



A Government in Chaos: Trump's first year back in office



About the Partnership

The Partnership for Public Service is a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization that works to revitalize the federal government by inspiring a new generation to serve and by transforming the way government works. The Partnership teams up with federal agencies and other stakeholders to make our government more effective and efficient.

Table of Contents

Introduction	4
Year one of the second Trump administration	7
The administration's unprecedented cuts to federal personnel, grants, and funding	8
Using executive power in new (and potentially illegal) ways	17
The politicization of government functions that have previously been apolitical	20
Looking forward	23
Appendix	25



Introduction

Since his inauguration on Jan. 20, 2025, President Donald Trump has undertaken the most radical transformation of the federal government in over a half-century, arbitrarily slashing the federal workforce, unilaterally dismantling agencies and eliminating critical programs and services. As the country marks the end of the first year of Trump's second term, it is critical to reflect on and assess the totality of these management decisions and their consequences for the American people.

While political leaders have debated and disagreed about the size and role of the federal government, there has always been widespread consensus that whatever the government does, it should do it well and do it in the public interest.

In just a few short months, Trump shattered the fundamental premise that our government exists to serve the public interest. He rejected the 140-year-old notion that federal employees should be chosen based on merit and experience, not on political considerations. And he has dismissed the very idea that public service is a worthwhile and necessary endeavor.

In place of these long-held beliefs, Trump is building a presidency in his image alone, of unrestrained power, enrichment for himself and his supporters and punishment for his perceived enemies.

The Partnership for Public Service's analysis finds that the numerous unilateral actions taken by Trump and his administration have harmed the ability of our government to meet public needs and deal with the country's biggest challenges. The 43 day shutdown that began in October—the [longest in history](#)—caused further disruption of critical government services.

The damage inflicted by the administration has led to the weakening of the federal government's capacity to serve the public's interest in the following ways:

The federal government is less prepared to keep the public safe and is less responsive to public concerns.

The primary responsibility of our government is to keep us safe, but due to the Trump administration's decisions, the country is now less prepared for a terrorist attack than it was pre-9/11, less capable of dealing with a catastrophic natural disaster than before Hurricane Katrina in 2005 and less able to deal with public health concerns than prior to the recent COVID-19 pandemic.

Early in his term, the president attacked the government's national security apparatus, firing leaders of intelligence agencies when he did not like their assessments. The administration also disbanded units such as the FBI task force focused on investigating foreign influence operations and made sweeping cuts to agencies such as the U.S. Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency, which oversees the nation's critical infrastructure.

On the public health front, top leaders from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention were removed while extensive staff and budget cuts were implemented, steps that could weaken the government's ability to respond to public health emergencies. At the same time, the Federal Emergency Management Agency, which helps communities respond to natural disasters, has been plagued by unsteady leadership as well as personnel reductions that threaten its ability to meet the critical needs of those in distress.

In other parts of the government, workforce reductions have worsened the direct interactions many Americans have with the federal government, whether it's the staff cutbacks at the Social Security Administration dramatically increasing wait times for callers and an enormous backlog of cases; the cutting of employees at the Internal Revenue Service that will likely create more problems for taxpayers in 2026; or the loss of doctors and nurses at the Department of Veterans Affairs that could adversely impact medical care.

The Trump White House has consolidated powers unlike any previous administration and turned many functions of the government designed to serve all people fairly into political tools. The administration has weaponized the Department of Justice to attack political opponents as well as purged prosecutors and FBI agents who worked on past investigations involving the president. It has undermined independent agencies like the Merit Systems Protection Board and the National Labor Relations Board that assure both the government and private entities are following laws and treating workers and the public fairly. And it has tried to withhold funds to cities, states and organizations that the administration believes do not agree with its policies.

These actions have politicized the career workforce in a way not seen since the corrupt and inefficient spoils system of the 19th century and have decreased the effectiveness and responsiveness of our government.

The federal government is less transparent and accountable.

By firing 17 inspectors general, who help prevent waste, fraud and abuse, and the head of the Office of Special Counsel, who protects whistleblowers, the administration has hollowed out

elements of the government specifically designed to ensure accountability and promote transparency. Without people in these positions, political leaders can make decisions without having to defend themselves against internal audits or questioning.

The administration has stripped advisory panels of independent expertise, including a [vaccine panel](#) at the CDC now stacked with individuals who have not gone through the usual scientific vetting process. This has resulted in decisions that have ignored established [science and public health research](#).

The administration has been less transparent [regarding government data](#) than previous administrations and taken actions that decrease trust in data that is available. For example, the administration was slow to provide detailed information regarding the number of workforce reductions or the agencies impacted by the cutbacks, leaving the public in the dark about what government functions have been diminished. The administration ended the Department of Agriculture's annual survey of [hunger in America](#), and [fired](#) the commissioner of the Bureau of Labor Statistics Erika McEntarfer after a jobs report that did not align with administration messaging, further devaluing the validity of government data. In January 2026, Trump [published jobs data](#) on social media prior to its official release, a break with long-standing practice that exacerbates the perception that government data is being politicized and is less trustworthy

The president's slash-and-burn approach to the federal workforce and the elimination of a wide array of critical services, programs and research has destabilized the federal government, resulting in seismic shifts for our civil service and dire consequences for the country. All of this has occurred despite the public's [general opposition](#) to such changes. Along with the rampant abuse of power, the Trump administration's actions increase the likelihood that our government, the one institution with the ability to deal with our nation's most critical social, economic and foreign policy challenges, will fall well short of meeting the needs of the American people.

Explaining the chaos created by the administration, along with the efforts to politicize the civil service and haphazardly strip it of unbiased expertise, is not a partisan or political position. Rather, it is a position supporting a healthy democracy that requires a capable government while respecting the rule of law and the separation of powers.

There is no doubt our government should be modernized and waste and inefficiencies eliminated. The Partnership for Public Service has been working to improve the government's performance for more than 20 years, most recently with our [Government for a New Era](#) initiative focusing on reforms to make the federal government more effective, responsive and accountable to the public.



Year one of the second Trump administration

In the first few months of taking office for his second term, Trump delivered an onslaught of executive orders, personnel directives and funding freezes to remake the federal government. While the stated goal of these actions was to create a more efficient and accountable government, our analysis finds that these actions had the opposite effect.

This report is a review of the Trump administration's management of the federal government during the past year and the consequences of the actions taken to slash federal programs and the federal workforce, featuring many of the most impactful and disruptive transformations.

