August 29, 2018

VIA ELECTRONIC MAIL

Dionne Hardy
FOIA Officer
Office of Management and Budget
725 17th Street NW, Room 9204
Washington, DC 20503
OMBFOIA@omb.eop.gov

Re: Freedom of Information Act Request

Dear Freedom of Information Officer:

Pursuant to the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA), 5 U.S.C. § 552, and your agency’s implementing regulations, American Oversight makes the following request for records.

Recent press reports suggest that White House adviser Stephen Miller has worked behind the scenes to install immigration hardliners throughout the executive branch.¹ According to one former official quoted in Vanity Fair, “he is on the phone with them all of the time, and he is creating a side operation that will circumvent the normal, transparent policy process.” In addition, he is allegedly installing allies “high up enough that they would know everything but not high up enough that they would be in the public spotlight or needing Senate confirmation.”

Immigration policy—including the administration’s ban on travel from majority-Muslim countries, harsh family separation policies, and drastic cuts to legal immigration—is a matter of great public interest. American Oversight is seeking records to shed light on Stephen Miller’s influence on immigration policy throughout executive branch agencies.

Requested Records

American Oversight requests that your agency produce the following within twenty business days:

1) All records reflecting communications (including emails, email attachments, voicemail transcripts, text messages, messages on messaging platforms (such as Slack, GChat or Google Hangouts, Lync, Skype, WhatsApp, Signal, or Twitter Direct Messages), telephone call logs, calendar invitations/entries, meeting notices, meeting agendas, informational material, talking points, any handwritten or electronic notes taken during any oral

communications, summaries of any oral communications, or other materials) with or about Stephen Miller, including but not limited to communications containing the name “Stephen Miller” or email communications sent or forwarded to, received from, copying, or blind copying stephen.miller@who.eop.gov or s.miller@who.eop.gov.

2) All records reflecting communications (including emails, email attachments, voicemail transcripts, text messages, messages on messaging platforms (such as Slack, GChat or Google Hangouts, Lync, Skype, WhatsApp, Signal, or Twitter Direct Messages), telephone call logs, calendar invitations/entries, meeting notices, meeting agendas, informational material, talking points, any handwritten or electronic notes taken during any oral communications, summaries of any oral communications, or other materials) with or referencing the phone number “(202) 881-8641.”

3) All call logs showing incoming or outgoing calls to or from the phone number “(202) 881-8641.”

Please provide all responsive records from the date of November 9, 2016, to the date the search is conducted.

You may limit your search to the following custodian: Senior White House Adviser Marcus Peacock

In addition to the records requested above, American Oversight also requests records describing the processing of this request, including records sufficient to identify search terms used and locations and custodians searched and any tracking sheets used to track the processing of this request. If your agency uses FOIA questionnaires or certifications completed by individual custodians or components to determine whether they possess responsive materials or to describe how they conducted searches, we also request any such records prepared in connection with the processing of this request.

American Oversight seeks all responsive records regardless of format, medium, or physical characteristics. In conducting your search, please understand the terms “record,” “document,” and “information” in their broadest sense, to include any written, typed, recorded, graphic, printed, or audio material of any kind. We seek records of any kind, including electronic records, audiotapes, videotapes, and photographs, as well as letters, emails, facsimiles, telephone messages, voice mail messages and transcripts, notes, or minutes of any meetings, telephone conversations or discussions. Our request includes any attachments to these records. No category of material should be omitted from search, collection, and production.

Please search all records regarding agency business. You may not exclude searches of files or emails in the personal custody of your officials, such as personal email accounts. Records of official business conducted using unofficial systems or stored outside of official files are subject to
the Federal Records Act and FOIA. It is not adequate to rely on policies and procedures that require officials to move such information to official systems within a certain period of time; American Oversight has a right to records contained in those files even if material has not yet been moved to official systems or if officials have, through negligence or willfulness, failed to meet their obligations.

In addition, please note that in conducting a “reasonable search” as required by law, you must employ the most up-to-date technologies and tools available, in addition to searches by individual custodians likely to have responsive information. Recent technology may have rendered your agency’s prior FOIA practices unreasonable. In light of the government-wide requirements to manage information electronically by the end of 2016, it is no longer reasonable to rely exclusively on custodian-driven searches. Furthermore, agencies that have adopted the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) Capstone program, or similar policies, now maintain emails in a form that is reasonably likely to be more complete than individual custodians’ files. For example, a custodian may have deleted a responsive email from his or her email program, but your agency’s archiving tools would capture that email under Capstone. Accordingly, American Oversight insists that your agency use the most up-to-date technologies to search for responsive information and take steps to ensure that the most complete repositories of information are searched. However, custodian searches are still required; agencies may not have direct access to files stored in .PST files, outside of network drives, in paper format, or in personal email accounts.

