



White House Memo on DoD Collective Bargaining Talking Points

Background: On February 21, 2020, the administration published in the Federal Register a memo from the President to Defense Secretary Mark Esper delegating to the Defense Secretary the power to deny Department of Defense workers the freedom to collectively bargain.

What's really driving this?

- The idea of eliminating collective bargaining at the Department of Defense comes straight out of a secret memo that was first reported by The New York Times and Politico.
- This 19-page memo was prepared by one of the President's senior advisors shortly after his election. It outlines a detailed strategy for eliminating federal unions and federal workers – specifically ending all collective bargaining at the Department of Defense.
- The memo was prepared by James Sherk, special assistant to the President for domestic policy, who previously was a research fellow at the anti-worker Heritage Foundation.
- The memo recommends that the President issue an executive order exempting DoD from collective bargaining on the basis of national security. It further recommends exploring a similar strategy to eliminate unions at the Department of Veterans Affairs, Transportation Security Administration, and portions of other departments including Homeland Security and State.

Statement from American Federation of Government Employees National Secretary-Treasurer

Everett Kelley: “Denying nearly half a million Defense Department workers the collective bargaining rights guaranteed to them by law since 1962 would be a travesty — and doing it under the guise of ‘national security’ would be a disgrace to the sacred oath and obligation that all federal workers make to their country. This administration will not stop until it takes away all workers’ rights to form and join a union, and we will not stop doing everything we can to prevent that from happening.”

Fast Facts:

- **58 years** – That’s how long DoD workers have had the freedom to join their union and bargain collectively for a better life at work. Through the Vietnam War, the first Gulf War, 9/11, the wars in Afghanistan, Iraq, and the Global War on Terror, and countless other sensitive military operations the U.S. has undertaken, these rights have never been called into question.
- **500,000 employees** – Nearly half a million employees are currently covered by union contracts inside the Department of Defense, including 300,000 represented by AFGE. Ripping up these employees’ contracts and denying them the freedom to join together for a better life at work would be the single largest anti-union action taken by a president in U.S. history.
- **Over 1/3 are veterans themselves** – Across the federal workforce, over 1/3 of federal employees are veterans themselves, and the same holds true at the Department of Defense. Now, the administration is claiming that those veterans joining together for a better life at work are a threat to national security that must be eliminated. It’s an insult to these employees’

military service and their continued service to our country at DoD. It's anti-veteran, anti-military, anti-employee, and anti-union.

- **85% outside the DC Metro area** – 85% of federal employees live and work outside the D.C. metropolitan area, and that's especially true for DoD civilians. The impact of this decision will be felt by communities across this country – particularly rural communities that depend on the good wages and benefits provided by federal government jobs at DoD facilities in their area.

How do unionized employees help national security at DoD?

- Unions ensure health and safety procedures are followed and that employees have adequate training and resources to perform their jobs effectively and completely – something our service members in harm's way rely on for their very lives.
- Unionized law enforcement civilian employees at Fort Hood played an integral role in foiling a terrorist attack, placing their lives at risk to protect members of the military and their families.
- During Operation Iraqi Freedom, the unionized workforce at Rock Island Arsenal worked with management to provide the combatant commanders needed armor kits for vehicles, which were completed and on a plane within one week. A similar project took private industry *two months* to complete.
- Congress has specifically recognized the importance of continuing collective bargaining agreements during any departmental reorganization of the cyber-security mission in previous National Defense Authorization Acts.

What is AFGE doing?

- **Working with Congress and Allies** – AFGE is already working with a bipartisan group of Congressional allies to fight back against this anti-employee, anti-veteran, anti-union action. Here are some of the best quotes from our allies in Congress and beyond:
 - **Sen. Mark Warner (Virginia)** – “This is only the President’s latest effort to erode our nation’s civilian, non-political federal workforce. The careless, slapdash manner in which [the President] is endeavoring to exempt all Department of Defense civilian personnel from the collective bargaining rights that the law guarantees them is unprecedented. The hostility and contempt he holds for our dedicated public servants and the institutions they serve is clear at this point. Federal employees in Virginia and across the country can count on my continued resolve to fight against the President’s efforts to undermine their rights.”
 - **Sen. Susan Collins (Maine)** – “Think about the implications of that. Left unchecked — and I’m determined to see that we overturn it — this decision could potentially affect hundreds of thousands of employees. I’ve read that the reason cited was ‘flexibility.’ Let me tell you, I do not accept that rationale. Please know that I will work with my colleagues from both sides of the aisle to protect the right of DoD civilian workers to engage in collective bargaining.”
 - **Richard Trumka, AFL-CIO President** – “We will fight this in the courts. We will fight this in Congress. We will fight this on every front and with every fiber of our being.”