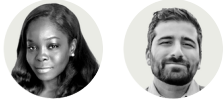


# Federal Workers Ordered to Report on Colleagues Over D.E.I. Crackdown

The warning came one day after the administration ordered that diversity, equity and inclusion efforts across the government be shut down by 5 p.m. Wednesday.



**By Erica L. Green and Hamed Aleaziz**

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The Trump administration on Wednesday threatened federal employees with “adverse consequences” if they fail to report on colleagues who defy orders to purge diversity, equity and inclusion efforts from their agencies.

Tens of thousands of workers were put on notice that officials would not tolerate any efforts to “disguise these programs by using coded or imprecise language.” Emails sent out, which were based on a template from the Office of Personnel Management, gave employees 10 days to report their observations to a special email account without risking disciplinary action.

“There will be no adverse consequences for timely reporting this information,” the template sent to agency heads said. “However, failure to report this information within 10 days may result in adverse consequences.”

The message also said: “These programs divided Americans by race, wasted taxpayer dollars and resulted in shameful discrimination.”

Some agencies, such as the Education Department and the State Department, sent the template to their employees on Wednesday. Other agencies made slight modifications when they sent emails to their workers. The Department of

Homeland Security, for example, said failure to report D.E.I. efforts “will result” in adverse consequences.

The warnings were a dramatic escalation of President Trump’s war on diversity programs that seek to reverse decades of systemic inequities. They were also part of a broader assault on the federal work force, which the president has long viewed as a bloated bureaucracy. He has pledged to eliminate departments and has ordered remote workers back to the office.

In his Inaugural Address, Mr. Trump said he would stop efforts to “socially engineer race and gender into every aspect of public and private life.”

“We will forge a society that is colorblind and merit-based,” Mr. Trump declared.

On Tuesday night, the Trump administration released a memorandum that employees working in D.E.I. offices across the government would be placed on administrative leave by 5 p.m. Wednesday, the first step toward shutting down the offices and programs altogether. Agencies were ordered to devise plans to lay off the staff members in the offices, which are also tasked with addressing accessibility issues for people with disabilities, by Jan. 31.

The directive was felt within hours of that memorandum being issued.

Stop-work orders went out as early as Wednesday morning. A contractor for the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, who spoke on the condition of anonymity for fear of retribution, was told to halt a project collecting demographic data for the agency, which for years has documented details on gender, race and veteran status. The person said the results of a D.E.I. survey conducted last year would no longer be released next month, as planned.

Also on Wednesday, a livestream planned by U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services to honor the legacy of Martin Luther King Jr. was canceled, according to an email obtained by The New York Times. The event for asylum and refugee officers, scheduled for Jan. 29, was set to include speakers discussing Dr. King’s legacy and a reading of his “I Have a Dream” speech.

Everett Kelley, the president of the American Federation of Government Employees, said Mr. Trump's attacks on D.E.I. were "just a smoke screen for firing civil servants."

"The federal government already hires and promotes exclusively on the basis of merit," Mr. Kelley said.

Dariely Rodriguez, the acting co-chief counsel for the Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law, said that the orders betrayed a fundamental misunderstanding of what D.E.I. initiatives were about, and that the federal government still had to comply with civil rights laws.

"D.E.I. is not about preferential treatment," Ms. Rodriguez said. "It's about eliminating barriers."

In recent days, Mr. Trump has revoked a 60-year-old executive order, dating back to Lyndon B. Johnson, that banned discrimination in hiring practices in federal government contracting. And he directed the Federal Aviation Administration to halt hiring practices that sought diversity, equity and inclusion, asserting that such practices have endangered passengers on airlines.

The Trump administration said that under the Biden administration, the F.A.A. "sought to specifically recruit and hire individuals with serious infirmities that could impact the execution of their essential lifesaving duties." It did not cite any examples, and administration officials did not respond to a request for one.

Some conservative groups praised Mr. Trump's moves. Yukong Mike Zhao, the president of the Asian American Coalition for Education, called Mr. Trump's orders "a major milestone in American civil rights progress and a critical step towards building a colorblind society."

"Affirmative action and woke D.E.I. programs are racism in disguise," said Mr. Zhao, whose group supported the lawsuit against Harvard that led to the overturning of affirmative action in college admissions.

The barrage of efforts in recent days has spread fear and confusion across the federal work force, according to employees who spoke to The Times.

One administration employee who received the email urging employees to report their colleagues said it made them feel as though they were being recruited into the Gestapo. Another employee told The Times that the directive to report colleagues made him feel as if he was living in the Soviet Union. The Times reviewed emails from more than a half-dozen agencies, including AmeriCorps, which oversees volunteers and service programs.

Several agencies have stated their intent to comply with the new rules.

A spokeswoman for the C.I.A. said on Wednesday that the agency had dissolved its office of diversity and inclusion, and that its workers were “laser focused on our intelligence mission.”

Under the previous C.I.A. director, William J. Burns, the diversity office had provided training to intelligence officers on fostering inclusive environments and improving recruiting.

Other agencies were still uncertain about what Mr. Trump’s orders meant for them. At the Environmental Protection Agency, which has an Office for Environmental Justice and External Civil Rights, some employees said they were unsure if they would have jobs on Thursday.

Matthew Tejada, who served as a deputy assistant administrator for environmental justice under President Joseph R. Biden Jr., said he hired many of the people who could be at risk.

“People don’t work at E.P.A. because they want a federal job,” Mr. Tejada said. “They work at E.P.A. because they want to protect the environment and people’s health.”

Michael D. Shear, Julian Barnes and Eric Schmitt contributed reporting.

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