

Congress of the United States

House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND GOVERNMENT REFORM

2157 RAYBURN HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING

WASHINGTON, DC 20515-6143

MAJORITY (202) 225-5074

MINORITY (202) 225-5051

<http://oversight.house.gov>

Statement in Support of Amendment on Trump Conflicts of Interest Ranking Member Elijah E. Cummings Oversight Committee Organizational Meeting January 24, 2017

Mr. Chairman, I have an amendment at the desk and ask that it be read.

Mr. Chairman, President Trump has refused to divest his personal businesses. As a result, he has put himself and this country in a serious dilemma. Each time the President acts, or makes a statement, or this body acts, there will be a lingering question—does that action benefit the country, or does it benefit the President’s personal finances?

This amendment’s goal is remove that question – at least for the actions of this Committee. We want to remove any doubt that the actions of this Committee might be done in order to benefit President Trump or his business entities.

The idea behind this amendment is simple and common-sense: no bill should pass this Committee if it directly benefits the President or his businesses.

I think every member of this Committee can support this amendment. You don’t just have to take my word for it. Republicans are some of the biggest backers of the principle that the President has a duty to avoid conflicts of interest.

While an attorney at the Department of Justice in 1974, Antonin Scalia wrote this, and I quote:

“It would obviously be undesirable as a matter of policy for the President or Vice President to engage in conduct proscribed by the Order or regulations, where no special reason for exemption from the generally applicable standards exists.”

Professor Richard Painter, President George W. Bush’s ethics adviser, wrote an op-ed saying this, and I quote:

“As long as the president-elect is financially benefiting from his enterprises, every appointment and domestic and foreign policy decision he makes will confront the question of whether he acted to benefit the nation or his own pocket. Moreover,

counterparties will face irresistible temptation to benefit Trump's enterprises so as to secure his action or win his favor."

I did not want to get to this point, I wanted to prevent it. Last December, several Democratic Members and I convened a bipartisan panel of top ethics experts so that the American people could hear directly about the challenges that could confront President Trump on Day One.

These experts strongly recommended that President Trump do what every previous president has done for decades—divest all ownership interests, liquidate his business assets, and place them in a truly blind trust operated by an independent party.

Even the Wall Street Journal's Editorial Board warned, and I quote:

"If Mr. Trump doesn't liquidate, he will be accused of a pecuniary motive any time he takes a policy position."

Yet, on January 11—nine days before he was inaugurated as the 45th President of the United States—Donald Trump defied these warnings and announced that he would not relinquish ownership.

As of Friday, these conflicts moved from theoretical to reality.

Now, it falls to us in Congress to do our job and ensure that these conflicts are thoroughly reviewed and addressed.

Mr. Chairman, this Committee's rules are more than a collection of do's and don'ts for the Members of this Committee.

They are also an expression of our values. Passing this amendment is an important first step in showing that we value the integrity of our own Committee. This amendment is a statement that we act on behalf of the citizens of our country, and not on behalf of the financial interests of one man.

We may disagree on policy, but we share the common goal of serving the American public, not the financial interests of the President. I hope all Members will agree that it is important enough to be part of our Rules Package here today.

Thank you.

Contact: Jennifer Werner, Communications Director, (202) 226-5181.