

C A M P A I G N F O R

ACCOUNTABILITY

October 11, 2017

David J. Apol  
Acting Director  
U.S. Office of Government Ethics  
1201 New York Avenue, NW  
Suite 500  
Washington, DC 20005

**Re: Request for Investigation of Secretary Ryan Zinke**

Dear Mr. Apol:

Campaign for Accountability (CfA) respectfully requests that your office investigate whether Secretary of the Interior Ryan Zinke has violated federal regulations prohibiting federal employees from using their public office to endorse private businesses.

ForthRight Strategy is a direct mail fundraising firm that uses direct mail strategies to “deliver results for conservative candidates for federal and state offices and conservative nonprofit and advocacy organizations.”<sup>1</sup> Prominently displayed on the firm’s home page is a quote from then-Congressman now Secretary of the Interior Ryan Zinke:

You guys are in large part why I had the money and support that afforded me the opportunity to become a Congressman for the at-large seat in Montana. Your results and personal commitment to Team Zinke were bar none! I greatly value the professional as well as the personal relationship we have developed over many years! Thank you!

As you know, federal employees are prohibited from using their public office “for the endorsement of any product, service or enterprise, or for the private gain of friends, relatives, or persons with whom the employee is affiliated in a nongovernment capacity . . .”<sup>2</sup> Ethics regulations prohibit employees from using their government positions or titles to endorse any product, service or enterprise.<sup>3</sup>

Earlier this year, White House advisor Kellyanne Conway had urged Fox News viewers to “go buy Ivanka’s stuff.”<sup>4</sup> Investigating the matter, the Office of Government Ethics found that

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.forthrightstrategy.com/>.

<sup>2</sup> 5 C.F.R. § 2635.702.

<sup>3</sup> 5 C.F.R. § 2635.702(c).

<sup>4</sup> Drew Harwell, Tom Hamburger and Rosalind S. Helderman, *White House Says Conway Has Been ‘Counseled’ After Touting Ivanka Trump’s Products*, *Washington Post*, February 9, 2017, available at [https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/conway-may-have-broken-key-ethics-rule-by-touting-ivanka-trumps-products-experts-say/2017/02/09/fd1cc64a-eeeda-11e6-b4ff-ac2cf509efe5\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/conway-may-have-broken-key-ethics-rule-by-touting-ivanka-trumps-products-experts-say/2017/02/09/fd1cc64a-eeeda-11e6-b4ff-ac2cf509efe5_story.html).

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Ms. Conway had violated the prohibition on endorsing products and suggested to the White House that she be disciplined for misusing her position.<sup>5</sup>

Here, by publicly endorsing a fundraising firm and allowing a quote of his to be included on the firm's website, it appears Secretary Zinke has violated the same prohibition. Therefore, CfA asks that you investigate this matter and recommend that the president take appropriate disciplinary action.<sup>6</sup>

Thank you for your prompt attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Dan E Stevens", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Daniel E. Stevens  
Executive Director

cc: Honorable Trey Gowdy  
Honorable Elijah Cummings  
House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform

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<sup>5</sup> Letter from Walter M. Shaub, Jr, Director, Office of Government Ethics to Stefan C. Passantino, Deputy Counsel to the President and Designated Agency Ethics Official, March 9, 2017, *available at* <https://oge.app.box.com/s/r2t4v8ftjmkx4cfgfolqzievuhcverfj2>.

<sup>6</sup> 5 U.S.C. §§ 402(b)(9) and (f)(2).