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United States Senate

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December 02, 2020

The Honorable Betsy DeVos
Secretary of Education
U.S. Department of Education
400 Maryland Avenue, SW
Washington, D.C. 20202

Dear Secretary DeVos:

I am writing to you regarding reports of the Department of Education's role in the Trump Administration's concerning relationship with Turkey's President, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. According to the *New York Times*, officials at the National Security Council asked the Department of Education to block federal funding for a network of schools associated with Fethullah Gülen, a permanent U.S. resident and critic of President Erdoğan.¹ Erdoğan blames Mr. Gülen for an attempted coup in 2016, without producing public evidence for the claim. President Erdoğan has also called Mr. Gülen a terrorist and has repeatedly sought his extradition.²

Reportedly, the National Security Council's recent request to the Department was related to others made by the White House aimed at forcing Mr. Gülen to leave the United States, as well as efforts to end an investigation into a Turkish state-owned bank, Halkbank. These actions by the Trump Administration are all the more troubling given that former National Security Adviser John R. Bolton publically detailed concerns that President Trump was granting personal favors to President Erdoğan.³

These policy interventions, which would likely advance Turkish interests, coincide with President Trump's pardon of his former National Security Advisor, Michael T. Flynn.⁴ Mr.

¹ *Turkish Bank Case Showed Erdogan's Influence With Trump*, THE NEW YORK TIMES, Oct. 29, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/10/29/us/politics/trump-erdogan-halkbank.html>.

² *Id.*

³ JOHN BOLTON, THE ROOM WHERE IT HAPPENED 412 (2020).

⁴ *Statement from the Press Secretary Regarding Executive Grant of Clemency for General Michael T. Flynn*, Nov. 25, 2020, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/statement-press-secretary-regarding-executive-grant-clemency-general-michael-t-flynn/>.

Flynn pleaded guilty to lying about his work on behalf of the Turkish government in 2016, including on election day.⁵

These circumstances reinforce my concern that the Trump Administration's policy on Turkey, and in this instance the Administration's domestic education policy, may be driven by President Trump's personal interests and those of foreign leaders rather than the interests of the American people. To assist this investigation I ask that you respond to the following:

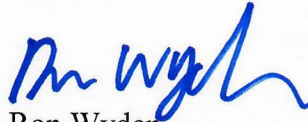
1. Did President Trump, his agents, National Security Council officials, or other White House personnel, ever instruct or suggest that you or the Department take any action with regard to charter schools associated with Mr. Gülen? If so, when and what were you asked to do? Did any such request raise any concerns about undue influence by President Trump in the matter?
2. If President Trump, his agents, National Security Council officials, or other White House personnel, instructed the Department to block or reduce federal funding to charter schools associated with Mr. Gülen, or suggested that they do so, what basis, if any, was cited for the instruction or suggestion?
3. If the Department was instructed or advised to block or reduce federal funding to charter schools associated with Mr. Gülen, did the Department examine whether it had the legal authority to do so? If so, what did the Department conclude, and with whom was this analysis shared?
4. In general, does the Department have the legal authority to block or reduce funding to charter schools solely on the basis of a request from the President, or someone acting at the President's direction?
5. Identify any meetings or conversations you or any other senior Department of Education officials have held with any senior Turkish officials since your confirmation, identify the participants in those conversations and meetings, and the nature of those discussions including whether or not they discussed Gülen.
6. Please provide all Department of Education documents related to Mr. Gülen or schools affiliated with Mr. Gülen since 2016, including but not limited to, documents responsive to these questions.

⁵ *United States of America v. Michael T. Flynn*, 1:17-cr-00232-RC (D.D.C 2019), Statement of the Offense at 5, <https://www.justice.gov/file/1015126/download>, ("In the FARA filings, FLYNN made materially false statements and omissions, including by falsely stating that (a) FIG did not know whether or the extent to which the Republic of Turkey was involved in the Turkey project, (b) the Turkey project was focused on improving U.S. business organizations' confidence regarding doing business in Turkey, and (c) an op-ed by FLYNN published in The Hill on November 8, 2016, was written at his own initiative; and by omitting that officials from the Republic of Turkey provided supervision and direction over the Turkey project.").

Please provide answers to these questions no later than December 16, 2020.

Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,



Ron Wyden
Ranking Member