

Shutdown reaches beyond government workers

By Marc Fisher and Holly Yeager, Washington Post

The reality of the government shutdown is finally hitting Americans who don't get their paychecks from Uncle Sam.

In Pittsburgh, Tim Russell was on the cusp of living his dream: After two years of work, after lining up federal and state licenses and buying equipment to make rum, he started making his first batch last week. Then the federal Alcohol and Tobacco Tax and Trade Bureau closed shop. With no one to approve the "Maggie's Farm Rum" labels, Russell can't sell a drop.

On Alaska's Upper Kenai River, the silver salmon and rainbow trout are huge and plentiful, but Fred Telleen's fly fishing guide service this week has been reduced to processing cancellations and refunds, because the Kenai National Wildlife Refuge is closed. Telleen lost \$1,100 on Monday alone.

In Bridgeport, Conn., Renate Seymour, an office manager at a factory, suddenly had to make alternative arrangements for her 4-year-old grandson, Jeremiah, who can no longer attend Head Start because classes shut down when the government closed up.

But wait: The pain of a shutdown is also eluding many millions of Americans.

Orange cones still dot plenty of federally funded highway projects, keeping an estimated 783,000 construction workers on the job. That's because the way road financing works, states usually pay the up-front costs, then bill Washington for reimbursement. And the Highway Trust Fund, funded by the federal gas tax, has money to make these payments.

Thousands of federal meat and poultry inspectors are still monitoring slaughterhouses and packing plants, which can't sell meat without the government's stamp of approval. The Agriculture Department told field inspectors to stay on the job "to ensure the safety of human life for the duration of a government shutdown."

In Mesquite, Nev., Police Chief Troy Tanner has seen no blip in crime, no signs of strain, no sense of a nation in distress. True, he has found himself pumping out more emails and phone calls than usual to figure out which of his federal counterparts are working – no answer at the nearest Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives office, but the FBI guy is there, he says.

But in his town of 16,000 near the borders with Utah and Arizona, the only frustration Tanner senses has come from one of his captains, who had just arrived in Virginia for a 10-week FBI National Academy course on the day before the government closed, only to be told that he had to turn right back around because the shutdown forced the cancellation of classes.

"What a waste of time," the chief said. "He's disappointed." There is one silver lining, though: When the airline charged the captain an exorbitant last-minute airfare to get back home, the feds picked up the tab, Tanner said. Thank you, Uncle Sam.

The federal government has become the behemoth that cried wolf. For more than two decades, budget brinkmanship has been such a mainstay of Washington politics that many Americans long ago grew skeptical of claims that if one deal or another weren't made, the Statue of Liberty would close or the nation's highways would seize up in the mother of all gridlocks.

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