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A SECTION

THE FEDERAL PAGE

Some Just Wouldn't Stop Working  
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 Washington Post Staff Writers

They were the phantoms of the Great Government Shutdown.

When federal offices closed last week, numerous white-collar employees sent home on furlough stuffed their briefcases and bags with files from the in-box, figuring they could take a project or two home and, at the least, work in peace and quiet. Other employees supposedly on furlough were sneaking into their offices, apparently they could meet upcoming deadlines at work.

Said one furloughed worker: "We were told not to fall down the stairs if you come to work," presumably because injuries would not be covered by insurance. He, like others interviewed, asked not to be identified.

Supervisors were instructed not to put pressure on anyone to complete their work, he said. Even so, many of his furloughed colleagues were showing up in the office.

This is, after all, Washington, where virtually everyone hates to miss work. Work is status, work is power, and everyone likes to think he or she is essential.

But work by any employee on furlough because of a shutdown has been deemed illegal. The 19th century Anti-Deficiency Act forbids agency managers to accept volunteer labor or other services. Violators can be punished with a \$5,000 fine, imprisoned for not more than two years, or both.

Unlike other federal workers, employees at the White House were permitted to volunteer during a shutdown. But at a price.

White House volunteers would have their salary changed to

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o, which carries "substantial consequences," as a White House spokesman explained. A zero salary meant the White House workers would: lose their health insurance and life insurance; lose the prospect of any back pay that Congress might grant furloughed workers; and cease accruing sick leave and vacation time.

Still, many among the rank and file wanted to work. Last week, a public affairs officer at one agency, bored with filling out graduate school applications, went to his office to sit in on an interview that a senior official was giving to a newspaper reporter.

"They told me I could be arrested or something," he said, "but I was going nuts. I got my car worked on. I made some calls. But I was going crazy," especially because his agency is fighting for survival in Congress.

It took him less than two minutes Thursday to respond to a call placed to his pager.

The people who study work were not surprised.

Edward Lawler, a University of Southern California business professor, said scientific studies have long found individuals who "are motivated by the task rather than the reward. . . .

"They are very much turned on by the work they do. I'm not surprised that some would do it but I would expect it would be a very small percentage . . . maybe 5 to 10 percent."

Lawler said such workers were probably involved in interesting, high-profile projects. "If you are a parking lot attendant, you are not coming in to park extra cars."

Bonnie Michaels, president of Managing Work & Family Inc., a Chicago consulting firm, said it is hard to explain why federal workers would take risks when told not to work. Many workers battle bouts of insecurity and a "fear of the future," she said. For them, work is an anchor in their lives.

Lawler said work acts almost as a narcotic for some people. "They are inseparable from the work they do. It defines who they are. Without it, some people literally can come apart."

The Anti-Deficiency Act also made life difficult for workers authorized to carry on government business during the shutdown. The law allows civil servants and the military to continue national defense, protect public safety and health, support the national economy and perform emergency tasks.

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But it apparently limited otherwise routine activities. Lawyers at the National Aeronautics and Space Administration said last week that NASA Deputy Administrator John R. Dailey could not appear for a panel discussion before the National Academy of Public Administration. An aide to Deputy Attorney General Jamie S. Gorelick refused a reporter's request for an interview, saying Gorelick was restricted to performing only "essential business."

Clinton administration officials, meanwhile, have repeatedly chided reporters for using the terms "essential" and "nonessential" when writing about employees affected by the shutdown. The official designations are "excepted," "emergency" and "non-excepted" employees, officials said.

"If the legal test was 'essential employees,' there would have been no furloughs," said John A. Koskinen, deputy director of the Office of Management and Budget.

Rep. Steny H. Hoyer (D-Md.) said he found "a disturbing trend towards downplaying the importance" of the furloughed workers. "It is disgraceful that some have chosen to suggest that 'nonessential' employees really are not needed or do not contribute," he said.

"Anybody who understands how to lead and deal with people would never declare 800,000 people nonessential," Ross Perot said yesterday on NBC's "Meet the Press." "That creates a scar that will take a long time to heal."

Senior Executives Association president Carol A. Bonosaro said furloughed workers "have been subjected to unwarranted ridicule in the media and by the public" because of the widespread use of "nonessential."

She recently met with Vice President Gore, she said, and "was gratified to learn that the vice president not only understands the denigrating nature of this label but is personally offended by its use."

Gore "has personally urged" top administration officials to assure returning federal workers of their importance to their agencies, Bonosaro said.

