

## Pendleton Civil Service Act (1883)

*In 1881, President James A. Garfield died from gunshot wounds inflicted by Charles J. Guiteau, who had failed to receive an appointment to a federal job. Garfield's assassination elevated public outrage to such a level that Congress could no longer ignore the growing demand to institute a new system of federal hiring. By 1881, the old system was out of control. Traditionally, a person who wanted a federal job had to rely on the party in office to appoint him or her. As the federal system grew, federal appointees increasingly had to pay to secure their jobs, and sometimes to continue to pay in order to keep them. Moreover, each change of administration in Washington resulted in a massive turnover in government workers. Not only was this system inefficient, but it encouraged corruption and ineptitude. Consequently, in 1883 Congress passed the Pendleton Act, which represented the first step in instituting a civil service system that relied on qualifications rather than patronage. Today, almost all federal jobs are filled through the civil service system.*

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled, That the President is authorized to appoint, by and with the advice and consent of the Senate, three persons, not more than two of whom shall be adherents of the same party, as Civil Service Commissioners, and said three commissioners shall constitute the United States Civil Service Commission. . . .

Sec. 2. That it shall be the duty of said commissioners:

First. To aid the President, as he may request, in preparing suitable rules for carrying this act into effect, and when said rules shall have been promulgated it shall be the duty of all officers of the United States in the departments and offices to which any such rules may relate to aid, in all proper ways, in carrying said rules, and any modifications thereof, into effect.

Second. And, among other things, said rules shall provide and declare, as nearly as the conditions of good administration will warrant, as follows:

First, for open, competitive examinations for testing the fitness of applicants for the public service now classified or to be classified hereunder. Such examinations shall be practical in their character, and so far as may be shall relate to those matters which will fairly test the relative capacity and fitness of the persons examined to discharge the duties of the service into which they seek to be appointed.

Second, that all the offices, places, and employments so arranged or to be arranged in classes shall be filled by selections according to grade from among those graded highest

as the results of such competitive examinations.

Third, appointments to the public service aforesaid in the departments at Washington shall be apportioned among the several States and Territories and the District of Columbia upon the basis of population as ascertained at the last preceding census. . . .

Fifth, that no person in the public service is for that reason under any obligations to contribute to any political fund, or to render any political service, and that he will not be removed or otherwise prejudiced for refusing to do so.

Sixth, that no person in said service has any right to use his official authority or influence to coerce the political action of any person or body. . . .

Sec. 11. That no Senator, or Representative, or Territorial Delegate of the Congress, or Senator, Representative, or Delegate elect, or any officer or employee of either of said houses, and no executive, judicial, military, or naval officer of the United States, and no clerk or employee of any department, branch or bureau of the executive, judicial, or military or naval service of the United States, shall, directly, or indirectly, solicit or receive, or be in any manner concerned in soliciting or receiving, any assessment, subscription, or contribution for any political purpose whatever, from any officer, clerk, or employee of the United States, or any department, branch, or bureau thereof, or from any person receiving any salary or compensation from moneys derived from the Treasury of the United States . . .

### **Document Analysis**

1. Examine the “Fifth” and “Sixth” paragraphs. What are these stipulations meant to deter? How do they differ from the stipulations in Section 11?
2. Under this new system, how would a job candidate obtain a public service position?
3. Do you know anyone who works for the federal government? If so, how did this person obtain her or his job?