

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

November 20, 2025

The Honorable Joseph V. Cuffari
Inspector General
Office of Inspector General
U.S. Department of Homeland Security
245 Murray Lane SW
Washington, DC 20528

Dear Inspector General Cuffari:

We write to request that you initiate a formal investigation into disturbing reports that the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) improperly awarded non-competitive contracts to companies with close ties to DHS Secretary Kristi Noem and other senior officials,¹ potentially in violation of federal laws and regulations designed to prevent self-dealing. At a time when working-class families are struggling to afford basic necessities and get ahead, it is critical that the American people trust that their hard-earned dollars are being used to improve their lives—not to enrich government officials and their cronies.

Records show that DHS has spent more than \$200 million this year on an advertising campaign purportedly designed to reduce illegal immigration.² About \$143 million of those funds was awarded to Safe America Media, which was founded just days before the contract was finalized.³ Safe America Media then secretly funneled a significant portion of its award to the Strategy Group, a company with very close ties to Secretary Noem and other senior DHS officials; the Strategy Group played a key role in Secretary Noem's South Dakota gubernatorial campaign in 2022, and the company's CEO is married to current DHS chief spokesperson Tricia McLaughlin.⁴ In addition, by invoking a national emergency, DHS was able to award this contract while circumventing federal contracting regulations requiring a fair and open competition, raising concerns that the Department misused emergency authorities to steer taxpayer funds toward politically connected entities.⁵

While DHS has claimed it did not engage in criminal activity, there is reason to believe that Secretary Noem's dealings are part of a broader pattern of abuse and corruption. During Secretary Noem's tenure as governor of South Dakota, the Strategy Group received \$8.5 million in state funds for yet another ad campaign.⁶ Alarming, she and her senior staff at the time reportedly intervened to ensure the company won the contract, according to a then-official in her

¹ Justin Elliott, Joshua Kaplan, and Alex Mierjeski, *Firm Tied to Kristi Noem Secretly Got Money from \$220 Million DHS Ad Contracts*, ProPublica, (Nov. 14, 2025) (<https://www.propublica.org/article/kristi-noem-dhs-ad-campaign-strategy-group>).

² Federal Procurement Data System, (https://www.fpds.gov/ezsearch/search.do?q=people+who+think+LLC+UEI_NAME%3A%22PEOPLE+WHO+THINK%2C+L.L.C.%22+PIID%3A%227) (accessed Nov. 16, 2025).

³ USAspending.gov, *Award CONT_IDV_70RDA225D00000004_7001*, (https://www.usaspending.gov/award/CONT_IDV_70RDA225D00000004_7001) (accessed Nov. 16, 2025).

⁴ Elliott, Kaplan, and Mierjeski, *Firm Tied to Kristi Noem Secretly Got Money*.

⁵ USAspending.gov, *Award CONT_IDV_70RDA225D00000004_7001*.

administration. As the Strategy Group received state funds, its CEO Ben Yoho simultaneously worked for Noem in other capacities.⁷ Moreover, that same year, Strategy Group paid Madison Sheahan, then one of Secretary Noem's aides and currently the deputy director of U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), up to \$25,000 for "consulting."⁸

Federal law and regulations prohibit conflicts of interest and require that contracts be competitively awarded in a fair and impartial manner to prevent corruption, promote transparency and ensure the government receives the best deal possible on behalf of the taxpayer. The circumstances surrounding these contracts are suspicious and raise serious questions about Secretary Noem's judgement and ability to guard the public trust. We request that you promptly conduct a full, fair and impartial investigation into this matter and that findings be reported to Congress and the public. Specifically, the investigation should review whether DHS 1) improperly relied on emergency contracting authorities, 2) failed to conduct conflict of interest reviews for senior officials involved in procurement decisions and 3) ensured appropriate competition and documentation under the Federal Acquisition Regulation. The public deserves to know that government officials are not using taxpayer dollars to enrich themselves and their friends on the backs of hardworking Americans.

Sincerely,



Ruben Gallego
United States Senator



Gary C. Peters
United States Senator
Ranking Member, Committee
on Homeland Security and
Governmental Affairs



Richard Blumenthal
United States Senator



Andy Kim
United States Senator

⁶ Dana Hess, *Freedom Works Here, but so Does Cronyism*, South Dakota Searchlight, (Jan. 23, 2024) (<https://southdakotasearchlight.com/2024/01/23/freedom-works-here-but-so-does-cronyism/>).

⁷ Elliott, Kaplan, and Mierjeski, *Firm Tied to Kristi Noem Secretly Got Money*.

⁸ See Financial Disclosure 2023, Madison Sheahan (Oct. 2023) (<https://www.documentcloud.org/documents/26222583-madison-sheahan-financial-disclosure-2023/?mode=document#document/p8>).