Trump orders Education Department to slash half its workforce in preparation for its destruction

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An online meeting of the Educators Rank-and-File Committee in defense of public education will be held Saturday. Click here to register.

On Tuesday, the White House moved to slash nearly half of the Department of Education's workforce in preparation for its outright elimination.

The ED began a "reduction in force" (RIF) that, through a combination of resignations, buyouts and terminations, will cut the number of jobs from 4,133 to 2,183.

In a press release, Trump's Secretary of Education Linda McMahon said, "Today's reduction in force reflects the Department of Education's commitment to efficiency, accountability, and ensuring that resources are directed where they matter most: to students, parents, and teachers." The resources that McMahon is speaking about are to be removed from public education and handed over to private for-profit schools.

The press release stated that employees facing termination will be placed on administrative leave starting March 21. It also noted that some staff had accepted voluntary resignations or retirements over the past seven weeks. The remaining 1,378 workers will remain on administrative leave with pay until June 9, after which they will be officially unemployed.

The press statement also absurdly claimed that the department will "continue to deliver on all statutory programs that fall under the agency's purview, including formula funding, student loans, Pell Grants, funding for special needs students, and competitive grantmaking."

The ED announcement came shortly after department employees were told that their offices—including those in the National Capital Region and other regional locations—would be closed for the day on Wednesday.

An email sent to staff and obtained by ABC News cited "security reasons" for the fact that department buildings would be inaccessible starting at 6:00 p.m..

The email said:

> You must vacate the building by that time. All ED offices in the NCR and the regions will be closed to employees and contractor employees on Wednesday, March 12th.

Department officials later said the safety precautions were meant to protect remaining employees, who will retain their positions with the ED.

The email continued:

> Please take your laptop with you when you depart on Tuesday. Employees will not be permitted in any ED facility on Wednesday March 12th for any reason. All offices will reopen on Thursday, March 13th, at which time in-person presence will resume.

ABC News interviewed one ED employee, who said:

> People are petrified to do their jobs. People are worried about like, if I push back on something that somebody wants to do, right, and I say, that's not really what the law says or is legal, am I going to get a bad performance and now they use a bad performance to kick me out?

As explained by the WSWS on Saturday, the Trump administration and Education Secretary McMahon are not only eliminating the Department of Education but dismantling the public education system in the US. A major component of this plan was articulated in Trump's January 29 Executive Order, "Expanding Educational Freedom and Opportunity for Families," which would divert $5-10 billion

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in public funds to a private, parochial and homeschooling voucher system.

In a Board of Education meeting on Tuesday evening Detroit Public Schools Community District Superintendent Nikolai Vitti laid out the catastrophic impact of the federal budget cuts that are coming to public schools across the country. Vitti said the "assumption" is that there will be a 25 percent reduction across the board of all K-12 federal budgets and revenue streams.

Vitti said:

> So internally right now, we have started to look at, you know, from a line item point of view, obviously, what are we funding in? Title One, Title Two, Title Three, Title Four, and what those cuts may mean. … I don't believe right now we're looking at things like closing schools, but there will be scenarios with maybe accelerating the phase out [of] schools, closures, looking at small high schools, and possibly looking at layoffs.

The attack on the Department of Education is just one component of the Trump administration's sweeping assault on social programs and democratic rights. From gutting Medicaid, Social Security and public education to mass deportations and draconian budget cuts, the administration is systematically dismantling the basic social infrastructure that tens of millions rely on.

Also Tuesday, the US House of Representatives passed a bill to fund the government through September 30. The House vote to avoid a government shutdown was 217 to 213, with one Republican, Representative Thomas Massie of Kentucky, voting against the bill, along with all but one Democrat.

In a late night post on his Truth Social platform, Trump attacked Representative Massie for his opposition to the bill, saying he "should be primaried" in the next election cycle. The passage of the bill was in part the result of the intervention of both the president and Vice President JD Vance among House Republicans on Monday and Tuesday morning.

In a private meeting on Tuesday morning, Vance reportedly told Republican representatives they would be blamed for a government shutdown, saying, "We already lost one vote, we can't lose another," referring to Massie. According to unnamed sources, Vance told House Republicans they needed to pass the stop-gap funding measure to lay the basis for a domestic policy bill now in preparation.

The temporary funding bill, known as a continuing resolution, would maintain spending at levels approved last year, plus increase military funding by $6 billion while decreasing non-military spending by $13 billion. The cuts would come from eliminating any special projects in lawmakers' districts or states and a forced reduction of more than $1 billion from the District of Columbia's budget for the rest of the fiscal year.

Most significant, however, are provisions in the bill that grant the Trump administration broad authority over the next six months to accelerate the dismantling and defunding of major government departments through Elon Musk's Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE).

This aspect of the resolution—which feeds into Trump's fascist assault on the constitutional separation of powers—was more than enough for sycophantic Republicans, including the House Freedom Caucus, to bury their supposed opposition to stop-gap funding measures that fail to address the massive US government deficits.

Among the provisions in the bill, for example, is one that allows the Trump administration to steer money away from combating fentanyl and use it on the mass deportation of immigrants.

Before the vote, House Speaker Mike Johnson said, "This clean CR contains no poison pill riders. No policy riders there at all. No cuts to Medicare, Medicaid, or Social Security. Zero. No cuts to veterans' benefits. Zero." In reality, the bill legitimizes Musk's DOGE taking a hatchet to the staff and operations of these programs without congressional authorization.

The Democratic Party has enabled Trump's massive attack on the jobs of federal workers and his efforts to dismantle what remains of the New Deal and Great Society reforms. In the Democratic Party's official rebuttal to the State of the Union address last week, Senator Elissa Slotkin vowed to help Trump attack bedrock social programs. "You wanna cut waste? I'll help you do it," declared the former CIA agent.

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