

**Chairman Peters Opening Statement As Prepared for Delivery Full Committee Hearing:
Ensuring a Trustworthy Government: Examining the National Security Risks of Replacing
Nonpartisan Civil Servants with Political Appointees
September 17, 2024**

Every day, civil servants across the federal government go to work for the American people. They ensure our constituents get their Social Security checks on time. They distribute resources in the wake of natural disasters. They strengthen our national security and help protect our borders. These people allow us to carry out the critical tasks of governance.

Right now, people are hired for the civil service because of their ability to do the job, not their political connections. They are career civil servants who serve across Presidential administrations regardless of political party. This ensures that our civil service is highly trained and able to deliver for our citizens.

But some Presidential administration officials and organizations advising Presidential administrations have pursued sweeping changes to this system.

Most recently, the prior administration sought to replace at least 50,000 nonpartisan career civil servants with appointees who followed the former President's politics.

This change would not only hinder our government's efficiency, it would be disastrous for the American people. It would drain the federal government of institutional knowledge, expertise, and continuity. It would slow down services, make us less prepared when disaster strikes, and erode public trust in government.

Perhaps most importantly, it would weaken our national security and make us more vulnerable to serious threats facing our nation. More than 70% of the federal workforce serves in defense and national security agencies.

Proposals that would remove career national security experts in order to increase a President's political influence over agencies would hit hardest where the stakes are highest.

Regardless of anyone's personal opinion about the U.S. strategy for military engagement, diplomacy, intelligence, or disaster preparedness we all want to trust that our leaders in these roles are informed with accurate, reliable, and complete information. This is especially true given the gravity of the decisions these leaders make every day in any Presidential administration.

We don't have to rely on hypotheticals to imagine what a personnel system under a President's political control would look like.

In the 1800s, employment in the civil service was a patronage system, based on rewarding people who followed the same politics. That led to a less effective workforce, one that was unqualified, inept, corrupt, and focused on helping a single party, rather than the best interests of the American public.

Congress finally took action to end this system of cronyism in 1883 – two years after President James Garfield was assassinated by a campaign worker who was denied a federal position he felt entitled to.

A century later, Congress took further action to strengthen hiring and firing protections for nonpartisan civil servants when Watergate documents revealed a Nixon Administration blueprint for a plan to fire and replace civil servants across the government who disagreed with his politics.

That is why today Congress must take action to prevent a future President from using a statutory loophole to make thousands of civil servants fire-able based solely on the whims of the President's political leaders. Job security for civil servants would no longer be tied to whether or not they meet objective performance criteria.

If their politically appointed boss decides to fire them for whatever reason, they would have no rights to appeal the decision. Civil servants would be exempted from the very protections that make them nonpartisan civil servants.

The vast majority of the American people prefer an independent civil service. There is a reason why civil servants take an oath to defend and protect the Constitution rather than the political will of a President.

Increasing the number of appointments by the President or the President's political leaders isn't even in the best interest of the party in power. Modern Presidential administrations already struggle to fill nearly 4,000 appointments across the government each term.

Increasing that number by 50,000 employees would hinder any President's agenda even further and likely lead to vacant jobs and disruptions to government services for much of an administration.

These proposals are short-sighted, misinformed, and put political loyalties above effective service for the American people.

We can and should consider ways to improve and modernize the way the federal government operates, including its personnel policies, whether it's making disciplinary procedures more straightforward to navigate or equipping agencies with better skills-based hiring tools.

My colleagues on this committee, on both sides of aisle, have a deep and shared commitment to making the government more effective and efficient, and eliminating waste, fraud, and abuse. And we have a great track record of passing bipartisan legislation and conducting bipartisan oversight to do so. That is why Congress, working on a bipartisan basis like we do on this committee, must be involved with any type of reform to the civil service. It is also why we need to step in when a President of any party seeks to interfere with the independence of the federal workforce.

Today's hearing is one important step in that mission. Our panel of expert witnesses will help us examine how to keep our civil service intact and suggest how Congress can take steps to improve it for future generations, especially when it comes to keeping our nation safe and secure. I thank them for being here today, and look forward to a productive discussion.