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COMMITTEE ON
EDUCATION AND THE WORKFORCE
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
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July 29, 2024

The Honorable Daniel Wefel
Commissioner
Internal Revenue Service
1111 Constitution Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20224

Dear Commissioner Wefel:

The Committee on Education and the Workforce (Committee) is investigating attempts by the Biden-Harris administration and certain pension funds to leverage retirement assets for the benefit of organized labor. The Internal Revenue Code (Code) makes public pensions eligible for significant tax subsidies if, among other things, their benefits are part of a plan “for the exclusive benefit of [an employer’s] employees or their beneficiaries.”¹ The Committee seeks information to determine whether the law is being undermined by the Biden-Harris administration and violated by certain pension funds.

On April 23, 2024, the Biden-Harris administration convened a group of “asset owners representing more than \$1 trillion in public and pension fund capital” who committed to “promote strong labor commitments among funds, asset managers, and companies.”² Present at this event was Theresa Taylor, President, California Public Employees Retirement System (“CalPERS”) Board of Administration. The Committee understands that CalPERS was one of the asset owners who made this commitment.³ CalPERS’ participation in the Biden administration’s scheme to leverage retirement assets for unions disqualifies its plan from tax-exempt status under Code section 401(a).⁴

¹ 26 U.S.C. § 401(a).

² THE WHITE HOUSE, READOUT OF WHITE HOUSE CONVENING WITH OWNERS OF \$1 TRILLION IN WORKERS’ CAPITAL TO PROMOTE STRONG LABOR STANDARDS (Apr. 23, 2024), <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2024/04/23/readout-of-white-house-convening-with-owners-of-1-trillion-in-workers-capital-to-promote-strong-labor-standards/>.

³ “The five asset owners included CalPERS, National Electrical benefit Fund Investments, Blue Wolf Capital Partners, Hamilton Lane, and Meketa Investment Group.” Letter from Soumya Dayananda, Partner, Willkie, Farr, & Gallagher, LLP on behalf of the Natl. Educ. Assn., to Reps. Virginia Foxx and Bob Good (June 14, 2024) (on file with H. Comm. on Educ. & the Workforce).

⁴ https://www.calpers.ca.gov/sources/member/CBEE/learning_guides/CalPERS_Retirement_Benefits-Nearing_Retirement.pdf.

The Code confers significant tax benefits to defined benefit and defined contribution plans that qualify under section 401(a). Contributions to qualified retirement plans generally are deductible when made.⁵ However, retirement benefits are not taxed when earned but instead are taxed when distributed. Further, trusts holding employer contributions for retirement benefits generally are not taxed on their earnings.⁶ These tax benefits represent a reduction in tax revenues, which must be underwritten by additional taxes. According to recent estimates, the amount of this tax subsidy will be more than \$369 billion in Fiscal Year (FY) 2024 alone and more than \$2.2 trillion from FY 2023 through FY 2027.⁷

The *Employee Retirement Income Security Act of 1974* (ERISA) contains a provision similar to the “exclusive benefit” rule in the Code. Specifically, ERISA provides that fiduciaries of plans subject to ERISA must discharge their duties “solely in the interest of the participants and beneficiaries and ... for the exclusive purpose of providing benefits to participants and their beneficiaries.”⁸ While ERISA does not apply to governmental plans such as CalPERS,⁹ the Code’s exclusive benefit rule does apply.¹⁰ The Internal Revenue Service (IRS) has an obligation to enforce the provisions of the Code to ensure that taxpayers are not improperly subsidizing a retirement plan that does not, in fact, comply with the Code’s exclusive benefit requirement. To the extent that CalPERS is using plan assets for the benefit of social or political causes, the plan’s tax status is no longer valid.¹¹

CalPERS’ commitment to the Biden-Harris administration and any actions consistent with that commitment would not be “for the exclusive benefit” of employees and beneficiaries but instead would be to forward a political and social agenda.¹² The Committee seeks a better understanding of whether certain pension funds are being managed for labor interests and are diverting tax-subsidized retirement assets in violation of the “exclusive benefit rule.” The Committee also is interested in determining whether amendments to ERISA are needed to circumscribe this activity in the event that the Code is not enforced effectively. Please, therefore provide the following information not later than August 12, 2024:

⁵ JOINT COMM. ON TAXATION, OVERVIEW OF THE FEDERAL TAX SYSTEM AS IN EFFECT FOR 2024, at 12 (May 24, 2024), <https://www.jct.gov/publications/2024/jcx-26-24/>.

⁶ *Id.* at 3.