The administration has altered how the government works and fundamental elements of a federal system of checks and balances that has sustained our democracy since the country's inception. And while the administration has claimed to be the [most transparent ever](#), many of their actions have resulted in less efficiency and transparency, and less accountability to the people it serves.

In analyzing the administration's management decisions, we identified three areas that have fundamentally reshaped the federal government and its democratic principles:

- The administration has made arbitrary and dramatic cuts to personnel, grants, funding and programs, hindering the government's ability to serve individuals, businesses and communities across the country.
- The administration has used executive powers in new, and sometimes illegal, ways—breaking norms and usurping powers previously held by Congress and other parts of the federal government.
- The administration has weaponized parts of government to politicize functions that have previously been apolitical.

This report offers details and examples for each of the areas, along with how the Trump administration's unprecedented decisions have impacted the effectiveness and efficiency of the federal government.



The administration's unprecedented cuts to federal personnel, grants, and funding

Trump entered office in January 2025 with plans for quick action that would dramatically change the way the federal government operates. Not only did he and his top aides hold specific views about the role of government, they came to power with a significant distrust of federal employees who they often referred to as the "[deep state](#)."

As the current director of the Office of Management and Budget Russell Vought [said](#) prior to taking office,

"We want the bureaucrats to be traumatically affected...When they wake up in the morning, we want them to not want to go to work because they are increasingly viewed as the villains."

Many of the administration's early actions sowed confusion, distrust and stress within the federal workforce. There were large-scale layoffs of employees, cuts to government programs and the ending of many grants, altering how the government does—or does not—serve the public and the outcomes it can achieve. Not only did the government lose invaluable expertise, it became less responsive to public needs and less prepared to keep Americans safe.

Cuts led by the Department of Government Efficiency

Many of the first management priorities of the new administration were ideas originally proposed by [Project 2025](#), a policy document constructed by the Heritage Foundation, a conservative think tank. These included significant reductions to segments of the federal workforce and the expansion of presidential powers. On day one, the president issued a [record 26 executive orders](#) and established the Department of Government Efficiency, led by billionaire Elon Musk, that was tasked with eliminating waste, fraud and abuse. DOGE and agency leaders cut more than [13,000 contracts](#), [15,000 grants](#) and directed the dismissal of more than 300,000 career civil servants— decisions that were often made arbitrarily and with little regard to the impact on services, programs or functions relied on by the American people.

See the [appendix](#) for a list of the executive orders issued by the Trump administration relating to the management of government.

DOGE further implemented radical changes to how routine [expenses were approved](#), creating bottlenecks and chaos in unexpected ways. The administration put a \$1 limit on most government credit cards—cards that are used across the government to buy supplies, conduct travel and pay for maintenance. This led to numerous interruptions. Labs at the Food and Drug Administration could not order [supplies](#) to continue research projects. [Army contractors](#) who assist in the recovery and identification of soldiers killed in combat could not get paid. Employees at the [National Park Service](#) could not purchase gas to fill government vehicles.

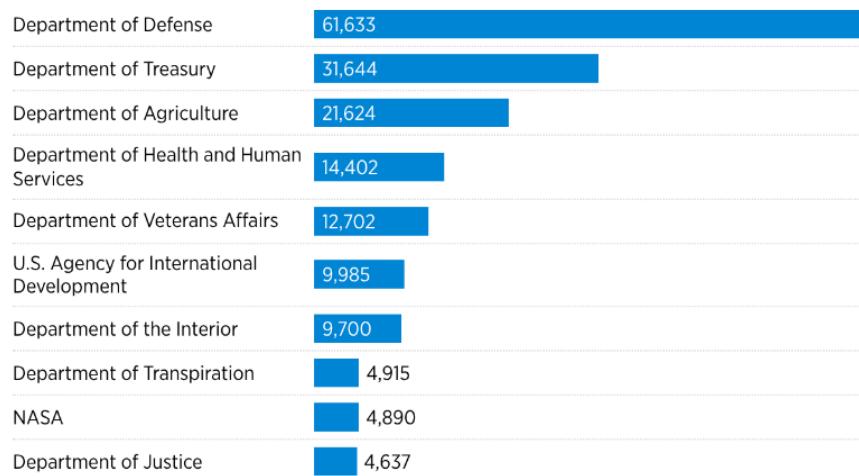
Other cost controls created new bureaucratic obstacles. Homeland Security Secretary Kristi Noem adopted a rule that every contract over \$100,000 required her personal sign-off. During the deadly July [floods in Texas](#), members of FEMA's rescue mission could not get authorization for key purchases for more than 72 hours after the flooding began. Funding cuts to FEMA have even delayed the distribution of assistance for people who had already experienced disasters such as those devastated by [Hurricane Helene](#) in North Carolina in November 2024.

Despite various pronouncements about the ways it cut fraud and waste, DOGE did not save the money it pledged to save. Prior to taking office, Musk [predicted DOGE](#) would cut at least \$2 trillion in waste from the federal budget, later changing the target to \$1 trillion. Once in office, DOGE [published](#) a list of contracts they canceled and claimed a savings of \$214 billion by October. However, the numbers posted have been full of errors and [widely disputed](#) by public reporting. The savings are likely much less than claimed. In fact, overall government [spending increased](#) in 2025 and the amount cut is unknown, [even by Congress](#). Some experts suggest the DOGE cuts—despite the chaos created by immediately ending grants and cancelling contracts—was likely less than [\\$2 billion](#), less than 1% of the original prediction.

Sweeping cuts to federal personnel

Within weeks of taking office, the administration reduced the federal workforce by tens of thousands of employees—often in sudden and haphazard ways. While the administration was slow to release official data about how many people have been terminated or incentivized to leave government, the Office of Personnel Management [announced](#) that more than 320,000 federal employees had departed the government throughout the year.

10 agencies with the most workforce reductions



Data as of Dec. 16, 2025

Source: Partnership for Public Service's "The Cost to Your Government"

Total separations between January and November 2025.

Source: [The Washington Post's analysis of OPM data](#)

Personnel separations were made across the government. According to an analysis by [The Washington Post](#) of OPM data through November, the Department of Veterans Affairs lost about 50,000 employees—more than any other agency—including many [health care positions](#). The Treasury Department lost 29,000, with the bulk of the layoffs at the [IRS](#). The Army, Department of Agriculture, Department of Homeland Security, Navy, Air Force and Department of Defense each lost more than 20,000.

