

# HEARINGS REPORT



DEPARTMENT OF PEOPLE  
WHO WORK FOR A LIVING



AFL-CIO

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# Hearings Report

Department of People Who Work for a Living

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**AFL-CIO**



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# Executive Summary

The AFL-CIO's Department of People Who Work for a Living (DPWL) recently held a series of hearings across the country to provide a platform for working people and local communities to express their views on the current administration's policies, the impact of those policies on their lives and what people want from their government in order to provide that information to Congress and the White House. The hearings found that people are concerned about ongoing cuts to federal jobs, programs and services. And people objected to Elon Musk's and the Trump administration's callous disregard for career civil servants, many of them veterans, and the administration's attacks on the institutions, programs and regulations that protect working people.

The hearings featured testimony by workers, veterans, farmers and local community members regarding Elon Musk's DOGE and the Trump administration's attacks on the federal workforce. Witnesses expressed anger at insulting characterizations of federal workers' public service, and chaotic and lawless mass firings. They were also concerned that, due to staff reductions and other cuts to federal programs, public servants will not be able to serve their communities properly at agencies already struggling from high demand and limited resources. Witnesses cited how these cuts will have an outsized impact on seniors, veterans, people with disabilities and rural communities.

The hearings featured testimony by workers and community members on the wide-ranging attacks by Elon Musk's DOGE and the Trump administration on workers' rights and protections beyond the federal workforce. For example:

- ➔ The Trump administration has moved to gut the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) and other critical worker safety agencies, such as the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) and Mine Safety and Health Administration (MSHA), putting workers' lives at risk.
- ➔ A variety of moves by the Trump administration to curb worker power—for example, by stripping collective bargaining rights, abandoning project labor agreements and crippling the independence of agencies tasked with protecting workers' rights—will have long-term downstream impacts that lower pay, benefits and other standards for all workers across the country.
- ➔ Frequent attacks on institutions, initiatives and services that have provided equal access protections to underrepresented populations will hinder efforts to combat systemic workplace discrimination, denying workers a fair shot at a job or advancement.

- ➔ The Trump administration's mass deportation program, with its disregard for due process, threatens the constitutional rights of every worker and poses serious disruptions in key industries and local economies.
- ➔ Instead of taking a targeted, evidence-based approach to tariffs to protect domestic employment, the Trump administration has adopted a chaotic approach to tariffs. While some tariff actions taken to date have the potential to support workers, particularly in the steel, aluminum, auto and shipbuilding industries, the reckless, untargeted, on-again, off-again approach to other tariffs, including those with our most significant trading partner Canada, threaten to swamp the positive impacts.

Witnesses also expressed concern about the Trump tax plan and Congress's approach to budget reconciliation. Medicaid and other government health programs support jobs and provide a crucial lifeline for communities and families across the country. The current budget resolution calls for dramatic cuts to these programs to give wealthy Americans a tax break. Witnesses expressed outrage that these potential cuts will cause millions of people—particularly from vulnerable groups—to lose their health care, and put further strain on an already overburdened health care system.

The DPWL hearings brought to light a growing frustration with Elon Musk's DOGE and the Trump administration's anti-worker policies and the need for a new direction from the White House and Congress, with policies that support workers' freedom, ensure fairness and provide security.

## Introduction

The Department of People Who Work for a Living (DPWL) was established because, if Elon Musk can have his own fake government department, then why can't workers?

DPWL fights to make sure that the Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE) and other efforts by unelected billionaires like Elon Musk to use government policy to consolidate power and profits for themselves are stopped, and that government works for the people who work for a living.

Since the advent of the DOGE, DPWL has been amplifying the voices of workers and local community members via social media, town halls and hearings.

DPWL offered a public forum for people to share their stories about how the policies of the Trump administration and Elon Musk have impacted them and their communities in a series of 10 public hearings across the country.

Each hearing had a panel consisting of union leaders, workers, members of Congress, and state and local elected officials to hear testimony from union and community members about the local impact Trump's and Musk's policies are having on working people.

Most witnesses were not warning about what could happen—they were reporting on what is already happening, because 42% of Project 2025 already has been put into effect, and working people and local communities are paying the price.

During these hearings, community members' testimony raised critical issues for working people, including impacts to services and the local economy from the termination of federal workers; concerns about proposed cuts to Social Security, Medicare, Medicaid, VA benefits and other government services; and attacks on worker protections, safety and the institutions that enforce them.

Terminated federal workers expressed shock at their rapid and wide-ranging removal from the workforce—and were concerned about the impact these terminations will have on the communities they serve. More were deeply hurt by the mischaracterization and demonization of their public service, including Darlene Forge, a nurse, AFGE member and VA worker, who described that the “very same nurse that so many before had been glad to have served alongside them was now somehow a vile, fraudulent, wasteful bureaucrat. To say the least, I’m stunned and in disbelief at how quickly so many have turned on federal employees...it stings.”

In many cases, witnesses looked to their elected officials to protect their jobs, lives, livelihoods and these important government services—and expressed disappointment and frustration at the lack of response by lawmakers at a time when workers need their support. Many, like Shawn Montgomery, a U.S. Navy veteran, SEIU member and access control agent in North Carolina, already were struggling to keep up with inflation and affordability. Others, such as Jay Croswell from AFSCME Local 449, continue to warn these cuts come at working people's expense to provide tax breaks to the wealthy.

The DPWL will continue its crucial work to support working people and local communities to ensure their government is responsive to them and not unelected billionaires.

This report to Congress and the White House provides an accounting of what the DOGE, the administration and Congress have been doing to date, and working people's views on those actions and policies.

A brief summary of each hearing has been included at the end of this report.

# Attacks on the Federal Workforce

The federal workforce stood at 2.4 million people when Trump took office in January, dedicated to delivering essential services to people like Social Security, Medicare, Medicaid and VA benefits. Less than one-fifth of all federal civilian workers work in Washington, D.C., Virginia or Maryland. The overwhelming majority live and work outside of the Washington area. California (151,000), Texas (131,000) and Florida (95,000) are the three states with the most federal workers, and federal workers make up a significant portion of the overall workforce in Alaska, Hawaii, New Mexico, Oklahoma, West Virginia and Wyoming.

The federal civilian workforce is disproportionately composed of military veterans.<sup>1</sup> Veterans make up 25% of the federal workforce, compared with only 5% of the total U.S. workforce.

Federal workers are overwhelmingly white collar and make less than their private sector peers, with more than half making less than \$109,000 per year and about one-fifth of all federal workers making less than \$70,000 per year. Health care jobs make up the single biggest occupational category for federal workers, and the Department of Veterans Affairs, whose job it is to care for and support the nation's veterans, is the single largest employer of the civilian federal workforce.<sup>2</sup>

Workers testified that DOGE and the Trump administration's policies since taking office showed a fundamental disrespect for civil servants and the essential services they provide to their communities.

## Insulting Public Service Work

Eight days after taking office, the Trump Office of Personnel Management sent an email to approximately 2 million federal sector workers encouraging them to resign from public service. OPM's FAQ about its "deferred resignation" offer explained: "We encourage you to find a job in the private sector as soon as you would like to do so. The way to greater American prosperity is encouraging people to move from lower productivity jobs in the public sector to higher productivity jobs in the private sector." Because, to a billionaire, a public sector worker is less valuable and less productive than a private sector worker.<sup>3</sup>

## Questioning Whether Federal Sector Workers Have a 'Pulse' or 'Working Neurons'

OPM also sent an email to more than 100,000 federal sector workers on a Saturday afternoon when the vast majority of them are home with their families, requiring each worker to respond with five accomplishments from the week before. Elon Musk separately tweeted that failure to respond to the email would be taken as a resignation. Employees then were given conflicting directives by

other Trump appointees about whether to respond to the email. The Veterans Administration told its employees to reply to the email, while the Department of Homeland Security, the FBI and the State Department told employees to “pause” on any responses, despite a deadline that came with a termination threat. Some of these appointees were concerned that their employees’ responses could result in national security breaches. That lack of high-level management coordination between OPM, Musk and the department heads caused needless stress for federal employees. Ultimately, Musk admitted that he did not actually care about the workers’ accomplishments, after a fellow venture capitalist pointed out that the DOGE did not have the personnel to even read all the responses. Instead, according to Musk, the email request was to “check if the employee had a pulse and was capable of replying to an email.”<sup>4</sup> He said that any employee with “two working neurons” should be able to reply.<sup>5</sup>

## **Unless Your Job Generates Revenue for Someone It Is ‘Not Real’**

The chair of the DOGE subcommittee in Congress, Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene (R-Ga.), charged with considering recommendations from Musk’s government efficiency project, explained her views of federal sector jobs at a hearing: “Those are not real jobs producing federal revenue, by the way. They’re consuming taxpayer dollars. Those jobs are paid for by the American tax people, who work real jobs, earn real income, pay federal taxes and then pay these federal employees....Federal employees do not deserve their jobs. Federal employees do not deserve their paychecks.”<sup>6</sup>

This lack of respect for federal workers has resulted in large-scale mistreatment. Carlos Ginard, vice president of the Chicago & Midwest Regional Joint Board of Workers United in Illinois, expressed serious reservations about DOGE’s cuts to federal programs, saying, “At one point, there was a growing concern that efficiency would be prioritized over empathy. Concern gone—reality here. This is the world we live in now, where profit is now more important than ever, and workers and their safety are expendable.”

