

Trump administration plans sweeping government restructure to cut social programs

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The Trump administration announced on Thursday its intention to restructure the federal government as part of a reactionary initiative to eliminate food stamps, housing aid and other forms of social assistance that millions of Americans rely upon.

The proposed reorganization of federal agencies and cabinet departments includes the merger of the Department of Labor and the Department of Education (DoE) into a single entity to be called the Department of Education and the Workforce. This would allow the administration to reduce or eliminate many job training programs, workplace protections and student aid programs.

Established in 1980 at the end of the Carter administration, the DoE has long been a target of conservative politicians. President Ronald Reagan attempted to eliminate the agency in the 1980s but was blocked by Congress. Former Texas Governor Rick Perry famously called for the elimination of the department during the 2012 presidential campaign along with the Department of Commerce and the Department of Energy, which he now leads.

With only 4,000 employees and a budget of some \$70 billion dollars, DoE is one of the smallest cabinet-level agencies in the federal government. Upon taking office Trump appointed Betsy DeVos to head the agency. The billionaire DeVos, whose husband is heir to the Amway fortune and whose brother, Eric Prince, is the founder of the notorious Blackwater mercenary group, has made a career of attacking public education.

Before taking office, DeVos, along with her family, spearheaded the attack on public education in the state of Michigan, where she hails from, and nationwide. They have spent tens of millions sponsoring legislation

which would enable the privatization of public schools, eliminate protections for teachers—including the right to strike—and enable religious organizations to play a prominent role in public education.

Trump's appointment of DeVos to head the agency at the outset of his administration was a clear signal to the various billionaire-funded think tanks and political action committees that he endorses their agenda of privatization. Now with his attempt to merge the Departments of Labor and Education, he is indicating to those same forces his intent to eliminate public assistance altogether.

The Department of Labor, with a budget of \$12.2 billion and 14,400 employees, currently oversees a host of programs, including federal Unemployment Insurance, the Occupational Safety and Health Administration, the Mine Safety and Health Administration, as well as programs covering workers' compensation, veterans' employment, workplace protections for the disabled, and other worker protection agencies.

All of these programs, however ineffective they may be, represent an obstacle to the more efficient exploitation of workers by big business.

Also set to be shifted from the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) to the Department of Commerce is the \$3 billion Community Development Block Grant Program, which funds various housing programs for low-income people. The rationale behind this move, according to an anonymous Republican advisor quoted by the *New York Times*, is that career bureaucrats within HUD may be too sympathetic to the recipients of this funding and that Department of Commerce officials would be more

likely to effect its elimination.

Most significantly, the administration of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), commonly known as food stamps, would be moved from the Department of Agriculture to the Department of Health and Human Services, which would be renamed the Department of Health and Public Welfare, paving the way for the elimination of SNAP benefits.

The elimination or reduction of SNAP benefits is a long-held ambition of Republican lawmakers, who have been foiled in past attempts to destroy the program due to the fact that its funding is provided through legislation passed by Congress every five years which in addition to providing SNAP benefits to low-income citizens also authorizes the vast subsidies collected by farm owners, especially the giant agribusiness corporations.

Because many Republican lawmakers have traditionally relied upon the support of agribusiness in so-called “red states,” it has been necessary to preserve the SNAP program in order to maintain the provision of subsidies to farmers. Trump’s proposed change would eliminate that obstacle.

Food assistance benefits have already been heavily eroded by various state legislatures which administer the federal program—especially over the past decade. This typically includes setting income thresholds so low that only the poorest workers are eligible, placing a time limit on how long an individual can collect benefits, and most recently instituting work requirements on beneficiaries of the program.

The branding of HHS as the Department of Health and Public Welfare is in itself an attempt to make the programs the agency administers more vulnerable to elimination. For decades politicians from both capitalist parties have used the term “welfare,” which refers to the program now called Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF), as an epithet. Insofar as they have been successful in attacking welfare, it is due to the fact that TANF, like SNAP and other social assistance programs, is only available to the very poorest citizens. This deprives millions of struggling workers of benefiting from these programs and creates a political wedge upon which the ruling class can divide workers who share a common class interest.

Just as with Trump’s moves last year to render Medicaid ineffective by allowing the states to institute

work requirements, charge premiums for coverage, and institute other measures to prevent Americans from benefiting from the social programs that were conceded to them through decades of struggle, his latest attempt at social regression is of a similar character.

Where social programs can be eliminated, they will be. Where they cannot, onerous work requirements will be attached to them to make them inaccessible to the majority of the population and ineffective for the few who do qualify. All of these actions are a prelude to the ultimate goal, the liquidation of Social Security and Medicare and the transfer of the assets of these programs into the hands of the Wall Street parasites in whose interests the US political system operates.

Trump’s proposed restructuring would require the approval of Congress, a tall order in an election year. Though Trump’s plan is in keeping with the long-held aims of both the Democratic and Republican parties, the political blowback may prevent enough Republican legislators from supporting it to prevent its passage. Just as with Bill Clinton’s destruction of “welfare as we know it” and Barack Obama’s Affordable Care Act—perhaps the two most reactionary pieces of domestic legislation passed in recent decades—Trump’s plan may ultimately require a Democratic politician to push it through.



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