
National Legal and Policy Center



“promoting ethics in public life”

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Founded 1991

May 20, 2010

The President
The White House
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

Your Administration has reached an important ethical crossroads.

Throughout your campaign, you repeatedly and correctly pointed out the harm to our nation from unethical behavior in government service. Such actions are typified by what you personally termed “the revolving door” of political appointees who influence federal rules that affect their previous employer. More specifically, as you personally promised the American people in 2008:

“No political appointees in an Obama-Biden administration will be permitted to work on regulations or contracts directly and substantially related to their prior employer for two years.”

If your administration still believes in this campaign pledge, you cannot shrink from a difficult yet important decision: whether to allow Deputy Chief Technology Officer Andrew McLaughlin to continue serving in his capacity as a senior White House official.

As you have no doubt heard, Mr. McLaughlin was officially reprimanded last week for violating the Administration’s ethics policies. Prior to joining the White House last year, Mr. McLaughlin was the senior official with Google overseeing all Google public policy and lobbying efforts worldwide. Despite signing the Administration’s ethics pledge, evidence shows that Mr. McLaughlin has repeatedly circumvented its letter and spirit by communicating with Google officials about Administration policy affecting the company.

Mr. McLaughlin’s deliberate flouting of the Administration’s professed high ethical standards is readily apparent from the very emails that the White House itself released earlier this month. From web privacy to Net neutrality to China’s Internet policies, Mr. McLaughlin actively engaged Google’s lobbying team and at least one top Company official, in at least one case contradicting the Administration’s public stance.

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In that instance, the Administration was publicly stating that it was fairly and dispassionately evaluating a Court decision that had the potential to affect Google materially. Yet Mr.

McLaughlin simultaneously leaked highly sensitive and material inside information to a senior Google official via confidential email that Administration policy under review would not change.

Moreover, Mr. McLaughlin conducted this and other email exchanges through a personal email account, an almost certain violation of federal archiving rules.

For his actions, Mr. McLaughlin has received an official reprimand, yet remains in his position as a senior White House official. This lack of accountability for clear and repeated circumvention of the Administration's pledge to maintain high ethical standards is tremendously disappointing for the cause of better government.

As voters throughout America showed this week, ethical considerations have become a serious and motivating issue. Ongoing economic hardship and the perceived unfairness of how the innocent are suffering from actions by others have heightened public attention on the need for better accountability.

Finally, your Administration must view Mr. McLaughlin's transgressions within their corporate context. Google executives were among the largest contributors collectively to your presidential campaign. After the election, the company's CEO and other officials contributed more than \$25,000 apiece to help pay for your inaugural celebration. As a candidate, you rightly condemned the perception that Washington, DC operated under rules that allowed the rich and powerful to escape the rules that justly applied to everyone else.

If your Administration is truly committed to the idea of strict ethical standards that apply to all people equally, then your immediate action is vital. To clear the air from this ethics scandal, Mr. McLaughlin's tenure as a senior official of the Obama White House must end.

Sincerely,



Ken Boehm
Chairman