

More Than 40,000 Federal Workers Have Resigned So Far, Short of Target

Uncertainty about whether they will get paid not to work through September is deterring employees who face a Thursday deadline for taking a buyout

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More than 40,000 federal workers have raised their hands to resign, putting the Trump administration at risk of falling short of its target for slashing the government through voluntary measures.

The Office of Personnel Management last week told workers that they have until Thursday to decide [whether to take a buyout](#). People who do so can continue to be paid through September without working, OPM has said. Unions and a dozen attorneys general say the offer isn't guaranteed.

On a call Wednesday with agency officials, OPM officials said the number of federal workers who have accepted the resignation offer is more than 40,000, according to a person familiar with the matter. Another person confirmed the figure was above 40,000 as of Wednesday afternoon. The Trump administration is expecting numbers to rapidly increase in the final day before the deadline, a White House official said.

When it offered the deal last week, the White House said it expected between 5% and 10% of federal employees to accept, leading to about \$100 billion in savings annually, without providing information on how the estimate was reached. Officials haven't translated the percentage range into a specific target for the number of employees it hopes will resign. There are about two million Americans [working for the federal government](#) in civilian jobs, though [some positions are exempted](#) from the offer.

Widespread uncertainty about whether the buyout will work as advertised has deterred employees from taking it. About a half dozen federal workers told The Wall Street Journal they were skeptical that those who accepted the resignation deal would be paid through September. They aren't sure whether they can take second

jobs during the delayed resignation, if they can access retirement plans for the federal workforce or if they can one day return to work in government, career coaches who are talking to federal workers said.

“I interact with federal employees all the time, my church in Richmond, a number of federal employees are there—I’ve not had anybody say, ‘I’m taking this,’” said Sen. Tim Kaine (D., Va.), who represents tens of thousands of federal workers. He advised workers to “keep serving your fellow Americans. Keep doing what you’re doing.”

The Trump administration is trimming the government workforce through executive actions and by dismantling agencies. Nearly all U.S. Agency for International Development staff will be [placed on paid administrative leave](#) starting Saturday morning. Dozens of Education Department employees were placed on administrative leave last week. More employees who were deemed as working on diversity, equity, inclusion and accessibility areas also have been pushed out.

Hanging over the buyout offer is the possibility that workers who opt to keep their jobs could be targeted for layoffs later, OPM has said. Employees have been unnerved by signs of increasing pressure to push out government workers. On the OPM call Wednesday, officials discussed having agencies submit lists of employees in their probationary period who have served less than one year, or two years for “excepted service,” according to a person familiar with the matter. The Peace Corps and TSA, for instance, have high percentages of such workers. Some federal workers are creating “virtual go bags” with their employment records for fear that they won’t be able to access those files in the future.

The resignation offer has a deadline of 11:59 p.m. Thursday. OPM asked workers to email their resignation directly to that office, not their agencies.

“This is a rare, generous opportunity—one that was thoroughly vetted and intentionally designed to support employees through restructuring,” said McLaurine Pinover, a spokeswoman for OPM.

Some language circulated by the Trump administration—deriding federal jobs as “lower productivity” and saying that moving to the private sector was “the way to greater American prosperity”—felt insulting to career public servants who say they are motivated by mission and often wear many hats to get work done. Those who remain in their roles must return to the office five days each week, an email about the resignation program said, and commit to being part of a “loyal” and “trustworthy” federal workforce that is committed to “excellence at every level.”

“The fact that people would be treated so dismissively was really hurtful,” said Nancy Segal, a former government human-resources leader who now trains federal

employees on resume writing and job searches, in addition to working with agencies. She said she had talked with more than 100 federal workers in recent days; she has encountered one who is leaning toward taking the package.

Those who do so can anticipate a competitive job search, she added, because many people with government experience are looking, and it might be hard to find a job with similar benefits. On a call Tuesday advising a few dozen applicants, she urged them to keep résumés to two pages, network actively and expand their search beyond big-name companies.

“The market is flooded,” she told them.

One supervisor decided to take the deferred resignation offer because he expected cuts to his agency and didn’t want to lose his job in a layoff. Leaving sooner rather than later means he will have the advantage of more time for his job search, he said.

Some federal employees say they aren’t taking the deal because of a renewed sense of pride in their work. The communications from the Trump administration have solidified their mission to serve the American people in a time of disruption, they say. Several said they feared that those who might be able to get a lucrative job elsewhere would leave their roles, leading to brain drain in agencies.

The sense of chaos in workplaces in the District of Columbia and elsewhere has added to a feeling of disarray that would be more challenging to manage with fewer staff.

“The thought of a large percentage of the workforce walking out and leaving the rest to manage something that was already in a lot of cases difficult to manage—it’s scary, scary times,” said Randy Erwin, president of the National Federation of Federal Employees, a federal employee union. “What we hear is concern about their abilities to do their jobs.”