



PEERreview

A Publication of Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility

What the War on the Civil Service Means

To say that the Trump White House has declared war on the federal civilian workforce is no exaggeration. As Russ Vought, the Director of the White House Office of Management & Budget – in essence, the chief operating officer for the federal government – has declared, “We want the bureaucrats to be traumatically affected. When they wake up in the morning, we want them not to want to go to work because they are increasingly viewed as the villains.”

Even more hyperbolically, White House Deputy Chief of Staff Stephen Miller said, “The existential threat to democracy is the unelected bureaucracy” – an extraordinary statement that discounts the threat from an elected demagogue who ignores the rule of law. Nonetheless, there is an unprecedented, concerted effort to demonize federal employees, disrupt their work, and dismiss them from public service.

Where We Are Now

Inauguration Day 2025 began an unrelenting and wide-ranging campaign of governmental deconstruction directed from the White House. As Vought noted, “Their entire apparatus is exposed to our strategy.” The goal of that strategy is pure presidential power, unrestrained by the checks and balances developed over the past nearly 250 years of American government.

In this edition of *PEERreview*, we discuss their unrelenting war against the civil service, and PEER’s response to it. So far, some of the administration’s tactical steps against agencies with environment



Protesters supporting government workers at NIH.

mandates include the mass firing of probationary employees, putting employees on long-term administrative leave, giving Elon Musk’s so-called Department of Government Efficiency access and control over confidential government data systems, cancelling contracts and grants, and shredding collective bargaining agreements with unions.

Trump has also moved to incapacitate all bodies with independent oversight authority over the executive branch and is prohibiting access to federal buildings, stripping security clearances, and directing federal employees not to meet with law firms and individuals who have challenged illegal activities by him and his administrations or who have represented prominent Democrats.

Their goal is to intimidate and crush those who are standing up for the rule of law and working to protect the interests of federal workers. Fortunately, many of these illegal

actions are tied up in the courts, but the damage is being done.

Unfortunately, these moves are just the beginning. Waiting in the wings are additional broad directives for agency restructuring and mass reductions in staff, new efforts to politicize the civil service, attacking non-profit organizations like PEER, and many other initiatives that we don’t yet know about.

What is the End Game?

The end game for Trump is unrestrained power, for Musk, it is to control the government to gain wealth, power, and control over the United States and the world.

For PEER, our end game is to protect democracy, the good men and women that work in government, and the environment for future generations. This is a monumental struggle we are undertaking together with our friends and allies.



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PEERreview is the quarterly newsletter of Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility

FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Dear Friend,

This issue of *PEERreview* is largely devoted to our role in the titanic struggle to protect our democracy, a non-partisan civil service, and the environment. In this issue, we examine our role in protecting public employees and the environment from the administration's and Elon Musk's illegal activities and weaponized incompetence.

This all represents the most significant challenge PEER has ever faced. Not surprisingly, requests for legal assistance from employees have skyrocketed.

To respond, we are bolstering our legal staff and refocusing our litigation docket. In addition, we are tracking the damage to our nation's environmental protection, public health, and scientific expertise and fighting to stop this damage wherever possible.

There has already been significant legal and public push-back to the Trump administration's efforts, with PEER at the center of many such actions. Things are moving fast and furiously.

While we are focused on immediate threats, we are also looking beyond the immediate with an eye toward reforms that would prevent these abuses from ever recurring. Our strategy is to focus on:

- Protecting the civil service from improper partisan influences
- Ensuring employees have proper legal representation
- Exposing and challenging unlawful activities by the administration
- Continuing a robust environmental litigation agenda
- Laying the groundwork for a long-term campaign to rebalance executive checks and balances by moving watchdog functions outside of Presidential control

In these difficult times, it has been refreshing to see people throughout the country rise up to defend their public workers. We will need to see a lot more of that in the coming months if we are to succeed in our efforts.

This is a time when your support and involvement have never been more needed.

Sincerely,

Tim Whitehouse

P.S. In this issue of *PEERreview*, we have included a survey for you to provide feedback on our work. We hope you will take a minute to fill it out and send it to us! It means a lot to us to have your input.

