February job cuts hit highest monthly level in 5 years under impact of Trump’s mass firings

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The Trump administration’s mass firings of federal workers resulted in February being the worst month for announced job cuts since July 2020, at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic.

According to a report released Thursday by outplacement firm Challenger, Gray & Christmas, February saw 172,017 job cuts, a 245 percent increase from the 49,795 cuts announced one month prior and the highest total for the month of February since 2009, in the wake of the Wall Street financial crash.

Federal workers accounted for the largest portion of February’s total, with 62,242 announced job cuts across 17 different agencies. The total of 221,812 job cuts so far this year is the highest year-to-date total since 2009**.** The technology sector continues to supply a large portion of the job cuts, with 14,554 announced in February and 22,042 for the year. However, retail eclipsed that number, experiencing a staggering 38,956 job cut announcements for a total of 45,375 for the year. This is a 572 percent increase from the 6,751 retail job cuts in the first two months of 2024.

In a press release, the senior vice president and workplace expert for Challenger, Gray & Christmas said:

> Private companies announced plans to shed thousands of jobs last month, particularly in Retail and Technology. With the impact of the Department of Government Efficiency [DOGE] actions, as well as canceled Government contracts, fear of trade wars, and bankruptcies, job cuts soared in February.

He added:

> When mass layoffs occur, it often leaves remaining staff feeling uneasy and uncertain. The likelihood that many more workers leave voluntarily is high.

The February numbers are only a fraction of the cuts in the pipeline. Trump’s plans to fire 200,000 federal probationary employees have been put on temporary hold by a court ruling.

The Challenger report came ahead of Friday’s monthly US Department of Labor jobs report, which showed a lower than expected 151,000 jobs created in February as compared to the predicted 170,000 and a rise in the unemployment rate from 4.0 percent to 4.1 percent. The report for February was compiled too late to reflect the real impact of Trump’s mass firings of federal workers.

Responding only to the Labor Department jobs report, Trump called the numbers “fantastic.” He said his policies might create “a little disturbance” but would ultimately generate “higher paying manufacturing jobs.”

Advancing a similar line in comments Friday morning, Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent said that financial markets and the overall economy had become too dependent on government spending, and there was “going to be a detox period” in the wake of the cuts.

He continued, “Could we be seeing this economy that we inherited starting to roll a bit? Sure,” contemptuously dismissing the devastating impact of Trump’s policies on masses of working people.

The numbers in both reports do not reflect the impact of the trade war measures being imposed by Trump, including the 25 percent duty on most goods imported from Mexico and Canada and an additional 10 percent tariff on Chinese imports. The potential disruptive impact of these measures is immense, with globally integrated industries such as auto facing the prospect of mass layoffs. Food and gasoline could see price rises within days.

The federal job massacre takes place under conditions where workers are already struggling with continued high rates of inflation and downsizing in key industries such as auto. Homelessness was up 18 percent in 2024 and has doubled since 2021.

Meanwhile, workers are falling behind on car loan payments at a record rate. According to Fitch, 6.6 percent of

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subprime auto borrowers were at least 60 days past due on their loans as of January 2025, the highest rate since the data began to be tracked.

US consumer confidence is slumping in the face of concerns over the impact of Trump's policies. The Conference Board reported that consumer confidence in February suffered a seven-point drop, the largest monthly decline in four years.

The job figures are just a slight foretaste of the social counterrevolution being prepared by the Trump administration, which wants to slash trillions from vital social programs such as Medicare, Medicaid and Social Security, education, food stamps, housing and the environment.

In reviewing the Labor Department job numbers, an economist quoted by the *New York Times* stated that it was "not a terrible report" but "not a great report." He added that "this predates most of the more potent policy actions"—in other words, before the tsunami of social devastation being unleashed by the Trump administration sweeps over the US and world population.

The February jobs report showed a net loss of 10,000 federal jobs, far below the actual number. To get its employment number, the report surveyed the payroll period that included the 12th of the month. Anyone who worked even one day during that time span was counted as employed.

The report nonetheless included signs of distress. The number of people not actively looking for work but currently wanting a job increased by 414,000 to 5.9 million in February. The labor force participation rate, the percentage of the total population over age 16 and not in the military or institutionalized who are employed, fell to the lowest level in two years.

Financial markets ended one of their worst weeks in months due to uncertainty over the impact of Trump's trade war policies. Wall Street is salivating over the prospect of massive tax cuts and the impoverishment of broad swaths of the working class. At the same time the US financial system remains a house of cards. There is also concern over a rising tide of working class struggles as previewed by the widening protests over the federal jobs cuts.

Friday saw nationwide and global protests by medical researchers and other scientists over the slashing of funding for research into cancer, Alzheimer's and other illnesses, along with Trump's broader attack on environmental sciences and his defunding of public education.

Earlier this week, young people and workers rallied in cities across the US to defend public education, oppose cuts at the national parks and other attacks on public workers and social services.

These protests have largely taken shape at the grass roots level since the trade union apparatuses and the Democratic Party are blocking effective opposition to the Trump administration's attacks. The Democratic Party is mounting no real opposition to Trump's moves to dictatorship and his assault on social and democratic rights, reserving its opposition to denouncing the administration for retreating from the war with Russia.

Meanwhile, union leaders have sought to cozy up to Trump. American Federation of Teachers (AFT) President Randi Weingarten has offered to work with Trump's Education Secretary Linda McMahon even as she dismantles the Department of Education. The United Auto Workers (UAW) and other unions have lined up behind Trump's reactionary tariff and trade war policies directed against the capitalist rivals of US imperialism, despite the devastating implications for workers' jobs and living standards. They support, either openly or tacitly, Trump's fascistic war on immigrant workers.

To be effective, opposition to Trump's social cuts must find channels outside of the capitalist Democratic Party and the pro-corporate trade union apparatus. This means building rank-and-file committees in every factory and workplace, uniting the fight against social cuts and layoffs with the defense of democratic rights, including the defense of immigrant workers and opposition to imperialist war.

This fight must be based on a socialist program aimed at uniting the working class in the US, Canada, Mexico and internationally, breaking the power of the corporate oligarchs, eliminating inequality and ending the system of capitalist exploitation.

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