

# Our Members are Writing...

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7/19/24  
**NAPERVILLE SUN**

## Proposed massive EPA cuts endanger environment, health

President Trump and Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Lee Zeldin announced at the recent cabinet meeting that they plan to cut EPA staffing and budget up to 65%. Hundreds of EPA staff have already been terminated.

The EPA has a permanent staff of about 15,000. A cut of 65% would reduce the staffing to the level the agency had when it was created in 1970 — about 5,000. That would in effect almost eliminate what EPA is all about, protecting the environment and public health.

In an op-ed in *The New York Times*, three former EPA administrators reported that “between 1970 and 2019 EPA cut emissions of common air pollutants by 77 percent while private sector jobs grew 223 percent and our gross domestic product grew almost 300 percent.” In addition, thousands of toxic contaminated sites have been cleaned up; water pollution has been greatly reduced, making most streams “fishable

and swimmable” throughout the country; and safe drinking water was achieved throughout the country.

Multiple studies have shown that the health benefits of work done by EPA outweigh the costs by more than 30 to 1. Such large spending and staffing cuts as being proposed would eliminate such things as monitoring air and water quality, responding to natural disasters and lead abatement in our water supply, among many other agency functions.

Critical to Naperville citizens, there have been truly major actions taken by EPA to protect the waters of the Great Lakes, the source of our drinking water. Naperville has received millions of dollars in grant money from EPA to improve our wastewater treatment plant and to improve our infrastructure for water supply.

The draconian and reckless cuts to EPA, an effective agency with a record of huge successes, are unwise and extremely shortsighted.

It is up to Congress to ensure the EPA has the resources to do its job. Weakening environmental protections isn't just bad policy, it's a direct threat to public health and future generations. Every citizen should protest these planned cuts by contacting their elected representatives to stop this insanity.

*Dale Bryson, Naperville*

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## 'Wholesale denigration': Former officials now in NC blast treatment of federal workers

JOHN DEEM Staff Writer

Elon Musk and his Department of Governmental Efficiency have pushed tens of thousands of federal employees from their jobs as President Donald Trump aims to fulfill his campaign promise to slash spending and “drain the swamp” in Washington.

Critics are expressing concern over the potential impact of what they see as indiscriminate layoffs carried out with little or no consideration of the likely consequences. But three former high-ranking officials who each spent nearly four decades in federal government and now live in North Carolina also fret over the accompanying demonization of their former colleagues.

“It’s this whole notion that somehow to even be a public servant is to be participating in a lower class of activity,” said Stan Meiburg, who served for 39 years with the Environmental Protection Agency, the last three as deputy administrator, and now is executive director of Wake Forest University’s Andrew Sabin Family Center for Environment and Sustainability. “That’s not withstanding the fact that the private sector does not work — it *does not work* — unless basic, essential government services are there.”

At the recent Conservative Political Action Conference, for example, Trump boasted that the “fraudsters, liars and cheaters ... are being sent packing.”

At the same gathering, Kari Lake, a Republican who lost races for governor and U.S. senator in Arizona before Trump tapped the former television news anchor to lead Voice of America, joined in the attacks by comparing the federal bureaucracy to an “animal infested with ticks and parasites.”

New presidential administrations often go to great lengths to realign agencies with their own agendas, particularly if the previous White House inhabitant was from the opposing party, Meiburg noted.

“But I don’t want to normalize the behavior that we have this time by even sort of comparing it (to the past), but rather to simply say that this wholesale denigration of the role of public servants is at a scale of magnitude we’ve never seen,” he added.

Attacks on the federal workforce have been unceasing since Trump’s inauguration. That includes vilification from those quick to suggest that government work — or even projects and research merely supported by federal funds — doesn’t amount to a “real job.”

Linda Birnbaum, another nearly four-decade veteran of the federal government, agreed that animus unleashed by Trump and his surrogates is unprecedented — and off target.

“Most of the federal employees I’ve known over the years are completely hard-working people trying to do the best they can for the American public,” said Birnbaum, former director of the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences and an adjunct professor at the University of North Carolina Gillings School of Global Public Health. “I mean, there’s a level of idealism in many federal servants (because) they’re serving the American public and *not* serving private industry and *not* just serving themselves.

“The way they’re being talked about is horrible.”