Under the FOIA Improvement Act of 2016, agencies must adopt a presumption of disclosure, withholding information “only if . . . disclosure would harm an interest protected by an exemption” or “disclosure is prohibited by law.” If it is your position that any portion of the requested records

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2 See Competitive Enter. Inst. v. Office of Sci. & Tech. Policy, No. 14-cv-765, slip op. at 8 (D.D.C. Dec. 12, 2016) (“The Government argues that because the agency had a policy requiring [the official] to forward all of his emails from his [personal] account to his business email, the [personal] account only contains duplicate agency records at best. Therefore, the Government claims that any hypothetical deletion of the [personal account] emails would still leave a copy of those records intact in [the official’s] work email. However, policies are rarely followed to perfection by anyone. At this stage of the case, the Court cannot assume that each and every work-related email in the [personal account] was duplicated in [the official’s] work email account.” (citations omitted)).


is exempt from disclosure, American Oversight requests that you provide an index of those
U.S. 977 (1974). As you are aware, a *Vaughn* index must describe each document claimed as
exempt with sufficient specificity “to permit a reasoned judgment as to whether the material is
actually exempt under FOIA.” Moreover, the *Vaughn* index “must describe each document or
portion thereof withheld, and for each withholding it must discuss the consequences of disclosing
the sought-after information.” Further, “the withholding agency must supply ‘a relatively detailed
justification, specifically identifying the reasons why a particular exemption is relevant and
correlating those claims with the particular part of a withheld document to which they apply.’”

In the event some portions of the requested records are properly exempt from disclosure, please
disclose any reasonably segregable non-exempt portions of the requested records. If it is your
position that a document contains non-exempt segments, but that those non-exempt segments are
so dispersed throughout the document as to make segregation impossible, please state what
portion of the document is non-exempt, and how the material is dispersed throughout the
document.” Claims of nonsegregability must be made with the same degree of detail as required for
claims of exemptions in a *Vaughn* index. If a request is denied in whole, please state specifically
that it is not reasonable to segregate portions of the record for release.

**You should institute a preservation hold on information responsive to this request.** American
Oversight intends to pursue all legal avenues to enforce its right of access under FOIA, including
litigation if necessary. Accordingly, you are on notice that litigation is reasonably foreseeable.

To ensure that this request is properly construed, that searches are conducted in an adequate but
efficient manner, and that extraneous costs are not incurred, American Oversight welcomes an
opportunity to discuss its request with you before you undertake your search or incur search or
duplication costs. By working together at the outset, American Oversight hopes to decrease the
likelihood of costly and time-consuming litigation in the future.

Where possible, please provide responsive material in electronic format by email or in PDF or
TIF format on a USB drive. Please send any responsive material being sent by mail to American
Oversight, 1030 15th Street NW, Suite B255, Washington, DC 20005. If it will accelerate release
of responsive records to American Oversight, please also provide responsive material on a rolling
basis.

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3 *Id.* at 224 (citing *Mead Data Central, Inc. v. U.S. Dep’t of the Air Force*, 566 F.2d 242, 251 (D.C.
   Cir. 1977)).
4 *Mead Data Central*, 566 F.2d at 261.
Fee Waiver Request

In accordance with 5 U.S.C. § 552(a)(4)(A)(iii) and your agency’s implementing regulations, American Oversight requests a waiver of fees associated with processing this request for records. The subject of this request concerns the operations of the federal government, and the disclosures will likely contribute to public understanding of those operations. Moreover, the request is primarily and fundamentally for non-commercial purposes.

American Oversight requests a waiver of fees because disclosure of the requested information is in the public interest because it is likely to contribute significantly to public understanding of activities of the government. The disclosure of the information sought under this request will document and reveal the operations of the federal government, including the methods by which important, wide-reaching policy is created, implemented, and administered. There has been great public interest and media coverage regarding various facets of federal immigration policy, including the administration’s ban on travel from majority-Muslim countries, harsh family separation policies, and drastic cuts to legal immigration. The American people have a right to understand the drivers of these policies, and as noted above, there is reason to believe those in power may be intentionally shielding their actions from public view and thus evading accountability. As described below, American Oversight has the intention and ability to disseminate the records it receives to a broad audience, allowing for greater transparency into government policy-making.

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See Tracy, supra note 1.
This request is primarily and fundamentally not for commercial purposes, but rather the primary interest is in public disclosure of responsive records. As a 501(c)(3) nonprofit, American Oversight does not have a commercial purpose and the release of the information requested is not in American Oversight’s financial interest. American Oversight’s mission is to promote transparency in government, to educate the public about government activities, and to ensure the accountability of government officials. American Oversight uses the information gathered, and its analysis of it, to educate the public through reports, press releases, or other media. American Oversight also makes materials it gathers available on its public website and promotes their availability on social media platforms, such as Facebook and Twitter. American Oversight has demonstrated its commitment to the public disclosure of documents and creation of editorial content. For example, after receiving records regarding an ethics waiver received by a senior DOJ attorney, American Oversight promptly posted the records to its website and published an analysis of what the records reflected about DOJ’s process for ethics waivers. As another example, American Oversight has a project called “Audit the Wall,” where the organization is gathering and analyzing information and commenting on public releases of information related to the administration’s proposed construction of a barrier along the U.S.-Mexico border. Accordingly, American Oversight qualifies for a fee waiver.

**Conclusion**

We share a common mission to promote transparency in government. American Oversight looks forward to working with your agency on this request. If you do not understand any part of this request, have any questions, or foresee any problems in fully releasing the requested records, please contact Katherine Anthony at foia@americanoversight.org or (202) 897-3918. Also, if American Oversight’s request for a fee waiver is not granted in full, please contact us immediately upon making such a determination.

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15 Audit the Wall, AMERICAN OVERSIGHT, https://www.americanoversight.org/investigation/audit-the-wall.
Sincerely,


Austin R. Evers
Executive Director
American Oversight