

FOLLOW THE RULES ACT

MARCH 29, 2017.—Committed to the Committee of the Whole House on the State of the Union and ordered to be printed

Mr. CHAFFETZ, from the Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, submitted the following

R E P O R T

[To accompany H.R. 657]

[Including cost estimate of the Congressional Budget Office]

The Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, to whom was referred the bill (H.R. 657) to amend title 5, United States Code, to extend certain protections against prohibited personnel practices, and for other purposes, having considered the same, report favorably thereon with an amendment and recommend that the bill as amended do pass.

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The amendment is as follows:

Strike all after the enacting clause and insert the following:

SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.

This Act may be cited as the “Follow the Rules Act”.

**SEC. 2. PROHIBITED PERSONNEL ACTION BASED ON ORDERING INDIVIDUAL TO VIOLATE
RULE OR REGULATION.**

(a) IN GENERAL.—Subparagraph (D) of section 2302(b)(9) of title 5, United States Code, is amended by inserting “, rule, or regulation” after “law”.

(b) TECHNICAL CORRECTION.—Such subparagraph is further amended by striking “for”.

COMMITTEE STATEMENT AND VIEWS

PURPOSE AND SUMMARY

H.R. 657, the Follow the Rules Act, clarifies that the prohibition against certain personnel actions includes personnel actions taken against any employee or applicant for employment for refusing to obey an order that would violate a rule or regulation.

BACKGROUND AND NEED FOR LEGISLATION

The Whistleblower Protection Act of 1989 (WPA) made it a prohibited personnel practice to “take or fail to take, or threaten to take or fail to take, any personnel action against any employee or applicant for employment because of . . . refusing to obey an order that would require the individual to violate the law.”¹ Codified at 5 U.S.C. § 2302(b)(9)(D), the provision was an explicit rejection of the general policy for federal employees to “obey first, grieve later.” The provision has not been invoked frequently.

In the fall of 2013, Dr. Timothy Allen Rainey was relieved of his responsibilities as a contracting officer representative at the Department of State. He contended his removal was the result of a refusal to obey a supervisor’s order to tell a contractor to rehire a terminated subcontractor, and that obeying such an order would violate the Federal Acquisition Regulation. Rainey filed a complaint with the Merit Systems Protection Board, arguing the removal of his duties constituted a violation of 5 U.S.C. § 2302(b)(9)(d).

The Department of State argued Rainey did not refuse to obey an order that would require him to violate a law, and thus the Board did not have jurisdiction to hear the case. The administrative judge originally disagreed and subsequently issued an order on October 24, 2014, exercising jurisdiction. Shortly after a hearing began on the merits, however, the Supreme Court issued a January 21, 2015 decision in *Department of Homeland Security v. MacLean*.² In *MacLean*, the Court found Congress intended to provide whistleblowers with the strongest protection possible, and thus held that as used in 5 U.S.C. § 2302(b)(8)(a), the word “law” refers only to a statute, not a rule or regulation. In light of the Court’s opinion in *MacLean*, on January 30, 2015, the administrative judge issued a decision reversing her original position that the Board had jurisdiction. On August 6, 2015, the administrative judge issued a final decision citing the *MacLean* case as a basis for finding that “law,” as used in § 2302(b)(9), could not include a rule or regulation, and thus that the Board lacked jurisdiction.³

¹ Whistleblower Prot. Act of 1989, Pub. L. No. 101–12 § 4(b), 103 Stat. 16, 32 (1989). The provision may have played a role in Merit Systems Protection Board case law that indicated an agency must show an employee willfully refused to obey an order *entitled to be obeyed* (emphasis added). *Bonanova v. Dep’t of Education*, 49 M.S.P.R. 294, 302 (1991).

² 135 S. Ct. 913 (2015).

³ *Rainey v. Dep’t of State*, 122 M.S.P.R. 592 (2015).

