

# Workplace Wellness

## Keeping NWSEO Members Safe, Happy & Healthy

October 25, 2019

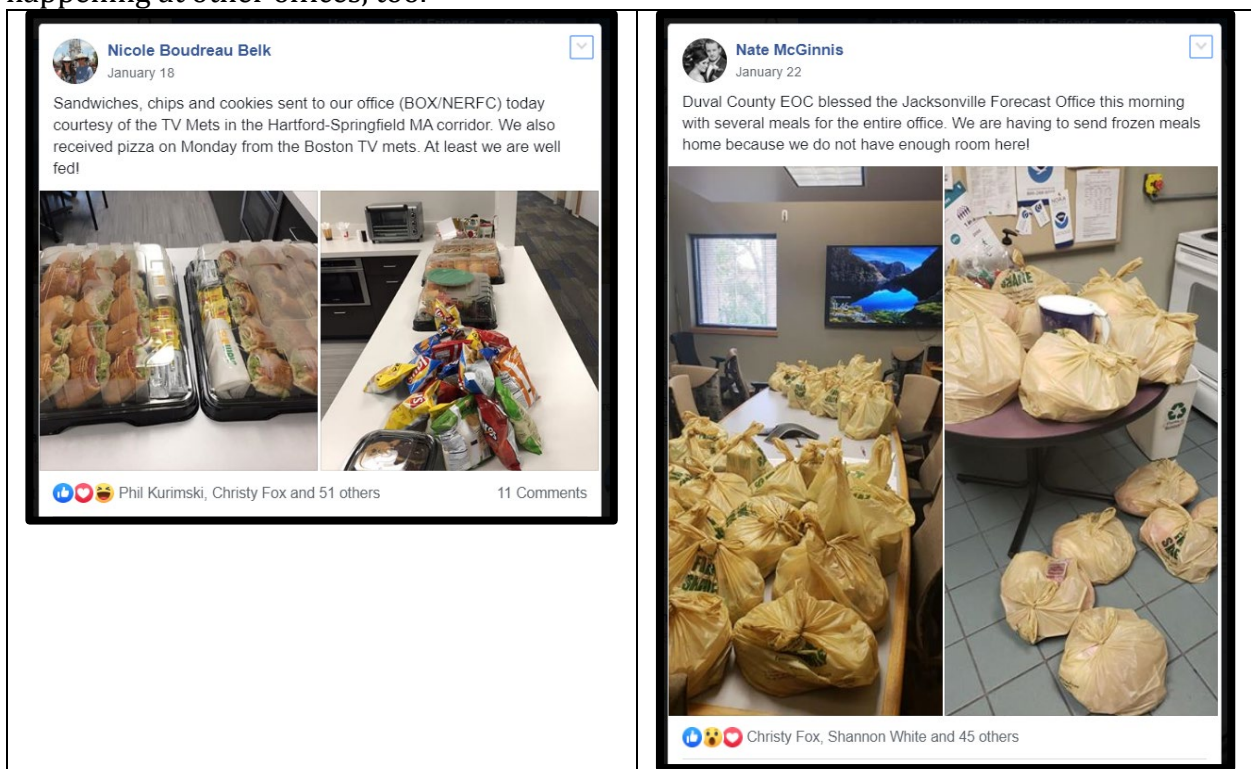
December, 2018: At first, I just rolled my eyes. Another government shutdown? More posturing and grand-standing by politicians, that just can't seem to get their jobs done on time. I had gone through previous shutdowns, most notably the 1995-1996 shutdown, which happened at the same time as my PCS move from one office to another- imagine going into temporary quarters while the rest of government is shut down? I remember having my MIC call to ask if I had to delay my move due to the shutdown. Thankfully, that apparently had already been paid for, and I don't remember missing a paycheck during that particular shutdown. The 2013 shutdown turned out to be no big deal either, as I recall getting a partial paycheck, but then it was all paid up in the next paycheck. Most of the other shutdowns were too short to have an impact. So, on December 22nd I wasn't too worried. I figured those politicians would get their shutdown in for spectacular effect, someone would back down right after New Year's, and then we would be back to business as usual. I was disgusted, but wasn't too worried, hoping that the politicians remembered the lessons they had learned from previous shut-downs.

By mid-January that optimism began to wear thin as the initial impasse turned into a full stand-off, and there was little to no movement in legislation even as we missed our first paycheck. The news was full of what the politicians were and were not doing, dramatics and histrionics. I began to see the "pawn" icons showing up on my co-workers profile pictures on Facebook. I followed suit, finding one that fit my annoyed and irritated mood. The news began to pay attention to employees that were working without their pay, and how it impacted us. Unfortunately, public response was lukewarm to outright antagonistic, claiming that we knew what we were getting into, were getting paid too much as it is, and should have built up an emergency fund, etc. Those of us who had been able to build up such an emergency fund were doing OK, but the new hires, people who had had to use up those emergency funds for something else, or those who were otherwise in a tight spot, they were beginning to be hurt, and that made me angry.



