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Subject: Federal Insider: Trump brings fear, anxiety and some hope to the federal workplace

Trump brings fear, anxiety and some hope to the federal workplace

By Joe Davidson

President Trump told CIA employees they have his full backing, at CIA headquarters on Jan. 21 in Langley, Va. (The Washington Post)

After comparing the intelligence community to Nazi Germany and repeatedly belittling the work of the nation's intelligence professionals, President Trump was smart to [visit the CIA](#) on his first full day as commander in chief, even though it was a self-indulgent, ego-driven exercise.

Also wise are his plans to visit other agencies to thank their employees, as well.

"The president continues to be humbled by the people who serve this nation and the work that they do so many times, without the proper recognition for the sacrifices that they make," press secretary Sean Spicer said last week.

It will take a lot more than brief agency appearances, however, to overcome the angst in the federal workforce. The new administration has vowed to freeze hiring. House Republicans have reinstated the [Holman Rule](#), which allows Congress to cut the pay of individual workers, and planned legislation would permit firing them for "[no cause at all.](#)"

For too many in government, this is a time of fear.

That doesn't apply to everyone. Let's give those who agree with Trump their say first:

"I hope that the bureaucratic red tape and overgrowth will get a severe pruning under Trump," said Peggy Richter, a former Defense Department staff member. "If done correctly, it will end with more, not less, effective

government.”

“Although I’m not a Trump supporter, I do agree with a few of the proposed initiatives relative to reducing the federal workforce,” said Michael Thompson, of DeKalb, Ill. “Recently retired, I have personally witnessed a lot of waste and abuse when it comes to federal resources.”

But many others are weighed down by anxiety.

During more than eight years of writing this column, I have sought the views of federal employees through informal email surveys. Never have I received comments filled with the kind of fright expressed by those who have written to me since Trump’s inauguration Friday.

Post policy rightly discourages the use of anonymous comments, but it’s acceptable when the source has a valid reason, such as a fear of retaliation. Feds fear retribution now more than ever.

One in that category is a 32-year supervisor who identified herself as white because that’s relevant to an experience she had with a caller seeking assistance specifically from a white employee. “Most of my employees are people of color — Hispanic, Asian, African American,” she said. “His reason boiled down to he didn’t like blacks. I have never, in my career, known of someone asking that of a manager. There’s no doubt in my mind where that came from.”

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Trump's history of racist statements, most notably his advocacy of the birther campaign to undermine Barack Obama's presidency, now casts its malignant shadow over the entire government.

"Just who, exactly, would be crazy enough to go on record with name and agency affiliation in WaPo given this new administration's overt hostility toward federal employees," asked one fed's note.

Said another: "Maybe those who are on their way out the door might be willing to go out on a limb, but those of us who have some time to go are concerned about the nascent McCarthyism that is apparent in the new administration. With the revival of the Holman rule, it's apparent that free speech isn't free for us."

Mike Benefield, a retired federal firefighter from Terrebonne, Ore., said he worries that under Trump "the federal government will be sabotaged and weakened to the point of being incapable of providing any social resilience in times of crisis."

Doris Sartor, national president of Blacks in Government, is concerned that "Trump's plan to further downsize the federal government, an area where Blacks make up nearly 20% of the federal workforce, will have a severe impact on Black Americans who are already struggling for economic security and advancement against racism, disparate treatment and favoritism."

Others in positions to interact with top administration officials spoke cautiously about federal life under Trump:

Max Stier, president and chief executive of the Partnership for Public Service: "My hope is that the new administration will see the civil service as an ally in delivering better government to the American people."

National Treasury Employees Union President Tony Reardon: "It is my hope that President Trump will recognize the important role of federal employees in protecting the country, in safeguarding the health and safety of our citizens and in keeping our economy moving forward. No new administration initiative will succeed without giving our agencies the resources to fulfill their missions and giving the workers who are on the front lines for America the support they need to do their jobs."

J. David Cox Sr., president of the American Federation of Government Employees, once a harsh critic of Trump, is not happy with his appointees but

takes a wait-and-see approach to the new administration: “I’m not sure what to expect.”

Folks such as Michael J. Harley, who retired as a Justice Department lawyer last year after 34 years of federal service, are more direct. He wished the American people well under the Trump administration with this final dig:

“As for the federal workforce, it’s hard to soar with the Eagles when you have to serve Turkeys.”

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