



CITIZENS FOR  
RESPONSIBILITY &  
ETHICS IN WASHINGTON

February 24, 2026

The Honorable Sarah E. Lake  
Assistant Inspector General  
U.S. Department of Justice  
Office of the Inspector General, Investigations Division  
950 Pennsylvania Ave., NW  
Washington, DC 20530

Re: Potential travel and ethics violations related to FBI Director Kash Patel's travel to and attendance at the Milan Olympics men's hockey competition

Dear Assistant Inspector General Lake,

Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington (“CREW”) respectfully requests that the U.S. Department of Justice’s Office of Inspector General (“DOJ OIG”) investigate potential violations of federal travel rules, the Standards of Ethical Conduct for Executive Branch Employees and any other relevant violations of federal law related to FBI Director Kash Patel’s appearance at the 2026 Olympics in Milan, Italy. Director Patel was photographed attending the medal round of the men’s hockey competition and drinking with the team afterward, following claims by his office’s spokesperson that the trip was official and meant for coordinating with Italian law enforcement. Given the conflicting reports on the nature of this trip, we urge your office to investigate the circumstances of the director’s trip, including whether the arrangements and approval of the travel complied with agency protocol, whether Director Patel received any gifts during the course of his travel and attendance at the Olympics and whether any personal expenses that were incurred by the agency from Director Patel’s personal activities during the trip are properly reimbursed.

**I. Factual Background: On a trip originally justified as official, Director Patel used government aircraft to travel to Milan, Italy, coinciding with his desire to attend the Olympics to watch the U.S. men’s hockey team.**

Director Patel reportedly used a government jet to fly to Milan where he then attended the final round of the Olympics hockey competition.<sup>1</sup> Director Patel arrived on Thursday evening, February 19, with the men’s play-off and medal rounds of the Olympic

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<sup>1</sup> Sarah N. Lynch & Daniel Klaidman, *FBI Director Kash Patel Takes Agency Jet to Italy, Plans to Attend Olympic Hockey Games, Sources Say*, CBS News (Feb. 20, 2026), <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/fbi-director-kash-patel-ice-hockey-flies-agency-jet-to-olympic-hockey-finals-italy/>.

hockey scheduled for Friday, February 20 through Sunday, February 22.<sup>2</sup> The FBI gave conflicting accounts related to the purpose, planning and details of the trip. He was reportedly scheduled to participate in meetings with law enforcement counterparts, and FBI spokesperson Ben Williamson originally stated that the trip was “not a personal trip” and that it “was planned months ago.”<sup>3</sup> Notably, though, Director Patel posted a message on his personal X account last July, apparently unrelated to official FBI business, expressing excitement that NHL players would be allowed to play in the 2026 Olympics and stating, “Team USA, I’ll see you there.”<sup>4</sup> Williamson later clarified to the media that “Patel was in Italy on official business and would reimburse the government for any personal use of FBI resources.”<sup>5</sup>



On Sunday, February 22, Director Patel attended the final men’s hockey game during his trip, appearing in the crowd and later appearing to celebrate with the players on the U.S. Olympic Team in the locker room. He issued multiple posts on his personal social media account about the game and documented his participation in the celebrations,<sup>6</sup> which he then reposted on his official account.<sup>7</sup> Patel can be seen in social media video footage,<sup>8</sup> appearing to chug beer and then spraying its remaining contents on the players.<sup>9</sup> Patel’s personal interest in hockey has crossed over to his role as FBI director several times in his short tenure, having used the FBI’s aircraft to attend other hockey games multiple times before.<sup>10</sup> Likewise, he reportedly has used government aircraft to travel to a wrestling event where his girlfriend was performing and possibly used the jet to fly her back to her hometown afterward.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>2</sup> *Schedule & Results Ice Hockey, Milano Cortina 2026*  
<https://www.olympics.com/en/milano-cortina-2026/schedule/iho>.

<sup>3</sup> See note 1.

