



NATIONAL FEDERATION OF FEDERAL EMPLOYEES, IAMAW, AFL-CIO



The Fight for American Democracy: Dispelling Lies and Myths about the Federal Workforce

Position: Most Americans are unaware of the federal government's size and scope. Many would be surprised to learn that the federal workforce has grown very little since the late 1940s and is now the smallest per capita in modern U.S. history. Unfortunately, some members of Congress misrepresent the size, cost, and functions of the federal workforce to advance political objectives or personal agendas. These false narratives erode public trust and weaken the institutions that keep the Executive Branch accountable, transparent, and resistant to corruption, abuse, and overreach.

The federal workforce is no larger today than it was in 1952.

The non-postal civilian federal workforce remains at roughly 2 million employees—the same size as in 1952—even though the U.S. population has more than doubled. Federal employees now make up just 0.6% of the population, the lowest level in modern history. At the same time, Congress has created thousands of new programs, mandates, and responsibilities. The result is a federal workforce doing substantially more work for substantially more Americans without a corresponding increase in staffing.

Federal employees are one of the best bargains in government.

Contractors are vital partners in carrying out government missions, but replacing federal employees with contractors rarely saves money. In fiscal year 2023, the federal government spent approximately \$759 billion on contracts—about 45% of discretionary spending—to support an estimated 3.7 million contract workers. By comparison, the federal government spent about \$271 billion on salaries and benefits for 2.1 million federal employees, representing roughly 16% of discretionary spending. Federal employees also return billions of dollars to the Treasury each year through income taxes, further reducing their net cost. DOGE-era workforce cuts weakened agency capacity, disrupted essential services, and increased long-term costs by eliminating experienced personnel and forcing agencies to do more with less or rely more heavily on contractors. Cutting federal employees does not eliminate the need for oversight; it eliminates the very workforce responsible for managing contracts, preventing waste, and ensuring taxpayer dollars are spent effectively. DOGE is fiscal stupidity at its best.

Federal employees are fired for performance and misconduct at nearly twice the rate of private-sector workers.

The claim that federal employees cannot be fired is a myth. Excluding layoffs, private-sector employers terminate roughly 0.25% to 0.3% of employees each year for performance or conduct reasons (BLS BOLTS). In the federal government, that figure has historically been approximately 0.55%, or about 11,500 employees annually. The evidence is clear: federal managers remove poor performers and employees who engage in misconduct. Merit System Principles and collective bargaining do not shield bad employees; they protect taxpayers by ensuring personnel decisions are lawful, fair, and free from political interference.

The Truth About the MSPB, FLRA, and OSC, and the Dangerous Effort to Weaken Them.

Federal employees win only about 18% of cases before the MSPB and just 3% on appeal to the full Board. At the FLRA, management prevails in roughly 60% of disputes with unions. The data are clear: these agencies do not favor employees. Yet some lawmakers continue to undermine these institutions by withholding funding and blocking qualified nominees. Weakening the MSPB, FLRA, and OSC does not strengthen government accountability. Rather, it weakens the safeguards that protect the civil service from political retaliation, favoritism, abuse of power, and corruption. Bottom line: If you support weakening these agencies, you support corruption and waste in government. It is that simple.