

TRUMP'S THREE BALLROOM STOOGES

WHITE HOUSE OFFICIALS BLAIR, SCHARF, AND
LEVENBACH ARE NOT QUALIFIED TO SIT ON THE
NATIONAL CAPITAL PLANNING COMMISSION
AND SHOULD NOT VOTE ON TRUMP'S
BALLROOM PROJECT

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Introduction



NCPC website photo of James Blair, William Scharf, and Stuart Levenbach at NCPC meeting¹

President Trump's White House Ballroom Project has been a fiasco from the beginning. When the White House announced it in July 2025, Trump claimed nothing about the existing White House would be changed.² Then in October, the East Wing was suddenly demolished. A massive amount of money has flowed from corporations, billionaires, and an unknown number of secret donors through what a federal judge has called a "Rube Goldberg contraption"³ that looks designed to evade Congressional and public oversight and shield the donors and the recipients of the money from scrutiny.

Now, a substantive planning agency that Congress created to ensure that development projects in the federal capital district are done in a coherent fashion is on the verge of being made a mockery of by 3 presidential appointments who fail to have any of the "experience in city or regional planning" the law requires appointees to have.

On March 5, 2026, the National Capital Planning Commission (NCPC) is slated to hold a formal public hearing, take public comment, and potentially vote to approve Trump's White House Ballroom Project. The Chair, Vice-Chair, and a key member of NCPC – all Trump White House staffers - are certainly qualified in their respective fields of political consulting, law, and marine ecology – but entirely unqualified to hold the positions of NCPC Commissioner. None of the three should be sitting on NCPC or voting on the Ballroom Project. Doing so will jeopardize the validity of the decision.

¹ About the Commission," website of the National Capital Planning Commission;
<https://www.ncpc.gov/about/commission/>

² "Trump is building a new \$200 million ballroom at the White House," ABC News, July 31, 2025 ("It won't interfere with the current building ... It'll be near it, but not touching it and pays total respect to the existing building, which I'm the biggest fan of. It's my favorite," Trump said."); <https://abcnews.com/Politics/trump-building-new-200-million-ballroom-white-house/story?id=124254902>

³ "Federal judge appears skeptical of DOJ's argument for White House ballroom construction," January 22, 2026; <https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/white-house/federal-judge-appears-skeptical-dojs-argument-white-house-ballroom-con-rcna255496>

Background

When the East Wing of the White House was shockingly demolished in late October 2025, President Trump claimed unilateral authority to make that kind of decision.⁴ He also claimed unlimited unilateral authority to proceed to begin constructing his dream of a massive golden ballroom in its place, paid for by corporations and billionaires, who would then get their names engraved for all time in stone on the White House as a thank you gift.⁵

Trump and his team at the time claimed that they did not need to submit the East Wing demolition or the plans for building the Ballroom to anyone for review – not to historic preservation bodies, not to local planning bodies, not to Congress. But, as the dust from the East Wing demolition settled, Trump's plans ran off the rails in three ways.

First, public outcry about the stunning demolition of the East Wing was immediate and widespread. The images of a bulldozer plowing through the people's house – without warning or explanation – was visceral and shocking to millions of Americans. Polls showed that Americans by a more than 2-1 margin objected to the East Wing Demolition and the funding of a ballroom paid for by corporations.⁶

Second, political pushback began immediately after the East Wing was demolished. Many members of Congress, including at least one high-ranking Congressional Republican, sent letters to White House staff or the President expressing their shock and concern about the East Wing Demolition and Ballroom Project.⁷

⁴ "The East Wing of the White House has been demolished. Here's a look at its history," PBS News, October 24, 2025; <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/politics/the-east-wing-of-the-white-house-has-been-demolished-heres-a-look-at-its-history>; "Remarks During A Ballroom Dinner," Administration of Donald J. Trump, 2025, October 15, 2025; <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/DCPD-202501018/pdf/DCPD-202501018.pdf>

⁵ "Who's paying for the White House ballroom and what's in it for them," CBS News, September 19, 2025; <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/trump-white-house-ballroom-donor-names/>; "Banquet of Greed: White House Donors Feast on Federal Funds and Favors," Public Citizen, November 3, 2025; <https://www.citizen.org/article/banquet-of-greed-trump-ballroom-donors-feast-on-federal-funds-and-favors/>

⁶ "Most Americans oppose East Wing demolition for Trump ballroom, poll finds," Washington Post, October 30, 2025 ("The findings echo other recent surveys, including an [Economist-YouGov](#) poll conducted from Oct. 24 to Oct. 27 that found 25 percent of Americans supported the project and 61 percent were opposed."); <https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2025/10/30/trump-east-wing-demolition-poll/>; "New images show White House East Wing leveled for \$300 million ballroom," ABC News, November 17, 2025 ("A 56% majority of Americans oppose the construction of the ballroom, including 45% who 'strongly' oppose it, according to the poll taken in October. Just 28% of Americans support it, with 15% strongly supporting the East Wing being torn down for a ballroom, the poll found. Another 16% say they are not sure."); <https://abcnews.com/Politics/new-images-show-white-house-east-wing-leveled/story?id=127604287>;

⁷ "Raskin, Colleagues Question Trump White House Ballroom's Compliance with Federal Law," October 30, 2025; <https://raskin.house.gov/2025/10/raskin-colleagues-question-trump-white-house-ballroom-s->