## **Project 2025 in Charge of OMB**

The purposeful mistreatment of federal workers began with the appointment of Russell Vought as director of the Office of Management and Budget (OMB). Vought was an architect<sup>7</sup> of Project 2025.<sup>8</sup> He described his plans for “bureaucrats” as one of purposeful cruelty: “We want to put them in trauma.”<sup>9</sup> This strategy is being implemented and has heightened the difficulties federal workers face daily.

“These past few months have caused me unnecessary turmoil and stress. I have lost paychecks. I have started bartending to feed my kids. I have taken loans from family members. I worry about losing my home that I have worked so hard for,” Leslie Desmond, a financial analyst for the U.S.



Department of Housing and Urban Development, said describing the experience. “I have an MBA and an in-demand skill set in quantitative finance, and have chosen to serve my country and help our most vulnerable populations in our state have access to safe and affordable housing. Now I stress about whether I can maintain a quality of life that used to be the power of the middle class.” Project 2025 is a wildly unpopular agenda written for the second Trump administration. Donald Trump has repeatedly disavowed Project 2025 as not his agenda, and his campaign promised to blacklist its architects from the administration. Nevertheless, Trump has appointed architects like Vought to key positions and enacted one Project 2025 proposal after another.<sup>10</sup>

## **Replacing Qualified Civil Servants With Political Appointees**

One of Project 2025’s top priorities is implementing “Schedule F” (now called PC by the Trump administration) for the federal workforce. Trump signed an executive order in his first week in office doing just that.<sup>11</sup> The order allows Trump to designate large swaths of the nonpartisan and qualified federal workforce as Schedule F employees who can be fired at will, without any civil service protections, and replaced by political loyalists. While Trump has created this authority for himself and taken steps toward implementing this plan,<sup>12</sup> he has yet to fully exercise it. The plan seems to be to fire as many federal workers as possible first before redesignating positions as Schedule F and hiring the loyalist replacements in earnest.

“We’re here because we know it’s not just an attack on our jobs—it’s a coordinated attack on the backbone of our country,” says Jessica Sweet, an AFGE member in Albany, New York. “We make the government work for ordinary people—and that scares them. This administration is choosing cruelty over duty.”

## **Make Work Chaotic to Push Buyout**

An early move by the Trump administration to sow chaos and uncertainty for federal employees was to end remote work arrangements, telling all agencies to require their employees to return to the office as soon as practicable.<sup>13</sup> With offices ill-equipped to support returning staff, workers have been forced to jump through unnecessary hurdles to keep their jobs, while continued instability from plans to shrink the size and scope of government building leases could further limit office space for the returning federal workforce. This tactic led to absurd and inefficient work arrangements, where employees who had performed work from home were now arriving at offices that lacked desks, Wi-Fi or even lights.<sup>14</sup> At the same time, DOGE has ended leases and closed government offices. Some federal employees’ reporting locations are therefore slated to no longer exist. If they want to keep their jobs, they may have to relocate their families to their new work locations, all for jobs that are perfectly suitable for remote work.<sup>15</sup> The return-to-office order was designed to encourage quitting. While the chaos unfolded, the Trump administration offered

employees a way out via its “fork in the road” offer—if you agree to resign effective Sept. 30, you do not need to return to the office in the meantime.<sup>16</sup>

## Unlawful Firings of Probationary Employees

After an immediate hiring freeze across the government, the Trump OMB directed all agencies to fire their probationary employees. Probationary employees are federal workers who have only one or two years of service and are not yet covered by civil service protections. This probationary status does not just apply to new employees, but also to long-term workers who were promoted or switched jobs. The directive came on Feb. 14 with the mass firings to be completed three days later. Approximately 24,500 employees lost their jobs in this fashion that month and were later ordered reinstated because the firings were likely unlawful. While many employees received positive job evaluations, the administration fired them with a blanket, false reason that their “performance has not been adequate.”<sup>17</sup> Instead of reinstating these probationary employees to their jobs, the administration put most of them on administrative leave, pending the outcome of further legal proceedings.

“Now, being laid off is hard—but I’ve been laid off before. What hurt the most was the false characterization of my service by the very government I was willing to die for,” recounted Andrew Lennox, a Marine Corps veteran and administrative officer at the VA Medical Center in Ann Arbor, Michigan, who was recently reinstated.

Workers terminated this way included civil servants who recently received promotions or transitioned to new roles within the federal government due to exceptional service. After serving for 10 years in the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, Nicole Rice was among those fired on the pretext of performance. She had “recently received a promotion based on my excellent performance. Due to my disability and being hired under the Schedule A hiring authority, I was placed into an arbitrary, two-year probationary status that left me vulnerable to the current administration’s wave of politically motivated firings.”

This back and forth has left federal workers confused and stressed, as they could be fired at any moment. According to Ozia Scott, a police officer and president of AFGE Local 54, “They are worried, like any working family, whether they will still be able to afford their monthly bills and put food on the table.”

Terminated employees expressed that uncertainty and drastic cuts will damage agencies’ ability to provide resources to the communities they serve. Abby Tighe, a Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) public health adviser in the division of overdose prevention, had been working to prevent substance abuse by children and teenagers—and focused on improving service to

rural communities. She shared, “My team at CDC now is serving over 700 communities across the United States with only 10 people to do the work.” She had been fired after receiving a promotion the previous month with an “almost perfect” performance review.

## **Shutting Down Worker Protection Boards**

To make matters worse for federal workers, President Trump fired members of the Merit Systems Protection Board (MSPB) and Federal Labor Relations Authority (FLRA). These agencies adjudicate claims of prohibited personnel practices and enforce collective bargaining rights, respectively. The MSPB firing has rendered that agency without a quorum, unable to issue decisions. The FLRA firing was temporarily overturned. Both firings are being litigated.

## **Large-Scale Reductions in Force and Programmatic Shutdowns**

In addition to the probationary employee mass firings, on Feb. 11 Trump ordered all agencies to “promptly undertake preparations to initiate large-scale reductions in force (RIFs).”<sup>18</sup> RIFs have been undertaken across the federal government, some as part of an agency process and some as part of a DOGE-initiated shutdown. For example, DOGE initially stopped all United States Agency for International Development (USAID) project funding, which subsequently triggered the termination of nearly all USAID staff, leaving some stranded overseas.<sup>19</sup> A reorganization at the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) that laid off 25% of the department’s 80,000 staff effectively demolished the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) by firing 85% of its staff, which will no longer be able to certify respirators that protect workers and the public from deadly exposures, investigate emerging workplace hazards and technologies for industries, and research serious health and safety concerns in coal mining, firefighting, commercial fishing, oil and gas extraction construction, health care and beyond.<sup>20</sup> The NIOSH dismantling has already resulted in the Mine Safety and Health Administration pausing enforcement of a rule protecting coal miners from silica poisoning, and will impact workers in every industry.<sup>21</sup> Liliana A. Calderon Castillo, director of health and safety programs for the Bricklayers (BAC), said elimination of the only respirator certification and approval laboratory will endanger workers: “Silicosis is a lung disease caused by inhaling crystalline silica, which is something that I was often exposed to as a bricklayer...without this critical program, who is to say that the next respirator I wear to help mitigate the hazard is really going to protect me and others, or if there will even be a next one.”

The slashing of jobs at HHS will have dire effects in the workplace and in communities around the country. The Food and Drug Administration faces a 19% cut in staff (3,500 workers), including experts at the Office of New Drugs, scientists at the Office of Veterinary Medicine who are working on combating the bird flu, and the country’s most experienced vaccine scientists and infectious disease experts. The CDC has lost 18% of its workforce (2,400 people), including entire offices

dedicated to treating people with HIV, tuberculosis, lead poisoning, substance abuse and birth defects. Many public health scientists believe any money saved will be wiped out by the economic damage that comes from the loss of expertise and experience.

Proposed RIFs, layoffs and closing governmental offices will hurt the public and their ability to access government services. DOGE's plan to close nearly two dozen Social Security Administration (SSA) offices will make it harder for workers and retirees to resolve problems, especially in rural areas.<sup>22</sup> Christine Surette, the District 4 national vice president for AFGE, underscored the damage that attacks on the Social Security Administration will have on seniors and people with disabilities, and emphasized DOGE's misuse of sensitive, personally identifiable information and other records held by this agency. Similarly, Margaret Soland, a stagehand with IATSE Local 415, raised concerns with DOGE targeting Social Security insurance for dependent children and how a loss of these benefits "could land me and my family on the streets or worse, dead."

Proposed cuts to the VA will mean cuts to the services it provides to veterans, including health care, short- and long-term housing options, life insurance, pensions, education stipends and the groundbreaking public health research the VA conducts. Scott Adams and Scott Surette, U.S. Army and Marine Corps veterans, respectively, in Maine, highlighted concerns that cuts or privatization of VA services will not yield better or expedited care—a sentiment echoed by many, including North Carolina veterans Doug Robinson, a retired physician, and James Jones, a 27-year National Park Service employee.

