

July 13, 2026

The Honorable Charles E. Schumer
Democratic Leader
U.S. Senate

The Honorable Richard J. Durbin
Democratic Whip
U.S. Senate

The Honorable Mark Warner
Vice Chairman
Senate Select Committee on Intelligence

The Honorable Ron Wyden
Senator
Senate Select Committee on Intelligence

The Honorable Martin Heinrich
Senator
Senate Select Committee on Intelligence

The Honorable Angus S. King, Jr.
Senator
Senate Select Committee on Intelligence

The Honorable Michael F. Bennet
Senator
Senate Select Committee on Intelligence

The Honorable Kirsten Gillibrand
Senator
Senate Select Committee on Intelligence

The Honorable Jon Ossoff
Senator
Senate Select Committee on Intelligence

The Honorable Mark Kelly
Senator
Senate Select Committee on Intelligence

Re: Nomination of Walter Joseph "Jay" Clayton III for Director of National Intelligence

Dear Democratic Leader Schumer, Democratic Whip Durbin, Vice Chairman Warner, and Democratic Members of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence:

The undersigned organizations write to express our concerns about and opposition to the [nomination](#) of Walter Joseph "Jay" Clayton III to serve as Director of National Intelligence, the role that oversees the Intelligence Community and serves as the principal intelligence advisor to the President. Our opposition takes on urgent weight following the [alarming revelation](#) over the weekend that Clayton, in his current capacity as temporary U.S. Attorney for the Southern District of New York, has issued grand jury subpoenas to four journalists at The New York Times seeking to uncover the sources behind their [recent reporting](#) on the security concerns surrounding President Trump's new Air Force One, an aircraft accepted as a gift from the government of Qatar. The Committee need not speculate how Clayton would exercise the enormous powers of the federal government: he is demonstrating it now.

In this extraordinary escalation against press freedoms in the United States, Clayton issued the grand jury subpoenas to the journalists at their homes. The subpoenas cite only a vague "alleged

violation of federal criminal law," but were issued following President Trump's ["enraged" reaction](#) to the news coverage of the Qatari-donated plane. A federal prosecutor who will weaponize the grand jury process against reporters—and their sources—to punish disclosures unwelcome to the president has shown the Senate the precise instinct that is disqualifying in a Director of National Intelligence. The DNI does not merely advise; the DNI directs what the government collects, what it analyzes, and what it declassifies or withholds. These are the very instruments most easily abused against journalists, whistleblowers, and political opponents. And Clayton is now displaying exactly how he wields such authority when the President's grievances and interests are at stake.

Rewarding an official who is actively executing the White House's war on an independent press with the keys to the Intelligence Community would be a catastrophic mistake. On an even more basic level, Clayton fails to meet the statutory prerequisite of the office. Congress has [required](#) by statute that the DNI "shall have extensive national security expertise." That requirement is not a discretionary preference, and it cannot be satisfied by the promise of on-the-job training; it is a foundational safeguard to ensure that the leader of America's spy agencies understands statecraft, espionage, and counterintelligence. Every person previously nominated to this office met it squarely: Tulsi Gabbard, Avril Haines, John Ratcliffe, Dan Coats, James Clapper, Dennis Blair, Mike McConnell, and John Negroponte each had some background in military service, diplomacy, intelligence work, or intelligence oversight. Some of those nominations were contested, but in these cases never was the Senate asked to accept a nominee with no national security background at all.

Clayton's career utterly falls short of that requirement—and not merely because, like Bill Pulte, Clayton also has no serious intelligence experience. Although the President's allies are attempting to frame Clayton as more sophisticated than Pulte and his nomination as a relief compared to Pulte's chaotic, embattled tenure, Clayton is also ultimately more structurally conflicted than the current DNI—making him fatally unfit and even more dangerous in a role of such paramount importance as the DNI.

Clayton is a Wall Street corporate lawyer by training, not a national security professional, having spent the vast majority of his career as counsel to Wall Street banks and other big companies. Although he is currently the temporary U.S. Attorney for the Southern District of New York, one year of experience in this role does not transform him into a national security expert who can be trusted to lead the Intelligence Community. More troublingly, Clayton has spent his time in this position weaponizing his authority on behalf of the President, particularly by politicizing high-profile investigations such as alleged Epstein ties to Democrats.

Before that, he chaired the Securities and Exchange Commission from May 2017 to December 2020 during President Trump's first term. Clayton's SEC tenure [was marked](#) by his deregulatory

success in "taking the shackles off corporations," leaving investors exposed to weaker safeguards and greater secrecy from companies. Clayton's SEC brought fewer enforcement actions than his predecessor, [pivoting](#) toward retail fraud cases and away from cases involving major financial institutions—thus reducing pressure on his former Wall Street clients. Under Clayton's watch, the SEC [rolled back](#) key whistleblower protection rules—a move [condemned](#) as another deregulatory gift to corporate America.

