



NATIONAL FEDERATION OF FEDERAL EMPLOYEES, IAMAW, AFL-CIO



The Fight for American Democracy:

Dispelling Popular Lies and Myths about the Federal Workforce

Position: **Most Americans are unaware of the true size and nature of the Federal government. Many would be shocked to hear that the number of Federal employees has grown little since the late 1940's and currently stands at its smallest per capita. Unfortunately, some on Capitol Hill tell false tales about the Federal workforce on behalf of others for reasons of political gain or personal enrichment. Sadly, they seek to cloud our open Democracy and its foundational tools by obstructing laws and regulations that benefit the American people, blocking accountability and transparency of leadership, and hindering the Executive Branch from enforcing the law and reporting political corruption.**

The Federal workforce has not grown since 1947 and is its smallest ever per capita.

In raw numbers, the Federal civilian workforce is the same size now (approximately 2 million) as it was in 1952 after the WWII downsizing from 2.6 million employees. Per capita, Federal employees are at the lowest number ever (.597%) when compared to the population of the U.S. from a record high in the late 1940s (1.85%). By contrast, the contractor workforce has expanded to more than 4 million workersⁱ. Nearly 40% of all discretionary tax dollars now goes to private entities totaling more than \$600 billion annually. Per CBO, the entire Federal workforce costs less than a third of contract costs. Plus, Federal employees pay their taxes, so Federal wages go back to the Treasury instead of corporate coffers.

10,000 Federal employees are terminated for cause each year.

A common falsehood often told by some on Capitol Hill is that Federal employees are “impossible” to fire. Each year, approximately 10,000 Federal employees are terminated for cause (conduct or poor performance)ⁱⁱ. This equates to approximately 40 involuntary terminations for cause per workday.

The Federal employee termination rate for cause is the same as the private sector.

The involuntary separations (terminations) rate in the private sector is 1% annuallyⁱⁱⁱ. Of that 1%, about one-third are terminations for cause and two-thirds are layoffs^{iv}. This means that the termination rate for cause in the private sector is .3%. The Federal government's termination rate for cause is also .3%.^v Detractors claim that Merit System Principles hinder the firing of poor performers. They claim Federal unions do the same. Clearly this is false. Merit System Principles buttress accountability throughout the government by deterring political overreach, corruption, poor management, and unfair practices.

The truth behind the MSPB and the FLRA, and the foolish effort to eliminate both.

Federal employees prevail only 18% of the time at the MSPB and only 3% of the time upon appeal to the full board. Management prevails 60% of the time against unions at the FLRA. Some in Congress argue these agencies favor employees. That claim is a lie. They block funding and qualified nominees to weaken these agencies to limit Federal case law that protects the Executive Branch from full political control and corruption (e.g., political bias, Schedule F “loyalty” employment, the Spoils system, etc.).

Why the war by some in Congress against Federal employee unions?

Federal employees do not have to pay union dues, they cannot strike or bargain for pay or benefits, they put their duty before politics, union members' politics extend to both parties, unions do not protect poor performers (*see above*), and most Federal unions get along with management, ...so why the hostilities toward Federal unions from some in Congress? The truth is that Federal unions are the eyes and ears across government. Often unions are the first to uncover efforts to diminish the laws, regulations, and rules that keep government fair, efficient, and effective. Federal unions promote transparency while enforcing accountability. Sadly, not everyone in Congress embraces these democratic principles.



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ⁱ Federation of American scientists. Federation of American Scientists. (2022, June 28).
<https://sgp.fas.org/crs/misc/R43590.pdf>

ⁱⁱ Office, U. S. G. A. (n.d.). *Federal employee misconduct: Actions needed to ensure agencies have tools to effectively address misconduct*. Federal Employee Misconduct: Actions Needed to Ensure Agencies Have Tools to Effectively Address Misconduct | U.S. GAO. <https://www.gao.gov/products/gao-18-48>

ⁱⁱⁱ U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2023, May 31). *Table 5. layoffs and discharges levels and rates by industry and region, seasonally adjusted - 2023 M04 results*. U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.
<https://www.bls.gov/news.release/jolts.t05.htm>

ⁱⁱⁱⁱ Trevor, C., & Piyanontalee, R. (n.d.). *Discharges, poor-performer quits, and layoffs as valued exits: Is it ...* Annual Reviews. <https://www.annualreviews.org/doi/10.1146/annurev-orgpsych-012119-045343>