Horace Cooper, a disabled Vietnam veteran and retired AFGE member, described the consequences these cuts have had on veterans' care as they return home, including many who transition into the federal workforce. He explained, "a country makes a sacred promise that when you put the uniform on, defend our nation and put your life on the line, they will ensure you are taken care of for the rest of your days. This administration is breaking that promise. Thousands of veterans have been fired from the workforce. Thousands of veterans have had their lives turned upside down."

"We were told to dismantle our veterans resource group," shared Alana Schaeffer, president of the Portsmouth (Maine) Naval Shipyard Metal Trades Council. "That space was not political, it was vital."

In addition to affecting access to services, these cuts will likely hurt local economies across the country as facilities close, federal employees continue to lose their jobs and federal contracts with the private sector are terminated. The loss of good-paying, stable federal jobs, and jobs in the private sector tied to federal spending, will hurt local communities. The overall contractionary

effects will be multiplied—more unemployment means less spending locally, and less spending will hurt small businesses and municipal tax revenues.<sup>[23](#)</sup>

“We are all essential employees,” said Liz Harkins, president of AFGE Local 2604 representing public sector employees across New Hampshire, Maine, Vermont and Western Massachusetts.<sup>[24](#)</sup> “We live with growing fear and uncertainty, worried about our own futures and the future of the veterans we serve.”

Attacks on federal programs have also had a chilling effect on grants and innovative research conducted by universities and other institutions. JoEllen Welsh, Ph.D., and a member of the United University Professions, had a breast cancer research grant cut by \$50,000, which she stated, “means we may not be able to finish this study.” Kimberly Jensen from the New York State Department of Health and also the Public Employees Federation depicted the loss of federal grants as “the canary in the coal mine. This is about taking from working people and giving to the oligarchs.”

DOGE’s large-scale reductions in force risk interruptions to critical services people rely on, evidenced by the following:

- ➔ FORTUNE: Social Security’s acting chief privately admits DOGE ‘will make mistakes’ while cuts delay processing of claims, report says<sup>[25](#)</sup>
- ➔ BLOOMBERG: Social Security Says DOGE Ruling Could Force Agency to Shut Down<sup>[26](#)</sup>
- ➔ CARDINAL & PINE: ‘Veterans are going to die’: Hundreds protest Elon Musk’s DOGE cuts in Raleigh<sup>[27](#)</sup>
- ➔ NBC: DOGE plans to cut VA contracts may harm veterans’ care, employees say<sup>[28](#)</sup>
- ➔ BLACK PRESS USA: “[S]ocial worker layoffs left homeless veterans without support.”<sup>[29](#)</sup>
- ➔ THE NEW YORK TIMES: “Initial cuts at the V.A. have...disrupted studies involving patients awaiting experimental treatments.”<sup>[30](#)</sup>
- ➔ STAT: “No money for kidney cancer. No money for pancreatic cancer. No money for lung cancer....[s]o much completely underfunded.”<sup>[31](#)</sup>
- ➔ PBS: “[S]hutting down the CDC’s Division of HIV Prevention could trigger a public health crisis reminiscent of the HIV pandemic in the 1980s.”<sup>[32](#)</sup>

- ➔ THE WASHINGTON POST: Fertility and maternal health programs slashed, alarming experts<sup>33</sup>
- ➔ POLITICO: ‘A gut punch’: Trump admin cuts wipe out firefighter health and safety programs<sup>34</sup>
- ➔ CNN: ‘A huge impact on worker safety’: Protection for miners, firefighters in jeopardy after CDC cuts<sup>35</sup>
- ➔ NEWS NATION: FDA milk quality testing program suspended after job cuts<sup>36</sup>
- ➔ ROLLING STONE: National Parks at Escalated Wildfire Risk, Thanks to DOGE Cuts<sup>37</sup>
- ➔ NEWS NATION: DOGE cuts could hinder weather forecasting<sup>38</sup>
- ➔ ABC: ‘People are going to get sick’: Fired HHS scientists protest federal terminations<sup>39</sup>
- ➔ CBS: FDA planning for fewer food and drug inspections due to layoffs, officials say<sup>40</sup>

## Attacks on Consumer Rights

Despite strong public support for the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau (CFPB) and its consumer protection mission, the Trump administration and OMB Director Russell Vought, working with Elon Musk and DOGE, have aggressively pursued efforts to undermine and stop the CFPB’s work. Hundreds of CFPB staff were illegally fired and the rest were ordered to stop working.

The CFPB was created after the big banks tanked our economy in 2008. The agency enforces existing laws and has returned more than \$21 billion to consumers in the form of compensation for corporate wrongdoing or canceled debts. Without the CFPB, we’re risking another financial crisis, allowing big banks, lenders and tech companies to operate unsupervised and unchecked.

The Trump administration’s CFPB paused finalization of 38 pending enforcement cases against banks and other corporations, and 10 enforcement actions already have been dropped “with prejudice,” effectively terminating the CFPB’s ability to seek justice and restitution forever and anointing corporate wrongdoers with what amounts to a pardon.<sup>41</sup> Among its higher-profile cases were lawsuits dropped against Capital One Financial Corp. for misleading consumers about its offerings for high-interest savings accounts, and another against banks including JPMorgan Chase & Co., Bank of America Corp. and Wells Fargo & Co. for allegedly rushing out a peer-to-peer payment network that allowed fraud to proliferate.<sup>42</sup> These actions send a signal to Wall Street banks, predatory lenders and Big Tech that it’s fine to cheat and rip off workers and families across the country with no accountability and no consequences for misconduct.

## Strip Federal Workers of Their Union Contracts and Bargaining Rights

In line with Project 2025's call for the destruction of public sector unions, the Trump administration illegally stripped hundreds of thousands of federal workers of their union contracts and bargaining rights. First, on March 7, the Trump Department of Homeland Security terminated the collective bargaining agreement with 45,000 Transportation Security Administration (TSA) employees tasked with maintaining airport security.<sup>43</sup> Then, on March 27, Trump issued an executive order stripping more than 1 million federal employees of their collective bargaining rights, simultaneously filing suits to have their union contracts immediately voided.<sup>44</sup> This was the single biggest act of union-busting in U.S. history. In explaining the order, the Trump White House blamed the workers and their unions for "fighting back" against the many personnel actions the administration had been taking to strip federal workers of rights and jobs.<sup>45</sup> In a filing for the National Treasury Employees Union's (NTEU's) lawsuit against the administration's actions, NTEU Director of Field Operations Daniel Kaspar stated: "It is my belief, based on the language of the Executive Order, the OPM Guidance, and the White House's Fact Sheet on the Executive Order that the President's motivations for the mass exclusion of agencies from the Statute's coverage are animus against federal sector unions and a desire to make federal employees easier to fire."<sup>46</sup> Filings across additional lawsuits against this executive order, including those brought by AFGE<sup>47</sup> and the American Foreign Service Association,<sup>48</sup> have alleged that the loss of membership and subsequent revenue are meant to diminish collective bargaining power or wholly disband union representation.

These unions had been exercising their First Amendment rights to speak out by filing successful lawsuits and grievances to protect their members from unlawful actions. With workers affected by the order whose jobs are far afield from national security concerns, which were Trump's technical excuse for the order, the cancellation of their contracts can only be seen as retaliation for invoking their constitutional rights. Chad Finch, president of AFGE Local 2119, which represents workers at Rock Island Arsenal, characterized these actions as an "assault" on collective bargaining rights and said that the government should "[remain] a place where workers are valued, their rights are respected, and the services they provide are second to none."

## U.S. Postal Service Under Threat

Based on the authority of the U.S. Constitution, Congress created the U.S. Postal Service (USPS) in 1792 to ensure the public had access to mail regardless of where they lived. President Trump has stated an interest in privatizing mail services, a position strongly opposed by postal unions, good government groups and community advocates. Privatization could lead to substantial job losses among the 600,000-plus USPS workforce, including letter carriers, employees at almost 40,000 post offices and workers at large mail-processing facilities that work together to serve the public.



Privatization would likely result in cuts in service to rural and low-income communities, impacting the delivery of essential items like medications on a timely basis, and hike prices—an argument Mike Moriconi from the American Postal Workers Union (APWU) says puts essential services in his state at risk. Jacqueline Sandle, a retired postal carrier and National Association of Letter Carriers (NALC) member, agreed with this assessment and singled out the ramifications of losing the Last Mile program to reach remote households.

“During the wake of Hurricane Helene, it became very evident that the community that I serve [relies] on us for many different reasons.” Tavon Wells, a postal worker and NALC Branch 248 president, recounted, “Some rely on the Postal Service for prescription medications, Social Security checks, personal love notes from their family. This will affect everyone, young or elderly....I do not know what privatizing the Postal Service would look like as a consumer, but I can tell you as an employee it would be detrimental to the service....The 168 million mailboxes we serve each and every day would not be the number one priority. The number one priority would be making money. The Postal Service is a service for a reason.”

