



An Offensive Federal Line

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Real Patriots are accountable. The federal workforce is not.

The day after Tom Brady spent the AFC championship game being harried by the Denver Broncos defense, the offensive line coach of the New England Patriots, Dave Deguglielmo, was sacked himself and fired by the team. Mind you, this is the same offensive line coach that was part of a team that finished 12-4 in the regular season and won the Super Bowl last year. If nothing else, you can't say the Patriots don't take results seriously, and when they don't reach their goals someone will be held accountable.

The Patriots are unquestionably a successful franchise, but when it comes to accountability they are like most sports teams. If the wins don't come, heads will roll. Since 2014 approximately one out of three baseball managers were replaced in Major League Baseball, and in the National Football League that number is even higher for head coaches. Most of the coaches fired weren't incompetent but were dismissed because they couldn't fulfill the organizational goals.

Wouldn't be nice if Washington, D.C. had the same accountability standards for its workforce as your average neighborhood sports team? Or for that matter any standard? Symptomatic of the mess we have with federal employees is evident in the aftermath of the 2012 embassy attack in Benghazi that left four Americans murdered, including the first American diplomat to die in an attack since 1979. Our government has repeatedly admitted that mistakes were made in our handling of Benghazi, but three years later when asked why no employees were dismissed, former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton had this to say, "It is my position that in the absence of finding dereliction or breach of duty, there could not be immediate action taken, but there was a process that was immediately instituted, and which led to decisions being made." In other words, no matter how big the screw-up, unless a federal employee can be proved beyond a shadow of a doubt to be grossly incompetent, their job is safe. That is the accountability standard of a banana republic, not a global super power.

The federal civil service process is so broken these days that even when they know someone is incompetent or a law breaker it might not matter. Between the years 2010-2014 the IRS rehired over 824 formally dismissed agents who had prior performance issues, including 141 agents who owed back taxes. This included five employees the Agency was fully aware had intentionally not filed taxes in over two years.

Jokes about civil service inefficiencies go back as long as civil service itself, but as the federal workforce is now over 2.1 million strong, costing taxpayers more than \$260 billion annually in wages and benefits, the jokes aren't so funny, especially at a time when the national debt load per citizen is over \$58,000.

While about 31 percent of the private work force is 50 or older, 46 percent of the federal work force is 50 or older, illustrating that when one gets a federal civil service job they tend to keep it for their entire working career. This is partially due to all the employment safeguards federal employees are granted. Another barrier of protection is union membership. The Bureau of Labor Statistics reports that Public-sector workers had a union membership rate of 35.2 percent, more than five times higher than that of private-sector workers 6.7 percent.

Not only do federal employees have job security, they are also paid well above market rates. The Cato Institute reports that federal employees earn \$119,934 in total compensation annually (including benefits), while private sector workers earn \$67,246, a difference of 78 percent. So the question really is, who is working for whom? Maybe non-government workers should be called civilian servants to best describe the current circumstances.

It should be noted that the Roman Empire declined and fell as much because of government excess and overspending, as by the well-remembered Barbarians. Between a Democratic Party that wants to hire more federal employees and spend more money and a Republican House that runs on fiscal conservatism but legislates like the Greek Parliament after an Ouzo binge, one can't help but think we are already well down that path.

One of Ronald Reagan's first acts as President was to enact a hiring freeze of federal workers, and a year later he also sacked the striking air traffic controllers demonstrating that the inmates weren't running the asylum. Those days are long gone, and with a new President less than a year away, we need a leader who has the courage and mettle to reform the federal workforce. Anything short of that will only move us one step closer to irrelevancy.