



February 3, 2025

The Honorable Peter B. Hegseth
Secretary of Defense
1000 Defense Pentagon
Washington, DC 20301-1000

VIA UPS & EMAIL:

Dear Mr. Secretary:

We write to request that you lift the security clearance of Reid Hoffman, who until recently was a member of the Defense Innovation Board, a federal advisory committee.

Furthermore, we ask that Mr. Hoffman's continued membership on the Microsoft board of directors be raised in any contract discussions between the Department and the company.

While we do not believe that the Department should determine the membership of the boards of directors of contractors, Mr. Hoffman presents an egregious case for the reasons detailed herein. Simply put, the United States government should not do business with any company on whose board Hoffman serves.

Our organization, National Legal and Policy Center ("NLPC"), promotes ethics in public life, and sponsors dual projects: the Government Integrity Project and the Corporate Integrity Project.¹

Mr. Hoffman is a tech entrepreneur and investor best known as a co-founder of social media site LinkedIn (now a Microsoft subsidiary). In recent years, it has come to light that Mr. Hoffman – in various capacities as a corporate leader, investor,

¹ <https://nlpc.org/>

fundraiser, political activist, philanthropist, and private citizen – has conducted himself in a manner that calls into question his judgment and character.

We itemize here a few of many significant areas of concern, based upon credible public reports – many confirmed by Mr. Hoffman himself – that reinforce the view that Mr. Hoffman is a threat to our national security.

1. Mr. Hoffman’s ties to sex offender Jeffrey Epstein highlight a serious failure of judgment and discernment.

Mr. Hoffman pursued and sustained relationships, and maintained professional partnerships to benefit mutual interests, with the late convicted pedophile Jeffrey Epstein, long after his disreputable character was established.

Mr. Epstein was sentenced in Florida in June 2008 to eighteen months in prison, and was required to register as a sex offender in jurisdictions he frequented.² Both during and after release from serving (what most observers considered) an extremely lenient penalty, he continued his jet-setting lifestyle, which included ongoing personal and professional relationships with well-known, wealthy public figures, including Mr. Hoffman.

According to several reports based upon lawsuits and publicly released information, Mr. Epstein’s efforts served a dual purpose: to lure these powerful figures into his sex abuse activities for potential blackmailing – many of which took place on his private island, Little St. James, in the Virgin Islands – and/or to persuade investors and donors to fund his financial and charitable interests.

Reports indicate that Mr. Hoffman’s initial connections to Mr. Epstein stemmed from his partnership with Joi Ito, former Director of the MIT Media Lab. *Wired* described Mr. Ito as a “good friend” of Mr. Hoffman,³ and according to Mr. Hoffman’s LinkedIn profile, he served on the Media Lab’s Visiting Committee and Advisory board from July 2014 to December 2021.⁴ Mr. Hoffman was one of the research laboratory’s most prominent supporters during his tenure, and his contributions included participation in a \$27 million fund for AI research.⁵

² Lewis, Paul & Swaine, Jon. “Jeffrey Epstein: inside the decade of scandal entangling Prince Andrew,” *The Guardian*, Jan. 10, 2015. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/jan/10/jeffrey-epstein-decade-scandal-prince-andrew>.

³ Dreyfuss, Emily. “Reid Hoffman and Joi Ito on Moving Fast But Not Breaking Things.” *Wired*, Oct. 13, 2018. <https://www.wired.com/story/wired25-reid-hoffman-joi-ito/>.

⁴ Hoffman, Reid. “Volunteering Experiences.” LinkedIn. <https://www.linkedin.com/in/reidhoffman/details/volunteering-experiences/>

⁵ Johnson, Khari. “LinkedIn cofounder Reid Hoffman, Omidyar Network create \$27 million fund for AI in the public interest.” *VentureBeat*, Jan. 10, 2017. <https://venturebeat.com/ai/linkedin-cofounder-reid-hoffman-omidyar-network-create-27-million-fund-for-ai-in-the-public-interest/>

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Mr. Epstein was *also* a generous sponsor of the Media Lab. Ronan Farrow published an investigative report in *The New Yorker*⁶ detailing Mr. Epstein's connection with the Media Lab:

Dozens of pages of e-mails and other documents obtained by *The New Yorker* reveal that, although Epstein was listed as “disqualified” in M.I.T.'s official donor database, the Media Lab continued to accept gifts from him, consulted him about the use of the funds, and, by marking his contributions as anonymous, avoided disclosing their full extent, both publicly and within the university. Perhaps most notably, Epstein appeared to serve as an intermediary between the lab and other wealthy donors, soliciting millions of dollars in donations from individuals and organizations, including the technologist and philanthropist Bill Gates and the investor Leon Black... The effort to conceal the lab's contact with Epstein was so widely known that some staff in the office of the lab's director, Joi Ito, referred to Epstein as Voldemort or “he who must not be named.”