About Us

PEER protects public employees who protect our environment. We are a service organization for local, state, federal, and tribal public employees, including scientists, law enforcement officers, land managers, and all others dedicated to upholding environmental laws and values. Through PEER, public servants can choose to work as "anonymous activists", so that public agencies must confront the message, rather than the messenger.

Welcome Linden Mueller

Linden brings a love of the law and the environment to her work at PEER.

PEER is pleased to welcome Linden Mueller as our new Director of Development and Communications. Linden brings a passion for environmental protection through the law to the role, most recently serving as Director of Development and Outreach at the Great Rivers Environmental Law Center in St. Louis, Missouri.

Linden was drawn to PEER's nonpartisan and strategic work to ensure our government works in service to the people and resources it is entrusted to protect. She believes PEER's role in exposing misconduct, protecting our nation's environmental workforce, and preserving public lands and resources is now more critical than ever as the current

administration seeks to gut protections safeguarding human health and the environment that sustains us.

With a deep appreciation for those who champion environmental protection through their giving, Linden is passionate about expanding environmental protections through connecting donors to work that matters to them and to the impact that their gifts can make.

She looks forward to meeting PEER's dedicated supporters and expanding our reach to secure the resources needed to continue fighting for honesty, integrity, and protection of this fragile planet. Please join us in welcoming Linden to PEER!



CLIMATE CHANGE

Climate Change Inaction Ramps Up

President Trump made his position on the threat of climate change clear on Inauguration Day. He withdrew the United States from the Paris Climate Accords and signed an executive order that paused funding for key programs under former President Joe Biden's Inflation Reduction Act, many of which were aimed at creating new jobs in the clean energy space.

Since then, the administration has doubled down on attacks on clean energy and targeted agencies that work on climate change. The administration has fired thousands of employees across the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), the Interior Department, the Department of Energy, and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA).

DOGE has proposed lease terminations at key climate collection facilities like NOAA's

Hawaii climate research station, which will limit the government's data on climate trends. There have already been funding freezes on climate research, including at the National Science Foundation, a federal agency specifically tasked with supporting research in science and engineering.

Even more menacingly, the administration launched a criminal investigation into Biden's awarding of \$27 billion of grants earmarked to combat climate change and boost clean energy in a green fund. EPA's current administrator has since attempted to claw back the funds, and the Department of Justice and the Federal Bureau of Investigation are investigating any wrongdoing. However, no evidence of illegality has emerged.

EPA administrator Lee Zeldin, who once said human-made climate change was

real, announced the agency will undertake a "formal reconsideration" of its 2009 endangerment finding, which underpins the agency's legal obligation to regulate carbon dioxide and other climate pollutants under the Clean Air Act. All of this is occurring as climate change continues to worsen throughout the world.

We are ready to defend public employees working on climate programs as we did during the first Trump administration.

In addition, we are working to educate the public on how the administration's efforts to dismantle EPA and NOAA will destroy our country's ability to address climate change. We invite you to watch our recent webinar with EPA and NOAA experts on this issue on our website at <https://peer.org/get-involved/webinars/>.



SCHEDULE F

PEER files Lawsuit to Safeguard the Merit System

The saying “To the victor belongs the spoils” aptly described the federal personnel system until the late 19th century. President James Garfield’s assassination in 1881 by a frustrated job seeker galvanized a political consensus to end the “spoils system,” which was associated with blatant corruption and favoritism, and replace it with a professional civil service based on a merit system.

Nearly 150 years later, this seminal reform is facing a major threat. President Trump is moving forward with a plan to add a Schedule F to the government service schedule for federal employees, which would give political appointees the ability to easily hire and fire civil servants in policy-determining, policymaking and policy-advocating positions and replace them with loyalists.

A new PEER lawsuit charges that Trump’s action is unlawful and exceeds his authority.

This deeply troubling move advances efforts by the administration to politicize policymaking by removing scientists and experts and inserting, instead, those who owe their loyalty to the political leaders of the day.

It would mean that thousands of federal employees – including those who protect our public health, the environment, and our food and water – who were hired for their expertise and serve in non-partisan positions would be stripped of vested job protections in one fell swoop.