Third, in mid-December 2025, the National Trust for Historic Preservation filed a lawsuit in federal court against the Ballroom Project.⁸ The lawsuit argued that the unilateral approach by Trump to demolish the East Wing, start building without public review, and use a convoluted funding scheme that evaded Congress all violated the law. After the initial federal court hearing in late December, where the judge expressed deep skepticism about Trump's unilateral approach, the White House consented to submit the Ballroom Project plans to the National Capital Planning Commission for its review.⁹

National Capital Planning Commission

As described on its website, "The National Capital Planning Commission (NCPC) is an independent executive agency charged with oversight of the development of federal property within the National Capital Region."¹⁰ NCPC's fundamental authority derives from an Act of Congress: the National Capital Planning Act of 1952.¹¹ In the law's findings, Congress stated that it created NCPC because "there is needed a central planning agency for the National Capital region to coordinate certain developmental activities of the many different agencies of the Federal and District of Columbia Governments so that those activities may conform with general objectives" to "best promote public health, safety, morals, order, convenience, prosperity, and the general welfare, as well as efficiency and economy in the process of development."¹² This statute created NCPC as it exists today and charged it with the responsibility for planning, policymaking, and professional project reviews, oversight, and approvals to provide "overall planning guidance for federal land and buildings in the region."¹³ NCPC's core activities include comprehensive planning, federal capital improvements, review and approval of federal plans and projects, and signature planning.¹⁴ Congress made this

[compliance-with-federal-law](#); "GOP lawmaker quietly questioned 'disturbing' East Wing demolition," Washington Post, February 24, 2026; <https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2026/02/24/trump-ballroom-gop-concerns/>; "Democrats ramp up probes into Trump's \$300 million White House ballroom," Washington Post, October 29, 2025; <https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2025/10/29/trump-ballroom-democrats-investigation/>

⁸ National Trust for Historic Preservation in the United States v. National Park Service (1:25-cv-04316); filed December 12, 2025; <https://www.courtlistener.com/docket/72028010/national-trust-for-historic-preservation-in-the-united-states-v-national/>

⁹ On February 26, 2026, Judge Richard Leon denied the National Trust for Historic Preservation's lawsuit on procedural grounds, while leaving the door open for a revised filing on other grounds. The National Trust for Historic Preservation issued a statement saying it intended to refile its lawsuit "promptly." "Trump's ballroom project can continue for now, court says," NPR, February 26, 2026; <https://www.npr.org/2026/02/26/nx-s1-5727859/trumps-ballroom-project-can-continue-for-now-court-says>

¹⁰ "Legislative Authorities," NCPC website; <https://www.ncpc.gov/about/authorities/>

¹¹ 40 U.S.C. §§8701 et seq.; <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/USCODE-2013-title40/html/USCODE-2013-title40-subtitleII-partD-chap87.htm>

¹² 40 U.S.C. §8701; <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/USCODE-2013-title40/html/USCODE-2013-title40-subtitleII-partD-chap87.htm>

¹³ "About NCPC," NCPC website; <https://www.ncpc.gov/about/>

¹⁴ "About NCPC," NCPC website; <https://www.ncpc.gov/about/>

meaningful by effectively giving NCPC veto power over federal building projects in and around D.C.: *“In order to ensure the orderly development of the National Capital, the location, height, bulk, number of stories, and size of federal public buildings in the District of Columbia and the provision for open space in and around federal public buildings in the District of Columbia are subject to the approval of the Commission.”*¹⁵

Composition of the NCPC Commission

Congress established a Commission to make NCPC decisions and to oversee the work of a professional staff of planners, landscape architects, urban designers, engineers, and historic preservation specialists. Congress’s statute says that the Commission is composed of 12 members: 7 “ex officio” members designated pursuant to the offices they hold and 5 “citizen” members who meet specific qualifications.¹⁶

§8711. National Capital Planning Commission

(a) **ESTABLISHMENT AND PURPOSE.**—The National Capital Planning Commission is the central federal planning agency for the Federal Government in the National Capital, created to preserve the important historical and natural features of the National Capital, except for the United States Capitol Buildings and Grounds (as defined and described in sections 5101 and 5102 of this title), any extension of, or additions to, those Buildings and Grounds, and buildings and grounds under the care of the Architect of the Capitol.

(b) **COMPOSITION.**—

(1) **MEMBERSHIP.**—The National Capital Planning Commission is composed of—

(A) ex officio, the Secretary of the Interior, the Secretary of Defense, the Administrator of General Services, the Mayor of the District of Columbia, the Chairman of the Council of the District of Columbia, the chairman of the Committee on Governmental Affairs of the Senate, and the chairman of the Committee on Government Reform of the House of Representatives, or an alternate any of those individuals designates; and

(B) five citizens with experience in city or regional planning, three of whom shall be appointed by the President and two of whom shall be appointed by the Mayor.

(2) **RESIDENCY REQUIREMENT.**—The citizen members appointed by the Mayor shall be residents of the District of Columbia. Of the three appointed by the President, at least one shall be a resident of Virginia and at least one shall be a resident of Maryland.

