



BUSINESS

These FAA employees working without pay are keeping the skies open

Air traffic controllers and FAA employees are at the end of their first week with a zeroed out paycheck.



John Love holds a sign with other union members of the Professional Aviation Safety Specialists union at Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport's domestic terminal, Wednesday, October 29, 2025, in Atlanta. PASS members at the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), working without pay or furloughed, held an informational picket at Hartsfield-Jackson to call public attention to the impact of th...

By Emma Hurt and Hyosub Shin

2 hours ago



As the government shutdown reaches Day 31, some of the least visible federal employees responsible for keeping the aviation industry functioning are speaking out.

Transportation Security Administration officers and air traffic controllers are among the more visible aviation industry employees forced to continue working during the shutdown. Local controllers handed out leaflets at Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport this week about the issue.

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But other Federal Aviation Administration employees in Atlanta — members of the Professional Aviation Safety Specialists union — are also showing up for work without a paycheck.

These aviation safety professionals also demonstrated at the Atlanta airport this week, urging passing travelers to pressure politicians to end the shutdown.

Their highly-skilled roles maintain the “critical systems” within the national airspace, including the radars, systems, lighting and radios that allow air traffic control and pilots to communicate, explained Amanda James, an airway transportation systems specialist and PASS representative.

After meeting with aviation industry and union leaders, including the national president of PASS, Vice President JD Vance warned on Thursday of a looming aviation “disaster” if a shutdown extends into the busy Thanksgiving travel season.

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Amanda James (right), a union representative for PASS, holds a sign as airport travelers walk by at Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport, Wednesday, October 29, 2025, in Atlanta. (Hyosub Shin/AJC)

“We need this shutdown to end, so that we can pay our bills,” James said. “We go into debt every day, just to come into work.”

Her colleagues in radar work are all military veterans, she said, and the shutdown is creating real problems.

“We all have mortgages or rent due. We have groceries. I have four boys at home.” She’s worried about the day that health insurance runs out.

“Our jobs are not part of partisan politics. Our job is safety, 100%,” she said.

“And in order to keep things safe, we need to make sure that we’re taking care of the people who are maintaining the systems that keep the rest of these travelers out here safe.”



Doug Lowe, regional vice president of PASS, hands out flyers to airport travelers at Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport's domestic terminal, Wednesday, October 29, 2025, in Atlanta. (Hyosub Shin/AJC)

Shawn Williams, a PASS union member and environmental coordinator, said it's been difficult.

"I have two children. Working without a paycheck really impacts a part of living. I have kids in school. One's a senior, she needs a lot of stuff for her senior class ... and I'm not able to pay that right now."

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"I just wish the government would come to terms and figure out how to solve this problem so that we can all get paid," he said.

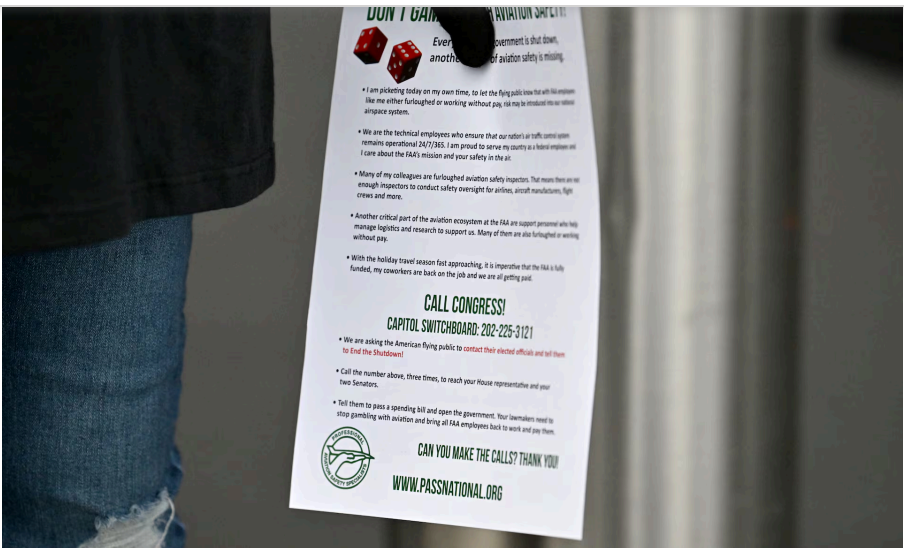
FAA employees are not asking for "handouts," James said. They just want to be paid for their work.

Atlanta-based Delta Air Lines and other carriers this week [called on politicians](#) to pass a "clean continuing resolution to reopen the government" and do just that.

"It's thanks to these federal employees that Delta is able to carry more than 500,000 daily customers on 5,000 daily flights," the airline wrote in a statement.

During the shutdown Delta has sent some meals to air traffic controllers and other transportation employees, as well as dispatched Delta staff to help with security checkpoints and Atlanta airport customer service.

It has also suspended its exclusive Delta One security screening lanes at airports in New York and Los Angeles.



Daphne Hosea, union member of PASS, holds a flyer at Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport's domestic terminal, Wednesday, October 29, 2025, in Atlanta. (Hyosub Shin/AJC)

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As a business reporter, Emma Hurt leads coverage of the Atlanta airport, Delta Air Lines, UPS, Norfolk Southern and other travel and logistics companies. Prior to the Atlanta Journal-Constitution she worked as an editor and Atlanta reporter for Axios, a politics reporter for WABE News and a business reporter for the Arkansas Democrat-Gazette.

Hyosub Shin



Hyosub Shin was born and raised in South Korea. Inspired by the work of National Geographic photographers, he came to the United States to study photography. He thought his time in the U.S. would be brief, but photography took him to California and eventually, the Atlanta Journal-Constitution. He took his oath of citizenship in 2017.



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