



## Trump Labor Aide Quits After Anti-Semitic Facebook Posts Surface

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A recently appointed Trump Labor Department official with a history of advancing controversial conservative and faith-based causes in court has resigned after revelations that he wrote a 2016 Facebook post suggesting the Jewish-controlled media “protects their own.”

Four hours after Bloomberg Law requested comment from the White House and DOL about Leif Olson’s social media post, the department said he has resigned, without elaboration.

Olson, 43, started at the Labor Department’s Wage and Hour Division Aug. 12 as a senior policy adviser, after being cleared for the job by the White House. He was part of a team of political appointees working to finish a series of deregulatory actions that are pivotal to the White House employment agenda. They include rules that would narrow corporations’ shared liability with affiliated companies and clarify time-and-a-half overtime pay calculations.

Olson, an unsuccessful GOP candidate in 2012 for a Texas district court judgeship, fired off a series of late-night posts on his personal Facebook page three years ago that started as a sarcastic quip about former House Speaker Paul Ryan’s blowout primary victory. They then devolved into an exchange referencing two anti-Semitic tropes: that Jews control the media and that they look out for members of their own faith.

“It was sarcastic criticism of the alt-right’s conspiracy theories and anti-Semitic positions,” Olson said in an interview. He declined to respond to other questions about his resignation and the Facebook post, including whether he wishes to apologize or if he regrets his actions. The remark remained on his [Facebook feedthrough](#) the end of August.

In response to an inquiry that included an image of Olson’s Facebook post, a DOL spokeswoman said in an Aug. 30 statement: “Today, the Department of Labor accepted the resignation of Leif Olson effective immediately.” The agency didn’t address any further questions about the terms of his vetting for the job and the details of his resignation.

The White House declined to answer any questions, including whether the Presidential Personnel Office reviewed Olson’s social media history, typically a standard step before signing off on agency political appointees.

Olson also was known in Houston-area legal circles for his appellate work challenging the rights of same-sex couples after the U.S. Supreme Court ruled gay marriage is legal; intervening to block defrauded consumers from receiving \$10 million that Target Corp. had agreed to pay in a class settlement; and urging the high court to invalidate the Obama administration's policy giving certain illegal immigrants a pathway to citizenship.

Until Friday, Olson held one of the few political leadership roles in a critical Cabinet subagency charged with regulating and enforcing laws that protect workers' paychecks and prevent child labor abuses.

### **Screening Questions?**

Olson's arrival at the agency, which was quietly noted in an online WHD organization chart, raises more questions about the Trump administration's vetting system for political appointees.

The White House Presidential Personnel Office came under fire after a 2018 Washington Post [article](#) chronicled the office's frat-house atmosphere filled with young, inexperienced former Trump campaign aides. More broadly, the Trump administration's personnel clearance process has been criticized for not flagging various executive branch officials and nominees with checkered histories.

"The vetting process for the White House is very good, but you're part of the vetting process, you know?" Trump told reporters in August. "I give out a name to the press, and they vet for me. We save a lot of money that way."

The list of personnel who have departed over personal controversies includes Carl Higbie, a Trump appointee to the Corporation for National and Community Service who [reportedly](#) made comments on the radio that were received as racist, sexist, and homophobic; [Rob Porter](#), the White House staff secretary who faced domestic violence allegations; and [Andrew Puzder](#), who withdrew from Senate consideration for labor secretary amid outrage over his ex-wife's since-recanted assault accusations. Higbie has apologized for his remarks and said he's now a different person, while Porter and Puzder both denied the allegations.

The PPO paperwork for candidates of Olson's status requires them to list all social media accounts.

"I followed the standard PPO process," Olson said of his application.

"The post in question is clearly anti-Semitic, and if it does indeed belong to Leif Olson of the U.S. Labor Department, we call on him to apologize and affirm that he no longer harbors such virulently hateful views," said Jake Hyman, a spokesman for the Anti-Defamation League in New York.

