

Trump to purge Obama/Google Seditious appointees and staff

Frustrated by the gush of leaks, attacks and administrative booby-traps, the president's allies say it's time to take action.

By [Josh Dawsey](#)



A number of President Donald Trump's advisers believe former President Barack Obama officials are behind the leaks and are seeking to undermine Trump's presidency. | Getty

By Matt Kibbe

Advisers to President Donald Trump are urging him to purge the government of former President Barack Obama's political appointees and quickly install more people who are loyal to him, amid a cascade of damaging stories that have put his nascent administration in seemingly constant crisis-control mode.

A number of his advisers believe Obama officials are behind the leaks and are seeking to undermine his presidency, with just the latest example coming from reports that Attorney General Jeff Sessions met twice last year with the Russian ambassador to the U.S. and apparently misled senators about the interactions during his confirmation hearing.

That was coupled with a New York Times story that Obama appointees spread information about the investigation into the Trump campaign's contacts with Russia in an attempt to create a paper trail about the probe. Trump's aides have also blamed Obama appointees for other damaging leaks, like Trump's erratic phone calls with foreign leaders.

Inside the White House, the chatter about Obama officials in the government has heightened in recent weeks, one administration official said. And advisers are saying it is time to take action.

"His playbook should be to get rid of the Obama appointees immediately," said Newt Gingrich, a top surrogate. "There are an amazing number of decisions that are being made by appointees that are totally opposed to Trump and everything he stands for. Who do you think those people are responding to?"

"If you employ people who aren't loyal to you, you can't be surprised when they leak," said Roger Stone, another longtime adviser. A third person close to Trump said: "He should have gotten these people who are out to get him out a long time ago, a long, long time ago. I think they know that now."

The reality, however, is more complicated: The White House has thousands of open jobs across the agencies, many nonpolitical civilian employees are critical of the administration, and some Cabinet secretaries say they need the Obama people during a rocky transition.

Only a few dozen Obama political appointees remain in the federal government apparatus, according to the Partnership for Public Service. Many of them are in crucial positions, including Robert Work, a top official at the Department of Defense, and Thomas Shannon, the acting deputy at the State Department.

Even if Trump were to ax those remaining senior political appointees, he would still have to reckon with the hundreds of thousands of civilian employees, who stay with every administration. Many of them are skeptical of Trump because they resent his assault on Washington and its culture, his impulsive decisions and his seeming lack of intellectual curiosity about their agencies and work.

They have spent the past six weeks on edge. Many are quietly on the job market, but others have been clashing with Trump appointees, either in the open or privately among colleagues, according to officials across agencies. From Homeland Security to Defense and beyond, it's become a regular conversation among employees about what lines they will not cross before quitting, and how best to slow-walk orders from above to frustrate implementation.

Amid those conversations is a running thread: how long they'd be willing to hold out to bear witness, and try to improve a climate they increasingly hate, or whether to leak information about changes they see in order to try and stop them. "I want to be able to tell people what's happening here," one State Department official said.



"Nixon essentially tried to bypass the federal bureaucracy, and the bureaucracy won and removed him from office," said Newsmax CEO Chris Ruddy, a longtime Trump friend. "The administration needs to be careful not to make too many dramatic changes because the federal bureaucracy itself is a powerful machine, and they tend to have very establishment ideas."

Gingrich added: "Ninety-five percent of the bureaucrats are against him."

The White House did not respond to a request for comment.

Some in Trump's inner circle increasingly fear that the FBI and the intelligence community are out to damage him. But some of the damaging leaks have also come from within his administration, advisers say, because the West Wing is plagued by competing factions that are vying for Trump's attention and affection.

"You hire a bunch of people in the West Wing who are hacks and aren't loyal to you, and you'll have a bunch of leaks," Stone said. "There aren't that many Trump loyalists in the White House."

In meetings, Trump aides like Stephen Miller, his senior policy adviser, have frequently complained about leaks and blamed the Obama appointees and longtime bureaucrats. Other aides have complained about having to sit in inter-agency meetings with Obama holdovers in senior positions. And Trump aides have told their people at agencies not to share plans and documents with Obama holdovers or others who are not sympathetic to them.

Yet across federal agencies, there are few Trump people. Candidates for only about three dozen of 550 critical Senate-confirmed positions have even been nominated, according to the Partnership for Public Service.

Several advisers and people close to Trump described the problem like this: During the transition, aides ignored hundreds of names that had been developed during New Jersey Gov. Chris Christie's time leading the transition. For several weeks after he was removed, work stopped as the team came to grips with Trump's improbable win.

Then, little was done to pick officials beneath the Cabinet level after Trump made a series of wham-bam choices. Picks have frequently been held up by the White House because they weren't loyal to Trump during the campaign, and people have grown increasingly skittish about being employed in a West Wing frequently described as chaotic and dysfunctional.

"I wish I had more of my staff on board," Sessions said Thursday, during a news conference in which he announced that he would recuse himself from any investigation related to the presidential campaigns.



In a twist, it will be an Obama appointee, Dana Boente, who will now be handling the investigation into the Trump campaign and Russian officials. Sally Yates, who was previously the No. 2 Justice Department official under Obama, was fired in late January after she refused to defend his controversial travel ban.

Gingrich said he blamed Sen. Chuck Schumer for slow-walking the nominees, though Schumer's office notes that many of the picks were not properly vetted: At least three have already dropped out. The Office of Government Ethics remains overwhelmed with applications now, "but they are beginning to catch up," one person involved in the nominations said. At many agencies, no top positions are filled, which means the layers of political appointees that report to them haven't been picked, either.

"I didn't get it early on. This is not about slowing down the Cabinet. This is about keeping working control of the government for Obama," Gingrich said. "It's actually very shrewd on Schumer's part. Trump is not going to have control of the government until at least June."

Others say it could be even longer. And that a massive purge is not the answer.

"The solution is not to purge the Obama holdovers but rather to actually identify people and move them forward," said Max Stier, president of the Partnership for Public Service, which has advised the Trump team. "Historically, it has taken a year plus for administrations to get their entire team in place. I'm afraid the Trump team is behind that, and that would not be a good thing. He has to have his own team in place if he's going to be able to get things done."

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