

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-4608

July 3, 2019

The Honorable Wilbur Ross, Secretary
Department of Commerce
1401 Constitution Ave, NW
Washington, D.C. 20230

Dear Secretary Ross:

I write seeking details on meeting(s) you held last year with Charles C. Johnson. Johnson, a white nationalist,¹ conspiracy theorist,² fake news purveyor,³ and Holocaust denier,⁴ exchanged emails with you requesting two separate meetings in June and October of 2018 (see attached correspondence obtained by Democracy Forward via Freedom of Information Act request). In your correspondence you agreed to meet with Johnson on Wednesday, June 25, 2018; the meeting reportedly took place and you exchanged details about it with him from your personal email account.⁵ I believe you owe the American people and their Representatives an explanation about this meeting, given the position of public trust which you hold.

The attached emails show a concerning degree of familiarity between Johnson—who has been banned from Twitter for threatening violence to a Black Lives Matter activist⁶—and a member of the President’s Cabinet. Johnson referred to a recent, prior conversation between you, and sought at least two meetings with you. Both of his requests were referred to your assistant. It is unclear from the available correspondence how many meetings between you took place, where they took place, and what you discussed, but it seems clear that Johnson’s highly objectionable background did not pose a problem for you in accepting his meeting request.

Additionally, Johnson addressed requests to both your personal and official email accounts for

¹ Brandy Zadrozny and Ben Collins, “Activist who met with congressmen about ‘DNA’ posted about black ‘violence gene,’” *NBC*, January 17, 2019 <https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/congress/activist-who-met-congressmen-about-dna-posted-about-black-violence-n959931>

² Ben Collins, “Alt-Right Media Framed Wrong Person in Car Attack, Labeled Him ‘Anti-Trump Druggie,’” *The Daily Beast*, August 13, 2017 <https://www.thedailybeast.com/alt-right-media-framed-wrong-person-in-car-attack-labeled-him-anti-trump-druggie>

³ J.K. Trotter, “What Is Chuck Johnson, and Why? The Web’s Worst Journalist, Explained” *Gawker*, December 9, 2014 <https://gawker.com/what-is-chuck-johnson-and-why-the-web-s-worst-journal-1666834902>

⁴ Anti-Defamation League, Letter to the Honorable Matthew Gaetz, Member of Congress, February 1, 2018 <https://www.adl.org/news/letters/adl-letter-to-congressman-matthew-gaetz-regarding-charles-johnson>

⁵ Alexander Nazaryan, “Why did right-wing troll Charles C. Johnson meet with Commerce Secretary Wilbur Ross?” *Yahoo News*, May 14, 2019 <https://news.yahoo.com/why-did-rightwing-troll-charles-c-johnson-want-to-meet-with-commerce-secretary-wilbur-ross-090000636.html>

⁶ Dylan Byers, “Troll Charles Johnson banned from Twitter,” *Politico*, May 26, 2016 <https://www.politico.com/blogs/media/2015/05/troll-charles-johnson-banned-from-twitter-207688>

meetings which Commerce Department staff seemed to regard as having a bearing on official business. When asked about the second meeting request, which he described to you as being of “international import,” Johnson described the meeting’s subject to a journalist as being a “national security matter.”⁷ Conducting official business of this kind via personal email would be inappropriate and potentially illegal, as you are doubtless aware. Johnson himself reportedly assisted the late activist and researcher Peter Smith in his efforts to contact Russian hackers and Wikileaks in order to obtain hacked emails.⁸

Given the lack of clarity around these meetings, I ask that you respond with answers to the following questions:

1. How many times have you met with Charles C. Johnson, whether in your official capacity as Secretary of Commerce, or informally, since you became Secretary?
2. Where have these meetings taken place, and when?
3. Who participated in the June 25, 2018 meeting between Charles C. Johnson and yourself? What topics did you discuss, and what subsequent dialogue or policy changes resulted from the meeting(s)?
4. Please provide any emails sent from your personal account related to official business which you exchanged with Charles C. Johnson.
5. What came of Charles C. Johnson’s October 2018 request to discuss a “national security matter” with you? Why did he direct such a request to the Commerce Department?

Thank you for your attention in this matter.

Sincerely,



Donald S. Beyer Jr.
Member of Congress

⁷ See Alexander Nazaryan, *Yahoo News*, above

⁸ Ben Schreckinger, “GOP Researcher Who Sought Clinton Emails Had Alt-Right Help,” *Politico*, July 11, 2017
<https://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2017/07/11/gop-researcher-who-sought-clinton-emails-had-alt-right-help-215359>

Slattery, Elizabeth (Federal)

From: Leach, Macie (Federal)
Sent: Tuesday, October 2, 2018 11:20 AM
To: Bedan, Morgan (Federal); Neuhaus, Chelsey (Federal)
Subject: FW: Request for a meeting

From: Macie Leach <(b)(6)>
Sent: Tuesday, October 02, 2018 11:19 AM
To: Leach, Macie (Federal) <SLeach@doc.gov>
Subject: Fwd: Request for a meeting

----- Forwarded message -----

From: Charles Johnson <(b)(6)>
Date: Mon, Oct 1, 2018 at 7:14 PM
Subject: Request for a meeting
To: Ross, Wilbur L <(b)(6)>, Wilbur Ross <(b)(6)>
Cc: Macie Leach <(b)(6)>

Hi Secretary Ross,

Are you free for a meeting this month? I will be in DC October 8-11. Have something of international import to discuss.

Thanks,
Charles

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Charles C. Johnson

Investor, author, entrepreneur.

Author of *Why Coolidge Matters: Leadership Lessons from America's Most Underrated President*.
<http://t.co/OsY5s6vD> and *The Truth About the IRS Scandals*. <http://tinyurl.com/o4t3mb7>.

Slattery, Elizabeth (Federal)

From: Charles Johnson <(b)(6)>
Sent: Monday, June 25, 2018 7:04 PM
To: Wilbur Ross
Cc: Macie Leach; Ross, Wilbur L; Teramoto, Wendy (Federal); Mark Epstein
Subject: Re: Tech discussion with Sec Ross

Sounds good. Let me know when on Wednesday.

Charles C. Johnson

Founder, CEO of WeSearchr.com: Crowdfunding the Truth

Founder of Gotnews.com
617-429-4718

Author of *Why Coolidge Matters: Leadership Lessons from America's Most Underrated President*.
<http://t.co/OsY5s6vD> and *The Truth About the IRS Scandals*. <http://tinyurl.com/o4t3mb7>.

On Mon, Jun 25, 2018 at 4:03 PM, Wilbur Ross <(b)(6)> wrote:
Thursday doesn't work as I will be in Wisconsin with POTUS for the Foxconn ground breaking. Please work a time on Wednesday with Macie. Wilbur Ross

Sent from my iPhone

On Jun 25, 2018, at 5:01 PM, Charles Johnson <(b)(6)> wrote:

Hi Secretary Ross,

Great chatting with you the other day.

I am speaking before about 30 congressmen on tech issues and would love to meet you either Wednesday or Thursday.

My
lawyer
Mark Epstein will be joining us.

Thanks,
Charles