When the full Board denied a petition for review, Rainey appealed to the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Federal Circuit. In a June 7, 2016 opinion, the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Federal Circuit affirmed the Board’s ruling, noting:

Dr. Rainey’s arguments are heavy on policy reasons why Congress likely would not have wanted to confine the scope of section 2302(b)(9)(D) to statutes. These policy considerations are not without force, and it may be that the statute should be extended to cover rules, regulations, and other sources of legal authority. If so, Congress is free to alter the scope of the statute.⁴

The Follow the Rules Act was introduced to clarify Congress’s original intent with respect to this provision of the Whistleblower Protection Act of 1989.

LEGISLATIVE HISTORY

In the 114th Congress, Representative Sean Duffy (R-WI) introduced the Follow the Rules Act as H.R. 6186 on September 27, 2016. This bill was referred to the Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, which on November 16, 2016 favorably reported the bill without amendment by voice vote. On November 30, 2016, the House passed H.R. 6186 under suspension of the rules.

In the 115th Congress, Representative Duffy reintroduced the Follow the Rules Act, this time as H.R. 657, on January 24, 2017. This bill was again referred to the Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, which adopted an Amendment in the Nature of a Substitute and favorably reported the bill as amended by voice vote on February 2, 2017.

SECTION-BY-SECTION

Section 1. Short title

The section establishes the short title of the bill as the “Follow the Rules Act.”

Section 2. Prohibited personnel action based on ordering individual to violate rule or regulation

This section amends 5 U.S.C. § 2302(b)(9)(D) by inserting the language “, rule, or regulation” after “law” and makes a technical correction to remove the word “for.” This section also specifies that the amendment will only apply to personnel actions after the date of enactment.

EXPLANATION OF AMENDMENTS

Because of the Committee’s view that this legislation clarifies Congress’s original intent in passing the Whistleblower Protection Act of 1989, Chairman Jason Chaffetz (R-UT) offered an amendment in the nature of a substitute. The substitute bill does not include Section 2(c), which regarded application of the bill only applying to personnel actions occurring after the date of the Act’s enactment. The amendment was favorably adopted by voice vote.

⁴*Rainey v. Merit Sys. Prot. Bd.*, 824 F.3d 1359 (Fed. Cir. 2016).

AMENDMENT IN THE NATURE OF A SUBSTITUTE TO H.R. 657
OFFERED BY MR. CHAFFETZ OF UTAH

Strike all after the enacting clause and insert the following:

SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.

This Act may be cited as the “Follow the Rules Act”.

SEC. 2. PROHIBITED PERSONNEL ACTION BASED ON ORDERING INDIVIDUAL TO VIOLATE RULE OR REGULATION.

(a) **IN GENERAL.**—Subparagraph (D) of section 2302(b)(9) of title 5, United States Code, is amended by inserting “, rule, or regulation” after “law”.

(b) **TECHNICAL CORRECTION.**—Such subparagraph is further amended by striking “for”.

COMMITTEE CONSIDERATION

On February 2, 2017, the Committee met in open session and ordered reported favorably the bill, H.R. 657, as amended, by voice vote, a quorum being present.

ROLL CALL VOTES

There were no roll call votes during consideration of H.R. 657.

APPLICATION OF LAW TO THE LEGISLATIVE BRANCH

Section 102(b)(3) of Public Law 104–1 requires a description of the application of this bill to the legislative branch where the bill relates to the terms and conditions of employment or access to public services and accommodations. This bill extends the prohibition against certain personnel actions to include personnel actions taken against any employee or applicant for employment for refusing to obey an order that would violate a rule or regulation. As such, this bill does not relate to employment or access to public services and accommodations.

STATEMENT OF OVERSIGHT FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF
THE COMMITTEE

In compliance with clause 3(c)(1) of rule XIII and clause (2)(b)(1) of rule X of the Rules of the House of Representatives, the Committee’s oversight findings and recommendations are reflected in the descriptive portions of this report.

STATEMENT OF GENERAL PERFORMANCE GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

In accordance with clause 3(c)(4) of rule XIII of the Rules of the House of Representatives, the Committee’s performance goals or objectives are to amend title 5, United States Code, to extend certain protections against prohibited personnel practices, and for other purposes.

DUPLICATION OF FEDERAL PROGRAMS

No provision of this bill establishes or reauthorizes a program of the Federal Government known to be duplicative of another federal program, a program that was included in any report from the Government Accountability Office to Congress pursuant to section 21

of Public Law 111–139, or a program related to a program identified in the most recent Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance.

