



The Cost of a Government Shutdown

When Congress failed to pass appropriations in the fall of 2025, the resulting 43-day government shutdown tested every corner of the aviation system—and placed an extraordinary burden on all PASS-represented employees. While much of the nation focused on delayed flights and service disruptions, the most critical work continued out of public view: PASS members kept radar functioning, navigational aids online, safety systems certified, and training and modernization plans intact—all while working without pay and without knowing when relief would come. Aviation safety inspectors and other employees were furloughed yet subject to intermittent recall with no telling what their schedule would be from week to week, adding to the stress of not getting paid.

With another funding deadline coming on January 30, PASS continues to warn of the dangers of costly shutdowns on the air traffic control system and the dedicated public servants who maintain and regulate it. “We will continue to stress that aviation workers must be insulated from political stalemates and cannot be forced to work unpaid,” said National President Dave Spero. “Disagreements in Congress cannot be allowed to impact the safety and efficiency of our country's aviation system.” He also emphasized that “It took many hands to ensure that not one delay during the historic 43-day shutdown was attributed to equipment or system failures.”

Despite working in challenging circumstances during the historic 2025 shutdown, PASS-represented employees remained focused on keeping the aviation system safe. But PASS members also took time to make sure the public and lawmakers were aware of the impact any lapse of funding would have not only on the air traffic control system but on their personal lives as dedicated federal employees.

They spoke to the media and participated in informational picketing at select airports across the country. With so much media attention focused on air traffic controllers, President Spero was appreciative that so many members were able to get the word out about the other critical work being done by FAA employees who were also not getting paid.

From the earliest days of the shutdown, PASS leadership urged lawmakers to recognize the danger of starving the agency of funding while requiring essential employees to keep the system running. President Spero noted that the workforces PASS represents “are going to play a critical role in the plans to modernize air traffic control,” warning the furloughs, hiring freezes, and halted procurement would set modernization back just when the FAA can least afford it.

Unfortunately, as PASS members know, any pause in procurement, maintenance or training can worsen any existing concerns in the system. When it comes to FAA systems specialists, the years of training required cannot afford any interruptions.

“It takes a skill level, and we’re the safest airspace I the world, PASS Region II Assistant Kelly McGonigal explained to the media in Oklahoma. Workforce losses, he warned, could set aviation safety back for years. Even so, he said, “We’ve got guys working right now every day, 24 hours a



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day—just doing it without pay."

PASS members reported increasing strain on equipment as routine maintenance was delayed and inventories ran thin. For example, radar technician William Cruise, a PASS union rep at the FAA's Lake Charles (La.) System Support Center (SSC), emphasized the operational consequences of halted purchasing when talking to local media. "We won't be able to get parts for the radar that spin...if it breaks and we don't have a spare, we won't be able to get another one." PASS member and Savannah SSC union rep Roy Weaver told a reporter the shutdown highlighted an underlying vulnerability: many FAA systems are old, and training new technicians to understand them takes years. "It just takes three years for [a new hire] to be comfortable doing the bare minimum," he said. "Nobody speaks that language anymore, technology-wise."

Yet despite mounting financial pressure, Weaver said employees kept showing up. "If you've been in the military, you just have that mindset—job needs to be done," he said. "There's a lot of people that rely on us. Without us, they're not going anywhere," he told the reporter.

In Phoenix, aviation safety inspector and PASS union rep Andy Branigan emphasized to reporters that their work, though largely invisible to travelers, is essential. "We are the people who make sure the plane is safe to fly. We are the people who make sure the pilot is safe to fly," he said. "We are busy trying to justify our existence," even while working without pay.

For many PASS members, the shutdown's effects were immediate and deeply personal. "We drive an hour to work four days a week, now without compensation," said Lake Charles SSC union rep Dylan Mulford, emphasizing that even getting to work became a financial hardship for some.

But PASS members continued reporting for duty. "We go into debt every day, just to come into work," technician and PASS union rep Amanda James told the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*. "Our job is safety, 100%. But we need to make sure that we're taking care of the people who are maintaining the systems that keep travelers safe."

PASS union rep and environmental coordinator Shawn Williams, supporting two children while working without pay, put the public frustration into plain language to the Atlanta newspaper: "I just wish the government would come to terms and figure out how to solve this problem so that we can all get paid."

PASS Region II Vice President Doug Lowe explained the widespread hardship while talking to the media in Florida. "It's just a lot of strain on everyone to deal with the backside of a shutdown like this. We had several people...both spouses were federal employees. So, they were at zero income during this whole ordeal." "We're all still working, none of us are furloughed, we're still having to drive in," echoed PASS Region II Assistant Tim Lindsey in Texas. "There are people I work with that were feeling it day one."



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At Phoenix Sky Harbor International Airport, PASS union rep Ashley Cioffi described workers emptying their freezers to avoid grocery bills and relying on food banks. "Thoughts and prayers are great, but we still need to eat," she told local media at an informational picket she organized. As burnout deepened, she issued a warning: "At some point, people are going to stop showing up for work...Equipment will fail eventually if people don't come into work."

DC Metro Area Radar PASS union rep Cleverson Schmidt told CNN, "I'm trying to stay strong and do my job with dignity and with the best of my ability. I don't think I could handle if I was responsible for a loss of life, a loss of lives."

At Philadelphia International Airport, technician and PASS rep Lane Conley told the *Philadelphia Inquirer* employees were facing cascading financial crises. "We've missed one full paycheck. We've got part of another paycheck. We're about to miss our second," New trainees, he said, were already reconsidering their career paths. "We have one guy saying he can't stay here much longer."

Added PASS member Chris Borgia, "It's just stressful." Throughout the FAA, PASS members echoed a common theme: their dedication to safety has not wavered, but their ability to weather future shutdowns is shrinking.