

Trump-Era VA Contract Cuts Impact Thousands of Cleveland Workers

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The Veterans Administration's abrupt termination of union contracts has affected thousands of workers at the Cleveland Stokes VA Hospital and beyond, sparking concern about the administration's approach to labor relations within federal agencies.

On Wednesday, the VA announced the immediate end of contracts with five major unions representing its employees nationwide. This decision was linked to a March executive order

from former President Donald Trump, which excludes most federal workers from collective bargaining rights on the grounds of national security.

Lisa Garvin, speaking on the *Today in Ohio* podcast, explained, “The VA cited national security issues as justification, but there is no evidence of an emergency that warrants such drastic action. This is a direct attack on workers’ rights.”

Among the approximately 4,000 affected workers in Cleveland are a wide range of staff—from doctors and nurses to maintenance personnel—whose contracts have been terminated without negotiation. Chris Quinn, another podcast host, criticized the decision: “There’s simply no legitimate national security concern here. Federal labor laws protect employees’ right to representation, and this move undermines those protections.”

The timing of the contract cancellations has raised questions about motivation. Everett Kelly, National President of the American Federation of Government Employees (AFGE), characterized the decision as retaliatory. “This administration is punishing unions that have stood up against policies harmful to veterans and workers,” Kelly said in a recent statement. The unions notably resisted previous efforts to close rural VA hospitals and clinics.

Quinn called the move “another negative impact of Trump’s policies on Northeast Ohio,” highlighting a broader pattern of federal workforce treatment under the former administration.

The disconnect between the VA’s mission to serve veterans and the current treatment of its workforce was a key point of discussion. VA Secretary Doug Collins claimed that ending union contracts would free employees to focus more on veteran care rather than union matters. However, podcast commentators viewed this explanation with skepticism, pointing to the crucial role of unions in protecting worker rights and maintaining service quality.

Congresswoman Shontel Brown voiced concerns over the broader implications. “This retaliation sends a dangerous message to all federal workers and could hamper the VA’s ability to attract and keep qualified employees,” she said during an interview last week.

Legal questions remain over the use of executive orders to override existing labor agreements. Quinn expressed frustration with the judicial system’s reluctance to intervene: “The courts have consistently sided with presidential authority here, which undermines the independent checks that protect workers.”

For the thousands of Cleveland VA employees, the immediate effect is the loss of union representation and the stoppage of union dues payroll deductions. The long-term consequences for worker protections and veteran care are uncertain, prompting calls for careful oversight.