SEQUESTRATION IN MICHIGAN

A COLLECTION OF ARTICLES OF
THE POTENTIAL EFFECTS AND
REPORTED EFFECTS OF
FEDERAL BUDGET CUTS
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Sequester could delay Michigan's first bus rapid transit line, Grand Rapids officials worry

By Zane McMillin | zmcmilli@mlive.com

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on February 28, 2013 at 12:01 PM, updated April 02, 2013 at 12:11 PM

Update: Sequestration still a threat, but work continues on bus rapid transit in Grand Rapids

GRAND RAPIDS, MI — Michigan's first bus rapid transit line is at the mercy of looming federal spending cuts known as sequestration, worrying Grand Rapids transit officials who plan to begin work on the project this spring.

Peter Varga, CEO of The Rapid, told the Grand Rapids-area bus system's Board of Directors on Wednesday, Feb. 27, the broad cuts set to trigger Friday might mean a hold-up $14.4 million in federal funding pledged to the project this year.

The nearly $40 million bus rapid transit Silver Line is scheduled to begin service in mid-2014, and will be the state's first such system.

Once complete, the Silver Line will ferry passengers between 60th Street in Wyoming to downtown Grand Rapids in 40 percent less time than a traditional bus.

"You should understand that the sequester affects us," Varga told the Interurban Transit Partnership Board on Wednesday.

"It doesn't affect us significantly," he said, "but it affects us to the extent that the BRT project could be delayed in funding and, therefore, implementation."

To be sure, it is not fully clear whether sequestration would impact the government's next financial contribution to the line, Varga said.

The possibility was spelled out in a Feb. 11 letter to Congress from federal Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood, who warned of "indiscriminate spending reductions" of nearly $1 billion to transportation spending should sequestration be triggered.

Transportation department staff likely would be furloughed and projects reprioritized, "which means delivery of our many grant programs may face unneeded delays," LaHood wrote.
Some $15 million in federal and state dollars already have been appropriated to the Silver Line's construction, Varga said.

The next batch of funding, to the tune of $14.4 million, could be held up by sequestration because it is attached to the federal general fund, Varga said.

There is little hope Congress will replace sequestration with more targeted cuts by tomorrow's deadline, leading to dire warnings from President Barack Obama's administration that painful times lie ahead.

"These kinds of situations could cause delays in funding," Varga said Wednesday.

"Those delays are not our efforts," he added, "it is really the inability of Congress to pass legislation and to pass funds to meet their obligations, so it's going to be an interesting time."

Just last fall, Federal Transit Administrator Peter Rogoff traveled to Grand Rapids to sign a project construction grant agreement, which green-lit $32 million in federal funding for the Silver Line.

It was the last essential piece to begin work on the Silver Line, and work is to begin this spring on the 18 stops to be situated along the line's 9.8-mile route.

The project agreement gives Varga heart, but "the question is when do we get the money," Varga said, "not do we get our money now, and how are we going to get the money. Because of sequester, that hasn't come in, we are not clear about how that's going to happen."

If sequestration triggers, its effects likely will go unrealized for several weeks, The Associated Press reported this week. Compounding the issue is the possibility of a government shutdown if lawmakers cannot agree on a federal budget by March 27.

Commentators have noted there is the possibility for sequestration to be nullified during those budget talks, but Varga noted during his remarks to the ITP that gridlock has become the norm in Washington.

"I am assuming that the BRT project is not going to be delayed, because they have signed an agreement with us," Varga said, "but that does not mean that Congress is going to easily be able to handle these things."
Jackson County Airport officials could receive FAA letter shutting down air traffic control tower

By Lisa Satayut | lsatayut@mlive.com
on March 05, 2013 at 6:30 AM, updated March 05, 2013 at 2:28 PM

JACKSON, MI – Officials at the Jackson County Airport could receive a letter this week notifying them that the air traffic control tower will have to shut down in April as a result of the sequestration cuts.

While Kent Maurer, the airport manager, said he has not heard any news from the Federal Aviation Administration on the fate of the Jackson tower, he has been discussing the issue with trade associations.

Larry Bowron, president of the Michigan Association of Airport Executives board, said shutdowns could start April 1.

Bowron is also the city of Battle Creek’s transportation director who oversees the W.K. Kellogg Airport.

The Jackson County air-traffic control tower is on the list of towers that will lose funding from the FAA due to the sequestration cuts that took effect Friday, March 1.

The county airport funds $69,000 yearly, or 15 percent, of the tower operating expenses and the FAA funds the remaining 85 percent.

“We’re a contract tower, we pay part of the cost because it’s privately contracted,” Maurer said.

There are 238 towers nationwide that will lose federal funding in an attempt to help offset the approximate $600 million FAA budget reduction. Six of those are in Michigan.

Ray LaHood the secretary for the U.S. Department of Transportation and Michael Huerta an FAA administrator sent a Feb. 22 letter to aviation trade associations explaining what could happen.

The Jackson County airport had just below 52,000 landings or takeoffs in 2012. This is a five percent increase compared to 2011.

“We are busier than Lansing, Kalamazoo and Marquette,” Maurer said.

But, Bowron said the FAA doesn’t take those numbers into consideration when deciding what towers will lose federal funding.
They base the decision on the number of “enplanements” or the number of passengers that get on a plane at specific airports for travel versus the number of take-offs and landings. The Jackson County airport does not handle large passenger planes like Southwest Airlines or American Airlines does.

“When they get on airplanes in Jackson, the FAA doesn’t count those people,” Bowron said. “When 350 Marines get on a plane at the Battle Creek airport they are not counted. It doesn’t make a whole lot of sense; we can’t count the number of enplanements because the FAA doesn’t let us.”

That also means the number of arrivals and departures during the Michigan International Speedway race weekends are not counted.

“It doesn’t make a whole lot of sense,” Bowron said. “I know it’s going to be difficult for Battle Creek to be the same airport it is today without a tower. He (Maurer) is going to have some problems during NASCAR races.

Bowron is hoping the FAA will work with stakeholders before cutting off funding as it had been discussed previously, but said it looks like that might not happen.

Bowron spoke with a representative from Midwest Air Traffic Control about the closings.

“He made it sound like closure letters are going out this week,” he said.

There are five employees in the tower who will lose their jobs. They are all retired pilots or former military. The tower is manned from 7 a.m. to 9 p.m. daily.

“To say it’s been needed for 52 years then tomorrow it’s not…it’s not a decision based on fact,” Maurer said.
Sequester 2013: Jackson County Department on Aging to lose $56,000 in federal funding

By Lisa Satayut | Lsatayut@mlive.com

on March 07, 2013 at 1:00 PM, updated March 11, 2013 at 10:27 AM

JACKSON, MI— While it’s still too early to identify the exact impact to the Jackson County Department on Aging’s budget due to the federal sequestration cuts, local officials anticipate a loss of $56,000 in federal funding yearly.

Marcie Wandell, the director of the Department on Aging, said the funding loss will have to be made up somehow but at this point she is not exactly sure what programs or services might have to be cut or shaved back.

She said closing some of the senior nutrition sites might be an option. There are eight centers in the county that provide meals for seniors.

But, the Meals on Wheels program will continue to deliver two meals daily to county seniors who are home bound. Originally, it was thought the federal cuts would have a larger impact on this program. Instead of delivering one hot meal and one cold meal, Wandell said the cold meal could be replaced with a frozen one to cut back on costs.