Mr. Hoffman and Mr. Ito also visited Little St. James island with Mr. Epstein sometime in 2014.⁷ He acknowledged having made one visit for an MIT “fundraising trip,” but records showed a second scheduled trip. “On the second date,” the *Wall Street Journal* reported, “[Mr.] Epstein planned to travel with both men from Palm Beach to the island for a weekend and then fly together to Boston.” It is not clear which 2014 trip Mr. Hoffman admitted to taking. Records obtained by the newspaper also show he was scheduled to stay overnight in Mr. Epstein's New York townhouse in December 2014, followed by a “breakfast party” the following morning with Mr. Epstein, Bill Gates and other guests. Mr. Gates has also come under scrutiny over his ties to Mr. Epstein and visits to his island.

According to Axios, Mr. Hoffman and Mr. Epstein both aggressively raised funds for the lab, with Mr. Hoffman also inviting Mr. Epstein to join him at an August 2015 dinner in Silicon Valley that included tech entrepreneurs Elon Musk, Mark Zuckerberg and Peter Thiel.⁸ In an email to Mr. Thiel, according to the *Wall Street Journal*, “Hoffman wrote

⁶ Farrow, Ronan. “How an Elite University Research Center Concealed Its Relationship with Jeffrey Epstein.” *The New Yorker*, Sep. 6, 2019. <https://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/how-an-elite-university-research-center-concealed-its-relationship-with-jeffrey-epstein>

⁷ Safdar, Khadeeja & Benoit, David. “Jeffrey Epstein Documents, Part 2: Dinners With Lawrence Summers and Movie Screenings With Woody Allen,” *Wall Street Journal*, May 3, 2023. <https://www.wsj.com/articles/jeffrey-epstein-documents-woody-allen-larry-summers-edb3e9b2>.

⁸ Salmon, Felix. “Exclusive: Reid Hoffman apologizes for role in Epstein-linked donations to MIT,” Axios, Sep. 12, 2019. See <https://www.axios.com/2019/09/12/reid-hoffman-jeffrey-epstein-mit-donations>

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that Epstein was a ‘mostly fun, very interesting guy, you may find him perverse, but very smart on biology, computation, macro econ.’”⁹

Recognizing the disgrace brought upon MIT following the publication of the 2019 *New Yorker* story, Mr. Ito resigned but Mr. Hoffman did not experience equivalent contrition to take similar action. Instead he defended his friend, Mr. Ito,¹⁰ and remained on the Media Lab’s advisory board until December 2021, as previously mentioned. A transparency-minded colleague of Mr. Hoffman, associated with a Media Lab awards program that he sponsored, said of him, “Hoffman basically hid behind bureaucracy and the old ‘ongoing investigation’ excuse. He said it would be complicated to release the correspondence publicly because other names might get dragged in.”

Mr. Hoffman’s extremely poor judgment leaves many unanswered questions. Recognizing Mr. Epstein as “perverse,” how did Mr. Hoffman justify ongoing collaboration with the convicted pedophile, who maintained his own luxury island to traffic underage girls to fulfill the sexual desires of himself and his associates? How could a highly educated, savvy and instinctive tech billionaire agree to visit such a place with such a person, with such a detestable reputation, unless it was intentional, showing utter disregard for his own image and that of the businesses and organizations with which he is identified?

At best, Mr. Hoffman gave Mr. Epstein access to the upper echelons of science and tech in exchange for donations to the MIT Media Lab, despite Mr. Epstein’s image. In addition, Mr. Hoffman gave Mr. Epstein a platform to restore his image, which Hoffman has admitted: “It gnaws me that, by lending my association, I helped his reputation, and thus delayed justice for his survivors.”¹¹

At worst, Mr. Hoffman’s activities with Mr. Epstein are evidence of more nefarious behavior.

