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Tracking the predicted sequester impacts

By Darla Cameron, David A. Fahrenthold and Lisa Rein. Published: June 30, 2013

While the sequester's budget cuts have brought real hardship to many people, they have not triggered widespread breakdowns in crucial services. The Washington Post recently surveyed 48 of the administration's predictions across 14 federal agencies about the cuts' dire consequences. Previously, we analyzed the sequester's effects on the federal workforce and public services. Here's what we found:

What happened to the predictions?



Agriculture



Agriculture

Commerce

Defense

Environmental Protection Agency

Federal judiciary

Health and Human Services

Homeland Security

Housing and Urban Development

Interior

Justice

Labor

National Science Foundation

Social Security Administration

What was predicted?

"Elimination of rental assistance for more than 10,000 very-low-income rural residents."

[Read the original prediction](#)

What was predicted?

"A loss of over \$60 million resulting in more than 100 fewer grants awarded for agricultural research, conducted by both university scientists and private partners."

[Read the original prediction](#)

Food Safety and Inspection Service

What was predicted?

Furloughs for meat inspectors. From Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack: "A

✓ What happened?

The Agriculture Department says that this is on track to come true by mid-August and that as many as 15,000 people may be affected.

✓ What happened?

The Agriculture Department says this is still on track to come true.



Transportation

nationwide shutdown of meat and poultry plants during a furlough of inspectors. The furlough could result in as much as 15 days of lost production. ... Consumers would experience limited meat and poultry supplies, and potentially higher prices, and food safety would be compromised."

[Read the original prediction](#)

Women, Infants and Children (WIC) program

What was predicted?

"A reduction of 600,000 low-income women and children who could receive nutrition assistance."

[Read the original prediction](#)

What happened?

Congress transferred \$55 million in new money to the USDA's inspection service, preventing furloughs before they began.

What was cut instead?

Competitive USDA grants to state agencies for food and nutrition. Money for buildings operation and maintenance.

 **What happened?**

After the prediction was made, the USDA says, Congress provided enough money to cover all needs.

What was cut instead?

Nothing.

Commerce

Census Bureau

What was predicted?

A six-month delay in important economic statistics. "The last benchmark of economic statistics supporting America's assessment of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and other key economic indicators was taken in 2007, prior to the recession. If the sequestration cuts move forward, the Census Bureau will be forced to impose a six-month delay in releasing vital statistics for these indicators, putting at risk our ability to take accurate stock of current economic conditions."

[Read the original prediction](#)

 **What happened?**

The release of these statistics has been delayed by six months.

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA)

What was predicted?

"For example, sequestration will result in a 2-3 year launch delay for the first two next-generation geostationary weather satellites (currently planned to launch in 2015 and 2017), which track severe weather events such as hurricanes and tornadoes. This delay would increase the risk of a gap in satellite coverage and diminish the quality of weather forecasts and warnings."

[Read the original prediction](#)

 **What happened?**

NOAA says it's still "calculating" whether the sequester has delayed the satellite program.

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA)



What was predicted?

"Up to 2,600 NOAA employees would have to be furloughed."

[Read the original prediction](#)

What happened?

No NOAA employees were furloughed.

What was cut instead?

NOAA continued a hiring freeze. It also cut \$425,000 in conference spending. In particular, the agency saved \$95,000 by canceling a "Coastal GeoTools" conference in Myrtle Beach, S.C., a week before it began. Many of the conference's speakers will now give their talks online. It also reduced funds for marine-mammal rescues and deferred maintenance on weather-monitoring buoys.

Defense

What was predicted?

"Some Components will begin cancelling ship and aircraft maintenance work for the third and fourth quarters of FY 2013."

[Read the original prediction](#)

 **What happened?**

Maintenance was curtailed but not nearly as steeply as predicted.

What was cut instead?

Congress passed a budget appropriation for DOD that allowed more maintenance to continue.

 **What happened?**

Defense officials said they had to proceed with these layoffs.

