

# Government Executive

## **GOP Lawmakers Question Ethics Waivers for Former Union Officials at OMB, OPM**

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Republicans on the House Oversight and Reform Committee on Tuesday demanded information on how two former labor leaders were granted ethics waivers to work in the Biden administration.

Earlier this year, President Biden appointed former American Federation of Government Employees Legislative Director Alethea Predeoux to be the Office of Personnel Management's director of the Office of Congressional, Legislative and Intergovernmental Affairs. Celeste Drake, former policy specialist for the AFL-CIO, was named Made in America director at the Office of Management and Budget.

Rep. James Comer, R-Ky., ranking member of the House Oversight and Reform Committee, and Rep. Virginia Foxx, R-N.C., sent letters to acting OMB Director Shalanda Young and acting OPM Director Kathleen McGettigan calling out these appointments, accusing Predeoux of being a lobbyist for a "political union" and Drake's former employer, the nation's largest labor union, of being "a massive Democrat lobbying organization."

"While some claim President Biden's ethics pledge is allegedly the most stringent ever, unions are receiving special treatment," the lawmakers wrote. "By appointing former union officials to positions that directly interact with their former employers, unions stand to directly benefit from Biden administration policies . . . It is unclear the extent other unions have infiltrated the highest ranks of the administration."

The Republicans described the two former labor officials' appointment as being a "classic definition of a conflict of interest," and accused Democrats of partisanship for not investigating the hires with the same voracity as industry executives and lobbyists appointed to key government posts in the Trump administration.

"In the prior Congress, Democrats launched an investigation into the White House's use of ethics waivers," Comer and Foxx wrote. "The recent reporting necessitates a similar review of the Biden administration's waivers. No political union should hold the levers of government power, but all indicators are that President Biden caves to the unions."

In a statement, an OPM spokesperson defended Predeoux's appointment.

"Alethea Predeoux is a talented legislative strategist and dynamic leader who is deeply dedicated to the federal workforce and the OPM mission," the spokesperson said. "OPM and the Biden-Harris administration are fortunate to have Ms. Predeoux in her role and we look forward to continuing to rely on her expertise as we continue the important work rebuilding the federal workforce and meeting agencies' modern human capital needs."

Ethics experts have largely found that ethics waivers in the cases of Predeoux and Drake are justified. There is a difference between lobbying on behalf of a for-profit corporation and serving as part of a nonprofit advocacy group, several experts told *Government Executive* last month.

"People who have been lobbying to vindicate their personal view of what is in the broader public interest do not have conflicts of interest when they enter public service regardless of whether their past employer was a union, the Catholic bishops, or the Cato Institute," said Jeff Houser, executive director of The Revolving Door Project, last month. "The people we fear entering offices of public trust are people with mercenary instincts whose political actions are designed to maximize personal economic gain, rather than vindicating their view of what is best for society as a whole."

Experts also noted that ethics waivers can be warranted when appointees have a particular expertise needed for the position, and said that thus far, the Biden administration's use of ethics waivers has been "judicious and targeted." But they have looked more skeptically at the recent news that three children of White House counselor Steve Ricchetti have all secured posts in the federal government