NCPC Ex Officio Members

NCPC’s “ex officio” members serve by virtue of their position in local or federal government and are not required by the authorizing statute to have any special experience in the field of planning. The seven NCPC “ex officio” members specified by statute are: the Secretary of the Interior, the Secretary of Defense, the Administrator of General Services, the Mayor of the District of Columbia, the Chairman of the Council of the District of Columbia, the chairman of the Committee on Governmental Affairs of the Senate, and

¹⁵ 40 U.S.C. §8722(d); <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/USCODE-2013-title40/html/USCODE-2013-title40-subtitleII-partD-chap87.htm>

¹⁶ 40 U.S.C. §8711; <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/USCODE-2013-title40/html/USCODE-2013-title40-subtitleII-partD-chap87.htm>

the chairman of the Committee on Government Reform of the House of Representatives.¹⁷ The “ex officio” members themselves generally do not participate in Commission meetings and are instead typically represented by alternates.¹⁸

NCPC Citizen Members

In contrast to the ex officio members, in designing the composition of NCPC Congress required that the five “citizen” members all have relevant qualifications to be eligible to serve. This included two categories of qualification requirements: a residency requirement and a planning experience requirement.

Residency Requirement

The residency requirement in the NCPC statute is straightforward. The law requires that the two citizen members appointed by the Mayor of D.C. be residents of D.C. It also requires that at least one of the three citizen members appointed by the President be a resident of Virginia and another a resident of Maryland. This seems designed to ensure that the NCPC Commission is sufficiently comprised of people with a diversity of regional geographic perspectives so that its planning decisions are reflective of the different needs of D.C., Virginia, and Maryland.

Planning Experience Requirement

The planning experience requirement in the NCPC statute is similarly straightforward. The law requires that all five citizen members of NCPC have “experience in city or regional planning” to be eligible to serve.¹⁹ The Department of Justice has noted this statutory planning experience qualification for citizen members of NCPC in a memorandum to the President.²⁰ Given the highly specialized mission of NCPC to engage in extensive and often intricate planning decisions, this seems designed to ensure that NCPC is led by members who are qualified enough to understand what they’re being presented with and know what they’re doing.

¹⁷ 40 U.S.C. §8711; <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/USCODE-2013-title40/html/USCODE-2013-title40-subtitleII-partD-chap87.htm>

¹⁸ “About the Commission,” NCPC website; <https://www.ncpc.gov/about/commission/>; For example, Paul Ingrassia appeared at the February 5, 2026 NCPC meeting as a new designee to NCPC from the General Services Administration. See Meeting Transcript, NCPC Meeting, February 5, 2026; https://www.ncpc.gov/docs/open_gov_files/transcripts/2026/2026_02_05_NCPC.pdf

¹⁹ 40 U.S.C. §8711(b)(1)(B); <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/USCODE-2013-title40/html/USCODE-2013-title40-subtitleII-partD-chap87.htm>

²⁰ “Power of the President to Remove Presidential Appointees from the National Capital Planning Commission,” Memorandum Opinion for the Counsel to the President, Office of Legal Counsel of the Department of Justice, March 17, 1982; <https://www.justice.gov/file/149871/dl>

Previous Qualified NCPC Citizen Appointees

The history of NCPC's Chairs and citizen members shows the value of having citizen commissioners who have the required city or regional planning experience. The historical roster of NCPC citizen commissioners includes planning professionals²¹, architects²², engineers²³, and real estate developers.²⁴

Until July 2025, when she was removed by President Trump, the NCPC Chair was Teri Hawkes-Goodman. When she was appointed Chair of NCPC, Hawkes-Goodman brought to the work her extensive planning experience as the Director of Strategic Partnerships for the City of Dubuque, Iowa, the Dubuque City Manager from 2012 to 2020, and the lead developer for Dubuque's National Mississippi River Museum & Aquarium.²⁵ The other two presidentially appointed NCPC Commissioners removed by Trump in July 2025 similarly had extensive planning experience when they were appointed. Elizabeth Hewlett was the former Chair of Prince George's County Planning Board and the Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission.²⁶ Bryan Clark Green, an architectural historian and historic preservationist, was the executive director of the Tidewater and Big Bend Foundation where he led the restoration, furnishing, and

²¹ "President Obama Reappoints Beth White to National Capital Planning Commission," NCPC Press Release, November 4, 2016; [https://www.ncpc.gov/participate/releases/2016/President Obama Reappoints Beth White to National Capital Planning Commission Nov42016.pdf](https://www.ncpc.gov/participate/releases/2016/President%20Obama%20Reappoints%20Beth%20White%20to%20National%20Capital%20Planning%20Commission%20Nov42016.pdf)

²² Meeting Transcript, NCPC Meeting, January 8, 2009 (presidential appointment of architect John Hart); https://www.ncpc.gov/docs/open_gov_files/transcripts/2009/2009_01_08_NCPC.pdf;

²³ "U.S. Planning Agency Gets Little Respect," Washington Post, July 13, 1987 (quoting William E. Baumgaertner, a Maryland traffic engineer appointed to the commission by President Reagan); <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/local/1987/07/14/us-planning-agency-gets-little-respect/8b1bc110-2604-4811-ad5f-726a0b17cd2b/>

²⁴ "Ronald Reagan, Appointment of Glen T. Urquhart as a Member of the National Capital Planning Commission, and Designation as Chairman," The American Presidency Project, February 23, 1983 ("Mr. Urquhart currently serves as president of Walker, Urquhart & Co., a real estate consulting and development firm he founded in 1975."); <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/appointment-glen-t-urquhart-member-the-national-capital-planning-commission-and>