The revelation of Olson's Facebook post also comes on the heels of President Donald Trump's Aug. 20 claim that it's disloyal for Jews to vote for a Democrat. That sparked charges that he was invoking an old anti-Semitic notion that Jews harbor "dual loyalty" to a foreign territory.

### **Facebook Exchange**

Olson's initial post about Ryan prompted another Facebook user to reply, "He's a neo-con, too, you know."

Olson replied, “No he’s not. Neo-cons are all Upper East Side Zionists who don’t golf on Saturday if you know what I mean.”

The same commenter then replied, “That’s what I meant. He’s a Jew. Everyone knows that.”

Olson at 12:46 a.m. Houston time wrote the following about the apparent Jewish faith of Ryan, an observant Catholic: “It must be true because I’ve never seen the Lamestream Media report it, and you know they protect their own.”

A review of a decade of Olson’s Facebook posts shows that he usually promotes his Christian faith and conservative views. The Paul Ryan exchange appears to be the only appeal to Jewish stereotypes. A few weeks later, he took to Facebook again on the eve of the Jewish New Year Rosh Hashanah: “My Jewish friends, I wish you a happy new year. My non-Jewish friends, I wish you a happy Jewish new year.”

As of last week, Olson’s Facebook settings allowed users who aren’t his “friends” to peruse his account history, although a Twitter page associated with his name has been scrubbed of all tweets.

### **Appellate Work**

Olson built a solo practice in recent years focusing on core right-leaning legal issues.

Much of his work was devoted to a longstanding case in which he represented two Houston residents who sued the city’s mayor in 2013 arguing an ordinance recognizing same-sex marriage licenses issued out of state violated a Texas law prohibiting such arrangements. Olson’s legal team convinced the judge in the case to issue an injunction barring the Houston policy.

When the U.S. Supreme Court in 2015 held that same-sex couples have the right to marry nationwide, including in Texas, Olson alleged that the city should still be prohibited from paying benefits to the spouses of municipal employees in same-sex marriages.

“All I can comment on is my professional interactions with him. I think he’s professional and he’s qualified for the position,” said Jonathan Saenz, president of Christian-conservative organization Texas Values, who was Olson’s co-counsel on the Houston ordinance lawsuit. Saenz spoke before Olson resigned.

He also was the lead objector in a legal challenge to the disbursement of \$10 million that Target had agreed to pay customers whose credit or debit card information was taken in a data breach. Backed by attorneys from the Libertarian Center for Class Action Fairness, Olson argued that the court failed to conduct an appropriate analysis before certifying the class.

Olson ultimately lost this battle and the final batch of Target customers received their checks this year. But his efforts to thwart the payments were not lost on the consumers’ attorney.

“He was objecting to the process, but not articulating what he wanted to get out of the litigation. So it led me to question the motives behind it,” said Vincent Esades, a partner at Heins Mills & Olson in Minneapolis. “It was extremely frustrating to take two years for somebody who didn’t suffer any damages and couldn’t articulate what he would’ve wanted from the settlement.”

Olson declined to comment on the Target class action.

His attorney on the Target case, the general counsel of the Center for Class Action Fairness Melissa Holyoak, had fond recollections of her time with Olson.

“I truly admire Leif. He is a talented appellate attorney with a sharp legal mind and the ability to tackle all kinds of complex issues,” Holyoak said in an email. “He is also just a really pleasant person to work with.”

In another high-profile case, Olson filed an amicus brief for the Cato Institute in 2015, asking the Supreme Court to strike down the Deferred Action for Parents of Americans and Lawful Permanent Residents program, or DAPA, an Obama administration immigration policy preventing some deportations.

The abrupt end to his 18 days of government service now gives Olson an opportunity to resume his appellate practice as a private citizen. His resignation also leaves the Wage and Hour Division and its leader Cheryl Stanton down a political appointee at a time when the acting Labor Secretary Patrick Pizzella is prioritizing rapid and robust rulemaking.

“I enjoyed my time in the division and I wish Cheryl Stanton and her team all the best,” Olson said.