

Mr. Dean, Ambassador Elson, distinguished guests of St. George's House, it is an honor to give the 2020 Elson Ethics Lecture. Tonight, I will deliver a message about the failure of government ethics in my own country in the hope that others may learn from our experience.

The executive branch of the United States federal government is a vast enterprise with over two million employees and twice as many contractors. These are nonpolitical, career government and contractor workers. They are not expected to resign with the change of presidential administrations. Overseeing them is a transitory, political layer of government comprising approximately 4,000 political appointees. This political layer reports through a chain of command to the president.

In school, American children are taught that a system of checks and balances prevents their president from abusing power. The Constitution divides power among the legislative, executive and judicial branches of government. Unlike a parliamentary system, the U.S. Constitution pits the three branches of the federal government against one another, with each jealously guarding its prerogatives. In theory, Congress can compel executive branch officials to testify in hearings and produce copies of government records. In theory, Congress can rein in excesses by withholding funding from the executive branch or by strengthening laws. Children believe this is how the system works. Until recently, most adults did too.

In reality, what held the system together were governmental norms. The executive branch's compliance with Congressional oversight was one of those norms. Compliance was never absolute. The two sides negotiated the scope and timing of information sharing. Occasionally, the process was difficult, and negotiations could be heated. But it was generally understood that the executive branch needed to cooperate with congressional investigations.

The Trump administration has upended this norm. Current and former officials have refused to testify before Congress. The administration has refused to provide information, records and testimony to Congress. It frequently ignores Congressional demands outright. When Trump administration officials have testified, they have often refused to answer questions. Frustrated members of Congress have sought the help of the courts. But the courts have moved slowly, in some cases perhaps intentionally, and they have been inconsistent in their support of legislative authority.

Take, for example the case of former White House Counsel Don McGahn. The House of Representatives issued a subpoena for his testimony in spring 2019. When McGahn refused to comply, House managers took him to court. Nearly a year and a half later, we lack a final resolution of that dispute. The case could continue into next year after the 2021 Inauguration of either Donald Trump or Joe Biden. If the courts do order McGahn to testify, he could very well refuse to answer questions posed by Democratic members of Congress. In that case, litigation will resume and more years will pass before the matter is resolved. The failure of this litigation has deterred the House from taking other recalcitrant witnesses to court.

A noncompliant witness can be charged with contempt of Congress. However, only the Department of Justice can prosecute the witness, and that department is part of the executive

branch. If the executive branch won't produce a witness for testimony, it most certainly won't prosecute that witness for failing to testify.

The House of Representatives has inherent authority of its own to find witnesses in contempt and arrest them. But there is no realistic mechanism for using this authority. Any attempt could result in a literal shoot out between federal officials, which would end tragically for House officials.

The remaining option to withhold funding doesn't hold much promise either. Budget battles have resulted in government shutdowns three times in the past six years. Essential functions of the government necessarily continued despite the lapse of appropriations, which blunted the effect of the shutdown. Federal workers and contractors bore the burden, with many going through savings and falling behind in paying their bills—in some cases with lasting effects. The public seemed to assign blame to one or the other party unpredictably, and neither party is confident the other would be blamed for another shutdown. As a result, the power of the purse is not what it is cracked up to be.

The option of last resort is, of course, the power to impeach and remove a president from office. But that power carries no deterrent effect when one chamber of Congress is led by partisans who remain loyal to the president. As a practical matter, a divided legislative branch has little ability to prevent abuses of power by the president.

Inside the executive branch, the Department of Justice can prosecute a president for any abuse that rises to the level of a crime. But that department has issued a policy memorandum declaring that it will not prosecute a sitting president. The legal justification for this position is thinly supported and probably wrong. But only the Justice Department can initiate a federal prosecution. As a result, its views in this area have the practical effect of law because no citizen has legal standing to challenge those views in court.

