

Trump administration scrambles to rehire key federal workers after DOGE firings

By [Eric Bradner](#), CNN

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Demonstrators protest personnel cuts at the Centers for Disease Control outside the organization's headquarters in Atlanta on March 12, 2025. Elijah Nouvelage/Getty Images

(CNN) — Federal agencies are rehiring and ordering back from leave some of the employees who were laid off in the weeks after President [Donald Trump](#) took office as they scramble to fill critical gaps in services left by the [Department of Government Efficiency-led effort](#) to shrink the federal workforce.

The Trump administration's quiet backtracking from the firings and voluntary retirements — which are also paired with new hires to fill vacancies those departures created — come as federal agencies are still implementing their [“reduction-in-force” plans](#) as part of a push for spending cuts.

spending cuts.

Experts warned that even though the Trump administration has backtracked on some of its efforts to shrink the federal workforce, the rapid rehiring is a warning sign that it has lost more capacities and expertise that could prove critical — and difficult to replace — in the months and years ahead.

“There are time bombs all over the place in the federal government because of this,” said Elaine Kamarck, the director of the Center for Effective Public Management at the Brookings Institution. “They’ve wreaked havoc across nearly every agency.”

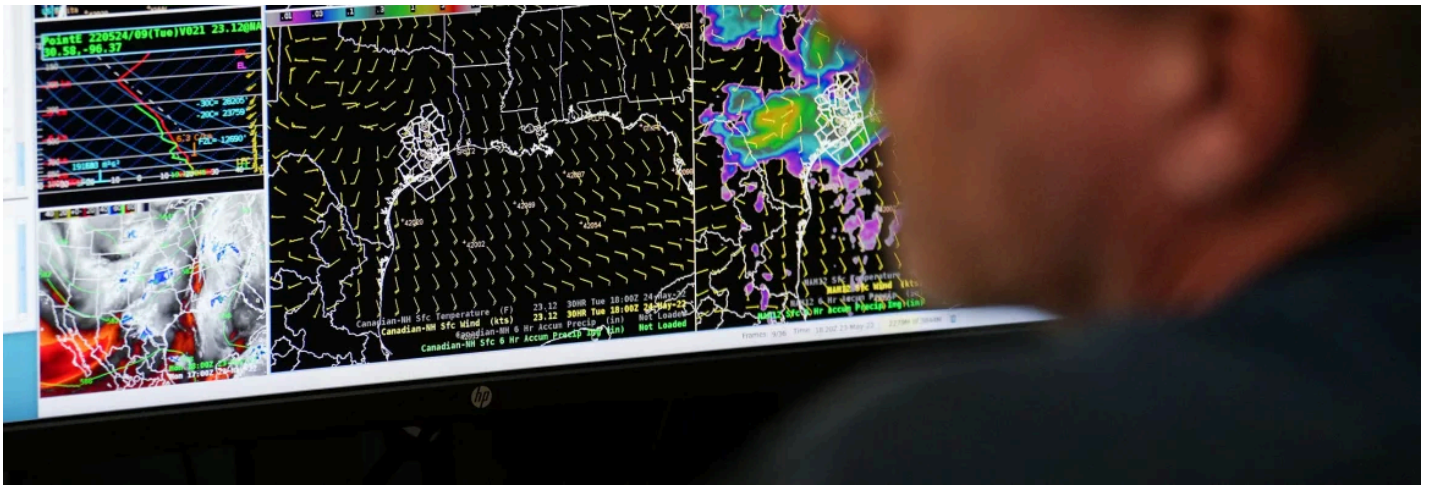


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Some government employees’ firings were halted by courts. But other moves to reinstate federal workers come as the Trump administration faces pressure from lawmakers, industries and groups they serve.

“President Trump pledged to make our bloated government more efficient by slashing waste, fraud, and abuse. The administration is committed to delivering on this mandate while rectifying any oversights to minimize disruptions to critical government services,” White House spokesman Kush Desai said.



A meteorologist at the National Weather Service offices in Dickinson, Texas, on May 23, 2022. Brett Coomer/Houston Chronicle/Getty Images

The Department of Health and Human Services reinstated 450 employees at the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention who were fired as part of a massive reorganization in April, including workers focused on HIV and childhood lead exposure.

