

January 13, 2017

Chairman Jason Chaffetz
Committee on Oversight and Government Reform
2157 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Ranking Member Elijah E. Cummings
Committee on Oversight and Government Reform
2471 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Chaffetz and Ranking Member Cummings:

Since 1981, the Project On Government Oversight (POGO) has been working to achieve a more effective, accountable, open, and ethical federal government. I know that you both share POGO's good government values. In that light, we urge you to uphold and protect the independence and vital role of the Office of Government Ethics (OGE). We strongly support this Committee providing bipartisan oversight of the ethics agency. However, in this instance we are deeply concerned about public attacks on an official who is facing extraordinary circumstances and difficult challenges while working to protect the integrity of our government by ensuring nominees are above reproach.

OGE director Walter Shaub's comments in Tweets and speeches are a sideshow that has distracted from the good work of the agency. Although Shaub's going public is unorthodox, it is understandable in the new era in which Twitter is defining public discourse—the OGE responded publicly to the President-elect's inaccurate statements regarding conflicts of interest. Nothing in OGE's statements or Tweets was partisan or political, and I applaud Shaub for his courage in speaking the truth.

The plans announced by President-elect Trump to address his conflicts of interest are wholly inadequate and set the table for controversy, private litigation, and Constitutional challenges that would distract him from the people's business.

OGE's vital role in assisting the Senate's confirmation process cannot be understated, especially when the Senate must rapidly consider a number of nominations to lead executive branch agencies.

OGE has been able to accomplish a tremendous amount in this transition period despite the fact that the Trump Transition Team has named nominees prior to any review by the ethics agency, a break from the usual procedure. Not only has that placed the cart before the horse, but it has also placed an enormous time pressure on OGE. Worse, it has sent the message that ethics reviews are not important.

According to the OGE, it had precleared 58 percent of the financial disclosure reports it has received from the President-elect's Transition Team as of last week, which far exceeded the 21 percent of precleared financial disclosure reports it had received from the Obama transition team at the same point in the process.

This, despite the forced late start.

The work of OGE is essential for preserving the real and perceived integrity of the federal government. I look forward to meeting with you and Committee staff to discuss ways to strengthen OGE's independence, mission, and reauthorization.

Sincerely,



Danielle Brian
Executive Director