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Date: 1/11/2017 12:00:33 PM

Subject: Federal Insider: Democrats seek thaw in Trump plan to freeze federal hiring

Democrats seek thaw in Trump plan to freeze federal hiring

By Joe Davidson

President-elect Donald Trump listens to questions from reporters in the lobby at Trump Tower in New York on Jan. 9. (Mike Segar/Reuters)

House Democrats are trying to shield federal employees from the cold reception President-elect Donald Trump promises them shortly after he takes office next week.

A federal government hiring freeze through attrition is a top item on his first 100-day agenda.

In a letter to Trump, 106 Democrats urged him to reconsider his hiring freeze proposal, saying it would have “precisely the opposite effect” intended.

Trump outlined the plan in his “[Contract with the American Voter](#)” issued during the campaign. It’s the No. 2 point in the contract and calls for “a hiring freeze on all federal employees to reduce the federal workforce through attrition (exempting military, public safety, and public health).”

The [letter, led by Rep. Stephen F. Lynch](#) (D-Mass.), demonstrates Democrats can coalesce around federal workforce issues in the face of soon to be complete Republican dominance. But there is no expectation they will be persuasive. Indeed, limiting the growth of federal employees has long been a goal of congressional Republicans. Just this week, Rep. Jason Chaffetz (R-Utah), chairman of the House Oversight and Government Reform Committee that oversees the workforce, supported Trump’s plan. The chairman said he is considering legislation that would hold agencies to one hire for every two or three that leave.

“We have good-quality federal workers,” Chaffetz said, “but we have too many of them.”

A [White House budget document](#) indicates, however, that the federal workforce has grown by 10 percent since the 1960s, while the nation’s general population increased 67 percent during that time.

Rebutting the notion that the federal workforce is bloated, Democrats say a freeze would not be effective.

“The impact of hiring freezes enacted during previous Democratic and Republican administrations demonstrates that such measures have not, in fact, significantly reduced the size of our federal workforce or enhanced federal government operations,” the 106 members wrote, citing a still-relevant 1982 [Government Accountability Office](#) (GAO) report.

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The previous freezes did not result in a significant reduction in the size of the workforce, yet served, the letter said, “to decrease efficiency, transparency, and accountability government-wide at the expense of the public safety and American taxpayer dollars.”

Instead of controlling federal full-time employment, agencies increased temporary and part-time workers. “They also resorted to an extraordinary reliance on private contractors,” the Democrats wrote.

The Trump transition team did not respond to a request for comment.

The inability to fill vacancies also could severely interrupt the work of

agencies. During a Carter administration freeze, health-care professionals at a Department of Veterans Affairs hospital had to perform administrative duties, leading to increased patient wait times.

“Furthermore, a federal hiring freeze would continue to stretch thin a dedicated federal workforce whose employment levels have remained relatively stagnant over the past several decades in comparison to the growing American public that it serves,” the letter added.

A broad range of federal employee organizations endorsed the letter, including the American Federation of Government Employees (AFGE).

“A hiring freeze will inevitably lead to the federal government outsourcing work, which has been proven to be far more costly than federal employees doing the work,” said AFGE President J. David Cox Sr. “Hiring freezes also have a disproportionate impact on veterans and minorities, who make up much of the federal workforce. For every day there’s a hiring freeze, understaffed VA hospitals go without the doctors and nurses they desperately need, retirees wait in longer lines to visit their Social Security offices, and communities that depend on federal jobs for their economic survival suffer.”

Tony Reardon, president of the National Treasury Employees Union, agreed, adding: “Hiring freezes, which have been tried in the past and failed, are an ineffective way to manage a workforce and control costs. ... A federal hiring freeze will only serve to hurt the American public.”

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