The norms we relied upon were more fragile than we realized. In their absence, we are learning just how little there is in place to stop abuses of power at the top of government. Adherence to norms was predicated on the personal character of the president or, at least, a fear that the electorate would reject a president who deviated too far from them. Trump has demonstrated his lack of character, but it is far from certain that the electorate will hold him accountable. His base of support seems immune to growth or erosion.

This is not our first encounter with a crisis of presidential power. Richard Nixon gave us the Watergate scandal. When congressional members of his own party turned on him in 1974, they forced him to resign. In an effort to restore public trust in government, Congress passed a wave of reforms a few years later in 1978. None of the reforms would have prevented the Watergate scandal. But they sent a message about government ethics that reinforced the norms Nixon had breached.

One creation of the 1978 reforms was the Office of Government Ethics—"OGE" for short. I led OGE from January 2013 through July 2017. I also worked for OGE for more than a decade prior to my appointment to the position of Director. OGE's mission is to administer the

executive branch ethics program. It is a small agency of only about 70 officials, but it guides the work of 4,500 ethics officials at agencies across the executive branch. Before Trump, it advised presidents on resolving their conflicts of interest. In fact, a president looking to establish a blind trust to manage conflicts of interest would need OGE to approve that trust.

One of OGE's core functions is to advise top appointees in positions requiring Senate confirmation and nominees to those positions. I have personally reviewed the financial disclosure reports of thousands of presidential appointees and nominees. I approved ethics agreements laying out the steps they needed to take to resolve conflicts of interests.

These agreements often required them to divest significant financial holdings. This was tough medicine, and some found the taste of that medicine bitter. Sometimes they pushed back, questioning the necessity of rearranging their families' financial plans. Sometimes they complained that circumstances were forcing them to sell assets for less than they had hoped. In the end, they almost always came around. On very rare occasions, those unwilling to make the necessary sacrifices dropped out of consideration for government posts. The expectation set by Democratic and Republican presidents alike was that financial conflicts of interest were incompatible with public service.

The president is exempt from the conflict of interest law. That law requires recusal from certain matters affecting an official's financial interests. But Congress reasoned that a president would need the ability to participate in any matter before the government, so it exempted the president and vice president from the law. Despite this exemption, the Department of Justice and the Office of Government Ethics urged presidents to act as though the law applied to them to the extent practicable. Before Trump, every president elected after the 1978 reforms followed this advice. They either divested their financial interests, placed them in blind trusts, or invested primarily in nonconflicting assets that are exempt from the conflict of interest law.

That tradition died when Trump became president. In late 2016, Trump notoriously told the *New York Times*, "The law's totally on my side, meaning, the president can't have a conflict of interest." He was right that the law didn't apply to him. But his claim that the president can't have a conflict of interest was quite obviously wrong. A conflict of interest is anything that creates an incentive for an official to put his or her interests before the public's interests.

The American people have given their president great power. It is his responsibility to use that power solely for their benefit. The people have a right to expect not only that he will use that power solely for their benefit but that he will *demonstrate* that he is using it solely for their benefit. If he retains a financial interest potentially affected by his duties, the burden is on him to demonstrate that he is carefully avoiding conflicts of interest.

Trump doesn't see it that way. On January 11, 2017, he announced that he would keep his businesses. To confuse the public, he placed them in a revocable trust. The trust is a sham. This was not a blind trust. Before he created the trust, his businesses were held in a complex network of tiered shell companies. After he created the trust, the tiers had one additional layer. The arrangement had no effect whatsoever on his conflicts of interest.

That day, I held a press conference and urged Trump to divest his financial interests. I knew the harm his conflicts of interest could do. I also knew how much the ethics program depended on his example and support. OGE relied entirely on the White House for the clout to pressure presidential appointees and other high officials to avoid conflicts of interest and satisfy their ethical obligations. In past administrations, OGE could call the White House whenever an official or an agency failed to comply with OGE's instructions. The White House would get them in line quickly. But a president with conflicts of interest would lack the moral authority—and the inclination—to provide that support.

