

AFGE is under a MASSIVE attack

written by David Gonzalez

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Billionaire Elon Musk recently appeared brandishing a chainsaw gifted to him by Argentine President Javier Milei. The chainsaw symbolized Milei's campaign promises to "shred" the government. The austerity measures under his administration have triggered rising unemployment and declines in real wages across the board. There's also been a surge in food insecurity, with at least 1

million children going to bed hungry every night.

David Gonzalez, National Vice President of District 2 AFGE representing federal workers in New Jersey, New York, Connecticut, Maine, Vermont, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, and Rhode Island, discussed the Trump/Musk DOGE assault with the Teamster National Black Caucus (TNBC) on a podcast on Feb. 24. It was co-hosted by Richard Hooker, Secretary-Treasurer, Teamsters Local 623, and Chris Silvera, Secretary-Treasurer, Teamsters Local 808. In addition to Hooker, guest speakers included Clarence Thomas, a third-generation retired member of ILWU Local 10. Following is an abridged account of the report by AFGE Vice President Gonzalez.

First, I want to thank you and your organization, the Teamsters, for inviting us — to hear our plight. Yeah, we're in the crosshairs on the front lines. And we're out in these streets. We're going to stay out in these streets until these attacks cease on the federal workforce. It's not just the federal workforce, but the working people all over who are under attack. And it's a shame. We have to unite together as one party, one organization, and fight for the working-class people, especially our people.

AFGE is under attack. We are the biggest federal union, representing 800,000 federal workers across the United States and Europe. We also represent USAID, the Department of Education, the EPA, and other agencies. With the exception of the post office and a couple of others, the federal workforce falls under us.

Our union and our workers are fighting for our existence right now. Donald Trump attacked us in his first term. When he got elected the first time around, he tried to take away our collective bargaining rights. He took away union officials' time, the time that's needed to represent our workers and our members. He took away or tried to take away the office space allotted to us contractually inside facilities. That is the space we need to meet with our members when they have issues and problems with their jobs.

So we were aware of what Donald Trump could do if he was elected again. We just want to ask you and other labor leaders to do everything in your power to help us right now because we're in a fight for our existence, the federal workforce. Please speak out as loud as you can about what Elon Musk and Donald Trump are doing to destroy the federal government and the workforce. We've never seen anything like this before.

Schedule F — he tried to institute this his first time around. It didn't get off the floor because of the COVID epidemic. But Schedule F, this action will transform the professional civil service into an army of political appointees loyal to only one person, and that's Donald Trump, and not the mission of our jobs. It dismantles the merit-based civil service, jeopardizing professionalism and impartiality in government.

[Editor's note: Trump's Executive Order 13957 in October 2020 — Schedule F — reclassified tens of thousands of federal employees, replacing qualified federal workers with political appointees whose only qualification is loyalty to the administration. The Biden administration rescinded the Schedule F executive order. In January 2025, Trump introduced a new version that expands the scope of the original Schedule F.]

They are intimidating government workers into accepting their crooked and corrupt resignation offers. As many know, this has been public. They sent out mass notices asking people to resign in the federal workforce in droves. AFGE is in the courts fighting this illegal action. We can expect worse to come from Trump.

He's showing that he will pay no attention to collective bargaining, even some that were enforced during his first term. We expect he'll follow the "Project 2025 Playbook" and try to end collective bargaining to bust the union, not just our unions, but unions in general in the name of fake national security.

Congressional Republicans will go after federal pay and benefits when they decide how to fund the government budget, which expires March 14. Just a couple of days ago, the House and Senate passed a budget resolution for fiscal year 2025, which did just that, which came after the benefits and the retirement of the federal workforce. So, they're already in motion with their plan.

Please use whatever leverage you have on the budget and the debt ceiling to save the Civil Service. Without functioning government agencies, there will be no way to undo the damage in two or four years. The damage will be done, and it will be too far gone. We ask that labor as a whole have our backs.

Hold the Line

Can you please speak out and tell all federal workers not to quit? If you know a federal worker, tell them to hold the line and not quit. We've been doing what we can, but our members are only 15% of the workforce. There are managers and executives that we don't represent, so please help us reach everyone. Services will collapse if this is not stopped in its tracks. Departures will only lead to more departures. More work will be piled onto less people, which is already a common problem throughout government.

Government services have been understaffed for a long time. If you look at the Social Security Administration (SSA) and the Veterans Administration (VA) and all the plights they've put out, even during the Bush administration and during the Biden administration, these and other agencies have been short-staffed for years.

This is going to affect every congressional district. It's food safety, it's Social Security payments, it's the VA benefits, and it's the safety of the flying public with TSA. Here's how you can help us. Please use mass media and social media to explain the work the federal workers do for you. We can help you identify powerful stories in your districts that show the critical work that federal workers do in the communities.

Please caution federal workers not to resign. People are counting on them.

We need to speak up for this federal workforce in hearings and whenever you have the opportunity to speak at these high-level forums. Please consider submitting amicus briefs in support of lawsuits that AFGE is filing against the Trump administration to challenge its unjust and unfair treatment of the federal workforce. We need to get the message out to stop Donald Trump, Elon Musk, and all those billionaires that he entrusts his loyalty to instead of the working-class people.

One of the things that Trump did was “the return to work directive.” Everybody knows that telework isn’t new. One of the things that occurred during the pandemic was that a lot of the workforce went remote and the government was okay with it. Smart telework enhances productivity, recruitment, and retention of experienced workers. Rolling it back disrupts operations and progress in the government.