But then, I saw something- something that made me hope for the future, feel grateful for this community, OUR community. And, believe it or not, it was on social media. The generally accepted advice when you are suffering from anxiety and stress is to avoid social media, as it can just make those symptoms worse. However, during the shutdown, I found that our community of NWSEO and Bargaining Unit employees, all suffering from the stress of the shutdown, were finding ways to help each other. We were engaging with each other to build each other up, show that we weren't alone, show how we were able to keep our spirits up, and communicate that we were not alone. I didn't spend a lot of time on social media, as if I looked at too many news articles I found too many depressing and unhelpful comments, but if I was careful about what I looked at, avoiding certain comment sections, I found the support I needed.

First, it was the offers of help. Articles posted about free or low cost options to put food on the table, recipe sharing, and even donations of food that were brought directly to the office! Our communities were stepping up to support us. We had supported them when they called us for the information and reassurance they needed, and now they were supporting us back. I can't tell you how humbled and grateful I felt the day one of our retirees showed up with sandwiches for everyone at the office. I saw that this was happening at other offices, too.



Numerous articles were posted on our NWSEO Facebook page about how businesses were offering deals to federal employees, including restaurants. A list was started that showed all the national level companies that were offering help. Near us, a barber shop was offering free haircuts to federal employees and their families. Perhaps these companies were only doing it to gain some new customers that would keep coming back, and to show how they were helping their communities, but every little bit helps in a situation like this.

I didn't feel as bad when I called my mortgage company to discuss my house, as I knew I wasn't the only one.

**Phil Kurimski** shared a link.  
January 20  
Some freebies for us during the shutdown. <https://www.thrillist.com/.../government-shutdown-free-food-d...#>

THRILLIST.COM  
**All the Places Furloughed Workers Can Get Free Food**  
Get hooked up.  
Gino Iz, Christy Fox and 12 others  
7 Comments

**David Snider** shared a link.  
January 10  
Fellow BU's... we've started a list of national companies offering help or assistance during the Shutdown. The doc isn't open to edit to everyone, but if you find an editor... we'll drop in your info. Plz help and share.  
Tag on twitter with [#FedShutdownHelp](#)  
[@davesnider](#)  
Thanks to Megan Taylor, Rick Smith, John Keyes (not all BU folks, of course). Go team.

**Other national lists:**  
<https://myfedbenefitshelp.com/assistance-programs-for-federal-employees-furlough-during-the-g-overment-shutdown/>

For more help and specials, follow: [#FedShutdownHelp](#) on Twitter.

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DOCS.GOOGL.COM  
**Financial Resources for Federal Employees - Shutdown 2019**  
Follow: [#FedShutdownHelp](#) and [#fedshutdownhelp](#) on Twitter for threads


The initial news coverage with the negative comments was disheartening, but then I began seeing other articles, ones that quoted NWSEO stewards and leadership, talking about how the shutdown was affecting us. It was not just the loss of our paychecks, but how the shutdown was making it harder for us to do our jobs. The Wakefield WSR-88D had broken, and the shutdown was making it hard to get the parts that were needed to fix it. Great Lakes Environmental Research Lab (GLERL) stopped sending out data critical for making Marine and Lake Effect Snow forecasts. Spotter training, and important partner outreach events, experiments and projects had to be put on hold. Fire Weather, Hurricane preparedness, and Integrated Warning Team meetings were cancelled. These interviews and articles were making the case for how this affected not just us as individuals, but the communities we serve. These articles took us from a faceless and voiceless “they” group of people who are otherwise easy to shoot verbal arrows at and take funding away from, to the dedicated scientific professionals who were performing an important mission. The negative comments on those articles were much less than they had been on other furlough news articles. Those articles gave me the courage to provide my own interview, which showed how this shutdown affected snowfall forecasts.

 **Christy Fox** shared a link.  
Admin · January 22


Continued story on WFO Wakefield, from NBC12 Virginia, regarding the broken radar and how the shutdown is continuing to make this difficult for our NWS Employees.



NBC12.COM  
**Government shutdown slows repair of National Weather Service Radar**

 **Linda Engebretson** shared a link.  
January 23

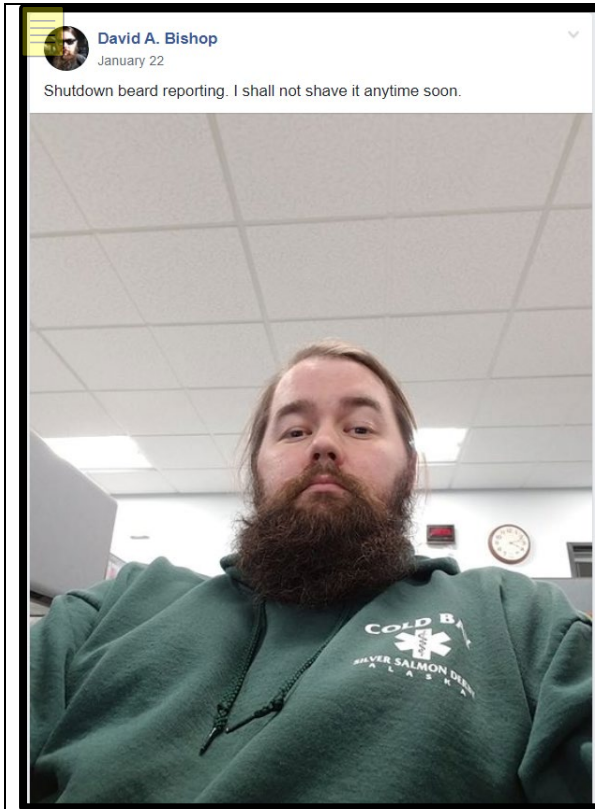
We talked about more than this during the interview, and there may be something with video later- we'll see.



