

Congress of the United States

House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND GOVERNMENT REFORM

2157 RAYBURN HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING

WASHINGTON, DC 20515-6143

MAJORITY (202) 225-5074

MINORITY (202) 225-5051

<http://oversight.house.gov>

Opening Statement Vice Ranking Member Gerald E. Connolly

Hearing on “Union Time on the People’s Dime: A Closer Look at Official Time”

May 24, 2018

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

When Congress enacted the Civil Service Reform Act, Congress found that, and I quote, “labor organizations and collective bargaining in the civil service are in the public interest.”

Because the reality is that unions contribute to the effective conduct of public business, and facilitate settlements of employment disputes.

Federal unions are required to represent all employees within a bargaining unit—including those who do not pay dues—and may not seek fees from non-members.

In exchange for those representational duties, the Civil Service Reform Act authorized the use of official time – the legal authorization for designated federal employees to protect whistleblowers, represent colleagues in their grievances against abuse, and negotiate collective bargaining agreements.

The truth is that official time is authorized by law, negotiated by agency management with the union, and is intended to promote the peaceable resolution of disputes and the efficient operation of government. Unions and agencies must agree on the amount of time for representational activities, which must be and I quote, “reasonable, necessary, and in the public interest.”

Congress carefully crafted a collective bargaining system for the federal government that balanced the interests of the agencies, federal employees, and the American public.

The cost of all of these benefits: just 40 seconds per day. That is the amount of time per federal employee official time costs the federal government according to the Office of Personnel Management (OPM). That is less than the time it takes to get a cup of coffee.

Do my Republican colleagues want to prohibit federal employees from getting their morning coffee because it is a drain on the federal government?

This hearing isn't about protecting the taxpayer dollar. It is about attacking federal employees – a central theme of this Congress and the Trump Administration.

Last week, the Oversight Committee held a hearing to discuss the recently-issued President's Management Agenda (PMA)—and the president's plan to take \$143 billion from middle class federal workers in wage and retirement cuts, and use their money to partially offset the cost of the \$1.5 trillion tax giveaway to billionaires and corporations.

During this Administration, federal employees have had to deal with efforts to gut the missions of federal agencies, attacks on the federal workforce and their retirement benefits, as well as the repression of and retaliation against federal whistleblowers.

Federal employees need more support and avenues for redress, not fewer. Whether it is through Congressional oversight, inspector general investigations, or through union representatives, we should be giving federal employees the tools they need to sound the alarm against activities that make it harder for the federal government to work for the American people.

If this Committee wants to quibble over the 40 seconds spent on official time, it should also look into how some Trump Administration political appointees spend the hours they are supposed to be working for taxpayers.

According to numerous press reports Millan Hupp, the director of scheduling and advance for EPA Administrator Scott Pruitt, spearheaded Administrator Pruitt's search for new housing after he moved out of a condo that he rented from the wife of a lobbyist who had business before the agency. Part of Ms. Hupp's search, including contacting real estate companies and viewing apartment options for Administrator Pruitt, took place during office hours.

Or this Committee can look into the White House Presidential Personnel Office. In March, the *Washington Post* reported that the office, which has struggled to fill vacancies throughout the federal government, has become, quote, "a social hub, where young staffers throughout the administration stopped by to hang out on couches and smoke electronic cigarettes." PPO leaders also regularly host happy hours in their offices that included beer, wine, and snacks for not only PPO employees, but also White House liaisons who work at other federal agencies.

And in January, they played a drinking game in the office called "Icing" for one employee's birthday. I have been informed that icing involves hiding a bottle of Smirnoff Ice and demanding that the person who discovers it, drink it as quickly as possible. Now, these individuals may be able to guzzle a 12-ounce bottle of flavored malt liquor in under 40 seconds, but it is still an infinitely less productive use of employee time than official time.

I look forward to hearing from our witnesses today on their perspectives regarding the impact of official time on the efficiency and effectiveness of the federal government. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.