It is impossible to gain a full picture of the layoffs and their impact. The administration has provided few specifics about what positions have been eliminated and which personnel have been laid off or incentivized to resign, meaning the only way to know about many layoffs has been from media reports. For example, the Department of Health and Human Services [refused](#) to confirm numbers or offices impacted by layoffs and it was news reports that revealed that the entire staff of the CDC's Washington, D.C., office, which has long-supported Congress in helping constituents, was eliminated.

Many of the layoffs have been challenged in the courts, further complicating the impact of the workforce reductions on the effectiveness of government activities and the personal lives of federal employees.

The largest method of reducing the workforce early in the year was the deferred resignation program which accounted for more than [80,000 employees by July](#). Under that approach, employees were given the option to resign at a future date, after which they were often placed on paid administrative leave until the agreed upon date.

Federal employees were given multiple opportunities to voluntarily leave service. However, the options were often confusing. The most publicized occasion was in February when OPM sent an email with the subject line, "[Fork in the Road](#)." The email told employees they could agree to a deferred resignation and be paid through September or decline the offer and risk losing their job entirely. Some observers warned the offer included unclear provisions, few guarantees and a

waiving of certain legal rights, placing employees in a precarious position. Some of those who chose the resignation offer later faced delays and errors in processing their benefits and retirement packages.

Also in February, the administration terminated many federal employees who were serving a probationary period based on a claim of “poor performance,” despite prior reviews showing no such issues for many of those terminated. However, the cuts were made hastily with little thought about the roles or individuals. New hires, workers who get promoted and those who switch agencies often serve a probationary period for the first year in their new position. The arbitrary decision to lay off thousands of probationary workers meant many who received excellent performance reviews were let go because they had recently changed jobs. The policy also resulted in the removal of new talent recently brought into the workforce.

Some of the workers let go due to the probationary firings were subsequently reinstated by court order, though in certain cases their agencies placed them on administrative leave and subsequently fired them after the Supreme Court stayed the original injunction in early April.

Other firings were a result of the administration’s efforts to remove “diversity, equity, and inclusion” initiatives from the federal government. Certain federal employees who worked on DEI issues—or even just attended DEI-related training—were fired for having participated in conversations or projects related to diversity.

While the justification for the layoffs was often to save money, the process created new costs instead. For example, a Washington Post report found the government paid \$86.5 million to compensate more than 2,600 employees at the Environmental Protection Agency placed on administrative leave for seven months and not allowed to work. Those employees were later fired.

Unilateral cuts to government grants and programs

The Trump administration has asserted the power of the executive branch to impound—meaning to delay or withhold—funds to programs that have been appropriated by Congress. By making hasty, wide-sweeping—and possibly illegal—cuts, the administration effectively instituted unilateral budgetary decisions without respect for the congressional power of the purse.

One of Trump’s first executive orders was to freeze most foreign aid. That was followed by a stop-work order on all existing foreign assistance awards. Within weeks, the U.S. Agency for International Development was dissolved, with most of its staff laid off or placed on administrative leave. Programs were cut, such as aid to South Sudan that funded cholera response efforts. Humanitarian assistance to conflict-ravaged Myanmar was cut, closing thousands of schools and child protection programs. As a result, scores of children have been forced into unwanted marriages, manual labor and prostitution. Some studies of the impact of USAID suggest that as many as 14 million lives could be lost through 2030 as a result of the aid cuts.

Trump's cuts impacted numerous other important government functions. The administration cut more than \$1.5 billion in [research investments](#) through the National Science Foundation, damaging thousands of active research and scientific studies. Also terminated were more than \$2 billion in medical research funded by the National Institutes of Health, [disrupting](#) more than 380 clinical trials affecting 74,000 patients. This resulted in the delays or cancellations of important research, such as a study involving a promising new treatment to fight [gastrointestinal cancers](#). Grants were also denied to help local officials respond to public health threats such as a [measles outbreak](#) in Texas, New Mexico and Oklahoma.

Congress is considering a [spending package](#) that would reject many of the research cuts proposed by the administration and a number of legal challenges are in the works, but past delays and interruptions of studies cannot easily be undone, even if funding is restored.

Other cuts came as a result of the [executive order](#) ending spending on “diversity, equity and inclusion” programs. These cuts involved a wide range of programs for simply including language relating to equity, such as one [supporting students](#) with hearing or vision loss and a program in [sub-Saharan Africa](#) aimed at growing “equity through savings accounts.”

Claiming the public media system has been politically biased, the White House and Congress [canceled](#) \$1.1 billion in funding to the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, which later [voted](#) to shut down entirely. Most of that money funded more than 1,500 locally-operated public television and radio stations, some of which have since [gone off the air](#). In many communities—particularly in [rural areas](#)—the public radio station is one of the few sources of local and emergency-related news available to residents.

Mismanagement of the federal workforce

Not only did thousands of federal employees lose their jobs, but the administration attempted to make the lives of those remaining employees more difficult by limiting their rights and not providing proper work conditions. In addition, Trump removed leaders from agencies that handle appeals regarding employee personnel actions, including the Merit Systems Protection Board.

Within weeks of taking office, the administration issued a [return-to-work order](#), which ended the hybrid model used by many agencies and forced most employees to return to in-person work. However, the order was not well-planned, and many employees returned to non-existent spaces or unprepared workplaces. [Reports](#) of offices without electricity or Wi-Fi were common. Some employees had no assigned desks and many people—including some who handle classified information—were [forced to work](#) in crowded conference rooms. Others reported [shortages](#) of equipment and toilet paper. Some returned to work only to be [ordered](#) to return home or spent hours waiting in security and parking lines.

In August, OPM canceled the [2025 Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey](#) after months of delays. The survey had been administered since 2002 and annually since 2010—satisfying the annual employee survey obligation required by law for many agencies. The FEVS has served as a critical management tool that agency leaders relied on to understand workforce perspectives, identify opportunities for improvement, make evidence-based decisions about workplace policies

and drive [organizational performance](#). While the administration said it will revise the survey and field it in 2026, the cancellation left a big void by denying the opportunity for federal workers to share their perspectives and for government leaders to identify and deal with a wide range of workplace issues.

In an attempt to gather information usually obtained through OPM's yearly survey, the Partnership for Public Service conducted its own [survey of federal employees](#), with results expected in March 2026.

