

TECH & SECURITY

Iowa Airport Security Screeners Working Without Pay

MITCHELL SCHMIDT ON DEC 28, 2018

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Dec. 27--CEDAR RAPIDS -- In one of the busiest weeks of the year for holiday travel, the roughly 200 security staffers at airports in Iowa -- and others around the country -- are working without a guarantee they'll be paid and without assurance the partial government shutdown will end soon.

The shutdown puts a halt on pay for some government employees, but not the need for services provided by federal law enforcement, correctional officers, firefighters and security employees, said Gregg James, national vice president of American Federation of Government Employees' District 8, which represents Iowa, Minnesota, Nebraska, North Dakota and South Dakota.

Funding for some federal departments has run out. A deal to continue their budgets is sidelined for now over President Donald Trump's demand for \$5 billion toward building a border wall and Democratic lawmakers' refusal to spend it. As a result, parts of the government are closed as negotiations continue.

According to projected impacts of the partial shutdown, prepared by the staff of Senate Appropriations Committee vice chairman Sen. Patrick Leahy, D-Vermont, more than 420,000 federal employees nationwide are deemed essential and are working without pay. Another 380,000 are being furloughed.

The Transportation Security Administration employs roughly 60 security workers at The Eastern Iowa Airport, said James Gregory, the agency's deputy assistant administrator of public affairs, in an email.

Gregory said all the workers will remain on the job despite the shutdown and travelers will see no difference.

"TSA officers, TSA canine handlers and their canines, TSA explosives experts, TSA inspectors -- all front-line security personnel -- will be working. They will not be getting paid during the furlough. However, historically they have gotten paid once the furlough ends," he said.

James said legislation calling for back pay typically follows a government shutdown. But that doesn't help those dealing now with holiday expenses or covering rent checks due at the beginning of the month.

"As always, it has to get through the House and Senate and nobody quite knows for sure these days what quite to expect from those houses. So it's certainly not a comfortable feeling," James said. "We're not sure what's going to happen with the wall situation. We do represent Border Patrol and (U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement) folks as well, but certainly we don't want to see others impacted because of the politics of immigration. Hopefully they'll at least pay for the work that is being done."

James said federal employees holding security clearances must maintain their financial status. A bounced check or missed payment could cause them to lose their clearance -- or even their job, he said.

"We're not there yet, but if this turns into some kind of extended time off, that's a real consideration, as well as your health benefits," he said.

I Comments: (319) 398-8309; mitchell.schmidt@thegazette.com

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