

November 13, 2023

Omar Ashmawy
Chief Counsel and Staff Director
Office of Congressional Ethics
U.S. House of Representatives
P.O. Box. 895
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Re: Request for Investigation into Speaker Mike Johnson

Dear Mr. Ashmawy:

I am writing to request that the Office of Congressional Ethics (“OCE”) immediately investigate Speaker Mike Johnson for his repeated violations of the Ethics in Government Act of 1978 (the “Act”) by failing to file complete and accurate financial disclosure statements.¹

As Speaker of the House of Representatives, it is *essential* that Johnson report the information required under the Act so that the public is granted full disclosure of his finances. Without this information, the public is blinded from knowing whether Speaker Johnson may have certain conflicts of interest. As demonstrated below, Speaker Johnson blatantly omitted reportable information and made numerous errors in several of his filings. Specifically, Speaker Johnson failed to disclose: 1) multiple trips paid for by private entities; 2) the sources of his spouse’s earned income; and 3) his spouse’s ownership interests in a privately-held business. It also appears that the Speaker likely failed to disclose reportable bank accounts, retirement assets, and honoraria earned by his spouse. In fact, Speaker Johnson has not reported a single asset held by his spouse in the seven years that he has been filing financial disclosure reports.

I respectfully request that you immediately investigate this matter.

I. Factual Background

Speaker Johnson was first elected to Congress in 2016. Beginning in 2016 and every year since, Speaker Johnson has filed personal financial disclosure statements (“PFDs”) which he has certified to be “true, complete, and correct to the best of [his] knowledge and belief.”² In total, Speaker Johnson filed one PFD as a candidate, and seven PFDs as a Member.³

When Johnson was sworn into Congress in 2017, he was required to complete a comprehensive ethics training from the Committee on Ethics.⁴ He is also required to attend an *annual* training

¹ 5 U.S.C.A §§ 13101-13111.

² See e.g., U.S. House of Representatives, James Michael Johnson – Financial Disclosure Report (filed June 23, 2016), available at https://disclosures-clerk.house.gov/public_disc/financial-pdfs/2016/10013244.pdf.

³ See Financial Disclosure Reports, Clerk of the United States House of Representatives, available at <https://disclosures-clerk.house.gov/FinancialDisclosure>.

⁴ House Rule 11, clause 3(a)(6)(B)(i).

from the Committee on Ethics.⁵ House Rules require Members to file a certification by January 31 each year stating the completed the annual training.⁶ Those trainings *include information about Members' financial disclosure obligations* and put Members on notice of their responsibility to disclose reportable assets not just for themselves but also for their spouse and dependent children.⁷ Further, the Committee on Ethics publishes detailed guidance each year explaining the reporting requirements in an Instruction Guide.⁸ The Committee even offers to review FD statements prior to submission and provides financial disclosure clinics to filers in the leadup to the filing deadline.⁹

II. Legal Background and Analysis

Federal officeholders are required by the Act to file financial disclosure statements that report information about their assets and other financial interests.¹⁰ This information includes, among other things, i) travel accepted by the filer that was paid for by private entities or foreign governments; ii) the specific sources of income earned by the filer and their spouse, including honoraria; iii) ownership interests in privately-held business entities; iv) bank accounts if the total sum of interest-bearing accounts held by the filer, their spouse, *and* their dependent children exceeded \$5,000; and v) investment accounts such as 401(k), IRA, and 529 accounts.¹¹

As detailed below, Speaker Johnson has committed multiple violations of the Act by failing to disclose several required pieces of reportable information on his PFDs.

a. Speaker Johnson failed to report trips he took that were paid for by private entities.

The Act requires filers to disclose travel they accepted that was paid for by private sources or a foreign government if the cost of the travel exceeded the statutory threshold.¹² For calendar years 2020 through 2022, that threshold was \$415.¹³ When disclosing reportable travel, filers are required to list the identity of the trip sponsor; the dates of the trip, the cities of departure,

⁵ House Rule 11, clause 3(a)(6)(B)(ii).

