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February 23, 2021

The Honorable Gary Peters
Chairman, Senate Committee on Homeland
Security and Governmental Affairs
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Carolyn Maloney
Chairwoman, House Committee on Oversight
and Reform
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Senator Gary Peters and Congresswoman Carolyn Maloney,

As we face an historic rate of unemployment, thousands of Americans dying each day from COVID-19, and a nation deeply divided along ideological lines, the new administration deserves every opportunity to address the devastating economic, social, and public health crises it inherited. At the most basic level, the Biden administration should be permitted to assemble its team quickly and without impediment to address these national crises on behalf of the American people.

Some of the Trump administration's political appointees may be lingering within agencies, seeking conversions to career civil service positions, a process commonly referred to as "burrowing." After four years of the weaponizing of government for political means and other abuses of power, we are calling for the public disclosure of political appointees who have attempted to burrow into the federal government.

Political appointees are just that: political. They do not have to adhere to the same competitive hiring process, merit system principles, or levels of accountability as others in public service positions. The goal of political appointees is to carry out the agenda and policy priorities of a particular administration; when a new administration is elected, priorities change — as should the agents tasked with carrying them out.

Generally, these appointed positions terminate along with the administration while their career civil service counterparts — posts intentionally insulated from political influence — keep the wheels of government rolling. However, that does not always happen, and holdovers from one administration can burrow into the next.

Even President Trump denounced burrowing at the beginning of his term, famously claiming he would "drain the swamp." Members of Trump's team decried supposed Obama administration officials' conversions to career service as an attempt to "[try to set up...roadblocks for \[the\] successor.](#)" Yet, just four years later, in the wake of Trump inciting a violent insurrection amidst claims of a fraudulent election, many of his political appointees are attempting to retain power through the same process Trump previously repudiated. Even as members of Trump's own Cabinet were stepping down, they called for staffers to "[be the resistance](#)" against the newly-elected Biden administration.

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The last four years have been unlike any other in our nation's history. An administration known for [skirting the law](#) under a twice-impeached president was jam-packed with ideological, often [unqualified](#) officials who were able to run agencies and departments and [elude approval of their appointments from legislative bodies](#).

In October, after a series of unprecedented actions, former President Trump signed an [executive order](#), effectively stripping career civil servants of employment protections and opening the door for even more political hires to be placed into government positions. The new administration repealed the executive order but the will of the American people is now at risk of being undermined by a potentially historic number of holdovers from the previous administration. As reported in [Politico](#), "The fear is that, once entrenched in these posts, the Trump bureaucrats could work from the inside to stymie Biden's agenda, much of which depends on agency action. The October executive order [...] has allowed federal agencies to help political appointees circumvent the usual merit-based application process for career civil service jobs [...]" We very well could be facing an unprecedented number of civil service conversions fueled by unusually ideological political appointees.

Additionally, former President Trump delayed for months a typically routine call for the resignation of political appointees. This inaction was not only dangerous to our country, it "[created anxiety and a high level of confusion across the federal work force](#)." It may have also allowed for an extended window for appointees to seek more permanent, better protected civil service roles.

As our country continues to face dueling crises of the pandemic and recession, we simply cannot afford to have our government unprepared to act and undermined from within. For the sake of the nation's health and safety, in addition to providing relief to those in need and quickly confirming a Cabinet for the new administration, political appointees from the previous administration who have burrowed into career civil service positions must be uncovered and ousted.

We request that you make the Office of Personnel Management's report to Congress concerning political appointees' conversion to nonpolitical permanent positions available to the American public without further delay.

Thank you for your consideration,

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American Oversight

Public Citizen

Campaign for Accountability

Government Information Watch

Government Accountability Project