

Before the
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY
CUSTOMS AND BORDER PROTECTION

Petition for Amendment of Regulations of:)
)
NATIONAL TREASURY) File No. _____
EMPLOYEES UNION,)
)
Petitioner.)
_____)

**PETITION FOR CUSTOMS AND BORDER PROTECTION
REGULATIONS TO ENSURE PROTECTION
FROM PROHIBITED PERSONNEL PRACTICES**

Pursuant to 5 U.S.C. § 553(e), the National Treasury Employees Union (NTEU) submits this petition to amend CBP regulations.

Federal law explicitly protects the bulk of federal employees from “prohibited personnel practices”—i.e., personnel actions motivated by discrimination, reprisal, political coercion, improper influence, or obstruction of rights. *See* 5 U.S.C. § 2302. NTEU’s proposal would extend these same protections, by regulation, to a category of employees who fall outside of the federal statute’s coverage. The category of employees covered by NTEU’s proposal consists of employees who are excepted from the competitive service because (1) their position is of a confidential, policy-determining, policy-making, or policy-advocating

character; or (2) their position is excluded from the competitive service by a President based on a determination that such exclusion is necessary and warranted by conditions of good administration.

NTEU’s proposal would extend to this category of excepted service employees the same fundamental protections reflected in Congress’s prohibited personnel practices. CBP may lawfully extend these same protections to additional groups of employees—and, indeed, it has previously done so. It would be sound policy for CBP to do so again.

NTEU’S PROPOSAL AND STATEMENT OF GROUNDS

I. NTEU’s Proposed Regulatory Language.

NTEU proposes new subsection 0.3 to 19 C.F.R.:

(a) This section applies to “covered employees,” which are defined as any employee occupying or applying for a position which is

(1) excepted from the competitive service because of its confidential, policy-determining, policy-making, or policy-advocating character; or

(2) or excluded from the competitive service by a President based on a determination by the President that such exclusion is necessary and warranted by conditions of good administration.

(b) This agency shall not take a personnel action based on a prohibited personnel practice against covered employees. “Personnel action” means the actions defined in 5 U.S.C. § 2302(a)(2)(A). “Prohibited personnel practice” means the practices defined in 5 U.S.C. § 2302(b)(1)-(14) and includes the definition of “disclosure” as defined in

5 U.S.C. § 2302(a)(2)(D), § 2302(f); and the definition of “veterans’ preference requirement” as defined in 5 U.S.C. § 2302(e).

(c) The head of this agency shall be responsible for informing covered employees of their rights under this section in the same manner as such information is extended to employees covered by 5 U.S.C. § 2302(c)(2)-(5), including providing such information to new employees in covered positions within 180 days after such employee’s appointment.

(d) This section shall not be construed to extinguish or lessen any right or remedy available to any employee or applicant for employment in the civil service under the laws identified at 5 U.S.C. § 2302(d) and regulations promulgated pursuant to those laws.

(e) An employee (or bargaining unit representative acting on the employee’s behalf, if applicable) may raise a claim alleging a violation of this section through the negotiated grievance procedure, if applicable, or with the agency by filing a claim with the agency’s Privacy and Diversity Office, but not both. A claim must identify the parties, identify any relevant personnel action(s), and describe generally the practice or activities at issue.

(f) The agency shall have the opportunity to respond to the allegations of the employee (or bargaining unit representative acting on the employee’s behalf, if applicable). If the claim is proceeding through a negotiated grievance procedure, the applicable grievance procedures shall apply. If a claim is proceeding through the Privacy and Diversity Office, that office shall investigate and issue a decision regarding the allegations within 60 days.

(g) Employees (or bargaining unit representative acting on the employee’s behalf, if applicable), raising a claim that the agency is taking a personnel action for the reasons described at 5 U.S.C. § 2302(b)(8) or (b)(9) may also seek a stay of the personnel action while the underlying claim is resolved. The request for a stay must include allegations of how this section has been violated. The request for a stay may be made to an arbitrator (if the claim is raised through the negotiated grievance procedure) or to the agency’s Privacy and

Diversity Office. If the request for a stay is raised to the agency's Privacy and Diversity Office, the appropriate agency official must respond to a stay request within five business days. If the request for a stay is raised through the negotiated grievance procedure, the relevant contractual provisions related to stay requests will govern.

