

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

January 24, 2019

The Honorable Margaret Weichert
Acting Director
Office of Personnel Management
1900 E Street, NW
Washington, DC 20415

Director Weichert,

We write on behalf of thousands of our constituents bearing the costs of the government shutdown, and urge the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) to ensure there are no gaps in employee coverage in the Federal Employees Dental and Vision Insurance Program (FEDVIP).

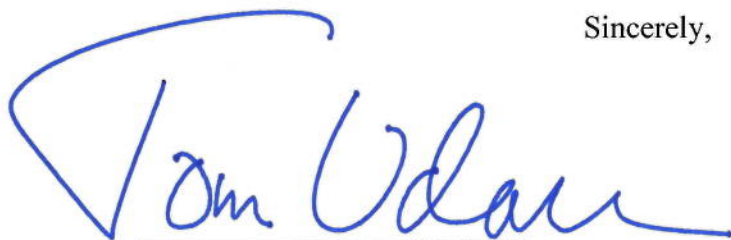
On Friday, January 25, 2019, more than 10,000 federal employees in New Mexico who are furloughed or working without pay will miss their second paycheck due to the partial government shutdown. It is our belief that Congress and the Administration should re-open the government so federal workers can return to work while further negotiations on border security funding continue. In the meantime, OPM must take steps to ensure federal employees who miss a second paycheck on January 25th are not cut off from health benefits, including vision and dental coverage. We have heard from federal employees who are afraid they will not be able to afford necessary vision and dental services for themselves and their families, including planned and important dental procedures.

We understand that current guidance by the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) states that “[p]ayroll deductions will cease for any employee that does not receive pay,” and federal employees will be billed “for premiums when no payment is received for two consecutive pay periods.” Under OPM guidance, after two missed pay checks, federal employees are responsible for premiums out of pocket in order to ensure continuation of coverage. OPM should clarify that federal workers going without pay due to the shutdown may be reimburse for these premiums when the shutdown has ended. As you know, federal workers are entitled to back pay under S. 24, which was passed earlier this month by Congress and signed into law by President Trump on January 16, 2019.

We urge you to make decisions regarding coverage and premium responsibility to ensure that federal employees continue to be covered under FEDVIP while they are furloughed or working without pay due to this unnecessary government shutdown. Federal employees and their families should not be forced to suffer the consequences of a shutdown that they had nothing to do with, including potentially serious medical consequences. Some of these workers live paycheck-to-paycheck, and cannot afford to pay their rent, grocery and other bills while the shutdown continues, let alone pay premiums for coverage normally deducted from regular pay.

We ask that you work to ensure that federal employees continue to receive the coverage for vision and dental care. We ask that you issue immediate clarifying guidance to impacted federal workers. We further ask a copy of that policy be sent to Jeffrey Lopez in Senator Udall's and Elizabeth Hill in Senator Heinrich's offices.

Sincerely,



Tom Udall
United States Senator



Martin Heinrich
United States Senator