"At this point, I don't see us reducing the amount of nutritious meals we provide for homebound seniors," Wandell said.

About 17,900 meals are served every month to Jackson County seniors through the program.

The Jackson County Meals on Wheels program receives approximately $275,000 a year from the federal government plus the United States Department of Agriculture funds another $114,000 every year.

Statewide four million fewer meals will be served as a result of the sequestration cuts.

As far as local cuts, Wandell said she plans to discuss any possibilities — including senior centers — with the county board.

“We might have to look at closing some of the senior nutrition sites,” she said. “I will have to talk to the board of commissioners about where to adjust.”
Wandell will meet with the Jackson County Board of Commissioners on Friday, March 8 to discuss the loss of federal funds.

While the department will have to make funding adjustments, one of those could be dipping into senior millage funds to continue services. This is the department's largest source of funding.

A .25-millage renewal request for senior citizen programs was passed by Jackson County voters last year. The tax essentially continued an eight-year levy approved by county voters in 2004.

The department receives federal funding through the Older Americans Act for 12 different programs. Some of those include Meals on Wheels, home care assistance, caregiver support services, senior center operating expenses, in-home counseling and exercise classes.
Sequestration hits Central Michigan University, Tuition Assistance suspended for active duty service members

By RANDI SHAFFER / @RandiMShaffer

Friday, March 8, 2013

At least 4,000 Central Michigan University students will be impacted as military cuts forced a suspension of the military’s Tuition Assistance Program Friday morning.

Mike Nunnally, CMU’s manager for U.S. Military Programs, said TA covers educational expenses for both undergraduate and graduate students, whether their coursework is face-to-face or online.

“It’s part of sequestration,” Nunnally said. “The services were given latitude ... to review those programs that they feel they can suspend.”

Nunnally said the Marines and Navy made their announcements about the suspension first, followed by the Army.

The Air Force is expected to make a similar statement Monday, he said.

Nunnally, who manages 20 CMU campuses at 20 military bases from New York to Hawaii, said he has about 3,000 face-to-face students, and 1,000 more online who will be affected.

“It’s not a huge number by CMU standards, but it’s a sizable number,” he said. “This is going to impact a lot of people.”
Central Michigan University is one of the largest providers of higher education to members of the military.

The tuition assistance program covers the entire amount of tuition.

Nunnally said CMU has been quick to react.

He said his office has been working on drafting a notice, probably an email, to help inform soldiers, sailors, airmen and Marines enrolled at CMU about the impact.

Nunnally said he plans to inform those affected that they can contact the university’s veterans resource center for support, and will direct military members toward both CMU scholarships and general military scholarships that can provide financial support.

Military members can continue to access their GI Bill benefits if applicable, and many military members would also qualify for financial aid as well, Nunnally said.

Carol Bale, director of marketing for CMU’s Global Campus, said CMU also offers competitive discounted tuition rates for military men and women.

“CMU’s been very proactive,” Nunnally said.

While no official word has been given on when tuition assistance will be reinstated, Nunnally said his Air Force counterpart said not to expect a reinstatement this fiscal year, which ends Sept. 30.

Nunnally said the TA suspension will not affect veterans, just active duty, reserve and National Guard individuals.

The U.S. Army put a statement on its education website Friday, which said soldiers currently enrolled in courses approved for TA will not be affected and will be allowed to complete their current course enrollments.

“The Army understands the impacts of this decision and will re-evaluate the decision if the budgetary situation improves,” the statement read.

While the cut will impact a lot of people, Nunnally said it will likely affect younger military members who are trying to get as much college in as possible while remaining at the lowest paid position.

CMU senior Brent Kearns is one of those younger military members.

Kearns, a private first class in the Michigan Army National Guard, said he was shocked and appalled at the decision.

“There are other cuts that should have been made long before this,” he said.

Kearns said he maxed out his FAFSA, and relies entirely on TA to pay his tuition.

He said he may not get his degree for a while now.

“Like anything like this, it’s marketing and training and education that are always the first things to cut,” Nunnally said. “It’s an easy target and ... it’s one of the more valuable things to the military and to the force in general.”
DETROIT (AP) — Six air traffic control towers in Michigan are among 238 scheduled to close nationwide in early April as the FAA shuts off funding for those services.

The shutdowns are part of the FAA's move to reduce spending by $600 million under automatic federal budget cuts.

Some airports are pressing their cases to preserve those services.

Michigan airports on the list are Ann Arbor, W.K. Kellogg in Battle Creek, Coleman A. Young in Detroit, Jackson County-Reynolds Field in Jackson, Muskegon County and Sawyer International in Marquette County.

The Lansing and Willow Run airport towers are among 72 nationwide that could close overnight through eliminating midnight shifts.

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Medical researchers in Michigan brace for $32M cut

By Catherine Kavanaugh
cathy.kavanaugh@dailytribune.com; @CatherineKav

Monday, March 11, 2013

Margot LaPointe (left), vice president of research for Henry Ford Health System, and Lisa Braddix of Komen Detroit talk with U.S. Rep. Sander Levin about funding cuts to medical research. (David N. Posavetz/Daily Tribune)

Longer lines at airports and the end of White House tours matter little to Sheila Cohoon, a Clinton Township mother concerned much more about what automatic federal spending cuts will do to medical research.

Cohoon’s son, 4, has neurofibromatosis 1 (NF1), which causes benign tumors to grow on nerves throughout the body and can lead to blindness, deafness, bone deformities and learning disabilities.

Cohoon said she has been encouraged by University of Michigan Medical School studies of an experimental drug that blocks the NF1 mutation in mice when given it at birth. The possibility the research could be delayed or halted troubles her personally and as the Michigan representative for the Children’s Tumor Foundation.

“As a parent I’m almost in tears,” Cohoon said Monday at an informal talk about how across-the-board federal cuts known as budget sequestration will hurt state programs funded by the National Institutes of Health (NIH).

Michigan will lose $31.6 million in NIH funding and about 565 jobs in the areas of medical research and innovation, according to U.S. Rep. Sander Levin (D-Royal Oak), whose district includes part of Macomb
County. He met with Cohoon, other health advocacy representatives and medical researchers at Gilda's Club, Royal Oak, to discuss the ramifications of reducing the NIH budget by 5.1 percent, or $1.6 billion, this year.

Because half the fiscal year has passed, the NIH essentially has to cut 8.7 percent in seven months. U-M stands to lose $19.5 million in that time period, said James Wooliscroft, M.D., dean of the School of Medicine. Hundreds of lab employees could be out of work and their research put on hold.

"Even existing awards are going to be cut and with that cut research that otherwise might have led to a discovery will not happen," Dr. Wooliscroft said.

Scientists are on the cusp of promising new drugs to help 90 percent of patients with cystic fibrosis and to reverse symptoms of Fragile X, which is the most common inherited cause of developmental disabilities and the most common known cause of autism.

Two weeks ago, Sue Collins-Schroeder learned about the drug for cystic fibrosis entering its third phase of study but she said the good news was tempered by the budget sequestration.

"If this funding is cut, that research will sit on the table," said Collins-Schroeder, who is development director of the Cystic Fibrosis Foundation chapter in Troy and the wife of a patient.

Lives are really on the line, she said.

