



Shutdowns harm national security and endanger America's reservists

BY JEFFREY E. PHILLIPS, OPINION CONTRIBUTOR — 01/29/18 11:30 AM EST
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When Congress will not discharge its most basic responsibility and thus forces a shutdown of the federal government, America's military readiness suffers. So do the men, women and families of our armed forces, especially the members of Reserve and National Guard units.

Monday's stopgap three-week budget extension, although better than an extended shutdown, is scant relief; damage has been done. In military training, continuity is vitally important. The shutdown forced cancellation of training for more than 110,000 Guard and Reserve personnel.

The following three examples of interrupted training during the shutdown clearly show the reverberations from congressional ineptitude.

- A Navy Reserve officer, who is a Reserve Officer Association member in Washington, drove to his drilling site at a Navy Operational Support Center some 200 miles away, only to learn upon arrival that his duty was cancelled. He wasted his time and money (many reservists are not reimbursed for travel). Perhaps more importantly, his training and contributions to his unit's readiness were derailed.
- Commanders at Andrews Air Force Base in Maryland, like those elsewhere in the Air Force Reserve, must determine how they will meet their flying mission with the cancellation of most of their personnel training and support orders. If there is one activity whose safe and efficient conduct demands constant refreshing and usage, it's flying and crewing a military airplane.
- For families of reservists on tight budgets, cancelled training can mean the difference between paying bills and going without. One

airman told the ROA that he and his wife would have to review his family's budget if the shutdown did not end. With [recent history as his guide](#), he knows another shutdown isn't out of the question.

For the reserve components, including the National Guard, training is more than just a weekend each month. As never before, the Guard and Reserve are [an operational force](#) essential to our military's full functioning. At Fort Bragg, North Carolina, commanders preparing for training exercises had to abruptly send home 2,600 troops on Jan. 20 because of the shutdown. These exercises were important — designed to help the military prepare for deployments to support overseas operations, and to respond to state and national disasters.

Once training is cancelled, it often cannot be easily revived. Reserve and National Guard units share facilities and equipment with the active force, and the usage of those facilities is scheduled a year in advance. Facilities and equipment may not be available to support Reserve and National Guard units if they must reschedule.

This is not the first shutdown in recent memory. Is it unrealistic to wonder if these patriots might question the soundness of the government they are sworn to support with their very lives — to leave family, civilian jobs and communities on a moment's notice and go into harm's way?

The Department of Defense has embarked on a two-year study of the [downward trend among young Americans](#) interested in serving in the military and the growing so-called "military-civilian gap." Budget shutdowns do not enhance the picture of service for those considering a hitch in the military, much less attract the support of their families.

The Reserve Officers Association has [proposed legislation](#) that would reduce these disruptions to military readiness and care for military families. The military personnel account is funded on an annual basis; ROA's proposal is for a [biennial military personnel funding bill](#). Such a two-year allocation would reduce the risk of a shutdown interrupting reserve component training and denting family finances. More stable funding also would give Pentagon leaders more predictability and would help increase readiness.

The real solution is for members of Congress to demonstrate that members know when the time for partisan dueling ends and the responsible conduct of the nation's governance begins. Blundering into shutdowns is evidence that individual members of both parties have yet to learn the difference. That hurts national security and endangers those who provide it.

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