



By Tim Linscott *Managing Editor*

A simple answering machine message summed up the trickle down effect of the government shut down.

“The Grant USDA office is currently closed due to a lapse in federal funding,” is the message heard, explaining why there were no employees at the USDA office to answer phones or meet with people.

On Tuesday, Oct. 1 the federal government went into a furlough and some government employees, including those from Perkins County, started the waiting game on when they could go back to work.

Congress did not fund the federal government by Oct. 1, the start of the new fiscal year, and went into a partial shutdown. Government functions deemed essential are continuing as usual, while others are suspended.

According to the Associated Press, more than 800,000 of about 2.9 million federal employees are likely to be furloughed.

Seven federal employees at the Perkins County USDA office have been idle since the furlough began.

There are two Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) and four Farm Service Agency (FSA) employees affected by the shutdown with one Upper Republican NRD employee ‘in limbo.’

Claudia Stevenson, Resource Conservationist for NRCS, explained that on Sept. 30 a teleconference was held in preparation of the shutdown and employees were given a checklist

to follow if/when the government furlough went into effect.

“Hope for the best, prepare for the worst,” is how Stevenson described the situation on Monday.

This is not the first time Stevenson has been through a furlough.

From Nov. 14-19, 1995 and Dec. 16, 1995-Jan. 6, 1996 a government furlough lasted 28 days. Stevenson, who has been employed with the NRCS for 26 years, 21 of those in Grant, moved on quickly from the first furlough of her career.

“You put it out of your mind,” she said.

Employees are not allowed to do any work, whatsoever, or even use government equipment, such as cell phones.

Her major concern at her office is the conservation projects that have been done, and the people who have not been paid for those projects.

“A lot of work has been done but not paid back,” Stevenson said. “Some projects are supposed to be happening and can’t.”

There will be some likely delays in future conservation sign-ups and other projects may be pushed back. She wasn’t sure how long they will be pushed back because she has no idea how long things will be shut down.

Stevenson said the situation was ‘disheartening’ and she has been keeping in touch with the other employees to make sure they are doing fine.

“We’re sitting at home waiting for Congress to do their thing,” she said. “I watch CNN, that is how I know what is going on.”

Federal employees received pay for the last six of 10 days. If things are not solved quickly, there will not be a next paycheck.

The last shutdown cost the government \$1.4 billion, according to an estimate by the Office of Management and Budget.

Stevenson explained that there are not only federal bills to pay through the NRCS, but she, personally, as well as the other federal employees, have financial obligations.

“Personally, we’ve been saving for a situation such as this, but you never want it to happen,” Stevenson said, explaining she gets through this nervous time with ‘prayer and a lot of quiet time.’