²⁵ "President Biden Designates Teri Hawks Goodmann as National Capital Planning Commission Chair," NCPC press release, January 30, 2023; <https://www.ncpc.gov/news/item/193/>; "Woman of the Year: Teri Hawks Goodmann," Her Magazine, October 8, 2022; <https://www.herdbq.com/featured-stories/woman-of-the-year-teri-hawks-goodmann/>;

²⁶ "President Biden Appoints Two New Commission Members," NCPC Press Release, December 12, 2022; <https://www.ncpc.gov/newsletters/december2022/>; "2023 Women Trailblazer: Ms. Elizabeth M. Hewlett," City of Bowie, May 15, 2023; <https://www.cityofbowie.org/2769/2023-Women-Trailblazer-Ms-Elizabeth-M-He>

interpretation of a series of landmark buildings and landscapes in Virginia.²⁷ These are people with unquestionable planning credentials qualifying them under the law to serve.

Trump's Three Unqualified NCPC Appointees

In contrast to the three qualified NCPC Commissioners removed by Trump in July 2025, the three White House officials Trump appointed to replace them are a political operative, a lawyer, and a marine ecologist. A review of their records reveals that these three individuals have no apparent “experience in city or regional planning.”

On Wednesday, July 9, 2025, the day before the July monthly NCPC meeting, President Trump summarily removed NCPC Chair Hawkes-Goodman and Commissioners Hewlett and Green from their positions. Instead of “the usual wonky architecture types” Trump replaced them with three “sharply political White House heavyweights”: White House Deputy Chief of Staff James Blair, White House Office of Management and Budget Associate Director Stuart Levenbach, and White House Staff Secretary William Scharf.²⁸ Trump named Scharf the new NCPC Chair. The White House made no public announcement about the appointees and provided no evidence that they had “experience in city or regional planning.” Trump just appointed them.

At their first NCPC meeting the following day, Blair, Levenbach, and Scharf immediately began to use their new positions to advance Trump's personal agenda. They spoke about an item that wasn't even on the official NCPC agenda but had become a Trump personal priority – not the White House Ballroom Project, which at that point had not even been announced yet²⁹ – but attacking Federal Reserve Chairman Jerome Powell.³⁰ As Axios described it: “Loyalists of President Trump are using an obscure D.C. architecture commission to go after political foe Jerome Powell over the renovation of the Federal Reserve building.”³¹ In his first NCPC speech, Blair blasted Powell, saying “We should not be made fools of” in reference to a renovation project to the Federal Reserve's

²⁷ “President Biden Appoints Two New Commission Members,” NCPC Press Release, December 12, 2022; <https://www.ncpc.gov/newsletters/december2022/>; “Bryan Clark Green, Visiting Associate Professor of Practice,” Virginia Tech School of Architecture; <https://arch.vt.edu/people/blacksburg-faculty/green-clark-bryan.html>

²⁸ “Is Trump Using an Obscure Architecture Board to Fire Jerome Powell?,” Politico, July 11, 2025; <https://www.politico.com/news/magazine/2025/07/11/jerome-powell-donald-trump-federal-reserve-building-blair-00448363>

²⁹ “The White House Announces White House Ballroom Construction To Begin,” White House Statement, July 31, 2025; <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/2025/07/the-white-house-announces-white-house-ballroom-construction-to-begin/>

³⁰ Meeting Transcript, NCPC Meeting, July 10, 2025; https://www.ncpc.gov/docs/open_gov_files/transcripts/2025/2025_07_10_NCPC.pdf

³¹ “Trump deputies take over powerful D.C. planning commission,” Axios, Jul 11, 2025; <https://www.axios.com/local/washington-dc/2025/07/11/trump-deputies-take-over-powerful-dc-planning-commission>

headquarters.³² Blair said he would request “a full review of plans of the Federal Reserve project,” saying some are referring to it as the “Taj Mahal near the National Mall.”³³ Scharf snickered.³⁴ “Please count me in,” said Levenbach.³⁵



National Capital Planning Commission (USA) Meeting, July 10, 2025

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Nothing much seems to have come of Blair, Levenbach, and Scharf’s attempts to leverage their NCPC posts to help President Trump fire Federal Reserve Chair Jerome Powell. On Fox News Blair criticized the Federal Reserve project³⁷ and on social media he proclaimed that he would “submit to the Fed my formal request” for information.³⁸ But, in response to Public Citizen’s public records request to NCPC for Blair’s “formal request” to the

³² Meeting Transcript, NCPC Meeting, July 10, 2025;

https://www.ncpc.gov/docs/open_gov_files/transcripts/2025/2025_07_10_NCPC.pdf

³³ Meeting Transcript, NCPC Meeting, July 10, 2025;

https://www.ncpc.gov/docs/open_gov_files/transcripts/2025/2025_07_10_NCPC.pdf

³⁴ Video recording of NCPC Meeting, July 10, 2025 (At minute 2:11:12);

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bzAy4-xY6Mc>

³⁵ Meeting Transcript, NCPC Meeting, July 10, 2025;

https://www.ncpc.gov/docs/open_gov_files/transcripts/2025/2025_07_10_NCPC.pdf

³⁶ Screenshot from video recording of NCPC Meeting, July 10, 2025;