What was predicted?

Layoffs for "a significant portion of our 46,000 temporary and term employees."

[Read the original prediction](#)

 **What happened?**

An appropriation from Congress allowed the Navy to maintain full operations in the Pacific for now.

What was cut instead?

Defense officials say this prediction may have been long-term.

Navy

What was predicted?

"The Navy will be forced to cut back on operations in critical areas such as the Pacific. Cutbacks of one-third could occur in Pacific naval presence."

[Read the original prediction](#)

 **What happened?**

Furloughs were limited to 11 days.

What was cut instead?

Congress allowed DOD to shift money from investment to operations and maintenance account.

What was predicted?

Twenty-two furlough days for civilian employees.

[Read the original prediction](#)

 **What happened?**

Defense officials said in a statement that their mandate was to "continue the uninterrupted provision of health care to

What was predicted?

The military health-care system, TRICARE, "could be short up to \$3 billion in needed funds, which could lead to denials of elective

service for active-duty dependents and retirees."

[Read the original prediction](#)

Environmental Protection Agency

What was predicted?

The sequester would "reduce EPA's ability to monitor compliance with environmental laws -- as fewer environmental cops are on the 'beat' to enforce environmental laws." The EPA predicted there would be 1,000 fewer pollution inspections in fiscal 2013.

[Read the original prediction](#)

What was predicted?

"Under sequestration EPA would reduce the number of undergraduate and graduate fellowships (STAR and GRO) by approximately 45, thus eliminating any new fellowships."

[Read the original prediction](#)

What was predicted?

"Sequestration would force the Agency to eliminate or significantly reduce essential air quality data systems like AIRNow, a popular air quality reporting and forecasting system."

[Read the original prediction](#)

Federal judiciary

U.S. public defenders

What was predicted?

In some offices, public defenders were told to expect up to 27 furlough days.

[Read the original prediction](#)

Health and Human Services

Head Start program

What was predicted?

"For example, up to 70,000 children would lose access to Head Start and Early Head Start services. This impact would be felt across the nation, with community and faith-based organizations, small businesses, local governments, and school systems laying-off

all beneficiaries to the maximum extent possible."

What was cut instead?

DOD is requiring furloughs for 650,000 civilians.

? What happened?

The EPA did not provide data about whether this specific function had been affected, as predicted.

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? What happened?

EPA did not provide data about whether this specific function had been impacted, as predicted. The AIRNow program is still in operation.

✗ What happened?

Furloughs limited to 15 days at most.

What was cut instead?

Other funding became available from the federal courts.

? What happened?

The department says the actual number of children and teachers affected by the loss of Head Start funds won't be known for several months.

over 14,000 teachers, teacher assistants, and other staff."

[Read the original prediction](#)

? What happened?

The department says the actual number of people who will lose substance-abuse help won't be known for several months.

What was predicted?

Loss of help for substance abusers.

"Admissions to inpatient facilities for people in need of critical addiction services could be reduced by 109,000, and almost 91,000 fewer people could receive substance abuse treatment services."

[Read the original prediction](#)

Health Resources and Services Administration

What was predicted?

"The Health Resources and Services Administration estimates that 7,400 fewer patients would have access to life-saving HIV medications through the AIDS Drug Assistance Program."

[Read the original prediction](#)

What was predicted?

"Congregate and home-delivered nutrition services programs would serve 4 million fewer meals to seniors."

[Read the original prediction](#)

? What happened?

The actual number of patients affected will not be known for several months.

? What happened?

The department says the actual impact on senior meals won't be known for several months. In the D.C. area, for instance, some local agencies made up the difference for funds lost. In other cases, agencies cut back on meals served or turned to frozen meals instead of hot ones.

Food and Drug Administration

What was predicted?

