

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

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February 20, 2025

Susan Wiles
White House Chief of Staff
Executive Office of the President
Washington, D.C. 20500

Secretary Doug Collins
Acting Director
U.S. Office of Government Ethics
250 E Street, SW, Suite 750
Washington, DC 20024

Dear Ms. Wiles and Secretary Collins:

I write with grave concern regarding President Trump's removal of the Director of the U.S. Office of Government Ethics (OGE), David Huitema, on February 10, 2025, and your subsequent designation, Secretary Collins, as Acting Director of the OGE.¹

The OGE, established in 1978, is an independent agency responsible for overseeing ethics compliance and financial disclosures for more than 140 agencies within the Executive Branch. Its work is critical to preventing financial conflicts of interest for government officials and ensuring the federal government's actions and decisions are not unduly influenced by personal financial interests. The Senate confirmed Mr. Huitema to serve as OGE Director on November 14, 2024, and he was sworn in for a five-year term on December 16, 2024.

On February 10, 2024, I sent letters to Mr. Huitema and you, Ms. Wiles, requesting clarification regarding Elon Musk's compliance with federal conflicts of interest, ethics, and reporting requirements.² This followed reporting on Mr. Musk's activities within the Executive Office of the President and access to sensitive government information while he retains significant financial interests in multiple private companies that benefit from federal government contracts.³ The White House Office of Legislative Affairs quickly confirmed receipt of this letter that same morning. Hours later, the OGE website announced that President Trump had removed Mr. Huitema from his position as Director. The statement on OGE's website did not identify any specific cause for Mr. Huitema's removal. President Trump subsequently designated Secretary Collins as interim head of both OGE and the Office of Special Counsel, after President Trump similarly removed the Special Counsel, Hampton Dellinger, without identifying the cause for Mr. Dellinger's removal.

¹ U.S. Office of Government Ethics, "OGE has been notified that the President is removing David Huitema as the Director of OGE. OGE is reverting to an Acting Director. Please see OGE's Organizational Leadership webpage," (February 10, 2025), <https://oge.gov/web/oge.nsf/News+Releases/FCCCCDB6367A7C0A85258C2D00683079?opendocument>.

² Letter from Senator Adam B. Schiff to White House Chief of Staff Susan Wiles, (February 10, 2025), <https://www.schiff.senate.gov/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/20250210-Sen-Schiff-Letter-to-COS-Wiles-on-Musk.pdf>; Letter from Senator Adam B. Schiff to OGE Director David Huitema, (February 10, 2025), <https://www.schiff.senate.gov/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/20250210-Sen-Schiff-Letter-to-OGE-on-Musk.pdf>.

³ Eric Lipton, David A. Fahrenthold, Aaron Krolik & Kirsten Grind, *U.S. Agencies Fund, and Fight With, Elon Musk. A Trump Presidency Could Give Him Power Over Them*, (October 20, 2024), <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/10/20/us/politics/elon-musk-federal-agencies-contracts.html>.

The OGE's independence, coupled with consistent enforcement of the federal criminal conflict of interest statute and other ethics rules, is integral to ensuring government employees, including special government employees, do not participate personally and substantially in official matters where they have a financial interest.⁴ These functions are essential to maintaining congressional and public trust in Executive Branch actions.

President Trump's abrupt removal of Mr. Huitema as OGE Director and decision to replace him with you, Secretary Collins, a political ally, fundamentally undercuts the OGE's independence; undermines trust in the OGE as an impartial, apolitical ethics arbiter; and calls into question the integrity of the OGE's future actions until it is again under independent, Senate-confirmed leadership. This is of heightened concern to the Senate, as the Senate relies on OGE's review of financial disclosures and advice to political appointees seeking Senate confirmation.

To ensure that the Senate can undertake its constitutional oversight and legislative functions, including consideration of potential reforms to strengthen existing statutes, please take the following measures and respond to the questions below by February 28, 2025:

1. Preserve all records and correspondence in your possession and within the Executive Office of the President and the OGE regarding (1) Mr. Huitema's removal and replacement with Secretary Collins, (2) Secretary Collins' activities at the OGE and the Office of Special Counsel, and (3) Mr. Musk's financial disclosure and ethics requirements.
2. Did any White House officials communicate with any OGE officials about Mr. Musk's financial reporting obligations and conflict of interest considerations, including whether Mr. Musk would need a waiver under 18 U.S.C. § 208, *prior* to President Trump's decision to remove Mr. Huitema from his position as OGE Director? If so, please explain the nature of those communications.
3. Have any White House officials communicated with Secretary Collins about Mr. Musk's financial reporting obligations and conflict of interest considerations, including whether Mr. Musk would need a waiver under 18 U.S.C. § 208, *prior* or *subsequent* to Secretary Collins' designation to lead the OGE? If so, please explain the nature of those communications.
4. Did any White House or OGE officials raise concerns about removing Mr. Huitema or replacing him with Secretary Collins? If so, please explain the nature of those concerns and communications and preserve all records and correspondence in your personal possession and within the Executive Office of the President and the OGE regarding these concerns.

In addition, I have yet to receive a response from the White House or the OGE regarding Mr. Musk's compliance with federal criminal conflicts of interest law and other ethics and reporting requirements,

⁴ 18 U.S.C. § 208. See U.S. Office of Government Ethics, "Analyzing Potential Conflicts of Interest," <https://www.oge.gov/web/oge.nsf/Resources/Analyzing+Potential+Conflicts+of+Interest>.

which was requested by February 13, 2025, and reinforces concern that Mr. Musk may not be complying with his legal obligations.⁵

I look forward to reviewing your responses to these questions and intend to conduct additional congressional oversight of the Office of Government Ethics under Secretary Collins' leadership.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Adam B. Schiff". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first letters of each name being capitalized and prominent.

Adam B. Schiff
United States Senator

⁵ Letter from Senator Adam B. Schiff to White House Chief of Staff Susan Wiles, (February 10, 2025), <https://www.schiff.senate.gov/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/20250210-Sen-Schiff-Letter-to-COS-Wiles-on-Musk.pdf>; Letter from Senator Adam B. Schiff to OGE Director David Huitema, (February 10, 2025), <https://www.schiff.senate.gov/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/20250210-Sen-Schiff-Letter-to-OGE-on-Musk.pdf>.