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# I Work in the Office Carrying Out the Government Purge. Here's What I Want You to Know.

We're as freaked out and angry as everyone else.

BY ANNIE PORTER

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The call is coming from inside the house, but it's not actually coming from us. Photo illustration by Slate. Photo by Kevin Dietsch/Getty Images.

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I'm a career civil servant at the federal government's Office of Personnel Management, and I'm sorry. Normally, the only time anyone hears about our agency is when we declare snow days for the D.C. area, and prior to Zoom schooling, that made us very popular with local schoolchildren. But since President Donald Trump's inauguration, a new email address has been set up at OPM and has been sending emails—after hours, on weekends, and sometimes more than once a day—that disparage the work of our fellow public servants and demand that they resign (or take mysterious “buyout plans”) or prepare to be fired.

These increasingly desperate pleas for civil servants—including us here at OPM—to quit are signed by the acting director of OPM, but mirror [the directives Elon Musk used](#) when dismantling Twitter, directives now being deployed in hopes of dismantling the federal government.

As an OPM employee, I want my fellow federal workers and the American people to know that these emails may be coming from inside the house—but they are not coming from us. We at OPM are just as frustrated, confused, and traumatized as the rest of America. When I started my job at OPM, I swore an oath to the Constitution, and to defend it against all enemies foreign and domestic, making it especially awful that the threat to our government is coming from inside my own office building.

OPM's origin goes back to the creation of the civil service in 1883, and the public servants who work here believe in the importance of having nonpolitical employees run the basic functions of government. We serve as human resources for the rest of the federal agencies, but unlike HR at a private company—where HR really works for your boss and not for you—our agency actually does work for the American people and the public servants who serve them.

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And it really is nonpartisan.

While Musk has made it clear that he dislikes many government agencies including the U.S. Agency for International Development, which was critical in supporting the end of apartheid in South Africa and supports access to basic services in war-torn regions of Ukraine, for example, or the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau, which helps Americans not get ripped off by massive corporations, he also seems to support other agencies, like Homeland Security and Immigration and Customs Enforcement. When an ICE agent takes their kids to the doctor, it's OPM that makes sure the doctor gets paid. If a Customs and Border Patrol agent retires, we make sure they keep getting the benefits they have earned over the course of their career. If a federal employee tragically passes away, we make sure their families are taken care of with life insurance coverage. We are supposed to be the backbone of the government, making it so the rest of the government can operate, and instead, the new gang in town is using our agency's name to do the opposite. The administration has asked for [70 percent of our own workforce to be terminated](#), a move that is expected to reduce our staffing for incredibly vital functions, including providing services to retired federal workers and the federal employee health insurance program.

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Nobody I know at OPM has any idea what will happen next. More than 2 million federal employees are supposed to decide by Monday, Feb. 10, whether to take the Trump administration's "deferred resignation" offer. Our union has already brought a lawsuit claiming that the severance package we've been offered is illegal. It promises us payment through September, but Congress has only funded the government through March, and I'm skeptical at the axe-wielders' enthusiasm to pay us not to work. Every question that gets raised is simply answered with another email or memo proclaiming the deferred resignation is legal, but also demanding we give up all our rights if we sign it. If we don't resign, remote workers have been told they need to move to work in one of nine cities by March 3, and we haven't been told if we get to pick from among the nine or if we will randomly be assigned to a city in which we don't live or have any connections. My bosses, and my bosses' bosses, don't have answers to any of our questions. Nobody knows who is in charge, though the leadership level of our parking garage is suddenly filled with Teslas.

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Ironically, this has been the greatest teambuilding exercise of my career, forging bonds in a way that no ropes course has ever managed. I suddenly have the personal cellphone numbers of all of my colleagues, and have been reached out to by colleagues I've never met to make sure I am downloading my earnings statements in the event I'm fired or our (now compromised) computer systems go down. Colleagues have been sharing tips about how to maximize our benefits that we might be losing only two months into the year. We're making plans to care for one another's families if we lose access to medical care and need life-saving prescriptions. Every increasingly desperate memo and email is driving us to form community, join our unions, and get to better know our co-workers. I had to turn off notifications for Signal, the secure communication app, because my group texts from co-workers ping multiple times per hour.

Russ Vought, the nominee to run the Office of Management and Budget—which is the policy heart of the government in the way that OPM is the HR backbone—said, according to ProPublica, that he wants to drive civil servants into trauma and make us feel like villains for doing our jobs. He's been very effective at the first half of his goal, but the villains here aren't the civil servants working to serve the American people. And it's not even those of us who work at the agency sending out all the emails that are terrifying everyone else. ■

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