August 14, 2020

The Honorable Sonny Perdue  
Secretary of Agriculture  
United States Department of Agriculture  
1400 Independence Avenue SW  
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Mr. Secretary,

We write to express deep concerns about a recent news report regarding the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) including a letter signed by President Donald Trump on White House letterhead in each food box distributed through the Farmers to Families Food Box (FFFB) Program. Using a federal relief program to distribute a self-promoting letter from the President to American families just 3 months before the presidential election is inappropriate and a violation of federal law. We strongly urge you to end the practice immediately.

The Hatch Act prohibits executive branch employees from using their official authority or influence for the purposes of affecting the result of an election. Additionally, federal law prohibits any person from commanding, or coercing, any employee of the federal government to engage in, or not to engage in, any political activity. A public health crisis is not an opportunity for the administration to promote its own political interests. Likewise, a federal food assistance program should not be used as a tool for the President to exploit taxpayer dollars for his re-election campaign.

For this reason, we ask that you provide responses to the following by August 31, 2020:

1. Detail the purpose of the President’s letter.

2. Identify who directed the President’s letter to be included in the FFFB food boxes and when the decision was made to do so.

3. Explain whether the inclusion of the President’s letter in FFFB food boxes is mandatory or voluntary. Detail any guidance or instructions USDA is providing to contractors or non-profits regarding including the letter in the food boxes.

4. Outline whether the federal government will be paying any portion of the costs associated with the production or inclusion of these letters in FFFB food boxes incurred by contractors or non-profits.

5. Identify the total amount of funding expended or obligated to plan, coordinate, draft, review, provide stakeholder or public notification, and disseminate the President’s letter. Include the specific regulatory or statutory authorities associated with such funding.

6. Detail whether any USDA employees were instructed or commanded to assist with the planning, coordinating, drafting, reviewing, stakeholder notification, or dissemination of the President’s letter.

---

1 5 U.S.C. § 7323(a)(1)
2 18 U.S.C. § 610
7. Explain the rationale for why the letter is signed by the President on White House letterhead rather than by the Secretary of Agriculture and/or the Secretary of Health and Human Services.

8. Explain whether the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) drafted or reviewed any part of the letter.

9. We understand the President’s letter notes a key best practice to support nationwide recovery is to “consider wearing a face covering when in public.” However, the CDC website states, “everyone should wear a mask in public settings and when around people who don’t live in your household.” Please explain why the President’s letter is not fully consistent with CDC guidance on masks.

10. Provide our offices a copy of any letter signed by the President on White House letterhead included, intended to be included or accompanying the FFFB food boxes.

The focus of the Farmers to Families Food Box Program should be to provide food to the millions of people in need across the country during the coronavirus pandemic. We appreciate your immediate attention to this matter and look forward to your timely response to this letter.

Sincerely,

Marcia L. Fudge
Member of Congress

Stacey E. Plaskett
Member of Congress

Rosa DeLauro
Member of Congress

s/
Alma S. Adams, Ph.D.
Member of Congress

s/
David N. Cicilline
Member of Congress

s/
Diana DeGette
Member of Congress

s/
Cindy Axne
Member of Congress

s/
Wm. Lacy Clay
Member of Congress

s/
Eliot Engel
Member of Congress

s/
Karen Bass
Member of Congress

s/
Emanuel Cleaver, II
Member of Congress

s/
Veronica Escobar
Member of Congress

s/
Sanford D. Bishop, Jr
Member of Congress

s/
Steve Cohen
Member of Congress

s/
Dwight Evans
Member of Congress

s/
André Carson
Member of Congress

s/
Danny K. Davis
Member of Congress

s/
Jesús G. "Chuy" García
Member of Congress

s/
Joaquin Castro
Member of Congress

s/
Madeleine Dean
Member of Congress

s/
Deb Haaland
Member of Congress
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Signature</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Role</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>s/</td>
<td>Sheila Jackson Lee</td>
<td>Member of Congress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>s/</td>
<td>Carolyn B. Maloney</td>
<td>Member of Congress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>s/</td>
<td>Tim Ryan</td>
<td>Member of Congress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>s/</td>
<td>Henry C. “Hank” Johnson, Jr.</td>
<td>Member of Congress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>s/</td>
<td>James P. McGovern</td>
<td>Member of Congress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>s/</td>
<td>Jan Schakowsky</td>
<td>Member of Congress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>s/</td>
<td>Marcy Kaptur</td>
<td>Member of Congress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>s/</td>
<td>Richard E. Neal</td>
<td>Member of Congress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>s/</td>
<td>Bradley S. Schneider</td>
<td>Member of Congress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>s/</td>
<td>Joseph P. Kennedy, III</td>
<td>Member of Congress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>s/</td>
<td>Eleanor Holmes Norton</td>
<td>Member of Congress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>s/</td>
<td>Kim Schrier, M.D.</td>
<td>Member of Congress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>s/</td>
<td>Daniel T. Kildee</td>
<td>Member of Congress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>s/</td>
<td>Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez</td>
<td>Member of Congress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>s/</td>
<td>Adam Smith</td>
<td>Member of Congress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>s/</td>
<td>John B. Larson</td>
<td>Member of Congress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>s/</td>
<td>Chellie Pingree</td>
<td>Member of Congress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>s/</td>
<td>Bennie Thompson</td>
<td>Member of Congress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>s/</td>
<td>Al Lawson, Jr.</td>
<td>Member of Congress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>s/</td>
<td>Ayanna Pressley</td>
<td>Member of Congress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>s/</td>
<td>Rashida Tlaib</td>
<td>Member of Congress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>s/</td>
<td>Barbara Lee</td>
<td>Member of Congress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>s/</td>
<td>David E. Price</td>
<td>Member of Congress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>s/</td>
<td>Nydia M. Velázquez</td>
<td>Member of Congress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>s/</td>
<td>Alan Lowenthal</td>
<td>Member of Congress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>s/</td>
<td>Lucille Roybal-Allard</td>
<td>Member of Congress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>s/</td>
<td>Bobby L. Rush</td>
<td>Member of Congress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>s/</td>
<td>Ben Ray Luján</td>
<td>Member of Congress</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>