Prior to government, Clayton chose to devote his career [working](#) for the big banks, from Goldman Sachs during the Wall Street bailout to Ally Financial in its foreclosure fraud settlement with the government and Deutsche Bank in its Russian oligarch money laundering scandal. He [defended](#) Valeant, the scandal-ridden pharmaceutical company, and Volkswagen, who deceived the public by cheating diesel emissions tests. He also [advised](#) Alibaba, the commerce giant from China, when it executed the largest foreign IPO in U.S. stock exchange history in 2014. Clayton's knowledge of U.S.-China national security issues is drawn from his work as a corporate lawyer to ease Chinese penetration of U.S. capital markets, and not as a public official looking out for the United States' global interests.

The White House's answer to Clayton's glaring lack of relevant expertise may be that his professional experience advising multinational corporate clients gave him exposure to foreign policy issues. That experience is not relevant to the DNI role: responding to a regulator's questions about a company's overseas contacts or drafting contracts for a cross-border acquisition is transactional legal work, not intelligence collection, analysis, or the development of national security policy. At a time when the Intelligence Community is deeply focused on geopolitical and technological threats from America's foreign adversaries, our country needs a DNI whose expertise lies in insulating U.S. national security from foreign espionage and sabotage—not in integrating those adversarial actors into our capital markets or advising corporations how to navigate foreign markets.

Among the gravest dangers that a DNI can pose is the manipulation of intelligence, surveillance, and the flow of government information on behalf of an improperly meddling president. Beyond concerns regarding his qualifications, Clayton's recent record demonstrates a profoundly troubling susceptibility to political direction. When President Trump directed the Department of Justice last November to target his perceived Democratic political foes in connection with the Jeffrey Epstein scandal, former Attorney General Bondi [chose Clayton](#) to "take the lead." Assigned to spearhead the redactions of the Epstein Files to protect victims, Clayton also instead oversaw a [debacle](#) that left email addresses and explicit photos of potential victims unredacted. He [failed to bring](#) charges against additional individuals tied to Epstein's trafficking network despite years of investigations and millions of pages of records.

Confirming Clayton to the DNI role invites the Administration to weaponize or suppress raw intelligence for nakedly partisan reasons, rather than speaking truth to power. Clayton has been stoking the White House's conspiracy theories about election results in California, [arguing](#) that the public is "right to question" the vote tallies and [claiming](#) that the state's mail-voting laws created an "opportunity for fraud." He recently also [defended](#) President Trump's corrupt \$1.776 billion slush fund, which Senate Select Committee on Intelligence Vice Chairman Mark Warner (D-VA) [warned](#) could be used to launder taxpayer funds for Trump-allied political organizations, campaigns, and candidates. From using his platform as a top DOJ official to amplify debunked election fraud narratives on national television to managing politicized components of the Epstein investigation, Clayton's record signals an eager receptiveness to political pressure that is antithetical to the mission of the DNI.

Questions regarding conflicts of interest are also relevant to considering this nomination. Clayton [led](#) the indictment of Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro while holding stakes in multiple oil and gas companies that stand to benefit from Venezuela's regime change. He holds more than [\\$1 million in Apollo Global Management](#), which manages money for and pursues deals with foreign sovereign entities such as Saudi Arabia's Public Investment Fund. The Director of National Intelligence is responsible for assessing and countering foreign influence, including influence exerted through financial channels. The American people cannot trust a DNI to objectively monitor foreign influence when his personal wealth is tethered to the same sovereign entities he would be responsible for scrutinizing.

Members of Congress across the aisle have embraced Clayton as a more respectable option than Pulte and hope to see the nomination process move quickly. Measuring Clayton's qualifications against Pulte's rather than the demands of the office would be a detriment to national security. The Director of National Intelligence must possess extensive national security expertise, command the confidence of the Intelligence Community, and exercise independent judgment free from political pressure. We are living with the serious consequences of unqualified Trump loyalists, blindly pursuing the "MAGA" agenda at agencies like the Departments of Defense, Homeland Security, Education, Health and Human Services, and more. Adding the IC to this list—especially in light of Clayton's shocking willingness to weaponize federal power to satisfy the President's political grievances, which we are witnessing in real time—will have devastating consequences for our national security and the civil liberties of Americans. Based on the disqualifications listed above, we firmly urge Senators to oppose the nomination of Walter "Jay" Clayton for Director of National Intelligence.

Sincerely,

ACIEDD

Advocacy For Principled Action In Government

All For Tech
American Family Voices
American Federation of Teachers
American Society of Journalists and Authors
Asian Americans Advancing Justice | AAJC
Center for Media and Democracy
Church Women United in New York State
Courage California
Demand Progress
Digital Space for Digital Governance (DSDG)
DNS World Media and Communications
Earth Action, Inc
Electronic Privacy Information Center (EPIC)
Free Press Action
Free Speech For People
Freedom of the Press Foundation
Greenpeace USA
Indivisible
Intouch Youth Development & Community Justice
Law Enforcement Action Partnership
Lawyers for Good Government
Luk Digital Defenders
Muslims for Just Futures
North American Climate, Conservation and Environment (NACCE)
Organize for Peace
Peace Action
Project South
Reporters Without Borders (RSF)
ReThinking Foreign Policy
Salmonberry Tribal Associates
Secure Elections Network
Stop AAPI Hate
Tech Oversight Project
The Media and Democracy Project (MAD)
Whistleblower & Source Protection Program (WHISPeR) at ExposeFacts
Win Without War
X-Lab

cc: Democratic Members of the U.S. Senate