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New Jersey Government Shuts Down Over Budget Standoff.

Kim Fetsko sat on the border of Island Beach State Park in New Jersey as a park ranger patrolled the coastline on Saturday. State lawmakers and Gov. Chris Christie were unable to agree on a budget, forcing the closure of state-run parks and beaches. Credit Tom Brenner for The New York Times

The New Jersey state government was forced to shut down at midnight on Friday, as the State Legislature remained locked in a standoff with Gov. Chris Christie that left them unable to agree on a budget plan.

The most immediate effect of the shutdown will be on those headed to state-run parks and beaches for the holiday weekend. Mr. Christie's office indicated that those parks and beaches would be closed, although their municipal counterparts will remain open.

Mr. Christie declared a state of emergency and called for a special session of the Legislature for 11 a.m. Saturday. Essential government services were to continue operating.

Mr. Christie is demanding that the \$34.7 billion budget negotiated by the Legislature, which is controlled by the Democrats, include a provision requiring that Horizon Blue Cross Blue Shield spend some of its reserve fund on public health initiatives — particularly his drug treatment initiative. Without that provision, Mr. Christie, a Republican, has threatened to veto any budget that lawmakers send him.

The Democrat-controlled State Senate had passed a form of the legislation Mr. Christie is demanding, but Vincent Prieto, a Democrat and the speaker of the State Assembly, said on Friday that he would "absolutely not" pass the Horizon bill.

In a news conference late Friday afternoon, Mr. Christie, who has six months left in office, tried to shift the blame to the Legislature.

"I'm upset because this will inconvenience the people of New Jersey," Governor Christie said on Friday. Credit Michael Catalini/Associated Press

"I'm upset because this will inconvenience the people of New Jersey," he said. "That's the only reason I'm upset. Otherwise, legacy, all that other stuff, please. There will be a long list of things pro and con on my legacy."

The government shutdown is the first in New Jersey in more than a decade, and it came as many in the state were heading to the Jersey Shore and its many state parks to celebrate Independence Day. The state's casinos and racetracks will remain open, however, because of a law passed after a shutdown in 2006.

While the state will continue to provide emergency services and other functions that are deemed essential, it was less clear throughout Friday how other agencies would operate during the shutdown. The governor's office sent a letter at midnight on Friday detailing which agencies would be closed and to what extent government operations would continue.

In addition to the closing of state parks and beaches, all public events within parks and historic sites would be canceled. Some rest stops and travel and tourism centers would be closed, as well as many administrative offices in major state agencies, from the Motor Vehicle Commission to the Department of the Treasury.

During the day on Friday, the state offered no guidance to anyone traveling to the parks and beaches, and calls by reporters to the relevant agencies went unreturned. Many settling in for the holiday weekend were left anxious, angry and in limbo.

Just before midnight, the Ocean County Sheriff's Office announced that Island Beach State Park would be closed on Saturday because of the shutdown.

Earlier Friday, Sue Deck said that she, her husband and two children had come to the park in their R.V. and had planned to fish through the holiday weekend.

They were not pleased about the possibility of having to cut their trip short, she said.

"We will not be very happy, to put it nicely," said Ms. Deck, 50, of Jackson, N.J., who added that the outing is a weekend ritual for her family. "This is our spot."

Her sentiment was echoed by other beachgoers who flocked to the park to swim, sunbathe, fish and, in the case of Wayne Morley, photograph birds. Mr. Morley, a 74-year-old retired schoolteacher from West Creek, N.J., hiked three miles for a glimpse of a rare piping plover on Friday morning.

"It would be a huge hit to the state park system," he said of a shutdown. "A real problem."

Robert Hanley, 69, a retired dock builder, vented his anger at state politicians as he let air out of his pickup truck's tires to better drive to his favorite fishing spot across the soft sand.

"I've been coming here for 18 years. I love it; it's the best place in New Jersey," he said. "If I can't come here maybe I should go down to the governor's mansion. I want to go down and find Christie and find where he's spending his weekend."

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