⁶ *Id.*

⁷ *See e.g.*, Office of Congressional Ethics, OCE Referral Regarding Rep. John Rutherford Exhibits at 37-39, 74-77, 115-117, 191-194, available at https://oce.house.gov/sites/congressionalethics.house.gov/files/documents/OCE%20Rev.%20No.%202021-7423%20Exhibits_reduced%20file%20size.pdf.

⁸ U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Ethics, Instruction Guide – Financial Disclosure Statements and Periodic Transaction Reports (2023), available at <https://ethics.house.gov/sites/ethics.house.gov/files/documents/Updated%20Final%20Combined%202023%20Instruction%20Guide.pdf> (hereinafter “House Ethics Instruction Guide”).

⁹ Committee on Ethics, Memorandum for all Members, Officers, and Employees regarding Upcoming Financial Disclosure Clinics & Training (Apr. 4, 2023), available at https://ethics.house.gov/sites/ethics.house.gov/files/documents/Updated%20FINAL%20FD%20Clinic%20Training%20Pink%20Sheet%20CY%202022_0.pdf.

¹⁰ 5 U.S.C.A. §§ 13103(c), (f); *see also* House Ethics Instruction Guide at 2.

¹¹ *See generally* House Ethics Instruction Guide.

¹² 5 U.S.C.A. § 13104(a)(2)(B).

¹³ *See* Gift Waivers, Committee on Ethics, available at <https://ethics.house.gov/forms/gift-waivers>.

destination, and return; whether the filer was accompanied by a family member; and whether the filer was provided with food and lodging.¹⁴

Speaker Johnson failed to report at least *two* separate trips that were paid for by private sources. In February 2020, Speaker Johnson and his spouse traveled to Israel on an all-expenses paid trip sponsored by 12 Tribe Films Foundation.¹⁵ In total, the trip cost approximately \$17,950.¹⁶ Despite this trip being paid for by a private source and exceeding the \$415 threshold, Speaker Johnson failed to disclose the trip on his CY 2020 PFD.¹⁷

The Israel trip was not the only reportable travel the Speaker chose not to disclose on his financial statements. He also accepted a free trip in April 2022 to Williamstown, Kentucky which was paid for by Answers in Genesis, a group associated with “a fringe evangelical movement called ‘young Earth creationism.’”¹⁸ According to public records, the cost of that trip exceeded the \$415 threshold and therefore was required to be reported on a PFD. Yet, Speaker Johnson failed to disclose any travel paid for by a private source on his CY 2022 PFD.¹⁹

These blatant omissions are clear violations of federal law and show a disregard for the Act’s important transparency goals that allow the public to know what groups have privately funded the Speaker’s travel.

b. Speaker Johnson failed to disclose the sources of his spouse’s earned income.

The Act also requires filers to report the source and type of their spouse’s earned income that aggregated over \$1,000 from a single source during the reporting period.²⁰ Earned income includes “compensation for services, including fees, commissions, and similar items; [and] gross income derived from business[.]”²¹ Filers must identify the source “by naming the organization, corporation, or other entity making the payment.”²²

On multiple PFDs, Speaker Johnson disclosed that his wife earned income, but failed to report the source of the income. Rather than “naming the ... entity making the payment,” Rep. Johnson merely listed the sources of income as “self-employment” and “multiple clients.”²³ By omitting

¹⁴ House Instruction Guide at 36.

¹⁵ James Johnson, Member/Officer Post-Travel Disclosure Form (filed March 2, 2020), available at <https://disclosures-clerk.house.gov/gtimages/MT/2020/500022863.pdf>.

¹⁶ *Id.*

¹⁷ U.S. House of Representatives, James Michael Johnson – Financial Disclosure Report (filed Aug. 13, 2021), available at https://disclosures-clerk.house.gov/public_disc/financial-pdfs/2020/10043280.pdf.

¹⁸ James Johnson, Member/Official Post-Travel Disclosure Form (filed Apr. 5, 2022), available at <https://disclosures-clerk.house.gov/gtimages/MT/2022/500024235.pdf>; Liz Skalka and Paul Blumenthal, New House Speaker Thinks Creationist Museum Is ‘Pointing People To The Truth’, HUFFINGTONPOST (Oct. 26, 2023), available at https://www.huffpost.com/entry/mike-johnson-young-earth-creationist_n_653adc81e4b0d69ae7068a0b.

