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## Trump Wants to ‘Drain the Swamp,’ but Change Will Be Complex and Costly

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After President-elect Donald J. Trump promised to “drain the swamp” that he sees in the nation’s capital, his millions of supporters are expecting vast changes in the sprawling federal bureaucracy, and conservative activists are drooling at the chance to remake, resize or reduce the reach of government.

Mr. Trump repeatedly told voters during the campaign that he would shut down the Environmental Protection Agency and repeal the Affordable Care Act. He said the Education Department is “massive, and it can be largely eliminated.” He has made the federal work force of 2.8 million employees a target, declaring that “you have tremendous waste, fraud, and abuse.”

But the one-time real estate mogul has largely avoided specifics about cuts he might make, and much of his agenda imagines changes that would require huge increases in federal spending: tripling the number of border patrol agents; supplying the military with more warships and fighter jets; increasing spending on infrastructure; undertaking new efforts to confront cyberterrorism; and aggressively working to remake trade policies.

Whatever change he envisions will likely be vastly more difficult to enact than his army of supporters believe. Veterans of Washington’s many fights over policy warn that the city is full of ingrained bureaucracies, each of which has entrenched support on Capitol Hill. And while Mr. Trump will have some executive authority, legal, practical and political limitations will constrain his efforts.

“He doesn’t possess the executive power to reorganize the government at whim,” said Jody Freeman, a law professor at Harvard University who served in the first Obama administration. “There are some minor things presidents can do, in terms of creating new offices in cabinet agencies. But the notion that he can single-handedly abolish agencies is fanciful.”

Energy and the Environment

The first indication of Mr. Trump’s intentions may come as he appoints members of his cabinet, sending signals about his priorities. Sarah Palin, the 2008 Republican vice-presidential nominee,

has expressed interest in running the Energy Department. In a CNN interview last year, she promised to dismantle it. “If I were in charge of that, it would be a short-term job,” she said.

Mr. Trump has also suggested a significant reshaping of the agency’s role, which includes oversight of the National Nuclear Security Administration and the nation’s nuclear arsenal. Mr. Trump has indicated that he would like the agency to focus chiefly on energy extraction, and some people close to him believe he may choose oil and gas magnate Harold Hamm to run it.

As Mr. Trump prepares to slam the brakes on President Obama’s climate change regulations and ramp up fossil fuel production, he has vowed to gut the Environmental Protection Agency. “We are going to get rid of it in almost every form,” he said.

That would be difficult. Mr. Trump would need an act of Congress to eliminate the agency entirely, Ms. Freeman said. The Clean Air Act and Clean Water Act include specific provisions that give the agency legal powers, and changing that would require action by Congress as well. “Any effort to interfere with that would immediately be challenged in court,” Ms. Freeman said.

## Health and Education

Ditching the Affordable Care Act, Mr. Obama’s signature legislative achievement, is close to a certainty.

But not every part of the law can easily be overturned, and some of the initiatives that have changed the way the government pays for health care in the Medicare program are supported by Republicans. The Center for Medicare and Medicaid Innovation and the Patient-Centered Outcomes Research Institute, both deeply unpopular with congressional Republicans, will probably be eliminated.

“I imagine they’ll focus on getting rid of the individual and employer mandates, insurance marketplace requirements and Medicaid expansion,” said Lanhee J. Chen, a scholar at the Hoover Institution and a former policy adviser to Mitt Romney, the 2012 Republican presidential nominee.

Within the government’s health agencies, Mr. Trump’s campaign also proposed eliminating the Food and Drug Administration’s “food police,” which it said “dictate how the federal government expects farmers to produce fruits and vegetables and even dictates the nutritional content of dog food.”

But the proposal was quickly taken down from the campaign’s website. The Food Safety Modernization Act of 2011, which strengthened the F.D.A.’s oversight of food, is popular among many Republicans as well as with food manufacturers, tarnished by massive food recalls.

Andy Roth, the vice president for government affairs at the Club for Growth, a conservative advocacy group, praised Mr. Trump’s comments on scaling back the Education Department. Mr. Trump has proposed sending \$20 billion to the states for school choice programs.

“Bureaucrats in D.C. don’t know how to provide for an education like a parent can,” Mr. Roth said. But he said he is largely mystified about the president-elect’s plans. “Trump is a huge question mark,” he said. “And we honestly don’t know which way he is going go.”

## Economy

The president-elect has vowed to double the nation's rate of economic growth through a combination of broad tax cuts, new trade policies and smart deregulation.

But analysts say he is unlikely to undertake a major overhaul of the various government agencies that handle economic affairs, such as the Departments of Treasury, Commerce, Labor, Agriculture, Transportation and Housing. At the Treasury Department, the Financial Stability Oversight Council and the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau, both created under the Dodd-Frank Wall Street Reform and Protection Law, may have their wings clipped, since neither is popular with congressional Republicans.

"I think Dodd-Frank is the major reason the economy has not grown at the usual pace of recovery following a recession," said Peter Wallison, a senior fellow at the American Enterprise Institute, a conservative Washington think tank.

A brief note this week on Mr. Trump's transition website promised to "dismantle" Dodd-Frank — but few foresee an absolute overhaul since that would require ambitious legislative action in Congress. Even Senator Mitch McConnell, the majority leader, signaled Wednesday that he intends to move cautiously.

## Law Enforcement and National Security

Some conservatives may also be disappointed when it comes to Mr. Trump's approach to the nation's military and intelligence establishment. Mr. Trump lashed out during the campaign at Mr. Obama's foreign policy, his handling of wars in the Middle East and the government's effort on immigration. But the president-elect's prescription for change is likely to result in more spending, not less.

Mr. Trump wants to root out waste and abuse at the Department of Defense, even as he calls for increasing the size of the Army to 540,000 active duty soldiers, increasing the Navy to 350 ships and providing the Air Force with 1,200 fighter jets. And he promises to pay for all of that with a "full audit" at the Pentagon that eliminates duplicative bureaucracy and ends unwanted programs.

But history suggests he will fail in any overhaul of military programs, said Amy Zegart, the co-director of the Center for International Security and Cooperation at Stanford University. She predicted that change would be opposed by legions of defense and intelligence bureaucrats, as well as powerful members of Congress whose turf would be threatened.

"Forging change will be much, much harder than he expects," she said.

At the Justice Department, Mr. Obama significantly expanded efforts to investigate unconstitutional policing and demanded changes in police departments that have shown patterns of excessive force or other abuses. Mr. Trump has not said what changes he was considering but has declared that "the war on our police must end."

A spokeswoman for the president-elect declined on Thursday to provide any information about Mr. Trump's thinking about the size and shape of government. For now, conservative activists say they are unsure of what to expect from the new president-elect.

"I would hope that he would embrace some radical program terminations, but I'm not holding my breath," said Chris Edwards, the editor of a blog for the Cato Institute on downsizing government. In a post on Thursday, Mr. Edwards called Mr. Trump "timid" and noted he had not pledged to eliminate subsidies for schools, farms, housing, energy and transit — cuts that conservatives crave.