News

Airport bottlenecks ease as TSA workers get paid, but shutdown continues



Stained-glass windows cast colorful shadows on the floor as travelers walk through LaGuardia Airport in New York, Monday, March 30, 2026. PHOTO BY SETH WENIG/AP PHOTO.

AP - Frustrating security lines dwindled at U.S. airports Monday, clearing the worst bottlenecks as Transportation Safety Administration officers began receiving backpay for working during the government shutdown.

Checkpoint lines that at times stretched to four hours at Houston's George Bush Intercontinental Airport shrank to waits of 10 minutes or less on Monday. In other previous trouble spots such as Atlanta and Baltimore-Washington International Airport, travelers were moving smoothly to their flights.

After weeks of airport chaos, there was finally optimism for the beleaguered aviation system.

Weary travelers hope the overdue paychecks will end the seemingly endless security lines and missed flights many experienced. It remains unknown how long federal immigration officers will maintain a visible presence in airport terminals as the busy spring break travel season continues.

TSA workers told union leadership Monday that they received some — but not all — of their back pay, according to Johnny Jones, secretary-treasurer of the TSA chapter of the American Federation of Government Employees. He said the rest is expected by next week. Some employees also reported incorrect backpay amounts, including missing overtime, the union said.

Jones, who is also a TSA agent at Dallas-Fort Worth International Airport, said one colleague told him his bank account was already "back to zero" after covering his car and housing payments and late fees. Workers, he said, are relieved the money has arrived but worry it will disappear as quickly as it came.

"None of my colleagues feel like they've been made whole," Jones said. "Their finances are destroyed."

What about the TSA officers who couldn't work without pay?

The union said the TSA updated its furlough policy on Sunday, removing guidance that allowed officers to request a furlough if they could not report to work for reasons tied to the shutdown, such as lack of transportation or child care.

"Working without pay forced more than 500 officers to leave TSA and thousands were forced to call out," acting TSA Assistant Secretary Lauren Bis said in announcing the delayed payday.

The union agreed with these numbers, but said those who could not afford to report for duty now "have disciplinary actions looming over their heads."

"Backpay alone does not fix those problems," the union said.

The AP emailed TSA and DHS seeking comment and additional details on the agency's furlough guidance.

The DHS shutdown resulted in not only travel delays but also warnings of airport closures as TSA workers who were only just recovering financially from last fall's extended government shutdown stopped going to work. TSA employees had gone without pay since DHS funding lapsed in February.

Other agencies affected by this latest shutdown include the Secret Service and the Federal Emergency Management Agency.

What Congress is doing about partial shutdown

President Donald Trump on Friday ordered the Department of Homeland Security to pay TSA officers immediately to ease the lines plaguing airports. Trump had rejected bipartisan efforts to fund the TSA while negotiations over ICE continue with Democrats, who have refused to approve more funding without restraints on Trump's immigration enforcement and mass deportation operations. Trump's order left other DHS employees unpaid.

Democrats are demanding that ICE agents wear cameras, identify themselves and operate without masks. They also want judges to decide whether to issue their warrants, and they want ICE raids to avoid schools, churches or other sensitive places.

Republicans and the White House have been willing to negotiate on some points, but a final agreement remains elusive.

On Monday, there were few signs of progress on Capitol Hill. Senators held a short session without considering the House bill, then resumed their two-week break.

The union again urged Congress to approve funding for the entire Department of Homeland Security. "To say we are utterly disgusted and disappointed with our elected officials is an understatement," the union said.

White House press secretary Karoline Leavitt said Monday that Trump has offered to host an Easter Dinner for members of Congress who return to resolve the impasse. On Democrats' demands, she said "there has not been a change in policy."

"It has always been the policy of this president and this administration to deport the worst of the worst illegal alien criminals," Leavitt said.

As for the ICE agents Trump deployed to some airports a week ago to help with security, White House border czar Tom Homan said how long they stay depends on how quickly TSA employees return to work.



Travelers wait in a line to get through security at LaGuardia Airport in New York, Monday, March 30, 2026. PHOTO BY SETH WENIG/AP PHOTO.

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