

# Federal workers take temporary jobs to survive government shutdown

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George Jankowski, a furloughed U.S. Department of Agriculture worker, helps a friend move out of an apartment in Cheyenne, Wyoming, January 14, 2019. Jankowski was paid \$30 for his help. Many federal workers are doing odd jobs or driving for ride-hailing apps to help make ends meet during the partial federal government shutdown. Photo by AP Photo/Mead Gruver

PROVIDENCE, Rhode Island — Parts of the government shut down on December 22, 2018. It happened because of a dispute about building a wall on the U.S.-Mexico border. President Donald Trump says he will not let the government have the money it needs until lawmakers give money for the wall. Lawmakers opposed to Trump do not want to give money for the wall, though.

Cheryl Inzunza Blum is one of about 800,000 workers affected by the shutdown. When she stopped receiving paychecks, she looked for a side job. She decided to rent out a room on Airbnb.

Some government workers are driving for Uber. Others are relying on word-of-mouth and social networks to find handyman work. They are doing whatever it takes to pay the bills during the longest shutdown in U.S. history.

## **More Choices Than In Past Shutdowns**

Government employees looking for short-term work have more choices than in past shutdowns, though. That's because of the rise of companies like Uber, Lyft and Postmates that offer part-time work.

Blum decided to take advantage of the busy winter travel season in Arizona to make some money. She had stopped getting paid for her government work as a lawyer in immigration court in Tucson, Arizona. She says she has no choice but to continue to work unpaid. Her clients are depending on her as their court cases continue.

She also has bills, though. She uses her phone so heavily for work that she now has a more than \$500 phone bill for the past two months. Normally, Blum bills the government for her work. The office that pays her hasn't paid her since before the shutdown began, though. She's even thinking about driving for Uber and Lyft as well.

The shutdown is happening at a time when millions of jobs are open. There are lots of opportunities with Uber and Lyft as well.

Roughly 8,700 Uber driver positions are advertised nationwide on the SnagAJob website. Lyft advertises about 3,000.

Those jobs do not pay very well, though. That's something furloughed government workers are finding out. When someone is furloughed they are temporarily out of work. And they are not getting paid.

## **Gig Workers' Pay Has Gone Down**

Pay for such workers has gone down over the past two years, a recent study found. They are earning a growing share of their income elsewhere.

Chris George, age 48, of Hemet, California, has been furloughed. He normally takes care of forests for the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) forest service. He's been driving for Lyft but has only been making about \$10 for every hour he drives. Paying for gas then takes away part of the money he has made.

George Jankowski is among those looking for money however he can. He's getting a \$100 weekly unemployment check, but that's hardly enough to pay for food and gas, he said.

Jankowski was furloughed from a USDA call center. He does not expect to get back pay because his job is part-time and hourly.

Jankowski, an Air Force veteran, said the situation is very difficult.

Some employers were looking at the shutdown as a way to hire people, at least for a while.

## **Recruiting Through Social Media**

Missy Koefod works for the Atlanta-based 18.21 Bitters. She said the company needs short-term help. It decided to put out the word to government workers on social media that they were hiring.

American Labor Services is a staffing agency. It finds jobs for 500 people a week in Rhode Island and Massachusetts. It sent out an appeal to government workers on January 14, asking them to get in touch for office work or light-industrial work.

Israel Diaz was put on leave from his Treasury Department job in Kansas City, Missouri. He then got an Uber job and applied to be a security guard. He said government work has become increasingly hopeless. He and many of his co-workers are considering quitting, he said.

Diaz said that government work used to come with good benefits. "Now, it's not even worth it," he said.

## Quiz

1 Read the section "More Choices Than In Past Shutdowns."

Select the paragraph from the section that shows that short-term work is unlikely to solve government workers' financial problems in the long run.

- (A) Government employees looking for short-term work have more choices than in past shutdowns, though. That's because of the rise of companies like Uber, Lyft and Postmates that offer part-time work.
- (B) The shutdown is happening at a time when millions of jobs are open. There are lots of opportunities with Uber and Lyft as well.
- (C) Roughly 8,700 Uber driver positions are advertised nationwide on the SnagAJob website. Lyft advertises about 3,000.
- (D) Those jobs do not pay very well, though. That's something furloughed government workers are finding out. When someone is furloughed they are temporarily out of work. And they are not getting paid.

2 Read the section "Recruiting Through Social Media."

Which selection from this section supports the conclusion that some companies view the shutdown as a way to hire more people for short-term work?

- (A) American Labor Services is a staffing agency. It finds jobs for 500 people a week in Rhode Island and Massachusetts.
- (B) It sent out an appeal to government workers on January 14, asking them to get in touch for office work or light-industrial work.
- (C) Israel Diaz was put on leave from his Treasury Department job in Kansas City, Missouri.
- (D) He then got an Uber job and applied to be a security guard. He said government work has become increasingly hopeless.

- 3 What caused the government to shut down?
- (A) The government ran out of money after President Trump put up a wall on the U.S.-Mexico border last year.
  - (B) The government does not have enough money to pay for a border wall so they took it from government workers.
  - (C) President Trump and lawmakers disagree about how much government workers should be making.
  - (D) President Trump is not giving the government money until lawmakers give him money for the border wall.
- 4 What effect is the government shutdown having on Cheryl Inzunza Blum?
- (A) She has found that renting a room on Airbnb actually gets her more money than her government job.
  - (B) She started working as an immigration lawyer to pay her bills while the government is shut down.
  - (C) She is looking for side jobs because she is working for the government without getting paid.
  - (D) She is feeling frustrated and is likely to quit her job if the shutdown does not end soon.