II. NTEU's Proposal is Lawful.

NTEU's proposed regulation lawfully extends protection against prohibited personnel practices. Federal statute provides those protections, as relevant here, to competitive service employees, to career appointees in the Senior Executive Service and to many excepted service employees. 5 U.S.C. § 2302(a)(2)(B). NTEU's proposal covers two categories of excepted service employees who do *not* have statutory protections against prohibited personnel practices. *See id.* § 2302(a)(2)(B)(i), (ii).

Nothing restricts CBP from extending protections against prohibited personnel practices to additional groups of employees. CBP has broad authority to promulgate regulations, as long as it acts reasonably and does not contravene a clear statutory directive. *See Chevron, U.S.A., Inc. v. NRDC, Inc.*, 467 U.S. 837, 842-43 (1984).

Indeed, the last administration explicitly ordered the expansion of prohibited personnel practice protections to the very category of excepted service employees that NTEU's proposal covers. President

Trump created a new schedule of excepted service employees in Executive Order 13957 (Schedule F), which was later rescinded by Executive Order 14003. Employees in the new Schedule F would not have had the statutory protections of 5 U.S.C. § 2302. *See* 5 U.S.C. § 2302(a)(2)(B). But the President specifically directed agencies to “establish rules to prohibit the same personnel practices prohibited by section 2302(b) of title 5, United States Code, with respect to any employee or applicant for employment in Schedule F of the excepted service.” Exec. Order 13957, sec. 6. And at least some agencies began drafting prohibited personnel practice regulations consistent with the Order before it was rescinded.¹

Further illustrating the legality of NTEU’s proposal, even before the President’s Order, agencies exercised their discretion to extend protections against prohibited personnel practices to employees following outside of the coverage of Section 2302 of Title 5. CBP itself

¹ *See* GAO, *Civil Service: Agency Responses and Perspectives on Former Executive Order to Create a New Schedule F Category of Federal Positions* (Sept. 28, 2022) at 13, available at <https://www.gao.gov/assets/gao-22-105504.pdf> (discussing OMB’s development of “rules related to prohibited personnel practices for Schedule F employees”).

has previously done so. The collective bargaining agreement between NTEU and CBP—at Article 7—lists prohibited personnel practices. The agreement extends protection against those practices to *all* bargaining unit employees, including all excepted service employees, and it entitles those employees to seek relief under statutory procedures, if applicable, or under the negotiated grievance procedure. Art. 7, Sec. 6.

The General Accounting Office is another example. Section 2302 does not apply to GAO, 5 U.S.C. § 2302(a)(2)(C), but that agency has promulgated its own prohibited personnel practice regulations. GAO's regulations broadly protect *any* employee or applicant for employment, including excepted service employees. 4 C.F.R. § 2.5.

B. NTEU's proposal allows an employee covered by the regulation to request a stay of a proposed personnel action if the action is alleged to be reprisal for whistleblowing or reprisal for exercising one's rights. This aspect of NTEU's proposal tracks existing law, 5 U.S.C § 1221(a), which generally allows most employees to request stays if they have been subject to either of two specific prohibited personnel practices, namely 5 U.S.C. § 2302(b)(8) (reprisal for whistleblowing) or § 2303(b)(9) (reprisal for exercising one's rights).

III. NTEU's Proposal is Sound Policy.

Government officials should not discriminate. They should not take reprisals against employees who blow the whistle on fraud or who exercise their lawful rights. Supervisors should judge employees on merit, and not on political considerations. NTEU's proposed regulation would codify these important principles. And it would enhance merit system principles for employees covered by the regulation, in accord with President Biden's position that "[t]he Federal Government should serve as a model employer." Exec. Order 14003.

CONCLUSION

For the foregoing reasons, CBP should adopt NTEU's proposal and amend its regulations.

Respectfully submitted,

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