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Who would help Trump carry out his promised “purge” of the “deep state”?

By Debra Perlin

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In a second Trump administration, Donald Trump has [made clear](#) that he wants to finish what he started in 2020 and cut the civil service massively, replacing experts and longtime public servants with loyalists and sycophants. To carry out his audacious plans, he would need deputies who are fully on board with his vision. Luckily for Trump, it seems he has them. In particular, John McEntee, Stephen Miller, Jeffrey Clark, Richard Grenell, and Kash Patel have all hitched their wagon to Trump—either financially or by doubling down on election denialism—and are reportedly poised for highly influential appointments where they could implement and enforce Trump's planned "purge" of the "deep state."

This isn't a new idea. At the end of President Trump's term his administration attempted to upend the modern civil service by creating a program that would have allowed them to replace the tens of thousands of experts who make sure our air is clean, our airplanes safe, and our tax rebates paid with loyalists, regardless of whether they had any particular expertise. The effort, colloquially referred to as [Schedule F](#), was never fully implemented because President Biden rescinded Trump's [executive order](#).

Trump has promised that he would reimpose Schedule F in a second term, and conservative groups like the Heritage Foundation are preparing to assist through a plan called [Project 2025](#). Led by individuals with close ties to Donald Trump and his administration, Project 2025 hopes to engage in an unprecedented reshaping of the executive branch. The goal is to implement radical policies by leaning into the adage that personnel is policy - and ensuring that each and every person hired into the federal government swears unflinching fidelity to Trump and the conservative cause. The consequences of extremists overseeing a radical restructuring of the federal government could be catastrophic, which has led the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) to finalize a [new rule](#) to strengthen protections for the civil service and Members of Congress have introduced legislation to formalize these protections legislatively.

Here are the Trump loyalists poised to help him make good on his promised purge of the executive branch:



John McEntee - Office of Personnel Management

John McEntee, who started as Trump's body man during the 2016 campaign and is currently [working on HR](#) for the Trump campaign, could build upon that role and lead the Office of Personnel Management (OPM), the office charged with recruiting, vetting, and hiring all civil service government employees from intelligence officers and policy advisors to administrative law judges and law enforcement personnel.

At the age of 29, McEntee rose from carrying Trump's suitcase as his personal aide and body man to serving as the Director of the White House Presidential Personnel Office (PPO) despite previously being fired by former Chief of Staff John Kelly for failing a security clearance background check. As the Director of PPO, McEntee [took it upon himself](#) to ensure that all presidential appointees were [sufficiently loyal](#) to Trump, conducting loyalty interviews with employees throughout the federal government and monitoring their social media presence. In one case, McEntee's staff brought to White House Chief of Staff Mark Meadows's attention a young assistant at the Department of Housing and Urban Development who was seen as "consorting with the enemy" by "liking" a Taylor Swift Instagram [post](#) where the singer said "VOTE", in connection to her plans to vote for Joe Biden - despite the fact that 3 million other people also liked the post or that this woman liked all of Taylor Swift's posts.

McEntee took a particular interest in hiring for cabinet liaison positions. Cabinet liaisons are mid-level positions that are responsible for coordinating messaging among agencies. McEntee [weaponized](#) this job category by choosing cabinet liaisons who would report back to him any real or perceived disloyalty. In one instance, McEntee's chosen DOJ liaison, Heidi Stirrup, walked into Attorney General Barr's office and lectured him that the 2020 election was being stolen and he wasn't doing enough to stop the steal. Stirrup's behavior was so alarming that DOJ officials worried she would snoop into DOJ investigations and barred her from their offices.

In other circumstances, McEntee's [hiring](#) seemed to be based on looks alone - hiring "the most beautiful 21-year-old girls you could find," including one Rockette whose only prior work experience was as a dance instructor.

Described by some as the “[deputy president](#),” McEntee drafted and had Trump sign an executive order directing the American military to withdraw from Afghanistan without consulting anyone at the Pentagon and without any military expertise himself. He also helped set the stage for the January 6th attack on the U.S. Capitol by sending former Vice President Pence a memo arguing that he had the constitutional authority to overturn the election despite the fact that McEntee is not a lawyer.

Since leaving the White House McEntee has [joined](#) the Heritage Foundation as a senior advisor to Project 2025. As the Director of the Office of Personnel Management, the chief human resources agency for the federal government, McEntee would arguably be the most central person in efforts to implement Schedule F.