<sup>4</sup> Kash Patel (@Kash\_Patel), X (Jul. 3, 2025, at 4:28 AM),  
[https://x.com/Kash\\_Patel/status/1940689160656114026](https://x.com/Kash_Patel/status/1940689160656114026).

<sup>5</sup> *FBI’s Patel Defends Beer-Soaked Olympic Celebration While on Italy Trip*, Reuters (Feb. 23, 2026),  
<https://www.reuters.com/world/fbis-patel-defends-beer-soaked-olympic-celebration-while-italy-trip-2026-02-23/>.

<sup>6</sup> Kash Patel (@Kash\_Patel), X, [https://x.com/Kash\\_Patel](https://x.com/Kash_Patel).

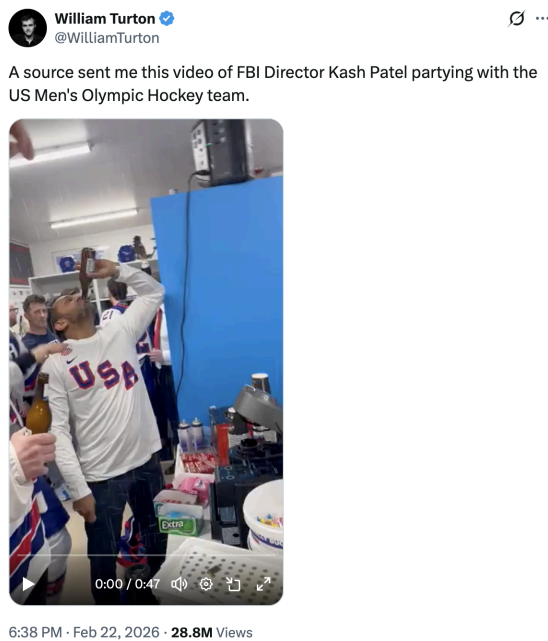
<sup>7</sup> FBI Director Kash Patel (@FBI DirectorKash), X, <https://x.com/FBI DirectorKash?lang=en>.

<sup>8</sup> William Turton (@WilliamTurton), X (Feb. 22, 2026, at 6:38 pm)  
<https://x.com/WilliamTurton/status/2025716894636929264>.

<sup>9</sup> *FBI Director Kash Patel Joins Team USA Hockey in Gold Medal Celebration*, ABC News,  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fVdOCVnCW6c>.

<sup>10</sup> See note 1; Antonio Pequeno IV, *FBI Denies That Kash Patel’s Olympics Trip Using Agency Jet Is For Personal Reasons*, Forbes (Feb. 19, 2026),  
<https://www.forbes.com/sites/antoniopequenoiv/2026/02/19/fbi-denies-that-kash-patels-olympics-trip-using-agency-jet-is-for-personal-reasons/>.

<sup>11</sup> Ariana Baio, *Kash Patel Scrambled Government Jet to Watch Girlfriend Sing at Wrestling Bout, Report Says*, Independent (Oct. 29, 2025),



## II. Relevant law

Because federal officials' travel is paid for by taxpayer funds, federal rules proscribe improper use of travel resources for personal benefit, meaning that federal officials' travel on agency aircraft generally must be for official purposes—to conduct agency business or other “required use travel.”<sup>12</sup> FBI policy requires its directors to use government aircraft for all travel, including personal trips.<sup>13</sup> However, consistent with federal travel regulations, when the director uses government aircraft for personal travel, he “must reimburse the Government the excess of the full coach fare for all flights taken over the full coach fare for flights that would have been taken without personal activities.”<sup>14</sup> In other words, the government pays for the portion of the cost that is for official purposes, but he must pay anything in excess of that based on his personal travel needs.

Federal agencies are authorized to “pay only those [travel] expenses essential to the transaction of official business” and cannot pay for any costs incurred by “circuitous routes, delays, or luxury accommodations or services that are unnecessary or unjustified in the performance of official business.”<sup>15</sup> Government regulations permit officials to combine

<https://www.the-independent.com/news/world/americas/us-politics/kash-patel-girlfriend-fbi-jet-b2854757.html>.

