

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND ACCOUNTABILITY

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May 23, 2024

The Honorable Jamie Raskin
Ranking Member
Committee on Oversight and Accountability
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Ranking Member Raskin:

Your May 13, 2024, letters to energy industry leaders have left some ambiguity on the position of myself and the Committee majority about your requests for information.¹ The source of confusion appears to stem from your letters' assertion of the Oversight Committee's "broad authority" under House Rule X to conduct oversight.² This confusion exists even as coverage of your request correctly notes, "Democrats on the Oversight Committee lack certain investigative powers because Republicans control the House. If the oil companies decline to turn over the information, Democrats will not be able to subpoena the firms, stymying their investigation."³

At the outset, I support the right and ability of the Committee minority to conduct oversight. By creating transparency and accountability surrounding shortcomings of the federal government, both the majority and minority members of this Committee create the opportunity to spur reform through legislation or actions of the executive branch to stop waste and abuse of taxpayer funds. As a former Ranking Member, I once utilized this Committee position to bring matters of concern to the attention of my colleagues on both sides of the aisle.

I must, however, distance myself and the Committee majority I lead from your inquiries to private sector energy leaders that seek information regarding individuals involved with the political campaign of presumptive Republican Presidential nominee Donald Trump. The inquiries represent not only your latest assault on the private sector but a naked attempt to chill rights protected by the Constitution under the First Amendment. Individuals, including employees of these companies, have the right to consider and support the candidate best aligned with their views without your interference.

¹ See, e.g., Letter from Jamie Raskin, Ranking Member, H. Comm. on Oversight and Accountability, to Mr. Domenic J. Dell'Osso, Jr., President and Chief Executive Officer, Chesapeake Energy Corp. (May 13, 2024).

² Id.

³ Maxine Joselow, *House Democrats launch probe of Trump's dinner with oil executives*, WASH. POST (May 14, 2024).

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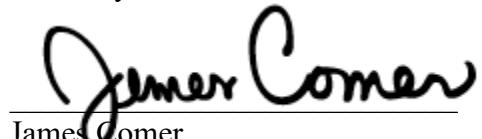
Your letters assert that former President Trump sought an “unvarnished quid pro quo”⁴ from attendees, promising he would, if elected president again, take actions favorable to the oil and gas industry—provided he received substantial campaign contributions from attendees. This charge ignores the commonsense reality that the vast majority of the American people prefer lower energy costs that policies leading to higher production levels provide. There is no mystery or gotcha moment in the revelation that energy companies tend to favor policies supporting higher production over Biden Administration policies that have restricted it, raised consumer gas prices, and contributed to higher inflation. Despite efforts by you and some left-leaning pundits to conjure a non-existent scandal, there is nothing inappropriate or surprising about oil and gas executives aligning themselves with the candidate who favors increased production and U.S. independence from reliance on foreign energy sources.

Since his 2016 campaign, President Trump has made clear his desire to restore the United States of America as an energy superpower. During his time in office, he emphatically achieved that, bringing back American energy independence based largely on his oil and gas policies. In contrast, President Biden has striven from Day One of his presidency to undo these policies, driving our country backward and harming American consumers. To charge or insinuate that former President Trump’s reiteration at a roundtable of his intention to restore policies he previously pursued as President is an improper “quid pro quo” for campaign donations is absurd.

On many inquiries you pursue in your position as Ranking Member, even when I do not share your concerns or add them to the Committee’s agenda, I remain open to new information they may uncover and the possibility of working together and utilizing the Committee’s authorities under House Rule X, as noted in your letter. In this matter, however, no such possibility exists. Given the invasive nature of your requests to private individuals, I find it easy to read your letters not as a genuine attempt to gather information but as a political attempt to send a message to all would-be supporters of and donors to former President Trump to beware of exercising their right to political participation.

Your letters carry the odor, not of good-faith oversight, but of the weaponization of government office and of hypocrisy in chilling participation in the election. This is far from the first time that election-year politics have entered into Committee Democrats’ oversight efforts. But there should be no ambiguity among the recipients of your letters or anyone else: neither I nor the Committee majority will be joining or utilizing the Committee’s investigative authorities in this matter.

Sincerely,



James Comer
Chairman
Committee on Oversight and Accountability

⁴ *Supra* note 1.