¹⁹ U.S. House of Representatives, James Michael Johnson – Financial Disclosure Report (filed Aug. 11, 2023), available at https://disclosures-clerk.house.gov/public_disc/financial-pdfs/2022/10055641.pdf.

²⁰ House Instruction Guide at 29.

²¹ *Id.*

²² *Id.* at 30.

²³ U.S. House of Representatives, James Michael Johnson – Financial Disclosure Report (filed Aug. 13, 2018), available at https://disclosures-clerk.house.gov/public_disc/financial-pdfs/2017/10024472.pdf; U.S. House of Representatives, James Michael Johnson – Financial Disclosure Report (filed Nov. 7, 2019), available at

the name of the source, Rep. Johnson defeated the entire purpose of the disclosure requirement and shielded the public from knowing *who* paid his spouse. Speaker Johnson’s decision to not report the payor is an obvious attempt to keep the public from knowing who made these payments and an egregious violation of the Act.

c. Speaker Johnson failed to disclose his spouse’s interest in an LLC she owns.

The Act and House Instructions require filers to disclose certain information related to their assets, including assets held by their spouse. One of those requirements is to report any ownership interests in privately-held business entities.²⁴ To report an interest in a privately-held company that is actively engaged in a trade or business, the filer must provide the name of the business, a brief description of the nature of its activities, its geographic location, the total value of the filer’s interest, and the type and amount of any unearned income received from the entity.²⁵

Speaker Johnson’s wife owns a company, Onward Christian Counseling Services, LLC (the “**Company**”). According to records filed with the Louisiana Secretary of State, Speaker Johnson’s wife is the sole manager of the Company, which was formed in 2017 and appears to still be active today.²⁶ While the Company’s website was recently taken down, it used to provide biographical information about his wife – explaining that she is the President and founder of Company.²⁷ The site stated that she “founded [the Company] to provide confidential, biblically-based individual, marriage and family counseling to the people of Northwestern Louisiana.”²⁸

If Speaker Johnson’s wife’s interest in the Company is valued at more than \$1,000 or generated more than \$200 in unearned income, he is required to disclose that interest on his PFDs. Yet, Speaker Johnson has never disclosed his spouse’s interest in this entity on Schedule A of his PFDs. In fact, as noted above, Speaker Johnson has never reported a single asset held by his spouse in any of the eight reports he has filed.

d. Speaker Johnson may have failed to disclose reportable honoraria received by his spouse.

https://disclosures-clerk.house.gov/public_disc/financial-pdfs/2018/10029929.pdf; U.S. House of Representatives, James Michael Johnson – Financial Disclosure Report (filed Aug. 13, 2020), available at https://disclosures-clerk.house.gov/public_disc/financial-pdfs/2019/10038438.pdf; U.S. House of Representatives, James Michael Johnson – Financial Disclosure Report (filed Aug. 13, 2021), available at https://disclosures-clerk.house.gov/public_disc/financial-pdfs/2020/10043280.pdf; U.S. House of Representatives, James Michael Johnson – Financial Disclosure Report (filed August 19, 2022), available at https://disclosures-clerk.house.gov/public_disc/financial-pdfs/2021/10050246.pdf. Note, Speaker Johnson filed his CY 2021 PFD nearly a week late – another example of a myriad of violations he’s committed related to his PFDs.

²⁴ *Id.* at 21.

²⁵ *Id.*

²⁶ State of Louisiana, Secretary of State – Commercial Division, Onward Christian Counseling Services, LLC, available at https://coraweb.sos.la.gov/commercialsearch/CommercialSearchDetails.aspx?CharterID=1252099_663503A094.

²⁷ Leadership, Onward Christian Counseling Services, LLC Website, available at

<http://web.archive.org/web/20231025204405/https://www.onwardchristiancounseling.org/leadership>.

