

BILL PULTE

President Trump has installed a loyalist, Bill Pulte, as the Acting Director of National Intelligence.

He has zero national security experience. He has worked with the private sector and in real estate. He has never had a security clearance before this job. He has never handled classified information before this job. And now, today, at this moment, he heads up 18 different intelligence Agencies in the United States.

He used to be the head of Federal Housing—that was his job given by President Trump—and he demonstrated his character at that job. He used Housing records—private Housing records—to go after President Trump's enemies. Just think of what is possible with him at the top of our intelligence community.

Now, President Trump placed him there to do two things: One, to focus on politicizing our elections; and, secondly, to use the intelligence community for the goals he has because he is obsessed with meddling with both.

You just have to use President Trump's own words to understand the story here. This isn't hyperbole. At the State of the Union, President Trump declared that the only way Democrats could win in the midterms is if they cheat. Just weeks earlier, he called for Republicans to "nationalize" elections in 15 states.

This year alone, he has repeated claims that the elections are rigged more than 100 times. Those words have been backed up by action. He has attempted to seize ballots in Georgia, my home State of Michigan, and Arizona. He has sued 30 States in total for their voter rolls.

He has pushed Congress over and over again to pass the SAVE America Act, which would disenfranchise millions of voters across the country.

He dismantled the Election Assistance Commission, which helps every State carry out their elections.

He has pushed the postal service to restrict mail-in voting.

He has refused to rule out sending U.S. uniformed troops or law enforcement to the polls to interfere in the elections come November.

And he has pressed the Supreme Court to go after and gut parts of the Voting Rights Act, allowing States to silence the voters, particularly minority voters.

Second, he has tried to weaponize our intelligence community. He has declassified information to support false claims about elections and sow doubt in our democracy. He has directed the CIA, the NSA, and other intelligence Agencies to target his enemies. He has created a weaponization working group to implement that order. And he has sent the former Director of National Intelligence Tulsi Gabbard to raid ballots in Fulton County, GA; something that the intelligence community has no business doing.

Now, President Trump is giving a speech tonight. Bill Pulte is now at the

center of this. President Trump was very open; he tweeted about putting him in this job specifically to use the intelligence community's power to support his false claims.

Tonight, in the President's address to the Nation, he is expected to say how, again, our elections are being rigged and attempt to cherry-pick intelligence to declassify.

But let us remember: Whatever he brings up, President Trump's team already saw what happened in 2020. He was the President of the United States during those elections. If his intelligence community at that time saw information, looked it over, and then decided that the election wasn't rigged, that was because that was what was presented to them as factual.

You are telling me that the President now, all these years later, wants to relitigate what he was in charge of in 2020, and choosing to do it 3 months before the midterm elections. Call me skeptical.

And all of this is happening as Bill Pulte is right there as our Acting DNI.

Tulsi Gabbard going down to Georgia was not enough to soothe the President. Bill Pulte is now his yes-man to do just that. He has gone from being unqualified for this role to dangerous to democracy.

With the bill, we will ensure that people who serve as the Acting Director of National Intelligence actually have some national security experience needed to do this job, they treat it responsibly, not on behalf of one party, not on behalf of one man but on behalf of Americans, to keep us safe. That is the mandate of the intelligence community. It is what we were trained to do—and I say that as a CIA officer—and this President is corrupting that with his choice as DNI.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Washington.

MEDICARE

Ms. CANTWELL. Mr. President, today, we are faced with a critical choice here in the U.S. Senate and across the country about the future of traditional Medicare.

We had an opportunity to protect Medicare, the thing that seniors care about most, and they wanted to hear from us that we were going to do that. I am not sure that is what transpired.

People don't want to have corporations or insurance companies tell them about traditional Medicare. They want that relationship to be about the doctor-patient relationship.

If you are on Medicare, you go to your doctor; you ask them what he thinks should be done; he basically tells you; and then you receive your Medicare treatment.

Well, Medicare is a promise. And that promise is made when we pay into that, as taxpayers, and we expect to get the care that we need.

But in this case, there are those in the Trump administration who are trying to change that obligation. Instead

of having your doctor tell you what you need, they are trying to push an AI-driven software program that will tell you in advance—in advance—you don't even get that treatment.

So, instead of relying on your doctor's advice, instead they are telling you, you do not get to hear what the doctor ordered.