In fact, Trump and his associates proved hostile to government ethics before they even entered the White House. On the campaign trail, candidate Trump broke with an important ethical norm by refusing to release his tax returns. After the election, Trump failed to prioritize ethics processes for his appointees.

This issue arose first during the presidential transition. The transition is the short period of 10 weeks between the election and a president's inauguration. During this time, most of the roughly 4,000 political appointees in government resign. With leadership positions vacant, it could be difficult for the government to respond effectively to natural, manmade or economic disasters. Therefore, an incoming administration needs to fill top positions quickly.

The process is complex because the U.S. Constitution requires the president to seek Senate approval to fill roughly 1,000 of the top posts. The president nominates them, and the Senate holds a confirmation hearing. But the Senate won't hold a hearing until it has received all of the paperwork for these nominees. That includes financial disclosures, ethics agreements and a report of the FBI's background investigation of the individual. It takes weeks to complete these vetting activities. Once all materials are sent to the Senate, the relevant Senate committee holds a hearing and votes whether to advance the nominee to the full Senate. The Senate then holds another vote on the nomination.

Coordinating this nomination effort, while also sending representatives to each federal agency to begin the process of transferring power, is a daunting undertaking. For that reason, OGE and other agencies spent five months training the transition teams for both Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton. Then, immediately after the election Trump fired his transition team and plunged the transfer of power into chaos.

After a delay that cost precious time during the short transition period, Trump slowly began to stand up a loose association of individuals to replace his transition team. Because he refused to come to Washington, his aides were forced to travel between Washington and New York. There was no command structure. There were only competing spheres of influence, with various players jockeying for power. At one point, one of these players told the Senate that nominees were ready for hearings when their ethics reviews and background investigations had only just begun. This led committee chairpersons to schedule hearings before the work was complete and threatened OGE's leverage to press nominees to resolve conflicts of interest.

The effort to shepherd potential presidential nominees through the nomination process was led by future White House Counsel Don McGahn and one young associate attorney. They

not only lacked an understanding of the process but also an appreciation that there even was a process to understand. Worse, they lacked a sense of urgency, though the firing of the first transition team had set them back by weeks. On New Year's Eve, members of my staff worked until about 11:00 p.m. to move Trump's nominees forward. That night, McGahn skipped off to play a concert at a Philadelphia bar with his garage band.

The indifference Trump and his associates displayed toward ethics infected his nominees. Not all of them, but many pushed back against our instructions to divest conflicting financial interests and comply with other ethics requirements. We joked grimly among ourselves that it had become common see OGE staffers in the hallways with hands against their heads muttering "why does everything have to be so hard with them?"

The hostility to ethics had a noticeable effect on some agency ethics officials who seemed to fear their new bosses. These ethics officials may have had cause to worry. The Trump team had recently demanded lists of career officials in the government who worked on climate change issues. Climate change deniers on Trump's team appeared to be targeting them for retaliation. Ethics officials may have been worried they would face a similar fate if they insisted on strict compliance with ethics requirements.

One seasoned agency ethics official who knew better, went so far as to propose that OGE approve a blanket ethics waiver exempting all of the holdings of one ultra-wealthy nominee from the conflict of interest law. I spoke with him privately and urged him to pull himself together. I told him that, if he was afraid of his new boss, he should let me do the talking. I tried to impress upon him the need to hold the incoming Trump administration to the same standard he had applied to past administrations. I wish I could say this was an isolated incident. It wasn't.

After the inauguration, White House staffers began referring to ethics rules as mere "protocols." The Trump administration viewed ethics rules as the stuff of polite manners to be ignored when they proved inconvenient. Trump persuaded the Justice Department to abandon an interpretation of the anti-nepotism law it had held for nearly half a century. This allowed him to bring his son-in-law, Jared Kushner, and his daughter, Ivanka Trump, into the White House.