“If we actually seek to protect Americans, preserve democracy, and restore our nation as a global leader, we must excise the infection of politics into our public service that is crowding out experts



Subversion of the Merit System Is a Key Element of the Trump Playbook. PEER is the lead plaintiff in a lawsuit to block “Schedule F,” Trump’s plan to remove civil service protections from thousands of employees.

and facts,” says Tim Whitehouse, PEER’s Executive Director. “Schedule F will make it more difficult for us to confront some of our most pressing problems, such as climate change, biodiversity loss, toxic chemicals, and the emergence of new diseases.”

PEER is ready for this fight. For more than 30 years, we have provided pro bono legal services and other support to scientists, public health professionals, and other civil servants who seek to uphold high standards of scientific integrity within their agencies, including by defending whistleblowers and shining a light on illegal government actions. Assisting us in this litigation are Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington and Democracy Forward.

Requiring Political Fealty in the Senior Executive Service

Under a separate initiative, the Trump White House wants to convert the top echelon of civil servants into political loyalists by rewriting how they are evaluated. Under the plan, “the most critical element” evaluation criterion for the fewer than 7,000 Senior Executive Service (SES) employees would be how well they “align with

and advance the President’s specific policy agenda.” This would make competence secondary to loyalty within the SES, which was created almost 50 years ago as a key element of the Civil Service Reform Act.

Currently, no more than 10% of SES positions can be filled by political

appointees. Changing the evaluation criteria to require political fealty would defeat the whole purpose of having a cadre of the most experienced career managers serving from one administration to the next. How could managers aligned with the Trump agenda be expected to serve a Democratic successor faithfully?

ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY

Zeldin Moves Rapidly to Unwind EPA

When the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Administrator Lee Zeldin announced a series of “historic actions” in mid-March, he called it “the most momentous day in the history of the EPA.”

Zeldin’s actions included calls to roll back air pollution and wastewater regulations for the oil and gas industry, winding down environmental enforcement actions against polluters, and reconsidering risk management programs for oil, gas, and chemical facilities. These risk management programs are designed to enhance emergency preparedness and improve the public availability of chemical hazard information on some of the most dangerous facilities in the country.

Behind the scenes, things at EPA are unwinding even more rapidly than reported in the press. Under Zeldin, EPA is illegally

canceling contracts and grants for congressionally authorized activities, targeting EPA employees and EPA grant recipients for FBI investigations, illegally firing employees with no notice and no severance, and threatening to cut EPA’s resources in half.

Perhaps the most historic of Zeldin’s actions was his call for EPA to reconsider its 2009 finding that the buildup of heat-trapping greenhouse gases in the atmosphere endangers public health and welfare. This “Endangerment Finding” required the EPA to act under the Clean Air Act to curb emissions of carbon dioxide, methane, and four other heat-trapping air pollutants from vehicles, power plants, and other industries.

Zeldin’s actions are indeed historic – they deliver EPA into the cold embrace of the oil, gas, and chemical industries and undermine our country’s ability to protect public health and the environment.



PHOTO: NOAA

Destroying Climate Science: The Mauna Loa Observatory in Hawaii measured CO2 levels exceeding 430 ppm in our atmosphere, the highest daily average on record and a level not seen in millions of years. The support office for the observatory, which opened in 1958, just had its lease terminated by DOGE.

Trump’s Abusive Use of Administrative Leave

When the Trump administration shuttered environmental justice and diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) programs, they relied upon a technique that PEER has battled against for more than a dozen years – paid administrative leave. In this status, agencies send employees home, disconnect them from work systems, and order them to stop work until further notice.

Paid administrative leave is often used against whistleblowers and others whom management deems troublesome.

Prompted by instances of federal agencies leaving employees on administrative leave for months or years, Congress passed the Administrative Leave Act of 2016, which, among other things, limits administrative leave to no more than 10 days in any calendar year.

The Act charged the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) with developing implementing regulations, something OPM failed to do until late in 2024 and only after it was sued by PEER.

OPM’s new regulations do not become effective until September 2025 and are ambiguous in spots. This has left the door open for the Trump crowd to summarily place thousands of employees on paid administrative leave for unspecified periods throughout the federal government.

