

47 ways Trump has made life less affordable in the last year

Report • By Celine McNicholas, Margaret Poydock, and Josh Bivens • January 13, 2026

In the first year of his second term, President Trump has actively made life less affordable for working people. Affordability has two sides—prices and pay. While public debate fixates on rising costs, the administration’s most serious harm has come from its policies that hold down wages and weaken workers’ bargaining power. The 47th president has pursued an agenda that undercuts incomes for all but the wealthiest households, slows job growth, and invites employer exploitation and abuse—including unprecedented attacks on federal workers’ collective bargaining rights that make him the **biggest union buster in U.S. history**. His policies have systematically stripped workers of leverage in the labor market, driving down pay and making it harder for working families to afford the basics.

At its core, affordability is shaped by whether workers’ paychecks keep pace with the cost of living. What many now describe as an affordability crisis is the predictable result of **decades of policies** that have suppressed wage growth and eroded workers’ bargaining power. In the decades before the pandemic, owners and corporate executives claimed an ever-larger share of the income generated by what workers produced. Had pay for typical workers kept pace with productivity over the last 45 years—rather than being suppressed—their **paychecks would be roughly 40% larger today**. This wage shortfall is the driving force in America’s affordability crisis—and reversing it must be central to any serious affordability agenda.

While workers’ wages—particularly those of low-wage workers—saw **sharp inflation-adjusted increases between 2019 and 2024**, these gains fell far short of recouping the losses of the four prior decades. These wage increases were largely obscured amid the anxieties of the immediate post-pandemic period, including a large jump in inflation that eclipsed even larger wage gains for most workers. But instead of building on the first real progress in decades, Trump’s policies over the last year will make this wage shortfall worse and are likely to contribute to greater wage suppression in the longer run. Absent an about-face in Trump’s economic agenda, life will continue to become even less affordable for working people.

In this report, we examine 47 of the most significant actions

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Trump has taken in the first year of his second term to make it harder for working families to afford the cost of living. We organized these actions into five categories:

1. Eroding workers' wages and economic security;
2. Undermining job creation;
3. Weakening workers' rights;
4. Enabling employer exploitation; and
5. Creating an ineffective government.

Our list of 47 is not exhaustive; it highlights a subset of Trump's actions with clear impacts on working people's economic security and ability to afford the basics. Many of the actions outlined here have impacts across categories. Trump's attacks on union workers, for example, reduce workers' wages, weaken workers' rights, and promote employer exploitation of workers.

Eroding workers' wages and economic security

Trump's actions over the last year consistently undermined workers' wages and increased their economic vulnerability, making it harder for many families to afford basic necessities. In the first weeks after being sworn in, Trump moved quickly to roll back minimum wage increases for hundreds of thousands of workers and more recently, he finalized regulations that reduce the wages of all farm workers, including those who are U.S. citizens. The actions below illustrate how this agenda has played out across a range of policies that harm workers' wages and economic security:

- **Reducing the minimum wage for nearly 400,000 federal contractors:** President Trump rescinded an executive order that increased the minimum wage for federal contractors to \$15 per hour in 2022 and indexed it to inflation. The minimum hourly wage for federal contractors had reached \$17.75 by the time he eliminated the policy.
- **Stopping enforcement of misclassification protections for workers illegally classified as independent contractors:** This robs workers of minimum wage, overtime, workers' compensation, and other basic rights.
- **Finalizing an interim final rule that will radically cut the wages of all farm workers:** The rule reduces the minimum wages paid to migrant farm workers in the H-2A program and deducts up to 30% of their hourly pay for housing costs. These wage cuts for H-2A workers are so massive that they will put downward pressure on the wages of *all* farm workers, including U.S. citizens. Farm workers as a whole will lose between \$4.4 to \$5.4 billion in pay—roughly 10% to 12% of their total wages. The Trump administration admitted that their immigration enforcement efforts are hurting farmers and will likely lead to higher food prices—an admission they use to justify the pay cuts.

- **Denying 2 million in-home health care workers minimum wage and overtime pay:** In July, the Trump administration **proposed a rule rescinding** the 2013 home health care worker rule, which gave in-home care workers the right to earn the minimum wage and overtime pay for the first time. The Department of Labor also **stopped enforcing** the 2013 rule, effectively giving employers the green light to ignore it during the rollback process.
- **Facilitating the inclusion of cryptocurrencies among 401(k) investment options:** The Trump administration rescinded guidance that warned employers they would face heightened scrutiny if they included cryptocurrency investments in their retirement plans. This “neutral approach” to cryptocurrency, alongside other types of retirement investment strategies, could expose millions of future retirees to significant financial risk.

