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Congress of the United States

House of Representatives

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December 11, 2009

Mr. Alan Solomont
Chairman and Chief Executive Officer
Solomont Bailis Ventures
300 Washington Street
Newton, MA 02458

Dear Mr. Solomont:

Over the course of the Committee's investigation into the President's removal of Gerald Walpin from his post as Inspector General (IG) at the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS or the Corporation), I have been especially concerned about the possibility that the President's decision was inappropriately influenced by political considerations. To thoroughly investigate that possibility, Committee investigators interviewed every member of the CNCS Board of Directors, among others, to determine what level of interaction each had with the White House.

On July 15, 2009, Committee staff questioned you in the course of this investigation. Having served as Chairman of the CNCS Board since February 2009, and having been the individual who first communicated the Board's concerns about Mr. Walpin to the White House, your testimony was uniquely valuable. During that interview, you were asked to identify each individual at the White House with whom you discussed the business of CNCS. In response, you acknowledged having discussed CNCS business with White House Counsel Gregory Craig, Special Counsel to the President Norman Eisen, Deputy Assistant to the President and Director of the Office of Social Innovation Sonal Shah, Senior Policy Advisor for Social Innovation and Civic Participation Carlos Monje, Jr., and the Deputy Director of the White House Office of Social Innovation, whose name you could not recall.¹

From that group, you were asked to identify with whom you discussed Mr. Walpin's performance. You said that aside from Mr. Craig and Mr. Eisen, with whom you discussed your concerns about the IG subsequent to the May 20, 2009 Board meeting, you had no substantive conversations about Mr. Walpin's performance with anyone else at the White House.²

¹ H. Oversight and Gov't Reform Comm. and S. Finance Comm. Staff Interview with Alan Solomont, July 15, 2009.

² *Id.*

After Mr. Walpin's removal, there was speculation in the press that former Chief of Staff to the First Lady Jackie Norris may have influenced the President's action because she left the White House to become a senior advisor at CNCS around the time of Mr. Walpin's removal. Accordingly, Committee investigators specifically asked if you discussed any Corporation business, including the issues relating to the Corporation's Office of Inspector General, with Ms. Norris. You indicated that you did not.³

Because you could not be entirely certain on July 15, 2009 that you did not discuss Mr. Walpin's performance with Ms. Shaw, Mr. Monje, or the Deputy Director, you promised to review your notes from meetings with each of them.⁴ Having done so, you confirmed that there were no conversations with White House personnel aside from Mr. Craig or Mr. Eisen in which you discussed Mr. Walpin's performance. In a voicemail left for investigators from the Senate Finance Committee, you stated there was "no mention anywhere [in your notes] of any reference to the Inspector General ... prior to the events that I disclosed at the interview"⁵

White House visitor records, released on November 25, 2009, indicate that you visited the White House 17 times during the period between the President's inauguration on January 20, 2009 and your initial interview with the Committee staff on July 15, 2009.⁶ According to the visitor logs, you met with Jackie Norris three times, including on June 9, the day before Mr. Walpin was removed by the President.

During a December 8, 2009 re-interview, Committee staff asked you to reconcile your statements of July 15, 2009 with the visitor log records that show you met with at least 13 different people at the White House, including Jackie Norris. As you are aware, White House staff attending the interview objected to this line of questioning. Cutting short the questioning on this issue indicated an unusually defensive posture on the part of White House staff, including a lawyer from the Counsel's office.

Because the records contained in the White House visitor logs are inconsistent with your statements to Committee investigators on July 15, 2009, and because you did not satisfactorily reconcile your testimony with the visitor logs, there remain unanswered questions. Most importantly, on July 15, 2009, why did you fail to include Jackie Norris among those people with whom you acknowledged having discussed CNCS business? One possible answer would be that you simply forgot about your three meetings with her when questioned without the visitor logs available to refresh your recollection. However, the logs, which Committee staff obtained after your first interview, indicate that you met with her the day before the President removed Mr. Walpin, and that you visited her more frequently than any other individual at the White House. In light of these records and the fact that Ms. Norris was transitioning from the White House to CNCS, it seems implausible that you would not remember your meetings with her.

