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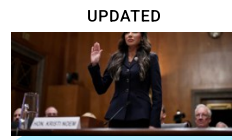
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Jill Anderson was one of at least four career executives at the Justice Department who were fired this week. KEVIN DIETSCH/GETTY IMAGES

**Workforce**

# Ousted career execs at DOJ are considering options after being given vague rationale for firings

The dismissals came just hours after Trump's inauguration and raises questions of the president's legal authorities.

ERIC KATZ | JANUARY 23, 2025

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Jill Anderson spent the weekend before Inauguration Day working on a legal brief related to the decertification of a federal employee union. On Monday, she was still chipping away at the brief—despite it being a federal holiday—when around 3 p.m. she received an unexpected email.

The email included an attached Standard Form-50, the document federal agencies use to record all major personnel actions, notifying Anderson she had been fired. It hit her inbox just three hours after President Trump was sworn into office.

Anderson, until that email, served as a career Senior Executive Service employee and the general counsel of the Justice Department's Executive Office of Immigration Review, the agency that runs the nation's immigration courts. She was surprised and confused, but after making some calls to colleagues realized at least three other career executives at EOIR had received the same notice.

Within an hour, Anderson told *Government Executive*, she was shut out of all computer systems and her phone was wiped.

Anderson served in government for 25 years, joining the Justice Department in 1999 as a staff attorney. She was promoted to the SES under Trump in 2019 and said she has received only "outstanding" performance evaluations ever since.

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The form contained only a short explanation for her dismissal: “Title II of the Constitution,” the form read, referring to the section of the document that outlines the powers of the president.

“No conduct, nothing like that,” Anderson said. “I was shocked.”

Career senior executives, unlike political appointees, do not serve at the pleasure of the president, but instead as the top-ranked civil servants who interface between presidential nominees and the rest of the career workforce. They are not considered “at-will” and are entitled to protections against politically motivated personnel actions.

“This is against all my civil service protections that are the law,” Anderson said. SESers are meant to be reassigned to cultivate new skills and share their managerial expertise and Anderson assumed “the worst that’s going to happen to me is they’re going to move me.”

Instead, she and her colleagues were fired, while other executives in EOIR and across Justice were moved into new roles.

Later Monday evening, Trump [signed a presidential memorandum](#) that emphasized career SESers must adhere to the policies of the administration. It did not create new firing authorities—as [another Trump order](#) will seek to do—instead designing a new oversight system that allows for more political influence over the nearly 9,000 SES members' hirings and performance reviews.

The other EOIR executives who were fired—Office of Policy Assistant Director Lauren Alder Reid, Deputy Director Mary Cheng (who also, until her firing, served as acting director) and Chief Immigration Judge Sheila McNulty—were equally shocked by their firings, Anderson said.

“We all worked well with the transition team, gave them the information they needed,” Anderson said. She added there was no indication from that team that this move was coming and there were “red herrings” that suggested they would be remaining in their roles. “We were all very much caught off guard.”

Their firings were signed by acting Attorney General James McHenry, another career executive who served as EOIR’s director under Trump and hired Anderson when she joined the SES. Anderson said she always thought she and McHenry had a good working relationship.

“I’m a career civil servant and I have served in several administrations,” she said. “I’m not an obstructionist.”

Anderson described her job as political appointees bringing potential policy changes to her and she, in response, explaining litigation risks. She was aware the Trump administration would likely be looking to institute change and she was ready to aid them in doing so, as she did in Trump’s first term and under President Biden.

“In my capacity as general counsel, I look at the law and give advice on that,” Anderson said. “I was ready to do the same for the Trump administration.”

Officials at the DOJ did not respond to a request for comment.

Marcus Hill, president of the Senior Executives Association, said this week that the Trump administration should lean on SESers to “design and deliver effective and efficient policies and programs that reflect presidential priorities and statutory requirements.”

“SEA strongly recommends that new administration leaders work with, rather than against, experienced career agency executives to achieve this goal,” Hill said.

In his first term, Trump’s Interior Department sought to reassign much of its Senior Executive Service workforce. The shakeup led to [widespread confusion](#) and allegations the department was retaliating against employees working on issues that were not Trump administration priorities, such as climate change. Joel Clement, one of the SESers who was swept up in Interior’s reassignments and eventually left government, speculated this week that his experience at Interior could become more widespread as the administration would say, “We got away with it and we’ll do it again.”



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