



COMMENTARY

DWIGHT INK

Career Employees Are Not the President's Enemies

Your Feb. 26 edition included a commentary by Robert Moffit ["President's Management Team Must Share His Vision"] that contains some good advice to the Bush administration, but includes advice I would see as quite damaging to President Bush.

I support the call to review the conversion of noncareer workers to career status and his urging that presidential appointees understand their responsibilities and opportunities provided by the Civil Service Reform Act of 1978. But I disagree most strongly with some of Moffit's other points, which I believe would undermine Bush's ability to increase the public trust and improve the effectiveness of government.

His recommendation that "new appointees maintain lines of demarcation between career and noncareer employees and functions" is both unworkable and unwise. He stresses the need for "exten-

sive managerial experience" on the part of political appointees. If both management and policy are the functions of political appointees, functions from which career people are to be excluded by a "sharp line" of demarcation, what is left for the career workers? If their role is confined to routine, robotic types of activity, who can the government recruit to make the government function? Certainly no one with the professional qualifications will want to apply.

Surely the answer is not to be found in his resurrecting the outdated argument that we need more presidential, or Schedule C, political appointees. Instead, what should be done is a careful review of the need for all the current political positions in departments and agencies before they are filled. The philosophy that we need to cut career positions but increase political positions seems to be based largely on the ill-founded theo-

ry that career employees cannot be trusted to carry out the policies of a new president. Experience is overwhelmingly in the opposite direction.

After leaving government, most successful department and agency heads will tell you they found the career service to be both highly competent and loyal.

A few Schedule C appointees can be of great help to a new administration. Too many, however, raise problems. First, White House personnel offices in the past have not had the time or resources to conduct screening much beyond background checks and financial disclosure statements. Consequently, the quality of such appointees has been highly uneven.

Second, added numbers of presidential appointees tend to diffuse the presidential guidance needed by the career service to be responsive.

Third, although all presidential appointees want to sup-

port the president, a number have stronger ties to their political or special-interest group patrons on certain issues than to the president.

Schedule C positions often have been used by both parties to reward campaign workers. This is called patronage, an invitation to corruption.

Rather than increasing an already questionable level of Schedule C appointments, some of us have urged that each department and agency review the need for the number they now have before filling positions. I believe that a review will reveal reductions that can be made.

The career service is comprised of professionals who are trained to serve the president of whatever political party. I saw them perform in the most difficult circumstances one can imagine when President Reagan appointed me head of the anti-poverty Community Services Administration with the objective of

ending its existence. Faced with the loss of programs in which they believed, as well as their jobs, the career employees were expected to mount marches and other forms of protest. Sabotage and appeals to Congress were widely predicted. None of that happened, and at midnight of the last day in the life of that agency — and the last day many had a job — most were still at work serving a president for whom they did not vote and whose policy of ending the agency was opposed by virtually every employee.

Moffit's recommendations run counter to the experience of successful political leaders and would weaken Bush's capacity to implement his policies effectively. It also could work against his efforts to earn greater public trust in our government.

Dwight Ink served in seven administrations and lobbied for passage of the Presidential Transition Act of 2000.