About 2,100 fewer FDA inspections. "FDA would conduct approximately 2,100 fewer domestic and foreign facility inspections of firms that manufacture food products to verify that domestic and imported foods meet safety standards. These reductions may increase the risk of safety incidents, and the public may suffer more foodborne illness such as the recent salmonella in peanut butter outbreak and the E. coli illnesses linked to organic spinach."

[Read the original prediction](#)

✗ What happened?

FDA says there will not be 2,100 fewer inspections this year. In fact, officials are still unsure if the number of inspections will decline as a result of the sequester.

What was cut instead?

Travel, training and conference costs. Only "mission critical" travel and training allowed.

Homeland Security

U.S. Coast Guard

What was predicted?

"Coast Guard would have to curtail air and surface operations by more than 25 percent, adversely affecting maritime safety and security across nearly all mission areas."

[Read the original prediction](#)

✓ What happened?

Coast Guard did reduce operations by about 25 percent, by cutting back on both public-relations events, such as fly-bys at sports games, and on duties such as icebreaking in the Great Lakes and drug interdiction in the Caribbean.

Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE)

What was predicted?

"U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) would not be able to ... maintain the 34,000 detention beds mandated by Congress."

[Read the original prediction](#)

✗ What happened?

Data provided to Congress show that, at last count, more than 36,000 beds were available for ICE detainees.

What was cut instead?

The department deferred maintenance on facilities and left positions open. It also found about \$140 million in substitute cuts. Those included \$5.7 million in unused funds from prior years. Homeland Security also cut \$7.8 million meant for "pre-disaster mitigation." But it told Congress that "there is no impact from this reduction," since another federal grant program was already doing the same job as the one that was cut.

Customs and Border Protection

What was predicted?

"Reduced [Customs and Border Protection] staffing would make four to five hour wait times commonplace and cause the busiest ports to face gridlock situations at peak periods."

[Read the original prediction](#)

✗ What happened?

Customs and Border Protection declined to provide data about how common four-hour waits have become. On Capitol Hill, congressional overseers said they had not been notified of regular four-hour waits. And recent spot checks of border-crossing wait times have shown no waits much longer than one hour.

What was cut instead?

Customs and Border Patrol transferred \$36 million from "acquisition accounts." It also "cut" \$7 million in money that had been left over, unspent, from prior years' appropriations.

Secret Service

What was predicted?

"Furloughs and reductions in overtime would adversely affect the U.S. Secret Service workforce, and hinder ongoing criminal and protective intelligence investigations. All [Secret Service] Special Agents and Uniformed Division Officers would be subject to furloughs of up to 7 days."

[Read the original prediction](#)

What was predicted?

"Furloughs of Transportation Security Administration (TSA) Transportation Security Officers (TSOs) would substantially increase airline passenger wait times by as much as an hour at the Nation's largest and busiest airports."

[Read the original prediction](#)

Housing and Urban Development

What was predicted?

"These cuts would also result in more than 100,000 formerly homeless people, including veterans, being removed from their current housing and emergency shelter programs, putting them at risk of returning to the streets."

[Read the original prediction](#)

Housing Choice Voucher program

What was predicted?

"About 125,000 individuals and families, including elderly and disable individuals, could lose benefits from the Housing Choice Voucher program and be at risk of becoming homeless."

[Read the original prediction](#)

Housing Counseling Grants

What was predicted?

"Sequestration would result in 75,000 fewer households receiving foreclosure prevention, pre-purchase, rental, or homeless counseling through Housing Counseling grants."

[Read the original prediction](#)

Housing Opportunity for Persons with AIDS program

What was predicted?

"These cuts to the Housing Opportunity for Persons with AIDS program would result in

✘ What happened?

No Secret Service personnel were furloughed.

What was cut instead?

The Secret Service implemented a hiring freeze and took funds from the budgets of other Homeland Security agencies.

Transportation Security Administration

✘ What happened?

No TSA officers were furloughed.

What was cut instead?

Congress added new money to the TSA budget, and TSA saved on personnel costs.

? What happened?

