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Potential Federal Government Shutdown Could Impact the U.S. Virgin Islands

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U.S. Congress By. GETTY IMAGES

As the potential federal government shutdown looms with just 2 days left, Congresswoman Stacey Plaskett has voiced concerns about its possible effects on the U.S. Virgin Islands.

The likelihood of a partial government shutdown this weekend has increased as the prospects for an agreement appear bleak. This comes after House Speaker Kevin McCarthy (R., Calif.) favored a House Republican plan heavily influenced by conservatives, overlooking a bipartisan short-term funding proposal from the Senate.

The disagreements between the House and Senate are evident, as both chambers are progressing with their own interim proposals. These are aimed at ensuring the government remains functional

as they continue deliberations on comprehensive funding legislation. However, there's a catch: each chamber's plan is viewed as unviable by the other, primarily due to pronounced differences concerning spending allocations, border security, and issues related to Ukraine.

Given the prevailing circumstances, numerous legislators are growing increasingly pessimistic, expecting Congress might not secure funding for the government beyond Sept. 30. Such an outcome would result in the partial shutting down of federal agencies and a temporary withholding of salaries for federal employees and active-duty military staff.

According to recent data from the House Budget Committee Democrats, a shutdown could have the following repercussions:

- About 417 civilian federal government employees in the Virgin Islands, excluding Armed forces servicemembers, may face furloughs and be unable to work.
- Federal law enforcement, air traffic controllers, TSA officers, Customs and Border Protection (CBP) agents, and military servicemembers would be mandated to work without pay.
- Although the USDA will continue administering SNAP benefits for October after a September 30 shutdown, benefits could be jeopardized if the shutdown extends into November or later.
- The U.S. Department of Agriculture will halt loan processing for farmers.
- Passport offices will suspend the processing of new passports, leading to delays for those currently in process.
- While Social Security recipients will still receive their checks, the Social Security Administration will offer limited services, and certain operations like benefit verifications will be halted. Customer service wait times are expected to rise significantly.
- Medicare, Medicaid, and disability insurance beneficiaries will maintain their benefits, provided the shutdown doesn't exceed three months.
- All VA medical facilities will remain open, and veterans' benefits will continue to be processed. Nevertheless, other essential services for veterans, such as job training and assistance for homeless veterans, could be disrupted.
- USPS operations will remain unaffected.

Ms. Plaskett emphasized the collaborative efforts between Senate Democrats, Senate Republicans, and House Democrat Members in crafting a Continuing Resolution (CR) that aims to keep the government operational until November 15th. This CR is crucial, especially after FEMA's recent announcement regarding the nearing exhaustion of its nationwide Disaster Relief Fund. The Senate's proposed allocation of \$6 billion to the Fund in the CR, if passed by the House, would guarantee that new rebuilding projects in the Virgin Islands continue, benefiting from FEMA's collaboration with the Office of Disaster Recovery, according to Ms. Plaskett.

The congresswoman and her team have pledged their commitment to aiding residents during this period, though they warn that responses from affected federal agencies might be delayed.

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