

EPA worker: “There’s shock and anger, but there is also a sense that we’re in a totally new situation”

White House claims 65,000 federal workers have accepted buyout offers, as judge imposes temporary hold

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The Trump administration has reported that, after a week of threats and intimidation from the White House, 65,000 federal workers have agreed to leave their jobs ahead of a February 6 midnight deadline. The “buyouts” are part of a massive downsizing operation imposed by the White House and Elon Musk’s Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE), which will decimate vital public services, from healthcare to environmental protection and safety.

A federal judge in Massachusetts ordered a temporary pause on the buyout program until Monday. The court did not rule on the merits of the case but only requested additional time to hear arguments.

The cuts are being carried out in open defiance of Congress’s constitutionally defined power over spending, as well as civil service regulations. They are aimed at slashing hundreds of billions from the federal budget to fund the Pentagon war machine and provide further tax handouts to the ultra-wealthy.

In a typically thuggish statement, Trump’s press secretary, Karoline Leavitt, derided federal employees working from home, saying: “They don’t want to come into the office. If they want to rip the American people off, then they’re welcome to take this buyout, and we’ll find highly qualified people to replace them.”

The federal buyouts represent only a fraction of the jobs targeted by Trump. Most of the 2.3 million federal workforce was eligible for the buyouts, excluding US military personnel, postal workers and those working in immigration enforcement and national security.

A wide range of vital government functions will be impacted by the cuts. The Department of Education is on the chopping block, an agency that Trump has threatened to abolish entirely.

One of the largest single groups of federal workers under attack includes more than 100,000 nurses employed through the Department of Veterans Affairs. The 10 percent workforce reduction proposed by Trump would have a devastating impact

on the care of military veterans.

The White House is also preparing an executive order to fire thousands of employees at the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), which currently employs more than 80,000 people. This agency includes the National Institutes of Health (NIH), the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS), the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

Gutting these agencies would have catastrophic consequences for public health, including monitoring and preventing disease outbreaks, ensuring food safety, and conducting cancer research. These cuts are being made amid the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, a severe flu outbreak and growing concerns over H5N1 avian influenza.

Another target is the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), which employs nearly 19,000 people. The EPA performs critical functions, such as monitoring and regulating hazardous waste disposal, air quality, water pollution and chemicals. It also sponsors research into environmental health risks and climate change and responds to environmental disasters, such as oil spills, chemical leaks and industrial accidents.

As of yesterday, more than 160 EPA employees were placed on administrative leave—the first step in terminating their jobs. Another 1,000 workers hired within the past year were told they could be “fired immediately” under Trump’s executive order ending Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) programs. However, the vast majority, if not all, of these workers have jobs entirely unrelated to DEI.

An EPA employee told the *World Socialist Web Site*:

Speaking to my coworkers today, there’s shock and anger, but there is also a sense that we’re in a totally new situation. The unthinkable is now unfolding before

our eyes.

Things we've taken for granted, from steady jobs to constitutional rule, are collapsing. The old methods we've clung to simply won't do anymore. There's no reasoning with these people. The Democrats are useless.

The unions are doing nothing. The courts are ripping up bedrock democratic rights and granting Trump carte blanche. If we are going to defend jobs and stop dictatorship, it's up to workers to make it happen.

Other cuts that will have sweeping and disastrous impacts include the downsizing of the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), which manages the air traffic control system, and the Social Security Administration (SSA), which oversees the distribution of retirement benefits to millions of workers.

Another target, the Department of Labor (DOL), employs 16,000 people and is responsible for enforcing workplace safety and labor standards. Republicans are pushing to abolish OSHA (Occupational Safety and Health Administration), part of the DOL, which is already chronically underfunded. Meanwhile, Musk's DOGE is seeking access to DOL records, including injury reports, medical records, claim forms and other sensitive personal information.

Also targeted is the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), which collects and shares vital weather information. NOAA houses the National Weather Service and the National Hurricane Center, which track storms and warn the public of approaching weather-related dangers.

According to a report by *Axios*, DOGE representatives arrived at NOAA offices in Silver Spring, Maryland, on Tuesday. Under the pretext of enforcing the Trump ban on DEI initiatives, Musk's team seized control of IT systems.

"This is basically like doing a major computer hack attack, but doing it inside the agency, because, you know, somebody gave you a badge," one NOAA employee told *The Verge*. Project 2025 calls for NOAA to be broken up and partially dissolved.

Other agencies targeted for dismantling include the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau (CFPB), the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC), which monitors workplace discrimination, and the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB). While these agencies are already relatively toothless, their elimination is aimed at removing whatever might remain that impedes corporate profit and exploitation.

Alongside the federal assault on government workers, Republican-controlled state administrations are launching their own attacks. In Utah, a bill eliminating collective bargaining for public employees has passed the legislature and is awaiting the governor's signature.

The legislation bans collective bargaining at all levels of state and local government, including public schools and fire departments. Significantly, it does not outlaw unions outright,

leaving the bureaucracies in place to collect dues while suppressing strikes and other forms of resistance.

While more than 1 million federal workers are in unions, the union apparatus has done nothing to mobilize opposition to the attacks on their members beyond weakly advising workers not to accept the buyouts. Not a single major union has endorsed or called a protest demonstration, let alone organized strike action.

In a sign of the rebellious mood among rank-and-file workers, earlier this week city letter carriers for the US Postal Service voted by a wide margin—63,680 votes to 26,304—to reject a sellout contract brought back by the National Association of Letter Carriers (NALC). The deal would have maintained inadequate pay rates, continued the use of temporary workers and renewed the hated surveillance system.

Not only are the unions doing nothing to oppose this unprecedented wave of attacks, but large sections of the union apparatus have also signaled their eagerness to collaborate with Trump, including the Teamsters, the United Auto Workers, the American Federation of Teachers and the International Longshoremen's Association.

The American Federation of Government Employees (AFGE) even endorsed Trump's nominee for secretary of labor, Lori Chavez-DeRemer, absurdly declaring, "She has stood with us to keep the government funded and operational, oppose attempts to privatize and weaken the VA, protect the hard-fought workplace rights of federal workers..."

In opposition to the drive by the capitalist oligarchs to destroy the social and democratic rights of masses of people, there exists another powerful social force—the US and international working class.

Signs of opposition are emerging. Nationwide protests took place Wednesday at all 50 state capitols. This initiative did not come from the pro-corporate union bureaucracies or the Democratic Party but from workers and young people outraged at the attacks on their democratic and social rights.

The collective power of millions of workers must be mobilized in an industrial and political struggle against the Trump administration and the billionaires it represents. This requires the development of a network of rank-and-file factory and workplace committees independent of the trade union apparatus and the Democratic Party to spearhead this fight.



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