DISCLOSURE OF DIRECTED RULE MAKINGS

The Committee estimates that enacting this bill does not direct the completion of any specific rule makings within the meaning of 5 U.S.C. 551.

FEDERAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE ACT

The Committee finds that the legislation does not establish or authorize the establishment of an advisory committee within the definition of 5 U.S.C. App., Section 5(b).

UNFUNDED MANDATE STATEMENT

Section 423 of the Congressional Budget and Impoundment Control Act (as amended by Section 101(a)(2) of the Unfunded Mandate Reform Act, P.L. 104–4) requires a statement as to whether the provisions of the reported include unfunded mandates. In compliance with this requirement the Committee has received a letter from the Congressional Budget Office included herein.

EARMARK IDENTIFICATION

This bill does not include any congressional earmarks, limited tax benefits, or limited tariff benefits as defined in clause 9 of rule XXI.

COMMITTEE ESTIMATE

Clause 3(d)(1) of rule XIII of the Rules of the House of Representatives requires an estimate and a comparison by the Committee of the costs that would be incurred in carrying out this bill. However, clause 3(d)(2)(B) of that Rule provides that this requirement does not apply when the Committee has included in its report a timely submitted cost estimate of the bill prepared by the Director of the Congressional Budget Office under section 402 of the Congressional Budget Act of 1974.

BUDGET AUTHORITY AND CONGRESSIONAL BUDGET OFFICE COST ESTIMATE

With respect to the requirements of clause 3(c)(2) of rule XIII of the Rules of the House of Representatives and section 308(a) of the Congressional Budget Act of 1974 and with respect to requirements of clause (3)(c)(3) of rule XIII of the Rules of the House of Representatives and section 402 of the Congressional Budget Act of 1974, the Committee has received the following cost estimate for this bill from the Director of Congressional Budget Office:

U.S. CONGRESS,
CONGRESSIONAL BUDGET OFFICE,
Washington, DC, February 13, 2017.

Hon. JASON CHAFFETZ,
*Chairman, Committee on Oversight and Government Reform,
House of Representatives, Washington, DC.*

DEAR MR. CHAIRMAN: The Congressional Budget Office has prepared the enclosed cost estimate for H.R. 657, the Follow the Rules Act.

If you wish further details on this estimate, we will be pleased to provide them. The CBO staff contact is Matthew Pickford.

Sincerely,

KEITH HALL.

Enclosure.

H.R. 657—Follow the Rules Act

H.R. 657 would expand the protections against retaliation that are currently given to whistleblowers who refuse to violate federal laws. Under the bill those protections would extend to employees who refuse to violate federal rules and regulations.

The Merit Systems Protection Board (MSPB) hears claims against federal agencies brought by whistleblowers. Expanding the scope of the retaliation protections to include violations of federal rules and regulations could increase the number of such hearings and related costs. However, based on information from the MSPB on the likely number of new cases under the bill, CBO expects that whistleblower cases dealing with violations of rules and regulations would be limited in number. Furthermore, based on an analysis of the cost of whistleblower cases, even if the number of cases increased by 20 percent (something CBO thinks would be unlikely) under the bill, CBO estimates that the annual cost to process them would be less than \$500,000.

Enacting the legislation could affect direct spending by agencies not funded through annual appropriations; therefore, pay-as-you-go procedures apply. However, CBO estimates that any net increase in spending by those agencies would be negligible. Enacting H.R. 657 would not affect revenues.

CBO estimates that enacting H.R. 657 would not increase net direct spending or on-budget deficits in any of the four consecutive 10-year periods beginning in 2028.

H.R. 657 contains no intergovernmental or private-sector mandates as defined in the Unfunded Mandates Reform Act and would not affect the budgets of state, local, or tribal governments.

The CBO staff contact for this estimate is Matthew Pickford. The estimate was approved by H. Samuel Papenfuss, Deputy Assistant Director for Budget Analysis.

