

AFL-CIO Dismissing Staff Amid Declines in U.S. Union Membership

by **Josh Eidelson**

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- GOP control of court, states, White House brings major threats
- Largest union federation cutting support for some programs

The AFL-CIO is dismissing dozens of staff members as part of a restructuring amid continuing declines in union membership and fresh political threats to labor rights.

“We will have to end support for some programs that don’t go to our core priorities,” said AFL-CIO spokesman Josh Goldstein, who declined to discuss the number of staff affected. “This is about reimagining and realigning our core priorities to best serve our affiliates.”

The affected employees, who include both union members and management, were informed Wednesday and Thursday of the cuts. Three people familiar with the cutback said several dozen jobs were lost. The AFL-CIO’s latest federal filing listed about 400 employees.

Amid “well-financed anti-union opposition,” Goldstein said, the federation is undergoing a shift in resources. Labor officials expect that restructuring to be a major topic of debate when the AFL-CIO’s executive council meets next month in Texas.

In 2016, 10.7 percent of wage and salary workers in the U.S. belonged to a union. That’s just over half the rate it was 1983.

The main U.S. federation <<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2017-02-02/unions-are-scared-mad-thrilled-as-trump-deepens-old-divisions>> for organized labor, the AFL-CIO includes 55 unions that together represent 12.5 million workers, from teachers to construction workers. It’s a major source <<https://www.bloomberg.com/politics/articles/2016-07-22/labor-clinton-rust-belt>> of funds and ground troops for liberal causes and lawmakers. Union leaders, whose members’ dues fund the federation, have long been divided <<https://www.thenation.com/article/afl-cio-pledges-prison-reform-partnerships-and-accountable-organizing-plans/>> over how the AFL-CIO should distribute its resources among priorities like promoting pro-union politicians or policies, or supporting affiliates’ unionization or contract bargaining campaigns.

Read more: Labor Left Off Trump’s Invitation List for Manufacturing Meeting <<https://www.bloomberg.com/politics/articles/2017-02-23/labor-left-off-trump-s-invitation-list-for-manufacturing-meeting>>

Those challenges have become more acute in recent years, as conservatives have scored [victories](#) <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2017-02-16/unions-are-losing-their-decades-long-right-to-work-fight> curtailing unions' funding and power, including a Supreme Court <https://www.bloomberg.com/quote/1000L:US> decision banning mandatory union fees for government-funded home-health aides and a wave of new "Right-to-work" laws doing the same for private sector employees in half a dozen states. With President Donald Trump poised to restore the Supreme Court's 5-4 conservative majority, unions are bracing for a potential ruling abolishing all public sector mandatory fees.

Such threats have prompted pre-emptive cuts at union headquarters. The month after Trump's election, [Service Employees International Union](#) <https://www.bloomberg.com/quote/0234716Z:US> President Mary Kay Henry [informed](https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2016-12-27/fear-of-trump-triggers-deep-spending-cuts-by-nation-s-second-largest-union) <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2016-12-27/fear-of-trump-triggers-deep-spending-cuts-by-nation-s-second-largest-union> her staff that the 2 million member organization, which is not in the AFL-CIO, was planning for a 30 percent budget reduction over the next year.

[QuickTake: As Trump Talks Up the Working Class, U.S. Unions Fade](#) <https://www.bloomberg.com/view/quicktake/u-s-labor-unions>

The challenge predates Trump. A memorandum of agreement signed a year ago by the AFL-CIO and one of its employees' unions, the Washington-Baltimore News Guild, said the parties "have considered the anticipated serious economic issues faced in the next few years and acknowledged the possible need for substantial reductions in cost for the AFL-CIO during this period," and that in the spirit of "shared and equitable sacrifice," there would be no across-the-board raises for managers before 2018.

Along with political threats, labor officials say, the AFL-CIO's budget has been hurt by a reduction in the revenue available from a royalty license agreement with [Capital One Financial Corp.](#) <https://www.bloomberg.com/quote/COF:US> for a union-branded credit card.

"We don't want any member to be laid off, but restructurings happen in all organizations," said Cet Parks, executive director of the guild, an affiliate of the [Communications Workers of America](#) <https://www.bloomberg.com/quote/0408363D:US>. "We believe we've been successful working with management to try to mitigate the number of layoffs the best we can."

