

Newsletter 37 Public Service and National Service September 1, 2025

I am concerned as we all should be with Mr. Trump's egregious destruction of so many public service departments and agencies, his disregard for thousands of their committed servants, and his plans for dismantling AmeriCorps, our major supporter of civilian national service.

While the term "national service" is generally thought of as a term of voluntary military or civilian service, unpaid, fully paid, or supported with a stipend, Step Forward America is equally supportive of all types of public service. When I address benefits to the individual and to the nation of universal national service, most of them also apply to other forms of public service.

Obviously, it's a difficult time for us to be promoting public service of any kind when the current administration is doing everything possible to make it less attractive, including dismissing highly regarded military and civilian service officials who are experts in their fields.

Claiming to downsize simply by getting rid of waste, fraud and abuse, Trump unleashed Elon Musk and a completely unqualified and untrained team to accomplish this effort. Rather than using the existing expert leaders to identify areas of waste, fraud and abuse, Trump took this as an opportunity to dismiss them and hire replacements whose only qualifications appear to be loyalty to him.

The attack on expertise started shortly after taking office when Mr. Trump decapitated the military by firing --- General Charles Brown an ex fighter pilot who was Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff --- Lisa Franchetti, Chief of Naval Operations --- Vice Admiral Nancy Lacore Chief of Naval Reserve, Rear Admiral Jamie Sands who headed Naval

Special Warfare Command, and US Coast Guard Commandant Admiral Linda Lee Fagan.

On the civilian side at the same time he dismissed 17 agency inspectors general, the most important overseers of responsible federal government, without the 30 days' notice to Congress with detailed reasons as required by law. Over the following months, others departing included Jen Easterly, a past director of the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency who had her senior teaching appointment at West Point revoked based on the recommendation of conspiracy theorist Laura Loomer, and Defense Intelligence Agency director Lt. Gen Jeffrey Kruse who was dismissed for assessing the results of our bombing of Iran's nuclear facilities as less destructive than reported by the President.

Paul Rosenzweig's article in *The Atlantic* "The Destruction of the Department of Justice" noted the following departures from the DOJ: the head of the Office of Information Policy which handles Freedom of Information requests who was fired, and the head of the Office of Professional Responsibility "whose job is to make sure that DOJ employees act ethically" who was placed on administrative leave. Others included the DOJ's Bradley Weinsheimer removed from his senior ethics official position.

And just within the past few days Director of the CDC Susan Monarez was dismissed when she refused to rubber stamp RFK Jr's attack on vaccines, and three other top scientists at the CDC then resigned: Chief Medical Officer Debra Houry, National Center for Immunization and Respiratory Diseases director Demetre Daskalakis, and National Center for Emerging and Zoonotic Infectious Diseases director Daniel Jernigan.

About the same time, the administration forced Social Security's Chief Data Officer Charles Borges to resign, ostensibly for blowing the whistle on serious data breaches that leave more than 300 million Americans at risk of identity theft and loss of benefits.

In an attempt to reduce interest rates Trump has even threatened to remove Fed Chairman Powell --- who has shepherded control of inflation and maximum employment thereby accomplishing the long sought "soft landing" so critical to the economy.

But of even greater concern than the removal of key individuals from positions of public service leadership is the downsizing of entire agencies and departments either in the guise of getting rid of abuse, waste and fraud or in an attempt to eliminate guardrails that might thwart the administration's autocratic ambitions.

An opinion piece in the Times indicates that the staff of the State Department's Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor will be cut by 15% --- their reports of foreign human rights abuse on which we and many of our allies rely will no longer include sections on free and fair elections and other valued rights, and the Human Rights and Democracy Fund which supports embattled human rights defenders will be eliminated. In addition, it noted that Trump has significantly reduced the staffing at the Justice Department's Public Integrity Section that is responsible for investigating corrupt acts by elected officials.

USAID, the great humanitarian endeavor that has saved millions of lives and fostered US international goodwill for decades, is being downsized with the remnants absorbed into the State Department, and anything left of our goodwill will fall victim to the silencing of Radio Free stations and Voice of America.