Ending programs for getting high quality talent into the federal workforce

One of the first executive orders signed by Trump was a [federal hiring freeze](#) that was extended several times over the course of the year. Not only did this mean that important vacant roles could not be filled, but pathways for new talent were cut off. The Justice Department was forced to [cancel](#) summer internship programs and revoke job offers to dozens of law students selected through competitive honors programs. Other programs, such as the State Department's [Pathways Internship Program](#), were ended. These changes prevented talented, young individuals from entering the federal workforce.

The administration also scrapped the prestigious [Presidential Management Fellows program](#), established in 1977 and a pipeline for early-career talent to enter federal service. The program has served as a prominent method for encouraging talented graduate students to join the government and has included alumni such as former NASA Administrator Sean O'Keefe, Deputy Commissioner Arjun Mody of the Social Security Administration, and Sens. Andy Kim (D-N.J.) and Jeff Merkley (D-Ore.).

For an aging federal workforce—where less than [8% of full time employees](#) are under the age of 30, compared with about 20% of the U.S. labor force overall—the dissolution of these various entry programs will hinder efforts to attract new, younger and skilled talent into the federal government.

In December, the administration began a new recruiting project called the [U.S. Tech Force](#) aimed at hiring about 1,000 top-level technical employees. However, the layoffs of workers earlier in the year at preexisting programs for adding high quality talent, such as the [U.S. Digital Service](#) and the General Services Administration's 18F, may have discouraged top candidates from pursuing these careers and left a significant void for many months. Those cuts required the marshalling of additional resources to create a new program. Keeping the existing infrastructure of the previous programs may have been more efficient and cost-effective.

Harms to the American people

The decisions to lay off workers and cut funding were made arbitrarily and with little consideration of the importance of certain government jobs or the quality of the individuals dismissed. The cuts have depleted the government of critical expertise, robbed it of the capacity to respond quickly to public needs and made Americans less secure at home and around the world, all at [increased cost](#) to the taxpayers.

Some of the country's most critical services were damaged. The [Federal Aviation Administration](#) laid off roughly 400 probationary employees despite staff shortages. About 350 employees at the National Nuclear Security Administration were [abruptly laid off](#) despite their sensitive roles in maintaining and modernizing the country's nuclear weapons enterprise. One day later, following a public outcry, the agency's acting director issued a memo rescinding most of those firings.

Thousands of staff and leaders were [fired](#) at the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) and National Institutes of Health with little regard for the expertise or work of the employees. Medical experts and some lawmakers have [decried](#) that these cuts will leave the nation [vulnerable](#) to public health threats without experienced leadership.

Services relied on by individuals and communities across the country were disrupted. Cuts at the Education Department led to [glitches and delays](#) for students looking to secure financial aid. Staff cuts at the U.S. Forest Service reduced the agency's [firefighting capacity](#). Funds appropriated for modernizing the nation's [emergency alert system](#) were withheld. And cuts at the Department of [Veterans Affairs](#) led to a slew of problems harming veterans including the disruption of studies involving patients awaiting experimental treatments and the firing of key support staff at hospitals.

American businesses were affected as well. [Small businesses](#) around the country that relied on contracts with the federal government lost key sources of revenue. Numerous employees at the [International Trade Administration](#) were fired, an agency that promotes industry and exports abroad. The Department of Homeland Security terminated the [Critical Infrastructure Partnership Advisory Council](#), a group that enabled threat intelligence sharing from private-sector partners. And [highly skilled workers](#) at the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Agency who protect the nation's water systems and power grids were let go.

While some initial cuts and funding freezes were eventually reversed, and others were overturned in court, the delays and confusion that resulted severely diminished the capability and continuity of these services for the American people.

The Partnership for Public Service has been continuously documenting the effects of these cuts through its [Federal Harms Tracker](#) products. [The Cost to Your Government](#) tracker is chronicling the dismantling of the federal workforce by sharing information about employee reductions. [The Cost to Your Community](#) map provides examples of harms or risks at a local level for every congressional district in the country.

The Partnership will continue to update these resources and provide others to demonstrate how the administration's cuts are putting the country's safety, prosperity and well-being at risk.

Other examples of harms resulting from the Trump administration's funding and personnel cuts

- Wait times for customer service calls to Social Security have [increased dramatically](#) and record backlogs have [delayed basic services](#) to millions of customers.
- Cuts to the National Weather Service workforce could degrade [disaster warning systems](#).
- Cuts at the Department of Veterans Affairs have increased wait times for medical appointments, while doctors and nurses across the country are [rejecting job offers](#) due to instability within the agency. The department plans to [eliminate](#) as many as 35,000 mostly unfilled health care positions, including doctors and nurses.
- More than half of colleges have seen noticeable [decreases](#) in responsiveness from the Department of Education regarding financial aid, leaving many students confused or misinformed.
- More than 90 national parks have [reported problems](#) with maintaining public lands, staffing visitor centers and collecting visitor fees.
- Staff and funding cuts at the Small Business Administration have left entrepreneurs across the country with [fewer options](#) for loans and other support.
- Americans are more likely to [face challenges](#) filing taxes in 2026 due to sizable Internal Revenue Service staff cuts.
- The Department of Agriculture [cut two programs](#) that provide more than \$1 billion for schools and food banks to purchase food from local farms and ranchers, potentially causing millions of children to lose access to free school meals.
- Hundreds of nonprofits focused on community safety, support for domestic violence victims and training for police officers have [lost over \\$800 million](#) in funding from the Department of Justice.
- After losing thousands of staffers and top career leaders, the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) has been hampered in its ability to protect the public from health problems and deal with emergencies.

Most Americans oppose the administration's cuts

In general, the American people have not been supportive of these drastic changes. Throughout 2025, public opinion surveys have consistently demonstrated that the public is mostly opposed to the government workforce reductions.

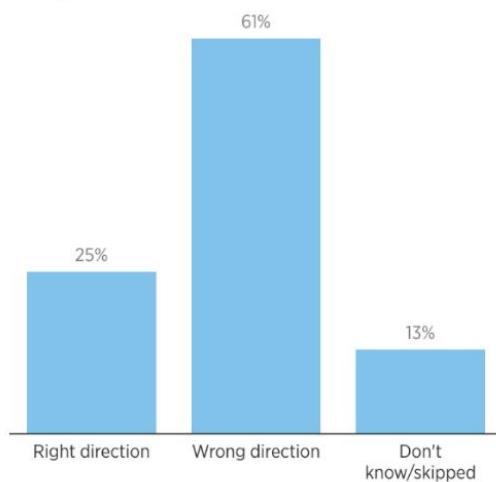
In October, a nationally representative [survey](#) conducted by the Partnership found that 61% of Americans said the government is headed in the “wrong direction” compared with only 25% who said it is headed in the “right direction.” Fifty-nine percent said Trump’s changes to the federal government’s workforce will have a negative impact compared with only 28% who said the impact will be positive.

