

# GOP's Proposed Assault on Federal Law Enforcement



**Jim Kessler**  
Executive Vice President for Policy  
[@ThirdWayKessler](https://twitter.com/ThirdWayKessler)



**Kylie Murdock**  
Executive Coordinator  
[@kyliemurdock](https://twitter.com/kyliemurdock)

We know Senate Republicans are contemplating across-the-board tax hikes on senior citizens. A dangerous and massive cut in federal law enforcement personnel may be next.

Last month, Republican Senator Rick Scott of Florida, chair of the campaign arm for Senate Republicans, released an 11-point agenda in anticipation of the GOP winning back majorities in November. “Americans deserve to know what we will do when given the chance to govern,” he wrote. He likened his plan to the “Contract with America,” which was the Republican governing blueprint after retaking Congress in the 1994 midterms.

In this updated “Contract with America,” Senator Scott has already had to defend a new GOP proposal to increase taxes on tens of millions of Social Security recipients and low income families who currently do not pay any federal income tax.

In this paper, we look at another sweeping policy proposal in Republicans' new governing blueprint, particularly as it relates to federal law enforcement: "reduce the government work force by 25% in 5 years."

Overall, the federal government employed 2,181,106 workers in 2020, according to the Congressional Research Service.<sup>1</sup> Reducing the workforce by one-fourth would amount to 545,277 lost federal jobs. Nearly one in ten federal employees — 199,036 people — works in one of eight major federal law enforcement agencies. If Senator Scott's 25% reduction in the federal workforce was applied evenly, 49,759 federal law enforcement personnel would lose their jobs.

- Federal Bureau of Investigation – 9,037 lost jobs.
- Drug Enforcement Agency – 1,782 lost jobs.
- Customs and Border Protection – 15,114 lost jobs.
- Immigration and Customs Enforcement – 5,314 lost jobs.
- Transportation Security Administration – 13,792 lost jobs.
- Secret Service – 1,990 lost jobs.
- Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives – 1,353 lost jobs.
- US Marshals Service – 1,377 lost jobs.

The Republican blueprint is deliberately opaque about which federal jobs should be eliminated or preserved. It pays occasional lip service to law enforcement ("we will re-fund and respect the police"), but police forces are locally funded and there is no mention of any increased funding to states and localities. The Republican document also swipes at federal law enforcement including an unfounded charge of "using the FBI to intimidate parents who speak up at school board meetings."

This underscores that Republicans continue to have a complicated relationship with federal law enforcement. In 2015, Republicans renewed their call to de-fund and eliminate the ATF. In 2000, then-Republican House Majority Leader Tom DeLay called federal immigration officials "jack-booted thugs." In 1995, former President George H.W. Bush resigned from the GOP-leaning National Rifle Association after it also labeled federal law enforcement "jack-booted thugs" following the terrorist bombing of the Alfred P. Murrah federal building in Oklahoma City by White supremacist Timothy McVeigh. And, of course, the January 6 insurrection at the Capitol has been derided by many Republicans as a tourist event, even though Capitol police officers were killed and wounded.

That is all to say that a proposal by one of the most prominent Republicans in the Senate to cut federal employment by 25% would likely treat federal law enforcement like any other federal job –

and perhaps even worse.

Federal employees are an easy target for demagoguery until one actually describes what they do. Many keep Americans safe, like the thousands employed in air traffic control, meat and food safety inspection, transportation safety, consumer product safety, and federal drug approval. Others help keep us healthy like those processing Medicare and Medicaid payments to doctors and hospitals or those directly providing health care to veterans. Some help keep food on the table such as Social Security employees handling caseloads for seniors or those with disabilities.

Senator Rick Scott is correct that “Americans deserve to know what we will do when given the chance to govern.” This is what it would mean for eight different federal law enforcement agencies if they merely received the same treatment Senator Scott and Republicans have planned for all other federal departments.

## **Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI)**

The FBI currently employs 36,149 people, including 13,414 Special Agents and 3,216 Intelligence Analysts stationed across the United States. A 25% cut to personnel would mean a loss of 9,037 employees, leaving the FBI with around 27,100 employees.

The FBI is charged with the enforcement of more than 200 categories of federal laws and oversees a number of vital investigative programs, including domestic and international terrorism, organized crime, and drugs.

In 2021, the FBI investigated 2,700 domestic terrorism cases, including the January 6<sup>th</sup> attack on the Capitol. Their Cyber Division deterred 15,427 cyber-attacks, including attacks on election infrastructure. They investigated more than 10,000 reported hate crimes, which have skyrocketed over the past couple years. They processed a record 13 million gun background checks. The FBI has investigated a number of high-profile cases, including Harvey Weinstein, Jeffrey Epstein, several mass shootings, 2016 election interference, and the 2008 market crash.

## **Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA)**

The DEA employs 7,128 people, including 3,602 Special Agents stationed from coast to coast. A 25% cut to personnel would mean a loss of 1,782 employees, leaving them with around 5,350 employees.

The DEA is tasked with combatting drug trafficking and distribution, both prescription and illicit. In 2020, they seized more than 60,000 pounds of methamphetamine, more than 300 firearms, and nearly \$54.5 million in drug proceeds as a result of more than 800 investigations. One initiative resulted in the seizure of 200 kilograms of fentanyl, more than 240 kilograms of heroin, 3,140 firearms, and nearly \$44 million in assets. And their work on the Appalachian Regional Prescription Opioid Strike Force directly led to the arrest of 73 healthcare professionals responsible for the

unlawful distribution of 40 million medically unnecessary pain pills. The DEA was instrumental in uncovering and investigating Purdue Pharma's role in the opioid epidemic.

