

# TURMOIL



NCNW Advocacy & Policy

## ***REALITY CHECK ON THE TURMOIL***

*by Dr. Ja'Lia Taylor, NCNW Director of Policy, Telecommunications & Technology*

*Welcome to what NCNW calls “Turmoil - Reality Check.” With all the developments coming from the three branches of government, one can often feel they are in “a state of great disturbance, confusion, or uncertainty” = TURMOIL. We understand you need to know what is really going on, rooted in facts and reality, so that you can be informed and ready for action. NCNW is prepared to give it to you as it happens.*

### **WE SALUTE YOU, THE HONORABLE ALEXIS M. HERMAN!**

NCNW deeply mourns the passing of the 23rd U.S. Secretary of Labor, Alexis M. Herman, a strategist and faithful servant-leader. “Our hearts are heavy from this loss. Sec. Herman provided guidance, poise, and expertise to all who had the opportunity to work with her,” said NCNW National Board Chair Dr. A. Lois Keith. NCNW President and CEO Shavon Arline-Bradley shared, “A master strategist and pioneer in corporate governance, Sec. Herman empowered generations of Black women and stood firm in her commitment to economic justice, intergenerational leadership, and organizational excellence.” As the first African American to serve as Secretary of Labor, appointed by President Bill Clinton, and a proud member of NCNW and NCNW Affiliate organization, Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc., Sec. Herman’s legacy is etched into the fabric of our mission. From her mentorship under Dr. Dorothy I. Height to her service as a national leader, we honor her life, leadership, and lasting impact. REST IN POWER!

### **CONGRESS**

Let us start with what is happening on Capitol Hill. Congress has been out of session for the past two weeks, but both the House and Senate will return Monday, April 28, 2025. Lawmakers will resume hearings and legislative business that will likely intersect with recent executive orders, national debates and the budget talks. On the Senate side, the

Veterans' Affairs, Intelligence, Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry Committees are all scheduled to meet. In the House, the committees on Veterans' Affairs, Financial Services, Oversight and Government Reform, Appropriations, Natural Resources, Foreign Affairs, and House Administration will hold hearings and briefings. These committees set the agenda for how Congress responds to what the White House is doing. The timing matters, especially given the four executive orders we are tracking closely this week.

## **WHITE HOUSE DEVELOPMENTS**

Over the past few weeks, President Trump has signed four executive orders that directly impact civil rights enforcement, student protections, public service benefits, and Historically Black Colleges and Universities. Though the language in these orders may sound neutral, the consequences are far-reaching and deeply political. Here is what each order does, why it matters, and how you can respond.

### **Executive Order Updates**

*Executive Order on Restoring Public Service Loan Forgiveness*  
*Issued March 7, 2025*

This executive order changes who qualifies for student loan forgiveness under the Public Service Loan Forgiveness (PSLF) program, which was originally created in 2007 to encourage public service by offering student loan relief after 10 years of service and payments. The order now disqualifies people working at organizations the administration identifies as having a “substantial illegal purpose,” including many nonprofit groups. These include organizations that provide immigration assistance, LGBTQ+ services, or legal advocacy related to protests or civil rights, particularly those viewed as supporting political causes that challenge the present administration's priorities.

The order directs the Department of Education to revise the federal regulation that defines public service under PSLF. Agencies are now instructed to deny forgiveness to employees of groups that are accused of violating immigration laws, supporting “domestic extremism,” or engaging in other broadly defined actions that the present administration considers harmful to national security or traditional values.

### **Why this matters**

This order limits who is considered a public servant based on the perceived politics of their employer, not their work. It punishes individuals who have dedicated their careers to helping underserved communities, many of whom are Black and brown professionals in civil rights, immigration, and nonprofit health care.

### **What you can do**

- Follow updates from the Department of Education as PSLF regulations are revised
- Contact your elected representatives and advocate for a nonpartisan PSLF program
- Share your story with us if you work in public service and are at risk of losing PSLF benefits

### *Executive Order on Reinstating Common Sense School Discipline Policies Issued April 23, 2025*

This executive order directs the Department of Education to withdraw federal guidance encouraging schools to review and reduce racial disparities in student discipline. It claims that equity-based discipline policies have made schools more dangerous by limiting administrators' ability to enforce strict discipline. The administration asserts that schools have allowed disruptive students to remain in classrooms in order to avoid appearing racially biased, and that this approach has reduced academic achievement and safety.

The order also calls for a government-wide review of any nonprofit organization or federally funded education programs that incorporate equity-based or race-conscious behavior management strategies. It instructs federal agencies to withdraw support from programs that promote what it calls “discriminatory equity ideology.”

### **Why this matters**

Black students are already more likely than their white peers to be suspended, expelled, or referred to law enforcement, even for the same behaviors. This order removes safeguards that were in place to monitor and address those disparities. By doing so, it allows racial bias to continue without accountability and creates a school environment where discipline may once again reflect systemic inequality rather than student behavior alone.