## **Attacks on the Federal Contractor Workforce**

### **No Good Jobs Initiative**

The Biden administration’s Good Jobs Initiative utilized federal contracting to promote good labor practices, like offering child care, paid leave, job training and registered apprenticeships, paying a living wage and respecting workers’ rights to organize. Trump rescinded this initiative.<sup>49</sup>

### **No Increased Minimum Wage for Federal Contractor Employees**

Trump also rescinded Biden’s executive order that raised the minimum wage for employees of federal contractors, covering 390,000 workers.<sup>50</sup> A Department of Labor regulation maintains that wage in the meantime, unless Trump’s secretary of labor moves to repeal it.

### **Disincentivizes Federal Contractors to Participate in Registered Apprenticeship Programs**

Trump rescinded a Biden executive order that directed federal agencies to prioritize federal contractors and grantees who participated in registered apprenticeship programs when making award and funding decisions. The Biden executive order also directed agencies to prioritize projects that would promote efficient project delivery and positive labor-management relations through project labor agreements; promote family-sustaining wages and prevailing wages; promote economic security for workers through the provision of paid leave (including paid sick, and family



and medical leave), health care, retirement benefits and child care; and promote employment in high-quality jobs for workers from underserved communities.<sup>51</sup>

## **Project Labor Agreements Ignored**

While Trump did not rescind a Biden executive order requiring project labor agreements (PLAs) on federal construction projects of \$35 million or more, at least two agencies have decided to ignore the order.<sup>52</sup> The Trump Department of Defense stopped the use of any PLAs on its large-scale construction projects, while the Trump General Services Administration gave itself a “class exemption” from the Biden PLA executive order. PLAs ensure a high-skilled workforce on complex construction contracts, which means well-trained and properly paid construction workers.

## **Displacement of Service Workers**

Trump rescinded Biden’s executive order protecting workers on service contracts with the federal government from being displaced when the government switches contractors.<sup>53</sup> Without that order in place, contractors can threaten workers with loss of employment if they file complaints or attempt to organize a union, suggesting either action could cause the contractor to lose its contract.

# **Attacks on Private Sector Workers’ Rights to Organize and Collectively Bargain**

## **Shutting Down the NLRB**

The first significant move against private sector workers’ rights to organize and collectively bargain came with Trump’s firing of National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) Member Gwynne Wilcox.<sup>54</sup> Wilcox was appointed by Biden and confirmed by the Senate for a term set to expire in 2028. Trump’s firing of Wilcox denied the board a quorum, meaning the agency could no longer issue decisions until at least one more board member was nominated and confirmed to the position. The firing of Wilcox also destroyed the board’s independence. In her termination email, Wilcox was told she was “unduly disfavoring the interests of employers” in her decision. The message was clear to the remaining NLRB members and any future ones: you will be fired if you do not rule in favor of employers. The firing itself was unlawful, and Wilcox was reinstated by a court via a preliminary injunction.

## **Destroying the NLRB’s Independence**

The next significant move against private sector workers’ rights was a Trump executive order that targeted all independent agencies, including the NLRB. Under the “Ensuring Accountability for All Agencies” executive order, Trump declared himself the law.<sup>55</sup> That is, his interpretation of the law

would hold for all executive branch employees, including those at the NLRB. The executive order also allowed Trump to delegate this authority to Attorney General Pam Bondi. As a result, a coalition of employers wrote to Bondi in April asking her to invalidate more than a dozen NLRB decisions, calling on her to use the executive order's extraordinary authority to simply rewrite the law to disfavor workers.<sup>56</sup> The open power grab envisioned by these employers may obscure a more insidious, hidden power grab. Trump and Bondi may use this executive order to dictate whether an unfair labor practice charge will even produce a complaint, as they could interpret the law on a case-by-case basis to ensure no NLRB investigator or regional director can pursue a case not to the liking of Trump or those to whom he wishes to do a favor. Because the NLRB is the only venue for enforcing rights under the National Labor Relations Act, workers no longer have a fair shot at their day in court, and rights they thought they had via decades of NLRB and court precedent may be wiped away by the stroke of Trump's or Bondi's pen. None of this squares with the statute, the Administrative Procedure Act, due process or the rule of law.

## **Crippling Federal Mediation**

The Federal Mediation and Conciliation Service (FMCS) is a relatively small, independent agency with a major function in labor relations. Among other things, it provides mediators to employers and unions to help resolve labor disputes and push along particularly tough collective bargaining snags. Without it, one can expect longer delays in reaching collective bargaining agreements and more strikes, lockouts and other strife. Trump issued an executive order titled "Continuing the Reduction of the Federal Bureaucracy," ordering the FMCS to stop offering any nonstatutory services and to minimize its statutory functions. The result was that FMCS saw 95% of its workforce laid off, with its 143 mediators reduced to just four.<sup>57</sup>

## **Attacks on Health and Safety**

### **Gutting the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH)**

Overnight on April 1, 2025, Musk and his DOGE team eliminated more than 85% of the NIOSH staff and eliminated nearly every program it runs.<sup>58</sup> NIOSH is a distinct and vital federal agency tasked to independently research causes of and interventions that prevent occupational safety and work-related illnesses, injuries and fatalities. No other agency can do its job. Using artificial intelligence, DOGE identified NIOSH as redundant of the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) and Mine Safety and Health Administration (MSHA), which is entirely flawed and inaccurate. Congress created all three of these agencies with specific and distinct responsibilities.

Many dangerous industries rely on NIOSH to conduct research on interventions that save lives. NIOSH is essential for identifying workplace hazards, developing practical solutions, and

recommending safety and health measures to industries and to other federal agencies. NIOSH also investigates fatalities without punishment to employers, in order to identify root causes and assist industries in preventing them from happening again.

NIOSH is the only certifier and approver of respirators that protect workers (and the public) from deadly hazards like lead, asbestos, other chemicals and infectious diseases. Manufacturers of respirators and other personal protective equipment (PPE) view NIOSH as the gold standard of certification globally; NIOSH is absolutely critical for keeping counterfeit products off the market that would give workers a false sense of protection when they are exposed to poisons in health care, mining, firefighting, construction and many other occupations.

In particular, many firefighters are disturbed by the cutting back of programs designed to protect first responders. Erik Steinmetz and Pat Cleary, both members of Fire Fighters (IAFF) Local 2, expressed how the dismantling of these agencies endangers firefighters—citing NIOSH’s critical work evaluating PPE, respirators and innovative research into cancers caused by firefighter gear. Dr. Micah Niemeier-Walsh, vice president of AFGE Local 3840 and a third-generation NIOSH researcher focusing on firefighter health, confirmed these fears.

Without NIOSH, investigations on emerging workplace hazards and research on serious health and safety concerns for workers in coal, mining, commercial fishing, oil and gas extraction, construction, health care, firefighting and other industries have been completely stopped.

Alysha Meyers, a 15-year NIOSH employee and AFGE Local 3840 member, warned “every day without action brings us closer to a time when workplace safety is compromised, and preventable hazards once again claim lives. This isn’t just about the unfair loss of some federal workers’ jobs or a program—it’s about the livelihoods and well-being of every American worker”—a message Hannah Echt and Jessica Li from AFGE Local 3840 emphasized as well.

Cutting NIOSH’s programs means losing medical screenings for hundreds of thousands of mineworkers to prevent black lung and silicosis, America’s only construction safety and health research center, and education and research centers in states across America focused on unique occupational morbidity and mortality issues.

For many researchers at NIOSH, this work is personal. In her testimony, Tashina Robinson, a research epidemiologist with NIOSH, shared, “I grew up in a small town where people work really physically demanding jobs, often for their whole lives....So when I talk about workers’ health, I’m not just talking about data. I’m talking about people I know, people I love, people who give so much of themselves just to provide for their families. People who deserve to be safe and healthy while working, and then to retire with good health.”

## Closures of Worker Safety Offices

Trump has contradicted his vocal support of “bringing back coal” to America by shuttering 34 Mine Safety and Health Administration (MSHA) offices in 19 states.<sup>59</sup> In addition to making mines even more dangerous, on April 8, 2025, the Trump administration stalled an MSHA rule that would require coal mines to cut respirable silica levels in half.<sup>60</sup> Similarly, the Trump administration has refused to renew the leases of 11 Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) offices across the country. This will inevitably undermine OSHA’s mission and make it more difficult for the agency to protect workers, and identify and address dangerous conditions on the job.

Failing to protect workers from these dangerous conditions can lead to harms that extend beyond the workplace. Exposure on the job could affect a person’s ability to have a healthy pregnancy, notes Kristen Van Buren, an AFGE Local 3840 member and NIOSH employee.

Beyond members of the federal workforce, reductions to these agencies will have significant ramifications across numerous essential industries.

For hospital workers, dismantling OSHA and NIOSH leaves no means of remedy for issues while chronic short staffing worsens the risk of injury, explained Anne Igoe, an SEIU Healthcare Illinois & Indiana (HCL) member. The message to front-line health care workers by pushing these safety cuts is clear to Tina Godinho, a nurse and member of National Nurses United (NNU): “You are on your own.”