Stephen Miller - Chief of Staff

An immigration hardliner, Stephen Miller was a Senior Advisor to the President for Policy and White House Director of Speechwriting during Trump’s administration. He is [considered](#) by many to be a candidate for Chief of Staff.

[Labeled](#) as an extremist by the Southern Poverty Law Center, Miller shaped and shepherded Trump’s immigration policies including the Muslim travel ban, Trump’s “zero tolerance” initiative which separated migrant children from their family, and ending the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program. When Trump and Miller felt that the Department of Homeland Security wasn’t cracking down hard enough, Miller oversaw a [purge](#) of DHS employees who were seen as insufficiently loyal including DHS Secretary Kristjen Nielsen and Secret Service Director Randolph Alles.

After the 2020 election Miller helped Trump’s attempts to overturn his loss and incite insurrection, including working on Trump’s remarks for the Stop the Steal Rally on January 6th at the Ellipse - a rally where Trump urged his supporters to march to the Capitol as Congress was certifying the 2020 presidential election. The crowd at the Ellipse reacted to the words that Miller helped draft with calls for violence, culminating in the insurrection at the Capitol.

Should Miller return to the White House as Chief of Staff, he will have power to oversee the implementation of Schedule F and Project 2025 at every federal agency. Just as he did in 2019 with the firing of Nielsen, one can expect that Miller will encourage purging employees who do not share his hardline immigration beliefs and election denialism. Such staff changes could also affect the State Department (which issues visas), the Department of Justice (which defends government actions), the Department of Health and Human Services (which cares for refugees and asylees in the United States including unaccompanied children), and the Department of Defense (which previously [balked](#) at Miller's idea of sending troops to the border).



Jeffrey Clark - Department of Justice

Jeffrey Clark was at the center of efforts within the Department of Justice to overturn the 2020 presidential election including efforts to push out DOJ leaders who were seen as insufficiently loyal to Donald Trump. Now he's [considered](#) a leading contender for Attorney General, despite facing potential disbarment.

While serving under Trump as Acting Assistant Attorney General for the Civil Division, Clark tried to mobilize the Justice Department to support Trump's efforts to overturn the election. Clark [drafted a letter](#) to be sent from the Department of Justice to Georgia claiming - without evidence - that the Department had "identified significant concerns" and unspecified election "irregularities" and urged the state to convene the legislature so they could appoint alternate electors who would vote for Trump. When DOJ leadership refused to send the letter, Trump [threatened](#) to install Clark as Acting Attorney General. In August 2023, Clark was [indicted](#) in Fulton County, Georgia for his efforts to overturn the election.

While Clark awaits trial in Georgia, a D.C. Bar disciplinary panel [concluded](#) in April 2024 that Clark violated ethics rules in his attempt to overturn the 2020 election. This will likely jumpstart disbarment processes that could lead to the suspension or revocation of Clark's license to practice law.

Should Clark run Trump's DOJ, one can expect that he'd try to root out and purge DOJ attorneys, including those who have worked on the various Trump criminal probes.



Richard Grenell - State Department

During the Trump Administration, Richard Grenell served as Acting Director of National Intelligence and in several diplomatic posts, including Ambassador to Germany and Special Presidential Envoy for Serbia and Kosovo Peace Negotiations. Now he is considered to be a top contender for Secretary of State.

Since leaving office in 2020, Grenell has peddled 2020 election denialism claiming that "[illegal votes](#)" tainted the results of the 2020 presidential election. He has also traveled around the world legitimizing rightwing authoritarian leaders including during a January 2024 visit to [Guatemala](#) where he defended the seizure of ballot boxes by Guatemalan officials in an effort to overturn an election declared "free and fair" by international observers.

He has also gone into business with Trump's son-in-law Jared Kushner, trying to engage in [real estate deals](#) in Albania and Serbia - a corner of the world where Grenell recently served as Special Envoy. The three real estate transactions - one in Serbia and two in Albania - could surpass \$1 billion and are being funded through Kushner's investment firm, Affinity Partners. It seems likely that Grenell's relationships in the Balkans may have helped pave the way for these transactions.

As Secretary of State, Grenell could surround himself with employees willing to turn a blind eye to his conflicts of interest and greenlight policies and projects that could pay him financial dividends in the long term. This raises the possibility that, if Schedule F were implemented, Grenell would try to purge regional experts from the Department. Losing this type of expertise - particularly in the Middle East and Russia where wars are raging - could be catastrophic for American national security.



