

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

April 25, 2018

The Honorable John F. Kelly  
Chief of Staff to the President  
White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue  
Washington, DC 20500

Dear General Kelly,

Technology and innovation are critical to our modern economy. Exciting developments in artificial intelligence, telemedicine, transportation, and countless other functions mean that strong leadership is required to ensure our nation's success in the twenty-first century. That is why we have interest in writing you today to request information related to the White House's Office of American Innovation (OAI).

As you well know, the Office of American Innovation was established by President Trump on March 27, 2017. The goal of the office was to focus on "implementing policies and scaling proven private-sector models to spur job creation and innovation."<sup>1</sup> As we have now passed the one year anniversary of OAI, it is imperative that the public can be sure that the office is making progress towards its aims while maintaining transparency and acting according to the highest ethical standards. Recent reporting raises concerns on a number of these issues.

According to a recent press account, multiple people in the White House reported that they "had no real idea what the Office of American Innovation was there for."<sup>2</sup> A report by the New York Times quotes Mr. Jared Kushner, who leads the office, as responding to an inquiry about the mission of OAI from former Chief of Staff Reince Priebus with "What do you care?" The White House told the New York Times that OAI has been involved in the hurricane recovery in Puerto Rico<sup>3</sup>, but so far no information has been made available about what actions were taken by members of the office and other US officials on the island were unaware of their presence. OAI did not respond to multiple press inquiries on this matter.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, financial disclosure forms filed by Reed Cordish, a former real estate developer who helped run OAI until earlier this year, indicate that he holds defaulted Puerto Rican debt.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Presidential Memorandum on The White House Office of American Innovation.

<sup>2</sup> Jared Kushner's Pet Project Doesn't Have A Signature Accomplishment. BuzzFeed News. (March 12, 2018)  
<https://www.buzzfeed.com/tariniparti/jared-kushners-pet-project-is-missing-a-signature>

<sup>3</sup> Jared Kushner's Vast Duties, and Visibility in White House, Shrink. New York Times. (Nov 25, 2017)  
<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/11/25/us/politics/jared-kushner-white-house-trump.html>

<sup>4</sup> The White House Bragged That Jared Kushner Helped Puerto Rico. Actually.. Mother Jones (Jan 24, 2018)

<https://www.motherjones.com/politics/2018/01/the-white-house-bragged-that-jared-kushner-helped-puerto-rico-actually/>

<sup>5</sup> OGE Form 278e. Reed Cordish. <https://www.documentcloud.org/documents/3766571-Cordish-Reed.html>

Worryingly, many White House staff members who worked for the office have resigned: Gary Cohn, an original member of the office, recently resigned; Dina Powell, Senior Counselor to the President for Economic Initiatives, left in January to return to her former company Goldman Sachs;<sup>6</sup> Reed Cordish left the office earlier this year and Josh Raffel left the administration in February. This high level of turnover raises concerns about the effectiveness of the office.

According to Kushner, the office was designed to implement “solutions by combining internal resources...with the private sector’s innovation and creativity...”<sup>7</sup> To accomplish this successfully, OAI must remain transparent. Yet, BuzzFeed News reports that the office has now resorted to off-the-record meetings with business leaders such as officials from an association representing Twitter, Google, and Amazon, all hidden from public view.<sup>8</sup> According to plaintiffs in an ongoing legal case against the White House, OAI has not acknowledged multiple requests for information, which was sought because of OAI’s role in the development of the administration’s infrastructure proposals.<sup>9</sup>

This pattern of failing to disclose information is troubling and raises questions about potential conflicts of interest and favoritism, especially given that OAI’s leader, Mr. Kushner, has failed to place his financial assets in a blind trust and repeatedly omitted key facts on his financial disclosure form. A transparent picture of what industry’s role has been in drafting and influencing policy designed by OAI, or otherwise considered by the Administration, is needed to ensure the trust of the American taxpayer.

Because of these, and other concerns, we are requesting the following:

- According to the Presidential Memorandum on The White House Office of American Innovation, OAI is charged with scaling up “private-sector models,” please provide:
  - A list of private sector partners with whom OAI has met with in pursuance of its mission.
  - The dates, times, and attendees of these meetings.
  - The topics discussed at these meetings.
- Please provide a list of names of all members, both current and former, of OAI, along with their official job title, and the dates on which they served in OAI.
- Please provide a list of dates, times, attendees, and topics discussed at all internal OAI meetings.
- Please provide details regarding how all former officials of OAI are complying with the Executive Order titled “Ethics Commitments by Executive Branch Appointees.”
- If the White House has a specific amount of money budgeted for OAI operations and mission, please provide:

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<sup>6</sup> Former Trump Adviser Dina Powell Is Returning to Goldman Sachs. Bloomberg. (Feb 27, 2018) <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2018-02-27/former-trump-adviser-dina-powell-is-returning-to-goldman-sachs>

<sup>7</sup> President Donald J. Trump Announces the White House Office of American Innovation (OAI). (March 27, 2017) <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/president-donald-j-trump-announces-white-house-office-american-innovation-oai/>

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> *Democracy Forward et al v. White House Office of Innovation*. 1:2018cv00349 (2018)

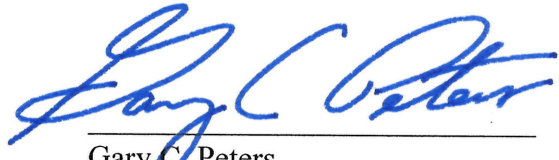
- The total amount of funds expended from this budget since the office was established.
- The total amount of funds spent to provide travel for OAI members for official OAI duties.
- Please provide information on what actions were taken by members of OAI in Puerto Rico, including any data gathered or recommendations made by the office.
- Please provide information related to any financial interests members of the office have in Puerto Rico.
- Please provide information on if any confidential or classified information were viewed by office personnel as part of OAI duties and the security clearances possessed by members of the office.
- Please provide any guidance that the White House has issued to the members of OAI regarding responding to inquiries for information.

The goal of OAI is admirable, but these recent reports suggest that rather than encouraging efficiency in government, the office is potentially a vehicle for cronyism and waste. We appreciate your time and attention on this matter and look forward to your response.

Sincerely,



Catherine Cortez Masto  
United States Senator



Gary C. Peters  
United States Senator