

# Congress of the United States

## House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND GOVERNMENT REFORM

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### Opening Statement Ranking Member Elijah E. Cummings

#### Hearing on “Workforce for the 21st Century: Analyzing the President’s Management Agenda”

May 16, 2018

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and welcome to all of our witnesses here today.

If the U.S. government were a business, it would be in the service industry. Most of the expenses in the service industry are for salaries and retirement benefits. In other words, most of the expenses are for the workers who provide the services.

The people of the United States civil service are secretaries and fire fighters, scientists and attorneys, janitors, nurses, and doctors. They direct air traffic to keep our skies the safest in the world. They keep our military planes, helicopters, and vehicles in optimal condition. They care for our veterans and senior citizens. They ensure that Social Security benefits are delivered on time and accurately. They enforce the laws of the nation and protect the environment for generations yet unborn. And when the government is not working as it should for our citizens, they blow the whistle out of a solemn sense of duty and patriotism. Without those brave federal employees, this Committee could not perform our job of oversight.

But government is not a business. The government’s purpose is to promote the interests of the American people—not to make a profit. Federal workers perform vital and essential tasks for our nation without fear or favor. Our dedicated civil servants do this work without any intention of getting rich. They are public servants, and they support middle-class families.

Unfortunately, it appears that President Trump does not value these workers or the critical services they provide to the American people. Today’s hearing will expose the aggressive attacks the Trump Administration is waging on middle class federal workers and their agencies.

Earlier this month, the Trump Administration submitted to Congress a draconian proposal to cut more than \$143 billion over the next ten years from the pay and benefits of middle class federal workers, retirees, future retirees, and even their survivors.

The Trump plan would eliminate cost of living adjustments (COLAs) for current and future retirees in the Federal Employees Retirement System, and it would reduce COLAs for

other retirees and survivors—including children who suffer the loss of a parent. This provision would erode the value of retirement income and would not even keep pace with inflation.

The Trump plan would impose higher costs on employees for their pensions, without any corresponding increase in retirement benefits. That is a wage cut.

The Trump plan would reduce retirement pay by replacing the existing system, which is based on three consecutive years of highest salary, with a system based on five years of highest pay. This provision would lower the retirement pay for many federal employees.

Enacting the changes that President Trump demands under the guise of “reform” would betray the promises our nation has made to federal workers who dedicate their lives to public service—as well as their families. It also would severely degrade recruitment, retention, and the performance of our civil service.

This is not the first time Republicans have raided the paychecks of public servants. Over the past decade, they have cut federal pay and benefits by \$195 billion, according to the nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office. They instituted a three-year pay freeze that cost federal workers \$98 billion. They increased required employee contributions to federal retirement programs—twice—and cut employee take home pay by an estimated \$21 billion. More than 750,000 federal employees were furloughed due to sequestration cuts, costing federal employees more than \$1 billion. And federal workers received pay adjustments that were lower than specified by statute from 2014 through 2018, costing them an additional \$75 billion.

What makes the Trump Administration’s proposal so disappointing is that it comes after the President and Republicans in Congress enacted \$1.5 trillion in tax cuts for wealthy individuals and corporations. Who is going to fund those tax cuts for the rich? Middle class workers, that’s who. And that is just plain wrong.

President Trump has demonstrated contempt for public servants from his first day in office, when he prohibited federal agencies from filling vacant positions. He has attacked government watchdogs, ethics officials, law enforcement officials, and career government employees. His administration has issued illegal gag orders to try to stop whistleblowers from telling Congress what their agencies are really doing, and his agencies are attacking employee unions that protect whistleblowers from retaliation.

We need to reject this latest proposal in a string of terrible proposals—this sabotage of the United States civil service. We need to begin building back up the confidence of our federal workforce. They have already paid billions to help pay down the debt—they should not be asked now to help fund tax cuts for the rich.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

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