CHANGES IN EXISTING LAW MADE BY THE BILL, AS REPORTED

In compliance with clause 3(e) of rule XIII of the Rules of the House of Representatives, changes in existing law made by the bill, as reported, are shown as follows (existing law proposed to be omitted is enclosed in black brackets, new matter is printed in *italic*, and existing law in which no change is proposed is shown in roman):

TITLE 5, UNITED STATES CODE

* * * * *

PART III—EMPLOYEES

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SUBPART A—GENERAL PROVISIONS

* * * * *

CHAPTER 23—MERIT SYSTEM PRINCIPLES

* * * * *

§ 2302. Prohibited personnel practices

(a)(1) For the purpose of this title, “prohibited personnel practice” means any action described in subsection (b).

(2) For the purpose of this section—

(A) “personnel action” means—

- (i) an appointment;
- (ii) a promotion;
- (iii) an action under chapter 75 of this title or other disciplinary or corrective action;
- (iv) a detail, transfer, or reassignment;
- (v) a reinstatement;
- (vi) a restoration;
- (vii) a reemployment;
- (viii) a performance evaluation under chapter 43 of this title or under title 38;
- (ix) a decision concerning pay, benefits, or awards, or concerning education or training if the education or training may reasonably be expected to lead to an appointment, promotion, performance evaluation, or other action described in this subparagraph;
- (x) a decision to order psychiatric testing or examination;
- (xi) the implementation or enforcement of any nondisclosure policy, form, or agreement; and
- (xii) any other significant change in duties, responsibilities, or working conditions;

with respect to an employee in, or applicant for, a covered position in an agency, and in the case of an alleged prohibited personnel practice described in subsection (b)(8), an employee or applicant for employment in a Government corporation as defined in section 9101 of title 31;

(B) “covered position” means, with respect to any personnel action, any position in the competitive service, a career appointee position in the Senior Executive Service, or a position in the excepted service, but does not include any position which is, prior to the personnel action—

- (i) excepted from the competitive service because of its confidential, policy-determining, policy-making, or policy-advocating character; or
- (ii) excluded from the coverage of this section by the President based on a determination by the President that

it is necessary and warranted by conditions of good administration;

(C) “agency” means an Executive agency and the Government Publishing Office, but does not include—

(i) a Government corporation, except in the case of an alleged prohibited personnel practice described under subsection (b)(8) or section 2302(b)(9) (A)(i), (B), (C), or (D);

(ii)(I) the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the Central Intelligence Agency, the Defense Intelligence Agency, the National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency, the National Security Agency, the Office of the Director of National Intelligence, and the National Reconnaissance Office; and

(II) as determined by the President, any executive agency or unit thereof the principal function of which is the conduct of foreign intelligence or counterintelligence activities, provided that the determination be made prior to a personnel action; or

(iii) the Government Accountability Office; and

(D) “disclosure” means a formal or informal communication or transmission, but does not include a communication concerning policy decisions that lawfully exercise discretionary authority unless the employee or applicant providing the disclosure reasonably believes that the disclosure evidences—

(i) any violation of any law, rule, or regulation; or

(ii) gross mismanagement, a gross waste of funds, an abuse of authority, or a substantial and specific danger to public health or safety.

(b) Any employee who has authority to take, direct others to take, recommend, or approve any personnel action, shall not, with respect to such authority—

(1) discriminate for or against any employee or applicant for employment—

(A) on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, or national origin, as prohibited under section 717 of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (42 U.S.C. 2000e-16);

(B) on the basis of age, as prohibited under sections 12 and 15 of the Age Discrimination in Employment Act of 1967 (29 U.S.C. 631, 633a);

(C) on the basis of sex, as prohibited under section 6(d) of the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938 (29 U.S.C. 206(d));

(D) on the basis of handicapping condition, as prohibited under section 501 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (29 U.S.C. 791); or

(E) on the basis of marital status or political affiliation, as prohibited under any law, rule, or regulation;

(2) solicit or consider any recommendation or statement, oral or written, with respect to any individual who requests or is under consideration for any personnel action unless such recommendation or statement is based on the personal knowledge or records of the person furnishing it and consists of—

(A) an evaluation of the work performance, ability, aptitude, or general qualifications of such individual; or

(B) an evaluation of the character, loyalty, or suitability of such individual;