In response to the cuts to these agencies, many witnesses included a direct call to action for elected officials to help their constituents. Tessa Bonney, Ph.D., an assistant professor of environmental and occupational health sciences at the University of Illinois Chicago School of Public Health, directly called on federal officials to reverse these cuts, while Ron Neimark, student liaison for the Occupational Health Section of the American Public Health Association, pushed for state and local officials to play a larger role in protecting workers in the interim.

E.J. Jenkins of United Steelworkers (USW) Local 1014 called out Elon Musk and DOGE’s attacks on safety agencies, challenging that they “don’t want to take care of your own workers, but yet you would tell a worker what they need...when you’ve never really been in the work facility.”

## Gutting Regulations That Protect Workers

The Trump administration revealed its antipathy for regulation in its early days in office. Trump issued the so-called “10 for 1” executive order.<sup>61</sup> In order to issue any new regulation, an agency must identify at least 10 other regulations to be eliminated. In other words, if workers want heat

protections, the Department of Labor must identify 10 other health and safety protections to be eliminated.

Marcos Cenicerros from Warehouse Workers for Justice called these actions “not just a budget cut, it’s not just deregulation. I want to be clear—it’s an attack on the safety of every working person in this country.” Brent Barron, a member of AFGE Local 648, captured a feeling shared by every participant in DPWL’s hearings: “Anyone that goes to work should be able to come home at the end of the day.” Many participants found this administration’s actions in direct opposition to that fundamental belief.

## **Dividing the Workforce**

### **Attacks on Diversity, Equity and Inclusion**

The Trump administration signed a series of executive orders aimed at eliminating diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) efforts within the federal government. These EOs also revoke longstanding DEI and affirmative action requirements put in place to protect workers employed by federal contractors and threaten to penalize private employers for promoting or enacting DEI programs. What constitutes “DEI” was not fully defined by the Trump administration orders, leading to confusion and absurd and petty actions at some agencies, like the Department of Defense removing a tribute to the Tuskegee Airmen or OSHA removing health and safety guidance that mentions gender. The orders direct the closure of all offices dedicated to DEI initiatives and programs, the end of all DEI-related contracts, and forced the layoff of civil servants who worked in these roles. There were also additional changes made to federal contracting, directing the Department of Labor’s Office of Federal Contract Compliance Programs (OFCCP) to stop promoting outreach to increase the number of diverse candidates in the applicant pool and cease all investigative and enforcement activity related to affirmative action. The OFCCP was also stripped of the resources and power that allow the agency to investigate and sanction contractors who are not following the law. This agency within DOL was established more than 60 years ago to prohibit employment discrimination by federal contractors and subcontractors, and has been critical in helping to combat systemic workplace discrimination and reduce equal opportunity barriers for employment. These policies have ensured that underrepresented populations have equal access to well-paying jobs, and that the nation’s government reflects the communities that it serves.

Mary Bauder, a native Alaskan and UAW Local 5285 member, emphasized that removing diversity, equity, inclusion and accessibility programs has caused underserved populations, including tribal and Indigenous peoples, to lose crucial protections and access to federal grants.

Omar Algeciras, an Air Force veteran and vice president of AFGE Local 2391, highlighted that these changes to the Office of Federal Contract Compliance Programs have removed protections for veterans and hurt their ability to secure employment after their service: “Veterans trying to get hired, promoted or treated fairly suddenly have nowhere to turn.”

Across the country, many workers drew attention to the fear the LGBTQ+ community is experiencing—including Heather Richardson Albee of Theatrical Stage Employees (IATSE) Local 798, who described these attacks as “personal” and “dangerous.”

Despite these attempts to divide working people, many speakers said they have found unity in the shared experience across these communities and in coming together to fight back.

## Attacks on Immigrant Workers

In keeping with the Project 2025 playbook, the Trump administration has launched an aggressive assault on the status and rights of millions of immigrant workers across all sectors of our economy. With a dozen immigration-related executive orders issued on Day 1 and many more since, Trump has invoked the language of “invasion”<sup>62</sup> to systematically increase the detention and deportation of immigrants, not just of those with criminal records, but of all immigrants, many of whom have legal status and have lived and worked in our country for decades. The administration is also dramatically reducing legal pathways to enter the United States and attempting to roll back core constitutional rights and protections.

### Millions of Layoffs Via Status Termination

Far from focusing immigration enforcement efforts on people who pose a public safety risk, Trump has taken active steps to strip status and work authorization away from millions of working people, many of whom have been members of our workforce and our unions for decades. These enormous populations have all had their status terminated and are now fighting in the courts to preserve their ability to live and work here:

- ➔ Nearly **1 million workers with Temporary Protected Status** due to unsafe conditions in Afghanistan, Cameroon, Haiti and Venezuela.
- ➔ More than **1.5 million workers with Humanitarian Parole** (an unfortunately named form of protection that has nothing to do with the criminal justice system) who were invited here with sponsors from Afghanistan, Cuba, Haiti, Nicaragua and Venezuela.<sup>63</sup>

Like our federal workforce, hundreds of thousands of these immigrant workers received notice through harshly worded form letters that their status, and therefore their ability to work, was being terminated. Some were given as few as seven days to pack up and leave the country, and told that failure to do so would result in criminal prosecution.<sup>64</sup> These callous terminations are effectively resulting in mass layoffs of workers across the country, causing massive disruptions in key industries, local economies and union membership. As Simplicio Kuelo, president of United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW) Local 431 who represents meatpacking workers, health care workers, manufacturing workers and others described, “It takes skill, training and hard-working immigrant families to get meat on America’s tables. Trump’s attack on 1.5 million workers threatens those families—and your food supply.”

## **Attacks on Due Process, Free Speech and Freedom of Association**

In another alarming development, immigrant workers, including green card holders and work visa holders, have faced arrest, detention, revocation of status and deportation with a complete lack of due process. These attacks are affecting more and more of our union siblings, including:

- ➔ SMART Brother Kilmar Abrego Garcia, who was deported to a Salvadoran mega-prison in what the Department of Justice has admitted was a mistake. The administration is refusing to comply with a unanimous Supreme Court order to facilitate his return.<sup>65</sup>
- ➔ Former UAW Brother Mahmoud Khalil, a green card holder with a pregnant U.S. citizen wife, who is being detained without charge and told his green card will be revoked for criticizing U.S. foreign policy.<sup>66</sup>
- ➔ SEIU Sister Rümeysa Öztürk, a grad student worker, was being detained, and was just recently released, for the offense of writing an op-ed in the Tufts University Law School Journal.<sup>67</sup>

Hundreds of other higher education student workers around the country from a wide range of unions have had their visas revoked for reasons ranging from the exercise of free speech to being from countries now being considered for new travel bans.

The quickly escalating efforts to deny due process, define what constitutes acceptable speech, and arbitrarily strip workers of their visas and work permits creates a climate of fear and sets a dangerous precedent for the rights of all working people, whether they are citizens or not. The administration’s open disregard of court orders and judicial oversight is another stark example of the threats to the constitutional balance of power and the dangers of unchecked executive authority.



## Workplace Enforcement Targeting Workers Rather Than Abusive Bosses

As the administration continues to dismantle the federal agencies charged with enforcing our labor and employment laws, the investment in immigration enforcement continues to increase. Our nation already spends 14 times more on immigration enforcement than it does to enforce all the laws to protect more than 165 million workers in jobsites around the country.<sup>68</sup> Gutting our government's resources and capacity to enforce labor standards and protections while stripping immigrant workers of rights and ramping up immigration enforcement is a core part of the anti-union, anti-worker playbook that will enable employers to violate worker rights with impunity. This is a toxic formula that will drive down standards for all workers in key industries and increase wage theft, child labor violations, and preventable workplace injuries and fatalities.

At a recent town hall in North Carolina, Maryann Ruiz from the Carolina Migrant Network connected these two groups' experiences, saying, "Union workers and immigrants have spent decades building this country with their hands, working long shifts with pride and purpose....Union workers want and deserve dignity. Immigrants want and deserve dignity. We all want a fair shot, a safe home and a voice that's heard."

As an indication of what this imbalance in spending and priorities looks like in practice, ICE reported that it conducted a recent raid at a Philadelphia car wash because it had reports that workers were being exploited. The consequence, however, fell to the seven immigrant workers who were arrested, rather than the employer who was violating their rights.<sup>69</sup> In a country where we rely on workers to report violations to enforce our labor laws, inappropriate enforcement responses such as this risk chilling the exercise of workplace rights, making all workplaces less safe and undermining our organizing efforts. Moreover, these misplaced worksite enforcement priorities incentivize predatory employer behavior that will fuel a race to the bottom in wages and working conditions in major industries around the country.

## Attacks on Health Care

### Curtailing Programs to Lower Drug Prices

Trump rescinded a Biden executive order that directed HHS to pursue initiatives to lower prescription drug prices, including capping certain generic drug prices at \$2.<sup>70</sup> Retreating from this policy will cause seniors and people with disabilities on Medicare to pay millions of dollars more for their prescription drugs.



