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# White House Sees No Conflict in Hunter Biden's Ukraine Gas Job

By The Moscow Times

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U.S. Vice President Joe Biden speaks during a media briefing after a meeting with Ukraine's Prime Minister Arseny Yatseniuk in Kiev.

The White House has brushed aside questions about whether the involvement of Vice President Joe Biden's son in a Ukrainian natural gas company raised ethical issues at a time when the administration is promoting energy diversity in the country.

R. Hunter Biden, a lawyer and a partner in an investment firm, was recently named to the board of directors of Burisma Holdings, a private company that has drilled for natural gas in Ukraine since 2002.

In a statement on Burisma's website, Hunter Biden said he would help the company with "transparency, corporate governance and responsibility, international expansion," and other issues.

Natural gas has been a central issue in recent tensions between Russia and Ukraine. Ukraine depends on Russia for most of its natural gas, and has accused Moscow of hiking natural gas prices as punishment for moving closer to the European Union.

In April, the vice president traveled to Kiev and discussed how the U.S. could help provide technical expertise for expanding domestic production of natural gas.

Asked by a reporter whether Hunter Biden's appointment to the company presented a conflict, White House spokesman Jay Carney said Tuesday it did not.

"Hunter Biden and other members of the Biden family are obviously private citizens, and where they work does not reflect an endorsement by the administration or by the vice president or president," Carney said during a briefing.

Kendra Barkoff, a spokeswoman for Vice President Biden, said he "does not endorse any particular company and has no involvement with this company."

**No Inherent Conflict**

The head of a watchdog group on government ethics said there was no inherent conflict in Biden's job.

"It can't be that because your dad is the vice president, you can't do anything," said Melanie Sloan, executive director of Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington.

Financial conflict of interest laws and regulations for government officials do not apply to the president and vice president, explained Richard Painter, who was chief ethics lawyer for former Republican President George W. Bush from 2005 until 2007.

Even if they did apply, the laws do not extend to the financial interests of officials' grown children, he said.

"It's very clear the statute does not cover this, even if the statute applied to the vice president," said Painter, now at the University of Minnesota Law School.

Regulations do require government officials to recuse themselves on decisions where their family members are a party, or representing a party, he said.

In any case, Painter said he does not believe that Biden, who plays a central foreign policy role at the White House, should step back from working on issues affecting energy in Ukraine for appearance's sake.

But it would have been preferable for the vice president had his son avoided the matter altogether, or decided to step down, Painter said.

"If I had been the lawyer for the vice president, I would have said, 'Try to get your son to get off that board,'" Painter said.

See also:

Son of U.S. Vice President Biden Joins Ukraine Gas Company

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