

TURMOIL



NCNW Advocacy & Policy
REALITY CHECK ON THE TURMOIL

REALITY CHECK FOR THE WEEK ENDING FEB 21, 2025
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Welcome to what NCNW will call “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.

WHITE HOUSE DEVELOPMENTS

The Trump Administration put a two-week timeline on schools and universities to end their diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) practices or lose their federal funding. This comes as the president continues his fight against “wokeness.” The Education Department presented a memo giving schools 14 days to end practices that “treat students and workers differently because of race.” The Trump Administration continues to insist that DEI has contributed to discriminatory practices and not merit based decisions. Despite evidence to the contrary as to who benefits from DEI the most and how it has been beneficial to professional and educational spaces.

In addition, the Trump Administration continues their cuts to spending, specifically this week the funding for the National Institute of Health (NIH). The administration announced a 15% cap on ‘indirect funding’ at the agency. The NIH is the largest funder of scientific research and could result in \$4 billion in cuts to research institutions. This move has resulted in lawsuits that are currently ongoing.

EXECUTIVE ORDERS UPDATE

On February 18, 2025, the current president signed an Executive Order (EO) titled “Ensuring Accountability For All Agencies.” This EO expands the president’s authority over independent federal agencies. This includes the Federal Communications Commission, Security Exchange Commission, and other agencies that are more independent of the president’s authority. The EO claims that this power is constitutionally vested to the president due to his role to carry out the law.

However, there are multiple legal and ethical questions posed by this move. The first is the overreach of presidential authority over independent agencies. These agencies were set up by Congress to be shielded from presidential authority. These agencies are regulatory agencies meaning they address conflicts of interests and violations of regulations across multiple sectors. It is important to note that two agencies were excluded from this order, the Federal Reserve Board of Governors and Open Market Committee. The order calls for the impacted agencies to submit regulatory proposals to the White House giving the president and attorney general sole authority to interpret laws for the executive branch.

This new order has created many concerns around legality and constitutional authority. First, the expansion of the president's power shed light on multiple conflicts of interests. The agencies are meant to be omitted from any partisan agenda and are meant to be under the umbrella of Congress not the president. Furthermore, these agencies are enforcing regulations that impact the business of many individuals within the current president's circle, including Elon Musk, who has 17 federal contracts and 32 federal investigations.

This move comes directly out of the Project 2025 playbook. Russell Vought, the head of the White House Office of Management and Budget, as well as the head of the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau, advocated against the concept of independent agencies in Project 2025. He states, "There are no independent agencies. Congress may have viewed them as such, SEC or the FCC, CFPB, the whole alphabet soup, but that is not something that the Constitution understands."

NEWEST CABINET MEMBERS

Tulsi Gabbard, Director of National Intelligence

Who is Tulsi Gabbard?:

Tulsi Gabbard is a former Representative of Hawaii's 2nd District serving in Congress until 2021. She unsuccessfully ran for President in 2020 as a member of the Democratic Party before joining the Republican Party in 2024. Gabbard endorsed the current president in 2024 before being nominated to be director of national intelligence. Gabbard formerly served as a lieutenant in the National Guard and deployed twice to the Middle East, but she has no prior intelligence experience.

Gabbard has faced controversy over her comments on the Assad regime in Syria, as well as showing sympathy towards Russia following the invasion of Ukraine. Gabbard also has apparent connections to an alleged cult known as the Science of Identity Foundation. This group is led by Chris Butler, a man Gabbard referred to as her "guru" in 2015. The group's leader has often faced criticism for his opposition to same sex marriage. Former members wrote to Congress expressing concern about Gabbard being under the influence of Butler stating that Butler "harbors ambitious political goals." Gabbard was confirmed by the Senate in a 52-48 vote along party lines. Senator Mitch McConnell was the only Republican to vote against her confirmation.

Hearing Highlights:

- Gabbard was called out by Democratic lawmakers for her alleged ties to Russian President Vladimir Putin. Senator Michael Bennet read several comments Gabbard previously made in relation to Russia. This includes a comment Gabbard made stating Putin “had legitimate security concerns” over NATO expansion in Eastern Europe. The Senator also noted that Russian state TV shared her comments and referred to her as “our friend Tulsi.”
- Both parties questioned Gabbard’s position on Edward Snowden, the employee from the National Security Agency who leaked millions of documents alleging the US government was illegally spying on its citizens. Gabbard was questioned about previous statements calling Snowden “brave” and arguments made saying he should be pardoned. Gabbard refused to give a yes or no answer. She then said, “Snowden broke the law” and that “He released information about the United States...I have more immediate steps that I would take to prevent another Snowden.”
- Gabbard was also questioned about her 2017 visit to meet then Syrian President Bashar Al-Assad. The trip occurred shortly after the US called for Al-Assad to step down following attacks on civilians, including chemical weapon attacks. Gabbard stated that she “asked Assad tough questions about his own regime’s actions.” She also stated in her opening remarks that “I have no love for Assad or Gaddafi or any dictator.”

Kash Patel, Director of the Federal Bureau of Investigations (FBI)

Who is Kash Patel?:

Kash Patel is a lawyer and the former chief of staff for the acting US secretary of defense, and then the principal deputy director of national intelligence during the current president’s first term. In 2017, Patel was appointed senior counsel on counterterrorism for the House Intelligence Committee. Patel also worked as a senior aide to Congressman Devin Nunes, where he was instrumental in the investigation into Russian interference in the 2016 election. Patel helped draft the Nunes memo, which alleged falsification of the FBI surveillance warrant of a campaign aide on the current’s president team in his first term. Patel has made many controversial statements about what he would do as head of the FBI, including targeting perceived enemies, such as press and civil servants, as well as revoking the security clearance of civil servants who participated in investigations into the current president. Patel also has falsely accused marginalized groups of wrongdoing and shared debunked conspiracy theories about undocumented people. There are also questions about his close ties to the current president and whether he can maintain the FBI’s non-partisanship. Patel was confirmed as director of the FBI on Feb. 20, 2025, in a 51-49 vote with Republican Senators Collins and Murkowski joining the Democrats in opposing.

Hearing Highlights:

- Patel faced scrutiny for his support of the Jan. 6 rioters. Several Democratic Senators pressed Patel on his connection to the attackers. Senator Dick Durbin asked Patel, “Was President Donald Trump wrong to give blanket clemency to the January 6 defendants?” Patel stated, “I have always rejected any violence against law enforcement, including in that group, any violence against law enforcement on Jan. 6”. However, Patel declined to criticize the current president’s decision to pardon the Capitol attackers on several occasions.

- Patel sought to change his tone on the FBI and appear more moderate. Despite previous comments emphasizing his loyalty to the current president and his scrutiny of the FBI. Patel claimed that his criticisms were noted in public opinion surveys that show declining confidence in the FBI. Patel highlighted addressing violent crime as a priority and stated, “I will remain focused on the FBI’s core mission, that is to investigate fully wherever there is a constitutional basis to do so.”
- Democratic Senators noted that Patel wrote a book called “*Government Gangsters*,” which displayed his theories about the alleged “deep state” targeting the current president. Furthermore, Patel expressed sympathy with the QAnon movement, a conspiracy theory that claims satanists run the highest levels of government, media, and business.

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