

Federal offices in Chase County open, trying to catch up on work

Written by Wauneta Breeze
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By Carolyn Lee

The Imperial Republican

The 16-day duration of the federal government shutdown this month was the third-longest shutdown in U.S. history, after an 18-day one in 1978 and a 21-day one in 1995-96.

Even if it was the third-longest, it was long enough for producers and government agencies in Chase County.

There was a lot of work piled up at the NRCS (Natural Resource Conservation Service) and FSA (Farm Service Agency) at the USDA Service Center at 706 E. 5th St. in Imperial.

FSA Director Linda Fegler said the buildup “was substantial because it was our biggest payment cycle of the year.”

The shutdown occurred from Oct. 1-16.

As of Oct. 1 the FSA was to have issued rental payments for the Conservation Resource Program (CRP), which allows producers to be paid for acres that are unfarmed.

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“We couldn’t give producers an idea of the date” that they would be paid, Fegler said, which “puts a burden on producers.”

In addition, also due Oct. 1 was a direct annual payment for the DCP, or Direct Encounter Cyclical Payments, or set-aside program.

At the NRCS, Director Andy Keep said a lot of field work involving the planning of terraces and grass waterways was set back due to the shutdown. He said personnel are “trying to catch up the field work” now that they are back at work.

Keep said the first part of October is usually a good time to do that field work because “farmers want to get those practices going.”

While the offices were closed employees had no option but to do other things, such as housework, or in Keep’s case, “I tried not to spend a lot of money.”

They were not able to work in the office even without pay. Fegler said “We were instructed to stay away from the office. As our records are all on the computer and the computers were shut down,” no work was able to continue.

About 800,000 federal employees were indefinitely furloughed, and another 1.3 million were required to report to work without known payment dates.

Keep and Fegler said they understand they will receive back pay for the 16 days.

In Chase County, eight NRCS and four FSA employees were affected.

The shutdown was called after Congress failed to enact legislation appropriating funds for fiscal

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year 2014, or a continuing resolution for the interim authorization of appropriations for fiscal year 2014.

Regular government operations resumed Oct. 17 after an interim appropriations bill was signed into law.