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COMMITTEE ON THE JUDICIARY

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May 21, 2025

The Honorable Steve Witkoff
U.S. Special Envoy to the Middle East
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street, NW
Washington, DC 20520

The Honorable Pete Hegseth
Secretary
U.S. Department of Defense
1000 Defense Pentagon
Washington, DC 20301

Dear Ambassador Witkoff and Secretary Hegseth:

For the past week, President Trump has been publicly suggesting that the Qatari royal family's offer to provide him with a \$400 million "flying palace" was a generous gift, a "very nice gesture," and a "free, very expensive airplane."¹ However, recent press reports indicate that this plane was no gift at all, but instead a coerced offering after a months-long pressure campaign that both of you were intimately involved with. Indeed, President Trump himself slipped up in his interview with Bret Baier and said: "I made a good deal, we need a plane for a couple years."² In any event, I write today to clarify whether this \$400 million "gift," in either case a glaring Emoluments Clause violation without congressional consent, is also the result of an illegal shakedown operation.

President Trump has long made clear that he believes the current Air Force One is drab and that he is impatient for Boeing to deliver replacements he ordered during his first term in office, at the astounding cost to taxpayers of \$3.9 billion. As soon as it became clear that the planes might not be ready before he leaves office in 2029, President Trump began to complain that he was "not happy with Boeing" and "was looking at alternatives because it's taking Boeing too long."³ By the time the "gift" of the luxury plane from Qatar was announced, the President's plane envy was on full public display: "We are the United States of America I believe we should have the most impressive plane."⁴

According to reporting from multiple sources, President Trump tasked Ambassador Witkoff with "finding a list of viable planes" that could replace his current Air Force One

¹ Donald J. Trump (@realDonaldTrump), Truth Social (May 11, 2025, 8:42 p.m.), <https://truthsocial.com/@realDonaldTrump/114492082555622686>.

² Special Report w/ Bret Baier, FOX NEWS (May 16, 2025), <https://www.foxnews.com/video/6372941900112>.

³ Donald J. Trump (@realDonaldTrump), Truth Social (May 11, 2025, 8:42 p.m.), <https://truthsocial.com/@realDonaldTrump/114492082555622686>.

⁴ *Trump on new Boeing 747: We are painting it 'like the American flag,'* FOX NEWS (May 15, 2025), <https://www.foxnews.com/video/6372774627112>.

planes.⁵ Soon thereafter, at Secretary Hegseth's direction, Pentagon officials entered into conversations with Qatar, facilitated by Ambassador Witkoff, to obtain an ultra-luxury plane. In February, the Qatari government flew the ultra-luxury plane to the United States at an estimated cost of \$1 million or more, so President Trump could inspect the plane at the Palm Beach International Airport.⁶ At the time, the White House explained that the President was merely viewing the plane "to check out the new hardware/technology" available from Boeing, which made little sense since the technology on the plane was already 12 years old.⁷ In truth, this was an opportunity for the President to check out the plane, which included a luxurious interior "done by famed French interior design firm Alberto Pinto Cabinet, and boasts gold-colored walls and gold furnishings, reminiscent of the president's opulent home in Trump Tower,"⁸ bedrooms outfitted with the "soft fabrics of the highest quality" and "luxurious leather and exquisite wood veneers" and a "lavishly designed" bathroom that is "almost a piece of art."⁹

After the tour, it was clear that President Trump was enamored of its handiwork and determined to obtain the ultra-luxury plane, reportedly "talk[ing] about the plane as if getting it for his own use was a done deal."¹⁰ Indeed, weeks before the President traveled to the Middle East, where Qatari royals purportedly decided to "offer" him this plane, the Trump Administration had already contracted with Florida-based L3Harris Technologies, Inc., to overhaul the plane for use as Air Force One.¹¹

Although sources indicate that the Pentagon initially discussed purchasing or leasing the ultra-luxury plane, one source told the *New York Times* that Ambassador Witkoff had "always believed the transaction would be a donation."¹² President Trump himself has repeatedly

⁵ Alex Marquardt, Kristen Holmes and Natasha Bertrand, *Sources contradict Trump narrative about Qatar offering plane as 'gift'*, CNN (May 19, 2025), <https://www.cnn.com/2025/05/19/politics/trump-administration-approached-qatar-jet>.