"If we can't finish this phase three study, I'm afraid patients will deteriorate to the point they need a transplant and lungs are not easy to transplant. They could end up passing away and we have the science right there. We just need the money to keep pushing it through the trial."

In addition to current research and drug trials, Ann Schwartz, M.D., deputy center director of the Karmanos Cancer Institute, said she is concerned about the future of the profession.

"I'm afraid we're going to lose a whole generation of scientists," she said. "Who is going to come up into an environment where your career is dependent on funding that is hard to get?"

Cindy Handford of the Epilepsy Foundation of Michigan suggested everyone unite under the acronym CDC, which usually stands for the Centers for Disease Control.

"We all have to get together and form the CDC: the Chronic Disease and Disorder Coalition," Handford said.

Levin said she may be on to something because there is no umbrella organization representing all the research and advocacy groups. For starters, however, he encouraged everyone to sign a letter giving details about what the loss of NIH funding means to their agencies and universities.

Jeffrey Cohen, director of governmental affairs and advocacy for the National Fragile X Foundation, said he would work on the letter.

"With NIH grants cut, we're looking at the prospect of real, substantive progress being slowed or halted," he said.
Sequestration: Cuts to control tower staff at Ann Arbor, Willow Run airports still uncertain

By AMY BIOLCHINI (FILES/PROFILE/PUID=78151) County, health and environment reporter
Posted on Tue, Mar 12, 2013 : 5:58 a.m.

Staff at both Ann Arbor Municipal (http://www.a2gov.org/government/publicservices/fleetandfacility/airport/Pages/default.aspx) and Willow Run (http://www.willowrunairport.com) airports are still uncertain as to whether federally funded control tower employees will be affected by $85 billion in automatic federal budget cuts (http://www.annarbor.com/news/federal-sequestration-what-budget-cuts-could-mean-for-washtenaw-county) — known as sequestration — that are slated to take effect as early as April.

Both airports are on the Federal Aviation Administration’s list (http://www.annarbor.com/news/federal-sequestration-puts-ann-arbor-municipal-airports-control-tower-in-jeopardy-of-closure/to be affected by cuts should a $637 million reduction in the FAA’s budget be enacted.

The entire 11-member control tower staff at the Ann Arbor airport in Pittsfield Township is on FAA’s list to be cut, while the Willow Run Airport could be losing nighttime controllers from its tower staff of 16 people.

The efficiency and, in turn, capacity of an airport is increased when there’s someone in the tower controlling traffic, said Scott Winther, department manager for communications for the Wayne County Airport Authority.

"Having someone in the tower makes the airport run more efficiently than when we rely on aircraft to talk directly to each other," he said.

Airport Manager Matt Kulhanek said the Ann Arbor control tower manager has not received a communication from the FAA yet that the tower will be closing.

"There’s uncertainty because there’s no hard information out there," Kulhanek said. "I don’t anticipate it would have a measurable impact on air traffic in Ann Arbor."

The tower at the airport is staffed seven days a week from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. Should the staff be eliminated, the tower will close — but operations would not cease, Kulhanek said.

"It’s hard to say how it would affect activity levels," Kulhanek said. "There are busy times of day in the summer when (not having a control tower) could slow activity down."

The control tower ensures operations at an airport flow smoother because they can provide an “advanced level of coordination” between the activity on the ground and in the air, Kulhanek said.

FAA regulations state "There is no substitute for alertness while in the vicinity of an airport," and advice that when a control tower is unmanned, pilots should communicate via a common radio frequency specific to each airport called the Common Traffic Advisory Frequency (CTAF). (http://www.faa.gov/air_traffic/publications/atpubs/air/aim0401.html)

Pilots have been trained on the protocols of using the CTAF system and know which planes have the right-of-way in certain situations, Kulhanek said.

"Pilots monitor and utilize it when they’re in the pattern when they’re getting ready to land and take off," Kulhanek said. "It’s not unfamiliar to pilots. It’s how they operate at airports that don’t have towers."

Melanie Maxwell | AnnArbor.com
There were 77,316 takeoffs and landings at the Ann Arbor airport, according to figures the FAA control tower staff collects.

The traffic at the Ann Arbor airport mainly consists of small corporate jets and flight school activity, whereas larger cargo planes are a majority of the traffic at the Willow Run Airport in Ypsilanti.

The Willow Run Airport, which is owned and operated by the Wayne County Airport Authority, is preparing to have the hours of their round-the-clock control tower reduced.

The FAA has put the Willow Run Airport on the list of facilities to have the control tower close for a night shift.

“We certainly expect we’ll be losing overnight controllers in the tower at Willow Run Airport,” Wintner said.

The exact specifications of how long the night shift would last and when it would begin have not been communicated, Wintner said.

The earliest changes may come to Willow Run will likely be mid-April, Wintner said.

An airport without a manned control tower isn’t shut down.

“Given the amount of traffic during the overnight hours (at Willow Run), I doubt it would be detrimental,” Wintner said. “It won’t be an issue until, when and if, Willow Run were to become busy (at night).”

The control tower at Willow Run is responsible for directing aircraft during the final approach and descent to the airport, Wintner said. Before planes communicate with the control tower, they’re in contract with Terminal Radar Approach Control (https://www.faa.gov/about/office_org/headquarters_offices/ato/tracon/) operators that work from the FAA’s control facility in the Detroit Metro Airport. Those operators manage the air space and the sequence of planes, Wintner said.

Cargo planes typically fly at night. Should freight cargo activity increase at the Willow Run Airport, there would likely be a need for nighttime control tower staff, Wintner said - at which point in time the airport could ask the FAA for additional staff. Wintner said the elimination of a 24-hour control tower at Willow Run could be detrimental to the region’s plans to expand economic activity using the airport as an asset. "It’s a perception thing that could hinder our development efforts," Wintner said.

Tags: Ann Arbor Municipal Airport (tag/Ann Arbor Municipal Airport), Ann Arbor airport (tag/Ann Arbor airport), Willow Run Airport (tag/Willow Run Airport), sequestration (tag/sequestration),

Amy Biolchini covers Washtenaw County, health and environmental issues for Ann Arbor.com. Reach her at (734) 623-2552, amybiolchini@annarbor.com (mailto:amybiolchini@annarbor.com) or on Twitter (http://twitter.com/amywrites_).

(users/profile/?UID=78151)
Federal prosecutors in Michigan face possible sequester cuts

Wednesday, March 13, 2013 10:22 p.m. EDT

U.S. President Barack Obama speaks about the sequester after a meeting with congressional leaders at the White House in Washington March 1, 2013. REUTERS/Kevin Lamarque

DETROIT (WKZO) -- Federal prosecutors in Detroit, including the team which worked on the corruption case against former Detroit Mayor Kwame Kilpatrick and two others, may face a ten-percent reduction in pay because of the government sequester cuts. All of the nearly 260 employees at the U.S. Attorney's office in Detroit recently received notices about the possibility of furlough days, and many have agreed to take one day off every two weeks without pay. The furloughs would go into effect next month and end in September.
The sequester does not discriminate from Kalamazoo to Detroit to Washington

Thursday, March 14, 2013 5:59 a.m. EDT

The gym was decorated with handmade signs welcoming the troops home.

UNDATED (WKZO) -- While it hasn’t had much impact in West Michigan, it seems no one on a federal payroll is safe from the Sequester.

