



(March 24, 2016)

In order to further improve the lines of communication and to respond to the concerns between the National VA Council and you our members, I have established a National VA Council Briefing. This NVAC Briefing will bring you the latest news and developments within DVA and provide you with the current status of issues this Council is currently addressing. I believe that this NVAC Briefing will greatly enhance the way in which we communicate and the way in which we share new information, keeping you better informed.

Alma L. Lee
National VA Council, President

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**In This Briefing:** Please pay special attention...*"they"* are on the hunt  
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Broad probe of federal employees gets specific with names

By Joe Davidson



House Oversight and Government Reform Committee Chairman Jason Chaffetz (R-Utah) sent letters recently to administration officials seeking information about federal employees by name. (Marvin Joseph/The Washington Post)

With a flurry of letters to a variety of federal agencies, the chairman of the House Oversight and Government Reform Committee has launched a broad investigation into the federal workforce.

The letters, sent over the past few weeks by Rep. Jason Chaffetz (R-Utah), contain no accusations of wrongdoing but are heavy with implication.

One set of letters to more than two dozen agencies requests the names of individual employees who are allowed to do union-related work on government time. Another letter tells the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) to answer 16 questions about federal employee compensation in agencies across the government. A third letter, sent to three agencies, demands information about spending on awards to employees, including “documents sufficient to identify each performance award” to senior executives by “name, title, and salary grade.”

Citing Republican attacks on federal employee pay and benefits, Rep. Elijah Cummings (Md.), the committee’s ranking Democrat, said the letters “may be just another extension of that misguided effort. These requests for information on official time and employee compensation could be attempts

to eliminate official time, slash compensation and benefits, and reduce due process rights.”

Yet he joined Chaffetz in a [letter sent Friday](#) that calls on 26 agencies to give the panel information on “all policies, procedures, directives and/or guidance for taking corrective, disciplinary, and adverse actions against civilian employees.”

It is a [Feb. 12 letter](#) from Chaffetz, also to 26 agencies, large and small, that has drawn the most heat. It probes the use of “official time,” long the object of Republican criticism. In exchange for representing everyone in a bargaining unit, even those who don’t pay union dues, some federal labor representatives work part or full time on union business while being paid by the government. Labor leaders on official time also work with management on such things as workplace safety and training.

In addition to Chaffetz, the letter was signed by Rep. Mark Meadows (R-N.C.), chairman of the government operations subcommittee, and Rep. Jody Hice (R-Ga.), who [sponsored committee-approved legislation](#) against what he has called “[this shady, wasteful practice](#).” While their letter says the committee wants to “better understand the number of federal employees” on official time, it demands specific information about individual workers, including name, title, salary and duty station. The missive is much more specific than the bill, which would require agencies to report more general information like the total amount of time and money spent on the practice. Both ask for the square footage of space designated for official-time activities.

Chaffetz and Meadows did not respond to requests for comments.

“I think it’s really a witch hunt on federal employees,” National Federation of Federal Employees President William Dougan said

about the official-time letter. “What on God’s Earth do they need the names for, unless ... they want to seek them out individually?” He fears anti-union agitators will use the names and work locations to harass labor organizers.

The [letters to three agencies](#) —FBI, the Bureau of Land Management and the Forest Service — were sent Tuesday and cover employee awards or bonuses. They also focus on specific, personally identifiable details, rather than broader information such as totals and averages. Like other letters from the committee, this one reminds agency officials that the panel is empowered “to investigate ‘any matter’ at ‘any time.’”

While congressional oversight of the executive branch is an important function in the separation of powers, these requests can keep agencies tied up with paperwork. A [Feb. 22 letter](#), for example, gave the relatively small Office of Personnel Management just two weeks to provide 16 points of employee compensation data “for each large federal department or agency...for the past five years.”

The requested information gets very detailed. Point 11 directs OPM acting director Beth Cobert: “By department or agency, identify the number of employees who received a performance rating of less than three who were transferred to another position, and the number of such employees who were transferred to another position more than once.”

Chaffetz told Cobert that he wants “to better understand the federal workforce,” but Rep. Gerry Connolly (Va.), the top Democrat on the government operations subcommittee, sees something not so benign. He said asking for names was “pretty intimidating.”

He worries that the letters are designed to provide Republicans ammunition for “the denigration and disparagement of the federal

workforce.”

“This innocent request for information,” he added, “is probably a lot more than that.”

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[*\[OPM asked to show whether federal employee performance counts for awards or discipline\]*](#)

[*\[House panel moves to limit ‘administrative leave’ for federal employees, examine ‘official time’\]*](#)