

Civil Service Reform Act of 1978

*Statement on Signing S. 2640 Into Law.
October 13, 1978*

History will regard the Civil Service Reform Act of 1978 as one of the most important laws enacted by this Congress.

Congress has done an extraordinary job in shaping this landmark legislation and enacting it in just over 7 months.

The ceremony today and the legislation it honors would not have been possible without the skilled, consistent leadership of Representative Morris Udall. I am also grateful for the bipartisan efforts of Representatives Edward Derwinski, and Chairmen Robert Nix and Jack Brooks on the House side, Chairman Abraham Ribicoff and Charles Percy on the Senate side, and the superb work done by Jim McIntyre and Scotty Campbell. We all owe a debt to these men.

In March, when I sent my proposals to Congress, I said that civil service reform and reorganization would be the centerpiece of my efforts to bring efficiency and accountability to the Federal Government. It will be the key to better performance in all Federal agencies.

In August, Congress approved Reorganization Plan No. 2 of 1978, which restructured the central institutions of Federal personnel management. This Civil Service Reform Act of 1978, which I sign today, adds the muscle to that structure.

This legislation will bring fundamental improvements to the Federal personnel system.

It puts merit principles into statute and defines prohibited personnel practices.

It establishes a Senior Executive Service and bases the pay of executives and senior managers on the quality of their performance.

It provides a more sensible method for evaluating individual performance.

It gives managers more flexibility and more authority to hire, motivate, reward, and discipline employees to ensure that the public's work gets done. At the same time, it provides better protection for employees against arbitrary actions and abuses and contains safeguards against political intrusion.

The act assures that whistleblowers will be heard, and that they will be protected from reprisal.

It moves Federal labor relations from Executive order to statute and provides a new agency, the Federal Labor Relations Authority, to monitor the system.

And it provides for systematic research and development in personnel management to encourage continuing improvements of the civil service system.

We know that legislation of this kind is possible only when highly respected men and women from outside government

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come forward and declare their support to Congress and the Nation. In this instance, many did so, and I am grateful for their contributions.

I would particularly like to acknowledge the efforts of Stanton Williams of PPG Industries and his colleagues of the Business Roundtable; the pivotal role of Ken Blaylock of the American Federation of Government Employees, and of Tom Donahue of the AFL-CIO; David Cohen of Common Cause; and John Gardner; the former Cabinet officers and former Civil Service Commissioners; and the organizations of State and local government officials who came forward to support the legislation; and the many, many professional and academic organizations who expressed strong support.

Now this bill is law, but this is just the start of a continuing effort to improve the Federal Government's services to the people. By itself, the law will not ensure improvement in the system. It provides the tools; the will and determination must come from those who manage the Government.

Our aim is to build a new system of excellence and accountability.

I am asking every executive, every supervisor, and every Federal employee to take part in this renewal. I am expecting all members of the Cabinet and all agency heads to give continuing personal attention to the implementation of this legislation.

The changes we expect will not happen all at once. But I pledge to you today that this administration will move to implement the civil service reforms with efficiency and dispatch.

We have already called a conference of 400 line executives and managers, together with agency personnel directors, to give concrete advice on making the act work as intended. It will be held in less than 2 weeks.

This historic bill goes to the very heart of what the American people are asking for: a government and a civil service that work. That was my campaign promise to the American people and it gives me great personal pleasure to sign the bill that keeps that promise.

NOTE: As enacted, S. 2640 is Public Law 95-454, approved October 13.