This is very troubling because this might be the way private insurance works; and many Americans know what it is like to be on the phone with an insurance company telling you they are going to deny your benefits. But they certainly don't, for traditional Medicare, want an AI app telling you in advance you don't even get the Medicare that you have paid into.

More than 700,000 Washingtonians and 28 million Americans have chosen the Medicare program because they want their healthcare decisions made by their doctor. If they don't, you can choose Medicare Advantage. Medicare Advantage is different.

But on January 1 of this year, the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services launched an application—driven by AI—euphemistically called the Wasteful and Inappropriate Services Reduction Model, known as WISeR.

WISeR is an AI-driven prior authorization program being piloted in six states: Arizona, New Jersey, Ohio, Oklahoma, Texas, and in my home State of Washington.

This model inserts a black box computer algorithm into the decisions that should be being made by a physician and the patient. It puts a layer of bureaucracy between seniors and the care their doctors have recommended.

In April, with the help of the Washington State Hospital Association, my office released a report examining the impacts of this application on seniors in my State. What we found was deeply troubling.

Washington patients are waiting up to four times longer to complete procedures covered by this model. Procedures that took approximately 2 weeks to get taken care of are now taking months.

In Washington alone, more than 18,600 people receive services now subject to this WISeR, and people in the Nation, it is about 1.1 million. That is 1.1 million people who could face delays or denials for care.

Michael Edgerly is a 78-year-old from Cle Elum in Washington, who spent 22 years serving his community as a mail carrier. He left his job with scoliosis and degenerative joint disease. His neurosurgeon recommended a nonopioid—a nonopioid—treatment, an epidural steroid injection, to manage this serious and severe chronic pain.

But what did the AI app WISeR tell him? Nope. System delayed.

He went on for weeks and weeks living in constant pain, which a doctor—if he was talking to a doctor—would have just said: I approve this treatment.

But, no, he was forced into an AI app approval process that took longer and longer and longer to get this coverage.

Another constituent Keith Magnuson of Seattle who used to be an extremely active man who could regularly walk 6 miles a day, now, because of a lumbar spinal stenosis, he can barely walk 100 yards without severe pain. His doctor recommended a minimally invasive procedure called MILD which is commonly used by physicians covered by Medicare. But, again, the WISer model put in his treatment and said it was denied.

As a result, this once-active man had to significantly scale back even his daily life all because of an AI model telling him he was denied.

Michael and Keith are not isolated cases. At the University of Washington Medical Center alone, our report found that more than 100 patients were waiting for similar approvals.

What makes this even more concerning is that many of the procedures included in the WISer model are nonopioid pain treatments. That means we are trying to get off of the opioids, not prescribe them. There are alternatives. But this AI model for Medicare, even though your doctor might have said otherwise, “go ahead and do it,” is now denying you or taking weeks and weeks and weeks and weeks to get you the approval.

These treatments provide patients with critical alternatives to addictive medicines, and we need to continue to get them to our constituents.

In a time when our country continues to face an opioid crisis with more than 50,000 overdose deaths annually, we should be making it easier for patients to access these nonopioid treatments, and we should not enable a system where contractors have financial incentives to delay or deny care. That is not efficiency.

These concerns are not just coming from me; they are coming from seniors, physicians, and healthcare organizations. Organizations like AARP and the American Medical Association have warned that the impact of this program on aging Americans is real.

I am hearing every day from my patients, from patients in my State—including the two I mentioned—who have been negatively impacted by this WISer model.

I brought this up at an important Senate Finance Committee with the Secretary of HHS and have said: This has to stop.

I do believe AI has enormous potential to improve in healthcare and healthcare research. I do think it is going to help us find some new things. But technology should not be used today, on programs that are guaranteed for our citizens, to now be interrupted and delayed by an AI model instead of allowing them to talk to their doctor.

Again, private insurance can do whatever it wants. Medicare Advantage can do whatever it wants. But traditional Medicare should not be subject to an AI model denying people things that the doctor wants to order.

There is nothing, in my mind, innovative about using a computer to tell seniors they can't get the care their doctors prescribe. Unfortunately, this model that is now in six States is being tested, but the administration has made it clear it expects to expand this nationwide.