The first sign of problems with this injection of nepotism into government was an apparent breakdown of the White House process for issuing security clearances to access top secret information. Political appointees interfered with the work of career experts and failed to act on dozens of background investigations that had uncovered adverse information about individual White House officials. My suspicion is that they were reluctant to deny security clearances on grounds that could potentially apply to Jared Kushner, for fear of embarrassing a relative of the president. The consequences of nepotism are real.

The ethics program soon began to suffer. In February 2017, presidential aide Kellyanne Conway used her position to tell the public to buy products Ivanka Trump was selling. In March, the White House ethics official openly questioned whether ethics regulations applied to White House appointees. In May, he papered over ethics violations by issuing undated, unsigned, retroactive ethics waivers purporting to exempt appointees from rules they had already broken.

In June 2017, Trump filed a personal financial disclosure report that omitted a debt he owed to his attorney Michael Cohen for a hush money payment to an adult film star. It bears emphasizing that knowingly and willfully omitting information from a financial disclosure report is a crime. It also bears emphasizing that Cohen went to jail on charges related to the hush money payment. Trump was identified in Cohen's indictment by the name "Individual 1" as the person on whose behalf Cohen had acted.

The bad tone from the top sent a message to Trump appointees that government ethics did not matter. They received that message. The result has been a national embarrassment. News outlets reported on a stream of ethics scandals that would have been catastrophic for any past administration.

Many of President Trump's top appointees were forced to resign due to ethics problems, including Health and Human Services Secretary Tom Price, Veterans Affairs Secretary David Shulkin, Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Scott Pruitt, Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Director Brenda Fitzgerald, Federal Emergency Management Administrator Brock Long, and National Security Director Michael Flynn. These are some of the more notable names, but other Trump appointees similarly resigned under the cloud of ethics scandal, investigation or security clearance concerns.

Still others violated ethics requirements with impunity. Trump took no action after OGE rejected the financial disclosures of Steve Mnuchin, Scott Pruitt and Commerce Secretary Wilbur Ross. Mnuchin circumvented a pledge he made in his ethics agreement to divest an asset. Rather than selling to a stranger, he sold it to his fiancé a month before marrying her, knowing full well that the conflict of interest law would treat his new spouse's asset as his own.

Transportation Secretary Elaine Chao participated in a series of Chinese television interviews with her father, touting his overseas shipping company in the region to an audience that surely included Chinese government officials. Chao also violated an ethics agreement pledge to divest her interests in an asphalt and construction materials company by a specified date while leading the Transportation Department. Her financial disclosure report failed to address this deviation from the agreement.

Violations of the Hatch Act have abounded as well. The Hatch Act is an ethics law that prohibits the misuse of official position to influence a partisan political election. The head of the office that investigates violations of that law recommended that Trump fire Kellyanne Conway for dozens of repeated Hatch Act violations. Trump ignored that recommendation. That office also found Hatch Act violations by a dozen other Trump appointees. Trump ignored those findings as well.

For his part, Trump has monetized the presidency. He has spent over \$140,000,000 on 303 trips to his own golf courses. He has visited properties he owns a total of 506 times at taxpayer expense. With the media following him everywhere, each of these trips has been a taxpayer-funded advertisement for his businesses. In violation of the Emoluments Clauses of the Constitution, Trump's properties have now hosted 13 foreign government-sponsored events, 143 foreign government officials, and officials from the state of Maine. Trump's paying customers

have also included special interest groups, which have held 130 events at Trump properties, and political groups, which have held 88 events at Trump properties. Trump also led a massive Independence Day celebration in Washington, and his hotel in that city raised its rates to capitalize on the event and its connection to him.

After Trump won the 2016 election, he doubled the membership fee at his Mar-a-Lago resort, which White House officials touted as the “Southern White House.” He let a secretive group of three Mar-a-Lago members unofficially oversee the Department of Veterans Affairs and make demands of its Secretary. He has appointed members of that resort to top government posts. He has held official state visits with foreign leaders and conducted other official business from Mar-a-Lago. Who could forget the image of Trump on television boasting about what he called a “beautiful” chocolate cake that Mar-a-Lago wait staff served him and his guests while he fired missiles at a Syrian airfield?

