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Pay, services may be altered for Georgia military bases if federal government shuts down

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With the threat of a looming government shutdown, many federal employees could be furloughed, or may have to report for work without pay — including military service members.

Georgia has the fifth highest number of Department of Defense employees in the country, according to the Georgia Department of Economic Development, with at least eight military installations across the Army, Air Force, Navy, and Marines. Even if a government shutdown does occur, however, military bases will carry on with their essential duties.

"In the event of a shutdown, the Fort Stewart-Hunter Army Airfield U.S. Army Garrison team will continue to deliver life, health, and safety services for those working and living on the installation," wrote Kevin Larson, chief of public communications for Fort Stewart near Savannah. "We remain in communication with our team and will continue to provide specific information as events unfold."

Other than that, Larson said they are still awaiting official guidance.

Fort Gordon echoed that sentiment.

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"We are awaiting official guidance and cannot speculate on impacts until we receive it," wrote Anne H. Bowman, deputy public affairs officer at Fort Gordon, in an email. "In the event of a

shutdown, the Fort Gordon team will continue to deliver life, health, and safety services for those working and living on the installation."

According to the Department of Defense, services on bases could be limited, including postponing elective surgeries and closing commissaries in the U.S. (although not overseas). At the end of the shutdown, people who worked unpaid hours will receive backpay.

On Fort Gordon in Augusta, civilian employees represented by T.W.U. Local 527 will likely continue to be paid, said Benyoel Morgan, president of the local. On Fort Gordon, members do facility maintenance for buildings and infrastructure, facility maintenance at Eisenhower Hospital, and logistics support including vehicle and electronic maintenance.

"If there is a contract in place that's funded, and our members are considered essential workers, they will probably continue working," Morgan said. "If the contract is fully funded, then they'll get paid while they're working, but because they're essential personnel, if it's not funded, potentially they could be working without getting paid right away."

The workforce was considered essential during the COVID-19 pandemic and during the last shutdown, Morgan said. One contract is incrementally funded, and should extend through the shutdown, the others are fully funded Morgan said. Still, things change.

"We should be good, and it has worked out that way over time, but until it actually happens and we're past that and still working, nobody's feeling comfortable," Morgan said.

When will the government shut down?

The U.S. is two days away from a shutdown — a situation moving from possible to likely as Congress has failed to cut through gridlock and reach a deal to fund the federal government.

Millions of Americans will be impacted if lawmakers can't reach a deal before 12:01 a.m. Oct. 1.

A shutdown would impact the country's largest food assistance programs, federally funded preschool, federal college grants and loans, food safety inspections, national parks and more.

When was the last government shutdown?

There have been 21 federal shutdowns over the last five decades, with four since 2000.

2013: Under President Barack Obama. Lasted 17 days.

2018: Under President Donald Trump. Lasted three days.

2018: Under President Donald Trump. Lasted several hours.

2019: President Donald Trump. Lasted 35 days.

USA TODAY reporters Candy Woodall, Rachel Looker, Savannah Kuchar, Sudiksha Kochi and Marina Pitofsky contributed to this story.