

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

May 23, 2024

Mr. Mike Sommers  
President and Chief Executive Officer  
American Petroleum Institute  
200 Massachusetts Avenue NW, Suite 1100  
Washington, DC 20001

Dear Mr. Sommers:

We write seeking information and documents from the American Petroleum Institute (API) concerning the recently reported *quid pro quo* solicited by former President Donald Trump at an April 11, 2024, fundraising event at the Mar-a-Lago Club, during which Mr. Trump apparently sought financial support for his election in exchange for future policy decisions. Such an obvious policies-for-money transaction reeks of cronyism and corruption. This solicitation, coupled with troubling reports that fossil fuel interests and other companies have been drafting language for use in executive orders favorable to their businesses during a possible second Trump Administration, demand immediate additional inquiry.

On May 9, 2024, the *Washington Post* and *New York Times* reported that oil billionaire Harold Hamm had hosted a 20-person fundraiser for former President Trump at the Mar-a-Lago Club that was attended by several oil and gas executives.<sup>1</sup> In the closed-door meeting, billed as an “energy round table,” Mr. Trump reportedly encouraged attendees, including representatives of API, collectively to raise \$1 billion for his 2024 presidential campaign because he would, in exchange, roll back environmental regulations, hasten permitting and leasing approvals, and preserve or enhance tax benefits that the industry enjoys.

According to reports, Mr. Trump made specific policy commitments, including promises to auction off more oil and gas leases on federal lands and in federal waters, reverse pollution standards for new cars, and end drilling restrictions in the Alaskan Arctic. He also vowed to terminate the pause on new permits for liquefied natural gas (LNG) exports, allegedly pledging to do so “on the first day.”<sup>2</sup> Notably, Mr. Trump called the proposed arrangement a “deal” for the executives given the tax and regulatory benefits that he would deliver for Big Oil companies and executives.<sup>3</sup>

Mr. Trump’s blatant *quid pro quo* offer is particularly concerning in light of concurrent reporting by *Politico* that the oil and gas industry is drafting “ready-to-sign” executive orders aimed at rolling back environmental policies, to be signed by Mr. Trump if elected. One

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<sup>1</sup> Josh Dawsey & Maxine Joselow, “What Trump promised oil CEOs as he asked them to steer \$1 billion to his campaign,” *Washington Post* (May 9, 2024) (online at <https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2024/05/09/trump-oil-industry-campaign-money/>); Lisa Friedman et al., “At a Dinner, Trump Assailed Climate Rules and Asked \$1 Billion from Big Oil,” *New York Times* (May 9, 2024) (online at <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/05/09/climate/trump-oil-gas-mar-a-lago.html>).

<sup>2</sup> Dawsey & Joselow, *supra* note 1.

<sup>3</sup> *Id.*

industry lobbyist told *Politico*, “We’re going to have to write exactly what we want, actually spoon feeding the administration. There’s 27-page drafts moving around Washington.”<sup>4</sup> Accordingly, by the fossil fuel industry’s own admission, there already exist specific policy proposals favorable to the industry, it is likely that the Trump campaign is aware of their substance, and Mr. Trump has now confirmed that he would deliver on them should the industry raise \$1 billion to support his election.

The fossil fuel industry’s active attempts to write policy for its preferred presidential candidate are simply the latest installment in Big Oil’s decades-long pattern and practice of lobbying for anti-climate policies even while trying to greenwash its public image. On April 30, 2024, the U.S. Senate Committee on the Budget and the U.S. House Committee on Oversight and Accountability Democrats released over 4,500 internal oil industry documents and issued a joint bicameral staff report. The release, which represented the culmination of a three-year investigation, detailed evidence that the fossil fuel industry has spread disinformation about the harms of its products and its commitment to addressing climate change in order to obstruct climate action and preserve—and even increase—the role of oil and gas in the energy mix.<sup>5</sup>

Of particular relevance here, documents released in the joint investigation detail the industry’s outsized influence on energy policy during Mr. Trump’s first administration. One email thread discussed submitting a *Washington Post* op-ed, a draft of which praised the Trump Administration’s “calls for increasing domestic energy production and reforming the federal regulatory system.”<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, the joint investigation found that, throughout the Trump Administration, the fossil fuel industry spent billions lobbying directly and via its trade associations against legislation and regulations to address climate change that it publicly claimed to support. In one example, BP publicly opposed the Trump Administration’s rollback of methane regulations, but contemporaneous internal emails showed that BP saw the rollback as “aligned with our thinking.”<sup>7</sup>

In turn, the Trump Administration appeared to rely on the oil and gas industry to support and defend its anti-climate energy agenda. In early 2017, a Trump Administration official emailed a Chevron official, among others, to offer talking points on President Trump’s withdrawal from the Paris Agreement, urging recipients to “use and share as you see fit and

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<sup>4</sup> Ben Lefebvre, “‘A little bold and gross’: Oil industry writes executive orders from Trump to sign,” *Politico* (May 8, 2024) (online at <https://www.politico.com/news/2024/05/08/oil-industry-orders-trump-day-one-00156705#:~:text=The%20U.S.%20oil%20industry%20is,direct%20knowledge%20of%20the%20work>).

