

Name: Alert ID: TMML2024038504531 Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin has been rebuked by the U.S. Ethics Office after selling his stake in a film production company, which he'd promised to divest from, to his own wife, Louise Linton. Whoops! The office said that, because of this, they won't certify Mnuchin's 2018 financial disclosure statement, according to a Thursday report in the New York Times. Mnuchin has promised to distance himself from the company, and won't face any penalties for the sale. From the Times: Mr. Mnuchin in 2017 sold his stake in StormChaser Partners to his then-fiancée, Louise Linton, as part of a series of divestments before becoming Treasury secretary. Since they are now married, government ethics rules consider the asset to be owned by Mr. Mnuchin, potentially creating a conflict of interest for an official who has been negotiating for expanded access for the movie industry as part of trade talks with China. [...] Mr. Mnuchin said last month at a Senate hearing that he was told by Treasury ethics officials that he was allowed to sell his stake in StormChaser to Ms. Linton, an actress and producer. However, the Office of Government Ethics was not made aware of that guidance and had not approved it. Mnuchin isn't the first Trump official to be scorned by the ethics office. Just last month, Commerce Secretary Wilbur Ross was also told that his disclosure statement couldn't be certified because of an inaccuracy. An attorney for the Treasury Department, Brian J. Sonfield, wrote a letter to the Ethics department this week explaining that Mnuchin's sale had been cleared by the department, and that he believes the sale is "consistent with all applicable ethics laws and regulations." Mnuchin has now promised he will recuse himself from any business that could potentially have an impact on the production company. But not having your financial records certified by the ethics office is a big deal, and extremely rare, according to the Times. This isn't Mnuchin's first ethics scandal. Last year, for instance, the Center for Ethics and Responsibility in Washington found that Mnuchin had "between the spring and fall of 2017, [taken] eight separate trips on military aircraft at a total cost of nearly \$1 million." "Those records make clear that Secretary Mnuchin has legitimately earned a place in the rogues' gallery of cabinet secretaries who have abused their all too easy access to military and other non-commercial aircraft for both business travel and what, upon closer inspection, appears to sometimes include personal travel," the group said at the time. Democrats pointed out that whatever Mnuchin says, his actions were a violation of his promise to divest from the company. "Before being confirmed by the Senate, he signed an ethics agreement that said he would divest from StormChaser Partners L.L.C.," Senator Ron Wyden, the highest ranked Democrat on the Finance Committee, told the Times. "Rather than divest, he violated the spirit of his ethics agreement by selling his interest to his then-fiancée and then he violated the letter of the agreement when he reacquired the assets upon their marriage."