⁶ Eric Lipton, et al., *The Inside Story of Trump's Search for a New Air Force One*, N.Y. TIMES (May 19, 2025), <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/05/19/us/politics/trump-air-force-one-qatar-jet.html>; See also Andrea Shalal and Tim Hether, *Trump tours a Boeing plane to spotlight delay on getting new Air Force One*, REUTERS (Feb. 15, 2025), <https://www.reuters.com/business/aerospace-defense/trump-tours-boeing-plane-spotlight-delay-getting-new-air-force-one-2025-02-15/>.

⁷ Andrea Shalal and Tim Hether, *Trump tours a Boeing plane to spotlight delay on getting new Air Force One*, REUTERS (Feb. 15, 2025), <https://www.reuters.com/business/aerospace-defense/trump-tours-boeing-plane-spotlight-delay-getting-new-air-force-one-2025-02-15/>.

⁸ Katherine Donlevy, *See inside Trump's lavish new Air Force One complete with gold walls and opulent furnishings*, N.Y. POST (May 3, 2025), <https://nypost.com/2025/05/03/us-news/see-inside-trumps-lavish-new-air-force-one-complete-with-gold-walls-and-opulent-furnishings/>.

⁹ Eric Lipton, et al., *The Inside Story of Trump's Search for a New Air Force One*, N.Y. TIMES (May 19, 2025), <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/05/19/us/politics/trump-air-force-one-qatar-jet.html>.

¹⁰ *Id.*

¹¹ Andrew Tangel, Josh Dawsey, and Sharon Terlep, *Trump Wants a New Air Force One So Badly He's Refurbishing a Qatari Plane*, WALL STREET JOURNAL (May 1, 2025), <https://www.wsj.com/business/airlines/air-force-one-trump-qatari-jet-l3harris-fc903838>.

¹² Eric Lipton, et. al., *The Inside Story of Trump's Search for a New Air Force One*, N.Y. TIMES (May 19, 2025), <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/05/19/us/politics/trump-air-force-one-qatar-jet.html>.

described the deal as “GIFT, FREE OF CHARGE” from Qatar.¹³ This is hardly surprising. President Trump has a long history of using his office to profit from business with foreign countries, including Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and United Arab Emirates, exploiting rivalries and competition among the Gulf countries to enrich himself and his family.

As a January 2024 House Oversight Committee staff report revealed, during his first administration, the President’s businesses collected millions of dollars from the three countries.¹⁴ Within just a two-month period in 2018, Qatar’s royal family booked multiple rooms at the Trump International Hotel in Washington, D.C., and incurred hundreds of thousands of dollars in debt. The State of Qatar also purchased a new unit in Trump World Tower for \$6.5 million.¹⁵ This lavish spending appeared to pay immediate dividends for Qatar. In 2017, President Trump initially expressed support for a blockade of Qatar by Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, who themselves had been booking rooms at the Trump International Hotel and receiving the benefits of a favorable U.S. foreign policy.¹⁶ However, after the Qatari government transferred millions to The Trump Organization through hotel stays and real estate transactions, President Trump agreed to meet with the Emir of Qatar at the White House.¹⁷ Two weeks later, then-Secretary of State Mike Pompeo traveled to Saudi Arabia and reportedly urged his Saudi counterpart to terminate the blockade.¹⁸

Qatar now has even more to benefit—and more to lose—from a good relationship with President Trump. Qatar is the second-largest government-to-government military trading partner with the United States, purchasing over \$26 billion worth of defense systems and military equipment annually.¹⁹ On his recent trip abroad, President Trump “signed an agreement with Qatar to generate an economic exchange worth at least \$1.2 trillion” and “announced economic deals totaling more than \$243.5 billion between the United States and Qatar.”²⁰ The commercial agreements include a \$96 billion deal with the state-owned Qatar Airways, the national airline of

¹³ *Id.*; Donald J. Trump (@realDonaldTrump), Truth Social (May 11, 2025, 8:42 p.m.), <https://truthsocial.com/@realDonaldTrump/114492082555622686>.