Trump has made money directly from the government too. The government paid for visits he and Vice President Pence made to a couple of his resorts overseas. He has billed the Secret Service for the privilege of protecting him at his resorts, and his administration has concealed the total amount of these billings. News broke that military flight crews were choosing to stay at his Turnberry resort, and Trump’s only response was that they had good taste.

Trump’s business activities have raised the specter of at least the appearance of conflicts of interest. For example, executives of T-Mobile spent \$195,000 at his Washington hotel while the government was reviewing the company’s planned merger with Sprint. The private prison company GEO Group, which has landed lucrative government contracts during the Trump administration, rented event space and hotel rooms from the Trump Organization. Other companies with interests before the federal government have paid the Trump Organization millions in rent, including Nike, Microsoft, AXA, Neuberger Berman Group, State Street Corporation, JPMorgan Chase, and UBS Financial Services.

Direct evidence of the effect of Trump’s business activities on policy is hard to come by, partly because Trump leads the least transparent administration in modern history. But there is cause for concern. One of the more startling examples involved the Chinese government-controlled telecommunications giant ZTE. Trump upended his administration’s sanctions against ZTE in May 2018, just seventy-two hours after the Chinese government announced its approval of \$500 million in loans to a project in Indonesia benefiting the Trump Organization. He tweeted that he wanted to give the company “a way to get back into business, fast.” Less than a week earlier, China had granted Ivanka Trump initial approval of five new trademarks. At the time, a Chinese government-controlled entity was paying \$2 million a year in rent to the Trump Organization.

Another example involved the Saudi government. The Saudi government or persons linked to it appear to be among Trump’s top customers. Trump defended the Saudi government after the murder of *Washington Post* journalist Jamal Khashoggi, despite the assessment of U.S. intelligence agencies that the Saudi government directed the murder. Trump also authorized legally dubious sales of weapons to the Saudis and transferred nuclear technology to them.

Trump was also involved in cancelling a long-planned relocation of the FBI headquarters, after the government had spent a dozen years and \$20 million preparing for the move. The massive FBI headquarters building sits on Pennsylvania Avenue near his Washington, D.C. hotel. There is reason to suspect Trump shut down the effort to avoid a risk that a competing hotel might move in after the FBI left. The Trump appointee in charge of the General Services Administration, which manages federal buildings, misled Congress about Trump's involvement in cancelling the move. At the direction of the White House, she also refused to discuss her communications with Trump and other White House officials with an investigator.

Were these and other policy decisions directly influenced by Trump's financial interests? We are left having to wonder due to the lack of transparency. What we have to guide our suspicions has been Trump's very public effort to profit off the presidency. The spectacle of greed and self-dealing suggests that his private interests are influencing his public policies. It also suggests that what little we know is only the tip of the iceberg.

None of this ethical failure should have come as a surprise to anyone. America's fate was sealed when Trump refused to divest his financial interests. I spoke out at the time because I knew that rot at the top would have a profound effect on the government as a whole. I knew his conflicts of interest were a threat to national security and public safety. But I also knew this was only the start of our troubles. Trump's attitude toward the ethical norms of government is the same as his attitude toward all other governmental norms.

One of the first norms Trump undermined was the independence of the Department of Justice. In addition to its headquarters staff, the Justice Department has 93 districts whose leaders are called "U.S. attorneys." Presidents have generally stayed out of the selection process for U.S. attorneys to avoid appearing to politicize law enforcement. But Trump personally interviewed replacements for the Southern and Eastern Districts of New York and the District of Columbia. He also took a special interest in the search for a U.S. attorney for the Southern District of Florida. What these four districts had in common was that their jurisdictions covered important business interests of the Trump and Kushner families.

Trump went further astray when he fired the heads of the nation's top two law enforcement agencies, first FBI Director James Comey, then Attorney General Jeff Sessions. He fired both of them because they refused to stop their agencies from investigating him. Trump's firing of these two officials was an open declaration that he considered himself above the law. He should have been removed from office after he fired Sessions.