(3) coerce the political activity of any person (including the providing of any political contribution or service), or take any action against any employee or applicant for employment as a reprisal for the refusal of any person to engage in such political activity;

(4) deceive or willfully obstruct any person with respect to such person's right to compete for employment;

(5) influence any person to withdraw from competition for any position for the purpose of improving or injuring the prospects of any other person for employment;

(6) grant any preference or advantage not authorized by law, rule, or regulation to any employee or applicant for employment (including defining the scope or manner of competition or the requirements for any position) for the purpose of improving or injuring the prospects of any particular person for employment;

(7) appoint, employ, promote, advance, or advocate for appointment, employment, promotion, or advancement, in or to a civilian position any individual who is a relative (as defined in section 3110(a)(3) of this title) of such employee if such position is in the agency in which such employee is serving as a public official (as defined in section 3110(a)(2) of this title) or over which such employee exercises jurisdiction or control as such an official;

(8) take or fail to take, or threaten to take or fail to take, a personnel action with respect to any employee or applicant for employment because of—

(A) any disclosure of information by an employee or applicant which the employee or applicant reasonably believes evidences—

(i) any violation of any law, rule, or regulation, or

(ii) gross mismanagement, a gross waste of funds, an abuse of authority, or a substantial and specific danger to public health or safety,

if such disclosure is not specifically prohibited by law and if such information is not specifically required by Executive order to be kept secret in the interest of national defense or the conduct of foreign affairs; or

(B) any disclosure to the Special Counsel, or to the Inspector General of an agency or another employee designated by the head of the agency to receive such disclosures, of information which the employee or applicant reasonably believes evidences—

(i) any violation (other than a violation of this section) of any law, rule, or regulation, or

(ii) gross mismanagement, a gross waste of funds, an abuse of authority, or a substantial and specific danger to public health or safety;

(9) take or fail to take, or threaten to take or fail to take, any personnel action against any employee or applicant for employment because of—

(A) the exercise of any appeal, complaint, or grievance right granted by any law, rule, or regulation—

(i) with regard to remedying a violation of paragraph (8); or

- (ii) other than with regard to remedying a violation of paragraph (8);
- (B) testifying for or otherwise lawfully assisting any individual in the exercise of any right referred to in subparagraph (A)(i) or (ii);
- (C) cooperating with or disclosing information to the Inspector General of an agency, or the Special Counsel, in accordance with applicable provisions of law; or
- (D) ~~for~~ refusing to obey an order that would require the individual to violate a law, rule, or regulation;
- (10) discriminate for or against any employee or applicant for employment on the basis of conduct which does not adversely affect the performance of the employee or applicant or the performance of others; except that nothing in this paragraph shall prohibit an agency from taking into account in determining suitability or fitness any conviction of the employee or applicant for any crime under the laws of any State, of the District of Columbia, or of the United States;
- (11)(A) knowingly take, recommend, or approve any personnel action if the taking of such action would violate a veterans' preference requirement; or
- (B) knowingly fail to take, recommend, or approve any personnel action if the failure to take such action would violate a veterans' preference requirement;
- (12) take or fail to take any other personnel action if the taking of or failure to take such action violates any law, rule, or regulation implementing, or directly concerning, the merit system principles contained in section 2301 of this title; or
- (13) implement or enforce any nondisclosure policy, form, or agreement, if such policy, form, or agreement does not contain the following statement: "These provisions are consistent with and do not supersede, conflict with, or otherwise alter the employee obligations, rights, or liabilities created by existing statute or Executive order relating to (1) classified information, (2) communications to Congress, (3) the reporting to an Inspector General of a violation of any law, rule, or regulation, or mismanagement, a gross waste of funds, an abuse of authority, or a substantial and specific danger to public health or safety, or (4) any other whistleblower protection. The definitions, requirements, obligations, rights, sanctions, and liabilities created by controlling Executive orders and statutory provisions are incorporated into this agreement and are controlling."

