CLIENT ALERTS & INSIGHTS

Trump's Labor Board Power Play: Firings, Fallout, and Legal Firestorms

JANUARY 29, 2025

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President Donald Trump has expectedly fired Jennifer Abruzzo, the general counsel of the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB), and unexpectedly fired Gwynne Wilcox, one of the board's two Democratic members. The firings mark a dramatic overhaul of the labor board and have ignited debate over the limits of presidential authority. Wilcox, the first Black woman to serve on the board, criticized the move as "unprecedented and illegal," citing long-standing Supreme Court precedent protecting NLRB members from at-will dismissal without cause. Abruzzo's firing was anticipated, following President Biden's then-unprecedented removal of NLRB GC Peter Robb in 2021. Abruzzo and Wilcox were instrumental in the NLRB's extreme pro-union shift that included attacks on settlement agreements, noncompete clauses, and mandatory anti-union meetings (known as captive audience meetings).

The firings raise significant questions about the future of the NLRB and its ability to function. With Wilcox's departure, the now two-member Board lacks the quorum required to issue decisions, halting its operations. Trump's actions also set the stage for a legal battle over the extent of presidential power, with Wilcox vowing to challenge her removal in court. As Trump prepares to install a more business-friendly labor board, the implications for workplace protections and unionization efforts could be profound, signaling a sharp shift in labor policy under the new administration. In the meantime, the door closes on the Biden-era NLRB before further union-friendly actions are taken.

The dismissals signal the coming of a more business-friendly era at the National Labor Relations Board, much to the relief of employers. With Trump poised to appoint new leadership, companies can expect a rollback of Biden-era labor policies that expanded worker protections and strengthened unionization efforts. Abruzzo's aggressive enforcement against noncompete clauses, mandatory anti-union meetings, and misclassification of workers as independent contractors had drawn sharp criticism from business groups. Her departure opens the door for the NLRB to take a less adversarial approach toward employers and return to many long-standing precedents in place prior to President Biden's administration, which will reduce regulatory scrutiny on workplace practices and grant businesses greater flexibility in managing their operations and workforce.

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