⁷ JOINT COMM. ON TAXATION, ESTIMATES OF FEDERAL TAX EXPENDITURES FOR FISCAL YEARS 2023-2027 (Dec. 7, 2023), <https://www.jct.gov/publications/2023/jcx-59-23/>.

⁸ 29 U.S.C. § 1104(a)(1)(A), ERISA § 404(a)(1)(A).

⁹ See 29 U.S.C. § 1003(b)(1), ERISA § 4(b)(1).

¹⁰ https://www.calpers.ca.gov/sources/member/CBEE/learning_guides/CalPERS_Retirement_Benefits-Nearing_Retirement.pdf (stating on page 1 “CalPERS is a 401(a) Defined Benefit Plan”).

¹¹ Not only do social and political investing policies violate the Code, but they may also result in significant loss of income to the trusts involved. Estimates are that CalPERS lost \$3.581 billion in investment gains by divesting from tobacco stocks as a result of following a social investing policy. <https://www.ai-cio.com/news/calpers-decision-divest-tobacco-costly/>. Other ample evidence exists that the IRS is not properly enforcing Code section 401(a)’s exclusive benefit rule. One study reports that roughly half of all assets held in public pension plans are being deployed using environmental, social, or governance (ESG) criteria. Jean-Pierre Aubry et al., *ESG Investing and Public Pensions: An Update*, 74 CTR. FOR RETIREMENT RESEARCH AT BOSTON COLL.: STATE & LOCAL PENSION PLANS 3 (Oct. 2020), <https://crr.bc.edu/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/SLP74.pdf>.

¹² 26 U.S.C. § 401(a).

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1. The process used by the IRS to determine plans' compliance with the exclusive benefit requirements of Code section 401;
2. Copies of any guidance the IRS has published to ensure the "exclusive benefit" test is met by plan sponsors; and
3. The number of enforcement actions the IRS has taken against plan sponsors related to the "exclusive benefit" test in FY 2018-2024, along with a brief description of the facts and circumstances underlying the enforcement action.

The Committee has jurisdiction over labor-related matters and ERISA, and it "shall review and study on a continuing basis the application, administration, execution, and effectiveness of laws and programs under its jurisdiction" as set forth in House Rule X.¹³ The Committee's investigation on this matter is within the Committee's jurisdiction and is a "subject on which legislation 'could be had.'"¹⁴ This request and any documents created as a result of this request will be deemed congressional documents and property of the Committee.

Your prompt attention to this request is appreciated.

Sincerely,



Virginia Foxx
Chairwoman

Enclosure

¹³ RULES OF THE U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES, Rule X cl. 2(b) (118th Cong.) (Jan. 10, 2023); *see also* Rule X (organization of committees), Rule X cl. 1 (committees and their jurisdictions), cl. 1(e) (Committee on Education and the Workforce), <https://rules.house.gov/sites/republicans.rules118.house.gov/files/documents/118/Additional%20Items/118-House-Rules-Clerk-v2.pdf>.

¹⁴ *Trump v. Mazars USA, LLP*, 591 U.S. 848, 863 (2020) (internal citations omitted).

Responding to Committee Document Requests

1. The agency's response to questions and request(s) should be answered or provided in separate document and not included inside a narrative response.
2. In complying with this request, you should produce all responsive documents that are in your agency's possession, custody, or control, whether held by you or other past or present employees of the executive branch, or a representative acting on your behalf. Your response should also produce documents that you have a legal right to obtain, that the agency has a right to copy or to which you have access, or that you have placed in the temporary possession, custody, or control of any third party.
3. Records, documents, data or information that have been requested and/or are related to underlying requests should not be destroyed, modified, removed, transferred or otherwise made inaccessible to the Committee on Education and the Workforce (the "Committee").
4. If any entity, organization or individual denoted in this request has been, or is also known by any other name than that herein denoted, the request shall be read also to include that alternative identification.
5. The Committee's preference is to receive documents in electronic form (i.e., email, CD, memory stick, or thumb drive) in lieu of paper productions. To the extent responses are provided in paper form, any documents that are stapled, clipped, or otherwise fastened together should not be separated. Documents produced in response to a request should be produced together with copies of file labels, dividers, or identifying markers with which they were associated when this request was issued.
6. Regardless of format, documents produced pursuant to this request should be produced in the order in which they appear in your files and should not be rearranged. Indicate the office or division and person from whose files each document was produced.
7. Regardless of format, documents produced to the Committee should include an index describing the contents of the production and a total page count for the entire production. To the extent more than one CD, hard drive, memory stick, thumb drive, box or folder is produced, each CD, hard drive, memory stick, thumb drive, box, or folder should contain an index describing its contents. Documents produced in electronic format should also be identified and indexed electronically.
8. Electronic document productions should be prepared according to the following standards:
 - (a) The production should consist of single page Tagged Image File ("TIF"), files accompanied by a Concordance-format load file, an Opticon reference file, and a file defining the fields and character lengths of the load file.
 - (b) Document numbers in the load file should match document Bates numbers and TIF file names.