The public is also concerned about the loss of experience in the federal workforce. In March, an [online poll](#) found almost two-thirds of the respondents (64%) said they are concerned about the loss of “experience and knowledge” from the workforce. That included 85% of Democrats, 63% of independents and 44% of Republicans.

Throughout 2025, increasing amounts of the public noticed the impact of the cuts.

Americans are concerned about the management of the federal government

“Would you say the management of the federal government is headed in the right direction or wrong direction?”



Numbers may not add to 100 due to rounding.

Source: Partnership for Public Service survey of 1,096 U.S. adults, Oct. 9-13, 2025, using the AmeriSpeak probability panel.

In an [online poll](#) conducted by the Partnership in September, 46% of respondents said they or someone they know had been personally affected by the government cuts. That was a substantial increase from March when only 29% of respondents said they knew someone personally impacted.

Those September results also showed a particularly prevalent impact among younger adults, with six in 10 respondents between the ages of 18 to 24 reporting they knew someone affected, versus only 33% of adults ages 65 and above.

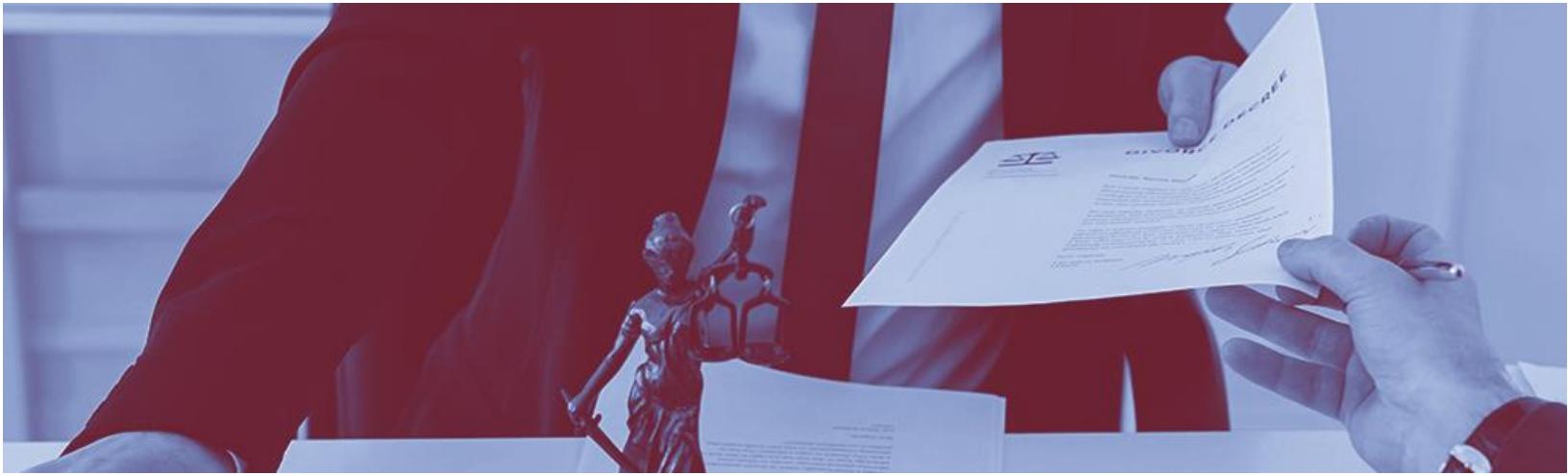
Do you know anyone personally who has been impacted by the Trump administration's cuts to the federal government?

	I was	Someone I know	Yes combined	No
Overall	16%	30%	46%	48%
Democrats	17%	38%	55%	38%
Republicans	22%	15%	37%	60%
Independents	10%	36%	46%	46%

“Don’t know” responses are not displayed. Numbers may not add to 100 due to rounding.

Source: Partnership for Public Service online survey of 1,000 U.S. adults conducted Sept. 12-15, 2025.

The fact that so many people said they are noticing the impact suggests the issue is not just an inside-the-Beltway story. Rather, people around the country are seeing how such changes are affecting their communities and lives.



Using executive power in new (and potentially illegal) ways

During a tumultuous first year, the president challenged numerous legal and political conventions including many aimed at fostering transparency and accountability for public figures. In many instances, the administration did not wait to discover whether tactics were legal but acted first and dealt with the ramifications later.

Following the “[unitary executive theory](#),” the administration has insisted the president alone has authority over the entire executive branch including the funding and operation of federal agencies.

Critics fear the consolidation of powers bypasses the role of Congress, decreases [presidential accountability](#) and makes it harder for the public to understand how and why decisions are made. It also sets a dangerous precedent that future administrations may use to justify changes to government funding or the federal workforce without consulting Congress or agency leaders.

Efforts to consolidate power

Trump signed more than [140 executive orders](#) in the first 100 days, more than any other president in the same period. Of those, more than 25 were directed at remaking the federal government.

Through its actions, the Trump administration has challenged many of the norms and laws that have previously governed the country’s system of checks and balances. Unlike any other modern presidential administration, the [Office of Management and Budget](#) under Director Russell Vought has exerted extensive control over policy and budget decisions including the impoundment of funds.

In a [February executive order](#), the administration asserted more power over “so-called ‘independent regulatory agencies,’” thus giving OMB and the White House greater control over agency budgets and requiring them to [submit draft regulations](#) to the White House for review.

The administration has used claims of such executive power to undermine some boards and commissions while unilaterally altering the partisan composition of others. Among those affected

are the Nuclear Regulatory Commission, the National Transportation Safety Board and the Federal Trade Commission.

The removal of government watchdogs

Despite claims they wanted to root out waste, fraud and abuse, the administration has weakened some of the key entities charged with preventing government abuse. Trump fired the head of the Office of Special Counsel, Hampton Dellinger, when he challenged the administration's firing of thousands of federal workers. This firing of the head of the independent agency charged with protecting the rights of federal employees served as a deterrence for other federal employees, suggesting that questioning the administration's actions could result in losing one's job.

The president also fired 17 presidentally-appointed inspectors general, leaving more than 75% of such positions vacant. Historically, inspectors general serve across administrations regardless of when or by which president they were appointed. They play a crucial, independent role to investigate, prevent and eliminate fraud. In 2024, inspectors general saved the government over \$70 billion. The removal of these key positions undercut important guardrails that were specifically created to prevent government waste and abuse.

