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Changes Debated on How Jobs Data Is Collected

BY JOSH DAWSEY

WASHINGTON—The Trump administration is considering changes to how the federal government collects and reports jobs data, according to White House officials, following President Trump's decision to fire the Bureau of Labor Statistics commissioner earlier this month in the aftermath of weak employment numbers.

In a series of closed-door discussions in recent days, White House aides and Labor Department officials have weighed new options for data collection, as well as new technologies that could make the process more efficient. White House aides said one goal is to improve the response rates to BLS surveys.

Trump has complained publicly and privately that jobs report data is designed to hurt him politically, taking aim at large revisions to the numbers that have complicated his contention that the economy is soaring in his second term. Trump has told his advisers that he doesn't want large revisions to the data in the future, the officials said. ↖ Note

Karoline Leavitt, the White House press secretary, said on Tuesday that Trump was looking at "means and methods" behind the jobs data.

Any changes to the reports, which are delivered on the first Friday morning of every month, could attract scrutiny that Trump is trying to game the numbers for political purposes. The president has long questioned data that he believes doesn't align with his worldview. He has also taken steps to assert more control over agencies that historically operate independently and weed out career officials he views as disloyal.

Trump fired BLS Commissioner Erika McEntarfer hours after the bureau reported a dramatic downward revision in the number of jobs created in May and June. In July, the economy gained 73,000 jobs, according to BLS, falling short of expectations. Trump said this week that he would nominate E.J. Antoni, a Trump supporter and BLS critic, to succeed McEntarfer.

In an interview with Fox News Digital this week, Antoni said BLS should suspend issuing its monthly jobs reports until the process is "corrected." He added it should "keep publishing the more accurate, though less timely, quarterly data."

He added, "Major decision makers from Wall Street to D.C. rely on these numbers, and a lack of confidence in the data has far-reaching consequences."

A White House official said Antoni conducted the interview before he knew he was going to be chosen as BLS commissioner, and his comments don't represent official BLS policy. Antoni, an economist for the Heritage Foundation and conservative radio personality, didn't respond to a request for comment.

Taylor Rogers, a White House spokeswoman, said Antoni will "prioritize increasing survey response rates and modernizing data collection methods to improve the BLS's accuracy."

White House officials said they had concerns about jobs reports numbers for months before the firing of McEntarfer. But they didn't communicate those concerns to her, according to people familiar with the matter.

Stephen Moore, an outside adviser to Trump, said Antoni had been picked because the White House believes the "process is not working." Moore said he expected the administration to focus on changing how the jobs report is conducted, instead of re--placing employees at BLS. "It is more about changing the procedures," he said. Note

"But I think we need a monthly jobs report," he said, adding that he doesn't think putting it on hold would be a good idea.

William Beach, who served as BLS commissioner during the first Trump presidency, said BLS employees were already deeply concerned about potential interference from the White House in the first term, but such interference didn't materialize.

He said tinkering with the numbers for political purposes would undermine credibility on Wall Street and around the world. "I think it would become a public issue very quickly," he said.

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