Jennifer Orme-Zavaleta, former principal deputy assistant administrator and science adviser at the EPA who spent 38 years at the agency, noted that Trump is playing to his political base with the “drain the swamp” message.

“The problem is, he’s got the wrong swamp,” said Orme-Zavaleta, who lives in the Durham area. “He’s been labeling federal employees as the swamp, as unelected bureaucrats who are developing all of this policy that’s contrary to what (Trump’s) political priorities are, and that’s just not true.”

Instead, federal workers are tasked with executing policies that often shift from administration to administration.

“In my opinion, ‘the swamp’ is really all the lobbyists and special interests in Washington,” Orme-Zavaleta added. “But this (administration) is playing to their base and taking a really nasty, mean, retaliatory approach to career civil servants, and I don’t feel like they really have any strategy other than to lower the numbers (of federal employees).”

Tens of thousands of federal workers have lost their jobs in the DOGE-driven purge but some — including at the Food and Drug Administration, National Nuclear Security Administration, U.S. Department of Agriculture and National Park Service — were quickly reinstated.

“They’re not taking a good, strategic look at what services they need and what services are really no longer applicable,” Orme-Zavaleta explained.

Birnbaum, meanwhile, offered a blunt assessment of DOGE.

“I don’t think they know what the hell they’re doing,” she concluded.

But in the end, simply demoralizing employees is its own form of strategy, suggested Wake Forest's Meiburg.

"The greatest thing that I personally am afraid of is that people will, in fact, for understandable reasons, succumb to fear and do something like take the 'fork in the road' memo (and resign) when it's really not in their own interest," said Meiburg, referring to Musk's offer for workers to still get months of pay if they resigned immediately. "But if you voluntarily agree to it, then you've done their work for them."

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### **Letter to the Chicago Tribune**

To the Editor:

I am a retired attorney who spent 30 years working for the federal government at the EPA and the Department of Justice. While government cost-cutting is a worthwhile and important goal that the majority of federal employees would support, the chainsaw approach being taken by Elon Musk and his Trump/DOGE allies only serves to eliminate the expertise and professionalism exhibited each and every day by the public servants who work at those, and many other agencies. Many government jobs are highly specialized, so that the random, reckless elimination of those positions being employed by Trump's DOGE will only serve to empty the halls of government of the experience and expertise the American people dearly rely on in times of emergencies, or perhaps more importantly, to keep those emergencies from happening in the first place. I am very concerned that the federal response to the next hurricane, wildfire, or hazardous material spill will be severely hampered if not completely curtailed by the actions that the Trump administration is taking now. The States simply do not currently have the resources to address these catastrophes, and it would take a very long time for them to ramp up. But maybe that is what Trump and his cronies want – to keep the masses mired in their day-to-day challenges while they continue to destroy our democratic institutions and ransack the public purse.

Marcy Toney  
3223 Sprucewood Rd  
Wilmette, IL

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## Letter to NC Health News

Dear Rose,

I am a longtime fan/reader of NC Health News (and occasional financial supporter). As a local resource, I would like to suggest some topics of public health interest based on 35 years doing research at EPA's Lab in RTP and as past Editor of NIEHS's outstanding open-access journal (Environmental Health Perspectives, <https://ehp.niehs.nih.gov/journal/ehp>). Please let me know if you would like further information or help with any of the following. I retired in 2020 and am free to speak out, as is my friend and colleague Dr. Linda Birnbaum, past Director NIEHS. The EPA Alumni Association is another resource with many NC members.

- Available now: The results of a post-election Poll conducted under the Environmental Protect Network (EPN) showing that the public is greatly supportive of continued funding for EPA. <https://acrobat.adobe.com/id/urn:aaid:sc:VA6C2:5143d6ad-9344-4619-96d9-93034a8c9d0c>
- With EPA's funding expiring to potentially huge adverse effect on 3/14, a time critical pieced about something like "Why should our taxes support research at the EPA" is urgently needed. This could be done via interview with someone like me and I can suggest others.
- Another idea might be a piece or interview about the unique ability of EPA (and some parts of NIEHS) researchers to protect NC health via targeted research designed in partnership with the regulators in DC who need the information ASAP to promulgate and/or enforce laws. EPA's lab can be highly responsive to requests for information from DC regulatory offices without the longer process of soliciting grants for new research from university partners. Also, EPA's lab can quickly test the replicability or repeatability of research conducted by others -- such research is very hard to get funded via grants simply because it is not "new/novel."
- How about "science translation"? e.g., as you must know, EHP publishes news articles that synthesize information on hot topics of public interest in language and format that is readily understood by a broad audience. A brief piece with links to articles of specific interest to NC residents could be pulled together easily.
- There are so many experts, both active and retired, in RTP area to help with these and other ideas. e.g., Dr. Birnbaum is expert on legacy chemicals like PBCs (of current interest re: Polk Hall at NCSU), dioxin, PFAS (NC rivers)

