

# Trump Administration Offers Millions of Federal Workers Payouts to Resign

*The move, which could dramatically reduce the size of the federal work force, appeared to stretch the limits of President Trump's authority.*

**By Chris Cameron, Madeleine Ngo and Erica L. Green  
New York Times**

The Trump administration on Tuesday offered roughly two million federal workers the option to resign but be paid through the end of September, in an effort to drastically reduce the size of the federal work force and push out people who do not support President Trump's political agenda.

In an email, the Office of Personnel Management, an agency that oversees the federal civilian work force, gave employees the option to leave their positions by typing the word "resign" into the subject line of an email and hitting send. Workers have until Feb. 6 to accept the offer.

The email, with the subject line "[Fork in the Road](#)," said that the majority of federal agencies would probably be downsized and that a substantial number of employees would be furloughed or reclassified to "at-will status" — essentially making them [easier to fire](#). Most people who have been working remotely will be required to work from their office five days a week, the email said, and some physical offices will be consolidated, causing some people to be relocated.

The message also said that "enhanced standards of conduct" would be applied to ensure that workers were "reliable, loyal, trustworthy" and warned that "at this time, we cannot give you full assurance regarding the certainty of your position or agency."

The email amounted to a frontal assault on the federal bureaucracy, which Mr. Trump has long derided as the "deep state" and has sought to bend to his will. In making the move, the president was testing the limits of his power, trying to push past the federal law that governs payouts and rules that have long protected the civil service from political interference and pressure.

The move also risked gutting the staffs of a wide array of federal agencies that Americans depend on, though federal unions immediately condemned the offer, and many federal employees viewed it as a trick.

The message echoed an email that the billionaire Elon Musk, a constant companion to Mr. Trump in recent months, sent to Twitter employees after buying the social media platform in late 2022. Mr. Musk's email shared the same subject line and offered employees [three months of severance](#).

Mr. Musk, who is leading the Trump administration's cost-cutting effort known as the Department of Government Efficiency, does not officially work at the Office of Personnel Management. But the agency has hired several of Mr. Musk's allies in recent weeks, including Amanda Scales, who until this month worked at Mr. Musk's artificial intelligence company, xAI, and is now the O.P.M.'s chief of staff.

In a post on X on Tuesday, Mr. Musk's America PAC said the move to offer severance packages could lead to billions of dollars in savings. Mr. Musk [recirculated the post](#) on his social media platform.

Employees who accept the offer will "promptly have their duties reassigned or eliminated," according to a guidance memo published by the O.P.M. on Tuesday. Workers will then be placed on paid administrative leave until the end of September, or an earlier resignation date of their choosing.

Employees who resign will not be expected to work, except in rare cases determined by agencies, according to a [question-and-answer page on O.P.M.'s website](#). Agency heads can require some employees to continue working for some time before they are placed on leave.

It is unclear what authority the Trump administration has to offer paid administrative leave to effectively the entire federal civilian work force. Under the law, no employee can be on [administrative leave for more than 10 days in a year](#) — let alone more than seven months.

Under the Homeland Security Act, agencies that are downsizing or reorganizing can offer federal workers \$25,000 in exchange for their resignation, known as a [Voluntary Separation Incentive Payment](#). In many cases, though, the payments proposed in the O.P.M.'s email Tuesday would far exceed that sum.

Other actions mentioned in the email to federal employees could run afoul of civil service laws, as well as union contracts. Anticipating those limits, the O.P.M. said in the email that the effort to cull the federal work force would be pursued "to the extent permitted under relevant collective-bargaining agreements."

A spokesperson for the Office of Personnel Management said some workers would be exempt from the offer, including military personnel, Postal Service workers, immigration officials and certain national security officials. Agencies can also carve out exceptions for specific positions.

Still, almost every facet of the government could be significantly affected by mass resignations, and a culling of the federal work force would have wide-reaching impacts on the lives of many Americans.

Regular activities like traveling, renewing passports or filing for a tax return could be delayed or disrupted. The operation of national parks and museums, and the administration of benefits like Social Security, Medicare, [veterans' care](#) and food stamps could also be affected. Regulators and inspectors for [food](#), [water](#), [drugs](#) and [workplace safety](#) could also leave the government.

Among the government employees who could turn in their resignations are skilled researchers and doctors; [environmental](#), [nuclear](#) and [rocket scientists](#); and meteorologists at the [National Weather Service](#). Depending on how the Trump administration defines “national security,” officers at law enforcement agencies like the F.B.I. and Drug Enforcement Administration may also resign.

The American Federation of Government Employees, the largest union of federal employees, representing over 800,000 workers, quickly condemned the move.

“There are more Americans than ever who rely on government services,” said Everett Kelley, the president of the union. “Purging the federal government of dedicated career civil servants will have vast, unintended consequences that will cause chaos for the Americans who depend on a functioning federal government.”

Senator Tim Kaine of Virginia — a state that hosts a large chunk of the federal work force — denounced the offer, and suggested that the offer of pay was a trick.

“If you accept that offer and resign, he’ll stiff you.” Mr. Kaine, a Democrat, said in a floor speech on Tuesday, referring to Mr. Trump’s [past refusals to pay workers](#).

Mr. Kaine added of Mr. Trump, “He doesn’t have any authority to do this. Do not be fooled by this guy.”