



October 15, 2018

VIA ELECTRONIC MAIL

Sam Kaplan
Chief FOIA Officer
The Privacy Office
U.S. Department of Homeland Security
245 Murray Lane SW
STOP-0655
Washington, DC 20528-0655
foia@hq.dhs.gov

Re: Freedom of Information Act Request

Dear Mr. Kaplan:

Pursuant to the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA), 5 U.S.C. § 552, and 6 C.F.R. Part 5, American Oversight makes the following request for records.

On August 28, 2018, *The Atlantic* reported on a set of leaked emails showing that Department of Homeland Security (DHS) policy analyst Ian M. Smith had had a friendly relationship with white nationalists prior to his government service.¹ Prior to the publication of *The Atlantic*'s story, Smith left DHS. *The Washington Post* subsequently reported that Smith had attended policy meetings at the White House while working for DHS.²

The public deserves to know the extent to which Mr. Smith influenced policy during his time serving the federal government, and whether his communication with hate groups continued during that time.

Requested Records

American Oversight requests that the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) produce the following within twenty business days:

¹ Rosie Gray, *Emails Link Former Homeland Security Official to White Nationalists*, THE ATLANTIC, Aug. 28, 2018, <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2018/08/emails-link-former-dhs-policy-analyst-to-white-nationalists/568843/>.

² Nick Miroff, *Homeland Security Staffer with White Nationalist Ties Attended White House Policy Meetings*, WASH. POST, Aug. 30, 2018, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/homeland-security-staffer-with-white-nationalist-ties-attended-white-house-policy-meetings/2018/08/30/7fcb0212-abab-11e8-8a0c-70b618c98d3c_story.html.



1. All calendars or calendar entries for Ian M. Smith between the dates of October 2, 2017, and August 28, 2018. For calendar entries created in Outlook or similar programs, the documents should be produced in “memo” format to include all invitees, any notes, and all attachments. Please do not limit your search to Outlook calendars—we request the production of any calendar—paper or electronic, whether on government-issued or personal devices—used to track or coordinate how Mr. Smith allocated his time on agency business.
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 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.
3. 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.
4. All call logs showing incoming or outgoing calls to or from the phone number 202-881-8641.
5. All email communications with any of the following individuals/organizations, including messages where custodians or outside individuals/organizations were carbon copied or blind carbon copied. This request includes all prior messages (whether incoming or outgoing) reflected in any responsive emails and any attachments.
 - a. Marcus Epstein
 - b. Devin Saucier
 - c. Jared Taylor
 - d. Ben Dionisopoulos
 - e. Kevin DeAnna
 - f. Ben Zapp
 - g. Matt Parrott
 - h. Jack Donovan
 - i. Matthew Heimbach
 - j. Richard Spencer
 - k. Jason Kessler
 - l. Peter Brimelow
 - m. John Derbyshire

- n. Wayne Lutton
 - o. VDARE (including any emails sent to or received from an address ending in vdare.com)
 - p. American Renaissance (including any emails sent to or received from an address ending in amren.com)
 - q. Federation for American Immigration Reform (including any emails sent to or received from an address ending in @fairus.org)
 - r. Immigration Reform Law Institute (including any emails sent to or received from an address ending in @irli.org)
 - s. Center for Immigration Studies (including any emails sent to or received from an address ending in @cis.org)
 - t. NumbersUSA (including any emails sent to or received from an address ending in @numbersusa.com)
 - u. The Remembrance Project (including any emails sent to or received from an address ending in @theremembranceproject.org)
 - v. ACT for America (including any emails sent to or received from an address ending in @actforamerica.org)
 - w. Kris Kobach (including but not limited to emails sent to or received from kkobach@gmail.com, kris@kriskobach.com, or any emails he sent from an address ending in @ks.gov)
 - x. Rep. Steve King of Iowa or any members of his staff, including but not limited to Sarah Stevens and Suanne Edmiston.
6. All email communications from Ian M. Smith containing any of the following terms. This request includes all prior messages (whether incoming or outgoing) reflected in any responsive emails and any attachments.
- a. AmRen
 - b. “American Renaissance”
 - c. Radix
 - d. “Richard Spencer”
 - e. “Jared Taylor”
 - f. “Marcus Epstein”
 - g. “Social Contract”
 - h. VDARE
 - i. Chronicles
 - j. “Unite the Right”
 - k. Charlottesville
 - l. C’Ville

Please provide all responsive records from January 20, 2017, through the date of the search.

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 DHS 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.³ **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.**⁴

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 DHS’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.**⁵ Furthermore, agencies that have adopted the National Archives and

³ See *Competitive Enter. Inst. v. Office of Sci. & Tech. Policy*, 827 F.3d 145, 149–50 (D.C. Cir. 2016); cf. *Judicial Watch, Inc. v. Kerry*, 844 F.3d 952, 955–56 (D.C. Cir. 2016).