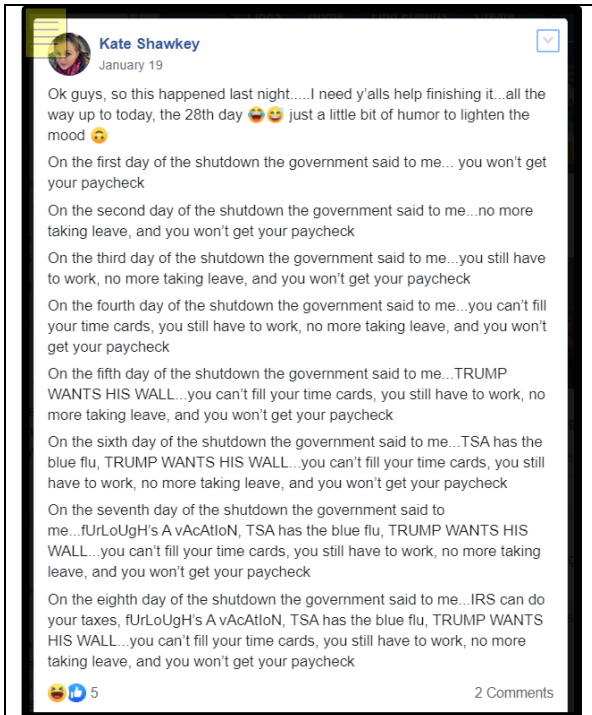
CBS3DULUTH.COM  
**Government shutdown impacts forecasting of lake effect snow**

History shows us that civil disobedience can appear in numerous ways, including protests, strikes, speech, etc. Many of those forms are not available to us as federal employees, and we have agreed not to use others through collective bargaining. However, we found other ways to protest our treatment. A few rallies and protests were held in Washington that those close to it could attend, and did. Farther away, we had to find other ways. I saw reports of delays in putting away holiday decorations, Pajama days, shutdown beards, mustaches and wild hair colors! The thought of my colleagues wearing shutdown beards, furlough hair and pajamas to work gave me a ray of sunshine, and wished I had something wild to sport in solidarity.

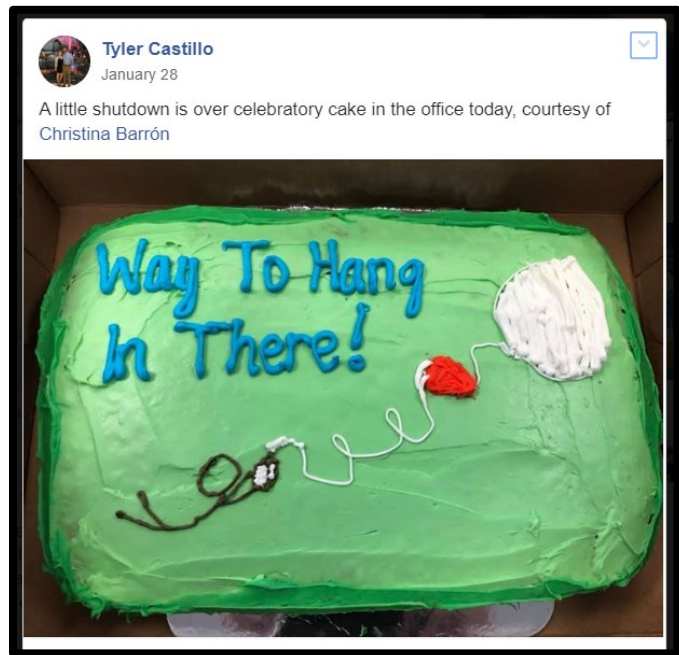




Poetry was written, mugs with sarcastic sayings were brought in and internet memes were shared, all to help us all keep our spirits up. The mug offered by a comedian cheered up a midnight shift made darker and drearier by the pending loss of the next paycheck.



Then, after 35 days, it happened. The politicians finally came up with an agreement, and the shutdown ended. Parties and celebrations were held, a collective cheer could be heard. Paychecks finally came, and there was relief all around. Unfortunately, even 6 months later we are still dealing with the fallout from this shutdown. There are paycheck issues, TSP issues, leave issues, and other lingering frustrations leftover from the shutdown. People that have retired or otherwise left the organization since then have listed this shutdown as a factor in their decision to depart. More of us stayed though, and I like to think that it was because of our sense of community. This group of people has supported one another, helped those in trouble find solutions, temporary or otherwise, to help us stick around. We helped each other get through this difficult time, and it was the spirit shown through these social media posts that did it.



*Written & submitted by NWSEO Steward Linda Engebretson, WFO Duluth, MN*