

Testimony Submitted for the Record
Senate Committee on the Budget
Hearing: The Nomination of the Honorable Russell T. Vought, of Virginia, to be Director of the
Office of Management and Budget
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Chairman Graham, Ranking Member Merkley and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony regarding the nomination of Russell Vought to be Director of the Office of Management and Budget (OMB).

My organization, Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington (CREW), is a nonpartisan nonprofit organization dedicated to fighting corruption and promoting ethical governance. With this mission in mind, I write to you today to express deep concern about Mr. Vought's efforts to dismantle our merit-based civil service system and how such a dismantling will likely cause large-scale corruption within the government.

Should he be confirmed, it is abundantly clear that Mr. Vought intends to misuse his authority as Director of OMB to harm civil servants, and as a result, endanger the American public. During his tenure as OMB Acting Director and then Director from January 2019 to January 2021, Mr. Vought was a central figure in attempting to implement Schedule F, President Trump's Executive Order that would have upended the merit-based civil service system by stripping employment protections away from thousands of career civil servants had President Biden not rescinded it. Mr. Vought has called for reinstating Schedule F and was a key architect of Project 2025, the Heritage Foundation's sweeping—and wildly unpopular—conservative policy plan that advocates for dismantling the civil service. If Schedule F is reinstated, it would not only harm federal employees but would also cause catastrophic harm to government services, as well as causing deep economic impacts in places with significant populations of government workers including California, Texas, Virginia, Maryland and Washington D.C., among others.¹

Research shows that when government politicization increases—which it would if career civil servants are replaced with political appointees—government performance deteriorates.² Career civil servants who are experts in their fields understand their responsibilities under the law are essential to a functioning government. They help ensure that our water and air are clean, we can travel safely, we have the technological

¹ U.S. Office of Personnel Management, "General", <https://www.opm.gov/frequently-asked-questions/workforce-information-faq/general/which-states-has-the-most-federal-employees/>.

² Donald Moynihan, *The risks of Schedule F for administrative capacity and government accountability*, Brookings (Dec. 12, 2023), <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/the-risks-of-schedule-f-for-administrative-capacity-and-government-accountability/>.

infrastructure to protect against cyber attacks, our government is prepared to respond to climate emergencies like wildfires and hurricanes and that the medicines we take are safe. A government hamstrung by federal agencies filled with unqualified party loyalists would negatively impact almost every part of everyday Americans' lives and cause unique harm to rural communities,³ senior citizens⁴ and veterans.⁵ It would also jeopardize national security and leave our democracy vulnerable to attempts to diminish it, including efforts by foreign adversaries, like Russia,⁶ Iran⁷ and China,⁸ that seek to unlawfully influence our elections.

By replacing independent civil servants with political loyalists who prioritize blind obedience over following the law, Mr. Vought would not only make our government more dysfunctional and ineffective but also more prone to corruption. This is evident from U.S. history: before the passage of the Pendleton Act in 1883, the U.S. government operated under a spoils system, in which federal employment was based on party loyalty and patronage rather than merit and expertise. In order to be elected, aspiring politicians would buy endorsements and reward loyalty with promises to put important party bosses' political cronies in positions of power in their administration.⁹ Unsurprisingly, this spoils system was directly linked to a rise in corruption and even violence, including the assassination of then-President Garfield in 1881 by a rejected office-seeker, which is why it was rightfully outlawed nearly 150 years ago.¹⁰ Mr. Vought's persistent eagerness to return to a spoils system and replace civil servants with political loyalists indicates a dangerous disregard for the rule of law, government ethics laws and our country's security.

Mr. Vought's attacks on the civil service go beyond Schedule F. In a private speech published by *ProPublica*, Mr. Vought told a crowd that he wants to put career civil servants "in trauma," and said that when "they wake up in the morning, we want them to not want to go to work

³ Joe Spielberger, *Schedule F Would Turn Its Back on Rural Communities*, POGO (July 30, 2024), <https://www.pogo.org/analysis/schedule-f-would-turn-its-back-on-rural-communities>.

⁴ Joe Spielberger, *"Schedule F" Plan to Gut Civil Service Puts Seniors at Risk*, POGO (May 16, 2024), <https://www.pogo.org/analysis/schedule-f-plan-to-gut-civil-service-puts-seniors-at-risk>.

⁵ Joe Spielberger, *Schedule F Betrays Veterans' Service to Our Country*, POGO (July 1, 2024), <https://www.pogo.org/analysis/schedule-f-betrays-veterans-service-to-our-country>.

