

# Government behind the scenes

**“Dang bureaucrats.” “Soulless agency drones.” “The swamp – drain it!” Comments like these express frustration over the slow gears of government.**

It is true — government is like a mighty river or an aircraft carrier. These things are not nimble and take time to turn, but in the end, policy decisions do matter and directives from elected officials are eventually implemented.

However, seldom acknowledged are the ordinary, committed public servants in our government, our legislative offices and our election certifiers. They all play a critical role so that our nation functions.

## **Civil service as a school play**

There are certain people nobody sees that make our system of government work. They are our unelected officials.

Our democratic system isn't really designed to highlight their individual achievements. Even the people who win an agency award will receive it and hustle back to their jobs before anyone has a chance to get to know them — and before elected officials ask for their spotlight back.

Even their nominations feel modest. It is never “I did this,” but “We did this.” Never “Look at me,” but “Look at this work!”

It's unfortunate, but when hearing the word “bureaucrat,” many people get a certain picture in their head that doesn't exactly make them curious. Bureaucrats are a dog that is OK to kick. Most people don't ask what bureaucrats do, or why.

What they do? The work. And the reason? Because it matters.

The bureaucratic workforce are the carrots in the third-grade play. You know the kids who preen to the teachers for attention and wind up cast in the lead roles? Those are our elected officials. They are quick to take credit for the good done by people in the smaller roles. They then blame them when things go wrong.

We never ask: Why am I spending

another minute of my life reading about and yapping about Donald Trump or Kamala Harris when I know nothing about the 2 million or so federal employees and their possibly lifesaving work? It will be the next president's job to support that work, or at least not screw it up. There is no constituency pushing to present civil servants as characters with voices needing to be heard.

## **Personal staff and committee professionals**

Who is really running this country? Mostly 25-year-olds. It is a fact.

When I go back to D.C., I see young, driven staff members pushing the agendas set by their elected officials. More so in Washington, D.C. than in the state, staffers hold enormous power to determine which interest groups get access and which are successful on their issues. The reason is simple: members of Congress simply do not have time to become subject-matter experts.

OAN leadership has seen this dynamic firsthand, and — as a former staff member to U.S. Sen. Bob Packwood back in the late 1980s to mid-1990s — I can attest that members of Congress rely greatly on staff recommendations.

Committee staffers are another breed. They have a steady hand on crafting policy. Several years ago, I brought our leadership back to D.C. and I asked for a gathering of the Senate Finance Committee staff members I grew close to over my years of service.

According to current staff members of the committee, this group was like the 1927 New York Yankees. I just knew them as Josh (Bolton, who became chief of staff for George W. Bush); Roy (Ramthun, who became the number two health care policy advisor for two administrations); Craig (Kennedy, who then was a junior staff like me but now runs a national trade association); and Brad (Figel, who was the head lawyer for Nike and now the top guy as the Mars Corporation).

They were focused on one part of the large bevy of tax issues. Sen. Packwood took the leash off and let them make gen-



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erational policy changes.

## **The greatest defender of democracy**

Election officials are the everyday Americans who administer our elections, keeping our democracy safe and secure. They undergo extensive training to make sure the necessary rules and laws are followed as they impartially conduct elections.

In recent years, however, these individuals who have spent their careers safeguarding the electoral process are facing unprecedented levels of threats, harassment, and intimidation.

We have seen a spate of election officials hanging up their duties because of the hyper-aggression of those who disagree with the outcome of an election. They use their ignorance to assign blame on those who are, in essence, umpires of a free and fair election.

Our elections officials make sure that only those eligible to vote are allowed to do it. This is a sacred public service that is ignored. At the end of the day, election officials are vital to our democracy. They are people in our communities who put in long hours before, during and after Election Day.

## **Ballots are out this month**

We are a vote-by-mail state and your ballots will arrive soon. I will encourage this: vote, vote, vote! And while we are focused on the election cycle, it is important to remember the people most Americans never consider as a critical part of our functioning government. They are our civil servants, our hard-working legislative staff at the state and federal level, and those who safeguard our elections and democracy to support our great nation. ©