²⁸ *Id.*

Filers are also required to disclose the source, type, *and* amount of their spouse’s honoraria that totaled \$200 or more.²⁹ Honoraria refers to “a payment of money or anything of value for an appearance, speech, or article[.]”³⁰

Before she took down her Company’s website, Speaker Johnson’s spouse touted that she “maintains a busy speaking schedule addressing church groups, women’s conferences and large public events [and can] tailor a memorable message to suit almost any occasion.”³¹ The website promotes her as a trained counselor and asks viewers to contact her to book her services.³² The site stated “Fees may varies [sic] depending upon event size, length, and topics.”³³ Together, these statements *strongly suggest* that the Speaker’s wife has received reportable payments for her speaking engagements and thus, Speaker Johnson should have reported those payments as honoraria on his PFDs. Despite this, Speaker Johnson has never disclosed an honoraria payment to his wife on any of his PFDs.

e. Speaker Johnson may have failed to disclose reportable bank accounts and retirement assets.

Lastly, it appears that Speaker Johnson may have failed to disclose reportable bank accounts and retirement assets. Filers are required to disclose any assets held for investment or the production of income that are valued at more than \$1,000 at the close of the reporting period or that generated more than \$200 of unearned income during the reporting period.³⁴ Reportable assets include investment properties, assets held in brokerage accounts or retirement accounts, defined benefit plans, 529 college savings accounts, mutual funds, insurance policies, and certain bank accounts.³⁵

To determine whether a bank account must be disclosed, the filer must first add together *all* interest-bearing checking and savings accounts held by the filer, their spouse, and their dependent children at every financial institution in which they have accounts.³⁶ If the total value of all of those accounts exceeds \$5,000 at the end of the reporting period, then the filer must disclose each financial institution that held deposits valued at more than \$1,000.³⁷

Both Speaker Johnson and his wife have worked for many years. Before entering Congress, Speaker Johnson worked as a lawyer for nearly 20 years, including as a partner at Kitchens Law Firm and as a litigator and spokesman for the Alliance Defense Fund.³⁸ He also served as the

²⁹ House Instruction Guide at 30.

³⁰ *Id.* at 29.

³¹ Services, Onward Christian Counseling Services, LLC Website, available at <http://web.archive.org/web/20230330174017/https://www.onwardchristiancounseling.org/services>.

³² *Id.*

³³ *Id.*

³⁴ House Instruction Guide at 14.

³⁵ *Id.*

³⁶ *Id.* at 21.

³⁷ *Id.*

³⁸ About Speaker Mike Johnson, Mike Johnson for Louisiana, available at <https://www.mikejohnsonforlouisiana.com/about/>; Katelyn Caralle, New Speaker Mike Johnson voted to overturn the 2020 election, opposed bill to avoid government shutdown and has a long conservative legislative record,

dean of a defunct law school and as a Louisiana state legislator for two years.³⁹ According to her website, Speaker Johnson’s wife “served as a certified teacher in some of Louisiana’s top public and private elementary and secondary schools, taught apologetics and Christian worldview courses, and served as a communications officer for multiple Christian organizations.”⁴⁰

It would be *highly unusual* for a Member of Congress and their spouse, after working for over twenty years, to not have a single reportable retirement asset, bank account, brokerage account, 529 savings plan, or insurance policy. If Speaker Johnson, his wife, or their dependent children held any assets that met the amount or income thresholds above, these omissions would constitute additional violations that Speaker Johnson has committed while filing his PFDs.

III. Request for Action

For all the reasons above, I respectfully request that OCE immediately investigate this matter. Prompt action is necessary to ensure that Speaker Johnson complies with federal law and that the public is granted full disclosure of his finances. I understand that 18 U.S.C. § 1001 applies to the information I am providing. To the best of my knowledge and ability all evidence submitted was not obtained in violation of any law, rule, or regulation.

Sincerely,



End Citizens United
Tiffany Muller
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DAILYMAIL, available at <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-12672321/Speaker-Mike-Johnson-long-conservative-legislative-record.html>.

³⁹ Brian Slodysko, House Speaker Mike Johnson was once the dean of a Christian law school. It never opened its doors. AP NEWS (Oct. 31, 2023), available at <https://apnews.com/article/mike-johnson-house-speaker-2d1a3399e8fe61bf0619d66ba29a1520>.

⁴⁰ Leadership, Onward Christian Counseling Services, LLC Website, available at <http://web.archive.org/web/20231025204405/https://www.onwardchristiancounseling.org/leadership>.