

# Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

June 15, 2022

Mr. Emory A. Rounds, III  
Director  
U.S. Office of Government Ethics  
1201 New York Avenue, N.W., Suite 500  
Washington, D.C. 20005

Dear Mr. Rounds:

We are conducting oversight over the White House's proposal to reportedly forgive at least \$10,000 in student debt for millions of federal student loan borrowers with a household income up to \$300,000.<sup>1</sup> This policy is an unjust wealth transfer from hardworking Americans to highly educated upper-middle-class graduates who borrowed from taxpayers to earn their degree, and, in some cases, multiple degrees. In addition to the substantial and negative ramifications of this illegal action, we are especially concerned that this policy may have been promulgated by White House staffers who stand to financially benefit from the decision, especially considering recent reports that White House political appointees owe millions in student loan debt. Public officials should never use their office to unjustly enrich themselves, and such behavior would directly violate the Ethics Pledge that President Biden implemented for all political appointees.<sup>2</sup> We write to request your assistance in determining whether White House staffers have a conflict of interest and whether they or their family members would benefit from the policy they are pushing the President to enact.

Presumably, political appointees with outstanding student loans are included in the reported student loan forgiveness scheme the Biden administration is planning to undertake, thereby raising concerns of whether appointees with conflicts of interest pushed student loan forgiveness to receive a financial windfall. Indeed, a recent report found no less than thirty senior White House staffers with millions in outstanding student loans.<sup>3</sup> One in five White House staffers required to file a disclosure reported outstanding student loans.<sup>4</sup> Together, this group owes approximately \$4.7 million—a sum that does *not* include White House staffers not required to disclose such debt due to junior status or pay thresholds.<sup>5</sup> Public officials should not be responsible for crafting policies from which they stand to financially benefit.

Notwithstanding the gross abuse of power as executive branch employees, this would explicitly violate President Biden's Ethics Pledge, which requires that every appointee in every executive agency contractually pledge to make decisions exclusively within the public interest

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<sup>1</sup> Pager, Tyler, et al., *Latest White House plan would forgive \$10,000 in student debt per borrower*, WASH. POST (May 27, 2022).

<sup>2</sup> Exec. Order No. 13989 "Ethics Commitments by Executive Branch Personnel," (Jan. 20, 2021).

<sup>3</sup> Josh Wingrove, *Biden's Student Loan Plan is Personal for 30 Top Aides with Millions in Debt*, BLOOMBERG (May 19, 2022).

<sup>4</sup> *Id.*

<sup>5</sup> *Id.*

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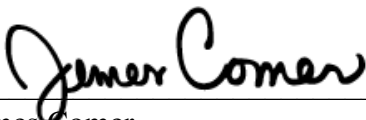
and without regard to personal benefit or gain.<sup>6</sup> Once again, the administration's actions contrast with President Biden's repeated promises to create a transparent and ethical administration.<sup>7</sup>

Many hardworking taxpayers do not hold a college degree, made difficult financial decisions to obtain a degree without borrowing from taxpayers, or made tough choices in order to pay off their student loans. We want to better understand the administration's decision to benefit indebted political appointees and highly educated graduates at the expense of taxpayers. To that end, we request the following information no later than June 29, 2022 covering the period January 20, 2021 to the present unless otherwise noted:

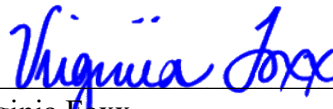
1. A list of all employees in the Biden administration who have worked on the administration's student loan forgiveness policy;
2. All documents and communications indicating whether those employees have outstanding student loans that would be forgiven in whole or in part under the policy;
3. A copy of any ethics waivers given to those employees to work on the student loan forgiveness policy;
4. A signed copy of all ethics pledges pertaining to individuals identified above.

To ask any follow-up or related questions, please contact the Committee on Oversight and Reform Republican staff at (202) 225-5074 and the Committee on Education and Labor Republican Staff at (202) 225-4527. The Committee on Oversight and Reform is the principal oversight committee of the U.S. House of Representatives and has broad authority to investigate "any matter" at "any time" under House Rule X. Thank you in advance for your cooperation with this inquiry.

Sincerely,



James Comer  
Ranking Member  
Committee on Oversight and Reform



Virginia Foxx  
Ranking Member  
Committee on Education and Labor

cc: The Honorable Carolyn Maloney, Chairwoman  
Committee on Oversight and Reform

The Honorable Bobby Scott, Chairman  
Committee on Education and Labor

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<sup>6</sup> *Supra*, n.2.

<sup>7</sup> Andrew Restuccia, *Biden Has Yet to Deliver on Some Ethics Pledges*, THE WALL STREET JOURNAL (July 14, 2021).