The firing of Senate-confirmed appointees at independent agencies

Trump defied long-held norms by sacking many Senate-confirmed appointees at independent agencies with whom he disagreed, a power that might be sanctioned later this year by the Supreme Court in a case involving the Federal Trade Commission.

The court's ruling could upend a 90-year-old precedent that has curbed executive power to dismiss without cause the members of independent government organizations where decisions on everything from securities and bank regulation to consumer and labor protections are supposed to be based on evidence rather than political or special interest considerations.

Among those Trump sought to remove was Lisa Cook from the Federal Reserve's board of governors, who Trump publicly accused of mortgage fraud without her actually being charged with a crime. Cook remains on the job as her case works its way through the courts, although the Federal Reserve may end up being exempt from the Supreme Court's pending ruling involving independent agencies. Her attempted dismissal, however, sent shockwaves through the financial community and came after Trump's repeated attacks on the Federal Reserve for not cutting interest rates fast enough.

Appointees to these independent agencies often serve multiple administrations and are generally selected based on their experience and knowledge rather than partisan concerns. The Trump administration's control of these agencies will undermine their ability to make truly independent recommendations, and instead serve as political tools for the White House to accumulate power and sway decision-making.

The appointment of officials to multiple roles

Another unconventional move by the administration has been to appoint officials to multiple, disparate positions. While Marco Rubio was confirmed to be secretary of State on Inauguration Day, he has [since been named](#) national security advisor, head of the U.S. Agency for International Development and acting archivist at the National Archives and Records Administration. Each of those jobs is an important, challenging role requiring full-time attention and proficiency. By having individuals perform such dissimilar jobs, agencies and federal employees are left without devoted leaders who can focus on the management and mission of the organization.

Other officials have also been asked to juggle [multiple roles](#)—many with disconnected responsibilities. Army Secretary Daniel Discroll was also named acting director of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives, an agency tasked with confronting crime in American communities and a far cry from his military duties. Special Presidential Envoy for Special Missions Richard Grenell was also appointed the director of the recently renamed Trump Kennedy Center.



The politicization of government functions that have previously been apolitical

The adversarial stance toward civil servants has been accompanied by an opposition to the 140-year-old notion that federal employees should be nonpartisan and chosen based on merit and experience as opposed to political considerations. The administration's efforts will allow federal employees to be fired for partisan reasons and replaced with loyalists. Such a change creates more opportunities for corruption, as was seen in the [spoils system](#) of the 19th century, and means the government is not staffed by people who are most qualified to serve but rather those most loyal to the president of the day. The government will have less knowledge and experience dealing with major problems facing the country, especially during times of crisis.

Politicizing the workforce

Initially proposed during Trump's first term as Schedule F, the administration has created a new employment category called [Schedule Policy/Career](#). Once implemented, the Schedule P/C rule will allow agency leaders to reclassify an estimated tens of thousands of federal employees in "policy-influencing" roles who were hired for their expertise, not their political affiliation. After being reclassified, employees in Schedule P/C will no longer have due process protections and will be at risk of being arbitrarily fired.

In July, the administration announced the creation of [Schedule G](#), another new employment category for positions of a policy-making or policy-advocating character normally subject to change as a result of a presidential transition. The new category would create even more positions for political appointees which could produce [redundant positions](#) and undercut the power of the nonpartisan civil service.

Additionally, the administration is infusing the previously merit-based hiring process with elements that emphasize [loyalty](#) and alignment with the president's political priorities. The [hiring plan](#) includes four voluntary open-ended essay questions for many job announcements including one that asks applicants to name their favorite Trump administration policy. Federal employee unions have [sued](#) OPM, claiming it is a "thinly veiled" loyalty test and runs counter to the nonpartisan nature of the civil service.

Politicizing expert recommendations

Traditionally, government agencies and independent boards have been given wide latitude to make recommendations based on nonpartisan expertise. Not only has the administration fired leaders at some of these agencies, they made additional moves to politicize decisions, allowing political appointees to overrule career experts. In the view of the Trump White House, these agencies are not, in fact, independent as Brendan Carr, chairman of the Federal Communications Commission, [stated](#) in a December hearing.

The administration forced the Environmental Protection Agency to [remove](#) basic facts connecting human activity to climate change from its website. Secretary of Health and Human Services Robert F. Kennedy Jr. [removed](#) all 17 members of a vaccine advisory committee that makes policy recommendations for the CDC. He then replaced them with [eight new members](#) who had previously expressed vaccine skepticism, concerning many medical experts. Within months, the new panel [changed](#) the universal recommendation that all newborns be given the hepatitis B vaccine and later altered recommendations for the entire [vaccine schedule without](#) significant consultation with career scientists.

A study by [Bloomberg Law](#) found that the administration eliminated 160 expert advisory committees across the government. These committees provide highly specialized guidance and explain dense scientific topics for both government agencies and the public. Terminated committees ranged from the Bureau of Labor Statistics Technical Advisory Committee to the National Cancer Institute Initial Review Group to the Civil Nuclear Trade Advisory Committee. Numerous other [committees](#) have stopped meeting or no longer have members.

The weaponizing of government

The administration has used intimidation tactics and threats of funding cuts and lawsuits to force entities inside and outside of the government to follow its policy goals.

While the Department of Justice has traditionally been independent of political interference from the White House, the Trump administration has inserted itself into many important legal decisions, undermining how it enforces the rule of law. Not only has the DOJ investigated and brought charges against Trump's political opponents after the president urged it to do so, but the administration [fired](#) high-level prosecutors who refused to bring charges in those cases. Several appointments of [U.S. attorneys](#) that circumvented normal procedures have been found to be [unlawful](#) by courts. Former DOJ officials have [condemned](#) the weaponization of the department and warned of widespread corruption.

Investigations into officials such as Federal Reserve Chair Jerome Powell, who Trump has criticized repeatedly for not cutting interest rates enough, have been seen by many as an attempt to influence the independent decisions made by the nation's central bank.

Investigations against Trump allies, such as former [Rep. Jeff Fortenberry](#) (R-Neb.), have been dropped, and the president has used the pardoning power to benefit people such as [Changpeng](#)

[Zhao](#), the founder of a cryptocurrency exchange who pleaded guilty to money-laundering violations and whose company struck a deal with the Trump family's crypto business.

