



February 5, 2019

VIA ONLINE PORTAL

National FOIA Office
Office of the General Counsel
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
1200 Pennsylvania Avenue NW (2822T)
Washington, DC 20460
Via FOIAOnline

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 the implementing regulations of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), 40 C.F.R. Part 2, American Oversight makes the following request for records.

Earlier this month, Sheldon Whitehouse and several other U.S. senators sent a letter to acting EPA Administrator Andrew Wheeler regarding information related to a gift of \$50,000 given to former Administrator Scott Pruitt by Diane Hendricks, purportedly as a contribution to Mr. Pruitt's legal defense fund.¹ As detailed in that letter, there is reason to believe that Mr. Pruitt may not have complied with federal ethics rules with regard to that payment.

American Oversight seeks records to determine how federal ethics rules should have been applied to Ms. Hendricks' gift to Mr. Pruitt.

Requested Records

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

- 1) Any communications (including emails, email attachments, text messages, calendar invitations, calendar entries, meeting notices, meeting agendas, any handwritten or electronic notes taken during any oral communications, or summaries of any oral communications) between any political appointee* in the offices listed below and Diane Hendricks, or anyone acting on her behalf:
 - a. Office of the Administrator
 - b. Office of Chemical Safety and Pollution Prevention

¹ Letter from Sen. Sheldon Whitehouse et al. to Andrew Wheeler, Acting EPA Administrator (Jan. 10, 2019), <https://www.whitehouse.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/2019-01-10%20Letter%20to%20Wheeler.pdf>.



- c. Office of Enforcement and Compliance Assurance
 - d. Office of Air and Radiation
- 2) Any communications (including emails, email attachments, text messages, calendar invitations, calendar entries, meeting notices, meeting agendas, any handwritten or electronic notes taken during any oral communications, or summaries of any oral communications) between (i) any political appointee* in the Office of the Administrator, the Office of Chemical Safety and Pollution Prevention, the Office of Enforcement and Compliance Assurance, and the Office of Air and Radiation; and (ii) any of the following companies or their representatives:
- a. ABC Supply Company
 - b. Blackhawk Transport & Logistics
 - c. Hendricks River Logistics
 - d. American Aluminum Extrusion Company
 - e. American Industrial Steel & Supply
 - f. Federal Heath Sign Company
 - g. Henry Technologies GmbH
 - h. Stainless Tank & Equipment
 - i. HT Industrial Holdings
 - j. Avid Pallet
 - k. Garick
 - l. GarTran LLC
 - m. Humane Manufacturing
 - n. Universal Recycling Technologies
 - o. Corporate Contractors, Inc. (CCI)
 - p. Hendricks Commercial Properties
 - q. GEM Pharmaceuticals
 - r. NorthStar Medical Technologies
 - s. Blonhaven Hunt Club
 - t. Ironworks Hotel
 - u. Merrill & Houston's Steak Joint
 - v. Beloit Art Foundry
 - w. Marsh Global Holdings
- 3) All communications (including emails, email attachments, text messages, calendar invitations, calendar entries, meeting notices, meeting agendas, any handwritten or electronic notes taken during any oral communications, or summaries of any oral communications) sent or received by anyone in the Office of General Counsel relating to Diane Hendricks or any of the companies listed in part (2) above.

Please provide all responsive records from February 17, 2017, to the date the search is conducted.

*“Political appointee” should be understood as any person who is a Presidential Appointee with Senate Confirmation (PAS), a Presidential Appointee (PA), a Non-career SES, any Schedule C employees, or any persons hired under Temporary Non-career SES Appointments, Limited Term SES Appointments, or Temporary Transitional Schedule C Appointments.

In addition to the records requested above, we also request 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 EPA 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.² **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; we have 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.**³ 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 EPA’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.**⁴ Furthermore, agencies that have adopted the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) Capstone program, or similar policies, now maintain emails in a

² 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).

³ 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)).

⁴ 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, “Managing Government Records Directive,” M-12-18 (Aug. 24, 2012), <https://www.archives.gov/files/records-mgmt/m-12-18.pdf>.

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 EPA's archiving tools would capture that email under Capstone. Accordingly, American Oversight insist that EPA 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. We are 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.”⁵ If it is your position that any portion of the requested records is exempt from disclosure, we request 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.”⁶ 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.”⁷ 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.’”⁸

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.⁹ 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, EPA is 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, we welcome 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.

⁵ FOIA Improvement Act of 2016 § 2 (Pub. L. No. 114-185).

⁶ *Founding Church of Scientology v. Bell*, 603 F.2d 945, 949 (D.C. Cir. 1979).

⁷ *King v. U.S. Dep't of Justice*, 830 F.2d 210, 223–24 (D.C. Cir. 1987) (emphasis in original).

⁸ *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)).

⁹ *Mead Data Central*, 566 F.2d at 261.

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, 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 40 C.F.R. § 2.107(l), 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.¹⁰ Moreover, the request is primarily and fundamentally for non-commercial purposes.¹¹

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 government operations and activities.¹² As discussed above, this request seeks records with the potential to shed light on whether and how former EPA Administrator Scott Pruitt complied with his ethical obligations. The American public deserves to know if any of EPA's actions were influenced by Ms. Hendricks' donation to Mr. Pruitt's legal defense fund, or if any federal ethics rules were violated by Mr. Pruitt with regard to Ms. Hendricks' donation. The importance of this issue is also evident from the fact that several U.S. senators have already asked EPA to provide much of the information requested herein,¹³ and the issue has garnered significant public attention and media coverage.¹⁴

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 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

¹⁰ 40 C.F.R. § 2.107(l)(1).

¹¹ *Id.*

¹² *Id.*; see also 40 C.F.R. § 2.107(l)(2)(i)-(iv).

¹³ Letter from Sen. Whitehouse et al., *supra* note 1.

¹⁴ See, e.g., Rebecca Leber, *Scott Pruitt Is Facing Yet Another Scandal Thanks to His Legal Defense Fund*, MOTHERJONES (Jan. 10, 2019, 12:00 PM), <https://www.motherjones.com/environment/2019/01/scott-pruitt-epa-legal-defense-fund-diane-hendricks-senate-democrats/>; Chase Peterson-Withorn, *America's Richest Self-Made Woman Helped Pay Scott Pruitt's Legal Expenses*, FORBES (Dec. 6, 2018, 6:35 PM), <https://www.forbes.com/sites/chasewithorn/2018/12/06/americas-richest-self-made-woman-helped-pay-scott-pruitts-legal-expenses/#1f97745f529e>; Kevin Bogardus, *Meet the Self-Made Billionaire in Pruitt's Corner*, E&E NEWS, Dec. 7, 2018, <https://www.eenews.net/stories/1060109095>.

¹⁵ 40 C.F.R. § 2.107(l)(1); 40 C.F.R. § 2.107(l)(3)(i)-(ii).

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,¹⁷ 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.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, this request qualifies for a fee waiver.

Conclusion

We share a common mission to promote transparency in government. We look forward to working with EPA 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 Sara Creighton at foia@americanoversight.org or (202) 869-5245. Also, if our 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 over 12,100 page likes on Facebook, and nearly 49,700 followers on Twitter. American Oversight, FACEBOOK, <https://www.facebook.com/weareoversight/> (last visited Feb. 5, 2019); American Oversight (@weareoversight), TWITTER, <https://twitter.com/weareoversight> (last visited Feb. 5, 2019).

¹⁷ *DOJ Records Relating to Solicitor General Noel Francisco's Recusal*, 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>.