

White House Warns of Long Lines at Airports, Other Delays if Government Shuts Down

Government is set to partially close on Oct. 1 if Congress can't reach agreement on federal spending legislation

*By Andrew Restuccia and Sabrina Siddiqui
Wall Street Journal*

WASHINGTON—Long lines at airports. Delayed food-safety inspections. Halted infrastructure projects. Military personnel working without pay.

These are just some of the potential consequences if the federal government partially shuts down next month, according to the White House, as infighting among House Republicans over spending makes a lapse in funding increasingly possible.

The White House on Wednesday weighed in publicly on the fallout from a shutdown for the first time. While White House officials have criticized House Republican appropriations bills, they have largely avoided wading directly into the politics of a shutdown.

“[I]f extreme House Republicans fail to ram through their radical agenda, they plan to take their frustration out on the American people by forcing a government shutdown that would undermine our economy and national security, create needless uncertainty for families and businesses, and have damaging consequences across the country,” the White House said.

House Republicans [are divided](#) over what should be included in a short-term funding bill that must win the approval of both chambers of Congress to avoid a partial federal closure on Oct. 1. On Tuesday, House GOP lawmakers worked to salvage the bill, but they remained short of the support needed to pass the measure.

The legislation [has sparked divisions](#) within House Speaker Kevin McCarthy's fractured caucus, with some members of the hard-right Freedom Caucus balking at a proposal unveiled by Republican lawmakers on Sunday. The proposed bill would fund the government past Sept. 30 and contains an 8% proposed cut in discretionary nonmilitary spending and a [border-security provision](#).

White House officials said privately that they are confident the public would blame Republicans for a shutdown, and in the coming days they plan to increase warnings about the consequences should one occur.

Some Republican lawmakers also worried about the political fallout of a shutdown. “I think all of you know, I’m not a fan of government shutdowns,” Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell (R., Ky.) said this week. “I’ve seen a few of them over the years, they never have produced a policy change and they’ve always been a loser for Republicans politically.”

The government shut down for 35 days during the Trump administration, and the majority of the public blamed then-President [Donald Trump](#) for it, according to polls. Shortly before the government shut down, as he was pushing for more funding for security at the U.S.-Mexico border, Trump said he would be “[proud to shut down the government](#).”

The severity of the effects of a shutdown will depend in part on how long it lasts. A brief shutdown likely would have limited fallout. But a shutdown that lasts weeks could result in the closing of swaths of the federal apparatus and government employees working without pay. Federal workers typically get back-pay after shutdowns end.

The White House pointed to wide-ranging consequences should the government shut down: All active-duty military personnel and some law-enforcement officers would work without pay and there could be a halt to disaster-relief funding that enables the Federal Emergency Management Agency to respond to deadly wildfires, hurricanes and other catastrophic events.

Increased travel disruptions because of a continuing shortage of air-traffic controllers could also get worse, with the White House emphasizing that air-traffic controllers and Transportation Security Administration officers would also go without pay in a shutdown. The National Institutes of Health may have to delay new clinical trials, potentially halting cancer and Alzheimer’s research, and some Head Start programs that serve preschool children from low-income families across the country would be forced to shut down.

Other effects highlighted by the White House include possible limits on workplace and food-safety inspections, a halt of inspections led by the Environmental Protection Agency to ensure clean air and safe drinking water, and a stop to any new business loans by the Small Business Administration.

In previous shutdowns, some national parks remained open to visitors, but other services such as trash collection and campground operations were temporarily discontinued. The U.S. Postal Service has typically continued to operate, due to its status as an independent entity with its own funding stream, and entitlement programs that aren’t funded through annual appropriations—such as Social Security and Medicare—have been unaffected.

In the event of a shutdown, each government agency follows its own [contingency plan](#) that estimates how many employees are deemed essential and lays out the extent to which operations will continue.