We are challenging this new round of mass suspensions exceeding the 10-day statutory limit. For the latest updates visit our website at <https://peer.org/second-trump-administration/>.



VALENTINE'S DAY MASSACRE

“Valentine’s Day Massacre” Aftermath

It began in mid-February around Valentine’s Day and quickly spread. Probationary employees (those with less than a year, or for some positions, two years of experience) were getting termination notices. Within the next month, more than 30,000 federal employees were fired from various departments in what was the biggest purge of the federal workforce in history.

The probationary employees were targeted because they can be more easily fired during their probationary period than vested employees. This mass removal was orchestrated by Elon Musk’s so-called Department of Government Efficiency through the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) and occurred

without any selectivity for needed skills or agency priorities.

Lawsuits quickly ensued. PEER helped recruit organizations directly affected by these removals in agencies such as the National Park Service to supply standing required to bring suit. This produced decisive judicial rulings on both coasts, as well as action by the Merit Systems Protection Board (the civil service court) striking down these unprecedented large-scale removals.

The resulting rulings halted the discharge of probationers after findings that OPM did not have the authority to fire anyone. Further, the merit system rules required that the decision to fail probation must

be based on performance, and OPM’s form letter email notification that the termination was due to “insufficient performance” was a sham since it gave no supporting reasons. Many of the probationers had the highest ratings.

The courts ordered the probationers to be reinstated; however, thousands found that upon return to work, they were placed on indefinite administrative leave and told to go home to await the next Trump-ordered fiasco. Now, because of new court rulings, many of these probationary employees are being fired again. We are continuing to work with these employees to make sure they have their day in court.

PEER Works to save Water Science Centers from DOGE Cuts

The network of federal centers tracking stream flow for flood warnings, drought management, and water quality is being shredded. More than a score of Water Science Centers housed within the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) had their leases terminated under cuts directed by Elon Musk’s DOGE operating through the General Services Administration, the government’s landlord. PEER is pushing to get these leases renewed.

The leases for Water Science Centers from Massachusetts to Wyoming were terminated effective as early as August 31, 2025. Each of these centers is a hub for science fundamental to effective management of the nation’s water resources.

Water flow data is used by states for drought declarations and water withdrawal permits. State and federal emergency services use the data to check flood levels and to ensure water does

not overtop dams. The data is also used by state and local officials, emergency responders, water system operators, road and building designers, city planners, and many others.

The water quality data helps agencies monitor chemical and oil spills to protect drinking water supplies. USGS also assesses and conducts targeted research on persistent pollutants, such as “forever chemicals” known as PFAS, which are pervasive in domestic waters.

“A big reduction in monitoring U.S. waters is among the least cost-effective cuts the federal government could make,” remarked PEER Science Policy Director Kyla Bennett. “These leases were terminated in a chaotic fashion without any consultation with USGS or any planning for replacing scientific data or analytic capacity which will be lost.”



PHOTO: USGS

Raw Data Require Collection. Each Water Science Center supports hundreds of stream gauges and groundwater monitoring wells.

GOVERNMENT LAYOFFS AND RESTRUCTURING

Reductions-in-Force and Restructuring

President Trump has directed that all civilian agencies prepare plans for “large-scale” cuts to their workforce. The mechanism for removing civil servants based upon factors other than their performance is called a reduction in force or RIF. Unlike layoffs in the private sector, federal RIFs are governed by civil service statutes and rules.

The Trump RIFs are not being done for the traditional reasons of lack of work or funds. Instead, these RIFs will be justified by the need to restructure and eliminate agency functions.

The first two victims, the U.S. Agency for International Development and the Department of Education, suffered mass layoffs without going through RIFs. As a result, both agencies’ dismantlement is under court challenge. It appears that other agencies will employ the RIF process. If so, they must determine in advance how many positions will be abolished. For example, the leaked plan for EPA indicates that half the scientists in its research arm (more than 1,100 scientists) will be terminated.

Next, the agency must delineate the competitive areas affected within each location. Within these areas, employees will

compete for retention. Then the agency establishes a retention roster ranking employees based on tenure, veteran status, and performance.

