

An Open Letter Opposing White House Retaliatory Investigations

We write with grave concern about the two presidential memoranda dated April 9, 2025, targeting Chris Krebs and Miles Taylor, respectively — two former national security officials who served the people of the United States. These executive actions represent a dangerous escalation in the abuse of presidential power: weaponizing federal agencies to carry out personalized retribution against named individuals.

Presidents of both parties have long respected the independence of federal law enforcement and refrained from using the power at their disposal to punish perceived enemies. Indeed, presidents have gone out of their way to avoid even the appearance of impropriety or influence. President Trump's statements are a profoundly unconstitutional break with this tradition. He is explicitly targeting two Americans because they exercised their First Amendment rights and criticized him. That is a miscarriage of justice which these individuals, and other people and institutions vindictively singled out by him, will be unfairly forced to endure. The president of the United States must not direct federal authorities to investigate people with whom he disagrees.

This is not democratic governance. It is baseless retaliation — and it has no place in the United States of America. Across our history, there have been dark chapters where state power has been weaponized and dissent suppressed, including the crackdown during and after World War I, the Red Scare of the 1950s, and President Richard Nixon's "enemies list." These episodes are now seen as shameful deviations from the fundamental American principles of free expression and impartial justice. The April 9 presidential memoranda are an appalling rejection of those bedrock democratic values.

Indeed, the President's actions not only evoke some of the worst moments in our history; they go even further. For a president to personally and publicly direct the levers of the federal government against publicly named citizens for political reasons sets a new and perilous precedent in our republic. It brings to mind the abuses of power that characterize authoritarian nations, not the United States. No matter one's party or politics, every American should reject the notion that the awesome power of the presidency can be used to pursue individual vendettas. Behavior of this kind is more to be expected from a royal despot than the elected leader of a constitutional republic. This is the path of autocracy, not democracy.

For these reasons, we urge that the President immediately rescind these memoranda and that agency heads repudiate any order that undermines their oaths, politicizes their missions, or betrays the constitutional principles they are sworn to uphold.

These actions, if carried out, will leave a permanent stain on our institutions and erode our democracy. History will not forget who stood silent. We will not stand silent.

List of Signatories:

Amb. Norman Eisen (ret.), Executive Chair, State Democracy Defenders Fund

Christine Todd Whitman, Governor of New Jersey from 1994 to 2001 (R); Administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency in the George W. Bush Administration from 2001 to 2003

Jeffrey Amestoy, Chief Justice (ret.) Vermont

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