(c) If the production is completed through a series of multiple partial productions, field names and file order in all load files should match.

9. All documents shall be Bates-stamped sequentially and produced sequentially.
10. When you produce documents, you should individually identify the paragraph, question number or request number in the Committee's request to which the documents respond.
11. It shall not be a basis for refusal to produce documents that any other person or entity—either inside or outside of the executive branch—also possesses non-identical or identical copies of the same documents.
12. If any of the requested information is only reasonably available in machine-readable form (such as on a computer server, hard drive, or computer backup tape), the agency's staff should consult with the Committee staff to determine the appropriate format in which to produce the information.
13. If compliance with any request cannot be made in full, compliance shall be made to the extent possible and shall include a written explanation of why full compliance is not possible.
14. If the agency does not expect to produce all documents responsive to a request by the date requested, the agency's staff shall consult with the Committee as soon as it is known the agency cannot meet the deadline, but no later than 24 hours before the due date to explain:
 - (a) what will be provided by the due date;
 - (b) why the agency believes certain materials cannot be produced by the due date; and
 - (c) the agency's proposed timeline for providing any omitted information.
15. If any document responsive to this request was, but no longer is, in your possession, custody, or control, or has been placed into the possession, custody, or control of any third party and cannot be provided in response to this request, you should:
 - (a) identify the document, including its date, author, subject, and recipients;
 - (b) explain the circumstances under which the document ceased to be in your possession, custody, or control, or was placed in the possession, custody, or control of a third party;
 - (c) state how the document was disposed of;
 - (d) identify the name, current address, and telephone number of the person who currently has possession, custody or control over the document;
 - (e) state the date of disposition; and

- (f) identify the name, current address, and telephone number of each person who authorized said disposition or who had or has knowledge of said disposition.
16. If any document responsive to this request cannot be located, identify the document and describe with particularity the efforts made to locate the document and the specific reason for its disappearance, destruction or unavailability.
17. In the event that a document or portion of a document is withheld on the basis of privilege, provide a privilege log containing the following information concerning any such document or redaction:
- (a) Bates number(s);
 - (b) the privilege asserted and the grounds therefor;
 - (c) the type of document;
 - (d) the general subject matter;
 - (e) any other description necessary to identify the document;
 - (f) the date, author, and addressee; and
 - (g) the relationship of the author and addressee to each other.

If a claimed privilege applies to only a portion of any document, that portion only should be withheld and the remainder of the document should be produced.

18. Any objections or claims of privilege are waived if you fail to provide an explanation of why full compliance is not possible and a log identifying with specificity the ground(s) for withholding each withheld document prior to the request compliance date.
19. In complying with the request, be apprised that (unless otherwise determined by the Committee) the Committee does not recognize: any purported non-disclosure privileges associated with the common law including, but not limited to, the deliberative-process privilege, the attorney-client privilege, and attorney work product protections; any purported privileges or protections from disclosure under the Freedom of Information Act; or any purported contractual privileges, such as non-disclosure agreements.
20. Any assertion by a request recipient of any such non-constitutional legal bases for withholding documents or other materials, for refusing to answer any deposition question, or for refusing to provide hearing testimony, shall be of no legal force and effect and shall not provide a justification for such withholding or refusal, unless and only to the extent that the Committee (or the chair of the Committee, if authorized) has consented to recognize the assertion as valid.

21. If a date or other descriptive detail set forth in this request referring to a document, communication, meeting, or other event is inaccurate, but the actual date or other descriptive detail is known to you or other agency employees, or is otherwise apparent from the context of the request, you should produce all documents that would be responsive as if the date or other descriptive detail were correct.
22. The time period covered by this request is included in the attached request. To the extent a time period is not specified, produce relevant documents from January 20, 2021 to the present.
23. This request is continuing in nature and applies to any newly-discovered information. Any record, document, compilation of data or information, not produced because it has not been located or discovered by the return date, shall be produced immediately upon subsequent location or discovery. Such submission shall include an explanation as to why the information was not produced originally.
24. If physical documents are to be delivered, two sets of documents should be delivered, one set to the Majority Staff in Room 2176 of the Rayburn House Office Building and one set to the Minority Staff in Room 2101 of the Rayburn House Office Building during Committee office hours (9am-5pm, unless other arrangements are made) and signed by members of the respective staffs upon delivery.
25. Upon completion of the document production, the agency's written response should include a written certification, signed by the Secretary or his or her designee, stating that:
 - (a) a diligent search has been completed of all documents in your possession, custody, or control that reasonably could contain responsive documents; and
 - (b) all documents located during the search that are responsive have been produced to the Committee.