Federal prosecutors in Detroit, including the team which worked on the corruption case against former Detroit Mayor Kwame Kilpatrick and two others, may face a ten-percent reduction in pay because of the government sequester cuts.

All of the nearly 260 employees at the U.S. Attorney’s office in Detroit recently received notices about the possibility of furlough days, and many have agreed to take one day off every two weeks without pay.

The furloughs would go into effect next month and end in September.

The same may occur for the returning members of Kalamazoo’s 507th Engineering Battalion, just back from Afghanistan. The members who will stay in uniform and on the payroll may find themselves only working four days a week.
As part of a national day of demonstrations by federal workers, about 50 unionized employees from the U.S. Army Tank-Automotive Command complex in Warren protested Wednesday in opposition to the so-called sequester cuts that will require them to take one unpaid furlough day on a weekly basis for 22 weeks.

Chris Michakalis, president of the Metro Detroit AFL-CIO, told the rally that they should engage in outspoken opposition to the "sequestration madness" and urge Congress to repeal the $85 billion in budget cuts that took effect March 1.

"We are with you and we will be with you until this fight is over," Michakalis said.

With a heavy police presence overseeing the demonstration from afar, the pickets braved sub-freezing temperatures and bitterly cold wind to march outside the 11 Mile Road entrance to TACOM, also known as the Detroit Arsenal.

"We will face a 20-percent pay cut for five months. This is devastating; devastating to our members and devastating to our families," said Paul Veselenak, president of the American Federation of Government Employees Local 1658, which represents more than 5,000 civilian TACOM employees.

Veselenak warned that the furloughs, which amount to 20-percent weekly pay cuts, will produce a trickle-down effect that will hurt Macomb County shops, restaurants and retailers. About 4,000 of the 8,000 workers are Macomb County residents, he said.

At Selfridge Air National Guard Base in Harrison Township, approximately 1,150 civilian and uniformed workers will face furloughs during the same 22-week period. The employees who will be limited to four days of work per week are base firefighters who respond to large, multi-alarm fires in the surrounding communities.

The across-the-board budget cuts that Congress allowed to go into effect will require weekly unpaid furlough days for several thousand TACOM workers from late April until Sept. 30.

Under the sequestration process, the Defense Department was hit with half of the cuts and the American Federation of Government Employees responded with over 100 rallies on Wednesday across the nation.

The demonstrator in Warren chanted, "Hey, hey, ho, ho, sequestration's got to go." They carried placards that read, "Sink the sequester" and "Jobs, not furloughs."

Veselenak said TACOM is responsible for virtually every U.S. Army vehicle in Afghanistan, including tanks and other tracked vehicles. Workers represented by the AFGE union perform a wide array of tasks: writing and negotiating defense tracks, handling Army logistics related to supplies and inventory, and engineers who engage in high-tech research and development.

"This is just the first year of budget cuts," Veselenak said. "If this keeps up, we have a lot of talented, experienced people here that the Army will lose."
Army workers protest pay cuts

By Chad Selweski
chad.selweski@macombdaily.com @cbsnewsman

Thursday, March 21, 2013

As part of a national day of demonstrations by federal workers, about 50 unionized employees from the U.S. Army Tank-Automotive Command Complex in Warren protested Wednesday in opposition to the so-called sequester cuts that will require them to take one unpaid furlough day on a weekly basis for 22 weeks.

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“We are with you and we will be with you until this fight is over,” Michakalis said.

With a heavy police presence overseeing the demonstration from afar, the pickets braved sub-freezing temperatures and bitterly cold wind to march outside the 11 Mile Road entrance to TACOM, also known as the Detroit Arsenal.

“We will face a 20-percent pay cut for five months. This is devastating; devastating to our members and devastating to our families,” said Paul Veselenak, president of the American Federation of Government Employees Local 1658, which represents more than 5,000 civilian TACOM employees.
Veselenak warned that the furloughs, which amount to 20-percent weekly pay cuts, will produce a trickle-down effect that will hurt Macomb County shops, restaurants and retailers. About 4,000 of the 8,000 workers are Macomb County residents, he said.

At Selfridge Air National Guard Base in Harrison Township, approximately 1,150 civilian and uniformed workers will face furloughs during the same 22-week period. The employees who will be limited to four days of work per week are base firefighters who respond to large, multi-alarm fires in the surrounding communities.

The across-the-board budget cuts that Congress allowed to go into effect will require weekly unpaid furlough days for several thousand TACOM workers from late April until Sept. 30.

Under the sequestration process, the Defense Department was hit with half of the cuts and the American Federation of Government Employees responded with over 100 rallies on Wednesday across the nation.

The demonstrators in Warren chanted, “Hey, hey, ho, ho, sequestration’s got to go.” They carried placards that read, “Sink the sequester” and “Jobs, not furloughs.”

Veselenak said TACOM is responsible for virtually every U.S. Army vehicle in Afghanistan, including tanks and other tracked vehicles. Workers represented by the AFGE union perform a wide array of tasks: writing and negotiating defense tracks, handling Army logistics related to supplies and inventory, and engineers who engage in high-tech research and development.

“This is just the first year of budget cuts,” Veselenak said. “If this keeps up, we have a lot of talented, experienced people here that the Army will lose.”

URL: http://www.macombdaily.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20130321/NEWS01/130329966&template=printart

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Print - Sequestration could mean fewer meals for seniors | wzzm13.com

10:19 AM, Mar 22, 2013

GRAND RAPIDS (WZZM) - West Michigan agencies continue to watch what is going on in Washington D.C. and brace for the potential impact of sequestration. One of those organization is West Michigan Meals on Wheels.

Lisa Wideman, director of operations for the Senior Meals Program says sequestration cuts could leave some seniors without food.

"We provide up to two meals a day 7 days a week for people. When we have to make hard decisions and service reductions we take a look at who is in most need, what their priorities are and whether they have support like local families," she said.

Getting proper nutrition during seniors years is critical for people to stay healthy and strong. Yet, 1 in 7 seniors in this country is threatened by hunger. Meals on Wheels helps fill the gap.

"I think for the most part it is about the only meal many of them get. They don't have to buy or prepare them. They just warm them up and enjoy them," said Terry Baker, a retiree who has been delivering meals for the past 4 years.

89-year Jerry Haveman of Grand Rapids is one of those clients. The widower and World War II veteran has had a rough go of it lately. He has arthritis in his hands and back, recently lost most of his vision in both eyes fell and broke his hip just last month.

Haveman says he lost weight and almost lost his will to live while he was hospitalized.

"I wanted to come home from the hospital to come home and pass away."

In fact, his condition was so bad Haveman was put in hospice care. But lately things are looking up for him.

"I'm getting stronger and stronger all the time," he said, thanking his daily Meals on Wheels for helping him get back on his feet.

"I need to keep up my strength. All of it is very delicious and very good. If I didn't have them I wouldn't be able to stay in my own home."

The West Michigan Meals on Wheels serves more than 1,200 seniors a day. Workers and volunteers cook, pack and deliver nutritious meals for seniors who cannot do it for themselves.

Wideman says the organization does not yet know what the full impact of sequestration would be.

"Well it is a really scary topic for us right now because there are a lot of unknown factors. But, we do have some projections from our national association," she said. "It looks like we could stand to lose as much as $50,000 and possibly much more. That is going to translate into about 12,000 meals. And, that is a great concern to us because there has already been a number of reductions. The economy has not been very good.
Givers have not been able to give what they have in the past. We have really tightening our belts over the past few years and our ability to continue to do that without affecting our services is really questionable."