<sup>12</sup> See 41 C.F.R. § 301-10.260; OMB Circular No. A-126, *Improving the Management and Use of Government Aircraft*, at § 7 (May 22, 1992),

<https://whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/Circular-a-126.pdf>.

<sup>13</sup> See U.S. Gov't Accountability Off., GAO-13-235, U.S. Dep't of Just. Executives' Use of Aircraft for Nonmission Purposes, at 17 (Feb. 2013), <https://www.gao.gov/assets/gao-13-235.pdf>.

<sup>14</sup> 41 C.F.R. § 301-10.264(b)(1).

<sup>15</sup> 41 C.F.R. § 301-2.2.

official and personal travel, but as DOJ explains its general rule, when an official chooses to combine dual purposes, “[a]ll costs in excess of those incurred for official travel resulting from personal preference must be borne by the traveler, not the Department.”<sup>16</sup> Therefore, to any extent that a trip is extended for personal purposes or includes events not related to agency business, the traveler must incur the cost of the additional length of the itinerary and related events.<sup>17</sup> In at least one example, the General Services Administration Board of Contract Appeals made clear that a federal official who orchestrated their official travel to accommodate personal interests on the trip did not comply with federal travel rules, explaining that employees cannot use government travel as “a certificate for [an] all-expenses-paid vacation.”<sup>18</sup>

Federal executive branch officials are also bound by standards of ethical conduct that require that they respect foundational ethical principles, including in relevant part: not using their office for personal gain, protecting and conserving government property so that it is used only for approved purposes and avoiding any behavior that would give an appearance of acting illegally or unethically.<sup>19</sup>

Officials cannot use their public office for their own private gain, or the gain of any person or organization with which they are personally associated.<sup>20</sup> As recently as last year, DOJ OIG investigated ethics allegations related to FBI travel and determined that a former FBI Assistant Director had “wasted taxpayer funds and used their public office for their own private gain, in violation of federal ethics regulations and FBI policy” when they engaged in official travel for the purpose of fulfilling “the Assistant Director’s personal ‘bucket list’ [...]”<sup>21</sup> The official’s effort to justify the travel as official by bookending personal interests with official events also violated agency travel policy.<sup>22</sup>

Travel on government aircraft for personal interests also may implicate the standards of ethical conduct that require that officials use government resources only for their authorized purposes, including their official time and that of their subordinates.<sup>23</sup> Additionally, the rules also generally bar officials from soliciting or accepting gifts, i.e., anything of value, given to them because of their official position.<sup>24</sup> For purposes of federal ethics rules, travel expenses—including costs of transportation, lodging, meals, etc. during a trip—are included in the definition of gifts.<sup>25</sup> Additionally, federal law restricts employees

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<sup>16</sup> U.S. Dep’t of Just., Policy Statement 1400.04, 301-41-010: Combining Official and Personal Travel, [https://www.justice.gov/sites/default/files/usao/pages/attachments/2015/02/03/combining\\_official\\_and\\_personal\\_travel.pdf](https://www.justice.gov/sites/default/files/usao/pages/attachments/2015/02/03/combining_official_and_personal_travel.pdf).

<sup>17</sup> See 41 C.F.R. § 301-10.8 (stating that an official is responsible for any additional costs to a trip that is planned to accommodate his personal convenience).

<sup>18</sup> *In re Gilreath*, GSBCA No. 16119-TRAV, 03-2 B.C.A. (CCH) 32391 (July 16, 2003).

<sup>19</sup> 5 U.S.C. § 2635.101.

<sup>20</sup> 5 U.S.C. § 2635.702.

<sup>21</sup> U.S. Dep’t of Just., Off. of the Inspector Gen., *Investigative Summary 25-086* (Sept. 18, 2025) [https://oig.justice.gov/sites/default/files/reports/25-086\\_0.pdf](https://oig.justice.gov/sites/default/files/reports/25-086_0.pdf).

