



U.S. Department of Justice
Office of the Deputy Attorney General

Bradley Weinsheimer
Associate Deputy Attorney General

Washington, D.C. 20530

July 26, 2021

Richard P. Donoghue
New York, NY
Via email to Counsel

Dear Mr. Donoghue:

The Department of Justice (Department) understands that you have been requested by the U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Oversight and Reform (House Oversight Committee) and the U.S. Senate Judiciary Committee to provide transcribed interviews to the Committees relating to your service as Principal Associate Deputy Attorney General. In these interviews, you are authorized to provide information you learned while at the Department as described more fully below.

According to information provided to you and the Department by the House Oversight Committee, its focus is on “examining President Trump’s efforts to pressure the Department of Justice (DOJ) to take official action to challenge the results of the presidential election and advance unsubstantiated allegations of voter fraud.”¹ The House Oversight Committee has stated that they wish to ask you questions “regarding any efforts by President Trump and others to advance unsubstantiated allegations of voter fraud, challenge the 2020 election results, interfere with Congress’s count of the Electoral College vote, or overturn President Biden’s certified victory.”²

Based upon information provided to you and to the Department from the Senate Judiciary Committee, the Department understands that the scope of that Committee’s inquiry is very similar to that of the House Oversight Committee. The letter to the Department dated January 23, 2021, explained that the Senate Judiciary Committee is conducting oversight into public reporting about “an alleged plot between then-President Donald Trump and then-Acting Assistant Attorney General of the Civil Division Jeffrey Bossert Clark to use the Department of Justice to further Trump’s efforts to subvert the results of the 2020 presidential election”—events that the letter described as raising “deeply troubling questions regarding the Justice Department’s role” in those purported efforts.³ In addition, the Senate Judiciary Committee has represented to

¹ Letter from Carolyn B. Maloney, Chairwoman, House Committee on Oversight and Reform, to Richard P. Donoghue, June 14, 2021.

² *Id.*

³ Letter from Richard J. Durbin et al., Senate Judiciary Committee, to Monty Wilkinson, Acting Attorney General, Dep’t of Justice, January 23, 2021, at 1, <https://www.judiciary.senate.gov/press/dem/releases/senate-judiciary-committee-democrats-seek-answers-about-doj-s-role-in-trumps-scheme-to-overturn-the-2020-election>.

the Department that the scope of its interview will cover your knowledge of attempts to involve the Department in efforts to challenge or overturn the 2020 election results. This includes your knowledge of any such attempts by Department officials or by White House officials to engage in such efforts. The Committee has further represented that the time frame for its inquiry will begin following former Attorney General William Barr's December 14, 2021, resignation announcement.

Department attorneys, including those who have left the Department, are obligated to protect non-public information they learned in the course of their work. Such information could be subject to various privileges, including law enforcement, deliberative process, attorney work product, attorney-client, and presidential communications privileges. The Department has a longstanding policy of closely protecting the confidentiality of decision-making communications among senior Department officials. Indeed, the Department generally does not disclose documents relating to such internal deliberations. For decades and across administrations, however, the Department has sought to balance the Executive Branch's confidentiality interests with Congress's legitimate need to gather information.⁴

The extraordinary events in this matter constitute exceptional circumstances warranting an accommodation to Congress in this case. Congress has articulated compelling legislative interests in the matters being investigated, and the information the Committees have requested from you bears directly on Congress's interest in understanding these extraordinary events: namely, the question whether former President Trump sought to cause the Department to use its law enforcement and litigation authorities to advance his personal political interests with respect to the results of the 2020 presidential election. After balancing the Legislative and Executive Branch interests, as required under the accommodation process, it is the Executive Branch's view that this presents an exceptional situation in which the congressional need for information outweighs the Executive Branch's interest in maintaining confidentiality.

The Executive Branch reached this view consistent with established practice. Because of the nature of the privilege, the Department has consulted with the White House Counsel's Office in considering whether to authorize you to provide information that may implicate the presidential communications privilege. The Counsel's Office conveyed to the Department that President Biden has decided that it would not be appropriate to assert executive privilege with respect to communications with former President Trump and his advisors and staff on matters related to the scope of the Committees' proposed interviews, notwithstanding the view of former President Trump's counsel that executive privilege should be asserted to prevent testimony regarding these communications. *See Nixon v. Administrator of General Servs.*, 433 U.S. 425, 449 (1977) (“[I]t must be presumed that the incumbent President is vitally concerned with and in the best position to assess the present and future needs of the Executive Branch, and to support

⁴ See Letter for Rep. John Linder, Chairman, Subcommittee on Rules and Organization, from Robert Raben, Assistant Attorney General, Office of Legislative Affairs at 2 (Jan. 27, 2000) (“Linder Letter”) (“In implementing the longstanding policy of the Executive Branch to comply with Congressional requests for information to the fullest extent consistent with the Constitutional and statutory obligations of the Executive Branch, the Department's goal in all cases is to satisfy legitimate legislative interests while protecting Executive Branch confidentiality interests.”).

invocation of the privilege accordingly.”); *see also id.* (explaining that the presidential communications privilege “is not for the benefit of the President as an individual, but for the benefit of the Republic”) (internal citation omitted).

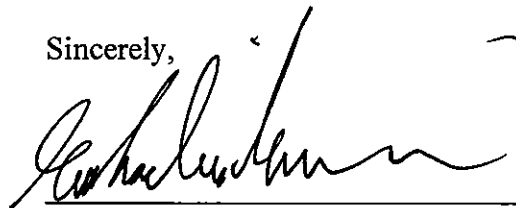
Therefore, given these extraordinary circumstances, including President Biden’s determination on executive privilege, and having reviewed the scope of the Committees’ requested interviews, the Department authorizes you to provide unrestricted testimony to the Committees, irrespective of potential privilege, so long as the testimony is confined to the scope of the interviews as set forth by the Committees and as limited in the penultimate paragraph below.⁵ This accommodation is unique to the facts and circumstances of this particular matter and the legislative interests that the Committees have articulated.

Consistent with appropriate governmental privileges, the Department expects that you will decline to respond to questions outside the scope of the interview as outlined above and instead will advise the Committees to contact the Department’s Office of Legislative Affairs should they seek information that you are unable to provide.

Please note that it is important that you not discuss Department deliberations concerning investigations and prosecutions that were ongoing while you served in the Department. The Department has a longstanding policy not to provide congressional testimony concerning prosecutorial deliberations. If prosecutors knew that their deliberations would become “subject to Congressional challenge and scrutiny, we would face a grave danger that they would be chilled from providing the candid and independent analysis essential to just and effective law enforcement or, just as troubling, that they might err on the side of prosecution simply to avoid public second-guessing.” Linder Letter. Discussion of pending criminal cases and possible charges also could violate court rules and potentially implicate rules of professional conduct governing extra-judicial statements. We assume, moreover, that such Department deliberations are not within the scope of the requested testimony as defined by the Committees.

Accordingly, consistent with standard practice, you should decline to answer any such questions and instead advise the Committees to contact the Department’s Office of Legislative Affairs if they wish to follow up on the questions. Responding in such a way would afford the Department the full opportunity to consider particular questions and possible accommodations that may fulfill the Committees’ legitimate need for information while protecting Executive Branch confidentiality interests regarding investigations and prosecutions.

Sincerely,



Bradley Weinsheimer

⁵ You are not authorized to reveal information the disclosure of which is prohibited by law or court order, including classified information and information subject to Federal Rule of Criminal Procedure 6(e).