⁴ 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)).

⁵ Presidential Memorandum—Managing Government Records, 76 Fed. Reg. 75,423 (Nov. 28, 2011), <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2011/11/28/presidential-memorandum-managing-government-records>; Office of Mgmt. & Budget, Exec. Office of the President, Memorandum for the Heads of Executive Departments & Independent Agencies,

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 DHS's archiving tools would capture that email under Capstone. Accordingly, American Oversight insists that DHS 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. American Oversight is available to work with you to craft appropriate search terms. **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.”⁶ If it is your position that any portion of the requested records is exempt from disclosure, American Oversight requests that you provide an index of those documents as required under *Vaughn v. Rosen*, 484 F.2d 820 (D.C. Cir. 1973), *cert. denied*, 415 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.”⁷ 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.”⁸ 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.’”⁹

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.¹⁰ 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, DHS is on notice that litigation is reasonably foreseeable.

“Managing Government Records Directive,” M-12-18 (Aug. 24, 2012), <https://www.archives.gov/files/records-mgmt/m-12-18.pdf>.

⁶ FOIA Improvement Act of 2016 § 2 (Pub. L. No. 114-185).

⁷ *Founding Church of Scientology v. Bell*, 603 F.2d 945, 949 (D.C. Cir. 1979).

⁸ *King v. U.S. Dep't of Justice*, 830 F.2d 210, 223-24 (D.C. Cir. 1987) (emphases in original).

⁹ *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)).

¹⁰ *Mead Data Central*, 566 F.2d at 261.

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, we can 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.

Fee Waiver Request

In accordance with 5 U.S.C. § 552(a)(4)(A)(iii) and 6 C.F.R. § 5.11(k), 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 a better understanding of relevant government procedures by the general public in a significant way.¹¹ Moreover, the request is primarily and fundamentally for non-commercial purposes.¹²

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 the operations or activities of the government.”¹³ There has been significant media coverage of and public attention on Ian Smith, as well as the presence of ethnonationalists generally within the Trump administration.¹⁴ This request goes directly to uncovering the sway that such individuals—both within and without the administration—hold over policymaking and enforcement actions. Moreover, the requested records have the potential to shed light on other individuals within the administration with ties to ethnonationalists, and how those ties have influenced agency actions

This request is primarily and fundamentally for non-commercial purposes.¹⁵ 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

¹¹ 6 C.F.R. § 5.11(k)(1)(i).

¹² 6 C.F.R. § 5.11(k)(1)(ii).

¹³ 6 C.F.R. § 5.11(k)(1)(i); *see also* 6 C.F.R. § 5.11(k)(2)(i)-(iv).

¹⁴ *See* Gray, *supra* note 1; Miroff, *supra* note 2; Vann R. Newkirk II, *Trump’s White-Nationalist Pipeline*, THE ATLANTIC, Aug. 23, 2018, <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2018/08/trump-white-nationalism/568393/>; Harry Cheadle, *The White Nationalists in the Trump Administration Aren’t There by Accident*, VICE, Aug. 31, 2018, https://www.vice.com/en_us/article/ywkyng/the-white-nationalists-in-the-trump-administration-arent-there-by-accident.

¹⁵ 6 C.F.R. § 5.11(k)(1)(ii), (3)(i)-(ii).

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.¹⁶ 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 website¹⁷ and published an analysis of what the records reflected about DOJ's process for ethics waivers.¹⁸ 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.¹⁹

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 DHS 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 Hart Wood at foia@americanoversight.org or 202.873.1743. Also, if American Oversight's request for a fee waiver is not granted in full, please contact us immediately upon making such a determination.

Sincerely,



Austin R. Evers
Executive Director
American Oversight

¹⁶ American Oversight currently has approximately 11,900 page likes on Facebook, and 45,300 followers on Twitter. American Oversight, FACEBOOK, <https://www.facebook.com/weareoversight/> (last visited Oct. 15, 2018); American Oversight (@weareoversight), TWITTER, <https://twitter.com/weareoversight> (last visited June 15, 2018).

¹⁷ *DOJ Civil Division Response Noel Francisco Compliance*, AMERICAN OVERSIGHT, <https://www.americanoversight.org/document/doj-civil-division-response-noel-francisco-compliance>.

¹⁸ *Francisco & the Travel Ban: What We Learned from the DOJ Documents*, AMERICAN OVERSIGHT, <https://www.americanoversight.org/francisco-the-travel-ban-what-we-learned-from-the-doj-documents>.

¹⁹ *Audit the Wall*, AMERICAN OVERSIGHT, <https://www.americanoversight.org/investigation/audit-the-wall>.