<sup>22</sup> *Id.*

<sup>23</sup> 5 U.S.C. § 2635.704; 5 U.S.C. § 2635.705.

<sup>24</sup> 5 U.S.C. § 2635.202.

<sup>25</sup> 5 U.S.C. § 2635.203(b).

from receiving certain gifts from foreign governments, foreign officials or foreign nationals absent the consent of Congress.<sup>26</sup>

### **III. Potential violations and areas for investigation**

While Director Patel's use of official aircraft for travel is required by FBI policy and not specifically at issue in this complaint, his compliance with federal travel regulations and his ethics obligations related to using government aircraft for a trip related to personal interests must be reviewed. CREW asks the DOJ OIG to use its authority to investigate Director Patel's trip to Milan to determine whether the trip violated federal travel and ethics rules.

Areas for investigation include:

1. Did Director Patel follow proper protocol and receive necessary approval for the trip to Milan (including from the DOJ Deputy Attorney General or FBI Office of General Counsel)? What was Director Patel's justification for this trip and what reasons justified the agency's determination that this trip was official?
2. Did Director Patel orchestrate official events in Italy during the short window of the Winter Olympics in Milan to facilitate the government subsidizing his personal trip to attend the Men's Olympic Hockey tournament? Did he direct any staff to facilitate his official travel to Milan for his personal interest in the hockey game?
3. What was Director Patel's agenda of official events for this trip? Were Olympic events scheduled before or after the official events that would require the travel to be extended longer than it would be for the official events themselves?
4. Did Director Patel seek or receive any ethics advice or clearance related to his travel for the trip to Milan?
5. Who purchased Director Patel's ticket to the Olympic event(s) that he attended? If the ticket was a gift, did Director Patel seek and receive advice or clearance from a designated ethics official?
6. Was Director Patel offered or did he accept anything of value as a gift (including costs of travel, lodging, meals, memorabilia, etc.) during his time in Milan, including from foreign nationals or any of the hockey team members?
7. Did Director Patel pay for or reimburse the required expenses for his trip to Italy as well as any other travel (including lodging, meals, etc.) within Italy that was for personal purposes?
8. Did anyone travel with Director Patel and did any such travelers pay the proper reimbursement costs for the flight and any other related travel expenses, e.g., lodging, meals?
9. Did any aspect of Director Patel's trip or its planning violate the letter or spirit of any federal law or regulations, agency or ethics guidance or any other rules governing the conduct of FBI employees? Does OIG have any recommendations for reform based on these events?

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<sup>26</sup> U.S. Const. art. I, § 9, cl. 8; 5 U.S.C. § 7342.

#### **IV. Conclusion**

Director Patel has a history of questionable use of official resources for personal recreational activities and his appearance at the Olympics raises new questions about his integrity in using his position and its travel benefits for his personal gain. Public trust requires that the DOJ OIG thoroughly investigate Director Patel's travel to Milan coinciding with event finals in men's hockey, one of his personal passions, as well as the pattern of his use of agency aircraft that coincides with events related to his personal interests. The privilege to use government resources to ensure national security is not compromised cannot be allowed to be abused to avoid financial responsibility for personal travel.

As a senior administration official, Director Patel's behavior sets an example for other appointees and executive branch officials. A complete investigation and audit of proper protocols and financial accounting will ensure integrity in the use of official resources and protection of public funds, preventing officials' abuse of their positions to seek undue benefits at taxpayers' expense.

CREW greatly appreciates your prompt attention to this matter.

Sincerely,



Donald K. Sherman  
President and Chief Executive Officer

cc: U.S. Senate Committee on the Judiciary  
The Honorable Chuck Grassley, Chairman  
The Honorable Dick Durbin, Ranking Member

U.S. House Committee on the Judiciary  
The Honorable Jim Jordan, Chairman  
The Honorable Jamie Raskin, Ranking Member