- My research focus was reproductive health and NC public is always interested in keeping our children healthy. EPA and NIEHS labs have conducted and/or funded research that informed regulation of BPA in baby bottles/IV lines; pesticides in apple juice; flame retardants in kids' PJs. EHP has published new research and comprehensive reviews, balanced commentaries and news articles on topics of interest to parents everywhere on, e.g., fluoride in drinking water; immunization and autism; food safety; and more. EHP's new Editor Susan Booker is a great resource for such.

I sure hope some of this helps motivate urgently needed outreach by NC Health News. Please feel free to forward this message to other outlets/interested parties. My CV is available via LinkedIn (or google Sally Perreault Darney)

With kind regards and many thanks for all you do on behalf of NC!

Sally Perreault Darney, Ph.D.  
Cary, NC

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### **Letter to Senator Eric Schmitt (R-MO)**

Dear Senator Schmitt,

Thank you for the reply message. I appreciate your candid response.

Please do all you can to support our democracy with 3 coequal branches. You and your republican Senators and Representatives have abdicated your responsibilities and a monarchy is taking over our country. The President saying "long live the king" is not funny. It's disgusting. You must reclaim your co-equal branch of the government and stop the destruction of our federal government by the DOGE and this empirical President.

You rationalize the President's unwise, undemocratic behavior and bow to a "king" when you make false claims that the federal government exercises a "one-size-fits-all" policy. The federal government provides ample flexibility to states to implement federal programs supported with federal taxes. Do you want to give states money without the responsibility of spending federal tax dollars in accord with the federal program? Who will oversee the state programs? Already, at US EPA and many other agencies, half or more of

the annual agency budget goes to states to implement federal programs with ample flexibility and appropriate oversight.

For example: the US EPA was created to address extreme market failures that caused terrible pollution nationwide. Since its creation, the US EPA has been the premier environment ministry in world. Without this agency, which is being destroyed by DOGE and the President, the states will have no longer have the “gorilla in the closet” (the EPA nickname given by Republican EPA Administrator William Ruckelshaus) to compel polluters to clean-up their misdeeds. Without EPA, there will be chaos as the states begin suing each other over transboundary pollution like they did before EPA was created. Pollution respects no boundaries. Will states set their own drinking water standards? Will states establish water quality standards? Who will research emerging contaminants? Will states ban toxic substances? How will states protect their people and lands/waters from pollution by another state? Or upwind air pollution from the other states? Do you want 50 different state environmental protection programs depending on the whims of state governors and legislators, who are heavily lobbied by industrial polluters? Do you want states competing to attract the biggest polluters, how many “cancer alleys” in the most disadvantaged communities (white, black, brown and low income) will be created in the states? Do you think some states will form compacts to control pollution, while other states will pollute to their hearts content? Do not hide these issues behind the claim that “efficiency” is the reason to destroy EPA, an agency already underfunded and understaffed. Whose efficiency are we talking about anyway? These cuts in federal work force will make it more efficient for corporate interests to pollute without controls, without an environmental cop on the beat. Also, the corporate interests will become very efficient at manipulating state governments to do their bidding. Finally, destroying federal programs and firing 1,000s of outstanding federal employees will do nothing to reduce taxes for low to middle income people because the House Budget Bill simply increases tax cuts for the wealthy and increases our public deficit and debts.

Our country needs a strong and vibrant federal government that is fully funded with dedicated civil servants, who take the oath to uphold the US Constitution (not an oath to a “king”); and we need our well-established legal doctrine of Cooperative Federalism, which is the envy of the world because it recognizes the supremacy clause of the US Constitution and all states agree to this when they come into our strong Union and yet, states maintain their own authorities. This destruction will collapse our strong

union into 50 fiefdoms of states that will no longer be united standing together, but divided and we will fall.

