

November 17, 2016

President-Elect Donald J. Trump  
Trump Tower  
725 5th Avenue  
New York, NY 10022

Dear President-Elect Trump,

We are writing to urge you to place all of your business assets and investments into a genuine blind trust or the equivalent. This means that control of these assets would be transferred to an independent trustee who would sell the assets and place the proceeds in investments which do not create conflicts of interest and which are not disclosed to you.

Alternatively, you could convert the Trump Organization businesses to cash and buy treasury bills and widely diversified mutual funds. These holdings are deemed conflict free under federal law.

If family members choose to stay involved with Trump Organization businesses, or any other business, then, within the constraints of you selling all your ownership interests, a clear firewall must be established so that these family members have no involvement with policy decisions at the White House. This means you should pledge not to discuss the businesses with your children or anyone else involved. Contacts about the Trump businesses should be prohibited between all other administration officials and people involved in the businesses, including any of the children who maintain an ongoing involvement with the businesses. Except for personal communication with the president or first lady, such telephone calls and emails should be routed to White House counsel to make sure that the firewall is not breached.

We understand that this arrangement would require you to sever your relationship with the businesses that bear your name and with which you have invested a life's work. But whatever the personal discomfort caused, there is no acceptable alternative – and your duties to the American people now must prevail over your personal ties to the Trump Organization businesses.

Failure to follow this course of action will create conflicts of interest of unprecedented magnitude.

The nature and diversity of the Trump Organization businesses mean that a wide range of government policy has direct impact on those businesses. This includes important domestic matters related to tax policy, standards for government contractors, consumer protection, the functioning of the civil justice system, financial regulation, labor rights and workplace safety and health standards, and bankruptcy law.

Matters of foreign policy are also implicated because of the global reach of the Trump Organization. The American people need to know that when you are making decisions concerning our allies or our adversaries, you are not doing so because they are allies or adversaries of your businesses. Moreover, every time any foreign government or company controlled by a foreign government does business with a Trump entity, you could be accused of accepting a payment in violation of the emoluments clause of the Constitution, creating a constitutional crisis that could even result in threats of impeachment.

In the absence of a full separation from the Trump Organization businesses, the sources of conflict from your overriding duties to the American public are legion. For example, every time any private party sees an opening for litigation against a Trump business entity, that person, perhaps in collusion with your political opponents, could file suit, perhaps even against you personally, embroiling the presidency in litigation.

Mr. Trump, you were elected to the presidency with a promise to eliminate improper business influence in Washington, to break the stranglehold that commercial interests impose on government. There is no way to square your campaign commitments to the American people – and your even higher, ethical duties as their president – with the rampant, inescapable conflicts that will engulf your presidency if you maintain connections with the Trump Organization, including by maintaining ownership with control transferred to your children.

We would be pleased to meet with your transition team to discuss these issues and explore specific protocols for carrying out the ethical imperative of creating a genuine blind trust, divesting your ownership stake in the Trump Organization and creating a genuine firewall between those connected to the Trump Organization businesses and your administration. You can contact us via Robert Weissman

Sincerely,

Gary D. Bass

Campaign Legal Center

Center for American Progress

Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington (CREW)

Common Cause

Democracy 21

Ambassador (ret.) Norm Eisen, chief White House ethics lawyer, 2009-2011

Issue One

Thomas E. Mann

Norman Ornstein

Richard Painter, chief White House ethics lawyer, 2005-2007

Project on Government Oversight

Public Citizen