Negatively impacting job creation

Trump’s second-term policies have weakened job creation across key sectors. His mass deportation agenda threatens to destroy millions of jobs, and his repeated attacks on federal workers have already cost more than a quarter million jobs. Most recent job data already show the effects of these policies, including rising unemployment, slowing job growth, and job losses in both public and private sectors. The policies outlined below show how Trump’s actions have undermined job creation:

- **Pausing funding for projects authorized under a bipartisan infrastructure law:** This will jeopardize **millions of jobs** on those projects and deny benefits to communities.
- **Signing into law legislation that facilitates President Trump’s mass deportation agenda:** This will cause **massive job losses** for both immigrants and U.S.-born workers, particularly in construction and **caregiving**. The Laken Riley Act, the first piece of legislation Trump signed into law, eviscerates due process for immigrants by allowing immigration enforcement to detain immigrants indefinitely if they are accused of even low-level crimes.
- **Revoking an executive order that created a federal interagency working group focused on expanding registered apprenticeships in federal employment or on federally funded projects:** By doing so, President Trump has limited opportunities to expand registered apprenticeship career pathways in federal employment and halted the expansion of private-sector registered apprenticeships that benefit both employers seeking skilled workers and workers seeking stable careers in high-demand industries.
- **Attempting to shut down Job Corps centers operated by federal contractors across the country:** Jobs Corps provides free education, workforce training, housing, and job placement to low-income teens and young adults ages 16–24. The uncertainty of the program left thousands of young people with no other options for housing at risk of homelessness.
- **Introducing uncertainty into U.S. manufacturing global supply chains through**

chaotic and arbitrary trade policy and tariffs: Over the first year of the second Trump administration, average effective tariff rates have **changed** from 2.4% to a high of 28% then back down to today's 17% as of January 5, 2026—a historically unprecedented scale of volatility in trade policy. This uncertainty and the retaliatory actions levied by U.S. trade partners overwhelmed any **potential strategic gains** from **smart trade and tariff policy** that could have supported U.S. manufacturing, resulting in a **steady decline in manufacturing jobs** in 2025.

Weakening workers' rights

From his attacks on the independence of agencies to his appointment of corporate-aligned, anti-worker officials, Trump has mounted a sustained assault on workers' rights, undermining their earnings and making it harder for them to make ends meet. While collective bargaining has been a central target, the damage extends well beyond it. By making work more dangerous, weakening basic labor protections, and heightening economic and immigration precarity, Trump's administration has systematically suppressed workers' ability to assert their rights, organize, and demand fair pay and decent working conditions. Trump's attacks on workers' rights include:

- **Stripping collective bargaining rights from more than 1 million federal workers:** President Trump became the largest union buster in U.S. history when he issued an **executive order** that revoked the collective bargaining rights for workers at more than 30 federal agencies. By rolling back these workers' right to organize with their coworkers and improve their working conditions, Trump is undermining their ability to efficiently provide services the public relies on.
- **Delaying enforcement of the silica rule for coal miners:** Exposure to coal mine dust containing silica has been found to lead to black lung disease and progressive massive fibrosis. The Mine Safety and Health Administration estimates that the silica rule would prevent more than **1,000 deaths and 3,700 cases of silica-related illnesses**. Delaying enforcement of this rule effectively shifts the burden of protection onto miners, forcing them to weigh their health against their jobs and economic security.
- **Proposing limiting the scope of the Occupational Safety and Health Administration's General Duty Clause:** This would make workers less protected from known and preventable hazards where no other specific standard applies.
- **Firing the general counsel of the NLRB:** Jennifer Abruzzo had instituted a number of important reforms aimed at reinvigorating workers' rights to a union and collective bargaining.
- **Stripping work permits and temporary immigration protections like parole and Temporary Protected Status from millions of immigrant workers who are lawfully in the United States:** Jeopardizing these workers' immigration status not only causes them to lose their workplace rights but also makes them targets for deportation, which has large negative **impacts on the economy**.
- **Deterring worker organizing by having immigration enforcement patrol public**

spaces including places of employment: These tactics make immigrant workers fearful of asserting their workplace rights. Surveillance and enforcement in **immigration courts** is also preventing migrants from having their cases proceed—cutting off potential pathways to lawful status or protection that would grant them workplace rights.