These firings were like a slow-motion version of the infamous Saturday Night Massacre when Richard Nixon ordered the Justice Department to fire the special counsel investigating him and forced out its top two officials, moving down the chain until he found one willing to carry out the order. The Saturday Night Massacre did not immediately end the Nixon administration but set it on an inevitable course to its destruction. Not so with the firings of Sessions and Comey. This time, Republicans rallied around a corrupt president.

Republican Senators let Trump replace Jeff Session with Bill Barr, who poses a threat to democracy in his own right. Shortly after his appointment as Attorney General, Bill Barr misled

the American public about the findings of the investigation of Trump's campaign by Special Counsel Robert Mueller. More recently, Barr worked to undermine faith in the 2020 election by criticizing mail-in voting, even though both Barr and Trump themselves have been known to cast votes by mail.

Last week, Barr criticized career prosecutors and defended the idea that political appointees should feel free to intervene in individual cases. The politicization of criminal investigations and prosecutions is the stuff of authoritarian governments. It is now the reality of Barr's Justice Department. Under Barr, political appointees intervened in the prosecution of Trump's friend Roger Stone to reduce the government's sentencing recommendation. They are similarly seeking to drop charges against former Trump National Security Advisor Michael Flynn, who has admitted to the crime of lying to investigators. Barr is pursuing a retaliatory investigation of those who investigated Trump's campaign. He has solicited foreign governments to help him undermine the finding by U.S. officials that the Russian government had links to the Trump campaign. Barr also opened a backdoor channel for Trump's private attorney Rudy Giuliani to send the Justice Department dirt on Joe Biden from sources in Ukraine who may be linked to the Russian government.

Barr has also been complicit in Trump's latest political stunt this week, which was to declare the state of New York a so-called "anarchist" jurisdiction. That bizarre language sounds like something out of a bad movie. It's a threat to withhold federal funds for programs in New York, which could be a disaster during the pandemic.

The Justice Department is not the only agency complicit in Trump's abuses of power. Trump shattered another norm when he used the State Department, the Defense Department and the Office of Management and Budget to try to extort Ukraine into investigating his political rival, Joe Biden. He had previously asked Russia on live television to interfere in our election, this time he backed up a demand for what he called "a favor" by withholding hundreds of millions of dollars in aid that Ukraine needed to defend against Russian-backed forces in Eastern parts of the country. While the House of Representatives was building the case for Trump's impeachment over this potentially criminal misconduct, Trump went on television and asked China to interfere in our election. Nevertheless, all but one Republican Senator voted along party lines to sanction this conduct by acquitting him.

The acquittal emboldened Trump. He retaliated against whistleblowers and witnesses alike. Doing Trump's bidding, the Defense Department drove out of government Lt. Colonel Alexander Vindman in retaliation for his having testified in the impeachment hearings.

Trump next went after inspectors general. An inspector general is a presidentially appointed investigator embedded in a major department, who operates independently of the department's leadership. Though they are political appointees, the norm has been to guard their independence. Trump either fired or named replacements for five inspectors general. In each case, the move was obviously based on retaliation for fulfilling their investigative duties.

As we head into the 2020 election, America is feeling the effects of nearly four years of Trump's norm-breaking conduct. He continues to expand his corruption of federal agencies. His

efforts to purge the leadership of intelligence agencies, for example, has weakened our defenses against foreign election interference. His Director of National Intelligence has resisted briefing Congress on Russian activities in support of Trump's reelection campaign. The new head of the U.S. Postal Service is sabotaging mail service to cast doubt on the viability of mail-in voting.

Other federal agencies have been coopted, as well. The Interior Department created and released videos that look like campaign ads for Trump's reelection. A Trump appointee is trying to turn Voice of America, Radio Free Europe and other federal media agencies into nationalist pro-Trump propaganda outlets. The Health and Human Services Department has been watering down science to advance Trump's misinformation about COVID-19, and the virus has now killed more than 200,000 Americans. The CDC, the National Institutes of Health, and the Food and Drug Administration have lost credibility, which will leave Americans unsure of the safety of any vaccine the Trump administration approves.