## Directing Congress to Gut Medicaid to Pay for Tax Cuts for the Wealthy

Trump urged House and Senate Republicans to pass a budget resolution that will provide up to \$5.3 trillion in tax cuts focused on corporations and the rich, while cutting \$1.5 trillion in health care and social programs.<sup>71</sup> Even though Trump has claimed he does not want to harm the program, it is impossible for Congress to meet its instruction of \$880 billion in cuts in programs overseen by the House Committee on Energy and Commerce without focusing most of these cuts on Medicaid. Republicans are discussing a number of approaches to achieving these massive cuts to Medicaid, such as adding red tape barriers to enrollment such as work reporting, reducing federal matching funds and/or simply capping what the program can spend on different groups of enrollees.<sup>72</sup> The proposed cuts will have a devastating impact on working families. The cuts will tear health care away from millions of people—particularly from vulnerable groups such as children, people with disabilities, seniors and lower-income families.<sup>73</sup>

The Energy and Commerce Committee recently advanced its budget reconciliation proposal that includes \$715 billion in cuts to health care, and Republicans' reconciliation policy will mean 13.7 million Americans will lose their health care coverage. Millions of Americans, like William del Rosario and Nancy Stevens, who each shared Medicaid support and services they rely on daily to manage complex medical needs. As Stevens further shared, "Medicaid pays for the nursing home that my neighbors and I live in. It pays for the aides who feed us when we can't use our hands, who roll us when we can't move our bodies....It pays for transportation to our medical appointments. And it pays for the sweet nurses and nursing home assistants who administer life-saving treatments.... It pays for the care that helps people with disabilities stay in their communities and stay in their homes. And stay amongst their families and it helps to stay alive. When you cut Medicaid, you're not just trimming the fat."

Medicaid cuts will also cause hospitals, clinics, nursing homes and home health agencies to close or downsize—causing 477,000 health care jobs to be lost nationwide in 2026 alone. Many of these services already face difficulties maintaining current staffing levels. "Even with existing funding we struggle to recruit. Cuts to Medicaid will mean more strain on the system," Zakaya Rhymer from the Civil Service Employees Association (CSEA/AFSCME) in Albany, New York, explained. Michael Fitzsimmons, a member of the New York State Nurses Association, agreed: "Any government cuts will impact staffing levels that are already unacceptable." And Christina Crim, an ER tech and SEIU 1199 member, emphasized cuts to Medicaid will have an outsized impact on hospitals serving rural communities.

Another 411,000 jobs would be lost in other industries, including retail, construction and manufacturing due to reduced economic activity.<sup>74</sup> As Medicaid is the primary source of federal

funding to the states (56%),<sup>75</sup> slashing the program will require many states to pull resources from other areas, such as education and transportation.

“We will not be silent, we will not be sidelined, we will not be sacrificed. Because Bella and millions like her in this great nation of ours deserve better,” says Tom Dominguez, a retired Orange County, California, sheriff’s investigator whose daughter has Down syndrome. Proposed cuts to Medicaid could threaten “the services that help her eat, move, communicate, grow and live the full life she deserves. And I lose peace of mind every single day wondering what her future looks like if these cuts happen.”

## **Ending Health Coverage for 7.4 Million Affordable Care Act (ACA) Enrollees**

As Republicans work on tax giveaways for the wealthy and corporations, they are stonewalling efforts to extend enhanced ACA premium tax credits that primarily help low- to middle-income working families. Unless these tax credits are extended beyond December 2025, 7.4 million people could lose insurance coverage over the next five years. In addition, families making between 200% and 250% of the federal poverty level would have to pay \$573 more each year for coverage.<sup>76</sup>

Liliana Jordan, a nurse in Arizona, described how cuts to health care programs will strain an already overburdened system: “When a person or family has to decide whether or not to eat or seek medical treatment, treatment is delayed. This increases the burden on the already overtaxed Emergency Room, where in Tucson, nurses are already at a dangerous seven patients to one nurse ratio.”

Lori Hedrick, a nurse with NNU in North Carolina, echoed this assessment: “Remaining hospitals will be overwhelmed, and nurses will experience a worsened staffing crisis.”

## **Attacks on Education**

### **Dismantling the Department of Education**

On March 11, the Department of Education initiated a reduction in force (RIF) affecting nearly 50% of its staff. Impacted employees were placed on administrative leave starting March 21. At the time of Trump’s inauguration, the department employed 4,133 workers; after the RIF and nearly 600 voluntary departures, that number has dropped to roughly 2,183.<sup>77</sup> On March 20, President Trump signed an executive order aimed at dismantling the Department of Education and returning authority over education to states and families.<sup>78</sup> The order directs the education secretary to begin shutting down the department while impossibly claiming they will ensure essential services continue. It also prohibits remaining federal education funds from supporting diversity, equity

and inclusion or gender identity initiatives. While Trump cannot fully eliminate the department without congressional approval, his administration is working to weaken it significantly by moving key programs to other agencies and cutting the department's workforce in half. These actions particularly harm working-class families who depend on federal education programs.

## **Attacks on Universities and Academic and Student Freedom**

The Trump administration has taken a series of actions that are a direct attack on universities and a dangerous erosion of academic and student freedom. It has frozen more than \$1 billion in federal funding to Cornell, nearly \$790 million to Northwestern, and hundreds of millions to Columbia, Penn and others—claiming the institutions failed to protect students during campus protests.<sup>79</sup> The administration is using the protests as cover for funding threats that are politically motivated to force universities to adopt the administration's agenda. Harvard professors have filed a lawsuit challenging a sweeping review of nearly \$9 billion in federal contracts, calling it an unconstitutional attempt to suppress speech and force policy changes, including bans on DEI programs and face coverings at protests.<sup>80</sup> The administration is also investigating more than 50 universities for working with diversity-focused groups and has ordered Columbia to place one of its academic departments under federal control—a move widely condemned as an attack on academic freedom.<sup>81</sup> Legal experts and education leaders warn these actions weaponize federal funding to silence dissent, chill protest, and undermine the autonomy and core values of higher education.

## **Budget Reconciliation Threats to Higher Education**

With Republicans controlling both chambers of Congress and the White House, they are advancing a budget reconciliation process that could significantly cut higher education funding. The House has adopted a budget resolution calling for \$7 trillion in deficit-financed tax cuts: \$5.5 trillion that Republicans fraudulently claim are free, plus another \$1.5 trillion in additional revenue losses. As part of this, the House Committee on Education & the Workforce was tasked with identifying \$330 billion in cuts. The bill the committee advanced proposes sweeping changes to federal student aid, including eliminating subsidized Stafford loans for undergraduate and Graduate PLUS loans, while limiting Parent PLUS loans. It caps aggregate loan limits at \$50,000 for undergraduates and reduces graduate borrowing to \$100,000 for most students, well below the cost of many colleges. Existing income-driven repayment plans would be scrapped in favor of a single, more burdensome plan that increases the percentage of discretionary income required for repayment and extends the number of payments before forgiveness, raising costs even for public service workers.

The bill also narrows Pell Grant eligibility to students enrolled at least half-time and redefines full-time status as 15 credit hours instead of 12, disproportionately harming part-time, working

and caregiving students. It repeals key borrower protections, which include Gainful Employment, Borrower Defense and closed school discharge, and bars the Department of Education from issuing future regulations that would provide debt relief or expand aid. These changes, coupled with the imposition of institutional risk-sharing on unpaid loans, prioritize budget cuts over student protections. While the bill authorizes new Workforce Pell Grants and limited administrative funding, these modest investments are swamped by the broader agenda to shift costs onto students and families. These changes aim to offset the cost of extending the 2017 Trump tax cuts set to expire in 2025.

Kristen Kiefer, an engagement manager with the American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network, shared her experience with these assistance programs—highlighting their impact on students and young parents, “After my son was born, I went back to school. My husband and I made \$26,000 a year combined. He worked during the day; I stayed home with our baby. At night, I went to school. On weekends, I pulled double shifts. We were both working, but we couldn’t make it work without help. \$124 a month in food stamps meant our son never went hungry. The Pell Grant made it possible for me to finish my degree. I delivered my final presentation—with pneumonia—because I couldn’t afford a doctor....These programs aren’t handouts—they’re a hand up. They are the safety net that caught me when I was falling, and helped me climb. And now, I fight every day to make sure others have the same chance.”

## Trade and Industrial Policy

Rather than address the litany of unfair trade practices used by global competitors through an investigation-based, process-oriented approach to levy strategic, targeted tariffs, this administration abruptly applied high, broad-based tariffs to all imports from nearly every country in the world. Trump’s reciprocal tariffs have been imposed in a needlessly chaotic way, without a clear strategy on what he expects to achieve in the short or long term. Just days after announcing them, he “paused” the reciprocal tariffs for 90 days, sowing more confusion.

The Trump administration claims these “reciprocal” tariffs are leading to extensive negotiations with trading partners. But workers certainly aren’t at the table to ensure their interests are front and center. Instead of conducting negotiations with stakeholder engagement, it appears most of these deals will be cut in back rooms where workers’ interests can be ignored or sold out.

