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Subject: Federal Insider: Federal union head, once a fierce Trump critic, now sanguine

Federal union head, once a fierce Trump critic, now sanguine

By Joe Davidson

J. David Cox Sr., president of the American Federation of Government Employees. (Photo by Keith Mellnick)

What a difference a victory makes.

Before Donald Trump's win last month, American Federation of Government Employees (AFGE) President J. David Cox Sr. was a fierce critic.

Trump's federal pay freeze proposal "is more evidence that he is unprepared and unfit to be the next president of the United States," [Cox said in October](#). "He has no clue how critical public servants are to caring for our veterans, protecting our communities, ensuring hard-earned benefits are delivered, supporting our Armed Forces, and much more."

"Donald Trump would run the country like he has run Trump Enterprises," [Cox said in September](#), "shortchanging working people, failing to honor his agreements, and putting his own self-interest ahead of everything else."

"Donald Trump embarrasses some of even the most right wing Republicans ... precisely because he IS (original emphasis) the modern-day GOP stripped of its dog whistles and taken to its logical extreme," [Cox said in July](#).

On the possibility of any Republican primary candidate winning the White House, "God help us all," [Cox said in February](#). "This country will be in a serious, serious situation."

Trump did win, but now the situation doesn't seem so dire to a more sanguine Cox, who hosted a year-end luncheon meeting with reporters Wednesday.

Taking the Trump victory in stride, Cox, a strong supporter of Democrat Hillary Clinton's presidential campaign, said his general view is "we have been here and done this over and over."

Rather than the calamity someone who is "unprepared and unfit" might bring to the White House, the leader of the nation's largest federal union now describes a Trump presidency in terms that sound more akin to a nuisance that happens every few years.

There are "ups and downs," Cox said, discussing changes in political parties. "I've been on this merry-go-round before. This union has been on this merry-go-round before ... We're still going to have a federal government. We're still going to have federal employees."

On that point, there's the question of how many federal employees there will be under Trump, who has called for a [hiring freeze](#) within his first 100 days in office.

Cox isn't worried.

He predicted a freeze would generate "an outcry from the American public" because government services would suffer. "We've seen those tactics used before, but they do not work very well."

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On common ground with Trump, Cox said, AFGE will "stand firm" with the president-elect on his efforts to protect Social Security and Medicare against other Republicans who want those programs cut.

Cox isn't nervous about long-standing Republican plans to make federal workers pay more for their retirement benefits. He pointed out that AFGE supported the election campaigns of 51 congressional Republican candidates, many of whom have large numbers of federal employee constituents.

Regarding President Obama, Cox applauded the White House for expanding benefits to the same-sex partners of federal employees and taking a strong stand against discrimination in the federal workplace. But he declined to give the president an overall grade, as Cox repeated his criticism of the three-year freeze on basic pay rates that Obama initiated.

Though Cox was a big supporter of Clinton, he also had criticism for her campaign. "I think Mr. Trump did a very good job talking about bread and butter issues ..." Cox said. "Secretary Clinton did not talk as much about bread and butter issues."

In notable contrast to his earlier criticisms of Trump, Cox said his main concern about the president-elect is his unpredictability. "He doesn't have experience with government. Running the government is not running a private corporation," Cox said.

What gives Cox hope for the Trump administration? "I've seen him stand-down the Republican Party leadership, very aggressively, on issues that are important to working people, like Social Security and Medicare and jobs. ... He wants new trade agreements, which every union in this country has stood firm on, about these bad, bad trade deals."

Cox said he's ready to "applaud him [Trump] for doing better trade deals in favor of American workers in this country."

Cox also has hope for the government workforce under Trump because "he's going to realize that he's has to have those federal employees to make his government work and work smoothly and effectively and to make him successful as president."

Despite his earlier warnings about Trump, Cox now is the perpetual optimist, at one point declaring that he had "never seen a glass that was half empty."

Not much later, his optimism had grown.

"My glass will always be," he said about AFGE, "three-fourths of the way full."

But what is he drinking?

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