The administration [revoked](#) billions of dollars of research funds for major universities, demanding schools agree to follow specific hiring and admission policies. Trump also moved to terminate federal government contracts with several large [law firms](#) unless they complied with policy demands.

Other government leaders have been fired for obviously partisan reasons. After a jobs report on the labor market that Trump disapproved of, he [fired](#) the commissioner of the Bureau of Labor Statistics Erika McEntarfer, traditionally an apolitical, nonpartisan role. Her removal damages the perceived independence of government statistics relied upon by policymakers and investors.

Trump even fired [Susan Monarez](#), who he appointed the director of the CDC, for clashing with Health Secretary Kennedy over vaccine policy.

Such firings suggest that the administration might use any policy disagreement as grounds for dismissal regardless of a person's experience or service.



Looking forward

The first year of the second Trump administration created unprecedented challenges for the federal government, and ultimately for the country as a whole. In 2025, the president and his appointees purged the government of more than [300,000 employees](#), began the politicization of the nonpartisan civil service, unilaterally dismantled agencies created by Congress, halted critical programs and services, and sought retribution against political opponents and perceived enemies.

With a diminished capacity to effectively serve the public as well as the use of often unchecked presidential authority, the administration will likely continue the steady erosion of norms, rules and the law in 2026 that are critical for an accountable, transparent and responsible government.

The continued attacks on the federal workforce will likely play out with [new rules](#) allowing the administration to arbitrarily and without due process protections fire tens of thousands of federal employees in “policy-influencing” roles who were hired for their expertise, not their political affiliation. At the same time, the administration has altered the hiring process to prioritize political loyalty, not merit, which risks further politicizing the workforce.

This radical transformation will go even further, with Trump already having defied long-held norms by removing leaders of independent federal organizations with whom he disagrees, a power likely to be fully sanctioned later this year by the [Supreme Court in a case involving the Federal Trade Commission](#).

Elsewhere, Trump will scale his efforts at retribution against individuals and institutions he believes wronged him, including using the Justice Department as a weapon to go after his perceived enemies and critics.

While the administration is working to change the focus of the federal government, the upcoming year coincides with the celebration of 250 years since the signing of the Declaration of Independence. While it is important to understand what has occurred and to oppose the erosion of the nonpartisan civil service, the dismantling of important government functions and the weakening of our democracy, focusing on the problems is not sufficient. It is also critical to lay out a new path forward to make government work better for the American people and ensure it meets 21st century needs.

The Partnership for Public Service's [Government for a New Era](#) initiative is focused on developing ideas and plans to make government more effective, responsive and accountable. We will particularly focus on ensuring that personnel, management and technology systems are set up to drive meaningful results and efficiently use taxpayer resources. But we cannot do this alone. We are collaborating with policymakers, practitioners, stakeholder groups and members of the public to advance bold, forward-looking improvements.

Appendix: Executive Orders issues by the Trump administration focused on the management of government

Noteworthy executive orders pertaining to the management of the federal government during the first year of Trump's second administration:

Executive Order 14147, “[Ending the Weaponization of the Federal Government](#),” Jan. 20.

- Directs the attorney general and Director of National Intelligence, with all department and agency heads, to review activities of departments and agencies exercising civil or criminal enforcement authority to identify times in which law enforcement or the intelligence community was “weaponized” against those who opposed the prior administration’s policies.

Executive Order 14148, “[Initial Rescissions of Harmful Executive Orders and Actions](#),” Jan. 20.

- Rescinds a number of Biden administration executive orders and memos and directs the heads of each agency to take immediate steps to end the implementation of “DEI ideology.”

Executive Order 14151, “[Ending Radical and Wasteful Government DEI Programs and Preferencing](#),” Jan. 20.

- Instructs federal agencies to end all diversity, equity, inclusion and accessibility policies, programs, preferences and activities and revise all related federal employment practices, union contracts and training policies or programs.

Executive Order 14158, “[Establishing and Implementing the President’s ‘Department of Government Efficiency’](#),” Jan. 20.

- Creates the Department of Government Efficiency by renaming the United States Digital Service to the United States DOGE Service, establishing agency DOGE teams, requesting USDS access to all unclassified agency records, software and IT systems, and directing USDS to launch a software modernization initiative for government-wide technology systems.

Executive Order 14170 “[Reforming the Federal Hiring Process and Restoring Merit to Government Service](#),” Jan. 20.

- Directs relevant White House and agency staff to create a federal hiring plan that prioritizes recruitment of those “dedicated to the furtherance of American ideals, values and interests,” implements skills-based hiring efforts and reduces the average time to hire for the federal government.

Executive Order 14171, “[Restoring Accountability to Policy-Influencing Positions Within the Federal Government](#),” Jan. 20.

- Establishes a new federal employment category, “Schedule Policy/Career,” formerly known as “Schedule F,” permitting the reassignment of career federal employees in policymaking or related roles into this category which would eliminate certain employment protections for reassigned workers, making them easier to fire.

Executive Order 14173, “[Ending Illegal Discrimination and Restoring Merit-Based Opportunity](#),” Jan. 21.

- Directs federal agencies to eliminate diversity, equity and inclusion policies and affirmative action practices, ends affirmative action programs among federal contractors, revokes prior DEI-related executive orders and encourages the private sector to end DEI-related activities.

Executive Order 14185, “[Restoring America’s Fighting Force](#),” Jan. 27.

- Eliminates all diversity, equity and inclusion offices within the Department of Defense and Department of Homeland Security and prohibits the Department of Defense and armed forces from promoting any “divisive concepts,” among other ideologies or ideas.

Executive Order 14192, “[Unleashing Prosperity Through Deregulation](#),” Jan. 31.

- Orders federal agencies to provide at least 10 existing regulations to be repealed when they publicly propose a new regulation and ensure that any new costs associated with regulations are offset by the elimination of existing regulations.

Executive Order 14207, “[Eliminating the Federal Executive Institute](#),” Feb. 10.

- Eliminates the Federal Executive Institute, a center for executive and management development and training for senior civil servants.

Executive Order 14210, “[Implementing the President’s ‘Department of Government Efficiency’ Workforce Optimization Initiative](#),” Feb. 11.

- Directs agency heads to prepare for large-scale reductions in force, prioritizing offices with functions not mandated by statute; requires that most agencies hire no more than one employee for every four that depart.

Executive Order 14211, “[One Voice for America’s Foreign Relations](#),” Feb. 12.

