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The Smithsonian Museums Have Fallen Victim to the Government Shutdown, Closing Until Further Notice

All 19 Smithsonian museums are shuttered. The National Gallery follows suit tomorrow.

Sarah Cascone, January 2, 2019



President Donald Trump at the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture with outgoing Smithsonian secretary David Skorton. All of the Smithsonian's museums have closed as a result of the ongoing partial government shutdown. Photo by Kevin Dietsch; Pool/Getty Images.

Since the partial government shut down in the US took affect on December 22, the Smithsonian Institution has limped along, staying open by using leftover funds from prior years—until today.

As the lapse in funding continues, all 19 Smithsonian museums in New York and Washington, DC, have been forced to close their doors. The National Gallery of Art will follow suit tomorrow.

In a statement issued December 27, the Smithsonian warned that “prior-year funds” would only keep the lights on until the new year, and that closures would begin January 2. The government has been paralyzed for nearly two continuous weeks since political leaders have failed to come to an agreement over President Donald Trump’s demands for \$5 billion in funding for his much-vaunted border wall with Mexico, a suggestion Democrats have rejected outright.

“For us, it’s really disappointing for our public because we know so many people come to Washington with plans to visit the Smithsonian museums, which are free, and they really plan on that being a part of their visit to the city,” Smithsonian spokesperson Linda St. Thomas told DCist. The Institution’s attractions include the National Zoo and the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden in DC, as well as the Cooper Hewitt Smithsonian Design Museum in New York.

Among the employees who are still at work despite the shutdown are a crew that takes care of the animals at the zoo, St. Thomas told artnet News. Starting tomorrow, the National Gallery of Art will only employ “essential personnel, necessary for security and life safety,” the museum’s chief of communications, Anabeth Guthrie, told artnet News in an email. “We cannot work on regular Gallery business.”

Meanwhile, renovation work at the National Air and Space Museum will continue despite the shutdown, according to the Washington Post. Thanks to funding from the 2019 Legislative Branch Appropriations Bill, the Library of Congress and the US Botanic Garden are among the government organizations continuing normal operations at this time. In New York, the Statue of Liberty and Ellis Island also remain open, courtesy of funding from the state government.

Visitors to the nation’s capital looking for alternative tourist attractions should note that the Phillips Collection, the National Museum of Women in the Arts, the National Building Museum, the Newseum, President Lincoln’s Cottage, and the Woodrow Wilson House are among the sites open for business as usual.

Other agencies, such as the National Archives, the US Commission of Fine Arts, the National Endowment for the Arts, and the National Endowment for the Humanities have been closed since the shutdown began.

The 116th Congress will be sworn in on Thursday, with Democrats taking control of the House of Representatives. According to the *New York Times*, Democrats plan to introduce two bills that would force President Trump to the bargaining table without providing border wall funding.



Smithsonian's Arts and Industries building in Washington, DC. Photo courtesy of the Smithsonian Institute.

The bills would provide a month's worth of funding for Homeland Security, allowing for further negotiation on the wall issue, and fund other federal agencies through the end of the fiscal year in September. The measures are part of a six-bill deal that Democrats say is nearly identical to previous legislation passed in the Senate. But Republicans may not be willing to approve anything that doesn't have the president's approval.

"It would be the height of irresponsibility and political cynicism for Senate Republicans to now reject the same legislation they have already supported," House Speaker-designate Nancy Pelosi and Senate minority leader Chuck Schumer said in a statement quoted by CNBC. They warn Republicans against being "complicit with President Trump in continuing the Trump shutdown and in holding the health and safety of the American people and workers' paychecks hostage over the wall."

The current shutdown is the first of the year and the third of 2018, with a three-day shutdown last January and a shorter overnight shutdown the following month.