With undoubtedly high-level security clearances and access to extremely sensitive Defense Department information and intelligence, Mr. Hoffman has demonstrated that he cannot be trusted.

⁹ Benoit, David; Safdar, Khadeeja. “How Jeffrey Epstein Tried to Tap Into Trump’s Circle,” *Wall Street Journal*, Aug. 30, 2023. See <https://www.wsj.com/politics/jeffrey-epstein-trump-associates-ab19d1f0>

¹⁰ Rogers, Taylor N. “LinkedIn founder Reid Hoffman defended a former MIT official who accepted donations from Jeffrey Epstein.” *Business Insider*, Sep. 8, 2019. <https://www.businessinsider.com/reid-hoffman-defended-mit-joi-ito-over-epstein-donations-2019-9>

¹¹ Thaler, Shannon. “LinkedIn billionaire Reid Hoffman visited Jeffrey Epstein’s private island, planned to visit NYC mansion,” *New York Post*, May 3, 2023. See <https://nypost.com/2023/05/03/linkedins-reid-hoffman-visited-jeffrey-epsteins-private-island/>

2. Mr. Hoffman’s unethical political activities, and his funding of “lawfare” and dirty tricks, demonstrate a hostility to democratic norms and values.

Mr. Hoffman is also one of the largest sources of funding for secretive, left-wing, political activism organizations. While he has the right to donate to whichever causes he wishes, his connections and funding of controversial – and arguably unethical – projects call into question his integrity and ethics.

Mr. Hoffman co-founded Investing in Us, a left-wing for-profit investment fund that applies a venture capital-like approach to political and social activism.¹² The organization was criticized by both sides of the political aisle for contributing to controversial organizations.

In 2018, Mr. Hoffman apologized for funding an operation that spread disinformation on social media platforms about Republican senatorial candidate Roy Moore during his campaign in the 2017 special election in Alabama.¹³ According to the *Washington Post*:¹⁴

Hoffman’s public apology follows news reports on the effort, known as Project Birmingham, which involved the creation of misleading Facebook pages to persuade Alabama conservatives to vote for somebody other than Moore.

One Project Birmingham tactic described in the document claimed backers had created false online evidence that a network of Russian automated accounts, called bots, were supporting Moore. In his statement, Hoffman called this report “the most disturbing aspect” of the disinformation effort.

MotiveAI, another firm credited with “with backing from billionaire LinkedIn chairman Reid Hoffman,” ran ads through associated limited liability companies that featured offensive content and disinformation. According to the Daily Beast:¹⁵

¹² Nguyen, Tina. “The Left’s ‘Capital Arm of the Resistance’: LinkedIn Founder Reid Hoffman Is Spending Hundreds of Millions to Growth-Hack Democracy,” *Vanity Fair*, Apr. 30, 2019. See <https://www.vanityfair.com/news/2019/04/linkedin-founder-reid-hoffman-spends-millions-to-grow-democracy>

¹³ Lutz, Eric. “LinkedIn Billionaire Distances Himself from Russian-Style Disinformation Campaign,” *Vanity Fair*, Dec. 27, 2018. See <https://www.vanityfair.com/news/2018/12/reid-hoffman-distances-himself-from-alabama-campaign>

¹⁴ Davis, Aaron; Romm, Tony; Timberg, Craig. “Internet billionaire Reid Hoffman apologizes for funding a group tied to disinformation in Alabama race,” *The Washington Post*, Dec. 26, 2018. See <https://www.washingtonpost.com/technology/2018/12/26/internet-billionaire-reid-hoffman-apologizes-funding-group-behind-disinformation-alabama-race/>

¹⁵ Markay, Lachlan. “Democratic Ad Firm Accused of Fake News Retools for 2020,” *The Daily Beast*, Apr. 23, 2019. See <https://www.thedailybeast.com/motiveai-a-democratic-ad-firm-accused-of-fake-news-retools-for-2020>

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A page called Drain the Swamp, which appeared to target Republicans, promoted conspiracy theories that Brett Kavanaugh—then facing a bitter Supreme Court confirmation fight—had helped Bill and Hillary Clinton cover up the murder of a White House aide.

