

SHUTDOWN WITHIN THE STATE

by **ben henschel**

In the midst of the longest government shutdown in U.S. history, government officials, employees and their families are adjusting their lives to handle the lack of pay, cutbacks and curtailed regulations.

The shutdown — which began largely from President Trump's insistence and the Democratic party's refusal to include \$5.7 billion in the federal budget to fund a southern border wall — has impacted the families of government employees to varying extents, leaving some to search for jobs elsewhere and others to dip into their retirement or savings funds.

Jenny Woods, an enforcement attorney for the Commodity Futures Trading Corporation and mother of freshman Chapin Woods, is one of nearly 800,000 government employees furloughed without pay.

"People are really frustrated, I'd say a lot of people are having trouble sleeping, just thinking about [the shutdown]," Woods said. "They just want to go to work. It's what we do. When you take that structure away from people, it gets a lot worse."

Woods and her husband, who is currently working without pay for the Department of the Treasury, have had to tap into their retirement accounts for relief. From her 10 years of working at the CFTC, an additional 10 years at Polsinelli and her husband's years of employment, she has sustainable savings to support her family. But less experienced employees and government-employed contractors, she says, are left with fewer savings and fewer options.

Such workers aren't just absent from pay, but also from ensured benefits government employees receive, such as back pay and job assurance once the shutdown ends. A Jan. 16 bill signed by President Trump guarantees back pay for furloughed government employees following the shutdown, but not to the contractors that government agencies employ. Congress has attempted to pass bills aiding the contractors due to the shutdown's historic length, but none have been signed into law by the president.

"I signed onto a bill to ensure that low-wage contractors who are not often included in the back pay provisions are included now," 3rd district Representative Sharice Davids said. "There are a lot of contractors out there who are living paycheck-to-paycheck, and ordinarily

wouldn't be taken care of after a shutdown that need to be."

According to Woods, all of the contractors at her office — mostly dealing in vital Information Technology (IT) — were laid off completely after the 2013 shutdown, which spanned sixteen days. Considering the current shutdown spans over a month, she believes the consequences could be similar.

Davids said she and her colleagues are prioritizing legislation to improve the efficiency of filing for unemployment, trying to make the process as smooth as possible. At the moment, according to Woods, the filing process for government employees is particularly difficult. Private companies supply necessary information regarding salary to the unemployment benefits supervisor in Kansas, but federal government jobs do not.

"[Government employees] have to pull all this paperwork and pay stubs to prove what [their] salary is," Woods said. "That's a huge obstacle for people trying to get money right away. And it's difficult because it's not a true layoff and you know you'll get recalled, but people still need money."

Kansas contractors are just one of many jobs put in a difficult position, Davids said. According to her, farmers are losing access to USDA operating programs that provide essential loans. Air traffic controllers — who she believes already work high-stress jobs — are placed under even more stress due to the lack of plan regarding their paychecks.

Many air traffic controllers and Transportation Security Administration operatives around the country were observed calling in sick to avoid work without pay — such was the case in Miami where, due to a lack of TSA screeners, a section of the airport was closed. However, Kansas City International Airport has a plan in place when absenteeism is observed, according to Joe McBride of the KC Aviation Department.

"It is part of the TSA's Screening Partnership Program whereby a contracted company, Akal Security, provides the screeners," McBride said in an email. "TSA informs us that the contract is funded, so Akal employees are being paid."

Despite this, the lack of TSA operatives at certain airports still pose problems. The SME Band, after returning from their week-long trip to Italy on Jan. 4, were without their instruments until Jan. 17, according to freshman Christopher Alka.

Kansans feel effects of the longest government shutdown to date

Since their equipment was diverted to another plane due to a lack of space, band members and their respective equipment made the trip separately. Along with canceled flights due to Winter Storm Gia, the lack of TSA workers to check and ship the belongings of the 100 plus students caused the delay, Alka said.

With a concert to prepare for which took place Wednesday, Jan. 23, band members were left with two weeks to practice upon their return from Italy — and nothing to practice with. They had to cut the majority of their planned songs from the concert.

"We just didn't have enough time to work with the songs," Alka said. "Unless you're a musical genius or something, it's going to take a few weeks to work with those songs at least."

The opening of the government would

“

People are really frustrated, I'd say a lot of people are having trouble sleeping, just thinking about [the shutdown]. They just want to go to work. It's what we do. When you take that structure away from people, it gets a lot worse.

jenny woods

mostly fill TSA's employment holes, but the difficulties and setbacks experienced from the shutdown may not end with the re-opening of the government, according to Woods. Further problems, she said, will likely arise in the first few days of the government's re-opening for many agencies — especially if the shutdown drags on for additional weeks or months.

During the 2013 shutdown, Woods said, it took several days for employees to receive their back pay, and morale was low amongst her co-workers.

She believes the same could occur when the government finally re-opens, but to an even greater extent. And with several other essential CFTC operations stalled by the shutdown, she considers hardship and delay when it opens to be inevitable.

"I haven't been to my office in 28 days," Woods said on Jan. 16. "There's going to be a backlog of complaints from calls and our online system to deal with. Things may have happened in my cases, the court may have made orders that need to be addressed or the opposing party may have filed motions. It's going to take a lot of time."

Countless other potential complications loom for furloughed workers. After 300 to 400 Internal Revenue Service workers were recalled — or required to return to work without pay — on Jan. 15, Woods speculated that the government may recall her or other furloughed agencies.

This means recalled government agencies would be run by not only unpaid, but unmotivated workers, according to Woods.

Fortunately for Prairie Village residents, all local government is running without direct effect from the shutdown, and will continue to regardless of its length, Mayor Eric Mikkelsen said. Local government runs autonomously in relation to the federal government and focuses mostly on crises that impact the city directly.

Yet the potential length of the shutdown

remains clouded with uncertainty. Throughout the shutdown, Majority Leader Mitch McConnell of Kentucky has taken widespread criticism for stalling votes on the Senate floor, causing many bills to be stopped short of the White House. Davids hopes the Senate will come to the table and "at least take up the votes," regardless of their likelihood to be signed by President Trump.

"It's really hard to tell, there are a lot of things that tell me it could go on for a lot longer," sophomore Mac Muehlburger, son of an attorney for the Environmental Protection Agency receiving half pay, said. "It's [McConnell's] job to be coming out in times like this and come up with solutions, and he's remained relatively quiet."

With no clear deal being made between Congress and the White House — and the shutdown beginning its 38th day as of Jan. 29 — Woods is left with one central question:

"We would just be in this limbo of a government shutdown if everyone's recalled without pay, but isn't that a little strange? Someone has to cave, right?"

PAST SHUTDOWNS

a breakdown of past government shutdowns



information courtesy of CNN and The New York Times

Food and Drug Administration



National Parks and Museums



NASA



Airports



ALL AFFECTED national organizations affected by the shutdown