

POLITICS

Loyalty tests and MAGA checks: Inside the Trump White House's intense screening of job-seekers

The White House is seen, Jan. 20, 2025, in Washington. (AP Photo/Mike Stewart, File)

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WASHINGTON (AP) — Job-seekers hoping to join the new Trump administration are facing a series of intense loyalty tests, with White House screening teams fanning out to government agencies to check for “Make America Great Again” bona fides and carefully parsing applicants’ politics and social media posts.

[President Donald Trump](#) has long said he believes the biggest mistake he made during his first term was hiring what he considered to be the wrong kinds of people. Now, aides are working aggressively to ensure the government is filled only with loyalists.

Negative social media posts have been enough to derail applications. Those seeking jobs have been told they will have to prove their “enthusiasm” to enact Trump’s agenda and have been asked when their moment of “MAGA revelation” occurred. One federal employee said they briefly considered buying Trump’s crypto meme coin in case the president’s team asked about their voting record.

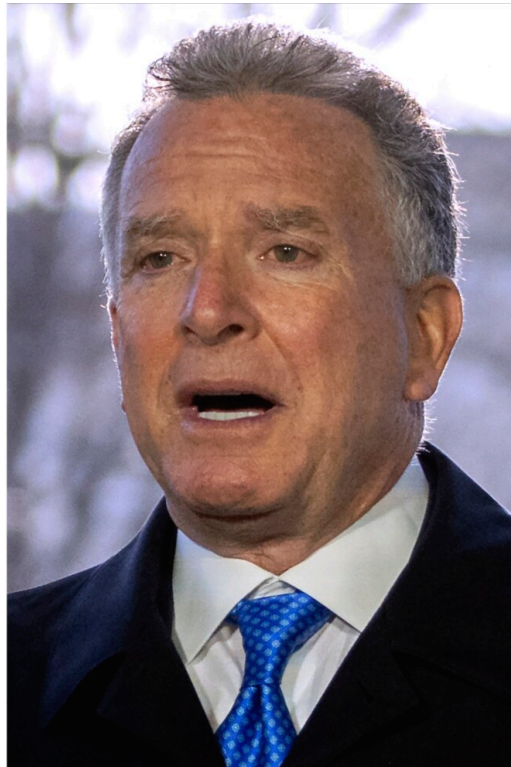
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The intense screening has led some federal workers to question whether Trump's team cares more about loyalty than competence. There is concern that [his team is ousting foreign policy and national security diplomats and others](#) who could offer the administration expertise and institutional knowledge at a time of conflict worldwide.

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Trump officials have made no secret of their intention to fill the administration with hires sharing the president's vision. They began checking potential staffers shortly after Trump launched his campaign and have continued since he won.

An application form on the Trump transition website, for instance, asks candidates, "What part of President Trump's campaign message is most appealing to you and why?" according to a link obtained by The Associated Press.

It also asks how they had supported Trump in the 2024 election — with choices including volunteering, fundraising, door-knocking and making phone calls — and to submit a list of their social media handles.

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“We are interviewing every single one of these individuals. If you are working in the federal government in a political appointee position, that comes through the White House now,” White House personnel director Sergio Gor said Thursday on Fox News.

Trump, he said, “has been very clear of who he doesn’t want to include in this administration. And so those are clear guidelines that we adhere to. And we bring the best people possible into the White House and into every department across this land.”

Screening teams deploy across federal agencies

Some officials have referred to the newcomers sent by the White House to federal agencies disparagingly as “MAGA commissars,” a reference to Communist Party officials from the former Soviet Union.

They are generally young and many do not appear to have particular expertise or background in the portfolios of the agencies in which they are working, according to three U.S. officials, who, like others, spoke on condition of anonymity for fear of reprisals.

They said the screeners seem to be looking for even the slightest divergence between candidates and Trump’s MAGA movement and “America First” policies. A negative social media post or a photograph with a Trump opponent has been enough for some applications to be rejected or put on hold for further review.

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One official said he and several colleagues from various agencies had been told that even if they passed the initial vetting process to be admitted into the applicant pool, they would still need to prove their bona fides

and convince interviewers of their “enthusiasm” to put in place Trump’s policies, including by providing references from people whose loyalty had already been established.

This official said one colleague who made it to the interview stage was asked when that person’s moment of “MAGA revelation” had occurred.

At the State Department, which has been a particular Trump target since his first term, current officials have described the atmosphere as “tense” and “glum,” with career civil and foreign service officers leery of voicing opinions on policy or personnel matters, let alone politics, fearing retribution from their new political bosses.

Two longtime department officials noted that there is always a period of uncertainty with any change of administration but that the current transition to a group intent on making sweeping changes to the management and work of the department was unlike what they have experienced in the past.

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Checking for MAGA alignment

Trump administration officials had made clear plans for a robust screening process that would ensure all officials inside the administration — and especially those who could help shape policy — were aligned with Trump’s agenda, according to U.S. government officials and people familiar with their planning.

One longtime government employee said he ran into a senior Trump administration official in December who told him that Trump’s team would look to be more thoughtful about how they were vetting appointees and even detailees. Those are nonpolitical, career experts on topics that range from counterterrorism to global climate policy who are loaned to the White House from other agencies for extended assignments.

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All appointees, the person said, would be issued questionnaires to ensure they were fully committed to Trump's agenda.

The AP has reported that [career civil servants who work on the White House National Security Council](#) have been questioned by senior Trump administration officials about which candidate they voted for in the election, their political contributions and whether they have made social media posts that could be considered incriminating by Trump's team.

On Wednesday, roughly 160 NSC detailees who worked in the Biden administration [were told that they were being sent home](#) so Trump's team could conduct a review to ensure its personnel aligned with Trump's agenda.

"Every president is entitled to have a staff and the advisers that they need to implement the goals that the American people elected him to pursue," Brian McCormack, chief of staff to national security adviser Mike Waltz, said in a two-minute phone call, according to a recording obtained by the AP.

One NSC director learned that every detailee would need to be screened and that they would be queried about whom they voted for, political contributions and social media postings, according to a person familiar with the matter.

White House officials defend their approach

"No one should be surprised that those being hired should align with the mission of the Administration. Nobody in private industry would ever hire someone who isn't mission focused, and the government should be no different," White House spokesperson Steven Cheung said.

"Over 1,300 individuals have been hired, while maintaining the highest standards of competency," he added.

Every new president looks to fill the thousands of government jobs they control with political appointees — rewarding campaign aides, allies, supporters and donors with plum positions. The White House presidential personnel office exists to recruit, screen and manage those employees.

Asking applicants their political affiliations is common. In some cases it is required, such as when filling jobs on agencies or commissions that require partisan balance.

Trump's White House is going deeper into potential appointees' political histories in part because he has carved out an ideological space that is often distinct from traditional Republican orthodoxy, making straight partisanship an unreliable indicator of commitment to his agenda.

"The Trump administration's conduct and imposition of a political litmus or loyalty test, it betrays the oath that the president took on Monday to preserve, protect and defend the Constitution," said Donald K. Sherman, executive director of Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington, a government watchdog group. "What this suggests to me is that demonstrating loyalty is as important or more important than merit."

Gor, in his Fox interview, said that in addition to hiring, the White House personnel office is also working to root out workers disloyal to Trump.

"We're also cleaning house. And so we started the process of terminating a lot of positions," he said. "It's time for a fresh start."

Colvin reported from New York. AP White House Correspondent Zeke Miller and Associated Press writer Josh Boak contributed to this report.

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