HUD declined to provide an estimate of whether its prediction is coming true or not. In a recent speech, HUD Secretary Shawn Donovan revised his earlier prediction, to forecast that this impact would befall 60,000 people.

? What happened?

HUD declined to provide an estimate of whether its prediction is coming true or not.

? What happened?

HUD declined to provide an estimate of whether its prediction is coming true or not.

? What happened?

7,300 fewer low-income households receiving permanent and short-term supportive housing assistance, including rent and/or utility assistance."

[Read the original prediction](#)

Bureau of Indian Affairs

What was predicted?

"Reductions will cut short the availability of assistance payments to the neediest of Indian Country by three or four months. Payments would stop to approximately 2,400 needy Indians."

[Read the original prediction](#)

U.S. Park Police

What was predicted?

Thirteen days of furloughs, which would mean slower response times to crime in national parks in Washington, New York and San Francisco.

[Read the original prediction](#)

Fish and Wildlife Service

What was predicted?

Sequester will "require complete closure or program elimination at about 128 refuges. Visitor programs at nearly all refuges would be discontinued."

[Read the original prediction](#)

U.S. Geological Survey (USGS)

What was predicted?

"The United States Geological Survey may have to discontinue operation of 350 to 375 stream gauges used throughout the country to predict and assess drought and flood conditions."

[Read the original prediction](#)

What happened?

HUD declined to provide an estimate of whether its prediction is coming true or not.

Interior



What happened?

The payments will stop for about one month, instead of three or four.



What happened?

After three days of furloughs, the rest of the furloughs were canceled.

What was cut instead?

A total of \$4 million in overtime pay, training, planned equipment purchases and annual payment from San Francisco's Presidio Trust.



What happened?

No refuges' visitor programs were discontinued, and no refuges closed.

What was cut instead?

The Fish and Wildlife Service has left some positions open, delayed maintenance and done less to combat invasive species at refuges.



What happened?

The USGS says it has discontinued 40 gauges and will soon discontinue at least another 15 out of the 8,000 in use.

What was cut instead?

Reductions in hiring, in maintenance costs and in travel. The USGS also reduced its attendance at conferences and canceled others. It had, for example, sent 242 employees to the last National

Map Users Conference. This year, it canceled the conference instead.

U.S. Attorneys' Offices

What was predicted?

"The [U.S. Attorneys] would handle 2,600 fewer cases in FY 2013."

[Read the original prediction](#)

FBI National Instant Criminal Background Check System (NICS)

What was predicted?

"Critical civil services - including the timely completion of checks by the National Instant Criminal Background Check System (NICS) of persons seeking to purchase firearms - would also be affected."

[Read the original prediction](#)

Bureau of Prisons

What was predicted?

"BOP would face a furlough of nearly 36,700 onboard staff for an average of 12 days. ... BOP would need to implement full or partial lockdowns and significantly reduce inmate reentry and training programs."

[Read the original prediction](#)

FBI

What was predicted?

"The FBI is faced with furloughing all personnel, including agents and intelligence analysts, for up to 14 days."

[Read the original prediction](#)

The Executive Office of Immigration Review



Justice

? What happened?

The Department of Justice says it is too early to tell if this prediction has come true.

✗ What happened?

No background checks have been delayed.

What was cut instead?

The FBI shifted more staff to the instant background-check office. As a result, fewer workers are available for another job: handling appeals of background-check decisions.

✗ What happened?

The prison-guard furloughs were canceled by Attorney General Eric H. Holder Jr.

What was cut instead?

\$117 million in funds left over from prior years' accounts, which could not generally be spent on new projects without congressional permission, plus \$33 million in construction and building funds.

✗ What happened?

The FBI furloughs were canceled by Attorney General Eric Holder.

What was cut instead?

To prevent furloughs at the FBI, the department made cuts including \$227 million in expired funds from past years, which could not generally be spent on new projects without congressional permission.

What was predicted?

