

Military Families and Veterans Casualties of Shutdown

This has never been a very politically charged blog. However, it would be naive and without basis to say I have no political feelings in the days since the federal government has been shut down.

But this post isn't about pointing fingers at one party or another. It's about the very real fallout facing military families and disabled veterans such as myself.

Let's take a look at the active duty side first.

Since the government shutdown, four U.S. servicemen and women have died in combat. Here is what usually happens for the surviving family:

"The benefits include \$100,000 to each family; a 12-month basic allowance for housing, usually given in a lump sum to survivors commensurate with the rank of the service member; and burial benefits. The benefits are also being withheld from the family of Lance Cpl. Jeremiah Collins Jr., 19, a member of the Marines, whose death on Saturday in Helmand Province is being investigated by the Pentagon."

However, none of the benefits are going to happen while the government is shut down. If a family wants to meet the plane in Delaware with the body of their loved one, they must pay their own way.



A Marine carry team carries the transfer case containing the remains of 19-year-old Marine Jeremiah M. Collins Jr. of Milwaukee, upon arrival at Dover Air Force Base on Oct. 7, 2013. Because of the shutdown, the family of Collins, who was supporting Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan, did not receive the death benefits to which they are entitled, according to NBC News. (Via huffpost.com)

That's a tragedy, and one that no one on Capitol Hill thought would happen when they ensured active duty military members would get paid. It's sad that something as important as this has fallen through the cracks.

As for me and my fellow disabled veterans, there is a lot on the line. Many services were shut down as soon as the government shutdown. Others, such as the Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment Program and claims processing, can only continue as long as funds are available. Education services have already been disrupted.

What this means is those who are training for new occupations through school and other programs may have to stop. It also means veterans with new and existing claims will have to wait longer for benefits because no decisions will be made during the shutdown. This is all according to the "Veterans Affairs Field guide to Government Shutdown," updated October 7, 2013.

The longer the shutdown, the more services are interrupted - including the possibility of no disability compensation paid out at the end of the month. That essentially puts many of us in the same category as the furloughed workers as we may have little to no money to pay bills.

How do I feel about all of this? Admittedly, I'm a little stressed out. I know that better saving and planning on my part would have been a good and prudent thing. I also know that my God will supply all my needs.

The long and the short of it is I wanted to draw attention to a group of people of whom I am a part and mean a lot to me. These people also fall under our call to help the poor and marginalized. Hopefully, by adding my voice, I can encourage prayer and action (not all of us can do both). Pray everyday for those in authority and look for ways to help your neighbor, military or not.