

STUDY: 14 PERCENT FED WORKFORCE IN JEOPARDY: 277,000 FEDERAL JOBS COULD FALL OFF FISCAL CLIFF



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A study by the Center for Regional Analysis at George Mason University has sent alarm bells ringing, warning that if the lawmakers cannot stop the fiscal cliff from happening than almost three hundred thousand, 277,000 to be precise, federal workers could find themselves out of a job. The study says that time is not a luxury that the government has and that it has less than 100 days to act, failing which \$1.2 trillion worth of spending cuts over a decade will automatically come into place that could see around 48,000 federal workers ousted from civilian jobs and 229,000 facing a similar fate from federal jobs. Hoping that this would not happen, federal workers have patiently tolerated a two-year pay freeze and increased health insurance premiums. What makes matters worse is that there is an overall sense of insecurity as no one really knows which jobs are going to be guillotined. The White House's Office of Management and Budget did release some figures of the financial costs that each agency may have to bear, but said nothing about which of the programs were at risk. Stephen Fuller, director of the Center for Regional Analysis, evaluated that the most vulnerable areas from where jobs are likely to be sliced are from food inspections, health institutes, national parks and even air traffic control towers that are manned by Federal Aviation Administration employees. He warned that this could have serious security and health consequences. "What that means is some airports won't be able to land as many planes, because FAA controllers won't be in the towers. FBI agents won't be on the ground investigating and meat inspectors won't be inspecting." Federal workers have always had a gun pointed at them and their pay and benefits have been termed as high and unreasonable. Last month, their two-year pay freeze on salaries was extended till March. However, with their jobs on the line a hike in salary would be the last thing on their minds. During the first presidential debate last week, Mitt Romney very categorically stated that if he became the president he would "cut back the number of employees, combine some agencies and departments." He assuaged fears somewhat that he would do it in a phased manner. The fiscal cliff will take its toll of jobs in the private sector as well and the current unemployment rate that is having president Obama smiling again could be above 9 percent by the end of 2013. The presidential elections, less than a month away, means that the lawmakers have time for little else and keep putting the ball in the other's court. The Obama Administration has becalmed frayed nerves telling them not to plan for huge furloughs and layoffs as they will find a way out before the deadline expires. Only the workers unions are telling its members what is likely in store for them and that they better be ready for it. Don Hale, a local president of the American Federation of Government Employees at the U.S. Military Academy West Point said, "I've been telling employees for the last year: You need to start putting something away just in case the worst case scenario happens." The problem with that is: It's hard for a (worker) at West Point making \$12 an hour to put a way a nest egg."