



POLITICS

Trump fires two Democratic commissioners of agency that enforces civil rights laws in the workplace



President Donald Trump speaks to reporters aboard Air Force One as he travels from Las Vegas to Miami on Saturday, Jan. 25, 2025. (AP Photo/Mark Schiefelbein)

BY [ALEXANDRA OLSON](#) AND [CLAIRE SAVAGE](#)

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ARLINGTON, Va. (AP) — President [Donald Trump](#) fired two of the three Democratic commissioners of the federal agency that enforces civil rights law in the workplace, an unprecedented move aimed at implementing his [crackdown](#) on certain diversity and gender rights policies.

The two commissioners of the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, Charlotte Burrows and Jocelyn Samuels, confirmed in statements Tuesday that they were fired late Monday night. Both said they were exploring options to challenge their dismissals, calling their removal before the expiration of their five-year terms an [unprecedented decision](#) that undermines the agency's independence.

In a similar move, National Labor Relations Board member Gynne A. Wilcox and General Counsel Jennifer Abruzzo were also fired late last night, the agency confirmed. Wilcox was the first Black woman to serve on the Board since its inception in 1935, according to the NLRB website.

The EEOC was created by Title VII of the 1964 Civil Rights Act as a bipartisan five-member panel to protect workers from discrimination on the basis of race, gender, disability and other protected characteristics. The U.S. president appoints the commissioners and the Senate confirms them, but their terms are staggered and are meant to overlap presidential terms to help ensure the agency's independence.

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The two firings leave the agency with one Republican commissioner, Andrea Lucas, who Trump appointed acting EEOC chair last week, one Democratic commissioner, Kalpana Kotagal, and three vacancies that Trump can fill. Another Republican commissioner, Keith Sonderling, left the EEOC last year when his term expired and was nominated earlier this month to be deputy labor secretary.

The EEOC panel investigates and imposes penalties on employers found to have violated laws that protect workers from racial, gender, disability and other forms of discrimination. The agency also writes influential rules and guidelines for how anti-discrimination laws should be implemented, and conducts workplace outreach and training.

In recent years, the agency's Democratic and Republican commissioners have been sharply divided on many issues. Both Republican commissioners voted against new guidelines last year stating that misgendering transgender employees, or denying access to a bathroom consistent with their gender identity, would violate anti-discrimination laws. The Republican commissioners also voted against regulations stating that employers must give workers time off and other accommodations for abortions under the [new Pregnant Workers Fairness Act](#).

The firing of Burrows and Samuels appears aimed at positioning the EEOC to aggressively crack down on employers with diversity, equity and inclusion — or DEI — policies that the Trump administration believes veer into discrimination in their attempts to support racial minorities, women and other groups.

Lucas, the new acting EEOC chair, issued a statement last week saying that she would prioritize "rooting out unlawful DEI-motivated race and sex discrimination; protecting American workers from anti-American national origin discrimination; defending the biological and binary reality of sex and related rights, including women's rights to single-sex spaces at work."

The three Democratic commissioners in contrast all issued statements last week condemning a slew of executive orders aimed at [ending DEI practices](#) in the federal workforce and private companies, along with protections for transgender workers. Their statements also emphasized that U.S. anti-discrimination laws remained intact despite Trump's orders and that the EEOC must continue enforcing them.

Burrows, who has been an EEOC commissioner since 2015, said in her statement Tuesday that the dismissal of two Democratic commissioners before their terms ended "undermine the efforts of this independent agency to do the important work of protecting employees from discrimination, supporting employers' compliance efforts, and expanding public awareness and understanding of

federal employment laws."

Samuels, who was appointed by Trump in 2020, said her removal "violates the law, and represents a fundamental misunderstanding of the nature of the EEOC as an independent agency – one that is not controlled by a single Cabinet secretary but operates as a multi-member body whose varying views are baked into the Commission's design."

This story corrects that Keith Sonderling left the EEOC before Trump nominated him as deputy labor secretary, not after.

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ALEXANDRA OLSON

Olson is a business reporter for The Associated Press, focusing on women in the workplace. She has spent many years as a correspondent in Latin America.



CLAIRE SAVAGE

Savage is a national reporter for the AP's Business team. She covers women in the workforce and is based in Chicago.



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