Kash Patel - CIA

A former official in the National Security Council who spent time as the Principal Deputy in the Office of the Director of National Intelligence and Chief of Staff at the Department of Defense, Kash Patel is considered a likely pick to lead the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) - despite being previously considered unfit to hold that job.

During his time in government, first as an aide to former Representative Devin Nunes and then in the Trump administration, Patel worked to undermine Robert Mueller's investigation into 2016 election interference by [writing](#) a [biased memo](#) about unsubstantiated alleged FBI misconduct. He has also [claimed](#) - without any evidence and in direct contradiction to former Acting Secretary of Defense Christopher Miller's testimony - that Trump pre-authorized the deployment of National Guard troops on January 6, 2021. Patel's testimony about Trump's conduct related to the January 6th insurrection was found to be [not credible](#) by a Colorado state judge.

Patel's activities were considered so problematic by the intelligence community that then CIA Director Gina Haspel [threatened](#) to resign in protest if Patel was installed as her deputy. Patel, who was in charge of facilitating the Defense Department's transition to Joe Biden's team following the 2020 election, [blocked](#) career officials and experts from giving the newly elected administration key information.

To date, Patel remains convinced that Trump won the 2020 election and has promised an agenda of revenge should Trump be reelected, [vowing](#) to find the "conspirators" in government and media and go after them criminally and civilly, identifying the so-called deep state as a problem that needs to be fixed.

If Patel were to take the helm of the agency charged with collecting, evaluating, and disseminating vital national security information, he could act on his frustration with the "deep state" and use a Schedule F mandate to sideline or remove career officials and experts.

Conclusion

While McEntee, Miller, Clark, Grenell and Patel appear to be the likeliest appointees who would be willing and empowered to carry out loyalty purges, there are other potential appointees who may be similarly inclined and have conflicts of interest that might affect who is hired and fired from the federal government. Jeff Yass is in consideration to become Treasury Secretary, and has business ties with Trump through Trump's media company. Jared Kushner says he doesn't want to join a second Trump administration, but that's not necessarily a guarantee. If he did join the administration, he would bring with him countless conflicts of interest, including a \$2 billion investment from Saudi Arabia's Public Investment Fund in his private equity firm Affinity Partners. Former Secretary of Interior David Bernhardt and Texas Agriculture Commissioner Sid Miller are other possibilities for the roles of Secretary of Interior and Secretary of Agriculture, respectively. Thanks to his role as a lobbyist for the mining, oil, gas, and utilities industries, Bernhardt was described as "[a walking conflict of interest](#)" during his time at Interior and his decisions were so ethically compromised that the House Nature Resources Committee [referred](#) him to the Department of Justice for criminal prosecution. Miller, on the other hand, is known for his reliance on conspiracy theories including Dinesh D'Souza's 2020 propaganda film *2000 Mules* and is highly [dismissive](#) of climate change which is particularly problematic given that agriculture accounts for over [10% of all U.S. greenhouse gas emissions](#).

Leaders in Congress and the executive branch have taken note of Project 2025 and Trump's plan to reimpose Schedule F. The Office of Personnel Management recently finalized a [rule](#) enhancing the merit system and making it harder for a future president to enact Schedule F by protecting career civil servants from being reclassified and fired at will. CREW strongly supports this rule and remains committed to helping defend it in court if its legality is challenged by those, like Stephen Miller's group America First Legal, who hope to upend the civil service.

Regulations are important, but they can be undone by a future administration. That is why legislatively protecting the civil service is so important. Senator Tim Kaine and Representatives Gerry Connolly and Brian Fitzpatrick developed and introduced the Saving The Civil Service Act (S. 399 and H.R. 1002), which would prohibit any future president from resurrecting Schedule F through executive action. Passing this legislation is a crucial next step.

The threat to our merit-based civil service is real, and if implemented, Trump's plans to purge experts and long-time public servants could impact everyday Americans in myriad ways. Experts who ensure our water is clean and safe to drink could be fired. Civil servants who process passports and visas could be gone, leaving Americans stranded overseas. And leaders whose job it is to ensure that national security and intelligence information keeps us safe from attack could vanish overnight - leaving our national security in serious jeopardy.

It's clear that Trump has potential appointees in his orbit willing to do the dirty work of carrying out a political purge – which is why we must implement these proposed protections before it's too late.