

January 17, 2017

Mr. Reince Priebus  
Trump Tower  
725 5th Avenue  
New York, NY 10022

Dear Mr. Priebus,

We are writing regarding your comments on Sunday, January 15, 2017 that threatened Walter Shaub, the director of the Office of Government Ethics (OGE). Your comments were highly inappropriate and an obvious effort to intimidate Director Shaub, who is properly doing his job.

Your comments, furthermore, are part of what appears to a pattern of attacks on ethics rules for Executive Branch officials and members of Congress by trying to undermine the oversight and enforcement of these rules.

First, House majority leaders initiated a sneak attack to try to gut the Office of Congressional Ethics, the one institution in Congress that has done an effective job of overseeing and enforcing the congressional ethics rules. An immediate public outcry played a central role in preventing this attack from succeeding.

Then another House majority leader, Representative Jason Chaffetz, chairman of the House Oversight and Government Reform Committee, made not so subtle threats to the Office of Government Ethics. In doing so, he was sending a message to Director Shaub that he should back off from addressing President-elect Trump's ethics problems.

The comments you made on Sunday represent a classic example of "shoot the messenger" as a way to shift attention away from the failure of President-elect Trump to take necessary steps to solve his serious ethics problems.

OGE Director Shaub has correctly described as "wholly inadequate" President-elect Trump's recently announced plan to deal with the serious conflicts of interest and Emoluments Clause problems he faces the moment he becomes president.

This is the same OGE director who labeled the ethics plan adopted by Rex Tillerson, President Trump's nominee for Secretary of State, "a sterling model for what we'd like to see with other nominees."

Instead of threatening the OGE director, we would urge you to focus your attention on persuading President-elect Trump to eliminate the ethics and conflicts of interest problems facing him, just as former presidents have done for the past four decades.

Ethics rules and standards exist to protect the American people from conflicts of interest, self-dealing, the improper use of public office for personal gain and other abuses of office by public

officials. Presidents and members of Congress are not free to ignore these rules and standards as they see fit. While one statutory provision dealing with conflicts of interest does not cover the president, other ethics rules and the Emoluments Clause do cover him, as do general standards of ethical behavior.

No president in our history has ever attempted to own and financially benefit from a worldwide business empire at the same time he served as president. President-elect Trump's plan to do this is a disservice to the American people and is bound to end in very serious problems for President Trump and for the country.

As the incoming White House chief of staff, we call on you to do everything you can to persuade President-elect Trump to eliminate the serious conflicts of interest and Emoluments Clause problems he is about to face.

We also call on you and others in the incoming administration to refrain from using threats and intimidation in an effort to prevent OGE from properly doing its job to protect the interests of the American people.

Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Signers of this letter include:

Norm Eisen, chief White House ethics lawyer, 2009-2011  
Richard Painter, chief White House ethics lawyer, 2005-2007  
Center for Media and Democracy  
Common Cause  
CREW  
Demand Progress  
Democracy 21  
Demos  
Every Voice  
Free Speech for People  
Kathleen Clark  
Norm Ornstein  
People For the American Way  
Public Citizen  
Represent.Us  
Revolving Door Project  
Sunlight Foundation  
Tom Mann  
Zephyr Teachout