She says the program could stand to lose as much as $75,000 locally which means making hard decisions about who gets food and how much.

"Oh, it would be a huge blow because the senior population is growing. Our numbers of individuals served, I believe, we are up over 200 since the first quarter of last year," she said. "For so many programs the thought process is let's try to help people become more sustainable on their own. Seniors most often don't have the ability to do that. Especially our meals on wheels clients. They are the most frail clients our community has."

Which is why service reductions could have a detrimental effect that goes beyond receiving fewer meals.

It is not uncommon for our drivers to find someone on the floor, someone in need of medical attention or someone doesn't come to the door. We don't know why so we call their emergency contact," said Wideman. "We have already cut back from 5 days delivery to 3 because of funding reductions in the past. When individuals are isolated and don't have family nearby, nobody is checking on those people. The only person, often times, they see during the week is our drivers. Every day we have to cut back is less contact with people, less safety checks going on. Every time we have to do that a little piece of us dies."

The latest estimate is that sequestration cuts threaten the funding for 4 million meals statewide and another $1.8 million dollars in other nutrition assistance for seniors.

Wideman says they are considering the possibility of having to reduce weekend and second meals for some seniors.

Jerry Haveman says he is frustrated about what is going on in Washington D.C. He feels cutting meals to people who need it most is unthinkable.

"There are many, many people who are in as bad a shape I am or worse. They could not get their own meals either. If Meals on Wheels wasn't delivered to them they would have to be in a nursing home or someplace where they could be taken care of," he said. "I don't know how these people will survive if they don't have it."
Sequestration may cause state layoffs in Michigan

By MICHIGAN RADIO NEWSROOM

Unionized state employees received notices earlier this month that layoffs may be coming as a result of funding cuts due to the federal sequester.

The notices were dated March 8, but were only made public this week. The state is required to give 30-day’s notice before any layoffs. The earliest any could occur would be April 8.

Kurt Weiss, a spokesman for the Department of Technology, Management, and Budget, said the state still isn’t sure what will be cut.

"That’s the hard part right now, we don’t know exactly where the cuts are coming," Weiss said. "We’re waiting for further guidance from the federal government. We expect the cut level will be somewhere around $150 million total, but whether that will result in layoffs or not, we just don’t know yet."

The notices were sent by Janine Winters, director of the Office of the State Employer. She wrote that "plans are being developed to quickly bring spending in line with anticipated revenues."

"The negative impact on client services and state employees that may result from sequester will only increase if there are delays in implementing plans," Winters wrote.

Weiss said the state hopes to have more details in the next few weeks.

"We’re getting some information that’s trickling in from the federal government, but it’s certainly not enough yet to determine where the cuts are going to be," he said. "We’re hoping that sometime in the next two to three weeks we’ll have some exact, specific, information."
Federal cuts affect Kent Co. Head Start

Approx. $900,000 cut to funding due to sequester

Updated: Saturday, 23 Mar 2013, 4:40 PM EDT
Published: Saturday, 23 Mar 2013, 4:40 PM EDT

GRAND RAPIDS, Mich. (WOOD) - The sequester is taking a chunk out of Head Start for Kent County.

Federal budget cuts went into effect March 1. Parents were sent notices from Head Start for Kent County, saying the program would be ending early because of the sequester.

A board member confirmed the changes to 24 Hour News 8, blaming them on a 5% cut in federal money. The board member says special events for the summer, including enrichment programs, have been cancelled. Also, teaching services will end two weeks early on May 1.

Head Start provides services to thousands of low-income families. A board member says immediate impact will be minimal, but it's unknown how less funding will affect the 2013-2014 school year.

Executive Director Mary Hockwell sent 24 Hour News 8 a copy of the letter that went out to parents:

""On March 1, 2013, a federal budget reduction went into effect. As a federally-funded Head Start grantee, Head Start for Kent County (HSKC) now needs to reduce our 2013 budget by about 5%, approximately $600,000.

Our staff, as always, continues to focus on providing quality services to your child and family and is to be commended.

While able to provide information today, there are some questions still remaining. It is expected that over the next few months the remainder of the plan will be finalized.

The current plan is still tentative because final approvals are required (Office of Head Start, Board of Directors, and Parent Policy Council). However, knowing staff and parents need to have time to prepare, we are letting you know now. If the plan would not be approved or guidance from the Office of Head Start changes, we will change the plan as needed.

Listed below are the expected changes for the 2012-13 school year.

2012-13 Program Year:
* Last day of class for Head Start students at all locations is May 1, 2013
* No Head Start parent meetings in April and May
* No changes to Early Head Start program year or enrollments
* Stop enrolling Head Start children for remainder of 2012-13 program year

* No family activity meeting right in May for Family Literacy Program collaboration program
* Parent Policy Council will continue to meet each month

Recruitment and enrollment for the 2013-14 program year has begun and will continue with the start date scheduled for Monday, September 9, 2013.

This time is understandably difficult and unusual. As decisions are finalized with more specific information, and if there are any changes, we will keep you notified."
Federal cuts impact Mid Michigan agency

By the Midland Daily News

Posted: Sunday, March 24, 2013 9:30 am

The automatic cuts that recently went into effect in the federal government will impact Mid Michigan Community Action and its customers.

“When the across-the-board cuts to the federal budget were signed into law, we at the local level still did not really know what kind of effect it would have on our ability to serve our communities,” said Jill Sutton, Mid Michigan Community Action executive director.

While not all federal departments have provided figures, the agency estimates that the cuts will amount to 5 percent per federal grant, causing a loss of $350,000 through Sept. 30. These cuts will impact nearly every agency program from Head Start to senior food programs.

“These cuts are devastating for numerous reasons,” Sutton said. “One, the cuts are occurring in the middle of a program year necessitating drastic reactions including loss of jobs and potential reduction of office hours; and two, the cuts are reducing not only direct service funding but also administrative dollars that are needed to run the agency’s operations in six counties.”

The total impact on programs will not be known until the federal offices that provide the funding to the agency have released guidance.

“We have been told to plan for 5 percent cuts, but some programs are based on enrollment and not dollars, so planning is very difficult until we receive more guidance,” Sutton said. “It is frustrating to deal with so many unknowns.”

The immediate impact of the sequestration cuts is that 11 full-time jobs across the agency’s six counties will be lost. That accounts for nearly 10 percent of the agency’s jobs.

“The jobs that we have to cut will significantly impact our ability to serve our customers,” Sutton said. “We are going from a situation where two people in an office could not meet demand to a situation where we have one intake staff per office; it’s definitely going to be a challenge.”

Other potential impacts include a reduction of Head Start slots for at-risk 3-5-year-olds; reduction in the commodity food program for thousands of seniors across mid-Michigan; reduction of WIC benefits that support women and their young children; reduction in funding to keep the heat on in the homes of low-income families and others.

“Despite the challenges, this is not going to stop us,” Sutton said. “We will continue to do whatever we can to serve low-income families in our communities. We will do what our customers do — persevere.”

“There are those who will be frustrated with this situation — frustrated because we cannot serve them or because it takes double the time to get an appointment,” Sutton said. “We share their frustration, and we encourage them to discuss the matter with their U.S. representative and/or senator.”