Promoting employer abuse and exploitation

Trump has consistently promoted employer exploitation of workers by weakening and politicizing labor enforcement. His firing of a National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) member for “disfavoring the interests of employers” was not an isolated act, but part of a broader pattern signaling that he expects the officials he appoints to favor employers in the enforcement of worker protections. His attacks on the independence of agencies tasked with enforcing worker protections further reinforce the message that enforcement will follow his political direction instead of the law—sending a clear signal that workers’ rights’ violations will go unpunished. Through the actions below, Trump is essentially inviting employers to violate the law without fear of accountability:

- **Nominating a secretary of labor who has pursued a deregulatory agenda:** This agenda robs workers of standards protecting their health and safety and weakens protections that ensure they are paid for their labor.
- **Firing a member of the NLRB for “disfavoring the interests of employers”:** The illegal firing of Gwynne Wilcox **compromises the independence** of the only agency with the authority to administer and enforce private-sector workers’ rights to a union and collective bargaining.
- **Ending grant funding to fight child labor, forced labor, and human trafficking around the world:** Trump terminated International Labor Affairs Bureau grants—leaving vulnerable workers around the world at risk, undermining the U.S.’ ability to monitor foreign governments’ compliance with U.S. trade agreements, forcing U.S. workers to compete on an uneven international playing field, and fueling a race to the bottom in the global economy.
- **Nominating a solicitor of labor hostile to workers:** Jonathan Berry supports weakening the federal minimum wage, limiting overtime eligibility, and undermining workers’ right to a union by forcing secret ballot elections.
- **Nominating a NLRB general counsel aligned with corporate interests:** Crystal Carey was a partner at Morgan Lewis & Bockius LLP, one of the largest management-side law firms that currently represents corporations known for violating workers’ rights, including Amazon, SpaceX, Apple, and Tesla.
- **Nominating a NLRB board member with a long career as a corporate lawyer:** Scott Mayer was the chief labor counsel at the Boeing Corporation—a company repeatedly accused of bad faith bargaining—and has a decades-long career as a corporate

lawyer, including at Morgan, Lewis & Bockius LLP.

- **Nominating an Employee Benefits Security Administration (EBSA) head whose background is misaligned with the EBSA's mandate:** Daniel Aronowitz most recently served as president of a company that insures employers against liability for violating their fiduciary duty as sponsors of employee benefits plans—in other words, a business that helps employers avoid the financial consequences of mishandling workers' benefits plans. EBSA works to enforce laws protecting workers in employee benefit plans, such as employer-provided health insurance or retirement savings benefits.
- **Weakening workplace safety penalties for smaller businesses:** This may reduce incentives for employers to proactively address workplace safety before hazards or accidents occur.
- **Nominating an Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) chair with a history of opposing anti-discrimination protections:** Andrea Lucas voted against workplace harassment guidance that included protections for LGBTQ+ workers and is a known critic of diversity, equity, and inclusion programs at the workplace. The EEOC is an independent agency that enforces federal laws that prohibit employment discrimination and harassment.
- **Revoking an executive order promoting strong labor standards on projects receiving federal funds through Biden-era economic investments:** President Trump's decision opens the door for federal funding to flow toward exploitative employers and increases the likelihood that taxpayer-funded projects will create jobs with lower wages and worse benefits, and that are less likely to be unionized.
- **Appointing the former leader of an anti-union organization to head the Office of Labor-Management Standards:** The agency oversees the financial disclosures of unions, employers, and union busting consultants.
- **Firing multiple EEOC Commissioners:** These firings compromise the independence of the agency and undermine the enforcement of federal laws that prohibit employment discrimination and harassment.
- **Conducting systematic worksite raids that failed to improve wages and working conditions and instead punished workers:** Some were carried out under the **guise of stopping labor exploitation**, yet occurred with no involvement from the Labor Department and resulted in little to no punishment for employers, whereas workers were detained and deported, losing their livelihoods. In most cases, these raids do not stop employers from exploiting their workers but rather make the workers more fearful of retaliation for speaking out against unsafe working conditions or labor abuses, which puts all workers at risk.

Promoting ineffective government

Trump has taken deliberate actions to weaken the federal government and erode trust in its ability to serve the public interest. From pushing out over a quarter million federal

workers to politicizing career civil service positions, eliminating entire agencies, and undermining the federal government's ability to produce timely, accurate data, the Trump administration has spent the last year reshaping the U.S. government to serve his and his corporate backers' interests over those of working people. His attacks on the federal workforce make it difficult for public servants to administer essential services that help families afford health care, food, and other basic needs. These actions are intended to foster distrust in the federal government and dismantle vital social safety net programs millions of people in the U.S. rely on. This agenda is most evident in Trump's signing a massive federal budget bill that includes huge tax cuts for the wealthy while slashing funding for Medicaid and SNAP. In his first year, Trump set a legacy of promoting ineffective government, including through the following actions:

- **Politicizing Career Senior Executive Service (SES) officials:** Trump issued a memorandum that states they are to serve at the pleasure of the president. SES officials are at the highest level of career civil service in the federal government.
- **Firing the majority of staff at the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health:** The agency was created to ensure safe and healthy working conditions. The firings eliminated divisions focused on the health and safety of miners, firefighters, and health care workers.
- **Nominating an EEOC commissioner who is unqualified in workplace civil rights enforcement:** Brittany Panuccio lacks the background and expertise to enforce workplace civil rights effectively.
- **Nominating an Office of Management and Budget director who was a lead architect of the right-wing policy agenda known as Project 2025:** This agenda aims to remake the administrative state into a vehicle for advancing the Trump administration's political ideology.
- **Firing the chair of the Federal Labor Relations Authority, an independent agency that oversees labor relations between the federal agencies and its employees:** This move—taking aim at a critical mechanism for oversight and recourse—came shortly after the Trump administration issued dozens of actions that harmed the federal workforce.
- **Firing a member of the Merit Systems Protection Board, the agency that protects the federal merits systems and the rights of employees in those systems:** The illegal removal of Cathy Harris makes way for President Trump to appoint an individual that aligns politically with his interests—further weakening safeguards for federal workers.
- **Trying to fire Federal Reserve Governor Lisa Cook in an attempt to replace independent Fed leadership with loyalists who would let him micromanage monetary policy from the White House:** Presidential control over Federal Reserve policy would signal to decision-makers throughout the economy that interest rates are no longer be set based on sound data or economic conditions—but instead on the whims of the president. As a result, confidence in the Federal Reserve would evaporate and lead to serious economic consequences for the U.S., including higher inflation and interest rates in the long run.

- **Firing BLS Commissioner Erika McEntarfer when accurate numbers that are legally required to be reported conflicted with Trump’s narrative about the economy:** The BLS is one of the most respected statistical agencies in the world, known for its methodological rigor, independence, and transparency. Many stakeholders, including the Federal Reserve, state and local governments, and private businesses, rely on the agency’s economic data releases. This country runs on reliable data. Politicizing economic data from the federal government would **undermine effective economic decision-making**.
- **Attempting to shutter the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau (CFPB):** The Trump administration has repeatedly withheld funds from the CFPB, blocking the agency’s work to protect consumers in the financial marketplace.
- **Trying to eliminate the Federal Mediation and Conciliation Service, a federal agency that provides mediation, training, and facilitation to resolve labor-management disputes:** If the Trump administration is successful in eliminating the agency, unions and employers will no longer have a neutral, third party in the government available to help navigate disagreements in bargaining.
- **Directing federal agencies to end the use of disparate impact liability:** This is a core civil rights safeguard that is key to ensuring that policies cannot evade civil rights law simply by being labeled “race-blind” even when they perpetuate discrimination, segregation, and racial inequity in the workplace, schools, or the law.
- **Politicizing and compromising independent agencies by putting them under the supervision of the president:** Independent agencies were established by Congress to ensure that those charged with safeguarding critically important public interests—like workers’ rights, product safety, or household financial security—would act to serve the public good, not the president’s political needs.
- **Signing into law a bill that is the largest direct transfer (through federal policy) of wealth from working families to the ultrawealthy:** The legislation is estimated to deliver \$1 trillion in tax cuts for the top 1%, while cutting more than \$1 trillion in social safety net programs. The legislation will likely cause more than **15 million people** in the U.S. to lose health insurance and will likely expose more than **22 million people** to food insecurity.
- **Proposing a new federal employee classification called “Schedule Policy/Career” rule, which would make it easier to fire federal employees for political reasons:** The Trump administration estimates that more than 50,000 federal workers—2% of the civilian federal workforce—could be reclassified under this new category.
- **Issuing an executive order on apprenticeships that does not require the federal government to consult with labor organizations, despite the integral role labor unions play in registered apprenticeship programs:** This weakens program quality and oversight and risks diverting public funds away from proven, high-road training models that deliver good jobs.
- **Implementing large-scale reductions in the federal workforce:** These have disrupted essential government services due to a loss in capacity and subject matter experts.
- **Directing the attorney general to bring challenges against state laws that would**

regulate artificial intelligence technologies: In the absence of federal action, **states have been working** to regulate uses of AI that may harm workers or consumers. President Trump's executive order to deter states from regulating AI represents a White House-led attempt at federal preemption, using the higher authority of the federal government to prevent states from adopting stronger labor standards or other guardrails.

- **Firing 17 inspector generals tasked with preventing mismanagement, corruption, fraud, and waste of taxpayers' money in federal agencies:** More than a dozen federal agencies now lack independent oversight.

Trump's actions since taking office a year ago reveal a clear and consistent effort to make working people more economically vulnerable while weakening the government's ability to respond to their needs. The motivation behind these actions is clear: They serve the interests of Trump's billionaire and corporate backers. Every dollar denied to typical workers in wages ends up as higher income for business owners and corporate managers. This growing inequality is what is making life so unaffordable for workers and their families today.