

# Bush aims to privatize half of all federal jobs

Ron Hutcheson

Knight Ridder Newspapers (KRT)

WASHINGTON — The Bush administration announced plans Thursday to turn over as many as 850,000 federal jobs to private companies in an effort to improve service and cut costs.

The proposal could eliminate about half of the 1.7 million federal civilian workers by contracting out jobs ranging from lawn mowing to satellite tracking. Private companies could bid for the work under a process that may be outlined as early as Friday in the Federal Register, which gives public notice of all government actions.

The aggressive effort to pare down the federal work force is sure to inflame labor unions already upset by President Bush's plan to waive civil service protections at his new department of homeland security.

The Washington area has the largest concentration of federal workers — about 360,000 — but the

move's effect would be felt nationwide.

Bush administration officials say they can impose the new bidding process without congressional approval after a 30-day review period.

"The Bush administration seems fairly antagonistic toward its federal employee work force. If they can't bust their unions or take away their civil service protections, they're going to privatize their jobs," said John Threlkeld, a spokesman for the American Federation of Government Employees, a 600,000-member affiliate of the AFL-CIO.

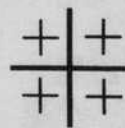
White House spokesman Scott McClellan did not answer directly when asked if federal workers should fear for their jobs.

Advocates of contracting out government services predict savings of more than 30 percent when federal jobs are put out for competitive bids. Skeptics contend the government is ill equipped to monitor work by private contractors, who may skimp on quality.

The Office of Management and Budget has identified dozens of job categories that could be turned over to private contractors, including security in government buildings, aircraft and railway maintenance, geological surveys, legal services and the overhauling and testing of space systems.

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# Office Depot gets recycling pressure from paper group

David Fleshler

South Florida Sun-Sentinel (KRT)

FORT LAUDERDALE, Fla. — After embarrassing Staples Inc. into agreeing to sell more recycled products, a coalition of environmental groups is threatening to launch a similar campaign against Office Depot.

ForestEthics and the Dogwood Alliance declared victory this week in their two-year campaign to persuade Staples to increase the recycled content of its paper products to 30 percent. Now the two groups are preparing a letter to Office Depot urging the Delray Beach, Fla., company to make the same commitment or face a campaign of picketing, shareholder actions and denunciations by celebrities.

"Staples now set a very high standard," said Todd Paglia, director of the Paper Campaign for ForestEthics, a San Francisco environmental group. "We're hoping that Office Depot responds with a strong environmental policy, and there isn't a year or two of campaigning on this issue to get them to see the light."

Eileen Dunn, Office Depot's vice president for investor and public re-

lations, said the company already has high environmental standards. She said Office Depot offers more than 1,700 products made at least partially from recycled materials, including a desk-organizer with a recycled content of 85 percent. And she said the company, which operates more than 1,000 stores, requires suppliers to certify that none of their products comes from rainforests or old-growth forests.

Dunn said the company's recycling percentage was already "in the double digits," but she was unable to say what the percentage was.

"Office Depot has been focused on the environment," she said.

But Paglia said Staples had also required suppliers to certify that no paper came from old-growth forests, and the claim turned out not to be true. ForestEthics released a report last August, "The Credibility Gap at Staples," which claimed that Staples' suppliers cut down trees in environmentally sensitive forests of Indonesia and northern Canada.

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