Definitions

1. The term "document" means any written, recorded, or graphic matter of any nature whatsoever, regardless of how recorded, and whether original or copy, including, but not limited to, the following: memoranda, reports, expense reports, books, manuals, instructions, financial reports, working papers, records, notes, letters, notices, confirmations, telegrams, receipts, appraisals, pamphlets, magazines, newspapers, prospectuses, inter-office and intra-office communications, electronic mail (e-mail), contracts, cables, notations of any type of conversation, telephone call, meeting or other communication, bulletins, printed matter, computer printouts, teletypes, invoices, transcripts, diaries, analyses, returns, summaries, minutes, bills, accounts, estimates, projections, comparisons, messages, correspondence, press releases, circulars, financial statements, reviews, opinions, offers, studies and investigations, questionnaires and surveys, and work sheets (and all drafts, preliminary versions, alterations, modifications, revisions, changes, and amendments of any of the foregoing, as well as any attachments or appendices thereto), and graphic or oral records or

representations of any kind (including without limitation, photographs, charts, graphs, microfiche, microfilm, videotape, recordings and motion pictures), and electronic, mechanical, and electric records or representations of any kind (including, without limitation, tapes, cassettes, disks, and recordings) and other written, printed, typed, or other graphic or recorded matter of any kind or nature, however produced or reproduced, and whether preserved in writing, film, tape, disk, videotape or otherwise. A document bearing any notation not a part of the original text is to be considered a separate document. A draft or non-identical copy is a separate document within the meaning of this term.

2. The term “documents in your possession, custody or control” means documents that are in your possession, custody, or control, whether held by you or your past or present agents, employees, or representatives acting on your behalf; documents that you have a legal right to obtain, that you have a right to copy, or to which you have access; and/or documents that have been placed in the possession, custody, or control of any third party.
3. The term “communication” means each manner or means of disclosure or exchange of information, regardless of means utilized, whether oral, electronic, by document or otherwise, and whether in a meeting, by telephone, facsimile, email, regular mail, telexes, releases, or otherwise.
4. The terms “and” and “or” shall be construed broadly and either conjunctively or disjunctively to bring within the scope of this request any information which might otherwise be construed to be outside its scope. The singular includes plural number, and vice versa. The masculine includes the feminine and neuter genders.
5. The terms “person” or “persons” mean natural persons, firms, partnerships, associations, corporations, subsidiaries, divisions, departments, joint ventures, proprietorships, syndicates, or other legal, business or government entities, and all subsidiaries, affiliates, divisions, departments, branches, or other units thereof.
6. The term “identify,” when used in a question about individuals, means to provide the following information: (a) the individual's complete name and title; and (b) the individual's business address and phone number.
7. The term “referring or relating,” with respect to any given subject, means anything that constitutes, contains, embodies, reflect s, identifies, states, refers to, deals with or is pertinent to that subject in any manner whatsoever.
8. The term “agency” means any department, independent establishment, or corporation of the federal government. For the purposes of responding to oversight requests, the Committee expects information to be provided from all sub-agencies of an agency and not just the information that is immediately available to the addressee or the addressee’s immediate sub-agency.
9. The term “privilege” includes, but is not limited to, any claim that a document either may or must be withheld from production pursuant to any statute, rule, or regulation.

10. The term “employee” means agent, borrowed employee, casual employee, consultant, de facto employee, joint adventurer, loaned employee, part-time employee, permanent employee, provisional employee, contract employee, contractor, or any other type of service provider.
11. The term “Administration” means and refers to any department, agency, division, office, subdivision, entity, official, administrator, employee, attorney, agent, advisor, consultant, staff, or any other person acting on behalf or under the control or direction of the Executive Branch.
12. “You” or “your” means and refers to you as a natural person and the United States and any of its agencies, offices, subdivisions, entities, officials, administrators, employees, attorneys, agents, advisors, consultants, staff, contractors, or any other persons acting on your behalf or under your control or direction; and includes any other person(s) defined in the document request letter.