The recent Republican National Convention delivered another shock. The convention is a recurring event to nominate a party's presidential candidate. By law, it must be kept separate from governmental authority. But Trump abused his access to the White House to host the convention there. The National Park Service, which controls land surrounding the Washington Monument, granted the Republican Party permission for a massive firework display above the monument that night. The event looked like something straight out of Moscow or the capital of some other authoritarian country.

The acting Secretary of the Department of Homeland Security, Chad Wolf, engaged in a stunning breach of norms and violated the Hatch Act by performing a naturalization ceremony for new citizens at the convention. Wolf had previously crossed a line when he dispatched unmarked law enforcement agents to various cities, where they pulled citizens into unmarked rental vans during protests. Under Wolf's leadership, the department also suppressed information about the terrorist threat of far-right militias at a time when Trump is fomenting civil unrest. Kellyanne Conway revealed the intentionality of this effort by acknowledging publicly that the White House views the civil unrest as helpful to Trump's campaign for reelection.

This norm breaking has reached a level where it is a threat to the stability of the republic, and Trump is not alone in attacking institutional safeguards. When Ukraine refused to satisfy Trump's demand for an investigation of Joe Biden and his son, Republican Senator Ron Johnson undertook the investigation and today released a report that repackages news reports and other previously known information to smear Trump's rival. Meanwhile, Republican-led state governments are aggressively purging voter registration rolls. They are continuing a related effort to remove voting sites in minority and poor neighborhoods.

To these obstacles, Trump has added an element of uncertainty about the election. He frequently rails against mail-in voting. He has spread disinformation by claiming there is widespread voter fraud in the U.S., which is patently false. He has threatened to send federal law enforcement officials to polling sites. He even told his followers in North Carolina to vote by mail first, then show up to vote a second time in-person on election day, which would be a crime.

We are now in the final days before the next presidential election. We have been in uncharted territory for nearly four years now. Over the next month or two, as Trump's norm breaking escalates, our republic will face what may be the greatest threat it has faced in the last two centuries. What began with Trump's flouting of the ethical norms of government progressed to a widening corruption of government and challenge to the rule of law. Trump is abusing the power entrusted to him to serve his own personal financial and political interests.

I will conclude with a warning. For the first time, Americans are having to wonder whether a sitting president will accept the outcome of the election if he loses. We have to worry that Trump supporters will attempt to prevent states from completing the work of counting votes by the Constitutional deadline. We have to worry that they will destroy votes. We have to worry that they have already weakened our defenses against a cyber-attack by Russia. We have to worry that Trump will seek to deter voters by declaring a state of emergency in regions where he fears losing or by invoking a law called the Insurrection Act to send troops to Democratic-leaning states. We have to worry that Republican state officials will illegitimately try to disqualify individual ballots in large enough quantity to affect the result. We have to worry that Trump supporters may physically disrupt voting sites or intimidate individual voters.

These are not things citizens of any free country should have to worry about. But this is where we find ourselves now. The American republic faces an existential crisis. We didn't get here overnight; Trump has grown bolder over the course of his time in office. Yet it's fair to say that his early breaches of ethical norms were signs of danger that too many either ignored or felt powerless to address.

My view is that we were destined to find ourselves at this moment of crisis from the day he declared he would not divest his conflicting financial interests. Those interests create an incentive for corruption, and their retention revealed a propensity for corruption. Therefore, my warning to the rest of the world is this: treat breaches of a government's ethical norms as dangerous; they are indicators of worse to come. Hold government officials to account for any failure to address conflicting financial interests. Take action to curb abuses of entrusted power for private gain. If you don't, you may find yourself where America finds itself now—in grave danger.

I thank you for your time and your gracious willingness to listen today. I'm happy to answer questions this evening.