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...Trump slashes federal workers' union rights

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tional responsibilities using paid work time. The amount of paid time they may use is supposed to be “reasonable, necessary and in the public interest,” and is to be negotiated between the union and the employing agency. Paid time can’t be used to conduct union-specific business like soliciting members, holding union meetings, electing union officers, or engaging in political activities. AFGE argues that paid time saves taxpayers in the long run because it helps resolve workplace conflicts before they become costly, agency-wide problems.

Under the laws passed by Congress, federal government workplaces are open shops, akin to “right-to-work,” in that union membership and dues are strictly voluntary matters, and yet unions are obligated to defend all employees, whether they’ve joined or not.

And federal workers already have pretty limited union rights compared to private sector workers. They can’t strike, and they can’t negotiate over wages and benefits, which are set by Congress. So their unions’ abil-



Some Congressional Republicans have been making a political issue of federal government union contracts that let union officers represent members on paid work time. The House Oversight Committee even held a May 24 hearing entitled “Union Time on the People’s Dime.” To set the record straight, AFGE explains the practice at afge.org/take-action/campaigns/official-time/

ity to represent them when they face discipline is one of the most important union rights federal workers do have.

That’s what Executive Order 13837 is aimed at. It severely hampers unions’ ability to de-

fend workers facing discipline — at the very same time that Executive Order 13839 makes it quicker and easier for federal employees to be fired.

Trump, who famously made “You’re fired” his signature catch-phrase, asked Congress in his February 2018 State of the Union address for greater authority to reward — or get rid of — federal workers. Congress hasn’t done that. Now Trump is trying to do it on his own authority.

Executive Order 13839 would tear up longstanding federal worker job security protections and replace them with something more like an “at will” work environment. Under the order:

- Managers at federal agencies don’t have to use “progressive discipline” (a standard union protection in which discipline progresses from a verbal or written warning to suspension or termination.)
- Federal managers don’t have to be consistent in how they discipline employees: “Conduct that justifies discipline of one employee at one time does not necessarily justify similar discipline of a different employee at a different time,” the order says.
- New hires have to go through a

“probationary” period as the final step in the hiring process.

- In the event of layoffs, seniority rights (a union policy that reduces management’s ability to reward favorites, and worker’s motivation to kiss up) would be replaced with manager-evaluated “performance” ratings.
- Managers could also terminate employees for performance issues after 30 days. [Currently, federal employees get at least 60 to 120 days to show they can meet performance goals before being terminated.]

A third order, Executive Order 13836, directs federal agencies to renegotiate their union contracts to increase management authority to “reward high performers, hold low-performers accountable, or flexibly respond to operational needs.” It also says bargaining should not take more than a year.

“This president seems to think he is above the law, and we are not going to stand by while he tries to shred workers’ rights,” said AFGE president Cox Sr., in a press statement announcing the lawsuit. “This is a democracy, not a dictatorship. No president should be able to undo a law he doesn’t like through administrative fiat.”

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