After that, the agency performs a second-round process with the retention register to determine the reassignment rights of RIF’d employees. The same eligibility factors used to determine who would be RIF’d in the first place are evaluated. Reassigned employees can displace, or “bump,” their colleagues on retention rosters who have lower retention standing.

RIFs take a lot of work to pull off successfully. Thus far, the Trump team has shown little inclination to do this work. Moreover, agencies often try to skew the process to target whistleblowers and safeguard favorites.

Failure to follow these rules can lead to successful challenges for RIF’d employees. PEER defended employees against a RIF under the Clinton administration. We represented 24 U.S. Geological Survey employees and were successful in reinstating more than half. These challenges were very labor intensive. In other words, we will have our work cut out for us.

The Public Speaks Out in Support of National Parks

In 2024, national parks set a new all-time visitation record, but for the first time in recent memory, the National Park Service (NPS) did not issue any press release or statement about that milestone. Instead, the NPS is engulfed in a scramble to meet the maniac demands of the Trump administration.

First, NPS cancelled some 5,000 seasonal worker positions and rescinded existing job offers. Then, hundreds of NPS employees took Elon Musk’s “Fork in the Road” retirement offer. Next, between 700 and 1,000 probationary employees were fired, and veteran staff were offered early retirement incentives. Meanwhile, the courts, elected leaders, and the public began pressuring the NPS to reverse course on these illegal firings and efforts to downsize.

DOGE staff, who know nothing about parks, are taking charge and instituting the worst and most unproductive form of micromanagement. For example, with no notice, the Trump administration suspended normal spending



Into the Breach. Operation of national parks is a key public barometer for how well government is working.

authority and limited purchasing authority at the parks to \$1 on most credit card purchases.

These factors spell deep uncertainty for parks for another busy year. Our goal is to continue supporting park service employees, keep tabs on efforts to privatize public service work, and build support for all our public lands.



GOVERNMENT WATCHDOGS

Inspectors General Collective Dismissal

Days after taking office, President Trump summarily removed 18 Inspectors General, including some he appointed during his first term. These dismissals remove the principal watchdogs from major agencies, including Defense, Labor, Health & Human Services, and Veterans Affairs. Several of these deposed IGs are suing to get their jobs back, citing Trump's violation of statutory requirements for notice to Congress and a statement of cause.

Regardless of the suit's outcome, the IG's institutional role of protecting whistleblowers and exposing wrongdoing has already suffered damage. Employees may now have concerns about the confidentiality of information shared with the IG. In addition, some IGs may be reluctant to open probes or issue reports, which will upset a vengeful White House.

The ultimate concern is that in an unchecked Trump administration, these sentinels of public integrity will be transformed into "plumbers' units" to identify whistleblowers and quash dissent.



PHOTOS: (L-R) DOI, OIG, EPA

Fired Inspectors General. Interior's Mark Greenblatt, USDA's Phyllis Fong, and EPA's Sean O'Donnell were among the 18 IGs Trump terminated.

Created by legislation signed by President Carter 47 years ago and expanded under President Reagan, the 74 total IG offices enjoyed bipartisan support and deference – until now. Trump's action underscores that IGs can no longer be expected to exercise independent judgment if these offices remain within the Executive Branch.

More Watchdogs Fired



PHOTO: OSC

Civil Service Guardian Gone. Trump fired Special Counsel Hampton Dellinger less than a year into his 5-year term.

Part of the Trump playbook is to neutralize or eliminate any independent checks within the Executive Branch, thereby diminishing the integrity of public service. In addition to Inspectors General, Trump has targeted these formerly nonpartisan institutions:

Special Counsel Cashiered

The U.S. Office of Special Counsel

(OSC) is the independent office policing the merit system on topics ranging from whistleblower retaliation to nepotism to the Hatch Act, which forbids political advocacy using official time or resources. The OSC is a key bulwark against official abuse, and its leader serves a 5-year term following Senate confirmation.

Trump ordered Special Counsel Hampton Dellinger terminated "effective immediately" without citing any cause. Dellinger won a short restraining order against that move but resigned after it was dissolved. The effectiveness of a headless OSC in protecting whistleblowers remains to be seen.

