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Weaponizing Schedule F

In late February, officials at the National Treasury Employees Union (NTEU) got their hands on 200 pages of former Trump Office of Management and Budget records via a Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request. This revealed that Trump's 2020 team sought to reclassify many more employees in mid- and lower-level occupational categories via Schedule F, including office managers, IT analysts, economists and statisticians, and administrative workers and assistants, arguing these workers handled "confidential" materials that touched on policy, an assertion strongly dismissed by NTEU officials.

"Looking at the OMB list, they stretched the definition of confidential or policy positions to the point of absurdity under these broad definitions," stated Doreen Greenwald, national president of NTEU, at a February 27, 2024 press conference. "Under these broad definitions, tens of thousands of frontline federal employees in every single agency potentially would be swept up, many of them GS-12 and below."

The tiered federal pay system is called the **General Schedule**, which covers hourly wages for employees in professional, technical, administrative, and clerical positions. It is broken down into grades and series. The GS has fifteen grades, starting at top GS-15 and going down to GS-1. Positions are broken down by function into a job series; there are 343 job series in the GS system. G-13 to G-15 are top-level technical and supervisory positions, where political appointees are found.

Our analysis of three sample pages of the Trump 2020 OMB records shows the greatest number of approved transfer requests were in GS-15 and GS-14 positions – but a good number were in categories 13, 12 and 11, and fewer in 10 and 9. A few were also SES SL Corps and two were consultant positions. When one factors in the sub series in each category, that reflects a huge number, as the NTEU warns.

Who's Most Likely to Lose Their Job? Anyone and Everyone.

An estimated two million federal workers belong to one of three types of services: the competitive service, excepted service, and Senior Executive Service (SES). The SES corps includes some 7,000 high-level federal executives who direct major programs and projects in departments and agencies. SES workers are governed by a separate regulatory structure from the competitive and excepted services. Career SES employees are hired via a merit-based process, but lack the same civil service protections as those in the competitive or excepted services. As a result, career SES employees have few remedies if a political appointee boss wants to remove them from their position of employment entirely. Unless there is a change in the law, career SES employees will remain extremely vulnerable to undue political influence.

Meanwhile, civil service protections are systematic protections that aim to prevent illegal or unethical behavior or political overreach in the government. "This is less about providing a specific person with job protections and more about backing federal employees when they discover bad behavior or rogue apolitical appointees," explains NFFE head Steve Lenkart. "If Schedule F is implemented, as promised by Republican officials, federal employees in the competitive and excepted services will be transferred into an at-will employment status without civil service protections." And he warns, "the government will not be able to defend itself from corruption and political operatives, impacting the missions and operations of every department and agency in the government." -- *ACD*