

# Trump's attacks on federal workers leading to local recession in the Washington D.C. region

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Tens of thousands of federal workers and probationary employees across the United States have been terminated in the first seven weeks of the Trump administration. Hundreds of thousands of positions remain at risk across the country as the administration seeks to proceed with its vision of a personalist dictatorship.

In Washington D.C., the seat of the federal government where almost 20 percent of the workforce is situated, the wave of mass firings undertaken by Trump and Elon Musk's Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE) threatens to bring the local economy into turmoil.

In late February, D.C. Chief Financial Officer Glen Lee released a report projecting a revenue decline of over \$1 billion over the next three fiscal years as a result of the mass layoffs. "With fewer federal employees in the region," wrote Lee, "spending on restaurants, retail, transportation, and other taxable goods and services is expected to decline, particularly for businesses that rely on federal workers."

The report also noted the potential knock-on effect of those businesses in consequence, leading to further layoffs in adjacent sectors, including the professional and management services sector, which depends on federal funding and contracts.

The report made comparisons to the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic, saying that while employment levels had risen, the increase in government jobs concerning health, safety and economic recovery helped to keep the D.C. economy afloat at that time.

The governmental workforce, which comprises one-quarter of the District's total, has long served as a

bulwark against recessions. With the wholesale wrecking operation currently in progress, however, that backstop has been removed.

The wave of layoffs affects both the District and its suburbs in the neighboring states. There are 150,000 federal workers in Maryland, over half of whom are in Montgomery and Prince George's counties. Within Virginia, the number of federal jobs is 190,000, with around 80,000 workers in the state's 8th Congressional District (Alexandria, Falls Church, Arlington County and parts of Fairfax) alone. St. Mary's County in southern Maryland also has a high rate of federal workers; almost one-tenth of the county's workforce consists of federal jobs.

Many workers have sought, or are presently seeking, legal options to defend their employment. Last week, two US District Court judges, William Alsup in San Francisco and James Breder in Baltimore, ordered the Trump administration to rehire thousands of probationary employees who had been laid off. Alsup ruled that acting Office of Personnel Management (OPM) Director Charles Ezell lacked the authority to terminate employees, while Breder ruled that the administration did not provide notice to state governments.

Many workers have filed appeals with the Merit Systems Protection Board (MSPB), an independent agency tasked with protecting workers from partisan political attacks and agency abuses, in the hopes of having their jobs reinstated.

The agency was itself under attack by the Trump administration when MSPB Chair Cathy Harris was removed from her post last month, but the US District Court for the District of Columbia ruled her firing

illegal and ordered her reinstatement. Shortly thereafter, the MSPB ruled that 6,000 US Department of Agriculture (USDA) workers can go back to work.

The MSPB reported a drastic increase in the number of appeals filed to the agency in the past three weeks, with 5,406 appeal petitions received in the period ending March 8, compared with about 100 per week prior to Trump's election.

The federal Department of Labor reported last month that unemployment claims for the District of Columbia rose by 119 percent from January to February. Maryland reported to the local Fox News affiliate that it had boosted staff to facilitate a spike in unemployment claims from federal workers, as well as contractors last month. Though federal workers receive unemployment insurance from a federal payment system, Fox News stated "this process can be delayed. Congress might need to allocate additional funds, and Maryland is relying on state resources."

In Virginia, officials reported a 40 percent spike, or 4,036 claims, in unemployment claims at the beginning of March.

In the wake of the Trump hatchet job, Washington D.C. Mayor Muriel Bowser, who in the past had spoken of her willingness to work with the fascist president on the issue of crime, made clear that she would do next-to-nothing to stop the harm that is being done to federal workers. She addressed the layoffs last month, calling on the D.C. government to "not use a chainsaw but figure out which jobs we need and which jobs we don't."

Recently, Bowser launched an employment hub for federal workers for openings in the D.C. government or in the private sector, which is only a token gesture and does not address the vast number of workers affected.

The D.C. Office of Planning announced last week it would be rewriting its Comprehensive Plan, the framework adopted in 2006 that guides the District's development. An initial plan, submitted last February, anticipated steady job growth, but with mass layoffs ongoing, and with unemployment numbers certain to skyrocket, it is uncertain what long-term plans the District has for jobs, if any.

Needless to say, the individual and familial impact on the mass layoffs will be devastating. Thousands of federal workers, laid off from their positions with little to no notice, are suddenly left to fend for themselves.

With inflation continuing to rise, and the high costs of living making it difficult for workers to stay afloat, the assault on jobs will result in a considerable increase in foreclosures, defaults on debts and homelessness.

Furthermore, there is no guarantee workers who have been fired from their federal positions will be able to locate employment by means of the jobs schemes undertaken by the state governments, and those who have been ordered back to work could have their jobs taken away from them once again. Donald Trump has never met a law he would not flout.



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