Other Facebook pages with MotiveAI associations made sexist comments about former Congresswoman Tulsi Gabbard and Republican megadonor Rebekah Mercer. One such page called Rep. Gabbard a “C.W.I.L.F.,” which stands for a “Congresswoman I’d like to f---.”

Mr. Hoffman also funded ACRONYM, a liberal dark money group behind Courier Newsroom, which creates progressive websites emulating local news outlets. The organization has been criticized for providing a hyper-partisan take on local news.¹⁶

Mr. Hoffman also carries an unhealthy fixation on former President Donald Trump and his tens of millions of supporters. For years Mr. Hoffman was linked with investor Dmitri Mehlhorn, who is also his chief political advisor and co-founder of Investing in US with him.¹⁷ Mr. Mehlhorn told CNBC in 2022, “Our political philanthropy is focused on weakening the political power of the anti-American Trump-MAGA movement.” He also characterized the former president as a “disease,”¹⁸ with Mr. Hoffman himself going a step further and calling him “The Disease President.”¹⁹

But it’s not just the “Republican half” of the country that Mr. Hoffman and his close associates disparage. His millions of dollars in political donations have split his own party as well, in a stated effort to elect “mainstream” Democrats. He has weighed in heavily in opposition to progressive candidates such as Bernie Sanders and so-called “Justice Democrats.” As one example, in response to an inquiry by CNBC, a Justice Democrats spokesman said, “Billionaire Reid Hoffman financing an extreme pro-NRA, anti-union, and anti-choice Democrat in Henry Cuellar’s candidacy in the name of ‘Mainstream Democrats’ is disgraceful.”

¹⁶ Thompson, Alex. “Newsroom or PAC? Liberal group muddies online information wars,” *Politico*, July 14, 2020. See <https://www.politico.com/news/2020/07/14/newsroom-pac-liberal-info-wars-356800>

¹⁷ Schwartz, Brian. “LinkedIn co-founder Hoffman hopes to get more Democrats elected to Congress this fall by beating some in the primaries,” CNBC, June 28, 2022. See <https://www.cnbc.com/2022/06/28/linkedin-hoffman-spending-to-elect-more-mainstream-democrats-to-congress.html>.

¹⁸ “Dmitri Mehlhorn: The Man Financing a Political Counterrevolution,” *The Intercept*, May 6, 2023. See <https://theintercept.com/2023/05/06/deconstructed-dmitri-mehlhorn-democratic-party/>.

¹⁹ Hoffman, Reid. “The Disease President,” Medium.com, Aug. 7, 2020. See <https://reid.medium.com/the-disease-president-4c7567e829c6>.

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Mr. Hoffman even stooped to juvenile levels in his blinding obsession against President Trump. During the 2016 campaign he created “Trumped Up Cards,” a satirical multi-player game. He promoted it on his personal Medium page as “The World’s Biggest Deck.”²⁰

But Mr. Hoffman reserved his most vicious vitriol towards President Trump for the 2024 election cycle, upon which America’s voters returned him to the White House.

In the summer Mr. Hoffman reportedly made disgusting comments about [President-elect] Trump, which came roughly a day before an assassination attempt against the former president at his campaign rally in Butler, Pa. Mr. Hoffman’s comments appeared to condone political violence against the frontrunner in the 2024 presidential election. The comments were reportedly made at Allen & Company’s Sun Valley Conference 2024. According to Puck News:²¹

Peter Thiel sarcastically thanked Reid Hoffman for funding lawsuits against Trump because they had turned him into “a martyr,” increasing his chances of re-election.

From the stage, Hoffman shot back with his own sarcastic quip: “Yeah, I wish I had made him an actual martyr.”

Rather than explicitly apologize, Mr. Hoffman offered a “clarification,” then later engaged in blame-shifting to his Sun Valley audience, rather than take explicit responsibility for his malicious remark.²²

“I definitely regret having echoed the word martyr, which was pitched to me from the audience, and I echoed it. That was a mistake,” Hoffman told CNN. “It’s super important that we all as leaders strongly speak against physical violence in democracies and politics and everything else. I deeply regret having echoed that word.”²³

²⁰ Hoffman, Reid. “Playing Trumped Up Cards: The World’s Biggest Deck,” Medium.com, Sept. 14, 2016. See <https://reid.medium.com/playing-trumped-up-cards-the-worlds-biggest-deck-74ff3f850e9c>.

