

2026 Legislative Priority: Artificial Intelligence (AI) in the Federal Workplace

Issue Summary: Artificial Intelligence (AI) is rapidly being deployed across federal agencies to support mission delivery, administrative functions, and workforce management. While AI can improve efficiency, **unregulated or unilateral implementation poses serious risks** to federal employees, agency missions, and public trust. Federal sector unions support responsible innovation—but AI must **augment human judgment, not replace it**, and must not be used to undermine merit system principles or collective bargaining rights.

Why This Matters

1. Federal Jobs Are a National Asset

The federal workforce is highly skilled and mission-critical, supporting national security, public safety, infrastructure, and essential public services. Large-scale job displacement or over-reliance on automation risks: - Loss of institutional knowledge - Reduced mission effectiveness - Increased dependence on contractors

The federal government should be a **model employer**, not a testing ground for unchecked automation.

2. The Human Element Is Essential

AI systems lack context, ethical reasoning, and accountability. Federal decision-making, especially involving enforcement, benefits, safety, and national defense—requires **human judgment, discretion, and responsibility**. AI must remain a **decision-support tool**, not the final decisionmaker.

3. AI Use in Hiring and Promotion Requires Guardrails

The use of AI in personnel actions raises serious concerns: - Embedded bias or discrimination in training data - Lack of transparency or explainability - Inability for employees to challenge or appeal decisions - Erosion of merit-based employment principles

Without safeguards, AI could unfairly screen applicants, influence promotions, or mask discriminatory practices behind automation.

Local 777, IFPTE, AFL-CIO represents over 1,500 employees of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in the Chicago, Pittsburgh, Sacramento Districts and the South Pacific Division. We work in Illinois, California, Pennsylvania, Indiana, Wisconsin, Utah, Arizona, and remotely nationwide, and plan, design, build, operate, and maintain Federal water resources infrastructure and environmental restorations, and protect our nation's aquatic resources and commercial navigation. Our members work in offices, on construction sites, at locks and dams, on government vessels, at flood control reservoirs, and at dredged material management and electric barrier facilities.

The views expressed are those of Local 777 only, and not of the Department of Defense or Department of the Army.

Requested Action:

- Ensure Transparency and Oversight**
 - Require agencies to disclose when AI is used in workforce or mission decisions – Mandate documentation of purpose, scope, and workforce impact. One method may be to request a CRS report on applicability of the procedural requirements of National Environmental Policy Act, Administrative Procedure Act, and/or Congressional Review Act to federal agency adoption of AI.
- Protect Human Decision Authority**
 - Prohibit AI from being the final authority in hiring, promotion, discipline, or performance actions - Require meaningful human review and accountability
- Preserve Collective Bargaining Rights**
 - Ensure AI implementation affecting working conditions remains subject to labor-management bargaining. This could be accomplished through a legislative amendment, or even a “sense of Congress” provision to make clear to the FLRA and agencies that this issue is a mandatory subject of bargaining.
- Prevent Workforce Harm**
 - Require workforce impact assessments prior to AI deployment – Prioritize retraining and upskilling over job displacement.
- Establish Ethical Federal AI Standards**
 - Codify fairness, transparency, and appeal rights - Prohibit “black-box” systems in personnel decisions.