

**US Politics & Policy****Life after Trump: White House alumni face an uncertain future**

Challenging climate for former employees who quit or were forced out



From left, KT McFarland, Rex Tillerson, Hope Hicks and Gary Cohn © FT Montage  
Andrew Edgecliffe-Johnson in New York 9 HOURS AGO

Washington's revolving door has never spun so fast. In the past month alone, top officials including chief economic adviser Gary Cohn and secretary of state Rex Tillerson have resigned from Donald Trump's administration or been told to leave. Some of the people closest to the president, including communications director Hope Hicks, have also gone, feeding talk of turmoil that Mr Trump dismisses. Reports are rife of more exits to come.

Kathryn Dunn Tenpas of the Brookings Institution calculates that 43 per cent of senior positions in the Trump White House have turned over in less than 14 months — more than any of the four previous administrations saw in their first two years.

In another era, all of these political alumni would have been of intense interest to corporate boards, Wall Street banks, government contractors and Washington's lobbying industry, eager for insights into White House decision making from insiders who have seen up close how the president and his cabinet work.

As with many things in the Trump administration, it looks different this time.

Those who have left so far “are not really moving onward and upward”, says Ms Tenpas.

[Reince Priebus](#), Mr Trump's first chief of staff, returned to his old law firm. KT McFarland, a deputy national security adviser, withdrew her nomination to be ambassador to Singapore after it

stalled in the Senate.

Anthony Scaramucci, who sold his stake in his hedge fund to join the White House but lasted only 11 days as communications director, is working on a book. So too is [Sean Spicer](#), the former press secretary, who is on the speaker circuit after a visiting fellowship at Harvard's Kennedy School. Steve Bannon, former chief strategist, returned to Breitbart News, but left after being quoted in an [incendiary book](#) about Mr Trump.

Others, such as former national security adviser [Michael Flynn](#), have been swept up in Robert Mueller's investigation and are preoccupied with their legal defence.

One of the few Trump alumni to have landed a bigger role is Dina Powell, former deputy national security adviser, who has rejoined Goldman Sachs with a mandate to enhance its relationships with sovereign wealth funds.

Jeff Hauser, who runs the Revolving Door Project at the Center for Economic and Policy Research, has studied the professional afterlife of previous generations of White House workers, from Clinton counsellors snapped up by Wall Street in the 1990s to Obama loyalists who flocked to Silicon Valley as the tech industry boomed.

In part because Mr Trump and his team do not come from the traditional Republican establishment, "there's a real desire to be able to understand the Trump administration, and get access", Mr Hauser notes.

But the sheer numbers of people touting such insight this time may count against their value, he says: "There's a lot of people hoping to get rich via the revolving door and I think they're going to run into an excess of supply."



Steve Bannon returned to Breitbart News but left after being quoted in a book about the president © Getty

According to Tim LaPira, associate professor of political science at James Madison University, access is not the only motivation for the private sector to hire people who have worked in the White House.

“It has more to do with the fact that they know the non-textbook aspects of how government works on the inside,” he says, but people whose time as insiders can be measured in months may find it harder to convince future employers of their value.

The unorthodox nature of the Trump administration also puts its veterans’ value in question, Mr LaPira argues. “It might be of some value to have that person in the room to say ‘Hey, can you explain the craziness to me?’” he says, but “nobody can explain how it’s working . . . I would caution potentially paying clients about what it is exactly that they’re buying.”

Jeff Hyman, an adjunct professor at the Kellogg School of Management, says recruiters are typically most interested in what impact a candidate has had, regardless of where they worked. “Expectations are pretty low that you made an impact in 12 months,” he says. “Smart employers are going to look through that to previous experience.”

The group Mr Trump hailed last year as “one of the finest group of people ever assembled as a cabinet” have unusual backgrounds that may also mean their post-public service careers are very different from their predecessors.

[Mr Tillerson](#) ran ExxonMobil, one of the world’s largest companies, but had to agree not to work in the oil and gas industry for a decade as a condition of getting a potential \$180m payout when he left. [Mr Cohn](#) was number two at Goldman Sachs, but the bank’s choice last week of David Solomon to succeed Lloyd Blankfein means no “onward and upward” avenue is available to him there.

Some of those Mr Trump put his trust in have thinner CVs: Ms Hicks, 29, was a model and worked in public relations before joining the Trump campaign.

“Their marketability after working for the Trump administration will depend on the nature of their departure,” says Ms Tenpas, noting that some have resigned of their own choice and others have been noisily forced out.

The headlines this turnover has attracted may also provide some cover for the alumni of this White House, says Kathleen Clark, a professor at Washington University School of Law specialising in government ethics.

“I think there’s a general consensus that the White House is in turmoil, so I think they’ve got this umbrella,” she says. “At the very least companies and recruiters will understand there are contributing factors, including one orange-haired individual at the top.”

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