²¹ Byers, Dylan. “The Thiel-Hoffman Face-off in Sun Valley,” Puck News, July 12, 2024. See <https://puck.news/peter-thiel-reid-hoffman-face-off-in-sun-valley/>.

²² Egan, Matt. “LinkedIn billionaire is going all-in on Kamala Harris. But he wants her to make a big change,” CNN, July 26, 2024. See <https://www.cnn.com/2024/07/26/business/reid-hoffman-kamala-harris-ftc-khan/index.html>.

²³ “More Reid Hoffman Accountability Avoidance: ‘Martyr’ Comment Just an ‘Echo’,” National Legal and Policy Center, July 26, 2024. See <https://nlpc.org/corporate-integrity-project/more-reid-hoffman-accountability-avoidance-martyr-comment-just-an-echo/>.

Adding insult to injury, Mr. Mehlhorn – still attached at the hip to Mr. Hoffman – urged reporters to consider that the assassination attack was “staged,” before issuing an apology following vehement blowback to his efforts.²⁴ No longer able to ignore the damage their joint vitriol has caused, the pair parted ways shortly after Mr. Mehlhorn’s comments.

The assassination attempt resulted in the murder of Corey Comperatore, a firefighter attending the rally with his family, and led to injuries to President Trump and others.²⁵ Mr. Hoffman’s refusal to explicitly apologize to President Trump and to Mr. Comperatore’s family, rather than “regret” his “echo” of the word we are supposed to believe was too great a temptation for him to resist, is disgusting.

Reports also showed Mr. Hoffman donated heavily to a nonprofit organization that contributed \$620,000 to a legal defense fund for Fusion GPS, the opposition research firm that created the debunked Steele dossier behind the Russian investigation hoax of the Trump administration.²⁶ Through yet another nonprofit (or possibly the same one), Mr. Hoffman has secretly paid the legal bills for Trump accuser E. Jean Carroll, who sued him for defamation over her allegations of rape against him.²⁷ A New York judge and jury found against the former president, and the case is being appealed.²⁸

²⁴ Singh, Kanishka. “Adviser to Democratic donor apologizes for saying Trump shooting may be staged,” Reuters, July 15, 2024. See <https://www.reuters.com/world/us/adviser-democratic-donor-apologizes-saying-trump-shooting-may-be-staged-2024-07-15/>

²⁵ Sottile, Zoe; Maher, Kit; & Mascarenhas, Lauren. “Man killed at Trump rally identified as firefighter Corey Comperatore, who ‘died a hero,’” CNN, July 17, 2024. See <https://www.cnn.com/2024/07/14/politics/corey-comperatore-trump-shooting-victim/index.html>.

²⁶ Ross, Chuck. “Tech Billionaire Who Bankrolled Numerous Disinformation Projects Linked To \$620,000 Donation To Fusion GPS’s Legal Fund,” Daily Caller, Dec. 21, 2020. See <https://dailycaller.com/2020/12/21/fusion-gps-reid-hoffman-dossier/>.

²⁷ Ross, Chuck. “Dem Megadonor Secretly Funds Rape Lawsuit Against Donald Trump,” Washington Free Beacon, April 14, 2023. See <https://freebeacon.com/democrats/dem-megadonor-secretly-funds-rape-lawsuit-against-donald-trump/>.

²⁸ Pollak, Joel B. “Anti-Trump Judge Rules for E. Jean Carroll in Defamation Claim,” Breitbart.com, Sept. 6, 2023. See <https://www.breitbart.com/politics/2023/09/06/anti-trump-judge-rules-for-e-jean-carroll-in-defamation-claim/>.

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Conclusion

While NLPC respects Mr. Hoffman's right to make political donations, and exercise his First Amendment rights, we believe that his partnership with Mr. Epstein and his malicious political activities make him unfit to hold a security clearance or serve on the board of any company doing business with the Department of Defense.

Sincerely,

/s/ Peter Flaherty
Chairman

cc: Ms. Susie Wiles, White House Chief of Staff
Hon. Roger Wicker, Chairman, U.S. Senate Committee on Armed Services
Hon. Mike Rogers, Chairman, House Armed Services Committee
Microsoft board of directors