

Denali Commission

Executive Order Update

Via Microsoft Teams
Anchorage, Alaska

March 3, 2025

Minutes

Present

Julie Kitka, Federal Co-Chair

John Whittington, General Counsel

Jocelyn Fenton, Director of Programs

Elinda Hetemi, HR Director

Anne Stanislawski, Administrative Officer

Joelle Hall, Commissioner

Alicia Amberg, Commissioner

Nils Andreassen, Commissioner

Pat Pitney, Commissioner

Call To Order

Transcription started at 1 pm AKST.

Update on Executive Orders.

John Whittington, General Counsel, presented the Executive Orders.

1. Return to In-Person Work

Summary: The Denali Commission used telework to reduce costs and allow us to invest more money in programs and projects. This EO required the Denali Commission staff to return to the office by February 20, 2025. The current office was not set up to accommodate a full staff. We have 17 employees, including Rod Fillinger, Inspector General. We had six empty offices to work with. This created a bit of a challenge. One program manager took the Deferred Resignation Offer, reducing our office space requirements by one. We configured and maximized the space we had at the Atwood Building, and we received reauthorization of our explicit leasing authority. We used that leasing authority to accommodate the remaining employees without offices. One employee lives in Fairbanks and found an office to lease at Fairbanks City Hall—\$ 1000/month.

Another office was leased in Eagle River for the two employees living there—\$ 1,897.50/month. The third satellite office in Anchorage accommodates two Anchorage-based employees at \$ 1,200/month. The Anchorage office is a 6-minute walk to the Atwood Building. Rod Fillinger, IG, is based in Washington, DC, and he found office space at the Smithsonian Office of the Inspector General.

Within the next couple of months, after the employees in the offsite offices have a chance to get used to the new locations, we will need to sit down with those employees and find out if it is working well or if any adjustments need to be made. We also kept the leases short because we don't know what will happen.

2. Hiring Freeze

Summary: A 90-day hiring freeze is in effect until April 20, 2025. The Denali Commission was nearly to the point where we had finished hiring two new employees, one program manager, and one executive scheduler. Both had to be canceled. The impacted employees were understanding, and we will miss not having them.

We don't know if the hiring freeze will be extended. There is some speculation that it will be extended, but we don't know.

There is now a separate EO requiring that you hire only one employee for every four who leave or are let go. OPM guidance seems to indicate that we may have to contend with this for the long term; there is no expiration date. Depending on how the funding develops, this could have a significant impact on the Denali Commission.

Next steps: The Commission will continue to send monthly reports to OPM on hiring freeze information as requested.

Commissioner Nils Andreassen: *Is this realistic for us?*

Federal Co-Chair Julie Kitka: *The future of the Denali Commission is the status quo on the number of people working here, and contracts and cooperative agreements are moving out. This is the existing staff, and I don't expect we will be able to do any hiring for months now. We are not letting our probationary people go, and we also have no intention of doing a RIF of the existing employees. The Denali Commission and the way we are set up is an efficiency model itself. John will explain the EO and how we will respond to it a little bit later.*

3. Restoring Accountability to Policy Influencing Positions Within the Federal Workforce

This EO has been reissued from Trump's first presidency. Since the Commission doesn't have any SES or Senior Executive Employees, it appeared the reissued EO would have little impact on the Commission. However, OPM's guidance expanded the scope of employees that would be impacted, depending on how you read it. Employees have due process rights that kick in whenever you take adverse action against them. The impact of this EO is that it removes the appeal rights for designated employees and, in effect, turns them into at-will employees. We are required to report on the 20th of April which positions would be impacted by this EO. The General Counsel and the Director of

Programs will be affected and become at-will employees. We hope that the way we structure our workflow and our organization will allow us to limit it to those two positions.

Federal Co-Chair Julie Kitka: *Talking to Commerce today on that, they are in agreement that the program managers don't need to be included in that. It will most likely be Jocelyn, John, and myself.*

4. Defending Women from Gender Ideology Extremist and Restoring Biological Truth to the Federal Government

Summary: On January 31, 2025, the Commission sent an email to agency employees announcing that the agency would comply with Defending Women as per the executive order guidance. On February 7th, 2025, the Commission sent a report to OPM on all steps taken to implement the guidance, including plans to fully comply. Compliance consisted of removing the pronoun function in Outlook and on some personnel forms.

Next steps: The Commission will continue implementing actions in the order and is fully compliant.

5. Ending Radical and Wasteful Government DEI Programs and Preferencing

Summary: The Commission has submitted all required documents as requested by the OPM and OMB per the guidance deadline and is fully compliant with the order. The Commission did not have a DEI office, so there was no impact.

6. Implementing The President's "Department of Government Efficiency" Workforce Optimization Initiative

Summary: The Commission is in the process of creating the Agency RIF and Reorganization Plans (ARRP) Phase 1 Plan, which is due to OMB and OPM for review and approval no later than March 13, 2025.

This EO encourages agencies to examine their employees and identify any positions that could be eliminated through the RIF process. We are aligning positions and functions for all employees. As Julie mentioned, the Denali Commission is already an efficiency model, and the people working here are all essential to its function.

Next steps: The Commission will continue to work on the ARRP Phase 2 Plans to OMB and OPM for review and approval no later than April 14, 2025, as well as the monthly progress reports to OMB and OPM on May 14, 2025, June 16, 2025, and July 16, 2025.

7. Reforming the Federal Hiring Process and Restoring Merit to Government Service

Summary: The Commission is gathering performance management data as requested in the associated executive order guidance and reviewing internal policies per the order instructions. The EO requested information on employees who have not met expectations within the last 3 years (no employee fell into this category). We had to

review policies to verify that we had the flexibility necessary to discipline employees for poor performance and/or misconduct. Our policies have been modeled after the Department of Commerce for a long time, and we have everything covered.

Next steps: The information requested will be sent to OPM by March 7, 2025.

8. Department of Government Efficiency's Cost Efficiency Initiative

Summary: The Commission has completed the following actions:

- Temporary Duty (TDY) travel remains limited to mission-critical travel until further notice.
- All travel charge card accounts are reduced to a spending limit of \$1 until further notice.
- Employees with an approved travel authorization must contact their Agency/Organization Program Coordinator (A/OPC) to request a temporary increase in the spending limit for their travel dates.

The Commission must complete the following:

- Verify with the Bureau of Fiscal Services that our electronic payment system can add a justification for every payment for grants and contracts.
- 30 days to review both existing contracts and grants to promote efficiency and advance the administration policies.
- 30 days to review contracting policy, procedures, and personnel for efficiency and consistency with administration policies.

Next steps: The Commission will continue to follow additional guidance received.

9. **Frozen Funds:** IJA funds were frozen for several days but are now available. There was some impact from delayed payments and grantee confusion, but the funds are now available, and our operations are now unimpacted by the frozen funds.

10. **OPM probationary employees:** An OPM memo required us to provide the names of our two probationary employees. We provided the names, but no further action has taken place. The employment dates for each are Christian (April 8, 2024) and Clare (September 3, 2024).

11. **Deferred Resignation Offer:** One Program Manager accepted the offer and is on Administrative Leave until the end of the FY.