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bzAy4-xY6Mc>

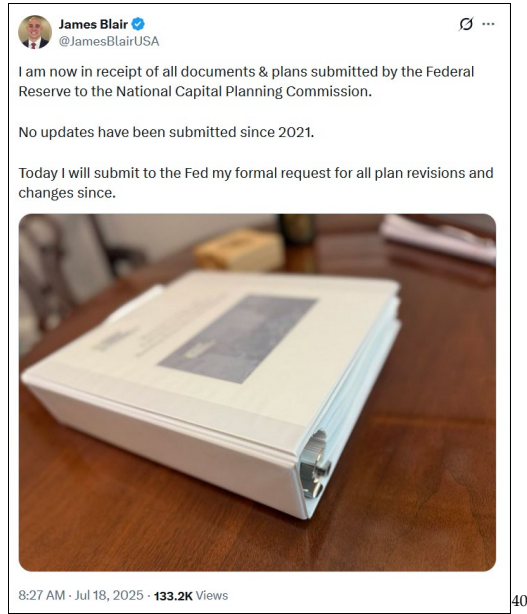
³⁷ “There is no reason the Fed shouldn’t be transparent, White House official says,” Fox News, July 18, 2025;

<https://www.foxbusiness.com/video/6375815204112>

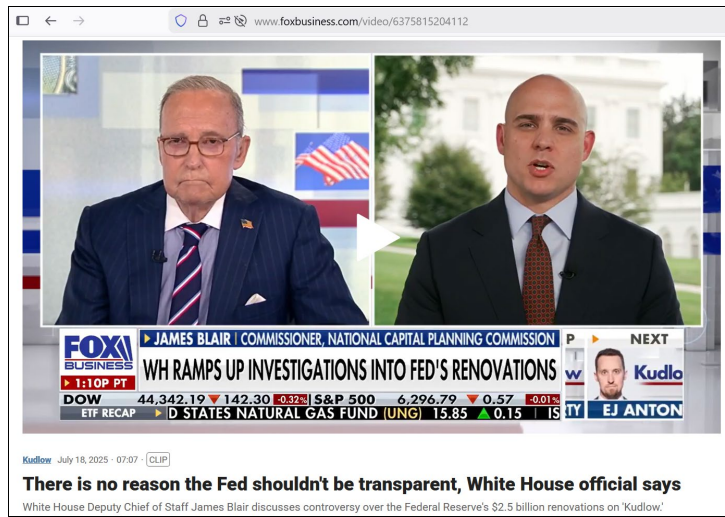
³⁸ James Blair social media post, July 18, 2025 (“No updates have been submitted since 2021. Today I will submit to the Fed my formal request for all plan revisions and changes since.”);

<https://x.com/JamesBlairUSA/status/1946184997620068574>

Federal Reserve, NCPC responded that no copy of any such a request by Blair was ever provided to the NCPC staff, if one was ever made.³⁹



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³⁹ Email from the NCPC General Counsel and Secretary to Public Citizen, January 22, 2026; (“Thanks for your follow up. At this time, I do not know if a letter was sent by Commissioner Blair to the Federal Reserve; if something was sent, NCPC staff did not receive a copy of the letter. I reached out to Commissioner Blair when your request came in, but I have not heard back from him with any additional updates. If I do receive updated information, I will let you know.”)

⁴⁰ James Blair social media post, July 18, 2025; <https://x.com/JamesBlairUSA/status/1946184997620068574>

⁴¹ “There is no reason the Fed shouldn’t be transparent, White House official says,” Fox News, July 18, 2025; <https://www.foxbusiness.com/video/6375815204112>

Similarly, Scharf at the September 2025 NCPC meeting stated that he would be sending a letter to the Federal Reserve demanding information.⁴² But when Public Citizen later requested a copy of Scharf's letter, NCPC said that Scharf never sent it.⁴³

Now, with NCPC poised to review and potentially vote to approve the White House Ballroom Project on March 5, 2026, Blair, Levenbach, and Scharf are very much in a position to advance one of Trump's personal priorities. However, an examination of their professional records by Public Citizen reveals that none of the three are qualified to serve as NCPC Commissioners and should not be voting on the Ballroom Project.

1. JAMES BLAIR

Michael James Blair⁴⁴, aka James Blair⁴⁵, is a professional political operative. He came up in Florida state politics, serving as an aide to the Florida House Speaker, as the political director of the Florida Republican Party's statehouse arm, and as deputy chief of staff to Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis, and founded and ran a Florida political consulting firm named Rapid Loop Consulting.⁴⁶ Blair worked on a variety of gubernatorial and congressional campaigns as a strategist and on both the 2020 and 2024 Trump campaigns alongside White House Chief of Staff Susie Wiles. As the 2024 Trump presidential campaign's political director, Blair shaped voter targeting decisions and drove the get-out-the-vote operation.⁴⁷

After the 2024 election, Trump named Blair to be White House Deputy Chief of Staff.⁴⁸ At the White House, Blair is responsible for driving Trump's most important political strategies, such as persuading Congress to pass Trump's "Big Beautiful Bill" last summer and leading the strategy to prevent the loss of Republican control of Congress in the 2026

⁴² NCPC Memorandum of Actions, September 4, 2025 ("The Chairman discussed a letter he plans to send to the Federal Reserve Board of Governors regarding their project renovations.")