A hiring freeze since the 1970s

A hiring freeze was put in place beginning in the 1970s. The federal workforce hasn’t grown since then, while the U.S. population has skyrocketed. Bill Clinton did what Trump and Elon Musk are trying to do now, but in a different way. His cap on the workforce led to understaffing and has shortened skill gaps undermining vital government services. The hiring freeze does not on its face abrogate collective bargaining agreements. However, agency implementations must align with negotiated agreements. If violations occur, unions need to file grievances.

Now, Trump and Elon Musk are trying to dismantle the government without preemptive planning about its functions and what is needed for it to work. That is the difference now.

There’s a lot of misinformation about the federal workforce. They claim that the federal workforce is lazy, but the federal workforce is what makes this country work.

When you retire and put in for social security, it's a federal worker that will be processing the claim. When we go through the airport TSA, we expect to get on a safe airplane. It's the TSA workers, the federal workers, that's making our trip safe. When we eat or when we go to the supermarket, it's a USDA worker, a federal worker, that's inspecting that food and making sure that these companies that process our food are doing it in a safe and non-harmful manner for people. It's a federal worker at the VA that's taking care of veterans and aging veterans. So the federal workforce is important and they make this country thrive.

When you go to national parks and monuments, when you go to the Empire Building or the Statue of Liberty, it's a federal worker there that's keeping the grounds and giving you tours — making sure you have a good experience. So the federal workforce is broad and is out there.

So there's many broad ways that the federal workforce functions. I can go on and on with all these agencies. There's a lot of misinformation. When they talked about USAID buying condoms and stuff, that was misinformation. Elon Musk even came back and said something later, it wasn't true. He said: "there is going to be misinformation." So this is the Trump administration, and it's not normal politics.

The Trump administration wants to divide us, especially the working people, so we won't be on one accord, so we can't unite our power, get back our government, and make these politicians respect the workforce.

This is PATCO on steroids

What Reagan did to the air traffic controllers is now being heaped on the entire federal system. When he fired the air traffic controllers who were on strike, the size of private sector unions between then and now shrank by half. Trump is trying to destroy unions. He's going to start with us. We're low-hanging fruit because he has control of the federal workforce. He's going to start with us, and then he'll come for

you. This is why we need to unite as one in labor.

There's a lot of us in the federal workforce. Over the years, people have been given a misconception of federal workers. One of the things that people need to know is that the federal government was one of the first places where people of African descent could get decent jobs. Frederick Douglass's son worked in the federal government.

Trump and Musk are promoting this disinformation around the federal workers, that: There are too many of them, they're not doing any work, they're lazy, and what have you. It's important that we expose all these lies and talk about the importance of the federal workers.

If you cut the workforce in half, what happens? If you sketch out what that would look like and see what happens when Donald Trump and his kind can now privatize out of these jobs and give the contracts to his billionaire friends. They can make money off the federal government. It's no secret that most of Elon Musk's contracts come from the Department of Defense, whose civilian workforce belongs to AFGE as well.

Elon Musk gets a lot of contracts for his satellites and his space company from the Department of Defense. So Elon Musk has his hand in the pocket of the federal government. Now he's having a say on what the government does and doesn't do in the federal workforce.

AFGE is a part of the AFL-CIO. We've got to do our due diligence and get our voice out there to gain the support of the whole union movement. That's why we're in the streets. We had a massive rally in Washington, D.C. with a lot of support from other unions. We just held a rally in New York Federal Plaza. We held one in Boston, and another in Connecticut on Feb. 28. In my district, we're going to be in the streets. We will be in the streets by the thousands all over the country.

In the federal government, we're low-hanging fruit for Donald Trump and his cronies like Elon Musk. Once they're finished with us, they're coming for the rest of labor. Those of us who lived in New York, New Jersey, and in the Northeast, we knew Donald Trump. We knew what he did to Atlantic City — how he bankrupted Atlantic City. He didn't pay contractors. He made them go to court because his pockets were deep and their pockets were small. They didn't have the money to keep up with him in a court of law.

We need to stick together as one and fight for our cause, for our work, for our working families, the working man and woman. He targeted DEI when the plane went down in Washington, D.C. He didn't even console the families of those deceased on that flight. Right away, he blamed it on measures taken to end racism and discrimination. That was his press conference. It was terrible for him to act like that. It was one of his first executive actions. He came in and did an executive order to do away with DEI (Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion) programs throughout the federal government in our workforce.

Federal employees are not rich people. A lot of people start at the minimum wage. Federal employees have been underpaid for a long time. It depends on what you do and the location you are in, what level you come into, and the positions you apply for. Take a young woman who had gotten a master's degree when she recently started work at the fish and wildlife department at base pay.

There's pay inequity in the federal workforce already. So when Trump takes away the DEI initiatives and policies, then that's going to create an even worse gender and racial pay gap.

We need a united front against Trump, Musk and his gangsters who want to smash the public unions. This is the agenda and program of Project 2025. We need actions.

Stand in solidarity with the federal workforce. When there's an attack on us, it is an

attack on you. Educate your members and your people in the private sector, and let them know that our cause and our fight is just. Partner with us every chance that you get to support us, just like we would support you. If you ever need AFGE, we're there with you, just like I know that you will be here for us. We need to push back and push back hard.