Civil Service Court Under Attack

The Merit Systems Protection Board (MSPB) is the court system for the civil service with the power to overturn illegal agency personnel actions. This 3-member Senate-confirmed body is chaired by Cathy Harris, whom Trump

is also trying to fire. Harris is fighting in the courts to get her job back.

Because one MSPB member recently left and Harris has been fired, the Board lacks the quorum needed to rule on cases. During his first term, Trump refused to fill any MSPB vacancies, which had lost its quorum, creating a backlog of thousands of whistleblower and other appeals – effectively nullifying much of the Whistleblower Protection Act.

Ethics Office Decapitated

Trump also removed the director of the Office of Government Ethics (OGE), the independent agency responsible for overseeing ethics rules and financial disclosures for the executive branch. David Huitema, the Senate-confirmed director of OGE was fired after less than two months on the job. Trump named a former Republican member of Congress to replace him.

DOGE

What is Elon Musk's Real Goal?

The Department of Government Efficiency, or DOGE, has only existed since the start of the year, and while it's been enormously disruptive to the federal government and public sector workers, it has produced very little efficiency.

Chaos Not Efficiency

Consider his "Fork in the Road" letter to all federal employees by unnamed DOGE officials at the Office of Personnel Management. The email, sent to all federal employees just over a week after Donald Trump took office, used the same subject line as a letter Musk had sent to workers at his social platform Twitter following his takeover of the company. DOGE's letter warned all federal employees they were at risk of being fired, but that those who responded to the email had the choice to immediately resign or retire early and receive full pay and benefits until September 30, 2025. All they had to do was respond to the email with the word "resign" in the subject line in less than a week's time. Approximately 75,000 employees took the buyout—that is around 3% of the 2.3 million civilian federal workforce.

The plan, which circumvented reduction-in-force laws, appeared to make no effort to target jobs the administration deemed wasteful, rather it was designed to cut down headcount dramatically and swiftly. The goal should come as no surprise, given that Vivek Ramaswamy, who was once slated to co-run DOGE with Musk, had suggested they cut employees based on their social security numbers. DOGE directives have led to chaos, including measures to force employees back to the workplace, relocate offices outside of Washington, and Musk's tweet that turned into a formal DOGE email demanding employees list five work accomplishments or risk losing their jobs. Musk later joked it was a "pulse check."

No Clarity on Legality

DOGE's actions have also led to confusion over their legality. Civil rights, unions, and environmental groups have sued DOGE

over the agency's access to IRS data and social security information, for cancelling funding for fair housing, dismantling USAID, attempting to gut the Department of Education, and for mass-firing probationary employees, among other things. The dizzying volleying of judicial rulings has left the public and public workers in a state of uncertainty, waiting to see how they all play out.

Savings Are Not Clear

Meanwhile, Musk's fiscal achievements, represented by what he calls a 'wall of receipts,' have been riddled with errors, including duplicate counts and costs for programs that were already zeroed out under President Joe Biden. The website has also recently made those mistakes harder to find. Most of Musk's claimed savings consist of cancelled federal contracts and leases as well as cuts to research grants. But some of the choices are baffling, with cuts appearing to target how grants and offices are named or their supposed ties to diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives without much other rhyme or reason.

Musk's Real Aims

Musk's stated goal of trying to downsize as much as possible is starting to look like an effort to personally cash in. Tech CEOs and others, including PEER, are accusing him of aiming to privatize space and satellite operations as federal agencies seek contracts, bolster Tesla through grants with government fleets, and take control of government communications through his satellite company, Starlink. There's also fear that Musk has succeeded in capturing vast quantities of government data and unleashing AI within agencies, which some warn is the real "Digital Coup."

It has become clear that Musk's ultimate goal isn't to make the government more responsive to the needs of the American people but instead to amass power and money on an unprecedented scale in human history.

New Concerns About AI and Personal Privacy

PEER is urging EPA employees not to use a new free Wi-Fi service offered by EPA management for use by employees on their personal devices. This connection would enable the agency to track what internet sites employees visit on their own time and compose profiles of workers with interests that would raise suspicions of current Trump-appointed overseers.

This warning comes on the heels of a series of press reports

that Trump administration officials and Musk's DOGE team are using artificial intelligence to surveil federal agency's communications to identify expressions of disloyalty in the federal workforce.

