

Show Me Your Shutdown Plan

By Shawn Zeller, CQ Staff

Conventional wisdom says Congress and President Obama will reach a deal to keep the government running before the current appropriations bill expires April 8. But federal employee unions are starting to worry that the administration doesn't have a contingency plan for what to do should there, in fact, be a government shutdown. And they've let the White House know they aren't happy.

“Our members and people we represent have a vested interest in knowing whether they'll be employed or furloughed,” says **William R. Dougan**, president of the National Federation of Federal Employees. His union represents 110,000 federal workers across 40 agencies.



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Dougan (
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Dougan was dissatisfied earlier this month when he pressed **Jeffrey D. Zients**, deputy director of the White House's Office of Management and Budget, for details of agency contingency plans. Zients said most agencies were still working on them and that they would be released if a shutdown were imminent.

Dribs and drabs of agency planning have come out. A memo has circulated at the Defense Department, for example, that says members of the military would be required to work without pay in the event of a shutdown. Civilians at the Pentagon would have to work without pay if the department deemed them essential. Others would be furloughed.

Last month, a Social Security Administration associate commissioner, **Jay Clary**, wrote to the agency's union, the American Federation of Government Employees, to warn of furloughs if the agency's funding is cut.

But other agencies have been more tight-lipped. That troubles Dougan because he says the unions have the right to negotiate how furloughs would be carried out. The unions, for example, could bargain over which employees would be furloughed first and how agencies would inform them of the furloughs.

Zients says he doesn't think a shutdown will occur. But Dougan is skeptical: “From everything I'm seeing, it's becoming fairly questionable whether they'll be able to reach a deal” on the budget.