Further, he’s also wielded tariffs as a cudgel against Canada, purportedly to address the fentanyl crisis. This approach ignores our close economic relationship with Canada and comparable wage and labor standards, while undermining industries that engage in cross-border trade that supports

good union jobs on both sides of the border—needlessly jeopardizing thousands of good jobs.

Matt Lienen, business manager/financial secretary-treasurer of United Association of Union Plumbers and Pipefitters (UA) Local 25, argued that “the level of uncertainty in the building trades has never been greater” as a result of Trump’s tariff policies threatening to increase material costs and impact hours worked by members. Similarly, Pat Stock, president of USW Local 105, raised serious concerns around the uncertainty created by reversing course on tariff exemptions for aluminum imports from some countries that is impacting costs and potentially putting manufacturers at a disadvantage. Tariffs on aluminum and derivative products increase domestic production cost across numerous industries, including in manufacturing and agricultural sectors, hampering their global competitiveness. Robert Bern, vice president of UAW Local 434, echoed these concerns and added that the on-again, off-again way this administration is applying tariffs severely limits any potential for expansion that tariffs could encourage.

## **Undermining Investment in the Next Generation of American Energy Innovation and Manufacturing**

Tariffs are an important tool, but a winning strategy also requires critical investments in our transportation and energy infrastructure. Unfortunately, President Trump has threatened to gut the vital investments made by the Biden administration into energy generation and infrastructure, supply chains and manufacturing.

Energy in America is at an inflection point. Working Americans are experiencing rising utility prices at home, demand on the grid is rising for the first time in a generation due to the deployment of data centers, electrification and new industry, all while we suffer the increasingly powerful impacts of climate change. Solving these problems while putting Americans to work in family-sustaining union jobs requires coordination and real investment from our federal government.

Despite the Trump administration declaring an energy emergency, it is freezing the investments and firing the people responsible for addressing it. Funding for solar energy deployment, electricity grid infrastructure, manufacturing and energy supply chains has been slowed, frozen and even clawed back, while the federal agency staff responsible for implementation are pushed out or fired. This directly threatens jobs for union members, holds back our country’s energy production, and stops industry from deploying the infrastructure and technology needed for the high-wage, low-carbon economy of the future.

## **Undermining Workers’ Rights Across the Globe**

In March 2025, the Department of Labor terminated all of the projects funded by its Bureau of International Labor Affairs (ILAB). For decades, these projects—the money for which is

congressionally authorized and appropriated—have supported worker rights programs around the world. By improving working conditions globally, these programs have been critical to ensuring that America’s workers are not undercut by countries that exploit forced and child labor or violate wage, safety and other laws to gain an unfair advantage in the global marketplace. The DOL’s decision to eliminate these programs not only undermines the administration’s own efforts to hold its trading partners accountable, but it also broke the law.<sup>82</sup> The DOL’s decision to cancel ILAB’s programming follows the DOGE’s effort to dismantle foreign assistance across the government but primarily through the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), which directly supported global worker rights programming as well.

## **Conclusion: People Who Work for a Living Want a Different Agenda Over the Next 100 Days**

It was clear from our hearings that people who work for a living and the communities they serve are looking for something far different from what the current administration and Congress are offering them. An agenda that reflects their testimony can be best summed up with three simple concepts.

### **Freedom. Fairness. Security.**

**Freedom.** Working people are less free today than they were in January. Exhibit A is the Trump administration’s revocation of the right to bargain from 1 million federal workers because their unions were “fighting back.” People demand the freedom to join a union and collectively bargain, the freedom to speak out and the right to petition their government for redress without the threat of retaliation. Freedom means:

- 1** Restoring bargaining rights to all federal workers who have lost them due to the March 27 executive order and other actions. Congress should pass the bipartisan Protecting America’s Workforce Act and the Rights for the TSA Workforce Act.
- 2** Reinstating Gwynne Wilcox at the NLRB and all other unlawfully fired board members and commissioners of independent agencies administering workers’ rights, so that these agencies may function and operate independently, and workers’ freedoms may be enforced.
- 3** In addition to the rescission of the many anti-worker executive actions cited in this report, the enactment of real labor law reform. Congress should pass the Richard L. Trumka Protecting the Right to Organize (PRO) Act to strengthen the freedom to organize and collectively bargain for private sector workers, and the Public Service Freedom to Negotiate Act to guarantee these freedoms to public sector workers.

**Fairness.** People who work for a living hold a deeply American belief—that if you work hard and play by the rules, you should be able to hold your own and even get ahead in life. Working people believe in fairness. However, what they have seen over the past five months is wildly unfair treatment of public servants, including veterans who have more than earned their right to be treated with respect and decency. Fairness means:

- 1 Honoring contracts.** The collective bargaining agreements unilaterally rescinded by the Trump administration at TSA and all other agencies should be restored.
- 2 Following the law.** Labor unions have had to file dozens of lawsuits seeking to enjoin the Trump administration from unlawful personnel actions and DOGE-related activities. The level of litigation reflects the level of disregard for the law. A good starting place for compliance would be on all employment matters. That is, all reductions in force and other mass firings must follow the process laid out in rules and regulations. Those rules and regulations exist for a reason: fairness.
- 3 Making hiring and firing decisions based on merit.** The removal of civil service protections by the Trump administration opens the doors to favoritism and discrimination, not to mention the deterioration of public services. Diversity, equity and inclusion programs were designed to give everyone a shot at a job. Those should be restored. And any rebranded version of “Schedule F” should be abandoned. Congress should pass the Saving the Civil Service Act.

**Security.** People who work for a living deserve some level of security for all their efforts to work hard and play by the rules. If anything has characterized the past few months, it is a rising sense of insecurity and chaos. Security means:

- 1 Job security.** Mass layoffs in the federal sector, attacks on immigrants, attempts to freeze a variety of federal investments and Trump’s chaotic trade policy have needlessly put our economy at risk of recession. Tariffs should be used strategically to level the playing field for workers in industries facing unfair competition overseas, and Congress and the administration should adopt a pro-worker trade agenda that also invests in domestic industry, discourages offshore outsourcing and enforces labor standards around the world. Congress should pass the No Tax Breaks for Outsourcing Act. The administration should restore grants at ILAB to enforce workers’ rights and fund job-creating projects in clean energy, semiconductor and other industries. Congress should also abandon efforts to diminish or eliminate tax credits for clean energy production, upon which hundreds of thousands of jobs are already depending. Moreover, Congress should drop efforts to cut critical social programs like Medicaid and the Supplemental Nutritional Allowance Program. Not only will those cuts harm the most vulnerable families, they will cause state budgets to tighten and health care provider revenues to suffer, leading to job loss in the public and health care sectors.



- 2** Health care security. Great strides have been made in recent decades to ensure everyone has access to affordable health care, even though much more needs to be done. The expansion of Medicaid has been an important part of that project, ensuring a backstop for working people who lose their jobs or otherwise have no access to affordable health care. Congress should abandon efforts to cut Medicaid or ACA subsidies.
- 3** Affordability. Rampant union-busting that led to stagnant wages and the ongoing effects of pandemic inflation have combined to make it much harder for families to make ends meet. In addition to unleashing workers' freedom to bargain through labor law reform, Congress should pass legislation to raise the minimum wage, including eliminating the tipped wage, and tackle high prices. This means addressing housing and energy supplies and empowering the Federal Trade Commission with the authority to investigate and prosecute price gouging by greedy corporations.



# Endnotes

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# Addendum

## Summary of Hearings

City, State: **Warner Robins, Georgia**

Date: **April 16, 2025**

Location: **Homer J. Walker Civic Center**

No. of Participants: **150**

Chair: **Jeannette McElheny, Secretary-Treasurer, Central Georgia Federation of Trades and Labor Council, AFGE**

### Panelists:

**Staci Fox**, Georgia Budget and Policy Institute

**Rev. Lammon Green**, New Smyrna Baptist Church

**Dot Ridley**, President, Macon Chapter, A. Philip Randolph Institute

**LaRhonda W. Patrick**, Mayor, Warner Robins

**Richard B. Hollar Jr.**, President, Central Georgia Federation of Trades and Labor Council

**Fenika Miller**, Southern Economic Advancement Project

### Testifiers Report:

[Ozia Scott](#), President, AFGE Local 54

*Impacts on federal workers who staff Fort Jackson*

[Kristen Kiefer](#), Engagement Manager for Medicaid campaigns at the American Cancer Society  
Cancer Action Network

*Impacts on Medicaid recipients*

[Delushundra “Dee” Thomas](#), Blue Bird worker and Executive Vice President, USW Local 697  
*Benefits of federal funding for electric vehicle manufacturing; impact of cuts on schools,  
investment in community*

[Horace Cooper](#), Veteran and retired AFGE member

*Impacts on VA services and health care*

[Abby Tighe](#), Terminated probationary employee at CDC’s National Center for Injury Prevention  
and Control and AFGE member

*Impacts on the role the CDC plays in public health and in the Georgia economy; impacts on  
the individuals in the community that she serves following her termination*

### Summary:

**Testimony covered federal workers and Medicaid.**

City, State: **Asheville, North Carolina**

Date: **April 17, 2025**

Location: **A-B Tech Ferguson Auditorium**

No. of Participants: **40**

Chair: **Marybe McMillan, President, North Carolina State AFL-CIO**

Panelists:

**Blake Honeycutt**, President, Western North Carolina Central Labor Council

**State Rep. J. Eric Ager (HD-114)**, veteran and farmer

**State Rep. Lindsey Prather (HD-115)**

**Jen Hampton**, Just Economics

**Ken Towe**, AFGE Local 446; chaplain for Veteran of Foreign Wars

Testifiers Report:

[Darlene Forge](#), AFGE Local 446, nurse at VA

*Cuts and impact*

[James Jones](#), AFGE Local 446, Blue Ridge Parkway worker

*Impact on cleanup of Helene, how that is slowing efforts*

[Tavon Wells](#), President, NALC Branch 248

*U.S. Postal Service*

[Christine Surrette](#), AFGE National Vice President, District 4

*Social Security*

[Lori Hedrick](#), NNU/NNOC; Vice President, Western North Carolina Central Labor Council

*Medicaid*

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City, State: **Chicago, Illinois**

Date: **April 21, 2025**

Location: **SEIU Healthcare Illinois**

No. of Participants: **60 in person, 50 via Zoom**

Chair: **Don Villar, Secretary-Treasurer, Chicago Federation of Labor**

Panelists:

**Bob Reiter**, President, Chicago Federation of Labor

**Fred Redmond**, Secretary-Treasurer, AFL-CIO

**Jill Manrique**, Executive Director, Chicago Jobs With Justice

**Rinda West**, Co-chair, Chicago Jobs With Justice Workers' Rights Board

**Anne Igoe**, Vice President of Health Systems, SEIU HCII

Testifiers Report:

[Patrick Cleary](#), President, Fire Fighters (IAFF) Local 2

[Erik Steinmetz](#), Vice President, IAFF Local 2

[Liliana A. Calderon Castillo](#), Director of Health and Safety, BAC

[Carlos Ginard](#), Vice President, Chicago & Midwest Regional Joint Board of Workers United

[Micah Niemeier-Walsh, Ph.D.](#), Vice President, AFGE Local 3840, Industrial Hygienist

[Tessa Bonney, Ph.D.](#), Assistant Professor, Environmental and Occupational Health Sciences at University of Illinois Chicago School of Public Health (funded by NIOSH); member of UIC United Faculty (Illinois Federation of Teachers) and union representative for School of Public Health

[Brent Barron](#), Retired Department of Labor, AFGE Local 648

[Anne Igoe](#), Vice President of Health Systems, SEIU HCII

[E.J. Jenkins](#), USW Local 1014

[Tina Godinho](#), NNU

[Marcos Cenicerros](#), Warehouse Workers for Justice

Written testimony:

[Alysha Meyers](#), AFGE Local 3840

[Kristen Van Buren](#), AFGE Local 3840

[Tashina Robinson](#), Research Epidemiologist, CDC (NIOSH)

[Ron Neimark](#), Student Liaison, Occupation Health Section of the American Public Health Association

[Hannah Echt, M.S.](#), union steward, AFGE Local 3840

[Jessica Li, M.S.P.H., CIH](#), union steward, AFGE Local 3840

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City, State: **Davenport, Iowa**

Location: **Starlight Ballroom**

Date: **April 22, 2025**

No. of Participants: **255 signed in**  
(but others not captured)

Chair: **Charlie Wishman, President, Iowa Federation of Labor, AFL-CIO**

Panelists:

**Fred Redmond**, Secretary-Treasurer, AFL-CIO



**Elissa McBride**, Secretary-Treasurer, AFSCME

**Dan Gosa**, President, Great River Area Labor Federation

Testifiers Report:

[Pat Stock](#), President, USW Local 105

[Robert Bern](#), President, UAW Quad City Area CAP Council and Vice President, UAW Local 434

[Simplice Kuelo](#), President, UFCW Local 431

[Chad Finch](#), Vice President, AFGE Local 2119

[Matt Lienen](#), Business Manager/Financial Secretary-Treasurer, UA Local 25

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City, State: **Charlotte, North Carolina**

Date: **April 23, 2025**

Location: **IBT Local 71**

No. of Participants: **85**

Chair: **MaryBe McMillan, President, North Carolina State AFL-CIO**

Panelists:

**Sebastian Feculak**, Ironworkers; Vice President, Charlotte-Metrolina Labor Council

**Tiawana Brown**, Charlotte-Metrolina Labor Council; CWA

**Mary Jose Espinosa**, Carolina Migrant Network

**Rev. Dr. Rodney S. Sadler Jr.**, Director of the Center for Social Justice and Reconciliation at Union Presbyterian Seminary

**State Rep. Jordan Lopez (HD-112)**

Testifiers Report:

[Mary Bauder](#), UAW Local 5285

*Tariffs; expecting major layoffs*

[Doug Robinson, M.D.](#), Chair, Health Care Justice • NC; retired doctor

*Working with the community; Medicare and Medicaid; joined by other testifiers*

[Jacqueline Sandle](#), NALC

[Maryann Ruiz](#), Carolina Migrant Network

[Shawn Montgomery](#), SEIU Local 49

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City, State: **Albany, New York**

Date: **April 26, 2025**

Location: **Albany Labor Temple**

No. of Participants: **200**

Chair: **Mark Emanation, Executive Director, Capital District Area Labor Federation**

Panelists:

**U.S. Rep. Paul Tonko (NY-20)**

Testifiers Report:

[Chris Pulley](#), Substance abuse counselor, CWA Local 1101

[Christina Crim](#), ER technician, SEIU 1199

[Jessica Sweet](#), Claims specialist, Social Security Administration, AFGE Local 3343

[JoEllen Welsh, Ph.D.](#), United University Professions, Researcher

[Kim Jensen](#), Public Employees Federation, New York State Department of Health

[Mike Fitzsimmons](#), ICU nurse, New York State Nurses Association

[Zakaya Rhymer](#), Direct support aide, CSEA/AFSCME Local 1000

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City, State: **Tucson, Arizona**

Date: **April 26, 2025**

Location: **IBEW Local 570**

No. of Participants: **120**

Chair: **Fred Yamashita, Secretary-Treasurer and Executive Director, Arizona AFL-CIO**

Panelists:

**State Sen. Priya Sundareshan (SD-18)**

**Anakarina Rodriguez**, Care in Action

**Cecilia Valdez**, CWA, Chair, Pima Area Labor Federation, and Member, Industrial Commission of Arizona

Testifiers Report:

[Omar Algeciras](#), Vice President, AFGE Local 2391

[Jay Crowell](#), AFSCME Local 449



[Margaret Soland](#), IATSE Local 415

[Liliana Jordan](#), NNU/NNOC

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City, State: **Durham, North Carolina**

Date: **April 29, 2025**

Location: **Union of Southern Service Workers**

No. of Participants: **86**

Chair: **MaryBe McMillan, President, North Carolina State AFL-CIO**

Panelists:

**Terrence Dewberry**, President, Triangle Labor Council

**Rev. Charles Clark**, AFL-CIO

**Rev. Dr. Jennifer Copeland**, Executive Director, NC Council of Churches

**Alexandra Forter Sirota**, Executive Director, NC Budget & Tax Center

**leisha Franceis**, Union of Southern Service Workers

Testifiers Report:

[Holly Wilson](#), President, AFGE Local 3347; regulatory engagement, EPA

[Libby Manly](#), NNU/NNOC and CNA; nurse at VA

[Wayne Bostick](#), President and Board Chair, North Carolina State Chapter A. Philip Randolph Institute (APRI)

[Julie Holcomb](#), NNU and CNA, clinical research coordinator at VA

[Mario Vargas](#), Farm Labor Organizing Committee (FLOC), organizer, coordinator and Secretary-Treasurer, (FLOC/Campaign for Migrant Worker Justice)

[Tonya Freeman](#), Vice President, APWU Local 1078, USPS mail processing clerk

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City, State: **Augusta, Maine**

Date: **April 30, 2025**

Location: **UA Local 716**

No. of Participants: **60**

Chair: **Cynthia Phinney, President, Maine AFL-CIO**

Panelists:

**Elizabeth Shuler**, President, AFL-CIO

**Cynthia Phinney**, President, Maine AFL-CIO

Testifiers Report:

[Scott Surette](#), President, Postal Mail Handlers Union (NPMHU) Branch 12

[Liz Harkins](#), President, AFGE Local 2604

[Scott Adams](#), President, APWU Local 458

[Alana Schaeffer](#), President, Portsmouth Metal Trades Council

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City, State: **Anchorage, Alaska**

Date: **May 1, 2025**

Location: **Delaney Park**

No. of Participants: **2,000**

Chair: **Joelle Hall, President, Alaska AFL-CIO**

Speakers:

**Bronson Frye**, Business Agent, Painters and Allied Trades (IUPAT); President, Building and Construction Trades Council of South-Central Alaska

Testifiers Report:

[Mike Macans](#), Small Business Administration Disaster Response Specialist, AFGE Local 1110, veteran

[Morgan Saladino](#), National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Fisheries Scientist, IFPTE Local 8A