If you don't represent a State where it is being deployed, I encourage you to get up to speed on this. The Senate, in this last vote, just had a chance to stop it, but we didn't. So I am asking my colleagues to please get educated on how devastating this can be for individual lives and ask yourselves if you believe in traditional Medicare and the doctor-patient relationship. If you do, I guarantee you we will force this administration to stop using this AI tool to deny care for our seniors.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. BUDD). The majority leader.

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to the consideration of the following nominations en bloc: Calendar No. 718, Calendar No. 783 through Calendar No. 812 and all nominations on the Secretary's desk in the Space Force, Air Force, with the exception of PN970-2; Army, with the exception of PN1061, Theresa M. Long; PN1015, Mark R. Berube and Mandi A. Samples; PN1017, Joel A. Arends and Michael D. Thompson; PN1072, Phillip T. Buckler; PN1065, Samuel A. Smith; Marine Corps, with the exception of PN681-4; Navy, with the exception of PN835; PN925, PN990, Robert J. Moreno and Joshua Q. McCright; and PN1029, Kelly Cruz; that the nominations be confirmed en bloc, the motions to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table with no intervening action or debate; that no further motions be in order to any of the nominations; that the President be immediately notified of the Senate's action.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is ordered.

The nominations considered and confirmed are as follows:

IN THE MARINE CORPS

The following named officers for appointment in the United States Marine Corps to the grade indicated while assigned to a position of importance and responsibility under title 10, U.S.C., section 601:

To be lieutenant general

Lt. Gen. Calvert L. Worth, Jr.

IN THE ARMY

The following named officer for appointment in the United States Army to the grade indicated under title 10, U.S.C., section 624:

To be major general

Brig. Gen. Jason B. Nicholson

IN THE AIR FORCE

The following named officer for appointment in the United States Air Force to the grade indicated under title 10, U.S.C., section 624:

To be brigadier general

Col. Scott C. Mills

IN THE ARMY

The following named officer for appointment in the Reserve of the Army to the grade indicated under title 10, U.S.C., section 12203:

To be major general

Brig. Gen. Mark W. Siekman

IN THE AIR FORCE

The following named officer for appointment in the United States Air Force to the grade indicated while assigned to a position of importance and responsibility under title 10, U.S.C., section 601:

To be lieutenant general

Maj. Gen. Paul D. Moga

The following named officers for appointment in the Reserve of the Air Force to the grade indicated under title 10, U.S.C., section 12203:

To be brigadier general

Col. Bryan M. Bailey
Col. Gregory B. Berry
Col. Robert M. Degregorio
Col. Brandon M. Douglass
Col. James S. Doyle
Col. Daniel J. Ebrecht
Col. Kyle H. Goldstein
Col. Jason M. Grandy
Col. Jesse L. Hamilton
Col. Benjamin R. Harrison
Col. Brandon M. Kelly
Col. Rodney E. McCraine
Col. Nicci S. Rucker
Col. Kristine B. Smith
Col. Roland C. Tsui
Col. Sheila W. Wilds

IN THE ARMY

The following named officer for appointment in the United States Army to the grade indicated under title 10, U.S.C., section 624:

To be brigadier general

Col. John W. Sannes

The following named Army National Guard of the United States officers for appointment in the Reserve of the Army to the grade indicated under title 10, U.S.C., sections 12203 and 12211:

To be brigadier general

Col. Michael D. Armstrong
Col. Jason S. Baker
Col. Timothy C. Baldwin
Col. Dennis A. Bickett
Col. Jeffrey M. Bilodeau
Col. William L. Blanco
Col. Olen C. Bridges
Col. Matthew D. Calton
Col. Maxime C. Casteleyn
Col. Thomas P. Compitello
Col. Jeffrey R. Cree
Col. David E. Crenshaw
Col. Adam M. Curry
Col. Chad W. Daniels
Col. Anthony W. Dennis
Col. Kristin L. Derda
Col. Russel K. Des Jardins
Col. Michele D. Edwards
Col. Matthew J. Elder
Col. Ian L. Fawks
Col. Todd A. Fitzpatrick
Col. Bradley M. Frank
Col. Todd R. Fredricks
Col. Brett J. Gagnon
Col. Peter G. Garver
Col. Russell W. Gibson
Col. Paul C. Gravely
Col. Michael J. Grzybowski
Col. Stephen T. Guertin
Col. Christopher M. Guilmette
Col. Willus B. Hall
Col. William B. Hanna
Col. Russel M. Harden
Col. Louis P. Hawkins, Jr.
Col. David M. Helfrich