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Frequently Asked Questions: Impacts to Travel and Trade during Sequestration

03/02/2013

What is sequestration?

Sequestration is a fiscal policy procedure adopted by Congress as part of the Budget Control Act (BCA) of 2011. The procedure, designed to force Congress to come to an agreement to address the Federal budget deficit, represents a series of automatic government spending cuts, totaling about \$1 trillion over the next decade. These spending cuts, which began March 1, 2013, are divided equally between defense and non-defense spending. Government departments and agencies, including the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP), do not have input on how these cuts go into effect since they are required by law to be implemented across the board. Sequestration will end when Congress passes legislation that undoes the legal requirements in the BCA.

How will sequestration affect CBP Field Operations?

Under the automatic sequestration cuts, we anticipate reducing agency-wide expenditures significantly during the remainder of Fiscal Year 2013. CBP Field Operations, the office responsible for securing the U.S. border at ports of entry, will experience budget cuts equating to the loss of several thousand CBP officers at these ports of entry, in addition to significant cuts to operating budgets and programs. Stakeholders in the travel and trade industries will see service impacts and CBP employees will be furloughed.

How is CBP going to maintain its priorities under sequestration?

CBP Field Operations has issued clear guidance on maintaining priority operations during sequestration with the following key principles:

- Our security efforts will remain our highest priority. We will not allow degradation of our primary anti-terrorism mission;
- We will prioritize core processing and facilitation operations for both travelers and cargo;
- We will continue to carry out border security operations consistent with all applicable legal requirements, including mandatory examinations of perishable commodities; and
- All trusted traveler and trader programs, including Global Entry, SENTRI, and Nexus, C-TPAT and FAST will be maintained and emphasized, limiting the impact on CBP's trusted partners.

Is it safe to travel to the United States during sequestration?

CBP's priority mission is detecting and preventing terrorists and terrorist weapons from entering the United States. While the results of sequestration may, at times, cause inconvenience for travelers at our ports of entry, we will not compromise public safety due to budget concerns.

How will sequestration impact service at ports of entry?

CBP will operate in a way that is least disruptive to border security and the facilitation of lawful

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travel and trade, but CBP will face budget cuts and employee furloughs that will result in increased wait times and reduced hours of service. These impacts will likely increase during the summer peak travel season.

In the air environment, we expect increased wait times at major U.S. international airports of up to 50 percent or more, with peak waits of up to four hours at our busiest airports. Increased processing times at airports — including both CBP operations and Transportation Security Administration screening — may make it more difficult for travelers to make tight connecting flights.

There will also be greater wait times for personal vehicles and pedestrians at our land border ports, with the doubling of peak waits up to five hours or more at our largest land border crossings. Travelers should adjust their trip itineraries to account for unexpected delays.

Will any ports of entry be closed, or will hours be curtailed?

CBP may reduce hours of service at select airports, seaports and land ports of entry; these reductions will be made in a way that minimizes the impact to operations. Any changes to service hours will be port-specific and will be determined at the local level. Information will be shared publicly through various media outlets.

What will happen if I miss my connecting flight?

CBP advises travelers to anticipate longer processing lines at air, land and sea ports of entry during sequestration and to schedule connecting flights accordingly. If you encounter problems, please contact your carrier.

What will be the impact on cargo shipments?

Sequestration will reduce service levels in CBP's cargo operations. There will be increased and potentially escalating delays for container examinations of up to 5 days or more at major seaports. We may also experience significant daily back-ups for truck shipments at land border ports. CBP will continue to carry out border security operations consistent with all applicable legal requirements, including mandatory examinations of perishable commodities. More detailed information is posted separately for trade community stakeholders.

Will sequestration curtail CBP's trusted traveler and trader programs?

All trusted traveler and trusted trader programs will be maintained, including Global Entry, SENTRI, Nexus, and FAST. Membership in these programs allows for faster processing as a general rule and members will also receive these same benefits during sequestration. However, we do expect longer approval times on new trusted traveler applications because of increased demand.

How soon will I notice a change as a result of sequestration budget cuts?

You may notice some changes immediately, while many of the anticipated effects of sequestration are likely to increase over time. Over the past three years, CBP Field Operations has maximized its existing resources to accommodate a 12 percent increase in the volume of international air arrivals. This has been achieved through a strong focus on efficiencies, innovation, and expanded use of trusted traveler programs. As such, the resource reductions that CBP Field Operations will face under sequestration will result in significant, noticeable changes. There may also be significant economic impacts because CBP will not be able to accommodate requests for extended hours or new services. These effects will be compounded if the budget cuts are not reversed and employees need to be furloughed.

Do I need to be concerned about CBP employee furloughs?

Many U.S. government departments and agencies are planning for employee furloughs due to the

automatic budget cuts. If sequestration continues through April, CBP would begin to furlough all employees. These unpaid furloughs will have a significant, negative impact on our own employees. In addition, the effects will also be noticed at our ports of entry in terms of longer wait times, delayed processing for travel and trade, and less flexibility to accommodate special circumstances.

How can I find out more about how sequestration as it relates to CBP and the Department of Homeland Security?

For general information about sequestration please visit the website. (WhiteHouse.gov)

We will continue to keep the public informed as the effects of sequestration upon CBP become clearer and better understood.

see also:



on the web:

WhiteHouse.gov