⁴³ Email from the NCPC General Counsel and Secretary to Public Citizen, January 13, 2026; ("I touched base with Chairman Scharf, and he did not end up sending the letter to the Federal Reserve as he had contemplated during the September 2025 NCPC meeting.")

⁴⁴ Public Financial Disclosure Report for Michael James Blair, May 20, 2025;

<https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2025/06/Blair-Michael-James.pdf>

⁴⁵ James Blair social media handle; <https://x.com/JamesBlairUSA>

⁴⁶ "'Brilliant James': How James Blair took Washington by storm," Politico, December 27, 2025;

<https://www.politico.com/news/2025/12/27/brilliant-james-how-james-blair-took-washington-by-storm-00706272>;

"James Blair, Founder & President - Rapid Loop Consulting," Tampa Bay Chamber;

<https://www.tampabaychamber.com/staff/speaker/james-blair/?back=staff>

⁴⁷ "'Brilliant James': How James Blair took Washington by storm," Politico, December 27, 2025;

<https://www.politico.com/news/2025/12/27/brilliant-james-how-james-blair-took-washington-by-storm-00706272>

⁴⁸ "James Blair, Taylor Budowich continue Florida influx into Donald Trump's senior staff," Florida Politics, November 13, 2024; <https://floridapolitics.com/archives/707563-james-blair-taylor-budowich-continue-florida-influx-into-donald-trumps-senior-staff/>

midterm elections.⁴⁹ When Wiles selected seven Trump Administration officials to sit for a now-infamous Vanity Fair White House portrait, she chose Blair to be one of them.⁵⁰ Blair stood in the photo sandwiched between Wiles and another, far better known White House Deputy Chief of Staff, Stephen Miller.



Karoline Levitt, J.D. Vance, Marco Rubio, Dan Scavino, Susie Wiles, James Blair, Stephen Miller at the White House, Vanity Fair, December 2025⁵¹

⁴⁹ “‘Brilliant James’: How James Blair took Washington by storm,” Politico, December 27, 2025; <https://www.politico.com/news/2025/12/27/brilliant-james-how-james-blair-took-washington-by-storm-00706272>; “Trump’s Cabinet huddles on midterms messaging,” Politico, February 17, 2026; <https://www.politico.com/newsletters/west-wing-playbook-remaking-government/2026/02/17/trumps-cabinet-huddles-on-midterms-messaging-00784570>; “Trump’s Enforcer Is Little-Known White House Aide With Enormous Influence,” Wall Street Journal, December 24, 2025; https://www.wsj.com/politics/policy/who-is-james-blair-trump-white-house-c23a7c7e?gaa_at=eafs&gaa_n=AWEtsqfj3rLWjzKQ_SKgDdFwY3zD4a1IVJ-zTyDIIdgjYNo85yGcTK8oQV8XuSYkBXus%3D&gaa_ts=699ccca6&gaa_sig=BMrf3Tsq9o9MYlxPRfc63fgjqYwCbDWu3DEoNdjHz3PO-Y8ODhkpU4F6tFclD0lNF3G2OR9Qiu68fzy3i3BEO%3D%3D

⁵⁰ “Vanity Fair Goes to the White House: Trump 2.0 Edition,” Vanity Fair, December 16, 2025; https://www.vanityfair.com/news/story/vanity-fair-goes-to-the-white-house-trump-2-edition?srsId=AfmBOooKt4sJu2D-0nFKWsktqUFB_ASHdMfNPzYUYn9yEVWGd9tTim8U

⁵¹ “Susie Wiles, JD Vance, and the ‘Junkyard Dogs’: The White House Chief of Staff on Trump’s Second Term (Part 1 of 2),” Vanity Fair, December 16, 2025; https://www.vanityfair.com/news/story/trump-susie-wiles-interview-exclusive-part-1?srsId=AfmBOoo7xzQVWq3i_hxKy7yrexR3aiI7aarzXMZj_W_O0LzBKOflvWjg

While Blair has plenty of experience as a political consultant, campaign operative, and election strategist, nothing in his background indicates the “experience in city or regional planning” as the law requires citizen NCPC Commissioners to have. After Blair’s appointment, Politico reported he has “no apparent planning or historic preservation experience.”⁵² When Blair was given the chance at his first NCPC Commission to introduce himself, he said he was an assistant to the President and White House Deputy Chief of Staff.⁵³ About his actual qualifications to serve on NCPC, Blair said nothing.⁵⁴

2. STUART LEVENBACH

Stuart Levenbach is a trained marine ecologist who “began his career in marine policy exploring how anemones, macroalgae, sea urchins and fish interact on rocky reefs off southern California.”⁵⁵ In February 2025, Trump appointed Levenbach to be the Associate Director for Natural Resources, Energy, Science, and Water at the White House Office of Management and Budget.⁵⁶ In January 2026, Trump also appointed Levenbach to be the new chief statistician of the United States.⁵⁷

According to his White House biography, Levenbach previously worked as the Director for Government Affairs for an energy technology company and in the first Trump Administration as a Senior Advisor in the National Economic Council and the Council on Environmental Quality and as Chief of Staff for the National Oceanic and Atmospheric

⁵² “‘It’s your house. And he’s destroying it’: Trump demolishes White House East Wing,” Politico, October 22, 2025; <https://www.politico.com/news/2025/10/22/white-house-demolition-sends-shock-waves-spurs-calls-for-pause-00618230>

