



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 actual size and nature of the federal government. Many would be surprised to learn that the number of federal employees has grown very little since the late 1940s—and today stands at the smallest per capita level in modern U.S. history. Unfortunately, some in Congress misrepresent the federal workforce to serve political interests or personal agendas. These false narratives undermine public trust and endanger the systems designed to keep the Executive Branch accountable, transparent, and free from corruption and overreach.

The size of the federal workforce hasn't increased since 1952—and it's never been smaller per capita.

The non-postal civilian federal workforce remains at roughly 2 million employees—essentially the same size as it was in 1952. Yet the U.S. population has more than doubled since then. Today, federal workers comprise just 0.597% of the population, down from 1.85% in the 1940s. Meanwhile, Congress has passed tens of thousands of new laws, mandates, and programs for the Executive Branch to implement—yet has provided no significant increase in staffing to carry out this work. The federal workforce's continuing to meet these demands with the same staffing levels is a triumph of efficiency and dedication, not a failure, proving that DOGE is a harmful disaster.

Firing federal employees and DOGE cuts will NOT save tax dollars. It will cost more in the end.

In fiscal year 2023, the federal government spent approximately \$759 billion on contracts—accounting for roughly 45% of all discretionary spending (out of \$1.7 trillion). That spending supports an estimated 3.7 million federal contract workers. By contrast, in fiscal year 2022 (the latest available), the government spent \$271 billion on 2.1 million federal employees, covering salaries and benefits. This represented about 16% of discretionary spending and 4.4% of total federal outlays. Federal employees pay taxes on their earnings, returning an estimated \$40+ billion annually to the U.S. Treasury, assuming a 15% effective tax rate. This reduces the net cost of the federal workforce to around \$231 billion—or approximately 13.5% of discretionary spending and 3.8% of the total federal budget. Meanwhile, contracting dollars are more likely to generate taxpayer-funded corporate profits, which are not directly reinvested into the Treasury. That makes federal employees more cost-effective and a smarter investment in terms of long-term fiscal responsibility.

The Federal employee termination rate is TWICE that of the general workforce.

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) Job Openings and Labor Turnover Survey (JOLTS), approximately 1% of the private-sector workforce is involuntarily separated each year. However, only 25–30% of those separations—or roughly 0.25% to 0.3% overall—are due to performance or conduct issues. The rest are predominantly layoffs. In comparison, data from OPM's FedScope shows that the Executive Branch separates approximately 11,500 employees per year for performance or conduct reasons—roughly 0.55% of the 2.1 million federal workforce. That's nearly double the rate of performance-based terminations in the private sector. Yet critics falsely claim that Merit System Principles and federal unions protect poor performers and obstruct accountability. In reality, Merit System Principles and federal unions are a cornerstone of government integrity that protects the system from political abuse, favoritism, and unlawful firings.

The Truth About the MSPB and FLRA and OSC — And the Foolish Effort to Eliminate Them

Federal employees win just 18% of cases at the MSPB, and only 3% on appeal to the full Board. At the FLRA, management prevails in 60% of cases against unions. Yet some in Congress falsely claim these agencies favor employees. The truth? That claim is a lie. And worse, some lawmakers are actively undermining these institutions, blocking funding and qualified nominees to weaken the legal framework that protects the Executive Branch from political interference, retaliation, and corruption.