



United States  
General Accounting Office  
Washington, D.C. 20548

National Security and  
International Affairs Division

B-256931

August 11, 1994

The Honorable Benjamin A. Gilman  
Ranking Republican Member  
Committee on Foreign Affairs  
House of Representatives

The Honorable William F. Clinger, Jr.  
Ranking Republican Member  
Committee on Government Operations  
House of Representatives

The Honorable Henry J. Hyde  
House of Representatives

In response to your letter of July 27, 1994, we interviewed Mr. Larry Byrne, Assistant Administrator, Bureau for Management, U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), about his written response to our draft report on inadequate controls over political appointee records.<sup>1</sup> As you requested, we specifically asked Mr. Byrne about the extent and source of his knowledge of the Bush administration's political appointee files at the State Department and USAID and of his information about the reasons for retrieval of the files at State. We also asked whether others shared his views and knowledge of the files and the circumstances surrounding the retrieval of the files at State. You also asked us to determine if his understanding of the circumstances was factually valid.

Mr. Byrne said that he began working at USAID in June 1993 and his appointment as Assistant Administrator was confirmed by the Senate in November 1993. Prior to that time, he worked as a voluntary consultant to the Clinton

---

<sup>1</sup>Records Management: Inadequate Controls Over Various Agencies' Political Appointee Files (NSIAD-94-155, July 13, 1994).

administration's Director of Priority Placement in the Office of Presidential Personnel during January-March 1993, and before January 1993 he assisted the Clinton transition team. Mr. Byrne said that he had also participated in the transition from the Carter to the Reagan administration in 1981.

KNOWLEDGE OF CONTENTS  
OF POLITICAL APPOINTEE FILES

Mr. Byrne said that he had no direct knowledge of the contents of the White House liaison files of the Bush administration's appointees at State and USAID, other than the information that was in the draft report we provided to USAID for official comment. Mr. Byrne said that his comment that the Bush administration had not properly segregated State and USAID files as to their confidentiality (personal sensitivity) represented his view about the contents of the files based on our report draft as well as his general criticism of the Bush administration's support during the transition process. He characterized the transition as unfriendly and the process for transferring needed records as unsatisfactory.

Mr. Byrne said that when he assisted the Presidential Personnel Office during the first months of the Clinton administration, some of the staff assigned to over 20 agencies as liaisons with the White House expressed concern to him that the outgoing administration had not left behind key institutional records, including position descriptions and staffing patterns. He said that in some cases, liaison staff had reported that almost all institutional files that would have benefitted the transition had been removed or destroyed. Mr. Byrne said that Presidential Personnel typically advised the liaison staff to contact each agency's personnel office to find out how the personnel function operated and to obtain position descriptions and other staffing information necessary to facilitate the political appointment process. Mr. Byrne said that no one was instructed to look for or seek out information on the prior administration that would be considered confidential or personally sensitive.

In response to a question concerning whether he or any members of his staff reviewed any personnel records of Bush appointees at USAID, Mr. Byrne said that the Official Personnel Folders of a small number of key people who continued employment with USAID under the new administration were updated and reviewed to (1) ensure that

all required personnel actions were complete and in order and (2) determine if they were in appropriate political or technical positions. He said that no other personnel records of Bush administration appointees were reviewed.

KNOWLEDGE OF REASONS FOR  
FILE RETRIEVAL AT STATE

Mr. Byrne said that he had no firsthand knowledge of the reasons for the retrieval of the White House liaison files at State. He said that his comments represented his general impressions concerning the Bush administration's support during the transition and his belief that Bush officials did not transfer needed records. Mr. Byrne stated in the USAID response that State's files were retrieved "because of the inappropriateness of the combination of multiple records and the inclusion of those confidential and nonconfidential records together." This statement is not consistent with the information we developed during our review or the conclusions drawn by State's Office of Inspector General during its criminal investigation. As discussed in our separate report on the retrieval of the files at State,<sup>2</sup> the reasons cited by the former White House liaison officials at State for the retrieval of the files included the need to (1) understand the functions of the White House liaison office and (2) identify political positions throughout the Department and specific employees that may have been transferred to nonpolitical appointments at State. (Mr. Byrne was not provided a copy of that draft report for comment.) The reasons cited by Mr. Byrne in his comments were not raised by any of the staff involved in the file retrieval at State.

Concerning his statement about an attack on the integrity of the individuals coming in with the new administration, Mr. Byrne said his comment reflected what he viewed as unfair attacks on the Clinton administration by certain members of Congress when the story of the retrieval of the files at State first became public. Mr. Byrne said that his view applied only to the former State employees in the White House liaison office and the Public Affairs aide as the victims of the attack. He also said that he did not believe that our report represented an attack on anyone.

---

<sup>2</sup>Records Management: Retrieval of State Department's Political Appointee Files (NSIAD-94-187, July 13, 1994).

B-256931

KNOWLEDGE AND VIEWS  
OF OTHER INDIVIDUALS

Mr. Byrne's letter used the term "we believe" several times in the USAID response. Mr. Byrne said that the use of "we" was only a general reference used in preparing the agency's comments and did not indicate that any other specific individuals shared his views or had knowledge of the contents of the Bush appointee files or the reasons for retrieval of the files at State.

Mr. Byrne added that his comments should not be construed as disagreement with the recommendations in our report. He said that he and other members of the Clinton staff fully support consistent approaches to handling White House liaison records at the end of presidential administrations.

We hope this information answers your questions. If you have any questions, please call me on (202) 512-4128.

  
Joseph E. Kelley  
Director-in-Charge  
International Affairs Issues

(711099)