Mid Michigan Community Action Agency is a human services agency serving Bay, Clare, Gladwin, Mecosta, Midland and Osceola counties.
Local agencies, institutions grappling to plan for cuts in federal funding due to sequestration

By AMY BOLCHINI (\users\PROFILE\UID=78151) County, health and environment reporter
Posted on Mon, Mar 25, 2013 : 5:58 a.m.

As the federal government continues to deliberate the extent and timing of forced budget cuts known as sequestration (http://www.annarbor.com/news/federal-sequestration-what-budget-cuts-could-mean-for-washtenaw-county/), local agencies and organizations are grappling with the possibility of extensive cuts to their funding.

The exact meaning of the cuts is relatively unknown, and local agencies and institutions that utilize federal funding are trying to adjust their plans to deal with shrinking budgets.

A number of Washtenaw County services that help poor individuals are readying for cuts that total about $437,000 – or about a 5 percent cut to federal funding award amounts across the board, according to information compiled by Mary Jo Callan, director of the Office of Community and Economic Development.

"We're trying to literally keep meals on the tables," Callan said. "We're doing triage."

The University of Michigan Health System anticipates $5 million less in Medicare reimbursements as a result of sequestration, but the exact amount is still unknown as the federal government deliberates.
Callan said the cuts will mean fewer people can be helped in programs funded through departments including U.S. departments of Housing and Urban Development, Labor, Health and Human Services, Energy and Agriculture.

About 11,000 fewer meals would be served through the Senior Nutrition Program and about 630 fewer people could be helped through the Employment Service Program, Callan said.

At the state level, those departments will be receiving cuts to their budgets exceeding $52 million.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Washtenaw County program name</th>
<th>Sequestration cut</th>
<th>Total federal funding award</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Community Development Block Grant (CDBG)</td>
<td>$99,751</td>
<td>$1,393,012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home Investment Partnership (HOME) Program</td>
<td>$51,767</td>
<td>$1,035,341</td>
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<tr>
<td>Emergency Solutions Grants (ESG) Program</td>
<td>$23,724</td>
<td>$444,476</td>
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<tr>
<td>Homelessness Management Information System (HMIS)</td>
<td>$6,585</td>
<td>$131,700</td>
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<tr>
<td>Workforce Investment Act (WIA) Youth Program</td>
<td>$59,813</td>
<td>$1,172,800</td>
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<tr>
<td>WIA Adult Program</td>
<td>$30,009</td>
<td>$666,851</td>
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<tr>
<td>Employment Service Program</td>
<td>$28,367</td>
<td>$566,267</td>
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<tr>
<td>WIA Dislocated Worker Program</td>
<td>$23,551</td>
<td>$461,788</td>
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<tr>
<td>Senior Nutrition Program</td>
<td>$13,649</td>
<td>$678,988</td>
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<tr>
<td>Community Service Block Grant (CSBG)</td>
<td>$29,568</td>
<td>$591,353</td>
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<tr>
<td>Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP)</td>
<td>$9,283</td>
<td>$185,555</td>
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<tr>
<td>LIHEAP Crisis Assistance (LCA) Deliverable Fuels</td>
<td>$2,650</td>
<td>$40,000</td>
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<tr>
<td>Weatherization Program</td>
<td>$9,266</td>
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<tr>
<td>MIPAC/PCA Energy Assistance Program</td>
<td>$4,745</td>
<td>$94,500</td>
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<tr>
<td>Foster Grandparent Program (FGP)</td>
<td>$14,691</td>
<td>$299,821</td>
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<tr>
<td>Summer Food Program</td>
<td>$5,418</td>
<td>$108,364</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>$487,237</strong></td>
<td><strong>$8,687,581</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sequestration includes a number of forced budget cuts throughout the next 10 years.

The Federal Aviation Administration announced Friday (http://www.faa.gov/news/press_releases/news_story.cfm?newsid=14414) the closure of a number of airport control towers it contracts out would be closing.

Control tower staff at the Ann Arbor Municipal Airport and the Willow Run Airport – who are full FAA employees – have yet to be notified (http://www.annarbor.com/news/sequestration-2013-cuts-to-control-tower-staff-at-ann-arbor-willow-run-airports-still-uncertain#.UT8w_hmxA0, google_plusone_share) that their hours would be cut or reduced, respectively.

Medicare is expected to reduce payments by physicians, hospitals and private insurers by 2 percent as of April 1.

For the University of Michigan Health System, reductions in Medicare reimbursements means a $6 million reduction in reimbursements for the remainder of the 2013 fiscal year, which ends June 30.

In the 2014 fiscal year, the health system will receive about $14 million less in Medicare reimbursements, according to information provided by UMHS.

To date, no layoffs at UMHS have occurred as a direct result of sequestration, said Pete Barkey, spokesman for the organization.

Barkey said UMHS anticipates that there could be ramifications with federal funding cuts.

"We're well aware of what the potential impacts of this are and keenly watching to see how this unfolds," Barkey said.

The potential cuts in federal funding were taken into account during the development of the budget for the current fiscal year, Barkey said.

However, researchers at UMHS and across the state will likely face less grant funding for their work and increased competition for the number of grants that are offered.

In 2012, researchers in Michigan received $655 million in funding from the National Institutes of Health and a total of $1.02 billion in federal research dollars.

Research institutions that make use of National Institutes of Health grants will likely see a 5 percent decrease in their funding.

About $33.4 million in NIH funding to Michigan researchers could be at risk for being cut this year, according to an estimate from the Federation of American Societies for Experimental Biology. (http://www.faseb.org//fshash.177UzEjdp four) The University of Michigan is anticipating a cut as high as $40 million (http://www.annarbor.com/news/university-of-michigan-could-lose-40m-in-research-funds-if-federal-policy-takes-place/) in its research funding.
Researchers at UMHS will likely receive lower levels of funding in grants that are non-competitive and renewed each year, and they may have to renegotiate the amount and scope of certain grant awards they have received from NIH.

There will also likely be several hundred less grants awarded from the National Science Foundation in the 2013 fiscal year.

Tags: Medicare (/tag/Medicare/), University of Michigan Health System (/tag/University of Michigan Health System/), Washtenaw County (/tag/Washtenaw County/), sequestration (/tag/sequestration/).
Federal budget cuts squeeze services at Sleeping Bear Dunes

By MICHIGAN RADIO NEWSROOM, UPBEAT (MICHIGAN RADIO NEWSROOM)

Listen

'The sequester' has generated a nervous buzz throughout the nation as we wait to see if the federal budget cuts will be a big deal.

For some agencies in Michigan, the cuts are already here.

Let's take a look at one of the state's most popular scenic tourist destinations - the Sleeping Bear Dunes. Last year, the Dunes had a record year with 1.53 million visitors.

Tom Ulrich is the Deputy Superintendent of the Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore.

Though he wasn't told to furlough any of his year round employees, Ulrich was required to cut a lot of the seasonal employees that are crucial to park maintenance over the summer.

"Our summer staff is where the rubber meets the road when it comes to visitor services and resource protection. So, the sequester cuts will result in things that the visitor will see when they come to the dunes," said Ulrich.

Earlier this week on Stateside, we spoke with Todd Spangler of the Detroit Free Press about how the sequester will effect Michiganders. In short, he said, there's still a lot we don't know.