This subsection shall not be construed to authorize the withholding of information from Congress or the taking of any personnel action against an employee who discloses information to Congress. For purposes of paragraph (8), (i) any presumption relating to the performance of a duty by an employee whose conduct is the subject of a disclosure as defined under subsection (a)(2)(D) may be rebutted by substantial evidence, and (ii) a determination as to whether an employee or applicant reasonably believes that such employee or applicant has disclosed information that evidences any violation of law, rule, regulation, gross mismanagement, a gross waste of funds, an abuse of authority, or a substantial and specific danger to public health or safety shall be made by determining whether a disinterested observer with knowledge of the essential facts known

to and readily ascertainable by the employee or applicant could reasonably conclude that the actions of the Government evidence such violations, mismanagement, waste, abuse, or danger.

(c) The head of each agency shall be responsible for the prevention of prohibited personnel practices, for the compliance with and enforcement of applicable civil service laws, rules, and regulations, and other aspects of personnel management, and for ensuring (in consultation with the Office of Special Counsel) that agency employees are informed of the rights and remedies available to them under this chapter and chapter 12 of this title, including how to make a lawful disclosure of information that is specifically required by law or Executive order to be kept classified in the interest of national defense or the conduct of foreign affairs to the Special Counsel, the Inspector General of an agency, Congress, or other agency employee designated to receive such disclosures. Any individual to whom the head of an agency delegates authority for personnel management, or for any aspect thereof, shall be similarly responsible within the limits of the delegation.

(d) This section shall not be construed to extinguish or lessen any effort to achieve equal employment opportunity through affirmative action or any right or remedy available to any employee or applicant for employment in the civil service under—

(1) section 717 of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (42 U.S.C. 2000e-16), prohibiting discrimination on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, or national origin;

(2) sections 12 and 15 of the Age Discrimination in Employment Act of 1967 (29 U.S.C. 631, 633a), prohibiting discrimination on the basis of age;

(3) under section 6(d) of the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938 (29 U.S.C. 206(d)), prohibiting discrimination on the basis of sex;

(4) section 501 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (29 U.S.C. 791), prohibiting discrimination on the basis of handicapping condition; or

(5) the provisions of any law, rule, or regulation prohibiting discrimination on the basis of marital status or political affiliation.

(e)(1) For the purpose of this section, the term “veterans’ preference requirement” means any of the following provisions of law:

(A) Sections 2108, 3305(b), 3309, 3310, 3311, 3312, 3313, 3314, 3315, 3316, 3317(b), 3318, 3320, 3351, 3352, 3363, 3501, 3502(b), 3504, and 4303(e) and (with respect to a preference eligible referred to in section 7511(a)(1)(B)) subchapter II of chapter 75 and section 7701.

(B) Sections 943(c)(2) and 1784(c) of title 10.

(C) Section 1308(b) of the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act.

(D) Section 301(c) of the Foreign Service Act of 1980.

(E) Sections 106(f), 7281(e), and 7802(5) of title 38.

(F) Section 1005(a) of title 39.

(G) Any other provision of law that the Director of the Office of Personnel Management designates in regulations as being a veterans’ preference requirement for the purposes of this subsection.

(H) Any regulation prescribed under subsection (b) or (c) of section 1302 and any other regulation that implements a provision of law referred to in any of the preceding subparagraphs.

(2) Notwithstanding any other provision of this title, no authority to order corrective action shall be available in connection with a prohibited personnel practice described in subsection (b)(11). Nothing in this paragraph shall be considered to affect any authority under section 1215 (relating to disciplinary action).

(f)(1) A disclosure shall not be excluded from subsection (b)(8) because—

(A) the disclosure was made to a supervisor or to a person who participated in an activity that the employee or applicant reasonably believed to be covered by subsection (b)(8)(A)(i) and (ii);

(B) the disclosure revealed information that had been previously disclosed;

(C) of the employee's or applicant's motive for making the disclosure;

(D) the disclosure was not made in writing;

(E) the disclosure was made while the employee was off duty; or

(F) of the amount of time which has passed since the occurrence of the events described in the disclosure.

(2) If a disclosure is made during the normal course of duties of an employee, the disclosure shall not be excluded from subsection (b)(8) if any employee who has authority to take, direct others to take, recommend, or approve any personnel action with respect to the employee making the disclosure, took, failed to take, or threatened to take or fail to take a personnel action with respect to that employee in reprisal for the disclosure.

* * * * *