¹⁴ *White House for Sale: How Princes, Prime Ministers, and Premiers Paid Off President Trump*, Democratic Staff Report, Committee on Oversight and Accountability, (Jan. 4, 2024), <https://oversightdemocrats.house.gov/sites/evo-subsites/democrats-oversight.house.gov/files/2024-01-04.COA%20DEMS%20-%20Mazars%20Report.pdf>.

¹⁵ *Id.*

¹⁶ *Id.*

¹⁷ *Id.*

¹⁸ *Id.*

¹⁹ U.S. Department of State, *Fact Sheet: U.S. Security Cooperation With Qatar* (Jan. 20, 2025), <https://www.state.gov/u-s-security-cooperation-with-qatar>; According to the State Department, recent and significant sales include: “Integrated Air & Missile Defense System, including the Patriot long-range missile system, the National Advanced Surface to Air Missile System, and the AN/FPS-132 Early Warning Radar; F-15QA fighter aircraft—the most advanced F-15 in production; and AH-64E Apache attack helicopters.”

²⁰ The White House, *Fact Sheet: President Donald J. Trump Secures Historic \$1.2 Trillion Economic Commitment in Qatar* (May 14, 2025), <https://www.whitehouse.gov/fact-sheets/2025/05/fact-sheet-president-donald-j-trump-secures-historic-1-2-trillion-economic-commitment-in-qatar/>.

the State of Qatar, to purchase 160 Boeing jetliners with GE Aerospace engines.²¹ Given what's at stake in this official deal-making, it would not surprise anyone to learn that the "gift" of the luxury plane was thrown into the deal as a personal sweetener.

The American people deserve to know whether Donald Trump is using the presidency to shake down foreign governments for his personal financial gain, violating the Constitution and his oath of office in the process. As the President's Envoy to the Middle East and the Secretary of Defense who reportedly assisted him in pressuring the Qatari royal family over a period of months into "gifting" him this coveted "flying palace," each of you owe the American people answers to the following essential questions.²²

Accordingly, I request that each of you please provide responses to the following questions as soon as possible but no later than 5:00 p.m. on June 4, 2025:

1. When did you first learn about President Trump's interest in obtaining the \$400 million "flying palace"?
2. When did discussions first begin with the State of Qatar regarding the \$400 million "flying palace"?
3. Did President Trump, or anyone on his behalf, convey to the Qatari royal family or the Qatari government that the President would like to receive a luxury airplane from Qatar?
4. Did you participate in discussions or negotiations with the Qatari government about the \$400 million "flying palace"? Who else participated?
5. Who first suggested that the \$400 million "flying palace" be "donated" for the use of President Trump rather than through a purchase or lease?
6. Who first suggested that the \$400 million "flying palace" be transferred to the Trump presidential library after President Trump departs office?
7. How much money will the United States government need to invest in the Qatari "flying palace" in order to retrofit it for Air Force One specifications, to debug it, and to make sure it complies with American national security and anti-surveillance, anti-espionage, and anti-sabotage requirements?

²¹ Andrew Mills and Dan Catchpole, *Qatar Airways orders 160 Boeing twin-aisle jets during Trump visit*, REUTERS (May 14, 2025), <https://www.reuters.com/business/aerospace-defense/qatar-signs-200-bln-deal-buy-jets-boeing-during-trump-visit-2025-05-14/>.

²² Eric Lipton, et al., *The Inside Story of Trump's Search for a New Air Force One*, N.Y. TIMES (May 19, 2025), <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/05/19/us/politics/trump-air-force-one-qatar-jet.html>.

The Honorable Steve Witkoff
The Honorable Pete Hegseth
Page 5

In addition to answering these questions, please provide all documents and communications related to the \$400 million ultra-luxury airplane, including any communications, agreements, or draft agreements with the State of Qatar, L3Harris, and the Palm Beach Airport as soon as possible, but no later than 5:00 p.m. on June 4, 2025. The information and documents you provide will help us determine whether the \$400 million ultra-luxury “gift,” already suffering from insurmountable ethical, constitutional, and logistical problems, is the result of a campaign of illegal extortion by this Administration.

Very truly yours,



Jamie Raskin
Ranking Member

cc: The Honorable Jim Jordan, Chairman