the White House an additional \$1.6 billion to further militarize the border in the Senate bill that was rejected by Trump.

Neither the Democrats nor the federal employee unions, such as the American Federation of Government Employees (AFGE), have made any attempt to mobilize opposition in the working class either to the attacks on immigrants or to the government shutdown. The home page of the AFGE website does not even feature the lockout of hundreds of thousands of federal workers and requirement that hundreds of thousands more work without pay.

Nine of the 15 cabinet-level departments and dozens of agencies are impacted by the shutdown. The affected departments include Homeland Security, Transportation, Commerce, State, Agriculture, Justice, Interior, Treasury and Housing and Urban Development. Impacted agencies include the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), the Peace Corps, the Small Business Administration, the General Services Administration, the National Archives and the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA).

Other departments, including Defense, Veterans Affairs, and Health and Human Services have already been funded for the next year and will be spared.

The shutdown will not affect the repressive operations of Immigration and Customs Enforcement or the Border Patrol, the vast majority of whose personnel will work without pay for the duration. The same applies to federal law enforcement personnel in the Justice Department.

However, the National Park Service will be decimated, with more than 80 percent of its employees on furlough, resulting in the partial or total closure of national parks and federal monuments. The Smithsonian Institution in Washington DC will be hit, potentially forcing the shutdown of its museums.

Ninety-five percent of Housing and Urban Development workers are being furloughed, as well as 95 percent at the EPA, 96 percent at NASA, 80 percent at the Forest Service, 87 percent at Commerce, 83 percent at Treasury and 76 percent at Interior.

After previous shutdowns, new funding bills included provisions for back pay for federal employees who were furloughed, but there is no guarantee of that happening in the current instance.



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