

Congress of the United States

House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND ACCOUNTABILITY

2157 RAYBURN HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING

WASHINGTON, DC 20515-6143

MAJORITY (202) 225-5074
MINORITY (202) 225-5051
<https://oversight.house.gov>

August 31, 2023

Mr. Jeffrey Zients
Chief of Staff
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. Zients:

The Committee on Oversight and Accountability is conducting oversight of the Biden Administration's post-pandemic telework and remote work policies for federal employees. As you are likely aware, the Committee sent letters to 25 federal agencies on May 18, 2023, requesting data and details necessary to assess the potential impact of expanded telework on agency mission accomplishment.¹ Despite our reasonable request for information, our first letter was largely ignored until we sent follow-up communications to the unresponsive agencies on August 4.²

By coincidence, on the same day the Committee sent its follow-up letters, you sent an email to agency heads stressing the importance of transitioning away from telework to return more federal employees to in-person work.³ Your letter stated that "aggressively" increasing in-person work is a priority for President Biden, and that doing so would allow the executive branch "to deliver better results for the American people" by improving "teamwork... and productivity" within the federal workforce.⁴ By suggesting that in-person work would lead to improved outcomes, your email implies that the Biden Administration's widespread use of post-pandemic federal telework has resulted in reduced productivity, diminished customer service, and worse overall returns for the American taxpayer. With the worst effects of the COVID pandemic long behind us, the timing and motivation of the Administration's sudden push for increased in-person work calls for a more formal explanation.

The American people deserve to understand the Biden Administration's post-pandemic telework policy and the thinking behind the Biden Administration's rapidly evolving telework posture. Accordingly, the Committee requests point-for-point responses to the following questions, as soon as possible but no later than September 14, 2023, to understand:

¹ See Letter from Chairman James Comer et al. to Various Agency Heads (May 18, 2023).

² See Letter from Chairman James Comer, Chairman Pete Sessions, and Representative Lauren Boebert to Various Agency Heads (Aug. 4, 2023).

³ Alex Thompson, "Scoop: Biden pushes to end remote work era for feds," AXIOS (Aug. 4, 2023), <https://www.axios.com/2023/08/04/biden-end-remote-work-federal-employees>.

⁴ Alex Thompson (@AlexThomp), X (Aug. 4, 2023), <https://twitter.com/AlexThomp/status/1687574175622316033>.

1. What motivated the White House’s call for federal agencies to transition away from telework to more in-person work;
2. Whether the Committee’s May 18, 2023, or August 4, 2023,—or any other congressional inquiries about post-pandemic federal telework—contributed to the White House’s sudden push to increase in-person work;
 - a. If responding to Question 2 in the negative, explain why the Biden Administration acted when it did to push for increased in-person work, and why the Administration did not act earlier;
3. Whether the White House had become aware of diminished performance by federal employees under the Biden Administration’s post-pandemic telework policy;
 - a. If responding to Question 3 in the negative, why did Mr. Zients’ August 4 email to cabinet leadership state that a transition to more in-person work would “deliver better results for the American people” and “[increase]... productivity;”
 - b. If responding to Question 3 in the affirmative, explain in what ways and to what extent performance by federal employees was impacted by the Biden Administration’s post-pandemic telework policy.

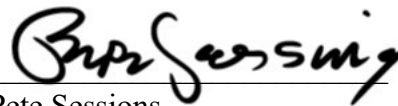
An attachment to this letter provides additional instructions for responding to the Committee’s request. To make arrangements to deliver documents or ask any related follow-up questions, please contact Committee on Oversight and Accountability Majority Staff at (202) 225-5074.

The Committee on Oversight and Accountability is the principal oversight committee of the U.S. House of Representatives and has broad authority to investigate “any matter” at “any time” under House Rule X. Thank you in advance for your cooperation with this inquiry.

Sincerely,



James Comer
Chairman
Committee on Oversight and Accountability



Pete Sessions
Chairman
Subcommittee on Government Operations
and the Federal Workforce



Lauren Boebert
Member of Congress

Mr. Jeffrey Zients
August 31, 2023
Page 3 of 3

cc: The Honorable Kweisi Mfume, Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Government Operations and the Federal Workforce

The Honorable Jamie Raskin, Ranking Member
Committee on Oversight and Accountability