

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

March 13, 2025

The Honorable Douglas A. Collins
Acting Director
U.S. Office of Government Ethics
250 E Street, SW, Suite 750
Washington, DC 20024

Dear Acting Director Collins:

We write with serious concern that a top Trump Administration official, Elon Musk — in conjunction with President Trump — is using his official role and the public resources of the White House to promote his car company, Tesla. We ask that the Office of Government Ethics (OGE) recommend this matter for investigation and possible disciplinary action.

Yesterday, President Trump and Mr. Musk held a press conference at the White House to promote Tesla, turning the White House into “a temporary Tesla showroom.”¹ Five Tesla vehicles were displayed prominently outside of the White House.² At one point, the President and Mr. Musk entered one of the cars to explain its features.³ Standing beside a Tesla, Mr. Musk touted that one model won “best car ever” and encouraged viewers to “try it,” adding, “you’ll like it.”⁴

President Trump assisted in the promotion. While holding notes explaining the prices and features of various Tesla products,⁵ the President announced that, although he does not drive, he would buy a Tesla and allow his staff to drive it.⁶ He “declared the vehicles ‘beautiful’ and in particular praised the company’s unusually designed Cybertruck.”⁷ President Trump even expressed support for the federal government defending Tesla by designating individuals who commit violence at Tesla dealerships as domestic terrorists.⁸ Earlier that day, President Trump also posted on Truth Social signaling that his supporters should purchase Tesla vehicles to demonstrate their political support: “To Republicans, Conservatives, and all great Americans,

¹ NBC, “Trump turns the White House lawn into a Tesla showroom,” David Ingram, March 11, 2025, <https://www.nbcnews.com/tech/elon-musk/trump-musk-tesla-white-house-showroom-buys-car-rcna195905>.

² *Id.*

³ PBS News, “WATCH: Trump talks Tesla shopping with Musk,” Chris Megerian, March 11, 2025, 20:00-21:00, <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/politics/watch-trump-talks-tesla-shopping-with-musk>.

⁴ *Id.* at 5:45-6:25.

⁵ NBC, “Trump turns the White House lawn into a Tesla showroom,” David Ingram, March 11, 2025, <https://www.nbcnews.com/tech/elon-musk/trump-musk-tesla-white-house-showroom-buys-car-rcna195905>.

⁶ PBS News, “WATCH: Trump talks Tesla shopping with Musk,” Chris Megerian, March 11, 2025, 1:34-1:45, <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/politics/watch-trump-talks-tesla-shopping-with-musk>.

⁷ NBC, “Trump turns the White House lawn into a Tesla showroom,” David Ingram, March 11, 2025, <https://www.nbcnews.com/tech/elon-musk/trump-musk-tesla-white-house-showroom-buys-car-rcna195905>.

⁸ Reuters, “Trump says violence against Tesla is domestic terrorism,” Jeff Mason and Abhirup Roy, March 11, 2025, <https://www.reuters.com/world/us/trump-says-he-will-buy-new-tesla-show-support-musk-2025-03-11>.

Elon Musk is ‘putting it on the line’ in order to help our Nation, and he is doing a FANTASTIC JOB! . . . I’m going to buy a brand new Tesla tomorrow morning as a show of confidence and support for Elon Musk, a truly great American.”⁹

Mr. Musk appears to have violated federal ethics laws by using his official position to promote his company. As a Special Government Employee (SGE), Mr. Musk is subject to OGE regulations governing the conduct of executive branch employees.¹⁰ He works as an SGE within the White House, and “[e]mployees of the Executive Office of the President are subject to the executive branch-wide standards of ethical conduct.”¹¹ One of those standards, OGE regulation 5 CFR § 2635.702, prohibits using public office for private gain — including by using one’s “[g]overnment position or title or any authority associated with their public office to endorse any product” or “to imply that their agency or the Government sanctions or endorses their personal activities.”¹² While President Trump is exempt from that prohibition, Mr. Musk is not. By promoting Tesla during an official press conference with the President while using the White House as a backdrop, Mr. Musk appeared to leverage his senior role in the government and the authority associated with the presidency to recommend Tesla and to imply that the Trump Administration endorses Tesla vehicles. His actions also may have implicated 5 CFR § 2635.704, which prohibits using government property for purposes other than authorized purposes — such as using the White House as a *de facto* showroom to advertise a consumer product.¹³ Violations of these standards of ethical conduct can result in disciplinary action, including suspension or removal.¹⁴

