

# Trump orders freeze in federal salaries as shutdown reaches ten days

Patrick Martin  
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The partial shutdown of the US federal government entered its tenth day Monday with no negotiations taking place between congressional Democrats and the Trump administration. There are no indications of any change in the stalemate until Thursday at the earliest. On that day the newly elected House of Representatives with a Democratic majority takes office.

Trump spent the weekend issuing a stream of abusive tweets, blasting the Democrats for a shutdown that he had previously boasted of wanting and taking responsibility for. He combined his insults toward his political opponents within the ruling elite with real injury towards federal workers, signing an executive order to freeze the pay of all two million civilian workers for the US government for the rest of the fiscal year.

The executive order demonstrates Trump's real attitude to the working class, behind the political demagoguery and claims that he is waging trade war to defend American jobs and American workers. While the military will receive an across-the-board increase of 2.6 percent, because the defense appropriations bill was passed by Congress and signed into law by Trump, no pay increase for civilian workers has been finalized.

The Senate passed an increase averaging just under 2 percent, but the outgoing Republican-controlled House never enacted a pay raise, tacitly honoring Trump's call for a civilian freeze in the budget he submitted to Congress last February. The executive order Trump signed Friday restates the proposed freeze, although it could be overturned in whatever legislation is eventually enacted to end the budget stalemate.

For the 800,000 federal employees affected by the shutdown, the pay freeze comes on top of the payless paydays that will begin January 11 unless Congress and the White House reach an agreement.

Federal workers have fallen behind their private-sector counterparts over the past decade, with a pay freeze from

2011 to 2013 and raises of between 1 and 2 percent since then. For many lower-paid federal employees, who live paycheck to paycheck like the vast majority of American workers, the prospect of a payless payday is dire.

There is ample evidence of this on social media.

One worker tweeted, "I can't make a deal with the bank for my car note on the car I need to perform my job. I cannot make a deal with the pharmacy for my husband's MS medication. Now I won't get the small increase next year we were counting on."

Another worker: "Just paid my rent #blessed however no more dollars to pay the rest of my bills. How do I explain this to my children when their 14th birthday is in 9 days!!!"

A third worker: "I work for FEMA and am furloughed. I have a large loan that's being repaid via auto-deduction every paycheck. If it's not in the bank, they keep trying, wracking up a great deal of money in bank fees."

A small businessman with a federal contract: "I just had to lay off 4 subcontractors, American citizens, taxpayers with families, directly due to the #TrumpShutdown. We received a letter from the government that our funding was furloughed until the budget clears. #2019Recession here we come."

A woman worker: "Thankful I have two jobs because I'm not getting paid at TSA. But I still have to show up. Which means I have to work both jobs every day, sleeping two to three hours at night, just to not even break even on bills."

A woman in the final stages of pregnancy: "First baby due any day now. Was feeling stressed about money since new job won't cover maternity leave. Not to worry husband has a pretty good job working for government ... oh wait never mind."

The Office of Personnel Management acknowledged that many workers could face the threat of repossession or eviction if they fall behind on rent, car payments or other

debts, issuing sample letters to creditors for unpaid workers to use in an effort to stave off the consequences of missing payments.

One draft letter was removed from the OPM Twitter account after it caused an uproar because it advised workers to offer to perform unpaid labor for their landlords to stave off eviction threats. The text of the withdrawn letter read, “I would like to discuss with you the possibility of trading my services to perform maintenance (e.g., painting, carpentry work) in exchange for partial rent payments.”

The federal shutdown will begin to have a much wider effect after the New Year holiday, as agencies exhaust any reserve funds and settle in for long-term operation without payroll funds. The Smithsonian Institution and the National Zoo are to close January 2.

Numerous aid programs for the poor are also threatened, such as the emergency food assistance program for the Department of Agriculture, which supplies surplus agricultural products to food banks, and a separate program sending food to the elderly poor.

Congressional leaders of both the Democratic and Republican parties left Washington over the holiday week, with House Democratic Leader Nancy Pelosi, who is expected to be elected speaker of the House on Thursday, vacationing in Hawaii in a show of indifference to the plight of 800,000 federal workers that nearly matched Trump’s.

Both right-wing, corporate-controlled parties could care less about federal workers missing paychecks or other hardships caused by the partial shutdown. They are engaged in a furious struggle, largely over foreign policy issues, in which the Democrats have been attacking Trump from the right, denouncing his order for a unilateral pullout of US military forces from Syria and a drawdown in troop strength in Afghanistan, while demanding a harder line against Russia.

Trump seeks to redeploy US military power towards a confrontation with China in the Far East, in which the US combines trade warfare and bogus denunciations of China for economic espionage, cyber warfare and “aggressive” military maneuvers in the South China Sea—the equivalent of China criticizing the US government for its operations in the Gulf of Mexico.

The purported “showdown” over Trump’s demand for a border wall is a stage-managed conflict in which both sides support repressive anti-immigrant measures, but choose not to reach agreement, at least for the time being, in order to perpetrate a political fraud against the

American people.

Two top aides to Trump admitted over the weekend that he has long abandoned his 2016 election pledge to build a physical wall from the Pacific Ocean to the Gulf of Mexico. Departing White House chief of staff John Kelly, who leaves office December 31, told the *Los Angeles Times* in an interview that Trump dropped the notion of “a solid concrete wall early on in the administration,” after consultations with officials at the Border Patrol. “To be honest, it’s not a wall,” Kelly said, describing the planned “border security” measures as a mix of technology, barriers and redeployed manpower.

White House counselor Kellyanne Conway called discussion of the wall “a silly semantic argument” during an appearance on Fox News Sunday. “There may be a wall in some places, there may be steel slats, there may be technological enhancements,” she said. “But only saying ‘wall or no wall’ is being very disingenuous and turning a complete blind eye to what is a crisis at the border.”

There was hardly any significant difference between Conway’s comments and the remarks of Representative Hakeem Jeffries, the fifth-ranking Democrat in the House, who appeared on ABC’s “This Week.” Jeffries said congressional Democrats are “certainly prepared to provide additional funding for enhanced fencing, technology, drones, satellites, lighting, sensors, cell phone towers and the things the experts have clearly indicated would improve our border security,” but not a physical wall.

Senator Jon Tester, a Democrat on the Appropriations Committee, appeared on “Face the Nation” on CBS. He pointed out that the Trump administration has not yet spent most of the \$1.3 billion authorized last year for border security. He indicated that he favored measures to secure the border and halt the flow of migrants, but declared, “I think we can do it with technology and manpower, and much more effectively than with a wall.”



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