## **Customs and Border Protection (CBP)**

The CBP employs 60,455 people, mainly stationed along our borders and coasts. A 25% cut to personnel would mean a loss of 15,114 employees, leaving them with 45,341 employees.

The CBP is responsible for monitoring America's borders, coastlines, and ports of entry. They have five main priorities, among them counterterrorism, combatting transnational crime, securing the border, and facilitating lawful travel.

They enforce nearly 500 U.S. trade laws and regulations on behalf of 49 Federal agencies, facilitating compliant trade, collecting revenue, and protecting the U.S. economy and consumers from harmful imports and unfair trade practices. The CBP is the second largest source of revenue in the Federal Government. In 2020, they processed 2.8 million international trade transactions worth \$2.4 trillion in imports and collected \$78.8 billion in duties and taxes. They also seized 828,000 of illicit drugs, 4,269 firearms, and 444,044 rounds of ammunition. The CBP inspected more than 238 million travelers at ports of entry and arrested 7,009 wanted for criminal activities.

## **Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE)**

ICE employs 21,257 people across all 50 states, and in 57 countries. A 25% cut to personnel would mean a loss of 5,314 employees, leaving them with roughly 16,000 employees.

ICE is the principal criminal investigative agency within the Department of Homeland Security (DHS). They enforce more than 400 Federal statutes and enforce customs, trade, and immigration laws. ICE investigates human trafficking and smuggling, child exploitation, human rights abuses, immigration and customs violations, narcotics and weapons smuggling, financial crimes, cybercrime, transnational gangs, and worksite enforcement. In 2020, ICE investigated, located, and made 981 arrests of priority non-citizens, 63% of which resulted in criminal convictions. They initiated more than 900 human trafficking investigations resulting in over 1,700 criminal arrests.

## **Transportation Security Administration (TSA)**

The TSA employs 55,169 people in all 50 states, with most working at airports that millions of Americans use every day. A 25% cut in personnel would mean a loss of 13,792 employees, leaving them with 41,377 employees.

The TSA secures the U.S. transportation network, which includes 4 million miles of roadways, 140,000 miles of railroad tracks, 612,000 bridges, more than 470 tunnels, 360 maritime ports, over 3,700 marine terminals, 12,000 miles of coastline, 2.75 million miles of pipeline, and nearly 30

million daily trips on public transportation. In 2020, they screened nearly 4.71 million aviation passengers while implementing new COVID-19 protocols nationwide.

## **Secret Service**

The Secret Service employs 7,961 people. A 25% cut to personnel would mean a loss of 1,990 employees, leaving them with less than 6,000 employees.

The Secret Service is mainly known as the agency that protects the President and other prominent politicians. But the scope of their work is actually much larger. They have five main responsibilities, including enforcing laws related to counterfeiting bonds and currency, and financial crimes, including identity theft and computer fraud.

In 2020, they provided protection for 4,244 protectee visits and screened more than 1.7 million people at protective sites. They seized \$505 million in counterfeit U.S. currency, responded to 539 cybercrime attacks, and closed 1,632 cyber financial crime cases totaling \$2.6 billion in potential loss. They also trained 2,886 local law enforcement investigators in cybercrime investigations.

## **Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF)**

ATF employs 5,410 people across 25 domestic and 10 international divisions. A 25% cut to personnel would mean a loss of 1,353 employees, leaving them with just over 4,000 employees.

ATF is responsible for investigating and preventing federal offenses involving the unlawful use of firearms and explosives, acts of arson and bombings, and illegal trafficking of alcohol and tobacco products. They also regulate licensing the sale, possession, and transportation of firearms, ammunition, and explosives. They often work in conjunction with state and local law enforcement to carry out investigations. One of their most prominent programs is Project Safe Neighborhoods, which aims to reduce gun violence in the U.S. through implementing violence reduction strategies in communities.

In 2020, ATF initiated 39,449 firearms cases, 2,252 arson cases, and 976 explosives cases. And they oversaw 130,525 active federal firearms licenses and 9,403 active explosive licensees.

## **US Marshals Service**

The US Marshals employs 5,507 people, 70% of whom are law enforcement officers. A 25% cut to personnel would mean a loss of 1,377 employees, leaving them with just over 4,000 employees.

The US Marshals are tasked with protecting, defending, and enforcing the American justice system. They have a number of responsibilities that include providing security for Federal courts and judges, apprehending fugitives and non-compliant sex offenders, and operating the Federal Witness Protection Program, among other duties.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, they were mobilized to deliver vaccines to communities, resulting in the successful delivery of over 4,00 million vaccine doses across the U.S. They maintain a fugitive caseload of approximately 50,000 each year and, over the past decade, have apprehended more than 257,000 fugitives. The U.S. Marshals were also deployed to protect the Capitol following the attack on January 6<sup>th</sup>.

## Conclusion

Senator Rick Scott is a top leader of the Republican Party in the Senate. He said, “Americans deserve to know what we will do when given the chance to govern.” That is why we felt it necessary to take his 11-point plan to rescue America both seriously and literally.

### TOPICS

**JUSTICE** 32

## **ENDNOTES**

- 1.** This does not include uniformed military personnel, postal service workers, CIA employees, and several other categories of workers who are paid by federal tax dollars.