



Interior Department Official Claims Job Change A Bid To Muzzle Him

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Department of the Interior official claims he was reassigned to a different job in the department because of his work on climate change, and says he has filed a formal complaint to fight the switch.

Joel Clement, the former director of the Office of Policy Analysis, has written an op ed in The Washington Post in which he alleges that he was singled out because the Trump administration is trying to silence him.

“I believe I was retaliated against for speaking out publicly about the dangers that climate change poses to Alaska Native communities,” Clement wrote Wednesday.

In June, Clement was reassigned to the Office of Natural Resources Revenue as party of a wide-ranging shakeup within the department.

“The president signed an executive order to reorganize the federal government for the future and the secretary has been absolutely out front on that issue,” Interior Department spokeswoman Heather Swift said when the changes were being announced.

“Personnel moves are being conducted to better serve the taxpayer and the department’s operations through matching senior executive skill sets with mission and operational requirements,” she said.

Clement’s new job involves him collecting royalty revenue for the federal government.

He said he has been aggressive in discussing his climate research with the White House as well as at international conferences.

“It is clear to me that the administration was so uncomfortable with this work, and my disclosures, that I was reassigned with the intent to coerce me into leaving the federal government,” Clement wrote in his op-ed.

Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke told a Senate committee in June that the Interior Department would be reducing staff and would “rely on a combination of attrition, reassignments and separation incentives” to do so.

When the changes were announced, Senior Executives Association President Bill Valdez said that “based on the limited information we have right now,” it appears the changes are “being executed according to applicable law and regulation.”

“SEA will monitor this situation to ensure that these personnel decisions are indeed being lawfully executed and are being made in the best interests of the government and taxpayers,” Valdez wrote.

Not everyone is opposed to shaking up the bureaucracy.

“I think it’s reasonable,” said Chris Edwards, director of tax policy studies at the libertarian Cato Institute.

“We all know that government employees can resist action and hope they’re going to wait out the Trump administration. If part of the reason people in, say, ranching states vote for Republicans to get a softer touch, why wouldn’t the administration put in people who will have a softer touch?”