OGE has previously warned that White House staff risk violating federal ethics laws by using their platforms to promote products.¹⁵ In 2017, senior Trump official Kellyanne Conway encouraged the public to “[g]o buy Ivanka’s stuff,” referring to a line of jewelry, clothing, and accessories sold by President Trump’s daughter.¹⁶ Conway added, “I’m going to give a free commercial here: Go buy it today, everybody; you can find it online.”¹⁷ Soon thereafter, OGE advised that the White House’s Designated Agency Ethics Official (DAEO) investigate the matter, noting that there was “strong reason to believe” that Conway had violated ethics laws and that disciplinary action was warranted.¹⁸ The White House Counsel’s Office then “immediately

⁹ Truth Social post by Donald J. Trump, March 11, 2025, <https://truthsocial.com/@realDonaldTrump/posts/114141854575248527>.

¹⁰ NPR, “Trump hired Musk as a ‘special government employee.’ Here’s what that means,” Joe Hernandez, February 13, 2025, <https://www.npr.org/2025/02/13/nx-s1-5293124/special-government-employee-trump-musk-doge>; 5 CFR § 2635.102.

¹¹ 3 CFR § 100.1.

¹² 5 CFR § 2635.702.

¹³ 5 CFR § 2635.704.

¹⁴ 5 CFR § 2635.106.

¹⁵ Letter from House Oversight Committee to the Director of the Office of Government Affairs Walter Shaub, February 9, 2017, <https://oversight.house.gov/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/Letter-to-OGE-re-Conway-Endorsement-FINAL.pdf>.

¹⁶ New York Times, “Kellyanne Conway Promotes Ivanka Trump Brand, Raising Ethics Concerns,” Richard Pérez-Peña and Rachel Abrams, February 9, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/02/09/us/politics/kellyanne-conway-ivanka-trump-ethics.html>.

¹⁷ *Id.*

¹⁸ Tweet from House Oversight Committee Democrats, February 14, 2017, <https://x.com/OversightDems/status/831578815868575744/photo/1>; NBC News, “Office of Government Ethics: ‘Strong Reason’ to Think Conway Violated Rules,” Andrew Rafferty, February 14, 2017,

undertook a review of the facts and circumstances,” agreed that the comments “implicated the prohibition on using one’s official position to endorse any product or service,” and met with Conway to review the standards of ethical conduct.¹⁹

OGE should do the same here. We ask that you recommend that the White House’s DAEO investigate these circumstances and determine whether Mr. Musk has violated federal ethics laws and whether additional action is warranted.

Ethics laws on the misuse of government positions serve a practical purpose. They help ensure that finite taxpayer resources are devoted to addressing public problems, from soaring egg prices to a Measles outbreak — rather than redirecting the President’s scarce time and White House resources to helping the world’s richest man get richer. Enforcement of these laws is of the utmost importance.

Sincerely,



Elizabeth Warren
United States Senator



Adam B. Schiff
United States Senator



Cory A. Booker
United States Senator



Richard Blumenthal
United States Senator

Cc: Scott Gast, Designated Agency Ethics Official, White House Office;
Susie Wiles, White House Chief of Staff

<https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/politics-news/office-government-ethics-strong-reason-think-conway-violated-rules-n720866...>

¹⁹ Letter from the Deputy Counsel to the President for Compliance and Ethics Stefan Passantino to the Director of the Office of Government Affairs Walter Shaub, February 28, 2017, <https://www.scribd.com/document/340675586/WH-Ethics-Office-on-Conway>.