Here's a quick snippet of Tuesday's discussion with Spangler:

"Agencies around the state (of Michigan) were lobbying hard for a stop to the sequestration because 70,000 kids for instance were going to lose Head Start services, but some of that money's been put back in through Congress from the 'continuing resolution' and some hasn't...so we're still waiting to see what the effect will be."
The continuing resolution has left many agencies on tenterhooks, waiting to see what funding they will lose while many employees within the Department of Defense are also waiting to see if their jobs will be furloughed.

In order to truly see the effects of the sequester, Spangler said, we just have to wait for the changes to work through the system.

"When the sequestration went into effect, it was an across the board cut. There were different percentage [cuts] for different agencies, but it was across the board. Agencies were supposed to lay off things off of programs. Now, by going back into it as a part of the budget appropriation from last week, Congress was able to say 'spend on this, but don't spend on that.'"

While some agencies are still waiting for more information, others know what will have to change with the sequester's across the board cuts.

The National Park Service has been directed to cut five percent from their annual budget, and in a state like Michigan, that means we'll see changes.

Kate Fox of 7 & 4 News reported that:

"For the Sleeping Bear Lakeshore, the spending cuts amount to a $234,000 reduction from its overall budget of $4,676,000."

The lack of staff due to the sequester will limit visitation for one of the Sleeping Bear National Lakeshore's most popular sites, the Pierce Stocking Scenic Drive.

The Drive is the only area where visitors can drive to an outlook that features the breathtaking view of Lake Michigan.

In the past, Pierce Stocking has opened in mid-April and closed for the season in late October.

Due to the sequester, Ulrich has delayed opening the Drive until Memorial Day weekend. The Drive will be closed to visitors on Labor Day weekend.

"I don't have the staff to open it, clear trees, sweep the Drive, clean the restrooms and put in the boardwalk," he said.

Restroom and garbage facilities will also run on the shortened schedule.

"Those things will be things that even a casual visitor will be disappointed to see," said Ulrich.

--Lucy Perkins, Michigan Radio Newsroom
April 1, 2013
By John Pepin, Marquette Mining Journal

K.I. SAWSER - Management officials at Sawyer International Airport have begun working toward the May closure of the air traffic control tower at the Upper Peninsula’s busiest airport.

After almost a week of delay, the Federal Aviation Administration officially notified management officials at Sawyer International Airport Thursday the air traffic control tower there will be shut down May 5.

Last Friday, the FAA published a list of 149 air traffic control towers on its website which are slated to close beginning early next month, including Sawyer’s tower, due to federal sequestration budget cuts.

Earlier this week, Sawyer management had no official FAA confirmation of its tower closure and had heard informally through the tower contractor - Midwest Air Traffic Control - about the Sawyer closure date.

The contractors told Sawyer airport manager Duane DuRay they received that date from the FAA in a fax a few days prior.

"I’m not 100 percent sure on how they’re planning on phasing this all out," DuRay said. "All I know is come May 5th, our tower is going down. Will it start as a transition where they’ll slowly reduce services and implement the closure or are they just going to be full service one day and lights out the next day? I’m not a hundred percent sure on that."

DuRay also couldn’t say conclusively what the future holds for five workers at the tower.

"I would have a hard time believing that they would be absorbed into a system when 75 percent of that system is being chopped off at the root," DuRay said. "There may be some transitions throughout the company, but I would venture to say the vast majority of them will become unemployed and will have to either move or just, I don’t know if they can retire, call it quits."

Meanwhile, DuRay wanted to assure air travelers flights will continue safely at the Sawyer airport. In fact, American Airlines is continuing its plans to add additional flights in June. Delta Airlines added new flights earlier this month.

"This is affecting jobs. This is affecting people’s lives and careers and by no means do I want it to sound like ‘This is no big deal, we’ll lose the tower, we’ll keep going,’” DuRay said. "Yes, Sawyer International Airport will continue to operate. We’ll continue to have flights. I don’t want any of the travelling public to panic and say it’s not safe to fly in there anymore we’re going to go someplace else or we’re just going to not fly anymore.”

Airport and airlines staff will coordinate, working into the transition.

"Short-term we’re probably going to have a few hiccups in the system that’s going to take a little bit of ironing out with our policies and our procedures, the airline’s policies and procedures and just re-educating our recurring customers on flying into an uncontrolled field again,” DuRay said. “I sat down with the airlines and we’ve talked a little bit about this. I’m anticipating that the FAA is going to take an active role in this as well because it should not fall just on the airports’ plate that we have to re-educate all of our pilots.”

DuRay said the airlines “understand the procedures of operating in and out of an uncontrolled airfield.”

"It’s just making sure that their staff, their crew and our staff are all on same page the day the lights go out,” DuRay said.

Sawyer director of operations Steve Schenden said U.S. Rep. Dan Benishek, R-Crystal Falls met with staff at the airport for about a half-hour Tuesday. Schenden said Benishek mostly asked questions about how the tower closure will affect the airport’s operations.

Schenden said county officials were working on cost estimates and the processes involved in closing the tower.

"Equipment will need to be moved from the tower and operations and emergency manuals updated,” Schenden said. "Then there would be costs to change them back if the tower received funding in the future. The airport is just starting preliminary evaluation to determine what would need to be done and what those costs are."

DuRay said he didn’t know how much money the government would save by closing the Sawyer tower or how much will need to be spent on maintenance.

“There’s the FAA costs and then there’s the airport costs, because our tower was a fully-funded tower, but we still maintained the facilities. We paid the utilities. We paid the upkeep of the building and the maintenance. So we had some out-of-pocket expenses that, over time, we’ll be able to reallocate into other areas,” DuRay said. "But still, we’ll have a building that we can’t just shut the lights off, turn our backs to it. It still has to be maintained to a certain extent. Otherwise, it’s going to become another abandoned eyesore.”

DuRay said "unless something drastic happens," the tower closure is expected to be permanent.
Sequestration hits Sault hard

Posted Apr. 3, 2013 @ 3:00 pm

Sault Ste. Marie -- A critical issue demanding a great deal of the Sault Ste. Chippewa Indians tribal leaders' attention is the $1.7 million impact of the federal budget cuts.

Tribal Chairperson Aaron Payment said the tribe's federal dollars are pre-paid. "We paid for these critically important services through 21,621 square miles of the Michigan territory to become a state just a year later, but the language in American Indian treaties calls for the United States to provide health, education and social welfare.

The Budget Control Act of 2011 called for $85 billion in mandatory cuts to government spending, but Congress could not agree on a budget. Congress passed the American Taxpayer Relief Act of 2013 that pushed the budget cuts back until March 1, but after that, allowed them to take place.

Since Congress did not find a remedy for the impact of sequestration, the Sault Ste. Chippewa Indians Tribal Council recognizes the $1.7 million loss of federal revenues at the same time a critical $1.3 million upgrade is needed. The tribe already appropriates 100 percent of the Kawakami revenues — about $17 million — for services and governmental operations.

Through a combination of operational savings, efficiencies, changes in casino expenses, performance improvements and a better allocation of funds, Payment believes the tribe will withstand the latest challenge. "Efficiencies will be sought and where a function is not justified or cannot sustain itself, changes will need to be made," he said.

At the same time, Payment acknowledges that gaming revenues must improve. "We need to make major changes in the way we operate and drive revenues," Payment said.