### **What you can do**

- Talk to your local school board about how discipline is handled in your district
- Advocate for transparency and equity in classroom management policies
- Support educators and organizations that prioritize fair and culturally responsive discipline

### *Executive Order on Restoring Equality of Opportunity and Meritocracy Issued April 23, 2025*

This executive order instructs federal agencies to stop using disparate impact as a way to enforce civil rights protections. Disparate impact means that even if a policy looks neutral, it can still be discriminatory if it causes unequal outcomes for certain groups and is not truly necessary for the job.

Legal protection in utilizing disparate impact to enforce civil rights protections is rooted in the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and was affirmed by the Supreme Court in *Griggs v. Duke Power Co.* in 1971. That case showed how companies were using policies like unnecessary education or test requirements that excluded Black workers, even when those requirements had nothing to do with the actual job. Congress later strengthened this standard in the Civil Rights Act of 1991, which made it clear that if a policy has a negative impact on a protected group, employers must prove it is required for business or job performance.

This specific executive order says that using disparate impact goes against the idea of fairness and merit. It also directs the Attorney General to look into whether the federal government can override state laws that still use it. But this principle has never been about lowering standards. It has always been about making sure the standards being used are fair and actually related to the job.

### **Why this matters**

Without disparate impact protections, companies and institutions can use policies that seem fair on paper but in reality keep people of color, women, and other protected groups out of opportunities. This is a serious rollback of civil rights protections and ignores decades of progress that Congress already put into law.

### **What you can do**

- Talk with others in your community about how this change could affect hiring, housing, and education
- Call your members of Congress and ask them to defend civil rights enforcement
- Support advocacy and legal organizations that are pushing back in court

*Executive Order on the White House Initiative to Promote Excellence and Innovation at Historically Black Colleges and Universities*

*Issued April 23, 2025*

This executive order replaces the Biden Administration's 2021 order on HBCUs and removes any mention of racial equity, systemic injustice, or historical underfunding. It instead reframes federal support for HBCUs as a workforce development effort, aligning these institutions with private sector needs in areas like manufacturing, national defense, and finance. While it retains a White House initiative on HBCUs and promises to coordinate across federal agencies, it eliminates references to reparative policies and community-based equity efforts.

The order also disbands the Environmental Protection Agency's HBCU and Advisory Council, which was supporting environmental justice work on Black college campuses, and ends coordinated federal work on building pipelines for students to attend HBCU's, broadband equity, and sustainability support for HBCUs.

### **Why this matters**

HBCUs are more than workforce engines. They are cultural institutions, community anchors, and spaces of Black scholarship, leadership, and resilience. Stripping out equity and justice language ignores the historic harm caused by federal and state neglect. The emphasis on corporate partnership over federal investment signals a shift toward privatization and performance over cultural preservation.

### **What you can do**

- Support your local HBCU with advocacy and direct donations
- Encourage Congress and state legislatures to invest equitably in HBCUs
- Share your story as an HBCU alumni and speak out against the erasure of racial justice goals in education policy

These four executive orders do not reflect progress. They reflect political ideology and a fundamental shift away from justice and equity. They undermine civil rights enforcement, silence public service workers, strip student protections, and redefine HBCUs by removing the context of racial exclusion that made them necessary.

### **State of the People Tour**

The [State of the People POWER Tour, April 24 – June 15, 2025](#), is a nationwide, people-powered campaign designed to rally, restore, and reimagine what's possible for Black communities across the country. This isn't just a series of events—it's a movement rooted in healing, empowerment, and mobilization. The first phase includes 10 stops across key U.S. cities, where we will amplify local voices, provide tangible support, and build momentum toward a national Black agenda.

The POWER Tour will bring together grassroots organizers, local Juneteenth leaders, creatives, educators, faith leaders, and everyday residents to listen, serve, and act. It's about showing up where our people are—and staying connected. NCNW is a committed partner, and we ask our members to serve as volunteers. Show the influence of our #purplepower!

### **Tour Dates/Locations**

April 26 - 27 in Atlanta, GA

April 29 - 30 in Raleigh-Durham, NC

May 2 – 3 in Montgomery, AL

## 6 – Reality Check – Turmoil – April 25, 2025

May 5 – 8 in New Orleans, LA

May 13 – 14 in Newark, NJ

May 16 – 17 in Richmond, VA

May 21 – 22 in Detroit, MI

May 30 – 31 in Jackson, MS

June 2 – 3 in Louisville, KY

June 5 – 6 in Altadena, CA

### **Freedom to Learn Week**

NCNW, in partnership with the African American Policy Forum, ask you to participate in the Freedom to Learn 2025 National Week of Action, April 27-May 4. In this moment, we need our history, our frameworks, and our allies more than ever. We should be clear that these efforts are intentional: our opponents are trying to erase Black history, Black voices, and Black lives. As a result, they are undermining democracy. Now is the time to show the public that we must stand up for civil rights, for the accurate accounting of history, for our books, our voices, and our lives. Join us in saying #HandsOffOurHistory! To take action this week, visit <https://www.eventbrite.com/cc/f2l-national-week-of-action-4244703>.

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