Health and Human Services Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr. said in May that the department had also reinstated 328 workers at the CDC's National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health focused on mine safety.

Those employees combined represent about one-third of the 2,400 workers whose jobs HHS eliminated as part of its “reduction-in-force” plan as the Trump administration slashed the size of the federal workforce.



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More than 200 employees had their firings rescinded at the CDC's National Center for HIV, Viral Hepatitis, STD and Tuberculosis Prevention, along with 158 at the National Center for Environmental Health, an HHS spokesperson confirmed. Another 71 were brought back in the Office of the Director and two dozen more at the Global Health Center.

The cuts had wiped out the CDC's Childhood Lead Poisoning Prevention and Surveillance Branch as it was in the midst of helping Milwaukee address a lead exposure crisis in its public schools. The firings meant the CDC had to deny a request from the city for specialists to help. The entire lead team was rehired, along with its parent group, the Division of Environmental Health Science and Practice, according to its newly reinstated director, Dr. Erik Svendsen.

Other rehires are similarly driven by specific government services that were gutted by the initial layoffs. The Food and Drug Administration rehired more than a dozen scientists at a food safety lab in Illinois. The Department of Agriculture halted plans to lay off 25% of its staff at 58 facilities responsible for responding to bird flu, which had driven up the price of eggs.

Federal agency heads are also blocking some plans to lay off their employees. Sen. Lisa Murkowski, who was concerned about plans to slash 10% of the Indian Health Service's staff, said in a New York Times interview that Kennedy called her to say he was personally blocking those cuts.

"He called me up to say, 'They told me that I was supposed to find 10% cuts across the board for IHS, and I told them I wouldn't do it, that IHS has chronically been underfunded, we cannot go backward, and I'm not going to do that,'" the Alaska Republican said.

In February, the Trump administration fired — and then the next day rehired — more than 300 probationary employees at the National Nuclear Security Administration, the agency within the Department of Energy tasked with managing the nation's nuclear stockpile. Sources told CNN at the time the Trump administration officials responsible for the decision did not seem to know this agency oversees America's nuclear weapons.

After HHS let go of the entire team that handles the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program, or LIHEAP, in early April, the agency had to rehire one longtime employee for 2½ weeks to run a critical formula needed to distribute more than \$400 million to states, said Mark Wolfe, executive director of the National Energy Assistance Directors Association.



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The dismissal of the more than a dozen LIHEAP staffers raised concerns among state officials and lawmakers, who feared HHS would not send out this final tranche of fiscal year 2025 funding. Some states were depending on receiving this money to help residents cool their homes this summer since the states had already exhausted their prior appropriations on the heating season.

The agency announced at the end of April that it was releasing the remaining LIHEAP money. Wolfe, however, remains concerned about how HHS will handle the distribution of any fiscal year 2026 funds that Congress may appropriate since the agency will not have any experienced LIHEAP staffers. Doing so “requires skills, requires knowledge about the program,” he said.

Scott Laney, a National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health epidemiologist who’d received notice he was being placed on administrative leave but was then called back, told CNN there is “still a lot of chaos, sort of throughout the federal workforce.”





Scott Laney stands outside the Iron Senergy coal mine plant in Kirby, Pennsylvania, on April 16, 2025.
Ricky Carioti/The Washington Post/Getty Images

But he said he is more concerned about coal miners' safety.

If protections in place for decades are cut, Laney said, it's certain "that people will die earlier — that people will die in mining accidents and roof collapses, all sorts of the work that we do to prevent injury and illness and mining more broadly across the United States."

Max Stier, CEO of the Partnership for Public Service, said the moves to eliminate, and then reinstate, many federal workers "shows the mosaic of incompetence and a failure on the part of this administration to understand the critical value that the breadth of government expertise provides."

"This is not about a single incident. It's about a pattern that has implications for our government's ability to meet not just the challenges of today but the critical challenges of tomorrow," Stier said.

CNN's Tami Luhby, Annie Grayer, Camila DeChalus, Andrew Freedman, Meg Tirrell and Brenda Goodman contributed to this report.

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