- Mandates that all federal employees involved in foreign affairs faithfully execute the president’s agenda and directs the secretary of state to reform the Foreign Service to ensure this occurs.

Executive Order 14215, “[Ensuring Accountability for All Agencies](#),” Feb. 18.

- Asserts that independent regulatory agencies are subject to presidential supervision and control; requires that independent agencies submit all regulatory actions to the Executive Office of the President before publication in the Federal Register.

Executive Order 14217, “[Commencing the Reduction of the Federal Bureaucracy](#),” Feb. 19.

- Terminates the Presidential Management Fellows program, eliminates all Federal Executive Boards, reduces several independent agencies or federal corporations to only their statutorily required functions, terminates several Federal Advisory Committees and directs agencies to prepare a list of additional entities and committees deemed unnecessary.

Executive Order 14219, “[Ensuring Lawful Governance and Implementing the President’s ‘Department of Government Efficiency’ Deregulatory Initiative](#),” Feb. 19.

- Requires all executive agencies to review existing regulations and identify those that are “unlawful” or “unconstitutional”, exceed statutory authority, impose costs on private parties or “harm the national interest”; directs agencies to de-prioritize the enforcement of regulations not based on statute.

Executive Order 14222, “[Implementing the President’s ‘Department of Government Efficiency’ Cost Effective Initiative](#),” Feb. 26.

- Directs agencies to centralize and publicly justify contract and grant payments, review and cut or modify existing contracts, travel, credit card use and real property and freeze agency employee credit cards for 30 days.

Executive Order 14236, “[Additional Rescissions of Harmful Executive Orders and Actions](#),” March 14.

- Rescinds several prior executive orders relating to government management including [Executive Order 14026](#) which increased the minimum wage for federal contractors.

Executive Order 14238, “[Continuing the Reduction of the Federal Bureaucracy](#),” March 14.

- Directs that the functions and personnel of the Federal Mediation and Conciliation Service, U.S. Agency for Global Media, Woodrow Wilson Center, Institute of Museum and Library Services, U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness, Community Development Financial Institutions Fund and Minority Business Development Agency are reduced to only those which are required by law.

Executive Order 14239, “[Achieving Efficiency Through State and Local Preparedness](#),” March 18.

- Seeks to realign the role of state and local governments to play a greater role in disaster preparedness; orders the review of all federal preparedness and response policies and recommendations for revisions, recissions and replacements; mandates the creation of a National Resilience Strategy.

Executive Order 14240, “[Eliminating Waste and Saving Taxpayer Dollars by Consolidating Procurement](#),” March 20.

- Designates the General Services Administration as the entity which purchases “common goods and services” for the federal government and the GSA administrator as the executive agent for all government-wide IT acquisition contracts.

Executive Order 14243, “[Stopping Waste, Fraud and Abuse by Eliminating Information Silos](#),” March 25.

- Requires agency heads to take steps to grant any official designated by the administration full access to all records, data, software and IT systems for the purposes of “identify[ing] and eliminat[ing] waste, fraud and abuse.”

Executive Order 14247, “[Modernizing Payments To and From America’s Bank Account](#),” March 25.

- Mandates that all payments for federal disbursements and receipts transition to electronic payments.

Executive Order 14249, “[Protecting America’s Bank Account Against Fraud, Waste and Abuse](#),” March 25.

- Centralizes the authority of the Treasury Department over federal payments, directing agencies that disburse funds independently to return that function to the Treasury.

Executive Order 14251, “[Exclusions From Federal Labor-Management Relations Programs](#),” March 27.

- Removes collective bargaining rights for federal employees at any agency that has a primary function in intelligence, counterintelligence, investigative or national security work.

Executive Order 14271, “[Ensuring Commercial, Cost-Effective Solutions in Federal Contracts](#),” April 15.

- Directs agencies to prioritize procurement of commercially available products and services to the “maximum extent practicable” rather than non-commercial, custom products or services.

Executive Order 14274, “[Restoring Common Sense to Federal Office Space Management](#),” April 15.

- Ends the policy of prioritizing central business districts and historic districts and properties for the location of federal facilities.

Executive Order 14275, “[Restoring Common Sense to Federal Procurement](#),” April 15.

- Directs relevant officials to amend the Federal Acquisition Regulation to ensure it only contains provisions required by statute or those necessary to “support simplicity and usability” or “protect economic and national security interests.”

Executive Order 14284, “[Strengthening Probationary Periods in the Federal Service](#),” April 24.

- Creates a new requirement that agencies affirmatively certify that the continued employment of employees in probationary or trial periods, “advances the public interest.”

Executive Order 14295: “[Increasing Efficiency at the Office of the Federal Register](#),” May 9.

- Directs the archivist of the United States and director of the Government Publishing Office to reduce delays in the publication of new regulatory actions and review fee schedules at the Office of the Federal Register.

Executive Order 14317, “[Creating Schedule G in the Excepted Service](#),” July 17.

- Creates a new category of federal employment for non-career federal political appointees who focus on policy-making or policy-advocating work and do not require Senate confirmation.

Executive Order 14319, “[Preventing Woke AI in the Federal Government](#),” July 23.

- Regulates the procurement of only those Large Language Models which are “truth-seeking,” have “ideological neutrality” and do not incorporate concepts like DEI.

Executive Order 14332, “[Improving Oversight of Federal Grantmaking](#),” Aug. 7.

- Directs agency heads to designate a senior political appointee to create a process for reviewing new funding opportunities and discretionary grants to ensure they are “consistent with agency priorities and the national interest.”

Executive Order 14338, “[Improving Our Nation Through Better Design](#),” Aug. 21.

- Creates a new national initiative to modernize and improve the user experience with federal services in both digital and physical spaces.

Executive Order 14343: “[Further Exclusions From the Federal Labor-Management Relations Program](#),” Aug. 28.

- Ends collective bargaining for additional federal agency subdivisions deemed as having a primary function in intelligence, counterintelligence, investigative or national security work.

Executive Order 14344, “[Making Federal Architecture Beautiful Again](#),” Aug. 28.

- Designates traditional and classical architecture as the ideal architecture for federal public buildings.

Executive Order 14347, “[Restoring the United States Department of War](#),” Sept. 5.

- Changes the name of the Department of Defense to the Department of War.

Executive Order 14356, “[Ensuring Continued Accountability in Federal Hiring](#),” Oct. 15.

- Requires that no federal civilian position that is vacant may be filled and no new positions may be created unless they are required by law, and any federal hiring must be consistent with the administration’s Merit Hiring Plan.

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