



Government Shutdown Taking a Toll on Employees, ATC Modernization

The Professional Aviation Safety Specialists, AFL-CIO (PASS) continues to warn that the government shutdown could jeopardize the administration's plans to modernize the nation's air traffic control system, but expressed concern, too, for the well-being of the employees the union represents. "If the government is not opened as soon as possible, employees will be faced with no pay on October 28," said National President Dave Spero. "In addition, training has been stopped for these employees who will be critical to the efforts to modernize the National Airspace System."

PASS represents approximately 11,000 Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) and Department of Defense employees throughout the United States and abroad. These employees install, maintain, support and certify air traffic control and national defense equipment, inspect and oversee the commercial and general aviation industries, develop flight procedures, and perform quality analyses of complex aviation systems used in air traffic control in the United States and overseas. The employees work in the Flight Standards Service and Aircraft Certification in the office of Aviation Safety (AVS), and in Technical Operations, Air Traffic Services, Mission Support Services and Flight Program Operations of the Air Traffic Organization (ATO).

PASS-represented employees in training at the FAA Academy in Oklahoma City were sent home on October 3, with no funding available to keep them in much-needed classes. "It can take three to five years to fully train a technician," said President Spero. "Any lapse in training can push the clock back, as it did during the academy's closure during the pandemic."

The union has expressed to agency leadership that the frontline employees are essential to the efforts to modernize the air traffic control system. The union is positioned to be a valued partner moving forward. "These employees have the knowledge and expertise to upgrade the system and transition to it in a safe and efficient manner," said President Spero. "Every day, though, we're taking one step forward but two steps back."

And now the stress of the government shutdown on these employees is starting to be felt in concrete ways.

PASS surveyed its members, asking what personal impacts were being felt now that they are working without pay or are still furloughed. Over 700 employees responded with stories of financial stress, trips to local food banks, canceled medical treatments, the challenges of being a single-income household, looking for part-time work, and more.

"Like many Americans, a number of employees we represent live paycheck to paycheck and the shutdown is putting a severe financial strain on their families," continued President Spero.

"Bills are not going to get paid and we are going to start struggling to put food on the table for our



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family,” wrote one member. “My mother is in assisted living which I help pay for. Without a paycheck, she may get evicted,” wrote another. Another member told PASS, “I have to pay for childcare to be able to work. No money equals no childcare.”

Many members are married to other federal employees, meaning there is no income at all for these families. “I’m a mother of two young boys. My husband is also furloughed (DOD civilian),” one member told PASS. And it is not uncommon for both spouses to work at the agency. “My wife and I are both FAA employees and this could affect us being able to pay our mortgage and all of our other bills,” wrote another member.

It is important that these safety critical employees remain laser-focused on the job and the mission of the FAA. But the longer the shutdown continues, anxiety about finances and their families’ future will creep into their workday. That should never happen, but unfortunately, the shutdown stress is real and can be a distraction.

“For every day the government is shut down and employees in the aviation ecosystem are still furloughed, another layer of safety may be peeled away,” said President Spero. “The furloughed employees want to be back on the job, all of the employees need to be paid and they want to start actively contributing to the modernization of the air traffic control system. We call on Congress to open the government as soon as possible.”