³ *Id.*

⁴ *Id.*

⁵ Alan Solomont voicemail to staff of the Senate Finance Committee, July 20, 2009, 10:15 A.M.

⁶ White House Visitor Records, available at <http://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/disclosures/visitor-records> (last visited Dec. 9, 2009).

Yet when questioned with the benefit of the visitor logs on December 8, 2009, you did not claim to have merely forgotten about the meetings. Instead, you asserted that you had in fact disclosed them in your first interview. That is simply false. The notes and recollections of multiple staff in the room at the time are clearly contrary to your recollection.

The White House announced on June 4, 2009 that Ms. Norris had been appointed Senior Advisor to the Corporation.⁷ The White House was in the midst of deliberating action regarding Mr. Walpin. According to a June 3, 2009 email you sent to White House Counsel Norman Eisen, CNCS had confirmed that another OIG employee was qualified under the Vacancies Act to serve as Acting IG in Walpin's place, and you provided Mr. Eisen with multiple personal contact numbers for Mr. Walpin in preparation for the notification that occurred seven days later on June 10, 2009. In light of all this, it seems highly implausible that you would meet with Ms. Norris on June 9, 2009 and **not** discuss the IG. Yet, you claimed in your December 8, 2009, interview that you only discussed other CNCS business with her.

Because of these remaining questions, I am not able to conclude with any confidence that inappropriate political considerations did not play a part in Mr. Walpin's removal. I am also left with serious questions about the veracity of your July 15 and December 8, 2009 testimony. Our Committee – the principal investigative committee in the House – needs to rely on the ability to obtain complete and truthful testimony from the witnesses who are interviewed during the course of investigations. I have an obligation to ensure that the fact finding process is not distorted by incomplete or untruthful testimony.

To clarify for the record the nature of your interaction with Ms. Norris regarding the removal of former CNCS IG Gerald Walpin, please respond in writing to the following questions by December 23, 2009:

1. Did you discuss the business of the Corporation with Jackie Norris during your meeting on March 9, 2009? Produce a copy of any notes prepared before, during, or after your meeting with Ms. Norris, including any note cards used for that purpose.
2. Did you discuss Inspector General Gerald Walpin with Jackie Norris during your meeting on March 9, 2009?
3. Did you discuss the business of the Corporation with Jackie Norris during your meeting on May 12, 2009? Produce a copy of any notes prepared before, during, or after your meeting with Ms. Norris, including any note cards used for that purpose.
4. Did you discuss Inspector General Gerald Walpin with Jackie Norris during your meeting on May 12, 2009?

⁷ White House Press Release, "White House Announces East Wing Staff Changes: Jackie Norris to Senior Advisor to Corporation for National and Community Service, Susan Sher to Chief of Staff to First Lady Michelle Obama," June 4, 2009.

5. Did you discuss the business of the Corporation with Jackie Norris during your meeting on June 9, 2009? Produce a copy of any notes prepared before, during, or after your meeting with Ms. Norris, including any note cards used for that purpose.
6. Did you discuss Inspector General Gerald Walpin with Jackie Norris during your meeting on June 9, 2009?
7. If it is the case that you did not discuss Gerald Walpin or the IG situation with Jackie Norris during your meeting on June 9, 2009, why not?
8. During your interview on July 15, 2009, why did you fail to include Jackie Norris among those individuals at the White House with whom you discussed CNCS business?
9. Do you recall making **any** comment about Gerald Walpin to Jackie Norris between January 20, 2009 and July 15, 2009? If yes, what were those comments? When and where did you make those comments?

As the Ranking Member of the principal oversight Committee in the House of Representatives with specific jurisdiction over Inspectors General, it is critical for me to fully understand the reasons for the removal of an IG, especially in cases where the requirements of the IG Act were not strictly adhered to. With that in mind, I thank you for your response to these important questions.

Sincerely,


Darrell Issa
Ranking Member

cc: The Honorable Edolphus Towns, Chairman
The Honorable Charles E. Grassley
The Honorable Richard Lugar