Sachin Pavithran reflects on furloughs, government shutdown | CPD

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10/15/2013

Sachin Pavithran, director of the Utah Assistive Technology Project and member of the U.S. Access Board.

While a deal between Senate Democrats and Republicans could end the partial government shutdown as early as today, it will take weeks or months to overcome the backlog of work that has been left undone since Oct. 1, said Sachin Pavithran, director of the Utah Assistive Technology Project at Utah State University’s Center for Persons with Disabilities. Pavithran is also a member of the U.S. Access Board, a federal agency charged with creating guidelines and standards related to issues of accessibility for people with disabilities.

It was just a formality, Pavithran said, but he was the one who had to inform the 29 U.S. Access Board employees in Washington, D.C. that they had been furloughed.

“Pretty much everything has stopped,” he said. “There is nobody in our office. They’re not supposed to take phone calls or answer e-mails—anything in an official capacity, until the furlough is lifted.”

Historically, Pavithran said, Congress has authorized back pay for furloughed government employees, so they will all get paid.

“It will be a week or two of unscheduled vacation,” Pavithran said. “The drawback is that things we have going will get delayed. We'll have to reschedule hearings that have been scheduled for two or three months.”

There’s no way to predict how long it will take for things to get back to normal, he said.

“All the work has to come to a complete halt,” he said. “We deal with all these other agencies—Department of Justice, Department of Transportation—who knows when they’ll even be able to talk. It’s a huge disruption in everything that happens in the federal government. We’re not saving money. Nothing is happening. No one is benefiting. Everyone’s hurting.”

Pavithran said that while the shutdown is not directly impacting people with disabilities yet, there are bigger things at stake. Even though not everyone works for the federal government, everyone will eventually be affected by the shutdown.

“It’s hard to predict,” he said. “Nobody knows what the negatives will be and nobody knows how they’re going to settle it. It’s disrupting the function and workings of the government. It’s purely an ego thing now. Nobody’s backing up.”

Pavithran said the issues leading up to the government shutdown are not Democrat or Republican issues.

“It doesn’t matter who’s right or who’s wrong,” he said. “It’s time to stop pointing fingers and fix it.”

He also said it’s the responsibility of the citizenry to tell their elected officials how they feel.

“I think it is important that people, as citizens, show how frustrated we are to the Congressional folks,” Pavithran said. “The responsibility is on us to make sure we express our feelings and concerns to our Congressional delegates. We can sit around and complain about it behind closed doors, but if we don’t voice it to them, it looks like none of us really care.”