⁵³ Meeting Transcript, NCPC Meeting, July 10, 2025; https://www.ncpc.gov/docs/open_gov_files/transcripts/2025/2025_07_10_NCPC.pdf

⁵⁴ Meeting Transcript, NCPC Meeting, July 10, 2025; https://www.ncpc.gov/docs/open_gov_files/transcripts/2025/2025_07_10_NCPC.pdf

⁵⁵ “Advice from Knauss alum Stuart Levenbach, Ph.D. on the path to leadership in public policy,” NOAA Sea Grant, June 18, 2020;

<https://seagrant.noaa.gov/the-power-of-purpose-personal-connections-and-paying-attention/>; “Grazing intensity influences the strength of an associational refuge on temperate reefs,” Stuart Levenbach, October 31, 2008;

<https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s00442-008-1186-8>

⁵⁶ “White House Office of Management and Budget Announces Incoming Senior Appointees,” White House Statement, February 21, 2025; <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/2025/02/white-house-office-of-management-and-budget-announces-incoming-senior-appointees/>

⁵⁷ “White House taps a new chief statistician,” FedScoop, January 23, 2026; <https://fedscoop.com/white-house-taps-new-chief-statistician/>

Administration.⁵⁸ Levenbach was a volunteer forester in the Peace Corps and holds a Ph.D. in marine ecology from the University of California, Santa Barbara.⁵⁹

Last November, Trump nominated Levenbach to be the director of the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau (CFPB).⁶⁰ Given that Levenbach had no background in consumer finance, Sen. Elizabeth Warren characterized Levenbach's nomination as a maneuver to allow his boss, OMB Chief Russell Vought, who sought to dismantle the CFPB, to remain in control of it.⁶¹ A CFPB spokesperson acknowledged Levenbach's nomination was just a "technical" move and it was never seriously considered by the Senate.⁶²

When Levenbach was given the chance at his first NCPC Commission last July to introduce himself, he said that he had been living in Maryland for almost 20 years and "commuting down to D.C. and working out of federal buildings."⁶³ He also said that he had been involved at OMB in budgeting of construction projects and also policymaking around environmental permitting. While Levenbach has experience as a marine ecologist and budget official, budgeting of construction projects and policymaking around environmental permitting are, at best, tangentially related to city or regional planning. Nothing apparent in Levenbach's background indicates that he had anywhere near the "experience in city or regional planning" his predecessors had, nor the experience the law sets forth.

⁵⁸ "White House Office of Management and Budget Announces Incoming Senior Appointees," White House Statement, February 21, 2025;

<https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/2025/02/white-house-office-of-management-and-budget-announces-incoming-senior-appointees/>; "Lawsuit Seeks Details on Ocean Chief's Oversized Role in Slashing Environmental Protections," Center for Biological Diversity press release, May 6, 2019; <https://biologicaldiversity.org/w/news/press-releases/ocean-chiefs-oversized-role-slashing-environmental-protections-2019-05-06/>

⁵⁹ "White House Office of Management and Budget Announces Incoming Senior Appointees," White House Statement, February 21, 2025; <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/2025/02/white-house-office-of-management-and-budget-announces-incoming-senior-appointees/>

⁶⁰ PN 652 – Stuart Levenbach – Bureau of Consumer Financial Protection"; <https://www.congress.gov/nomination/119th-congress/652>

⁶¹ "Senator Warren Statement on New Trump CFPB Nominee," November 19, 2025; <https://www.banking.senate.gov/newsroom/minority/senator-warren-statement-on-new-trump-cfpb-nominee/>; "Trump picks new CFPB director amid efforts to close agency," Politico, November 19, 2025; <https://www.politico.com/news/2025/11/19/trump-cfpb-nomination-levenbach-vought-00659032>; "Trump nominates Stuart Levenbach to head CFPB," November 20, 2025;

⁶² "Trump picks new CFPB director amid efforts to close agency," Politico, November 19, 2025; <https://www.politico.com/news/2025/11/19/trump-cfpb-nomination-levenbach-vought-00659032>; PN 652 – Stuart Levenbach – Bureau of Consumer Financial Protection"; <https://www.congress.gov/nomination/119th-congress/652> (Nomination returned to the President, 1/3/26)

⁶³ Meeting Transcript, NCPC Meeting, July 10, 2025; https://www.ncpc.gov/docs/open_gov_files/transcripts/2025/2025_07_10_NCPC.pdf

3. WILLIAM SCHARF

William “Will” Scharf, is a lawyer, a policy advisor, a former assistant U.S. attorney, and a former candidate for Missouri state attorney general.⁶⁴ Since January 20, 2025, Scharf has been as an assistant to President Trump and White House Staff Secretary.⁶⁵ His most visible duty at the White House has been to hand binders of executive orders to President Trump and then stand by while Trump signs them.



