

The Worm Turns: House, Senate Investigate TSA Surveillance of Tulsi Gabbard

Substack : 6-7 minutes



Two weeks ago, former presidential candidate Tulsi Gabbard [found out](#) she'd been placed on the TSA's "[Quiet Skies](#)" watch list, and put under "Special Mission Coverage" surveillance by Federal Air Marshals. A Lieutenant Colonel in the Army Reserves who enlisted and served in Iraq after 9/11, Gabbard was almost speechless at reports of her placement on a terror list. She felt "the deepest sense of betrayal," [she said](#), adding: "It cuts to the core."

Since then, multiple Air Marshals came forward as whistleblowers and their firm, [Empower Oversight](#), sent [letters](#) to eight House and Senate Committees of jurisdiction. Each was asked to "get to the bottom" of why Gabbard was surveilled and look into Quiet Skies more generally. Today, *Racket* learned members of at least three of those Committees decided to investigate, giving deadlines to Transportation Security Administrator David Pekoske to answer a range of queries, and not just about Gabbard.

Gabbard herself also just heard from the Department of Homeland Security in response to a [Traveler Redress Inquiry Program](#) (TRIP) report she completed back on July 31st. The letter doesn't confirm or deny that Gabbard was ever on a list, but does say "corrections" were made that may assist in avoiding "misidentification" errors in the future. As the Department wrote:

DHS TRIP can neither confirm nor deny any information about you which may be within federal watchlists... However, we have made any corrections to records that our inquiries determined were necessary, including, as appropriate, notations that may assist in avoiding incidents of misidentification.

As for congress, at least one House Committee chair and two influential Senators reached out to the TSA in search of information about how programs like Quiet Skies work, how many whistleblower complaints have been filed, who's been surveilled and why, and what agencies partner with TSA in making watch list designations.

Ohio congressman and House Judiciary Committee chair Jim Jordan's Weaponization of Government Committee gave Pecoske until 5:00 pm on September 4th to answer a series of requests, [demanding production of](#):

*All documents and communications between and among TSA or other executive branch agencies or officials referring or relating to surveillance of former Representative Tulsi Gabbard **or other federal elected or appointed officials** for the period January 20, 2021, to the present.*

As the ranking member of the Senate's Homeland Security Committee, Kentucky's Rand Paul also sent a letter out today to Pecoske with a detailed list of requests. Notably, Paul is seeking:

- *"All documentation and internal communications related to the process for determining whether an individual is designated as a 'domestic terrorist' or subjected to [Special Mission Coverage] under the Quiet Skies program";*
- *"All documentation, internal communications, and records related to the inclusion of former U.S. Representative Tulsi Gabbard in the Quiet Skies program, including the criteria used to justify her surveillance";*
- *"Comprehensive data on the number of individuals placed on each TSA-managed list, including the Quiet Skies program," and;*
- *"Detailed accounts of any incidents where TSA or [Federal Air Marshal Service] resources were diverted from high-risk international missions... to conduct surveillance on individuals wrongfully classified as 'domestic terrorists.'"*

Lastly, Iowa Senator and Ranking Member of the Budget Committee Chuck Grassley sent a [letter](#) of his own, demanding Pecoske "name all TSA employees who were provided information obtained through surveillance of Lt. Col. Gabbard" while explaining if "that information shared outside TSA" and "if so, which agencies?"

Grassley also asked why a decision was "made to include Lt. Col. Gabbard's congressional portrait in the TSA database," rather than her passport photo or other government ID as usual. Grassley also asked for a broad explanation for the use of resources given an apparent total lack of investigative results:

TSA must explain why it's using taxpayer resources in this manner at a time when the FBI has stated that threats from international terrorism, domestic terrorism, and state-sponsored terrorism are all simultaneously elevated... The [\[Air Marshal National Council\]](#) has also disclosed that the

TSA is, “improperly classifying innocent Americans as ‘Domestic Terrorists’ on internal TSA/FAMS databases and watchlists,” and that, “[m]ost of these classifications occur in the absence of any investigation or even any follow up....”



SENATE INTEREST: Iowa’s Chuck Grassley (left) and Kentucky’s Rand Paul sent detailed requests to the TSA

The story of Gabbard’s surveillance was first broken by [Uncover DC](#) on August 4th. When multiple Air Marshals signed up as clients of the high-profile firm Empower Oversight, more details came out. Over the weekend, Empower president Tristan Leavitt [tweeted](#) a screenshot from the internal TSA system, appearing to show Gabbard was placed under surveillance by virtue of her inclusion in the Quiet Skies program, which is listed as the “requestor” of Special Mission Coverage:

SMC Display ☰

Status Operational

SMC # ✎ 24-023680



AAR Report



SMC Date 07/26/2024

Requestor Quiet Skies
SAC MIA Daily Ops

SUBJECT(S) INFO • GABBARD, TULSI (F) -
04/12/1981
QUIET SKIES

SMC Issue N/A

FAM  

Subject  

The TSA has gone mostly uninvestigated since 2018, but the miserable accident of a Quiet Skies designation for a prominent national politician with a [history of criticism](#) of the Biden/Harris administration provided incentive for Congress to take an interest. For those in and around the Air Marshal Service who've long been waiting for a thorough outside investigation of the TSA, this misfortune can mean a rare opportunity. Readers can help by continuing to share details of the bizarre surveillance tale as far and wide as possible. "They may only screw up this badly once," is how one former Marshal put it to me last week.

More to come, as congressional inquiries are answered.