

A Nation in Limbo
by Brooklynn Banks

Unbeknownst to civilians, October 1, 2025, would commence a period of limbo across the United States of America. The first marked the last day of certainty for American federal government employees, after everything went dark. Over a month later, they were receiving answers, following the conclusion of the longest federal government shutdown in history. But as political leaders waver on whether the government will remain open through the New Year, many employees are left feeling abandoned, discarded, and silenced by their own country. The Social Security Administration was just one of the many agencies affected by the 43-day shutdown. Brewing tension within the administration indicates that agents must remain anonymous, out of fear of retribution. Taking a closer look at those who kept the wheels turning, Florida SSA agents expressed their dismay.

“This administration really let us down,” said Agent 1, while Agent 2 echoed, “We weren’t given any helpful resources or accurate information.” Agreeing with them, Agent 3 exclaimed, “The struggle was real!” The 43-day shutdown devastated these hardworking agents, who did not know when the next paycheck would come. Agent 2 shared, “I was affected emotionally and financially. I was not able to pay my bills on time and provide properly for my children.” But while the office was mired in low morale, furloughed employees were still expected to perform at the same level. “Work was stressful. At times, callers were rude and entitled,” said Agent 2. “The public was upset that services were being cancelled. And to top it off, we had fewer employees to deal with the high volume of calls,” added Agent 3. Collectively, agents and management were forced to lean on each other after being left with little

direction from the federal government. “We would bring meals, snacks, and treats into the office, to hopefully alleviate some of the burden for struggling coworkers,” said Agent 1.

But the 43 days of darkness not only had an intense effect on employees, management, and callers, but also went deeper than the surface. These employees began to lose their spirit, understandably, and those closest to them, their families, could have felt the effects. Agent 1’s spouse shared his disdain and disappointment for the situation, saying the government achieved only two things: poor communication and poor leadership. “I think it affected the mental health of the government employees as well as their family members. I don't think that's something those in Congress took into consideration. It's a lot more than just not giving someone a check.”

Nevertheless, despite the government going dark, agencies like SSA cannot. The Social Security Administration, in serving for over 90 years, is an agency of support. They are integral in the lives of Americans across all walks of life, from assigning identification at birth to assisting the elderly with SSA benefits. Those with disabilities or early retirees apply to SSA in hopes of receiving benefits and resources needed to sustain their daily living. “We like to always say, in the office, that we’re one of the functions in the government that is actually with you, from the day that you're born until the day that you pass away. So that's how we look at ourselves as far as the importance that we have and what we do daily for the American public,” Agent 1 shared with a smile.

“One could ask, ‘How do these employees do it?’ ‘How can they go to work every day not knowing when or if the next paycheck will come?’” Agent 3 shared, “I feared losing everything. But, I hoped for a little light at the end of the tunnel.” While her coworker Agent 2 provided a more candid answer, “I’ve worked for the agency for 18 years. If I leave now, I will lose my pension. I would also lose health insurance and stability, which are needed for my children.” Agent 1 concluded, “The reason why I do what I do is that at the end of the day, no matter how hard it can be, I really do enjoy helping people. I just keep that at the top of my list. And that's how I keep going.” She reminds everyone that in times of adversity, it is important to stand tall, be firm, stay positive, and remain grounded in prayer.

Through their testimonies, they collectively shared that they pray the next time they are more protected. With just a hair shy of the support needed, the Shutdown Fairness Act needs some changes before it is strong enough to pass Congress. If it receives bipartisan support, depending on the scale, all or select furloughed federal employees could receive pay during a shutdown. This would be a huge stride forward, protecting Americans and their families, like these three agents, across the country. Coincidentally, the shutdown has been lifted until January 30, 2026. And with talk about the Shutdown Fairness Act, federal employees could finally regain a sense of security.