

## Local federal workers welcome accord

### WORKERS

By Scott Calzolaio

Daily News Staff

They haven't received a paycheck in 35 days, but local residents who hold federal jobs are hoping Friday's announcement of a temporary end to the government shutdown will allow them to breathe a bit easier.

"Since right after Christmas, I've been out of a job," said Franklin resident James Byrne, an environmental scientist with the Environmental Protection Agency.

Byrne, one of about 8,000 Massachusetts residents employed by the federal

government, wasn't ready to point fingers. He said that while he knows President Donald Trump instigated the shutdown, he believes there are two sides to the **See WORKERS, A6**

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Within the next three weeks, he said he's expecting the back pay from his time off.

"That (Trump's announcement on Friday) was fantastic news; it certainly settles a lot of the stress," Byrne said. "The only concern I have is what happens three weeks from now. Hopefully, I can get some bills paid off."

"He's graduating in May, and of course we help him out with tuition," Byrne said. "I had to get into contact with the college and say that I couldn't do a monthly payment plan at this point in time because I don't know when my next paycheck is coming in."

Byrne called the political standoff "a grade-school spat," and that "someone has to start acting like an adult."

The Daily Bread Food Pantry in Milford has had open doors to anyone affected by the

loss or a lack of money to buy essentials should not be in government service.

"Statements like that come from people that lack a sense of empathy," he said.

Byrne said his primary job is to help municipalities and nonprofits in assessing and cleaning up contaminated sites to be prepared for redevelopment. One of the EPA's main goals, he said, is maintaining the health of the people who use those contaminated spaces, and also to

Trump said the government will reopen for three weeks while negotiations about border security are conducted between the House, Senate and the Oval Office.

“I just hope some saner heads can prevail,” Byrne said. “I would at least like to get my pay for the rest of the year and return to my job.”

With more than a month’s worth of work to do in three weeks, he said, his hopes are higher than they were before, but he knows his voicemail and email are likely backed up with inquiries and concerns.

Byrne’s wife works full time and has been supporting the family while her husband’s bank account dwindled. The family hasn’t had to visit a food bank, nor have they dipped into savings. Their major concern was their son’s college tuition at St. Anselm College in Manchester, New Hampshire.

shutdown, while businesses like Critter Visits pet sitting and dog training in Bellingham are offering affected workers free dog food and extremely discounted care.

State Rep. Jeffery Roy, D-Franklin, said he’s heard from multiple federal workers who are concerned about paying rent and other basic needs. He said he’s also put off by some of the statements made by other politicians.

“It’s unnecessary. It deeply disturbs me, because it shows a complete lack of empathy,” Roy said, specifically pointing to comments made about federal workers going to food banks by Commerce Secretary Wilbur Ross last week. “To make a statement like that is preposterous, and not having room in your heart to understand and walk in someone else’s shoes, is disheartening.”

Roy said people who cannot see through the lenses of those who are deeply affected by job

make sure the environment doesn’t suffer from it.

Inspections of wastewater, hazardous waste sites and others haven’t been done. That not only puts federal workers out of a paycheck, but could possibly delay or cause harm to those businesses and facilities that require the federal help to clean things up, he said.

“Besides being incredibly bored and binge-watching television, I just don’t know when my next paycheck is coming,” he said. “Financially, it really stresses me out.”

And even after Trump’s announcement on Friday, Roy’s main question was this: “What happens if they can’t come to an agreement on it?” *Scott Calzolaio can be reached at 508-734-0389 or scalzolaio@wickedlocal.com. Follow him on Twitter: @ScottCaz.*

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