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⁶⁴ “Former Missouri Attorney General hopeful Will Scharf appointed as Trump’s staff secretary,” St. Louis Public Radio, November 16, 2024;

<https://www.stlpr.org/news-briefs/2024-11-16/former-missouri-attorney-general-hopeful-will-scharf-appointed-as-trumps-staff-secretary>; “Trump names attorney Will Scharf to key White House job,” The Hill, November 16, 2024;

<https://thehill.com/homenews/administration/4994382-trump-names-attorney-will-scharf-to-key-white-house-job/>

⁶⁵ “Statement by President-elect Donald J. Trump Announcing the Appointment of William Owen Scharf as Assistant to the President and White House Staff Secretary,” The American Presidency Project, November 16, 2024; <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/statement-president-elect-donald-j-trump-announcing-the-appointment-william-owen-scharf>

⁶⁶ Vice President JD Vance social media account photo, January 22, 2025;

<https://x.com/VP/status/1882163616646132011/photo/1>

⁶⁷ White House social media account photo, January 21, 2025;

<https://x.com/WhiteHouse/status/1881692356006797552/photo/3>



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Prior to his duties as White House Staff Secretary, Scharf worked as a lawyer. Scharf was a member of Trump's legal team before joining the new administration. He previously worked as a policy director for former Missouri Gov. Eric Greitens and on the campaign of 2016 Republican gubernatorial candidate Catherine Hanaway.⁷² Scharf worked as an assistant U.S. attorney in St. Louis and then in the 2024 Missouri state election ran for state

⁶⁸ "Trump signs orders to promote stricter school discipline, end analysis of racial disparities," Chalkbeat, April 23, 2025; <https://www.chalkbeat.org/2025/04/24/trump-orders-stricter-school-discipline-less-focus-on-racial-disparities/>

⁶⁹ "Law and Order in Tariffs," Christianity Today, April 7, 2025; <https://www.christianitytoday.com/2025/04/trump-tariffs-law-and-order-economy/>

⁷⁰ "Elon In The Oval," The Bulwark, February 12, 2025; <https://www.thebulwark.com/p/when-president-musk-speaks-donald>

⁷¹ "How does Trump's ban on paper straws impact Mass.? Here's what to know," MassLive, February 11, 2025; <https://www.masslive.com/politics/2025/02/how-does-trumps-ban-on-paper-straws-impact-mass-heres-what-to-know.html>

⁷² "Who's the guy handing Trump those binders of executive orders? Meet Will Scharf," Associated Press, January 24, 2025; <https://apnews.com/article/trump-white-house-staff-secretary-will-scharf-7b9b6ca8ff99e4d79b743999bf560f62>

Attorney General.⁷³ Scharf lost the Attorney General election, but drew attention for running a controversial ad featuring a grenade launcher.⁷⁴

Nothing apparent in Scharf's background indicates that he had the necessary "experience in city or regional planning" when he was appointed to NCPC and designated to be the Chair. Scharf did make an attempt to justify his qualifications for the NCPC job at his first meeting in July 2025. At that meeting, when Scharf made his introductory comments he said: "I also served as policy director to the governor of Missouri in which capacity I worked extensively on economic development, tax credit issues, and related permitting and planning issues, which is, I guess, my most relevant experience, for the purposes of this Commission."⁷⁵ It stretches credulity to call that actual city or regional planning experience. And, in fact, Scharf's campaign biography from his 2024 campaign for Attorney General characterized his work as policy director to the Missouri governor this way: "worked to cut taxes, cut wasteful spending, reduce the burden of state regulations, pass needed tort reform measures, and advance pro-life policy initiatives."⁷⁶ There is no mention of city or regional planning experience.

Conclusion

When Congress created the National Capital Planning Commission three quarters of a century ago, it designed a sophisticated, professional planning agency and empowered it to review and approve federal building projects in and around D.C. Congress stated that it did so, "In order to ensure the orderly development of the National Capital." A critical element in NCPC's success has been the statutory requirement that its five citizen Commissioners, appointed either by the President of the United States or the Mayor of Washington, D.C., can fulfill the challenging duties that are required of NCPC Commissioners. Congress sought to ensure that was the case by requiring that citizen Commissioners have "experience in city or regional planning."

Unfortunately, when President Trump appointed James Blair, Stuart Levenbach, and Will Scharf to NCPC seats last July, he did so without regard to the law. As NCPC prepares to evaluate and vote to potentially approve the wildly inappropriate White House Ballroom Project, it is a mistake for the people driving that process to be unqualified and ineligible

⁷³ "'Trump's lawyer' Will Scharf pegs bid for Missouri AG on alleged Jeff City corruption," Missouri Independent, July 19, 2024; <https://missouriindependent.com/2024/07/19/trumps-lawyer-will-scharf-pegs-bid-for-missouri-ag-on-alleged-jeff-city-corruption/>

⁷⁴ "Missouri attorney general candidate Will Scharf keeps ad with grenade launcher on air," KSHB 41 News, July 16, 2024; <https://www.kshb.com/news/local-news/missouri-attorney-general-candidate-keeps-ad-with-grenade-launcher-on-air>

⁷⁵ Meeting Transcript, NCPC Meeting, July 10, 2025; https://www.ncpc.gov/docs/open_gov_files/transcripts/2025/2025_07_10_NCPC.pdf

⁷⁶ Citizens for Scharf, "Candidate Biography"; <https://www.politico.com/f/?id=0000018a-1daf-d2a3-a3fe-ffb2a1b0000>

to cast those votes. At a bare minimum, Blair, Levenbach, and Scharf should recuse themselves from voting on the White House Ballroom Project rather than risk jeopardizing the validity of that vote and the NCPC process around such a high-profile and important project. Even better, they should resign from NCPC so that the president may find and appoint qualified citizen Commissioners as the law requires.