April 25, 2024

The Honorable Joseph R. Biden
President of the United States
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20500

The Honorable Jeffrey D. Zients
Chief of Staff
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, D.C. 20500

The Honorable Lael Brainard
Director, National Economic Council
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear President Biden and White House Chief of Staff Zients,

We write to you as a coalition of anti-monopoly advocates supportive of federal antitrust enforcement. Since coming into office, the Biden administration has acted aggressively to reinvigorate antitrust enforcement. This includes efforts to rein in monopolies in the tech sector that have hindered innovation and reduced options for consumers. Since 2023, for example, the administration has filed federal antitrust lawsuits against Alphabet’s Google,¹ Amazon,² and Apple, with each promising to curb anti-competitive abuses in the industry.³ Given that the Biden administration evidently appreciates how each of these companies have undermined competition, we were disappointed to see that top executives from the three companies were invited to the White House State Dinner held on April 10, 2024.

Per a White House press release, guests at the event included Apple CEO Tim Cook, Alphabet president of global affairs and chief legal officer Kent Walker, Amazon chairman and founder Jeff Bezos, and Amazon general counsel and senior vice president David Zapolsky. As you may know, statements made by Cook, who had previously attended two of four prior State Dinners, were cited in the Department of Justice’s (DOJ) antitrust complaint against Apple as evidence of the company’s anti-competitive conduct. Walker has played a leading role in Alphabet’s efforts to evade antitrust scrutiny since 2009, including in the company’s defense in the 2023 U.S. v. Google trial over the company’s search monopoly. Last year, formerly-redacted Federal Trade Commission (FTC) filings revealed Bezos’ role in degrading Amazon’s services to pad the company’s profits while harming consumers. In his role, Zapolsky has helped Amazon fight efforts by the FTC to hold the company accountable for its anti-competitive behavior.

Moreover, we are disappointed by the justification given by these individuals’ presence by Press Secretary Karine Jeanne-Pierre. When prompted by CNN’s Kayla Tausche, Jeanne-Pierre stated that “when it comes to the State Dinner, we invite an array of folks to come in” during a State Dinner, adding that, when hosting an allied nation like Japan, “it’s always different types of people that come”. But the fact of the matter is that inviting individuals from corporations facing antitrust lawsuits serves to undermine the cases in the eyes of both the American public—and our allies. No one would dispute that the presence of, say, a tobacco major executive at a State Dinner at the time of the 1998 Master Settlement Agreement would’ve undermined the government’s efforts to hold them accountable. The scope of the harm committed by today’s tech monopolists makes it inappropriate to invite representatives of the company to such a prestigious event.

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As a result of the respective records of each of these individuals in fighting accountability efforts—including those launched under this administration—their appearance at a high-profile event like a White House State Dinner sends mixed messages about the White House’s commitment to strong competition policy. We encourage you not to invite these executives to future state dinners or take other actions that dilute the administration’s efforts to hold Big Tech accountable.

Sincerely,

American Economic Liberties Project  
Athena  
Blue Future  
Demand Progress  
Fight for the Future  
Freedom BLOC  
Jobs with Justice  
Main Street Alliance  
NextGen Competition  
Open Markets Institute  
Other 98%  
Progress America  
Revolving Door Project  
Rootsaction.org