"EOIR would be forced to cease all hiring of key critical positions ... including Immigration Judges, likely increasing pending caseloads to well over 350,000."

[Read the original prediction](#)

U.S. Marshals Service**What was predicted?**

"USMS is facing the need to furlough its 5,100 employees for up to 13 days. ... This would result in a reduced capacity to apprehend violent fugitives, investigate sex offenders, protect witnesses and the judiciary, and ensure safe and humane care and transportation of prisoners."

[Read the original prediction](#)

Labor**Department of Labor****What was predicted?**

"More than 3.8 million people receiving Emergency Unemployment Compensation benefits will see their benefits reduced by as much as 9.4 percent."

[Read the original prediction](#)

Occupational Health and Safety Administration (OSHA)**What was predicted?**

"Roughly 1,200 fewer programmed inspections of the most dangerous workplaces will occur."

[Read the original prediction](#)

Mine Safety and Health Administration**What was predicted?**

A shortfall in inspections of non-coal mines. "The Mine Safety and Health Administration ... will likely not be able to [complete 100 percent] for the mandatory Metal Nonmetal mine inspections."

[Read the original prediction](#)

What happened?

The caseload remains at about 333,000, under the threshold. Justice officials say they're not sure if it will rise before the end of the year.

What was cut instead?

Funds for staffing, translators, training, travel and equipment.

✘ What happened?

The Marshals Service furloughs were canceled by Attorney General Eric H. Holder Jr.

What was cut instead?

The cuts included \$45 million from the prisoner-detention budget. This money was not needed, since the prisoner population was smaller than expected. The Marshals Service also cut staffing, supplies and training.

✔ What happened?

The agency says that cuts have actually been slightly higher in some states — up to about 11 percent.

✔ What happened?

The agency expects to do even fewer programmed inspections than predicted, because of the sequester cuts, plus additional demands related to disasters such as the West, Tex., explosion.

✘ What happened?

MSHA will complete all mandatory inspections.

What was cut instead?

Grants to states, employee travel, overtime costs and new equipment

purchases, plus other cuts from "lower priority activities."

What was predicted?

"A reduction of nearly 1,000 research grants."

[Read the original prediction](#)

What was predicted?

"The termination of approximately \$35 million in contracts ... for work in progress on major facilities."

[Read the original prediction](#)

Social Security Administration

What was predicted?

"Visitors to our field offices could wait almost 30 minutes to see a representative, and callers to our 800-number would wait almost 10 minutes for us to answer."

[Read the original prediction](#)

What was predicted?

Layoffs for temporary employees.
"Sequestration would result in ... the termination of over 1,500 temporary employees."

[Read the original prediction](#)

Transportation

Federal Aviation Administration

What was predicted?

"The furlough of a large number of air traffic controllers and technicians will require a reduction in air traffic. ... The result will be felt across the country, as the volume of air travel must be decreased."

[Read the original prediction](#)

National Science Foundation

 **What happened?**

An appropriation from Congress boosted the NSF budget, but the sequester still forced up to 600 grants to be cut.

 **What happened?**

No contracts were terminated.

What was cut instead?

The NSF got an appropriation from Congress that boosted its budget by 4.8 percent.

 **What happened?**

At Social Security offices, officials say wait times are now often 30 minutes and can stretch to more than an hour. On the phone, the wait time is about eight minutes.

 **What happened?**

No temporary employees were terminated.

What was cut instead?

The Social Security Administration suspended the mailing of paper Social Security statements, saving \$70 million per year. It reduced the hours that its field offices are open to the public. It reduced travel expenditures and overtime and restricted hiring only to "critical frontline jobs."

 **What happened?**

Congress passed a law that allowed the transfer of \$253 million from another FAA account, ending the threat of furloughs among air-traffic controllers.

What was cut instead?

The \$253 million in grant money was previously distributed by the FAA to

airports for upgrades to runways and other projects. But those airports had already told the FAA that they couldn't spend it this year.