Trump administration prepares mass firings if federal shutdown commences

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On Wednesday, the Trump White House issued a memo from the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) which directs federal agencies to use the "opportunity" of a possible government shutdown to prepare mass firings.

The memo directs the heads of all the various federal agencies to prepare "Reduction in Force (RIF) notices for all employees in programs, projects, or activities (PPA)" that will run out of funding on October 1, do not have alternate sources of funding and which do not align with Trump's "priorities."

Importantly, the memo calls on agency heads to revise their Reduction in Force plans once a budget is passed to retain only the "minimal number of employees necessary to carry out statutory functions," meaning that even if an agreement is reached before September 30 it is entirely likely there will still be mass layoffs.

Since Trump's return to the White House just over nine months ago, federal workers have been consistently threatened and targeted with job cuts. Under the guidance of centi-billionaire oligarch Elon Musk and the "Department of Government Efficiency" (DOGE), tens of thousands of government workers have already been laid off, fired or bought out this year. As of April 2025, Challenger, Gray & Christmas estimated that DOGE actions were responsible for 280,253 cuts involving federal workers and contractors, impacting 27 agencies.

It is unclear at this time how many workers could be fired if the government were to shut down. The president has enormous leeway to determine which agencies are "essential" for government functions. There is no doubt that the administration will continue with its "mass deportation operation," authorizing the immigration Gestapo to continue to terrorize workers, while ordering many other agencies that provide social services for the working class and conduct regulatory actions over corporations to close their doors.

If there is a shutdown, Social Security benefits, which are mandatory, not discretionary spending, would continue to be sent out, but Social Security Administration offices, already facing layoffs and cuts, would likely be shuttered. The longer the shutdown continues, the greater the backlog grows for disability claims, appeals and other service requests since all "nonessential" staff will be furloughed.

Speaking from the White House on Thursday, Trump blamed Democrats for any potential shutdown. "This is all caused by the Democrats, they asked us to do something unreasonable," he said. "This is what [Senate Minority Leader Chuck] Schumer wants, this is what the Democrats want."

Trump and the Republicans are accusing Democrats of using the possibility of a shutdown to try and increase spending by "$1 trillion," which they say is being used to fund healthcare for "illegal aliens." In reality, the majority of the funding requested by Democrats would restore only partially the $800 billion in Medicaid cuts that were previously passed as a part of Trump's "One Big Beautiful Bill."

Earlier this month, the Republican-controlled House passed a continuing resolution to fund the government through to November 21, but the resolution needs seven votes from Democrats in the Senate to meet the 60-vote threshold to halt a filibuster. So far, only Democratic Senator John Fetterman has signaled he would be willing to vote to keep the government open.

There is mass anger among broad layers of the population over Trump's attacks on federal and immigrant workers. Millions of people, including many who previously considered themselves Democrats, remain outraged that Schumer and nine other Democrats provided the necessary votes in March of this year to keep Trump's government operating.

Following the passage of that spending bill in March,

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Trump and the Republicans continued to run roughshod over the democratic, economic and social rights of the working class while consolidating power within the executive branch. Armed with the funds supplied by the Democrats, the Trump administration continued the genocide in Gaza, launched illegal military strikes on Iran, illegally deployed US Marines to Los Angeles, and National Guard troops to Washington D.C. At the same time Trump withheld already appropriated funding for agencies and organizations such as the Public Broadcasting Service and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Democrats responded to Trump's threats to carry out mass layoffs with their usual empty rhetoric. House Minority Leader Hakeem Jeffries said on Thursday that the Trump administration wants to "continue to fire civil servants who are hardworking, American taxpayers because throughout the year, they've been firing civil servants who are hardworking American taxpayers."

Jeffries added, "We will not be intimidated by these threats coming from the most extreme parts of the Trump administration." But he proposed no action at all.

Senator Schumer, oozing complacency, said Trump's threats were "an attempt at intimidation." He noted nonchalantly that Trump has "been firing federal workers since day one … this is nothing new and has nothing to do with funding the government."

Lending credence to some of Trump's pending layoffs, Schumer clarified that "*unnecessary* (emphasis added) firings will either be overturned in court or the administration will end up hiring the workers back, just like they did as recently as today."

While a few hundred workers have successfully, for now, managed to regain their positions through court action, tens of thousands of workers have not and remain unemployed.

In response to Trump's attacks on the federal workforce, the major government trade unions, following the lead of the Democratic Party, have done nothing but file lawsuits in court, even as workers continue to lose their jobs and previously won protections.

In a September 22 statement, American Federation of Government Employees (AFGE) President Everett Kelley called on Congress, filled with millionaires and fascists, to do their "duty to fund government agencies on time."

Kelley said Congress also had an "equally important duty to rein in an-out-control executive branch." Far from taking any action against the aspiring dictator in the White House, Kelley urged "both parties to come to the negotiating table and find common ground on the key issues facing most Americans."

Such a statement is politically bankrupt. Neither party represents the interests of workers: both Democrats and Republicans are parties of Wall Street and the Pentagon. Trump is openly preparing a dictatorship, carrying out mass firings of federal workers, and overseeing the mass round-up of immigrants, while the Democrats work to contain opposition and preserve the framework of capitalist rule, and above all, the military-intelligence apparatus. Kelley's plea for "common ground" is an attempt to bind workers to their class enemies, suppressing the independent struggle that is necessary to defend jobs, wages and democratic rights.

Workers are not confronting a dispute between two parties that have policy differences, but a coordinated attack by both parties of big business in preparation for dictatorship. In preparation for the shutdown, Secretary of War Pete Hegseth has summoned all the top military officers to the the capital next week for an unprecedented meeting to further plans for war against the American people.

While Trump slashes jobs, guts health care and escalates repression against his political enemies, the Democrats posture as defenders of democracy even as they vote for Trump's war budgets, commemorate his fascist minion Charlie Kirk, and prostrate themselves before his supposedly unstoppable power. The demand for "common ground" is nothing but a demand for workers to submit to the destruction of their livelihoods.

What is required is not "common ground" with the enemies and betrayers of the working class, but the development of independent political action by workers themselves, guided by a revolutionary perspective. The AFGE rank and file—like auto workers, logistics workers, healthcare workers and immigrant workers—need to break from both capitalist parties and from the bureaucrats who tie them to these parties. The Socialist Equality Party is prepared to assist in this historic task.

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