⁶ Press Release, Justice Department Disrupts Covert Russian Government-Sponsored Foreign Malign Influence Operation Targeting Audiences in the United States and Elsewhere, Department of Justice (Sept. 4, 2024), <https://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/justice-department-disrupts-covert-russian-government-sponsored-foreign-malign-influence>.

⁷ Robert Legare and Andres Triay, *U.S. intelligence officials warn of Iran's attempts to interfere in presidential election*, CBS News (Aug. 19, 2024), <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/intelligence-community-iran-interference-hacking-u-s-elections/>.

⁸ Tiffany Hsu and Steven Lee Myers, *China's Advancing Efforts to Influence the U.S. Election Raise Alarms*, New York Times (Apr. 2, 2024), <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/04/01/business/media/china-online-disinformation-us-election.html>.

⁹ See William 'Boss' Tweed and Political Machines, *Bill of Rights Institute*, <https://billofrightsinstitute.org/essays/william-boss-tweed-and-political-machines>.

¹⁰ See "Spoils System," *Encyclopedia.com*; see also "Machine Politics," *PBS*, <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/presidents-unity-garfield/>.

because they are increasingly viewed as the villains.”¹¹ Mr. Vought’s statements about his potential future employees make him wholly unqualified as a manager, to say nothing of being worthy of the privilege of administering the federal budget and overseeing federal agencies.

In addition to Mr. Vought’s intention to dismantle the civil service, he has pushed extreme strategies to consolidate presidential power under the banner of “radical constitutionalism.”¹² He supports the president withholding congressionally appropriated funds in violation of the Impoundment Control Act,¹³ bypassing the advice and consent of the Senate to push recess appointments,¹⁴ invoking the Insurrection Act to deploy the military on the American public¹⁵ and abusing emergency powers.¹⁶ These plans to expand presidential power are even more troubling taken with Mr. Vought’s stated desire to reduce the independence of federal agencies such as the Department of Justice, in part by purging agencies of career civil servants that are seen as standing in the way of the president’s agenda.¹⁷ Mr. Vought has called for “an army of investigators” to prosecute current and former government officials who sought to hold President Trump accountable.¹⁸ These are just some of the ways Mr. Vought intends to misuse his own authority and craft plans for the president to subvert the law and, in the process, American democracy.

Our constitution entrusts the Senate with the duty of giving its advice and consent on presidential nominations.¹⁹ CREW strongly urges the committee to exercise this responsibility by rejecting Mr. Vought’s nomination in order to protect our democratic institutions and the American public.

¹¹ Molly Redden, Andy Kroll and Nick Surgey, “Put Them in Trauma”: Inside a Key MAGA Leader’s Plans for a New Trump Agenda, ProPublica (Oct. 28, 2024),

<https://www.propublica.org/article/video-donald-trump-russ-vought-center-renewing-america-maga>.

¹² Richard Lardner, *Russell Vought, a Project 2025 architect, likely in line for high-ranking post if Trump wins 2nd term*, PBS (Aug. 5, 2024),

<https://www.pbs.org/newshour/politics/russell-vought-a-project-2025-architect-likely-in-line-for-high-ranking-post-if-trump-wins-2nd-term>.

¹³ Jeff Stein and Jacob Bogage, *Trump plans to claim sweeping powers to cancel federal spending*, The Washington Post (June 7, 2024),

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/2024/06/07/trump-budget-impoundment-congress/>.

¹⁴ Katherine Culliton-González and Virginia Canter, *Abuse of recess appointments raises constitutional law concerns*, CREW (June 14, 2025),

<https://www.citizensforethics.org/reports-investigations/crew-reports/abuse-of-recess-appointments-raises-constitutional-law-concerns/>; Alice Herman, *Trump’s pick for budget head worked on Project 2025 – and wants to bypass the US Senate*, The Guardian (Nov. 23, 2024),

<https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2024/nov/23/trump-project-2025-russell-vought-budget-director>.

¹⁵ Beth Reinhard, *Trump loyalist pushes ‘post-Constitutional’ vision for second term*, The Washington Post (June 8, 2024),

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2024/06/08/russ-vought-trump-second-term-radical-constitutional/>.

¹⁶ Marianne LeVine and Quint Forgey, *White House asks Congress for \$5.7 billion for ‘steel barrier’*, Politico (Jan. 6, 2019),

<https://www.politico.com/story/2019/01/06/trump-emergency-border-wall-government-shutdown-1082712>.

¹⁷ *Supra* note 15.

¹⁸ *Id.*

¹⁹ U.S. Const. art. II, § 2 cl. 2.