Thank you for considering my comments. Thank you, bless you and peace be with you. May you always perform your job as US Senator with ethical behavior including your responsibility to protect human health and the environment.

Sincerely,  
Jane Kloeckner

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**From:** David B.  
**Sent:** Thursday, February 27, 2025 9:42 AM  
**To:** letters@seattletimes.com <[letters@seattletimes.com](mailto:letters@seattletimes.com)>  
**Subject:** Cuts at EPA

I worked at the EPA for 38 years. What does Trump mean cutting 65% of the staff at EPA? Stop cleaning up Handford, the Lower Duwamish, responding to hazmat spills, prosecuting those who knowing harm people? Going back to rivers catching fire, homes built on toxic waste dumps, industry releasing unlimited amounts of pollution? President Nixon created the EPA for very good reasons. Remember, there are always consequences.

David Bennett

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### **Letter to Congressman John Rutherford (R-FL-05)**

Dear Congressman Rutherford,

I want to express my complete dissatisfaction with the actions of the President, Elon Musk and the unelected and unauthorized DOGE.

The arbitrary and thoughtless firing of federal workers and the elimination of departments and agencies is not only callous but downright dangerous. The fact that federal workers overseeing the nuclear arsenal had to be reinstated proves that there is no rational approach to these chaotic firings.



Eliminating waste is an admirable goal. There's undoubtedly a lot of inefficiencies and extra fat in the federal government. But on the flip side, most government work is vitally important for the health, safety and wellbeing of all Americans. I guarantee that many of the people who voted for the President will soon be regretting their support for his slash and burn agenda.

And the fact that the unelected billionaire Elon Musk is making decisions and has been given access to sensitive information about each and every American taxpayer is beyond troubling.

Many of his actions and those of the President are unquestionably unconstitutional. They have usurped the powers of the legislative branch of government by impounding funds and cutting agencies. And it will be even more troubling if they ignore the rulings of the courts in these matters. The founding Fathers purposely made three branches of government to prevent this type of executive abuse of power.

Equally troubling is the assault on the media and the press. Revoking licenses of media organizations and limiting access is in direct violation of our principles of freedom of the press and free speech.

Will you be hosting any community meetings or town halls? Many people in this country, including me, are very fearful with the direction we're headed.

Thank you,

Patty Scott  
256 Front Door Lane  
St. Augustine

Unfortunately our local paper no longer has an editorial page and it's only published online now. Otherwise I would be writing letters to the editor and opinion pieces about the importance of EPA.

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### **Posted on LinkedIn**

Protect EPA Funding to Safeguard Our Environment

John Armstead  
Adjunct Professor, Villanova University, Pennsylvania

Director, US EPA Reg 3 (Retired)  
Board Member, PennFuture

As Congress debates the federal budget, drastic cuts to the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) threaten decades of progress in protecting public health and our environment. Slashing the EPA's budget by 20% - as proposed by Congress - could severely weaken effective clean air and water programs, delay hazardous waste cleanups, and stall an equitable, job-creating economy by advancing clean air, pure water, and climate change solutions.

Our environment has seen improvements thanks to Federal, State, and Local efforts and not at the expense of economic progress. Unfortunately, pollution remains a significant challenge. Cutting EPA's funding now would undermine those gains and leave communities vulnerable to worsening air, water, and land quality threatening our quality of life.

According to reports from The New York Times and The Washington Post, hundreds of EPA staff have already been terminated, delaying critical environmental reviews and enforcement actions. Reckless cuts to EPA, an effective agency with a record of success, are unwise and shortsighted. Congress must ensure the EPA has the resources to do its job. Weakening environmental protections isn't just bad policy—it's a direct threat to public health and future generations.

One thing we can do is help to communicate to the public what severe cuts to EPA will mean for the environment, health and quality of life. Consider sending letters to local newspapers, and/or writing an email to your Member of Congress and other elected leaders. Communicating the benefits of strong environmental protection; what EPA does to protect our nation's food, water, air; and the adverse effects of weakening EPA and the State, Tribal, and other partners which receive support from EPA is an invaluable contribution to public discourse.