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United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON FINANCE

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6200

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October 29, 2019

The Honorable Wilbur Ross
Secretary
United States Department of Commerce
1401 Constitution Ave, NW
Washington, DC 20230

Dear Secretary Ross:

It is no secret that the Trump Administration is engaged in trade negotiations with China. What is a secret is what domestic political benefit the Administration is trying to obtain in those negotiations. Recent comments by administration officials have left me deeply concerned that U.S. economic interests are taking a back seat to President Trump's personal interests in our discussions with China.

On October 24, 2019, Peter Navarro, Director of the White House National Trade Council, attended the CITIZEN by CNN conference in New York. There he was interviewed by Jim Sciutto as part of an event titled "China Trade Deal: Fact or Fiction."¹ During the interview, Sciutto asked him several times if investigating the Bidens was brought up as part of trade negotiations with China. Navarro refused to answer the question. He further stated the American people "don't have a right to know" the answer.²

This interview followed an earlier interview between Navarro and Sciutto on the same topic. On October 4, 2019, Sciutto asked Navarro several times if he ever "raised investigating Joe Biden with China during trade negotiations."³ Navarro refused to answer and instead criticized reporting on the matter as "fake news."

In fact, there is every reason to believe that the Administration is seeking to link advancement on a trade deal with advancement of its own domestic political agenda. Speaking to reporters at the White House on October 3, 2019, President Trump told reporters "China should start an investigation into the Bidens because what happened in China is just about as bad as what

¹ Jim Sciutto, "Hi folks. Stream us today as I interview WH trade advisor Peter Navarro on the latest on US-China trade talks and where the trade war goes from here. #CitizenCNN," Oct. 24, 2019, <https://twitter.com/jimsciutto/status/1187335097558667264>.

² Oliver Darcy, "Here's video of @jimsciutto asking Peter Navarro if political investigations about the Bidens have come up during China trade talks, and Navarro declining to answer," Oct. 24, 2019, <https://twitter.com/oliverdarcy/status/1187384677520117760>; Jim Sciutto, "I just asked WH trade advisor Peter Navarro half a dozen times if Trump would press China to investigate Biden as part of trade talks and he refused to answer citing 'confidentiality'. #CITIZENCNN," <https://twitter.com/jimsciutto/status/1187367812240678912>.

³ "Watch White House adviser dodge question about Joe Biden," CNN, Oct. 24, 2019, <https://www.cnn.com/videos/politics/2019/10/04/peter-navarro-trump-joe-biden-sciutto-nr-vpx.cnn>.

happened with Ukraine,” referencing the unsubstantiated allegations of wrongdoing by Joe and Hunter Biden in the Ukraine.⁴ Several days later, Michael Pillsbury, an informal White House adviser on China, told the Financial Times that he had gotten “quite a bit of background on Hunter Biden from the Chinese” on a recent visit to Beijing.⁵

Contrary to Navarro’s assertions, the American people have every right to know if negotiators are using United States’ trade policy to advance President Trump’s personal and political interests.

As Ranking Member of the Senate Finance Committee, I have a constitutional obligation to conduct oversight of matters related to trade agreements and the settlement of trade litigation. To assist my oversight of this matter, please provide answers to the following questions by November 8, 2019.

1. Did you ever discuss an existing or proposed investigation of Vice President or Hunter Biden as a part of ongoing trade negotiations with China with any Chinese official or Chinese national?
2. Did you ever discuss an existing or proposed investigation of any of President Trump’s political opponents as a part of ongoing trade negotiations with China with any Chinese official or Chinese national?
3. Are you aware of any discussions by the President, trade negotiators, or any other Administration officials or their agents, formal or informal, concerning investigations of Vice President or Hunter Biden as part of ongoing trade negotiations with China?
4. Are you aware of any discussions by the President, trade negotiators, or any other Administration officials or their agents concerning investigations of any of President Trump’s political opponents as part of ongoing trade negotiations with China?
5. Did you ever discuss any issues related to the personal financial benefit of President Trump or his family as a part of ongoing trade negotiations with China with any Chinese official or Chinese national?
6. Are you aware of any discussions by the President, trade negotiators, or any other Administration officials or their agents, formal or informal, concerning the personal

⁴ Kevin Liptak, “Trump now says both China and Ukraine should investigate Bidens,” Oct. 3, 2019, <https://www.cnn.com/2019/10/03/politics/donald-trump-ukraine-china-investigate-2020/index.html>.

⁵ Demetri Sevastopulo, “Trump Adviser Says China Provided Information About Hunter Biden,” Financial Times, Oct. 10, 2019, <https://amp.ft.com/content/d4b9b0a8-eb14-11e9-a240-3b065ef5fc55>; Demetri Sevastopulo, “Apparently Mike (@mikepillsbury) denied on C-Span that he told me this (<https://cs.pn/324FFP0>).

But here is the email exchange with him last night (and our story: <https://on.ft.com/2nACn79>).
https://twitter.com/Olivia_Gazis/status/1182291386554617857 ...” Oct, 10, 2019,
<https://twitter.com/Dimi/status/1182295578128064513?s=20>.

financial benefit of President Trump or his family as part of ongoing trade negotiations with China?

Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Ron Wyden". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Ron Wyden
Ranking Member