Staff writers William Branigin, David Brown, Elizabeth Corcoran and Thomas W. Lippman and staff researcher Barbara J. Saffir contributed to this report.

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NO-GRAPHIC

CAPTION: SHUTDOWN CHRONOLOGY

MONDAY, NOV. 13

President Clinton vetoes legislation that would have averted a government shutdown, saying the bill would raise Medicare premiums and deeply cut education and environment programs. An attempt to find a compromise between the White House and GOP congressional leaders fails.

TUESDAY, NOV. 14

Clinton and Republican leaders exchange public recriminations but fail to find a solution to the budget stalemate.

+ About 800,000 federal workers across the nation are sent home. About 150,000 of the 310,000 civil servants in the Washington area are furloughed.

+ National park visitor centers and monuments close. All Smithsonian museums and the National Zoo close. More than 4,000 ticket holders to the biggest show of Johannes Vermeer's painting in three centuries are locked out of the National Gallery of Art.

+ The administration continues to issue Social Security checks, but new applications are not processed. Medical staff remains on duty at veterans hospitals and clinics.

+ Air traffic controllers, the Coast Guard, railway inspectors and other safety personnel remain on the job. Weather forecasting continues.

All active duty military stay at work, along with about 571,000 of the Defense Department's 866,000 civilian employees.

+ Federal prisons operate as normal. Criminal investigations and prosecutions continue, but postponements are sought in most civil cases.

+ A reduced staff of maids, butlers, chefs, electricians and engineers take care of the White House. About 90 of Clinton's 430 non-household staff members stay on duty.

+ Schools and hospitals in the District of Columbia stay open, but other services are disrupted.

WEDNESDAY, NOV. 15

Treasury Secretary Robert E. Rubin announces plans to pull \$61.3 billion from two federal retirement accounts, an unprecedented move that he said was necessary to save the government from the first default in its history.

+ Government contractors began to receive "stop work" orders from agencies, leading some of them to send their workers home, too.

+ Corporations register stock and bond offerings with the Securities and Exchange Commission at sharply lower fees because a higher fee is part of the budget and has not become law yet. The loss to the Treasury is estimated at between \$15 million and \$25 million.

THURSDAY, NOV. 16

Congress draws criticism because it keeps virtually all of its staff at work, even though its appropriation has lapsed, too.

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The National Park Service instructs parks to close lodges and cabins, the first step to completely shutting down the nation's largest parks.

+ The Grand Canyon closes for the first time in its 76-year history, prompting protests from Arizona Gov. J. Fife Symington (R).  
 + The shutdown begins to take its toll on area businesses, with companies furloughing at least 1,000 private-sector workers.

FRIDAY, NOV. 17

Hours of intense negotiations aimed at reopening the government collapse.

+ Federal employees besiege government personnel offices seeking advice on when they might be paid. An increasing number fill out forms to apply for unemployment compensation.

+ A federal judge rejects a request by the American Federation of Government Employees to stop agencies from requiring employees to work without pay during the budget standoff.

+ Interior Department officials say they are being pressured by members of Congress to accommodate hunters who use dozens of wildlife refuges that are shuttered.

+ Housing and Urban Development Secretary Henry Cisneros worries that the shutdown could jeopardize rental subsidies to 1.3 million low-income households and stall the processing of millions of dollars worth of home loans and mortgages.

SATURDAY, NOV. 18

Republican leaders and the White House begin lengthy talks to end the shutdown. Administration officials warn that the government will face a series of financial emergencies within several days.

+ Cash shortages could make it difficult to provide milk and food to federal prisons and medical supplies to veterans hospitals.

+ The shutdown jeopardizes the distribution of about 7,000 welfare checks to Native Americans and more than 3.3 million benefit checks to veterans and survivors.

+ The cost of the shutdown is estimated at about \$120 million a day, with the bulk of that representing back pay that GOP leaders have pledged to restore.

SUNDAY, NOV. 19

Clinton and the Congress agree to balance the budget not later than fiscal 2002, and the House and Senate pass a one-day funding bill allowing about 750,000 federal employees to return to their jobs today. The Senate, in session on a Sunday for only the 17th time in its history, also passed a bill to fund the government until Dec. 15, and the House was to vote on that measure today.

-- Stephen Barr

---- INDEX REFERENCES ----

NAMED PERSON: STENY H. HOYER;

ANIZATION: ANTI-DEFICIENCY ACT

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