Kewadin Chief Operating Officer Anthony Coetz and governmental administrative teams, with oversight from the board of directors, have been working diligently to identify savings and to drive new revenues.

The board has begun a quality improvement review process while Payment has established a Casino Oversight Ad Hoc Committee to report regularly to the board on revenues and trends, marketing, advertising, promotions, customer service, team member morale, staffing, performance rewards and an ongoing reflective discussion on improvement.
Michigan sees increase in homeless students

Updated: Wednesday, April 3 2013, 10:49 AM EDT

DETROIT (AP) - The state Department of Education says Michigan has seen a 66 percent rise in homeless students over four years, to more than 37,500 in 2011-12.

Federal regulations define homeless children as those who lack "a fixed, regular and adequate nighttime residence." That includes those staying in someone else's home. Michigan's number of homeless students in 2011-12 was up from about 22,600 in 2009-10.

The Detroit News reports Wednesday that in 2011, Michigan received $2.3 million in federal funds, or $40.47 per homeless student. The state is getting the same amount for 2012-13, but an expected increase in homelessness is expected to reduce the subsidy to about $21.62 per student.

The automatic reduction in the federal budget is expected to cut funding by 5 percent for 2013-14.
Meals on Wheels program facing financial issues

April 4, 2013
Betsy Lehndorff and Jordan Travis - News Staff Writers, The Alpena News

ALPENA - Sequestration is beginning to impact community services, as Republicans and Democrats remain divided over a solution to spending. On March 1, $85.4 billion in federal money was automatically cut from programs for fiscal year 2013, and some local agencies are scrambling to make up the difference.

At the Alpena Senior Citizen Center, Director Grace Marshall is in the middle of raising $10,000 to make up for what her board anticipates will be a 10.4 percent shortfall totaling the same amount.

"It's a horrific impact to the senior population," she said, referring to the budget sequestration. "In a metro area you might have several soup kitchens and services. What people don't understand is that in a rural area we're the only ones. We're it."

Access to funds is complicated. The senior center spends money to provide home services, meals and other assistance to residents 60 and older. Later the center is reimbursed by the county, and also receives state and federal funds. Other money comes from donations and matching grants.

Last year the center received enough money for its food program to provide 45,000 home delivered meals for area residents. It leveraged that amount through food bank credits and other funds so it was able to feed people 72,000 meals, she said.

"We kept waiting for the sequestration to go away, but it hasn't yet," she said.

In Alcona County, Suzan Krey, executive director of the Commission on Aging, said sequestration isn't the only problem. Alcona has been hit with lower property values, resulting in a drop in the senior citizen millage funds it receives. And with the economy the way it is, fewer people are making donations. All totaled, Krey said so far she has lost one-sixth of her budget - around $90,000.

Among other services, the county delivers hot meals to residents four times a week, also providing them with three frozen dinners.

"At this point, we're not even sure what the cuts are going to be," she said.

One way to reduce costs for the program could be to deliver seven meals only three times a week for three hot meals and four frozen dinners. This step has not been authorized yet.

Part of the food program assures that people living by themselves get a welfare check at least four times a week, she said. She would not comment on what the impact would be if those visits were reduced to three times a week.

"You figure it out," she said.

For the Presque Isle County Council on Aging, the sequester means the organization is facing roughly $10,000 in funding cuts, Director Kate Kuznicki said. This amounts to about 7 percent of the organization's budget. It could equate to about four or five senior citizens the organization can't serve.

In March, PICCOA served 158 people, although the number fluctuates from month to month.

It's just the latest in five years of decreasing state and federal funding. As a result, the organization is having to rely more and more on a half-mill, four-year millage that goes in part to the organization.

"The millage has traditionally picked up a good portion of our transportation program, with state and federal money covering in-home care" and other programs, she said. "With more cuts coming to in-home care ... we have more millage money going to other programs, which leaves the money that used to be used for transportation in limbo."

Along with its transportation and in-home care services, PICCOA also provides homemaking, respite care, home meal delivery and congregate meal services, Kuznicki said.

Right now, PICCOA's board of directors is weighing its options for dealing with shrinking funds, Kuznicki said. One would be to reduce or revamp the organization's bus service.

"We know there's a need in the county, we're aware of that," she said. "We're working with (county) commissioners and the state to come to the best solution for everyone involved."

The organization is looking into more funding avenues, including state grants or funding sources from the county, Kuznicki said. This could include increasing the countywide millage, a move Kuznicki said is likely the organization's "best bet."

"There's no easy pot of money sitting out there for us," she said.

In Montmorency County, however, impact of sequestration on the Commission on Aging has been minimal, Executive Director Anna Rogers said.

Approximately 55 percent of her budget goes into the county's food program for senior citizens. Some 2,500 to 3,500 meals are provided each month, including home delivered meals, she said.

"Shortages will be made up by our millage fund, so we won't have to reduce any services," she said. "If it is long lasting, we will obviously need to review our budget and our priorities."

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FAA delays air traffic control tower closures, saving Battle Creek $75,000

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on April 05, 2013 at 6:45 PM, updated April 05, 2013 at 9:18 PM

BATTLE CREEK, MI – The federal government will pay for W.K. Kellogg Airport's air traffic control tower a few months longer.

One day after the city of Battle Creek announced it would pick up the costs to maintain the tower, the Federal Aviation Administration announced it would postpone the closure of 149 control towers from Monday, April 8 to June 15. The closures come as a result of the federal funding budget cuts mandated by the sequester.

"It buys us more time, but I have concerns about what the FAA is up to," said Larry Borwon, Battle Creek's Transportation Director. "I'm imagining this had something to do with the numerous lawsuits filed. They may be realizing that they got the cart in front of the horse."

MORE: Battle Creek control tower to remain open; WMU College of Aviation director encouraged

On Thursday, the city announced that it was entering into a six-month contract with Midwest Air Traffic Control, which currently runs the tower, and that it was hiring a law firm to file a motion against the FAA, with about a dozen other airports trying to stop the closures.

Airport officials fear the pace of operations would significantly slow down and the safety of the commercial pilots and students at Western Michigan University's College of Aviation could be at risk without a control tower.

Steve Jones, director of the college's flight operations, said an unmanned tower is similar to a traffic stop without a light or officer patrolling an intersection.

The new contract would reduce the amount of hours the tower would operate and cost the city about $33,000 a month.

MORE: With closure of Battle Creek's air traffic control tower, WMU's College of Aviation seeks a Plan B
"You could say that’s $75,000 we won’t be spending until June, but we’re spending money on a consultant and lawyers," Borwon said, adding that the city attorney is authorized to spend up to $20,000 for outside council. "They ripped a $644,000 contract right out from underneath us."

The delay will give the FAA additional time to resolve "legal challenges," according to a statement issued Friday.

Of the 149 closures, about 50 airport authorities and stakeholders said they would join the FAA’s non-Federal Contract Tower program and fund the tower operations themselves.

Borwon said the city is now seeking to change the contract it signed this week to become effective on June 15. The control tower will operate as usual on Monday, he said.

"If (the delay) is going to bring about real change in the form of the FAA following their existing procedures and orders to determine if all the federal contract towers are eligible to be in the program, that’s good news," Borwon said. "If it’s the FAA buying themselves more time, it’s not exciting. We are very adamant that some form of air traffic control is important for our facility."

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