<sup>5</sup> Senate Committee on the Budget, *New Joint Bicameral Staff Report Reveals Big Oil’s Campaign of Climate Denial, Disinformation, and Doublespeak* (April 30, 2024) (online at <https://www.budget.senate.gov/chairman/newsroom/press/new-joint-bicameral-staff-report-reveals-big-oils-campaign-of-climate-denial-disinformation-and-doublespeak/>).

<sup>6</sup> BPA\_HCOR\_00029988 (online at <https://www.budget.senate.gov/chairman/newsroom/press/new-joint-bicameral-staff-report-reveals-big-oils-campaign-of-climate-denial-disinformation-and-doublespeak/>).

<sup>7</sup> Lawrence Carter, “BP Lobbied Trump Administration to Roll Back Key U.S. Climate Rules,” *Unearthed* (Dec. 3, 2019) (online at <https://unearthed.greenpeace.org/2019/03/12/bp-lobbied-trump-climate-methane-obama/>); BPA\_HCOR\_00341864 (online at <https://www.budget.senate.gov/chairman/newsroom/press/new-joint-bicameral-staff-report-reveals-big-oils-campaign-of-climate-denial-disinformation-and-doublespeak/>).

please do flood the zone with public communications of support—TV, radio, social media, statements, op-eds, etc. The climate-change supporters will be out there trashing this move, so we'd love as much back-up for the President as possible.”<sup>8</sup>

Time and time again, both Mr. Trump and the U.S. oil and gas industry have proved they are willing to sell out Americans to pad their own pockets. As Mr. Trump funnels campaign money into his businesses and uses it as a slush fund to pay his legal fees, Big Oil has been lobbying aggressively to protect and expand its profits at the expense of the American taxpayer.<sup>9</sup> And now, emboldened by impunity, Mr. Trump and Big Oil are flaunting their indifference to U.S. citizens' economic well-being for all to see, conferring on how to trade campaign cash for policy changes. Such potential abuses must be scrutinized.

Accordingly, to assist the Committees in their investigation, please produce the following information and documents by no later than June 6, 2024:

1. The names and titles of any individuals employed or funded by your company who attended an event on or about April 11, 2024, at Mar-a-Lago. In addition, please provide documents or information sufficient to show the names and titles of all other attendees.
2. All materials and communications related to the event shared or distributed with any attendees of the event by any participant, organizer, or entity during, in advance of, or following the event. This includes contemporaneous notes taken by any participant, organizer, or entity detailing discussions during the event that are in the possession, custody, or control of your company or any individual who attended the event on behalf of your company.
3. Descriptions of policy proposals discussed at the event, including but not limited to any promises by former President Donald Trump, Trump 2024 campaign officials, or anyone else acting on behalf of Mr. Trump or his campaign, regarding official actions by a potential future Trump Administration.
4. Descriptions of discussions of campaign contributions at the event, including but not limited to any promises by former President Donald Trump, Trump 2024 campaign officials, or anyone else acting on behalf of Mr. Trump or his campaign, regarding official actions by a potential future Trump Administration that would be taken as a result of those contributions.

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<sup>8</sup> CHEV-117HCOR-0047194 (online at <https://www.budget.senate.gov/chairman/newsroom/press/new-joint-bicameral-staff-report-reveals-big-oils-campaign-of-climate-denial-disinformation-and-doublespeak/>).

<sup>9</sup> Zac Anderson & Erin Mansfield, “Trump is funneling campaign money into cash-strapped businesses. Experts say it looks bad.,” *USA Today* (Apr. 18, 2024) (online at <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/politics/elections/2024/04/18/trump-campaign-funnels-money-to-his-businesses/73344744007/>); Katherine Doyle & Ben Kamisar, “More than \$27M in Trump campaign fundraising went to legal costs in the last six months of 2023,” *NBC News* (Jan. 31, 2024) (online at <https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/2024-election/trump-campaign-paid-legal-fees-lawyers-millions-rcna136498>).

5. Any audio recordings, video recordings, or other similar contemporaneous recordings of the entirety or any portion of the event that are in the possession, custody, or control of your company or any individual who attended the event on behalf of your company.
6. Communications—including emails and email attachments, memoranda, meeting minutes, phone logs, and text messages dating from January 1, 2024 through the present—between or among API’s executives, officers, employees, or contractors, and representatives of the Trump campaign or any outside groups supporting the Trump campaign concerning oil and gas production, exploration, permitting or leasing; environmental or energy policy; climate change; and potential future executive orders concerning any of these issues.
7. Copies of any draft executive orders, regulatory proposals, or other policy-related documents API has drafted, edited, or reviewed that were created for the purpose of potential use in a future Trump administration. For any such proposals not authored by API, please provide the original author of the document and any other entities that may have reviewed it. For any such proposals authored by API, please provide a list of any other entities that may have reviewed it.
8. All donations made by API, any political action committee affiliated with API, or any executive officers of API to the Trump 2024 campaign, any outside political spending organizations supporting the Trump 2024 campaign, and any organizations incorporated under sections 501(c)(3), (4), or (6) of the Internal Revenue Code since January 1, 2023.

Thank you for your attention to this important issue. We look forward to further engagement with you on this topic.



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Sheldon Whitehouse  
Chairman  
Senate Committee on the Budget



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Ron Wyden  
Chairman  
Senate Committee on Finance