Because DOGE operates with little or no transparency, the information gathered by the DOGE teams can be used to enrich Musk and his allies and to go after political targets.



PEER PERSPECTIVES

In a Clown Car to Crazy Town?



Lt. Gen. William Graham, Army Corps Chief of Engineers

After the horrific L.A. fires were contained, President Trump ordered the Army Corps of Engineers to release billions of gallons of water from dams in California's Central Valley and then cluelessly boasted on X, "Everybody should be happy about this long fought Victory! I only wish they listened to me six years ago – There would have been no fire!" In fact, the Corps releases had no impact on conditions in Southern California. Testifying on the Hill, Gen. Graham admitted, "I don't know what happened to the water once it was released from the dams." The sudden releases did, however, nearly inundate local farms. When asked for his response to these complaints, Graham said, "I don't believe I have an answer to that." In today's DC, even this tiny bit of candor requires a profile in courage.



U.S. Representative. Andy Ogles

Rep. Ogles (R-TN) has introduced an impeachment resolution against a federal judge who issued a temporary restraining order in a suit brought by a physicians' group restoring online public health datasets. The data had been scrubbed under Trump's Executive Order that there are only two sexes and banning activities promoting "gender ideology." Ogles' resolution states that U.S. District Judge John Bates's action was "so utterly lacking in intellectual honesty and basic integrity that he is guilty of high crimes and misdemeanors." He then exclaimed on social media, "We must protect our children from predators like Judge Bates." In our system of checks and balances, we must recognize that some actors, like Ogles, are clearly unbalanced.



Trump's Woke Police

In response to various Trump directives on gender, race, climate change, etc., federal agencies have flagged hundreds of words to limit or avoid altogether, according to a compilation by the *New York Times*. Trigger terms include "accessible, at risk, barrier, Black, disability, disparity, environmental quality, expression, female, Gulf of Mexico, historically, immigrants, institutional, mental health, minority, Native American, orientation, political, pollution, socio-economic, status, systemic, victim, vulnerable populations, and women." Notably absent from the list is "stupid."



21 Ex-DOGE Employees

The United States Digital Service was an obscure bureau commissioned to advise federal agencies on information technology. Then, Trump based Elon Musk's so-called Department of Government Efficiency there. The match did not go well. Some 21 Digital Service career employees have now resigned, issuing a joint letter saying, "We will not use our skills as technologists to compromise core government systems, jeopardize Americans' sensitive data, or dismantle critical public services," adding, "we swore to serve the American people and uphold our oath to the Constitution across presidential administrations. However, it has become clear that we can no longer honor those commitments." Sounding very much like another very stable genius, Musk responded with typical restraint: "More fake news. These were Dem political holdovers who refused to return to the office. They would have been fired had they not resigned."



U.S. Senator Lisa Murkowski

Alaska's Murkowski is one of the very few Republicans speaking out against the Musk-driven firings, calling them illegal and done without "respect and dignity." She also stated that Trump's attempts to block funding already approved by Congress cannot be allowed to stand," adding, "If we in Congress allow that, we effectively cede some of our authority." Yet, she concedes, "The 'we' has to be more than just me. And this is where it becomes more of a challenge." Good luck with that.



French Member of Parliament Nicolas Thierry

Led by the Green party's Thierry, the French Parliament has banned the use of toxic "forever chemicals" called PFAS from clothing, footwear, cosmetics, and ski wax beginning in 2026. The ban will be extended to all textile products from 2030. But, this being France, the cookware lobby won an exemption for nonstick frying pans and saucepans. The legislation also fines companies €100 for every 100 grams of PFAS released. "With this victory, we've broken a silence, because behind the explosion in chronic disease and cancer rates there are lives and families, who suffer a collective denial around the contamination of our environment, and for them we must continue the fight," Thierry said. The action foreshadows a similar pending EU-wide ban in an attempt to Make Europe Healthy Again.

PUBLIC HEALTH

Another Trump Pandemic?