The Federal Emergency Management Fund is being downsized by 2000 employees slated to go at a time when, as evidenced by recent horrendous floods and other natural disasters, it is most needed. With Trump desiring to turn over more relief efforts to the states, FEMA's future is uncertain.

The unmerited deployment of national troops to Los Angeles and DC with plans to eventually include New York and Chicago can't help but discourage the volunteering and recruitment of those prospects interested in serving and protecting their country from foreign foes, not in apprehending druggies, traffic violators and shop lifters.

Regardless of the positive trend in violent crime reduction in these cities, any violent crime in a country with the resources that we have is too much, and we should all support local, state and federal efforts to combat same with the appropriate tools, for example, community violence intervention(CVI) programs that have been successful in Chicago but have had federal funding significantly reduced. Using federal troops except in emergency situations is not an appropriate tool. It doesn't fit with their mission and training.

While we're at it, there is nothing wrong with being "woke" (actively aware of and attentive to important facts and issues---especially issues of racial and social justice) about supporting transgender troops in the military. Every reference to performance reviews that I've read is exemplary, yet Trump issued an executive order barring from the military the approximately 4200 transgender troops now serving and others wishing to follow.

But perhaps the most serious threat to our and the world's well-being as well as our international reputation is the planned removal by DHS of 20,000 positions at the NIH, FDA and CDC, half of which have already been dismissed. These include some of the scientists working at the NIH

main campus in Bethesda, MD and some at the more than 2500 universities and medical centers working on hundreds of health and welfare grants.

And over 400 science grants and their scientists are being terminated for DEI related issues by the National Science Foundation that finances research on quantum computing, microbiology, and STEM. Indications are that the administration is trying to cut all federal basic research funding by a third.

As William Burns, former director of the CIA and Deputy Secretary of State, phrased it in “A Letter to America’s Discarded Public Servants” in *The Atlantic*, “under the guise of reform, you all got caught in the crossfire of a retribution campaign --- of a war on public service and expertise.”

Fortunately, a multitude of these cutbacks were aimed at removing anyone who could be considered unsuitable by MAGA just by dint of serving at least some of their time under the Biden administration, and many will eventually be replaced by others with no blackmarks. So, plenty of openings will exist as the needs arise, and increase when the present administration departs. There is one significant concern, however. By law, 4000 federal jobs are filled by political appointees, presumably supportive of the President’s policies regardless of the appointees’ qualifications. But a recent memo from the current administration would expand that to include every position level GS-5 or above. This is surely headed for court review.

As W. Kamau Bell pointed out in her essay in *Who Is Government*, a book edited by Michael Lewis that I highly recommend “federal employees go to work every day with the explicit job description of making the lives of everyday Americans better. Contrary to [popular] belief, these employees aren’t lazy or conspiring how to make

Americans' lives harder. They aren't allowed to noodle around with ideas for too long without showing real-world progress. And if they did just want to cause problems and noodle around all day, there's a more efficient way to do that: become a member of Congress."

As to civilian national service, there is uncertainty surrounding AmeriCorps funding for Fiscal Year 2026. The President's budget request for FY 2026 of \$107 million proposes eliminating AmeriCorps and allocates \$32 million for its closure. But the Senate Appropriations Committee, with bipartisan support, voted to provide near-level funding for AmeriCorps in FY 2026, similar to FY 2025 levels (approximately \$1.25 billion). The House is expected to debate the budget in September, but the outlook is not promising.

So, what can we all do to combat the many threats to national and public service that I have addressed?

First of all, before you toss this newsletter, simply select one or more of the above cuts that particularly concern you and commit now to do or say something, while practicing your non-confrontational civil discourse skills, that will be seen or heard by some person(s) whom you have reason to believe supports the current administration's downsizing efforts. Likewise, as we all are frequently urged to do, contact your US Senators and Representative---the easiest way of doing so is spelled out on their websites. And participate in your nearest local rallies sponsored by Act Local or other organizations in or near your town all across the country. If, like me, AmeriCorps is your main concern, keep track of the situation by visiting <https://www.VoicesForService.org> and write your congressman or congresswoman.

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