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Trump administration estimates 50,000 federal employees will lose civil service protections

Some experts warned that a new "Policy/Career" classification will create a chilling effect on the federal workforce and lead to incompetence and corruption.



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Trump administration estimates 50,000 federal employees will lose civil service protections



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Approximately 50,000 career federal employees are on track to see their civil service protections removed, as the Trump administration pushes

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"If these government workers refuse to advance the policy interests of the President, or are engaging in corrupt behavior, they should no longer have a job," Trump wrote Friday in a [social media post \(https://truthsocial.com/@realDonaldTrump/posts/114360632714487285\)](https://truthsocial.com/@realDonaldTrump/posts/114360632714487285). "This is common sense, and will allow the federal government to finally be 'run like a business.'"

OPM's proposed rule is scheduled to be published to the Federal Register on Wednesday, but the regulations will not officially convert any federal positions. Instead, the Trump administration said the conversions will take place through an executive order that will come after the finalization of OPM's rule.

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OPM estimated that 50,000 federal employees would be converted into Schedule Policy/Career, a number on the lower end of previous estimates. Documents from Trump's first term showed that [around 200,000 \(https://federalnewsnetwork.com/workforce/2024/02/schedule-f-plans-show-far-higher-impact-on-federal-workforce-than-anticipated-nteu-warns/\)](https://federalnewsnetwork.com/workforce/2024/02/schedule-f-plans-show-far-higher-impact-on-federal-workforce-than-anticipated-nteu-warns/) career federal positions could have their job protections stripped.

"The President may move a greater or smaller number of positions, but OPM believes [50,000] is a reasonable preliminary estimate," OPM wrote in its proposed regulations. "Of those positions moved into Schedule Policy/Career, OPM estimates 45,000 would be filled by incumbent employees and 5,000 would be vacancies filled by new hires upon the conclusion of the hiring freeze."

Kevin Owen, a partner at Gilbert Employment Law, said he expects the reclassifications to ultimately have a much heavier hand across government.

"It's really going to be a spoils system," Owen said in an interview with Federal News Network. "We're already seeing that right now with the implementation of reductions in force, and the hiring that will occur behind the RIFs so the administration can pick who they want to put into positions."

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their civil service protections. Shortly following the order from January, OPM published a memo [targeting a wide range](https://federalnewsnetwork.com/workforce/2025/01/trump-administration-targets-wide-range-of-positions-for-removing-federal-job-protections/) (<https://federalnewsnetwork.com/workforce/2025/01/trump-administration-targets-wide-range-of-positions-for-removing-federal-job-protections/>) of employees for reclassification.

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But Trump's steps in January were only the beginning of the process for moving forward with the new federal employment classification. Now with OPM's regulations moving forward, the administration can continue down the path to make Schedule Policy/Career a reality.

"Policy-making federal employees have a tremendous amount of influence over our laws and our lives," OPM Acting Director Chuck Ezell said Friday. "Such employees must be held to the highest standards of conduct."

Given the other recent actions of the Trump administration, however, Owen said he's far more concerned about the impacts of [agency RIFs](https://federalnewsnetwork.com/workforce/2025/04/as-rifs-get-underway-several-agencies-renew-deferred-resignation-offers/) (<https://federalnewsnetwork.com/workforce/2025/04/as-rifs-get-underway-several-agencies-renew-deferred-resignation-offers/>), some of which are already occurring, and others that will take place in the coming weeks and months.

"If you had asked me three months ago, I would have said it's significant, and I do think the new [classification] is going to do damage," Owen said. "But with what we're seeing right now — wholesale roll-ups of agencies, firings of entire departments, dragging inspectors general out by security — I'm not sure it's going to do more damage than what they've already done."

"But if it is in place long-term," Owen added, "I think it will still have a significant chilling effect and further undermine the efficacy of the federal government."

Robert Shea, former associate director of the Office of Management and Budget under the George W. Bush administration, previously called Schedule F an effort that would create an "army of suck-ups." (<https://www.cnn.com/2024/04/27/politics/trump-federal-workers-2nd-term-invs>)

"But given all that's transpired over the last several months, it seems quaint to have been worried about things like Schedule F," Shea told Federal News Network Friday. "I pray this new personnel regime is focused on improving objective performance and not enforcing political loyalty. We've needed greater accountability for some time, so I'm going to hope that's what this brings about."

Although the Trump administration's proposed regulations on Schedule Policy/Career were expected, the American Federation of Government Employees harshly criticized the action on Friday.

"It will erode the government's merit-based hiring system and undermine the professional civil service that Americans rely on," AFGE National President Everett Kelley said. "This is another in a series of deliberate moves by this administration to corrupt the federal government and replace qualified public servants with political cronies."

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AFGE and the National Treasury Employees Union are both [suing](https://federalnewsnetwork.com/workforce/2025/01/trump-revives-executive-order-aiming-to-strip-some-federal-employees-of-civil-service-protections/) (<https://federalnewsnetwork.com/workforce/2025/01/trump-revives-executive-order-aiming-to-strip-some-federal-employees-of-civil-service-protections/>) the administration over its efforts to revive a policy similar to the previous Schedule F. The lawsuits allege that Trump's order goes against established federal hiring principles, due process rights of federal employees and OPM regulations.

Opposing views on civil service reform

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"Our government needs serious improvements, but the way to do it is by making merit more important, not less," Partnership President and CEO Max Stier said Friday.

The Partnership has instead pushed for other significant changes to the career civil service. In 2024, the organization published a [blueprint \(https://federalnewsnetwork.com/workforce/2024/08/partnership-for-public-service-charts-course-for-civil-service-reform-rejects-schedule-f/\)](https://federalnewsnetwork.com/workforce/2024/08/partnership-for-public-service-charts-course-for-civil-service-reform-rejects-schedule-f/) that included a focus on holding poor performers accountable through updating and simplifying the current system rather than upending it.

"Instead of pursuing this misguided policy," Stier said, "The administration and Congress should undertake an evidence-based approach to performance management and modernize processes so they work better for leaders, managers and employees alike — while maintaining the merit system principles that are the foundation of our civil service."

If you would like to contact this reporter about recent changes in the federal government, please email drew.friedman@federalnewsnetwork.com (<mailto:drew.friedman@federalnewsnetwork.com>) or reach out on Signal at [drewfriedman.11](#)

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