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One Hundred Sixteenth Congress
U.S. House of Representatives
Committee on Foreign Affairs
2170 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515
www.foreignaffairs.house.gov

October 5, 2020

The Honorable Brian Bulatao
Undersecretary of State for Management
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20037

Marik String
Acting Legal Adviser
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20037

Dear Mr. Bulatao and Mr. String:

We appreciated your participation in the Foreign Affairs Committee's September 16th hearing regarding the firing of State Department Inspector General Steve Linick. We were greatly concerned, however, by Mr. String's remarks to the Committee acknowledging that the issue of potential participation by the Secretary in campaign rallies for President Trump was reviewed by the Department last year.

The Secretary of State is our country's top diplomat, responsible for representing all of America to the rest of the world, not the narrow interests of a particular president or political party. For this reason, Secretaries of State have long avoided weighing in on domestic political matters, and no Secretary of State in recent history has actively participated in a political party convention. There is no place for partisan politics in the halls and offices of the State Department, and we consider it deeply inappropriate and potentially illegal for the Secretary of State even to seriously consider actively campaigning for a presidential candidate. Based on the lack of appearances by the Secretary at Trump political rallies in 2019 and early 2020, we can only surmise that the Department came to the same conclusion then.

Nevertheless, since you both testified, Secretary Pompeo has delivered speeches at domestic locations, including a church in Texas and the state Senate in Wisconsin, and remotely

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at a fundraiser for a domestic organization in Florida. There are reports that the former chairman of the Republican Party and the President's first chief of staff, Reince Priebus, traveled with the Secretary to Wisconsin on his government plane.¹

It is concerning that the Secretary is suddenly crisscrossing the country at taxpayers' expense to speak with state legislators and private groups and that these events appear to be increasing in frequency as the November 3rd election approaches. The nexus of speeches about the Secretary's personal religious beliefs, to a swing-state legislature accompanied by a former senior Republican party official, and at a paid-access event for an anti-abortion advocacy group, to the Secretary's official duties as America's lead diplomat is unclear and possibly illegal. These latest speaking engagements come on the heels of Secretary Pompeo's remarks before the Republican National Convention on August 25th, which we are investigating² and have also asked the State Department's Inspector General to investigate.³

These developments beg the question as to whether the Secretary has received new requests from the White House—beyond the 2019 request Mr. String acknowledged in his testimony—to engage in activities to support of President Trump's reelection. It also underscores our outstanding question of whether the State Department Office of the Legal Adviser has provided new or updated guidance to the Secretary on the matter of participating in partisan political activities since July 24, 2020 (when cable guidance went out to all State employees enumerating restrictions on political activity).

To ensure that the Committee may properly review these issues, we ask that you immediately provide the documents Chairman Castro requested in his August 25th letter. Further, we ask that you provide the Committee with the following by October 12, 2020:

- The Department's current guidance to the Secretary on Hatch Act compliance, and whether this guidance differs in any way from the guidance reiterated to all Department employees in a July 24, 2020 cable. If it differs, please describe the differences, the date on which the new guidance was issued, and furnish a copy of the new guidance in your response.
- Any and all records reflecting legal guidance sought by or provided to the Secretary in connection with his September 20 remarks in a Texas church.

¹ <https://www.cnn.com/2020/09/24/politics/pompeo-priebus-wisconsin/index.html>

² <https://castro.house.gov/media-center/press-releases/chairman-castro-launches-investigation-of-the-us-secretary-of-states-participation-in-the-republican-national-convention>

³ <https://foreignaffairs.house.gov/press-releases?ID=B541D448-FA1A-4CB8-80E7-A503F2A90CE3>

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- Any and all records reflecting legal guidance sought by or provided to the Secretary in connection with his September 23 speech at the Wisconsin State Capitol, as well as any and all records pertaining to former RNC chairman and former White House chief of staff Reince Priebus joining the Secretary's traveling party on the taxpayer-funded plane trip to Wisconsin and the foreign policy purpose Mr. Priebus' presence served on the delegation.
- Any and all records reflecting legal guidance sought by or provided to the Secretary in connection with his October 3 remarks to a domestic policy advocacy organization in Florida;
- Any and all records related to communications between the White House and Department of State regarding Secretary Pompeo's potential participation in events connected with the campaign to re-elect President Trump.

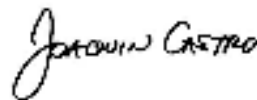
We are concerned that Secretary Pompeo's actions threaten the institutional integrity and reputation of the State Department, as well as long-standing principles of election fairness. To that end, we urge the Secretary to cease from engaging in any further activity that could be construed as partisan in nature.

I thank you for your prompt attention to our concerns.

Sincerely,



ELIOT L. ENGEL
Chairman



JOAQUIN CASTRO
Chairman
Subcommittee on Oversight and
Investigations