A panzootic that began in wild birds is spreading widely across the U.S., infecting poultry, cattle, pigs, and other mammal species. The H5N1 virus, commonly referred to as bird flu, is leaping across species barriers, evolving into new strains that could potentially become more threatening to humans. As scientists warn about the unprecedented nature of this global panzootic, the Trump administration's actions are hobbling our ability to respond to it.

While the current human risk is low, that could turn on a dime. Every time the virus jumps to a new species, it evolves, and each new infection gives it an opportunity to mutate into more virulent strains. Yet, as the risk grows, the Trump administration is dismantling our public health institutions and crippling our ability to respond. So far, he has –

- Put RFK Jr., a vaccine skeptic, in charge of Health and Human Services, where he has called for an eight-year break on infectious disease research.
- Purged leadership of the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) of any not deemed loyal and silenced CDC public health communications.
- Begun massive budget and staffing cuts to not only CDC but to parts of the National Institutes of Health and the Food and Drug Administration tasked with helping develop our response to H5N1.

- Axed 25% of the U.S. Department of Agriculture's National Animal Health Laboratory Network, which plays a major role in responding to animal disease outbreaks.
- Blown apart international cooperative agreements at a time when we need global collaboration.

PEER is watching closely with our finger on the alarm.

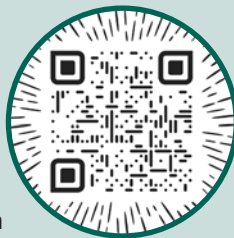


PHOTO: USDA

Bird Flu. The disease has affected more than 136 million commercial, backyard, and wild birds since 2022 and is spreading at a rapidly increasing rate.

2025 Community Survey

We are excited to launch our 4th annual Community Survey. The survey will be distributed to all our community members, including donors, whistleblowers, public employees, and journalists. Last year's survey helped us tailor communication strategies with our members and gain invaluable feedback on our work. From 309 participants, we learned that the greatest perceived threat to public employees at the federal level was political interference – an apt observation given our current political climate. This year, we invite you to help us evaluate our goals, focus areas, and engagement strategies for the coming year. We hope you will take a few minutes to complete the survey, either by returning the enclosed copy or using the QR code above to access the survey online.



SCAN FOR SURVEY

We Thank You!

We would like to thank the 172 new donors who have supported us since November 6th.

Thank you to the following Foundations for their support:

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NOAA is Undergoing a Hostile Takeover

Trump's efforts to gut the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) are right out of the Project 2025 playbook, the pre-election plan formulated by The Heritage Foundation.

In February, DOGE staffers entered NOAA's headquarters to access its IT systems and illegally fired hundreds of probationary employees across the country. Since then, it's announced plans to lay off 10% of the agency's staff, cancelled leases on buildings used for weather collection and analysis, and developed plans to remove civil service protections for most employees.

Why target NOAA?

Project 2025 calls for the agency to be "broken up and downsized" and calls it "harmful to US prosperity" for its role in climate science. But there are also more sinister reasons the administration is going after NOAA.

One reason is to privatize NOAA's weather data. Control of the data would allow Musk and other companies to corner the market for weather forecasting products marketed for consumers.

Another reason is that NOAA plays an important role in space. Musk's team has successfully infiltrated NOAA's Office of Space Commerce, the National Weather Service, and the National

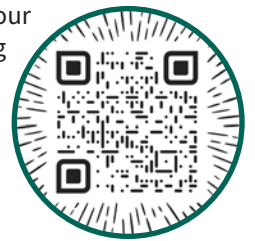
Environmental Satellite, Data, and Information Services. In doing so, Musk and his team have gained access to sensitive NOAA databases that will substantially financially benefit his companies—Space X and Starlink.

PEER Takes Action

This power grab threatens the American people. NOAA provides lifesaving information on wildfires, hurricanes, and climate threats and conducts innovative research to recover and manage our nation's living marine resources.

PEER has sent a new emergency Freedom of Information Act request to NOAA asking for communications among NOAA offices and DOGE staff to track Musk's and Trump's efforts to profiteer off NOAA. We are also asking our supporters to sign our petition expressing your concern about the rapid destruction of NOAA by Musk and Trump. The petition can be found on our website at www.peer.org or by using the QR code to the right.

We are determined to stop this administration's takeover of NOAA.



SIGN THE PETITION