

US Supreme Court permits Trump to move ahead with mass layoffs and destruction of federal agencies

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In an attack on workers' democratic and social rights, the Supreme Court of the United States (SCOTUS) has cleared the way for the Trump administration to proceed with mass layoffs of federal employees.

The tens of thousands of job cuts target the infrastructure of government and public services, the focus of the assault by the Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE), formerly led by billionaire oligarch Elon Musk.

The decision, which overrides a lower court injunction, marks a new stage in the offensive by the Trump administration against US government services dating back to the New Deal reforms that were implemented to forestall social revolution in the 1930s.

On July 8, the Supreme Court lifted a lower court ruling that temporarily blocked Trump's sweeping plans to lay off federal workers across more than 20 agencies.

The unsigned SCOTUS order, supported by the Court's right-wing majority as well as liberal Justices Elena Kagan and Sonia Sotomayor, allows the administration to resume its efforts to "reorganize and scale back" the federal government while the legal challenge proceeds.

The order does not decide the underlying legality of Trump's executive order announcing the elimination of the jobs or the specific agency reduction plans. Instead, the Court claims the government is "likely to succeed" in its argument that the executive order and related directives are within presidential authority.

The court majority states:

We express no view on the legality of any agency reduction-in-force and reorganization plan produced or approved pursuant to the executive order and memorandum. The district court enjoined further implementation or approval of the plans based on its view about the illegality of the executive order and memorandum, not on any assessment of the plans

themselves. Those plans are not before this court.

As it has done in other recent critical decisions, SCOTUS refused to address the substance of the matter while granting Trump precisely what he wanted: the green light to proceed with his fascist agenda.

The Supreme Court's order is notably terse, offering little in the way of legal language. There is no engagement with the catastrophic real-world consequences of the layoffs or the constitutional questions raised by the lower courts.

The lower court decision, issued by US District Judge Susan Illston in San Francisco, had temporarily blocked the layoffs, saying that Trump had exceeded his authority by ordering mass firings and reorganizations without Congressional approval, which is required for agencies created and funded by Congress.

The judge asserted this critical element of constitutional checks and balances, noting that the executive cannot unilaterally dismantle the federal government.

Justice Ketanji Brown Jackson stood alone in dissent, issuing a rebuke and warning to the nation. She wrote:

Given the fact-based nature of the issue in this case and the many serious harms that result from allowing the President to dramatically reconfigure the Federal Government, it was eminently reasonable for the District Court to maintain the status quo while the courts evaluate the lawfulness of the President's executive action.

Jackson accused the majority of allowing Trump to take a "wrecking ball" to the federal bureaucracy:

At bottom, this case is about whether that action amounts to a structural overhaul that usurps Congress's policymaking prerogatives—and it is hard to imagine deciding that question in any meaningful way after those changes have happened. Yet, for some reason, this Court sees fit to step in now and release the President's wrecking ball at the outset of this litigation.

Her dissent points to the court's ongoing abdication of its responsibility to defend the constitutional separation of powers and protect the public from executive abuse.

The case originated in a wave of lawsuits filed by states and labor unions after Trump's February executive order mandating mass layoffs and agency downsizing. Attorneys general from Washington D.C. and 19 states argued that federal agencies were violating the law by firing probationary employees under the pretense of poor performance, when they were executing a politically motivated far-right reduction of the workforce.

The states warned that these actions would devastate regional economies and public services, as federal law requires advance notice and coordination for mass layoffs to mitigate economic dislocation.

The layoffs target departments including Agriculture, Commerce, Health and Human Services, State, Treasury and Veterans Affairs. Experts and state officials warned that the cuts would disrupt essential services such as healthcare, food safety and veterans' benefits, create cascading instability in local economies reliant on federal employment, and overwhelm state support systems as displaced workers seek assistance.

Arthur Wheaton, director of labor studies at Cornell University, cautioned:

It will not save a lot of money if they try to maintain the same level of service, so you may be getting less from the smaller workforce. ... It's going to be real expensive for the lawsuits and the fights that are going to go on for long term. And it creates an incredible amount of tension and stress within the system, which is partly by design.

Federal workers themselves report deep anxiety and exhaustion, with many contemplating early retirement or fearing for the future of their departments. The layoffs, already affecting over 10,000 workers, threaten to cripple agencies like Veterans Affairs, the Centers for Disease

Control and Prevention and the Environmental Protection Agency.

The dire impact of staff reductions has already been manifested in the death and destruction caused by the flooding in Texas, where the National Weather Service was ill-prepared to warn the public due to understaffing and a lack of critical resources.

The response of federal government employee unions, particularly the American Federation of Government Employees (AFGE) and the AFL-CIO, has been characterized solely by legal maneuvering and appeals to the courts, without any mass mobilization of the workers.

When the layoffs were first announced, the unions filed lawsuits and issued statements but refused to organize strikes or workplace actions that would mobilize the broader working class against the Trump administration in defense of jobs and services.

This strategy, rooted in the unions' alliance with the Democratic Party, has proven bankrupt. The unions have preferred to rely on legal appeals and negotiations with the very political establishment that is complicit in the assault on public sector jobs.

This has left the working class vulnerable and without any effective means of resisting the deadly impact of the destruction of government infrastructure and the vital services it provides.

The Democratic Party has played a critical role in enabling the Trump administration's offensive. In March, Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer announced that he would vote to keep the government running by supporting a Republican-led continuing resolution, providing Trump with the votes needed to avert a shutdown and continue his policies.

Schumer insisted a shutdown would be worse than giving Trump the means to further attack federal employees. This maneuver, combined with the Democrats' reliance on stunts and legal challenges with little hope of success, has allowed Trump and his fascist Republican allies to push through their "Big Beautiful Bill"—a massive transfer of wealth to the billionaire elite which balloons the federal deficit while destroying public services and kicking more than 11 million workers off Medicaid.



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