

Congress of the United States

House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND REFORM

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November 7, 2021

The Honorable Emory A. Rounds III
Director
U.S. Office of Government Ethics
1201 New York Avenue NW, Suite 500
Washington, D.C. 20005

Dear Director Rounds:

As you may be aware, Hunter Biden, the President's 51-year-old son, has recently become an artist. Despite his being a novice, the prices listed for his paintings range between \$75,000—more than the median annual American income—and \$500,000.¹ The prices are not only shocking to the art community, they are shocking also to the American people given Mr. Biden's lack of training as an artist and his previous career as a lobbyist, lawyer, and "unqualified oil-and-gas adviser" who "work[ed] alongside post-Soviet oligarchs."² Nevertheless, recent reporting indicates that people have actually purchased Mr. Biden's art at these exorbitant prices. However, the purchasers' identities are otherwise unknown.³

The White House, Mr. Biden, and other parties participating in this scheme have cloaked the identities of Mr. Biden's patrons and refuse to cooperate with congressional or press inquiries into the matter. I write to ask the Office of Government Ethics to bring a halt to these attempts to evade oversight.

While Mr. Biden's creative endeavors are his own to pursue, it is the duty of Congress to investigate potential influence peddling, fraud, and other crimes connected to the presidency. Such offenses become even more egregious when funded by the American taxpayer—we recently learned the federal government has funded Mr. Biden's gallerist, who received over \$500,000 from the federal government.⁴

This problem has characterized much of the President's political career, as *Politico* has recently detailed:

¹ Graham Bowley and Robin Pogrebin, *A Gallery Sells Hunter Bidens. The White House Says It Won't Know Who's Buying.*, N.Y. TIMES (Aug. 13, 2021).

² Casey Michel, *The Emerging Artistry of Hunter Biden*, THE ATLANTIC (Sept. 22, 2021).

³ Emily Smith and Bruce Golding, *Hunter Biden sells five art prints for \$75K each as NYC show pushed back*, N.Y. POST (Oct. 7, 2021).

⁴ Isabel Vincent, *Art gallery repping Hunter Biden received \$500K federal COVID loan, records show*, N.Y. POST (Oct. 9, 2021).

[I]n recent decades, members of the First Family, including Hunter Biden, have repeatedly entered into financial relationships with people who have an interest in influencing their powerful relative — including taking loans from lobbyists; seeking business from labor groups; taking a job with a bank that relied on Biden’s support to pass a personal bankruptcy law loathed by progressives; and, of course, taking a seat on the board of a Ukrainian energy company, Burisma, that faced allegations of corruption, even as Biden headed up U.S. anti-corruption efforts in Ukraine.⁵

Hunter Biden has profited from his father’s public positions of trust in the past,⁶ but the support he is currently receiving is alarming. The White House has not shared the agreement it has reached with Georges Bergès, Mr. Biden’s gallerist and “relatively little-known newcomer” to New York’s art scene.⁷ The White House and Mr. Bergès have ignored Committee requests for this agreement for months.⁸

Ethics experts have flagged concerns with this secret arrangement.⁹ For example, your predecessor, and former chief ethics officer at the White House, Walter Shaub opined, “There is no ethics program in the world that can be built around the head of state’s staff working with a dealer to keep the public in the dark about the identities of individuals who pay vast sums to the leader’s family member for subjectively priced items of no intrinsic value.”¹⁰ Mr. Shaub further wrote, “If this were Trump, Xi or Putin, you’d have no doubt whatsoever that this creates a vehicle for funneling cash to the first family in exchange for access or favors. Nor would you doubt that the appearance of monetizing the presidency was outrageous.”¹¹

Public records indicate the federal government has helped finance Mr. Bergès’s latest ventures. According to independent reporting, Georges Bergès Galleries, LLC was approved for loans through the Paycheck Protection Program on April 29, 2020 for \$38,991 and on February 5, 2021 for \$36,170.¹² The loan approved on April 29 was forgiven as of March 8, 2021—during the current Administration—and the status of the February 2021 loan is undisclosed.¹³

⁵ Ben Schreckinger, *‘Hiding the Ball’: Hunter Biden Complicates White House Anti-Corruption Push*, POLITICO (Oct. 12, 2021).

⁶ See, e.g., David Von Drehle, *The Hunter Biden story is a troubling tale of privilege*, WASH. POST (Oct. 4, 2019).

⁷ *Supra*, n. 1.

⁸ Letter from James Comer, Ranking Member, H. Comm. on Oversight and Reform, et al., to Dana Remus, Counsel to the President (July 14, 2021).

⁹ Steven Nelson, *‘Did you have another question on something else?’ Psaki annoyed by Hunter Biden ask*, N.Y. POST (Oct. 12, 2021).

¹⁰ Tweet by Walt Shaub, @waltshaub, 3:59 PM, Oct. 13, 2021.

¹¹ Tweet by Walt Shaub, @waltshaub, 4:02 PM, Oct. 13, 2021.

¹² *Tracking PPP: Search Every Company Approved for Federal Loans*, PROPUBLICA, available at <https://projects.propublica.org/coronavirus/bailouts/search?q=berges> (last visited November 4, 2021).

¹³ *Id.*

Further, according to the Small Business Administration records, Georges Bergès Galleries, LLC, received an Economic Injury Disaster Loan for \$150,000 on May 28, 2020.¹⁴ This amount reportedly “revised” and increased by \$350,000 just three months ago, “shortly before the gallery exclusively marketed 15 paintings by Hunter Biden.”¹⁵ In total, the gallery—which apparently has only two employees—has received almost \$600,000 in federal funding it will likely not have to pay back.

Mr. Bergès has expressed his desire to become the “lead guy in China” for art,¹⁶ and Mr. Biden has cultivated foreign contacts around the world that would help his gallerist accomplish just that.¹⁷ The White House has previously covered for Mr. Biden regarding his interest in a Chinese private equity firm, and Mr. Biden accompanied his father, who at the time was Vice President, to China on board Air Force Two in 2013.¹⁸

Mr. Biden and his accomplices both within and outside the White House believe they are insulated from oversight and accountability. As the entity that “oversees the executive branch ethics program” which “works to prevent financial conflicts of interest to help ensure government decisions are made free from personal financial bias,” the Office of Government Ethics is in a prime position to investigate the ethics agreement between the White House, Mr. Biden, and the Bergès Gallery. I therefore urge you to open an investigation into this matter.

Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "James Comer". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "James" and last name "Comer" clearly legible.

James Comer
Ranking Member
Committee on Oversight and Reform

cc: The Honorable Carolyn Maloney, Chairwoman
Committee on Oversight and Reform

¹⁴ U.S. Small Business Admin., *COVID-19 EIDL data CSVs*, available at <https://data.sba.gov/dataset/covid-19-eidl> (last visited Nov. 3, 2021).

¹⁵ Adam Andrzejewski, *Taxpayers Subsidize Manhattan Gallery Showcasing Hunter Biden Art*, REALCLEARPOLICY (Oct. 19, 2021).

¹⁶ George Wayne, *Modern Eye for Modern Art*, RESIDENT (Mar. 2, 2015).

¹⁷ See, e.g., *Hunter Biden: What Was He Doing in Chica and Ukraine*, BBC NEWS (Apr. 6, 2021).

¹⁸ Samuel Chamberlain, *White House mum on whether Hunter Biden holding stake in Chinese private equity firm*, N.Y. POST (Oct. 4, 2021).