

UNITED STATES OFFICE OF
GOVERNMENT ETHICS

January 16, 2017

The Honorable Jason Chaffetz
Chairman
Committee on Oversight and Government Reform
United States House of Representatives
2157 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Chaffetz:

In a letter dated January 12, 2017, you requested that I attend a transcribed interview with your Committee staff to answer questions about the role of the U.S. Office of Government Ethics (OGE). Over the weekend, your office modified your original request and proposed a private meeting with you and the Ranking Member and your respective staffs to take place on January 23. Through staff, I requested that meeting be open to the public. I recently received word from your Chief of Staff that you are not able to accommodate that request. I write to ask you to reconsider. Allowing the public to attend our meeting—or, at the very least, to view it through live broadcast or the attendance of the news media—would ensure transparency and educate the public about how OGE guards the executive branch against conflicts of interest.

As you know, I have devoted most of my career to government ethics. I believe passionately that ethics matters and that if Americans do not have confidence that their government leaders' decisions are free from conflicts, the integrity of our government suffers. I have had the honor of helping thousands of officials from both parties ensure that their work is free from any conflicts of interest. In recent weeks, I have spoken publicly about my concerns about the President Elect's current plan to not divest—as well as to applaud some of his nominees' ethics agreements, such as Rex Tillerson's. My remarks were intended to educate the public about the shortcomings of the President Elect's current plan and made in the hopes of persuading him to make adjustments that will resolve his conflicts of interest. I believe these remarks to be in line with OGE's mission.

OGE is an independent agency that aims to prevent conflicts of interest in the executive branch. A core function of OGE is to educate the public about government ethics and “promote transparency of the executive branch ethics program by raising the visibility of the ethics



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program and OGE, and by ensuring that ethics information is publicly available.”¹ Since the election, there has been significant public interest in OGE and government ethics issues. Our office has received an unprecedented volume of telephone calls, emails, and letters from members of the public related to our executive branch ethics program. As these communications make clear, the public wants to understand conflicts of interest in government and the role that OGE plays in preventing conflicts from hindering effective governance. Holding our meeting in public is in accordance with OGE’s educational function and will further ensure transparency in how we approach ethical governance.

Although I am willing to attend a private meeting if you insist, I am hopeful that you will agree that a public meeting is preferable. If a different date would allow for a public meeting, I would be happy to discuss alternative dates with you or your staff.

Sincerely,

Walter M. Shaub, Jr.
Director

cc. The Honorable Elijah E. Cummings
Ranking Member
Committee on Oversight and Government Reform
United States House of Representatives
2471 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

¹ See <https://www.oge.gov/web/oge.nsf/Mission%20and%20Responsibilities>; see also, e.g., 5 C.F.R. § 2638.108(a)(16) (“The Office of Government Ethics conducts outreach to inform the public of matters related to the executive branch ethics program.”).